

The Role of Human Dignity in Promoting Creativity, Knowledge and Peace: Humiliation as a Basis for Dehumanization, Conflict and Destruction

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A renowned geneticist Stephen Wells (2002) points out that creativity is a hallmark that separates human beings from other animals. Genetically, *homo sapiens sapiens* emerged as the only surviving species, descending from a single tribe in Kalahari, Africa 60,000 years ago (Wells, 2002). Through a series of innovations (e.g., stones tools, controlled use of fire, domestication, agriculture, industrialization, and information technology), we have learned to understand and control our environment. The second critical feature is our capability to empathize and care for others (Conrad, 2007). We enshrine these virtues in morality, values and ethics. The third critical feature is anchoring abstract ideas into material forms (e.g., art) and systematizing knowledge through religion, math, philosophy and science. Human dignity arises from people participating in the creative process, sharing these ideas, and building peaceful societies where these ideas and innovations can flourish. Democracy and the rule of law allow people to participate as equals and to enjoy the highest quality of life. The greatest humiliation, in contrast, occurs when people are excluded from the process and denied a sense of humanity. It occurs when a set of ideas in religions, philosophy or science become an entrenched ideology and stifle creativity and used to create artificial divisions (e.g., based on race, class, gender, or religion). The artificial divisions and ideological justifications sow the seeds of anger, distrust and despair, which in turn can lead to conflict, destruction and war. In religion, Crusades and slavery were justified using Christian doctrines and terrorism is now being used by radical extremists who claim to represent Islam. In politics, social Darwinism was used to justify political ideologies of free-enterprise capitalism, fascism, and communism, which paved the way to World War II, Cold War and genocide. In psychology, IQ tests were used to “scientifically” classify individuals as “genetically inferior” to support a policy of eugenics, immigration restriction and racial discrimination. In secular societies, non-believers herald freedom of speech to humiliate religious beliefs that are sacred to its followers. Currently, unbridled capitalism and greed have created the financial turmoil that poses the greatest economic crisis since the Great Depression. It is important to recognize that an individual or group can only have a version or an approximation of reality and that it does not represent the Truth, the whole Truth and nothing but the Truth. Our reality is collectively constructed through our senses (e.g., science) or through culture (e.g., philosophy, religion and art). Destruction, conflicts and wars emerge when we erect artificial divisions and deny an individual or group to participate as equals. Creativity is stifled when ideas become fixed or standardized (difference in dangerous), but emerges when we appreciate, share and celebrate differences (*vive la différence!*). We have a choice to create

or to destroy, to wage peace or war. Peace is the fruit of the creative human process and the hallmark that separate humans from other species. In human life, it is not the survival of the fittest, but building a society in which everyone is viewed as unique, imbued with dignity, and with equal access to the process and product of human creativity, innovation and compassion.