

FOREWORD BY HOWARD RICHARDS

Philosopher of Social Science and Scholar of Peace and Global Studies

Foreword for

Lindner, Evelin Gerda (2019). *From humiliation to dignity: For a future of global solidarity*. Lake Oswego, OR: World Dignity University Press, Dignity Press.

The central message of this book emerges gradually as the confluence of many lines of research and reflection employing various methodologies, various conceptual schemes, various models and various vocabularies. It cannot really be understood without reading through the evidence and argument that show not only what the central message is, but also that it is true. Nevertheless, I will begin this Foreword by trying as hard as I can to summarise it briefly. Then I will offer an opinion on how to get from here to there. 'Here' refers to the world as it is. 'There' refers to the world as it needs to be. Lastly, I will make a remark on method.

Emotions have histories. Our experiences today of shame or humiliation, or of the happier emotions associated with dignity, are present-day outcomes of centuries-long histories. If we include the long evolution of the human species, from the time of our common grandmother Mitochondrial Eve until now, then we can speak of the millennia-long histories of our emotions. We could go even farther back, all the way to the appearance of the first unicellular organisms on planet earth, approximately 2.3 billion years ago.

This book breaks up history in a way that features two major periods in the history of emotions. The first, and by far the longest, began when our ancestors first crossed the somewhat arbitrary imaginary line that marked their passage from being pre-hominids to being hominids. It ended, after about 190,000 years, with what anthropologists call 'circumscription'. During that time the deepest and most fundamental features in the human emotional repertory were composed.

'Circumscription' meant that around and about 10,000 years ago, the human population on planet Earth reached a point where humans ran out of space. You could no longer wander farther away whenever you needed to find more wild animals to hunt or plants to gather, because when you arrived where you were going you would find some other band or clan already there, already hunting the same animals or gathering the plants you wanted. Competition for scarce resources led to a sea-change in social structures and in emotional repertories.

The second, more recent and shorter, featured period began around 1757 and is not over yet. The year 1757 serves as a marker for the beginning of a transition from honour-humiliation to dignity-humiliation. Otherwise put (regarding humiliation as an assault upon dignity): 1757 marked (again the exact date is somewhat arbitrary) the beginning of a transition toward equal dignity for all. Honour-humiliation corresponds to defining dignity as rank in a hierarchy. It functioned, and in many places still functions today, to maintain social structures that evolved to adapt to circumscription, originating in conquest and preserved by dominance and subordination.

Dignity-humiliation corresponds to a different way of understanding human beings. It corresponds to human rights anchored in equal dignity for all. The age we are living in can be thought of as a long and difficult transition. Sometimes one step forward is followed by two steps back. The moral compass of the transition points to its guiding star: equal dignity. Its ideal is a planetary civilisation whose ethical-juridical framework is founded on 'recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family'.¹

An unintended consequence of today's global culture formally committed to human rights ideals has been an epidemic of humiliation. The insight that this is the case first came to Evelin because of her experiences in the Middle East and Africa. However, once one sees that this is the case and why it is the case, it becomes evident that human rights ideals to a greater or lesser degree lead to humiliation everywhere. Here I omit anticipating this book's extensive discussions of how to define humiliation, and move straight to thumbnail sketches of two of the reasons why more proclamations of human rights have led to more humiliation.

The first is that people are no longer willing to accept being put down and kept down. Most people have come to feel that there is something wrong with them if they knuckle under and do not insist on being treated with the respect due to any human being. It was (and is) different in a society based on unequal dignity where humiliation is understood as failing to get the honour due to a person of one's rank. People learn to know their place, even when their place is down. Putting them down by voice or by violence is regarded as a proper way to teach them their place.

The second is that proclamations of human rights, especially of the social rights proclaimed since 1948, as far as most people most places are concerned, are sheer hypocrisy and insult. They begin trails of broken promises leading to intolerable gaps between rhetoric and real life. The rhetoric says over and over again: You do not live up to expectations; you do not have what you are supposed to have; you are not what you are supposed to be. I will say more about this below under the heading 'structural humiliation'.

The second of these two reasons tells us that to a large extent it is not human rights ideals *per se* that leads to massive humiliation and anger. It is promising them and then not delivering on the promises. To this extent we can still almost agree with the authors of the Universal Declaration and the diplomats who voted to approve it: Recognition of human rights 'is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world'.² We only need to rephrase their words to say: 'Recognition of human rights *would be* the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world *if* human rights *were* recognised in fact and not only on paper'.

But wait. The first of the above two reasons *does* say that human rights ideals *per se* lead to massive humiliation and anger. Human rights ideals call for equal dignity, and equal dignity calls for dismantling traditional hierarchies. And in many cases dismantling customs that are deeply ingrained in the hearts and in the common-sense of the people leads to humiliation. It attacks their sense of who they are, their identity. But wait again. In many other cases – and often in the same cases seen from other perspectives – traditional hierarchies have been imposed on people who hate and resent them. And further -- to add yet another layer of complication -- nothing rules out the possibility that promoting human rights might serve as a cover for corruption and exploitation. This is not just a bare possibility. It has happened.

One might conclude that in principle it is a good thing when the modern kind of humiliation (dignity humiliation) motivates people to stand up for rights they previously did not know they had; but general principles need to be tempered to fit particular cases. One might also say that most traditions can be 'harvested' by finding the germs of equal dignity already in them. There is no need to be anti-tradition to be pro-rights.

I wrote the preceding two paragraphs as short teasers. They are an invitation to read the long treatments of these and many other issues, in later pages of this book I am introducing.

Getting from here to there

Let me overlook for now the complications just mentioned that will be taken up later, although not by me, and go back to my revised version of part of the preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: ‘Recognition of human rights *would be* the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world *if* human rights *were* recognised in fact and not only on paper’.

A threshold question is why the human family has failed so miserably to do what it officially intends to do. It has failed to assure the human rights of each of its members, including personal safety, freedom of speech, cultural identity, clean drinking water, dignity in old age, employment, health care, and others; even though such rights are solemnly declared in international treaties signed and ratified by nearly every nation. They are also included in most national constitutions that have been written in recent years. If we knew why we failed, then we could deduce from our failure a list of obstacles we need to clear out of the way before we can succeed.

I could make a long list of factors often cited that purport to explain but (in my view) do not explain the phenomena that are observed. There is not enough greed in the world, not enough callous indifference, not enough racial prejudice, and not enough general hostility and ill will to explain the precarious lives, the stress, and in general the exclusion from the joys of life of the majority of our cousins who, like you and me, are descendants of Mitochondrial Eve. Ignorance of the science of ecology (defined as a synthesis of the natural sciences) is (in my view) only a small part of the explanation of humanity’s lockstep death march leading straight to irreversible deviations from the delicate equilibria that make the biosphere possible. Further, it is not true that it is to the interest of a small elite, the famous 1%, to keep most of us on the ropes, living from pay check to pay check, or living without a pay check, in order to maximise their happiness and/or their power. It is certainly not to the interest of their descendants to bring human life to an end, nor is it to their interest to spend the time that remains between now and extinction in grossly unequal and grossly dysfunctional societies. What is true is that there are *deep structures*, analogous to DNA in biology, molecules in chemistry, and tectonic plates in geology, whose *causal powers* generate the main trends seen in the facts.³

The phrase ‘deep structure’ came to me via my co-author Joanna Swanger. Joanna sometimes remarks that in our book *The dilemmas of social democracies*⁴ we analysed the deep structures of modern economies as Noam Chomsky analysed the deep structures of languages.⁵ Our case studies of Spain, Sweden, Austria, South Africa, Indonesia, Venezuela and the World Bank echoed Jürgen Habermas’s point in *Legitimation crisis* that what he called ‘late capitalism’ must end in the fiscal crisis of the state.⁶ Habermas showed that as time goes by, it becomes more and more clear that a government’s obligations to promote economic growth and to pay for complying with human rights saddle it with obligations it cannot fund. Many writers who analyse the decline of social democracy stop here. Habermas, and Joanna and I echoing him, go on to specify that human social rights cannot be funded within the constraints imposed by modernity’s neo-Roman rule of law; or, as Joanna would suggest, rephrasing the same point in more general terms, *within the constraints imposed by the deep structure*. For example, taxes must be low to avoid provoking capital flight and to promote growth, but taxes must be high to pay for a welfare state. Among the typical results of this dilemma are cynicism, unmet needs, low growth, and unpayable debt. The deep causes (the legal framework, but not only the legal framework) of such dilemmas of social democracies we have called ‘the basic cultural structure’ in our book. Joanna suggests that they could also be called *à la Chomsky* the ‘deep structure’.

I picked up the phrase ‘causal powers’ from one of my tutors at Oxford, the philosopher of science Rom Harré.⁷ Unlike philosophers of a positivist temper, who tend to see science as fitting mathematical models to data, Harré tends to see science as the discovery and the modelling of the underlying causal powers that produce the data.

If we now ask the question, ‘What are the deep structures whose causal powers generate the obstacles we need to clear out of the way before we can succeed in building a world where human rights are the foundation of freedom, justice and peace?’ I would suggest reading this book as a giant step toward answering it. Let me say why. Unlike some other studies of the psychology of the emotions, this study sees the history of humiliation, and the history of dignity, as part and parcel of the history of social structures. It shows that the way the deep structure is, is not the way the deep structure has always been. It illuminates, as I will discuss in a little more detail shortly, and as I have already begun to illuminate by citing *The dilemmas of social democracies* and *Legitimation crisis*, why the particular historically evolved deep structures that most people take for granted today are simultaneously promises of equal dignity for all and obstacles in the way of achieving it.

This Foreword to this book has the peculiar characteristic that both the author being introduced, Evelin Lindner, and her introducer, myself, hold two earned doctorates. Hers are in medicine and psychology. Mine are in philosophy and law. She, in this remarkable book and in other works, has added a new dimension to understanding the historical genesis of the world we live in today, by studying it from the general point of view of the history of the emotions with a specific focus on the history of humiliation. In what follows, I seek to contribute to our partnership – and at the same time to diagnose some obstacles preventing humanity from carrying out what at this point in history are its official intentions – by restating some of her key points from the point of view of the history of law.

The transition from honour-humiliation to dignity-humiliation runs parallel to the transition the legal historian Sir Henry Maine called a transition from status to contract.⁸ For Maine, in a status society one’s social relations are determined principally by the Family into which one is born. This would correspond to being humiliated by being denied the respect due to one’s inherited rank. In a contract society social relations are determined principally by Free Agreements among individuals. This would correspond to being humiliated by being denied freedom of choice; for example, by being raped or groped. The parallel is not perfect, but it is close enough to make it clear that when we are talking about a society whose ethical ideal is equal dignity, when we are talking about a society where the principal social ties are established by free agreement – most fundamentally, free agreement among buyers and sellers in markets – we are talking about the same kind of society. Namely: modern society.

From a legal point of view, it is important to notice that because contracts are by definition free agreements, *nobody has a duty to enter into a contract*. Importantly: nobody has a duty to buy, just because someone else needs to sell to make a living. This deep structure generates what I call *structural humiliation*.⁹ It provides the legal basis for a society where everyone is expected to stand on their own two feet and make their own living; but making a living requires selling something. To earn money to live on, one must sell either one’s labour power or sell something else. Everybody has to sell, but nobody has to buy. Since everyone is in the business of trying to rake in more money than they pay out; it is a mathematical certainty that there will be people who fail to sell for lack of buyers. Whatever their good intentions and hard work may or may not be, it is structurally impossible to sell without a buyer. Many more will only be able to sell what they have to sell for sums so small that they live in poverty, and therefore live in embarrassment.

The opinion I offer on how to get from here to there is to take seriously the language in declarations of human rights that define humanity as a ‘the human family’ and calls for a ‘spirit of brotherhood.’ Since 1948 we have learned to add ‘sisterhood.’ My opinion

complements the passages in the following pages by Evelin Lindner calling for conceiving human rights as those of a member of a family, and not just as those of individual buyers and sellers in markets where each is authorised by law to seek her or his own advantage, and nothing else. In the terms of Sir Henry Maine, the path to a sustainable future runs by way of a synthesis of Family and Free Agreement, and not by way of obliterating the first for the sake of maximising the second. It is true that the cultural structure Maine conceptualised as the Family principle was a principle of unequal dignity. But it was also a principle of mutual obligation. Maine did not even think about any laws more ancient than those of ancient Greece; he did not even consider human life prior to 10,000 years ago. If his knowledge base had been larger, he would have realised that the human body evolved as the body of an animal adapted to live in extended families.¹⁰

A key and indispensable part of my advice is to build institutions that do something families – or at least those families that are reasonably functional – do: Share the surplus. Create surplus. Share it. Move resources from where they are not needed to where they are needed. Of course, it is impossible to share the surplus if there is no surplus; and impossible to move resources if there are no resources. Therefore, my simple advice to share the surplus implies complicated tasks for mission-driven organisations.

Let me say a few words in praise of the word ‘mission.’ A great beauty of this book is that its call to complete the historical transition to equal dignity defines a *mission* for us all; rooted in science and ratified by a global consensus. I am praising the word ‘mission’ because I think it is a fine old word, capable of stirring the roots of fine old ancient emotions, and at the same time today it is a word strongly identified with systematic collective efforts to solve problems.

These abstract considerations have everything to do with such very concrete questions as: How to fund human social rights like health, education and pensions? How to assure access to dignified livelihoods for the increasing numbers of people made redundant, or demoted to low-paying and precarious work, by the exponentially accelerating advance of sophisticated technologies that make human labour less and less marketable as a factor of production? How to get off the treadmill that requires ever more sales, and an ever larger human population to do ever more buying and selling, to keep the economic machine going, killing life on this planet at the physical level while at the economic level growth (defined as increasing sales) is a systemic imperative? How do we defend social justice when its attackers are economic phenomena authorised by law like capital flight, disinvestment, budget cuts, rising prices, falling real wages set by market pricing, and layoffs?¹¹

A remark on method

I began by saying, and still believe, that the central message of this book emerges gradually as the confluence of many lines of research and reflection employing various methodologies, various conceptual schemes, various models and various vocabularies. I suggest that the same can be said of Charles Darwin’s *On the origin of species*. The examples of these two books serve to illustrate an important point about scientific method.

Darwin described his masterpiece as ‘one long argument’,¹² but he is far from following the scholarly tradition of writing at the end of his long argument, Q.E.D. (*Quod erat demonstrandum*, ‘what was to be demonstrated’) and repeating at the end of the argument the exact statement that at the beginning he set out to prove, declaring it now to be proven. Instead, Darwin concedes that his theory can be countered with ‘many and grave objections’.¹³ He does not think of himself as having advanced logically irresistible arguments which all rational minds will be compelled to quickly accept; instead he expects the majority of scientists to disagree with his theory, and counts on ‘young and rising naturalists’¹⁴ to

gradually change the status of his theory from that of a minority view to that of a generally accepted view.

Like the reasoning of Evelin Lindner, Darwin's reasoning freely mixes what he has learned from personal experience and from travel with what he has learned from readings. Darwin expects the reader, like himself, to be persuaded not so much by a tight chain of abstract definitions, as by a summation of various reasonings from various sources. The weight of the evidence gradually shows what it is reasonable to believe and what it is not reasonable to believe.

Darwin writes instead of Q.E.D., 'it may be convenient to the reader to have the leading facts and inferences briefly recapitulated'.¹⁵ What he then recapitulates are various lines of research and reflection. They are incurably miscellaneous. For example, numerous facts about the breeding of domesticated plants and animals are part of the same 'one long argument' as this inference: The existence on widely separated cold mountaintops of the same species of animals (and therefore, if his theory is true, of animals with common ancestors), while those same cold-weather animals are absent in the vast intervening lower and warmer spaces between one mountainous region and another, can be explained by geology. During the cold Pleistocene Epoch animals of the same gene pool with the same ancestors roamed both the mountains and the intervening plains. As the weather warmed up, they died out on the plains, leaving cousins of the same blood on separated mountaintops.¹⁶

In the entire *Origin of Species*, Darwin gives not a single immutable precise definition. Questions about the proper classification of the species and varieties of living forms are always to be answered by decisions; and the decisions are always to be made and to be revised, in the light of evidence gathered in field work. Indeed, Darwin finds that scientists have no golden rule fundamentally distinguishing what is to be counted as a species from what is to be counted as a variety.¹⁷ To this day, biologists do not agree on exactly how to define evolution, or on exactly how it works; and nevertheless, it can truly be said that 'in biology nothing makes sense except in the light of the theory of evolution'.¹⁸

The important point about scientific method that I want to make with my comparison of Lindner and Darwin can also be made by a variation of the old story about the blind men and the elephant. In the standard version of the story, several blind men give different accounts of what an elephant is, depending on what part of the elephant they are touching. Now let us vary the story: Suppose we increase indefinitely the number of blind men touching the elephant, and then we synthesise the evidence coming from their diverse reports. We would then expect their numerous reports to converge toward a true account, and the reason why we would expect convergence toward truth is that *there really is an elephant*. In the language of Roy Bhaskar, the ontologies (the being and the causal powers) of the objects of scientific study stay the same while human researchers describe them in different ways.¹⁹

Accordingly, living species really do evolve, and there really is a transition going on from honour humiliation to dignity humiliation in the period of history we are living in. Different authors approach the facts from different directions and describe them in different words, but however they are described the drives toward equal dignity and respect for human rights are happening in Cairo and in New York and all over the planet. The scientific method in the last analysis is not about following any particular recipe for producing knowledge, or about describing data in some particular regimented format. It is about discovering the deep structures whose causal powers generate the events that happen and the phenomena that appear.²⁰

¹ This quote is from the first sentence of the Preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 10th December 1948.

² This quote is also from the first sentence of the Preamble.

³ See my article ‘On the intransitive objects of the social (or Human) Sciences’, in the *Journal of Critical Realism*, Richards, 2018a. This article makes a case supporting Roy Bhaskar’s proposal to do social science treating social structure as analogous to the generative causal powers studied in the natural sciences.

⁴ Howard Richards and Joanna Swanger (2006). *The dilemmas of social democracies*. Lanham MD, Rowman and Littlefield.

⁵ Noam Chomsky, 1968. *Language and mind*. New York: Harcourt Brace and World.

⁶ Jürgen Habermas, 1973/1975. *Legitimation crisis*. Boston: Beacon Press.

⁷ Rom Harré and Madden, 1975. *Causal powers*. Oxford: Blackwell.

⁸ Henry Maine, 1861/1963. *Ancient law*. Boston: Beacon Press. First published 1861.

⁹ The concept of structural humiliation is further discussed in Howard Richards and Andersson, 2018. *Economic theory and community development*. Lake Oswego OR: Dignity Press.

¹⁰ Nancy Tanner, 1981. *On becoming human*. Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press.

¹¹ All these matters are discussed in more detail in *Economic theory and human development*.

¹² Charles Darwin, 1861. *On the origin of species*. New York: D. Appleton and Co. p. 399.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Id. pp. 418–419.

¹⁵ Id. p. 399.

¹⁶ Id. p. 318 ff.

¹⁷ Id. p. 244

¹⁸ Theodosius Dobzhansky, 1973. ‘Nothing in Biology makes sense except in the light of the theory of evolution’. In *The American Biology Teacher*. Volume 35, pp. 125–129.

¹⁹ Roy Bhaskar, 1975/2008. *A realist theory of science*. London: Routledge. First published 1975.

²⁰ The point of view here expressed is further developed, and compared to the views of Michel Foucault in Howard Richards, Evelin Lindner and Catherine Hoppers (2018). *Following Foucault: The trail of the fox*. Stellenbosch, South Africa: African Sun Media. The easiest and least expensive way to obtain the book is to Google ‘African Sun Media e book store.’