The Conditions, Criteria, and Dialectics of Human Dignity

A Transnational Perspective

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Human dignity refers to the status of individuals as ends in themselves rather than means to extraneous ends. To be consistent with dignity, institutions must provide for their constituencies' identity and community—the two components of dignity. These correspond roughly to individual freedom and social justice, which are seen as interdependent conditions of dignity. Achievement, extension, and preservation of human dignity are to a large extent a transnational enterprise. The paper addresses three issues in the realization of dignity in which the transnational dimension plays a significant role. It proposes (1) that the conditions for realizing human dignity (which include international peace in addition to social justice and individual freedom) must be created through worldwide efforts, given our increasing global interdependence; (2) that the criteria for assessing whether policies and institutional arrangements are consistent with human dignity must be universalistic, while remaining respectful of cultural and political differences; and (3) that the social processes whereby human dignity is extended and protected are inherently dialectical, since they require both the fulfillment and the inhibition of nationalistic demands.

My assumption, at this convention, of the presidency of the International Studies Association, represents a very significant

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personal fulfillment for me. Its significance is enhanced by the fact that I did not come to the field of international relations by the standard professional route. My primary discipline was—and continues to be—social psychology. And my primary motivation for turning to the study of international relations was—and continues to be—a concern for world peace and for increasing the capacity of the social sciences to contribute to its achievement.

It is almost precisely 25 years ago that a small group of young social scientists, which I had helped to mobilize, established the Research Exchange on the Prevention of War. Most of us were psychologists, but we made serious and partially successful efforts to become interdisciplinary. Very few of us had professional training in international relations or were actually doing research in the field when we formed the group. Our aim was to promote the idea that social science research can make relevant contributions to the prevention of war and attainment of peace. The Research Exchange led, through a direct line of descent, to the establishment of the *Journal of Conflict Resolution* a few years later, and foreshadowed the emergence of the peace research movement in the late 1950s and the early 1960s. My own work, over this quarter century, addressed itself increasingly to international relations issues, including efforts to conceptualize and integrate social-psychological contributions to international relations, and empirical research on international exchange, nationalist ideology, public opinion on foreign-policy issues, and new approaches to the resolution of international conflict.

My election to the office of ISA President thus reflects a gratifying degree of acceptance within the profession, not only of myself as an individual—despite my unorthodox origins—but also of some of the ideas that I, among others, have been putting forward. To this sense of profound gratification I must add the hope that neither I nor these ideas have gained so much respectability that it reduces our critical and innovative role—our capacity to challenge established assumptions and to propose alternative concepts and perspectives.

In view of this personal history, I was delighted to discover, a year ago, the theme that had been selected for this year's convention, "World-Wide Appraisal of Institutions: Toward Realizing Human Dignity." Although I played no part whatsoever in the selection of this theme, it reflects all the emphases with which I have been identified. Indeed, it almost seems as if the title had been deliberately constructed to contain a word representing each of my biases. The term "human dignity" expresses a value commitment, thus abandoning the chimera of a value-free social science. The words "toward realizing" point to the applied, action-oriented component of the enterprise. The word "appraisal" implies a scientific orientation, combining quantitative and qualitative analysis. The term "institutions" suggests a conception of the field as part of a broad, interdisciplinary social science. And the term "world-wide" indicates a global, transnational definition of the enterprise.

DEFINING HUMAN DIGNITY

Snyder et al. (1976) use the term human dignity as a summative symbol for the combined preferred states associated with various basic values. My own definition differs from theirs in that I take the individual as my starting point and I am less comprehensive in the values subsumed under the concept. Still, my conception is sufficiently broad so that there is probably a close correspondence between the phenomena that we are each trying to capture when we use human dignity in the appraisal of institutional structures and practices.

Human dignity can be said to refer to the status of individuals as ends in themselves, rather than as means toward some extraneous ends. We can distinguish two components of human dignity: identity and community. "To accord a person identity is to perceive him as an individual, independent and distinguishable from others, capable of making choices, and entitled to live his own life on the basis of his own goals and values. To accord a person community is to perceive him—along with one's self—as part of an interconnected network of individuals who care for

each other, who recognize each other's individuality, and who respect each other's rights" (Kelman, 1973: 48-49). Treating another with dignity means to accord him both identity and community—to respect his individuality and to care about his fate. The overarching indicator of human dignity in a society is the worth attached to an individual's life. Insofar as individuals are accorded identity, each life (regardless of the person's origin or status) is perceived as *valuable*, and each death is individualized as the loss of a unique and irreplaceable human being. Insofar as individuals are accorded community, each life is *valued* by others, and each death is felt as a personal loss diminishing the entire society.

From the perspective of the individual, personal dignity can similarly be characterized by a stable sense of identity and community. To possess a sense of one's own dignity thus means to perceive one's self as valuable and to feel valued by others. To the extent that a person is devalued and treated as a means rather than an end, he is deprived of dignity, from both an objective and a subjective point of view.

In evaluating institutions and societies in terms of their consistency with human dignity, we can ask how adequately they provide identity and community for their constituencies. As a first approximation, the provision of identity can be equated with the prevalence of individual freedom, the provision of community with the prevalence of social justice.

Thus, to maximize human dignity, a society needs institutions designed to expand the range of individual choices; to create opportunities for self-development and self-utilization; to promote widespread participation in decision-making; to assure freedom of expression and the right to dissent; to protect individuals against arbitrary treatment by authorities; to enable them to give free expression to their ethnic, cultural, and religious traditions; and to protect their right to organize themselves into groups devoted to the achievement of all of these purposes. At the same time, maximization of human dignity also calls for institutions designed to meet the population's basic

needs for food, housing, clothing, security, health care, and education; to protect the society as a whole against violence, starvation, disease, and disaster; to protect individuals against the disabilities arising from unemployment, sickness, and old age; to provide compassionate care for those who are unable to care for themselves; and to assure that all segments of the society have equal access to all of these benefits.

THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

The requirements for individual freedom and social justice are sometimes seen as independent of one another and, at least to some degree, mutually exclusive. There are occasions when these values may come into conflict with each other and when one can be achieved only at some sacrifice in the other. For the long run, however, I would maintain that individual freedom and social justice are inseparable and interdependent conditions for realizing human dignity and each of its components, identity and community.

In a society that falls short on the dimension of social justice—because its institutions either fail to provide adequately for the needs and welfare of the population, or do not assure equal access to these benefits to all segments of the population—there are inevitable limitations to the unfolding of individual freedom. Individuals living under conditions of poverty, violence, chronic unemployment, oppressive or meaningless labor, overcrowding, poor sanitation, poor health care, poor education, and constant anxiety about the future rarely have either the capacity or the opportunity to exercise choices, to develop and utilize themselves, or to take advantage of the civil liberties that may in principle be available to them. Groups that suffer from systematic discrimination in their access to economic opportunities and social benefits—that are, in other words, excluded from full and equal participation in the community—are collectively deprived of the means for exercising individual freedom and developing personal and group

identity. Moreover, such groups lack the power to resist encroachments on their freedoms and violations of their rights. Thus, at the individual level, deprivation of welfare and exclusion from community limit the exercise of freedom which is essential to personal identity. At the social level, such shortcomings in social justice limit the universality, the vitality, and the accountability of institutions designed to promote and protect individual freedom.

Conversely, in a society that falls short on the dimension of individual freedom—because its institutions either fail to encourage free expression of views and participation in decision-making, or do not provide adequate protection for the rights of minorities and dissenters—there are inevitable limitations to the realization of social justice. In such an atmosphere, individuals who seek to express their personal freedom and identity through political dissent, unorthodox creative pursuits, or promotion of ethnic minority traditions may find themselves subject to repression and arbitrary treatment. Thus, their exercise of individual freedom is directly penalized by deprivation of the welfare and protection that the society provides to its other citizens. Subjected to surveillance, arbitrary dismissal, jail, torture, or exile, they are deprived of physical freedom, of privacy, of personal safety, of the ability to earn a livelihood and pursue a career, and of access to the social benefits to which they are entitled. For nonconformists, then, the price of expressing their identity is exclusion from the community. Not only does this represent a deprivation of social justice for the individuals involved, but it undermines the principle of equal access to social benefits by making such access, for some groups, contingent on sacrificing their identity.

More generally, in a society in which freedom of expression and citizen participation are discouraged, it is more difficult to engage in a continuing process of evaluating institutions, in order to assess how adequately they need basic needs and assure equal access to social benefits. The process of evaluating institutions is particularly inhibited by the suppression of dissenters, whose critical attitude makes them more alert to the shortcomings in

institutional functioning, and of minorities, whose special vulnerability makes them more sensitive to practices of inequality and exclusion. Insofar as the freedom of expression and civil rights of these elements are restricted, there will be less concerted pressures within the society to change the procedures and structures of institutions that are no longer adequate to the needs of the entire population. Thus, at the societal level, shortcomings with respect to individual freedom limit the effectiveness, the fairness, and the responsiveness of institutions designed to achieve and maintain social justice.

In sum, then, both at the individual and at the societal level, individual freedom and social justice are interdependent: the integrity of one is crucial to the integrity of the other. It is the interaction of these two values that determines how consistent a society's institutions are with the requirements of human dignity.

In speaking of societies, my implicit focus, so far, has been on national societies. But, even though the global system is primarily organized in terms of national societies, the achievement, extension, and preservation of human dignity are to a large extent a world-wide, transnational enterprise. I shall address the remainder of my remarks to three issues in the realization of human dignity in which the transnational dimension plays a significant role: What are the necessary *conditions* for realizing human dignity? What are the *criteria* for assessing whether policies and institutional arrangements are consistent with human dignity? And what are the social *processes* by which human dignity is extended and protected? Clearly, I do not propose to treat these questions in detail, but merely to touch on an aspect of each of these questions that can be illuminated by a transnational perspective. In brief, I shall argue that the conditions for human dignity must be created through world-wide efforts because of the ever increasing level of global interdependence; that the criteria of human dignity must be universalistic, while remaining respectful of cultural and political differences; and that the extension and protection of human dignity is an inherently dialectical process, since it requires both the fulfillment and the inhibition of nationalistic demands.

THE CONDITIONS OF HUMAN DIGNITY

Most of the conditions for human dignity can be subsumed under the categories of social justice and individual freedom already discussed. Before showing why the establishment of these two conditions calls for world-wide efforts, let me comment on an overarching condition for human dignity: international peace. That this condition requires world-wide cooperative efforts for its establishment would appear to be self-evident, yet the dominant formula for achieving peace still relies on national military strength as its key ingredient.

International peace. A sine qua non of human dignity is security about the survival of self, family, and group. Security about survival is not independent of social justice and individual freedom, as illustrated by the threats to survival in the form of mass starvation and political repression, respectively. For the moment, however, I shall focus on security about survival in the context of international peace. The definition of peace has both a negative component, referring to the absence of war, and a positive component, referring to a cooperative world order (Kelman, 1976). In the present context I speak of peace primarily as the absence of systematic, large-scale, collective violence, accompanied by a sense of security that such violence is improbable.

War is certainly one of the most relentless and systematic destroyers of human dignity. It has the direct effect of massive destruction of human life—on the battlefields, in attacks on civilian centers, and in the massacres that invariably accompany war—which represents the ultimate deprivation of human dignity. It conveys the message that human life is cheap. It brings in its wake a plethora of human suffering, in the form of hunger, injury, illness, homelessness, displacement, and chronic fear, whose primary victims are those who are least able to bear these burdens—the children, the aged, the poor, the minority communities. It creates permanent classes of victims, including refugees, disabled veterans, and truncated families. It devastates the cities and the countryside, often endangering the economic base of the society. It destroys physical and cultural centers

that may have taken generations to construct. It legitimizes the suppression of freedom and human rights. It constricts the definition of the human community.

Wars—whether in the name of national security, national honor, or national liberation—are generally fought for the presumed purpose of maintaining and enhancing human dignity. Although I view all such claims with great suspicion, I do not at the moment wish to propound the position that they are universally and totally invalid. What I do wish to stress, however, is that the highly speculative gains in human dignity that might be achieved by war must always be weighed against the certain, direct, and immediate losses in human dignity that war brings about. The problem is that the groups within a society that have the most to gain from war are different from those that have the most to lose; it is typically the former that make the decision to go to war and the latter that do the bulk of the suffering.

Avoidance of war is clearly a major condition for the realization of human dignity. To achieve this condition requires transnational efforts, particularly in view of the high degree of interpenetration and interdependence of contemporary nation-states in their pursuit of military objectives. This interdependence manifests itself in the formal or informal involvement of many nation-states in military alliances, in the vast dimensions of international trading in arms, in the engagement of superpowers or other larger powers in proxy wars between their client states or communities, and in the military support that nation-states provide to liberation movements or opposing factions in other states. Thus, it is often the actions of outside powers that make the occurrence of international or civil wars possible, probable, or even necessary. Under the circumstances, nation-states are equally interdependent in creating the conditons that would make wars progressively less likely.

The elimination of war as an instrument of national policy depends on bold innovative efforts, carried out through transnational and international institutions, that take full account of this global interdependence. Such efforts must be directed to world-wide disarmament, based on the recognition that national

security in a nuclear age can be attained only through international cooperation; to the reduction of arms sales and other actions by which greater powers encourage wars among smaller powers or engage in proxy wars through them; to the development and institutionalization of transnational mechanisms for the management and resolution of conflicts; and to the exploration of alternative mechanisms for conducting conflict capable of advancing social justice by nonviolent means.

Social justice. I have already spoken of social justice—in the sense of meeting the basic needs of the population, providing for their welfare and protection, and assuring equal access to these benefits to all—as a fundamental condition of human dignity. Increasing global interdependence in economic pursuits, in the development, utilization, and preservation of both natural and human resources, and in the maintenance of ecological balance and a liveable environment makes it imperative to plan and organize for the achievement of social justice within the framework of a total world system.

The most obvious domain of interdependence is the environment shared by different nations, such as the sea and the atmosphere, which are subject to dangerous pollution and resource depletion. The economic activities and life styles of one nation—not to speak of its modes of transportation and weapons tests—have a direct effect on the health, the quality of life, and the availability of food supplies of its neighbors. Clearly, the use of this shared environment must be subject to joint planning and control, based on readiness of each nation to yield a degree of its sovereignty.

A corollary of interdependence that clashes more sharply with the tradition of national sovereignty is the concept that scarce resources, regardless of their geographical distribution, are part of the heritage of all humankind. This concept places upon each society the responsibility to consider how its utilization of such resources influences their availability to other societies. An example that is often cited in this connection is the protein-inefficient use of grain as cattle feed in affluent countries, where

meat has become the major source of protein in the diet; as a result, grain is less available and more costly to poorer countries, where it represents a direct source of protein. Thus, avoiding dangerous shortages in food, as well as energy and other necessities, requires joint planning, on a world-wide basis, for the most efficient use and conservation of scarce resources. Such plans may well require changes in wasteful lifestyles in some countries to assure that basic needs are met in others.

This brings us to the problem of inequality, which is the fundamental consideration in the achievement of social justice. Interdependence for scarce resources among countries that are relative equals can generally be managed, through trade and intergovernmental agreements, to their mutual satisfaction. Interdependence takes on a qualitatively different meaning, however, when there are marked inequalities in the resources of the countries, compounded by inequalities in economic, military, and diplomatic power. Social justice in the face of such inequality can be achieved only if the have nations assume some responsibility for the welfare of the have nots. This responsibility, as a matter of justice, becomes even more apparent when we recall that the existing inequalities are often the outcomes of long histories of exploitation of the have nots by the haves. To confront the consequences of inequalities and to move toward their elimination requires collaborative, global programs for the transfer of resources—such as, for example, programs designed to combat hunger and malnutrition throughout the world, to strengthen agricultural and industrial capacities, and to develop a variety of productive skills. An essential feature of such programs must be the development of independent resources—natural, technical, human, and organizational—so that the have not societies will become increasingly capable of meeting the needs of their own populations.

Inequalities in resources, especially when coupled with inequalities in power, have a tendency to perpetuate themselves. Thus, for example, economic investments in developing societies by firms from industrialized societies may encourage the development and use of resources, facilities, and personnel in

ways that serve the interests of the dominant economy at the long-run expense of the weaker one. The interaction may, perhaps inadvertently, create or reinforce a pattern of dependency, quite inconsistent with the goal of reducing inequalities. To achieve greater social justice, global institutions must address themselves to the development of patterns of relationships among nations of unequal power and resources that will avoid and reduce economic exploitation, reverse the self-perpetuating cycle of dependency, and close the gap between the rich and the poor.

Individual freedom. The other fundamental condition of human dignity that I have discussed, individual freedom, has increasingly become a matter of world-wide concern, expressed through transnational activities for the protection of human rights. Such world-wide efforts are imperative, not only because human freedom (like social justice) is indivisible as a matter of general principle, but also because of the high degree of interdependence among groups across national boundaries in the status of their human rights and their struggle against repression. The interdependence is rooted in the fact that violations of human rights are generally directed at groups that have cross-cutting links with counterparts in other areas of the world. These links may be based on common racial, ethnic, or religious identity; on common political ideology; or on common artistic, scientific, or professional values and commitments.

Sometimes the status of human rights of a group within a country is directly affected by the actions or involvements of their fellows elsewhere. Ethnic minorities are particularly vulnerable to retaliatory actions when the country in which they reside clashes with the country to which they are ethnically linked. To take a diverse set of examples, Japanese-Americans during World War II, Jews in some Arab countries after the Middle East War of 1967, Vietnamese in Cambodia in the early 1970s, and Kenyans in Uganda during the past year have all experienced repression, of varying degrees of intensity, as a result of outside events in which they had no part. Fallouts from events in other countries may also affect political dissidents and

independent-minded intellectuals, whose governments may decide to curtail their freedom, as a preventive measure, in response to rising dissent elsewhere.

Another consequence of cross-cutting links is that violation of the human rights of a group within one country is often experienced by its counterparts throughout the world as a violation of their own rights. In part, this is a symbolic reaction, based on their psychological identification with members of their own group, wherever they may reside. In part, the reaction reflects the view that the group's struggle for its rights in a particular country is but one aspect of a common struggle—across national lines—for the extension and protection of the entire group's rights. Thus, black Africans across the continent react to the repression of the black population in South Africa or Rhodesia in the context of their own still incomplete struggle against colonialism; Jews throughout the world react to the repression of fellow-Jews in the Soviet Union or elsewhere in the context of their long-standing struggle against anti-Semitism; political dissidents everywhere react to the repression of their counterparts in Chile, Czechoslovakia, or Iran in the context of their own struggle against authoritarian regimes. Often a group's reaction to violations of human rights in other countries is based not merely on sympathy and support, but on perceived threat to their own rights. Ethnic minorities and political dissidents have good reason to be concerned about possible contagion effects: repression of a group in one country may help to legitimize and provide an example for similar acts in other parts of the world.

The interdependence of groups across national boundaries in the status of their human rights is matched by their interdependence in the struggle for human rights. Human rights movements within a country are heavily influenced by activities in other countries. Other countries often provide models for the rights to be demanded and the ways to organize for their attainment. Direct and indirect contacts with outside individuals and groups are important sources of encouragement. Official and unofficial agencies in other countries, as well as transnational and sometimes international organizations, provide moral and

material support and serve as pressure groups and watchdogs. As a result, the timing, the form, and the success of a human rights struggle in any given country often depend on activities beyond its borders. Indeed, the struggle can usually be seen, to a significant extent, as part of a cross-cutting, transnational movement defined by shared values and common elements of identity.

The extensive cross-cutting links that characterize the contemporary world necessarily make violations of human rights in any country a matter of active transnational concern. As a result, such violations constitute sources of international tension and threats to international peace. The status of human rights everywhere thus becomes important, not only to those who specifically identify with the victims of repression on ethnic or ideological grounds, but to the entire world community. It adds pragmatic support to the principled position that the protection of human rights is indivisible.

THE CRITERIA OF HUMAN DIGNITY

Let me turn now to the question of the criteria that can be used to assess whether a particular policy or practice is consistent with human dignity. If, as I have argued, the conditions of human dignity must be established on a world-wide basis, through transnational efforts, then we are constantly faced with the problem of assessing policies and practices across national and cultural lines. There is a need, then, for criteria that can be applied universally—that are both broad enough and flexible enough to be relevant to different cultural contexts and to be perceived as legitimate by all concerned.

In deriving such criteria, transnational actors immediately confront a dilemma. On the one hand, it is essential, on both moral and political grounds, to respect cultural and national differences and to make allowances for them in assessing institutional practices within different societies. Failure to do so would represent a morally unacceptable imposition of alien values on another society; it would also be politically unwise in that it would reduce the perceived relevance and legitimacy of the

assessment process. On the other hand, in making allowances for cultural and national differences, one must beware of the danger of sliding into a vulgar relativism, which maintains that the practices of a society can only be evaluated within the terms of its own culture—that no external criterion of judgment can be brought to bear upon them. This view, when applied to nation-states—conceiving each as a self-contained cultural unit—erodes the moral basis of transnational efforts to promote human dignity. Transnational appraisal of institutions must proceed from the assumption that there are certain fundamental values, yielding universalistic criteria for assessment. Respect for cultural and national differences must not be confused with acceptance of institutional practices that are clearly destructive of human dignity, wherever they may occur—such as murder, torture, or slavery, to take some of the most obvious examples.

One point at which the conflict between universalism and respect for cultural differences manifests itself is in selecting the criteria that are to be applied cross-nationally. The dilemma here may turn out to be less severe than might be anticipated, because there are many such criteria that are in fact accepted—at least at the level of general principle—by a virtually universal consensus. These are criteria that are derivable from all major ethical systems and acknowledged in many national constitutions. They are even formalized in international agreements, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to which all member states of the United Nations subscribe, even if they do not always adhere to it. The existing consensus can at least serve as a starting point for continuing transnational exploration and specification of criteria that would have universal validity. There is a need to confront differences where they do exist, to press for ever increasing consensus on criteria that express fundamental values, and to spell out the implications of universally accepted criteria for specific institutional practices.

The evaluation of specific institutional practices represents a point at which the conflict between universalism and respect for cultural differences becomes more difficult to resolve. There need be no conflict about condemning extreme violations of human

rights, such as acts of genocide, torture, or racial discrimination, which clearly run counter to universal consensus, as expressed in international agreements signed by the offending nations themselves, and often in their own national constitutions. Conflict arises, however, when transnational actors feel morally repelled by practices that are not covered by universally agreed upon criteria. Even where there is universal consensus at the level of general principles, there may be conflicting interpretations of specific practices. For example, the arrest of political dissidents may be seen as illegitimate suppression of free speech and denial of due process, or as a government's legitimate exercise of control against subversion and disorder; child labor may be seen as a disabling and exploitative practice, or as an educational experience, promoting integration into productive social roles. Often there may be consensus about the validity of different criteria, but disagreements about the order of priorities. Thus, reaction to programs of collectivized farming or compulsory sterilization may depend on the relative weights one assigns to individual freedom versus public welfare.

The disagreements and ambiguities in the evaluation of specific institutional practices present a major challenge to transnational actors. To maintain the integrity of their efforts toward enhancing human dignity, they must avoid both horns of the dilemma posed by the need to evolve universalistic criteria respectful of cultural differences. To put it simply, they must avoid the twin dangers of condemning practices that should not be condemned and failing to condemn practices that should be condemned. Determining the category to which a given practice is to be assigned often requires a sensitivity developed through the confrontation of diverse cultural perspectives over an extended period of time.

An error of the first kind—condemning a practice that should not be condemned—is most likely to be committed when we evaluate a long-standing cultural pattern within another society in terms of our own cultural experience. Though similar practices in our experience may have oppressive consequences, they may take a different form, carry a different meaning, and have on balance a beneficial effect within another culture. Thus, to return to an earlier example, child labor in the Western experience represents an abuse associated with the industrial revolution, whereby children were often mercilessly exploited and their education and development aborted. In other contexts, however, children's participation in productive activities may be an essential part of the socialization process, assuring their integral involvement in the community and preparing them for future roles in the occupational and social structure. Moreover, abrupt changes in such practices—in the form of laws barring children from work and extending the period of compulsory schooling—may have unintended harmful consequences in that they may upset the existing balance between occupational opportunities and aspirations in the society. Population control provides another example. Although there is no doubt that overpopulation exacts a cost in human dignity, large families—especially in rural cultures—may fulfill important positive functions. Thus, to press for reductions in family size, without providing alternative means to fulfill these functions, may be undesirable.

The mere fact that a practice represents a cultural pattern of long standing does not, of course, assure its moral quality or make it immune to transnational evaluation. It does suggest, however, that the practice must be evaluated within its cultural context and that the systemic consequences of tampering with it must be carefully considered. It may turn out that the existing practice, despite its drawbacks, is preferable to available alternatives; or that changes in the practice would be advisable only within the framework of broader structural changes. The process of transnational evaluation must be informed by multiple perspectives and designed to minimize cultural biases, recognizing that differences in practices may reflect differences in cultural experiences and in the priorities that different societies assign to different values. Such a process would minimize the danger of condemning practices that should not be condemned.

The respect for cultural differences inherent in this process must not be allowed, however, to lead us into errors of the second kind: *failing* to condemn practices that should be

condemned. Direct acts of violence, oppression, discrimination, and neglect are not entitled to respect, no matter what the cultural context or the political tradition within which they occur. It is incumbent upon transnational actors to investigate reports of such acts and the circumstances surrounding them, and, where the facts warrant it, to condemn these acts, to exert public and private pressures against them, to offer support and aid to the victims, and to consider appropriate forms of non-violent intervention.

Insofar as possible, such efforts should draw on existing universal consensus, basing themselves on international agreements and working through intergovernmental organizations that represent this consensus. Where there is no clear international consensus—either because various national actors disagree about the criteria or their applicability in the particular case, or, what is more likely, because they are reluctant to take a stand out of political considerations—it is essential to initiate world-wide debate in an attempt to mobilize or create such consensus. Even if the consensus remains elusive, the debate must be continued as part of a long-term effort to evolve and test criteria whose validity is universally accepted. In the meantime, however, as long as they remain convinced that particular practices are in violation of universalistic criteria of human dignity, transnational actors cannot passively acquiesce while waiting for international consensus to be formed or consistently applied. Indeed, it is largely through their repeated and vigorous challenge of these practices that the consensus will eventually evolve and be mobilized. These processes are well illustrated by the world-wide struggle against human rights violations in recent years. In directly challenging violations of human rights, wherever they may occur, the various actors in this struggle—including such transnational organizations as Amnesty International—have drawn on the existing consensus, have attempted to mobilize it and extend it, and have succeeded in changing the level of consciousness about human rights issues throughout the world.

The line between practices that reflect legitimate cultural differences and those that represent violations of universal principles cannot always be clearly drawn. Nevertheless, we cannot escape the obligation to draw that line through expedient recourse to an easy relativism. While avoiding self-righteousness and maintaining cross-cultural sensitivity throughout, we must be prepared to take an unambiguous and active stand against practices that violate fundamental criteria of human dignity.

THE DIALECTICS OF HUMAN DIGNITY

I have argued that the basic conditions for human dignity must be established on a world-wide basis, in keeping with a set of universalistic criteria, and that this goal cannot be achieved without extensive transnational efforts. A direct implication of my position is that nation-states must be prepared to yield a degree of their national sovereignty, to expand their range of empathy, and to think in terms of global rather than entirely national interests. In short, the realization of human dignity in the contemporary world requires changes in the nationalistic assumptions that have dominated the international system and curtailments of nationalistic demands and aspirations.

This global emphasis runs counter to the dominant view of the nation-state as the primary provider of human dignity—a view shared across the international political spectrum: the populations of established nation-states look to the state for the protection and extension of their dignity. At the same time, movements of national liberation seek to establish new nation-states to assure dignity for oppressed populations. The central role of the nation-state as provider of dignity is rooted in nationalist ideology. A fundamental assumption of modern nationalism is that the nation-state is most naturally and effectively representative of the population under its jurisdiction by virtue of the fact that its political boundaries also constitute national boundaries. The presumed correspondence of the political entity to an ethnic, cultural, and historical entity, with which at least large portions of the population identify, leads to

the further presumption that the nation-state assures the best protection of the needs and interests of the population (Kelman, 1969). Thus, the nation-state is perceived as a source of dignity in two respects, related to the two components of dignity distinguished earlier: identity and community. On the one hand, insofar as the nation-state is representative of the ethnic and cultural identity of the population, it provides individuals a sense of participation and control over their own fate. Through identification with an independent state, the individual affirms and expresses his personal identity and experiences an enhanced sense of self-respect and self-transcendence. On the other hand, insofar as the individual is included within the boundaries of the political system and secure in his citizen status, he can rely on the nation-state to meet his basic needs and protect his interests.

The reality of the nation-state rarely lives up to the ideal model envisioned by nationalist ideology. The very composition of most states violates, to a greater or lesser degree, the assumption that the political entity corresponds to a national (i.e., ethnic-cultural) entity. Many nation-states are multiethnic and contain population segments—usually ethnic minorities—whose identity is not adequately reflected by the system. Along with this deprivation of identity, these population groups often experience exclusion and discrimination, so that their needs and interests are inadequately met. Furthermore, there are many nation-states in which the majority of the population lacks opportunities to participate in decision-making or suffers from inadequate attention to their basic needs or both. Still, the nation-state typically provides enough sentimental or instrumental satisfactions to enough people to hold their allegiance. The ability of the state to mobilize allegiance is aided by the fact that sentimental and instrumental satisfactions tend to reinforce each other and can partially substitute for one another. Thus, on the one hand, "the perception of the state as representative of national unity can compensate for failures to meet the population's needs and interests. On the other hand, the perception of the state as meeting the populations's needs and interests can compensate for

a lacking sense of national identity, and can in fact help to create such an identity" (Kelman, 1969: 285).

The near monopoly of the nation-state on the supply of human dignity is reinforced by the structure of the international system. Since the international system is organized around the nation-state as the predominant unit, the provision of important goods and services and the protection of important rights are channeled through the nation-state. For example, development aid—whether provided by individual states or by international organizations—goes to recognized nation-states. States can make trade arrangements, enter into military alliances, and sign a variety of agreements. States can also provide protection to individuals when they are away from home; the significance of this protection is painfully apparent to those who are deprived of it—stateless individuals or groups.

The structure of the international system and the central role of the nation-state within it account for the continuing strength of nationalist ideology. It is both understandable and in many ways rational for groups that feel oppressed to take the establishment of an independent nation-state as the focus of their struggle, perceiving such a state as their vehicle for achieving dignity. Despite the fact that the nation-state rarely corresponds to the ideal model postulated by nationalist ideology, it contrasts favorably with the experience of foreign domination and colonial status, which by its nature denigrates a people's identity and neglects its needs and interests. An independent state provides opportunities, at least to certain elites, to gain control over their lives, to increase their economic and political power, and to give expression to their cultural values and traditions. To the masses, it provides greater assurance that their needs will be sympathetically considered and a greater feeling that they are respected, autonomous human beings. To be sure, the hopes for a better life in an independent state are often frustrated; foreign oppression may merely be replaced with domestic oppression, and, for some minorities, membership in a nation-state may be tantamount to internal colonization. Nevertheless, we should not minimize the potential contribution of an independent nation-

state to an oppressed people's dignity, even if it is only by enabling them to gain, through identification with the state, a vicarious sense of efficacy and importance.

It is paradoxical that the spread of nationalism and its renewed vigor throughout the world come at a time when two dysfunctional aspects of the nation-state are increasingly being recognized. These are related, respectively, to the growing interdependence between nation-states and the upsurge of ethnic divisions within nation-states.

I have already spoken in some detail about our global interdependence for the achievement of international peace, social justice, and individual freedom. This growing interdependence has made it

> increasingly evident that the nation-state is no longer capable of serving some of the functions it was designed to serve. Foremost among these is the function of military security, which no state—no matter how powerful—can fulfill on a unilateral basis today. Newer and poorer states, in particular, cannot entirely rely on their own resources to carry out the functions of economic development and of meeting the health and welfare needs of their populations. Higher education, scientific research, and technological development are among those functions that will increasingly have to be organized on a transnational basis. [Kelman, 1968: 661]

Thus the ideology of the nation-state becomes dysfunctional by erecting barriers to alternative patterns—supranational or transnational in scope—of organizing for those functions that individual states cannot handle effectively.

The second dysfunctional aspect of the nation-state also derives from the underlying assumption of nationalist ideology "that only a system reflecting the population's ethnic character can properly look out for its needs and interests. . . . If there are strong ethnic and cultural divisions within a state, then this ideology may interfere with the government's ability to organize the society effectively" (Kelman, 1968: 664). Such ethnic divisions and the associated feelings of discontent are not only hampering the development of national unity in new states, but

are creating serious unrest in older, well-established states and even, in some cases, threatening to break them up. These conditions point to the importance of subnational arrangements to satisfy some of the sentimental and instrumental concerns of population segments within nation-states. At the same time, they reinforce the importance of transnational arrangements, in view of the cross-cutting links between subnational groups (such as ethnic minorities) and groups in other countries with which they share elements of identity and interest.

These dysfunctional aspects of the nation-state—quite apart from any ideological commitment to the concept of a global society—make transnational efforts essential to the achievement of human dignity. This consideration, taken together with the potentially liberating role of nationalism, makes the extension and protection of human dignity a dialectical process, characterized by an inherent contradiction. On the one hand, dignity implies the right of each group to express its national identity, to control its own fate, to resist domination and oppression, and to protect the interests of its members. In the context of the current international system, the exercise of these rights often takes the form of establishing an independent nation-state or at least a highly autonomous unit within a larger state. On the other hand, extension and protection of human dignity require the development of a global society, in which many important functions—including the basic function of protecting the population against threats to their survival in the form of war, starvation, and repression—are provided on a cooperative transnational basis. In view of the increasing interdependence of nation-states, this implies a diminution of national sovereignty and of the paramountcy that the nation-state currently enjoys. We are thus faced with the contradiction that nationalism represents both a vehicle for and a barrier to the enhancement of human dignity.

There is no easy formula for resolving this contradiction. For example, the argument that nationalism is a progressive force in national liberation movements and former colonies, but a reactionary force in established states, is specious on at least

two grounds. First, it ignores the fact that creation of a new nation-state has a potentially liberating effect precisely because of the powerful role of nation-states within the international system, which is preserved and modeled by the established states. Second, it draws an unrealistically sharp line between new and established states, forgetting that new states quickly become established in the sense of developing vested interests and patterns of internal discrimination or external aggression; and that established states, under the prevailing conditions of interpenetration, may well find their autonomy threatened. Thus, the dialectical character of nationalism cannot be glossed over by the application of a double standard. The right of oppressed peoples to the expression of their national identity and determination of their own fate is not synonymous with the perpetuation of the nationalist model of nation-states unrestrained in their exercise of national sovereignty and their pursuit of national interests. This model, in any part of the world, is inconsistent with the requirements of human survival. In short, the realization of human dignity depends on a balance between fulfillment and containment of nationalist aspirations.

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