**Teaching Honor and Dignity:**

**The Basics**

**Charles S. Herrman**

**Part I**

**Honor and Dignity**

Teaching honor and dignity entails five considerations: first, the matter of defining the two words; second, the need to compare their natures and interactions; third, the individual and cultural contexts; fourth, the validity of the concepts as typological categories, and fifth, the rationale behind the importance of the topic.

As I mentioned in the background paper titled “Belief & Reliance: Mythic Ground for an Honor-Dignity Binary,”[[1]](#endnote-1) dignity is the backbone of honor, and honor is the face of dignity. These two words cannot and must not be defined separate from one another. They are as conjoined twins despite their important differences. As the backbone supports the integrity of the attached skeleton and the internal organ systems, so dignity supports the integrity of honor and all that it entails. As the organ systems reflect in their functions their obligation to the backbone, so honor reflects – in a certain respect it speaks to, speaks of – the dignity that secures its integrity.

Dignity is associated with *grace* and *quietude*. The early headmen and chiefs held authority by virtue of the respect they garnered by their quiet, graceful ways. Honor is active and louder by contrast. Honor is celebratory; it is the gift society confers upon those who act in defense of group values.[[2]](#endnote-2) In some old Norse societies there was a “bragging cup” enabling talk that would otherwise be scandalous for its apparent hubris, its *loudness*. It was for the honored folk only. If dignity has an element of *grace*, honor has a special claim to *charm* in its capacity to claim group allegiance and togetherness, as well as the mutual bonds and behaviors to which they conduce.

Every individual, and every culture, possess both honor and dignity, in varying amounts and ratios. Every individual and culture are alike in that each strives to attain and retain mutual values, by acts that commute to honor (defined how you will). As honor feeds dignity, so dignity restrains the excesses inherent to the quest for honor. Once having attained to honor, it is imperative to keep it, which implies additional acts deserving of more honor still. Once dignity becomes prominent in one’s inner and outer expressions, it can only be seriously diminished under the most inauspicious and rare of events. It has a long life, and most everyone has a long memory of its value.

Honor, on the other hand, is fragile and prone to diminishment if not sustained with meritorious activities on behalf of the community. The chief among these added behaviors is the attaining to high offices such as the chieftainship, and even here honor must be maintained largely through expressions of dignity that garners unanimous acceptance and applause. Importantly, dignity is held to the standards of dignity itself, *not* to the standards of honor.

I first elaborated these ideas in college after reading of the attempts of Frederick Nietzsche to elaborate a typology in which the Apollinian (his pronunciation and spelling) has correspondence to dignity, and the Dionysian, with correspondence to honor. He made two gross errors, which presented themselves to me as fatal to his objective. He saw only individuals as expressing these exemplars, and he saw individuals as exemplifying only one of the two possibilities.

This necessarily led to embarrassing results. Nietzsche had placed Richard Wagner on a pedestal as the chief among Dionysians until learning of Wagner’s antisemitism, which he simply couldn’t stomach. It proved the death of his typology, and the embarrassment of this failure, having been put into print in his very first book, *The Birth of Tragedy*, led him to self-immolate in the introduction to the second edition of that book. He pegged Goethe as a weak, sentimental Apollinian, an accusation he was to regret and apologize for in his later book *The* *Gay Science*. He ultimately broke with Wagner and even with Schopenhauer, his mentor.

Back in the early 1970’s, when I was in school, Peter Berger and his co-authors were the first to put honor and dignity into the same sentence.[[3]](#endnote-3) But neither they nor anyone else followed up, to determine what is really going on with honor and dignity. Why do they exist and why do they rank as the most important values in each and every society that has ever graced this planet? You can count the investigators – who continually elaborate and advance our knowledge on this topic – on one hand. This despite a meek binary threatening to ground the most pressing issue of our day and time: the conflicts between and within nations.

The late Samuel P. Huntington urged that we carefully attend to cultural events that he saw as a dangerous force for death and destruction in, as he memorably put it, “The Clash of Civilizations.” Written initially as an article for the journal *Foreign Affairs* it appeared later as a stand-alone book of the same title, and which for a time held the spotlight on cultural typology.[[4]](#endnote-4)

His thesis was that religious factionalism (and fanaticism) threatened to break out into war between the major cultural “civilizations” (very roughly, Occidental and Oriental). He was wrong to place the entire focus on religion, but right to focus on cultural typology. What he didn’t realize is that the contest is actually between honor cultures on the one side and dignity cultures on the other. Needless to say, it is important that we better understand how this has come to be.

But first, how do we distinguish between honor-based (H-B) and dignity-based (D-B) cultures? We can begin with the values each appears to hold dearest. For the honor-based we will posit respect (of self or other), trust and earned or merited worthiness. For the dignity-based the values amount to acceptance, faith and inherent worth. Dignity-based societies are known for tolerance and optimism, honor-based for their realism and hospitality. In addition, we note that the D-B societies reflect inherent rights by the character of their legal systems which stress rights, transparency, and of course democracy of one sort or another.

Having studied more than two hundred cultures over five decades, these are some of the generalizations that set up the possibilities for a typological examination of culture. Yes, of course there are others. In the binaries that follow, the first refers to the honor-based, the second to the dignity-based societies.

I will begin by reprising the ideal dimensions just given. Honor-based (H-B) *respect* is outward toward others or inwardly directed in the form of self-confidence and/or self-help ideals (but lacking the outward-given respect there is accordingly less social capital).[[5]](#endnote-5) Dignity-based (D-B) *acceptance* conduces to tolerance and the giving of second chances, as well as the legal precept “innocent until proven guilty”. H-B *trust* in the sense of trustworthy is gained with experience dealing with others. D-B *faith* grants a benefit of the doubt until evidence denies the worthiness of the beneficiary. *Merited worth* in the H-B context reflects the duty of self to group and serves as the basis for a ground-level honor. *Inherent worth* (D-B) reflects a birthright to various human rights, grounding both acceptance and faith.

Honor-based *realism* has been mentioned; the dignity-based equivalent is *idealism*; anthropologist Ruth Benedict developed the shame-guilt typology in which *shame* cultures correspond to the H-B and *guilt* cultures to the D-B;[[6]](#endnote-6) H-B *freedom* is freedom from dependence on others whereas D-B *liberty* is a freedom earned through obtaining leave or obeying laws; H-B people share in the *responsibilities* owed to the community, whereas D-B people value their *rights* that the government is charged with protecting; under autocracies H-B citizens are, in matters of war especially, largely *dispensable*, like the soldiers Russia sends to Ukraine, whereas D-B soldiers are in theory *indispensable*; legal historian Henry Sumner Maine allowed that traditional H-B societies relied on *status*, whereas modern D-B societies rely on the *contract*.[[7]](#endnote-7) H-B status presupposes persons whose word can be *trusted*, whereas a contract implies the factor of *faith* that each party will do its assigned part. China and Japan were rather late coming to the contract because a level of trust in dealing with the other party couldn’t be presupposed.

The honor-based are *self-aware*, whereas the dignity-based are largely *self-conscious*; sociologist Harry Triandis developed the *collective-individual* dichotomy which correlates the first with the H-B and the latter with the D-B[[8]](#endnote-8); the H-B are *participational*, joining in numerous ceremonies and festivals, whereas the D-B sit apart, voting others to *representational* tasks that they themselves cannot or will not do whether together or separately. Finally, H-B cultures tend to be *far-sighted*, gauging what they do in terms of future consequences down the road. The D-B are *near-sighted*, paying heed only to what is immediate. There are other binaries, but these are the more important ones.

**Part II**

**Classification**

Allow me now to offer a short introduction to the types of honor-based societies in existence, and then draw broad comparisons between these and the dignity-based societies. [[9]](#endnote-9)

The following is the general classification schema:

**Quiet Cultures:** Cooperative / Competitive

**Intermediate Cultures:** Composite / Mixed

**Loud Cultures:** Dignity cult / Caudillo

**Quiet Cultures:** The prerequisite to a study of honor-based cultures is to apprehend and appreciate the distinction intended by the words “quiet” and “loud”. In general they refer to the mode of expressing or otherwise indicating the state or condition especially of one’s *dignity* but of honor as well. A Japanese blogger spoke truthfully from her cultural perspective in describing American speech and personality –

大声　（おおごえ　ohgoe) - loud - loud literally and loud as in opinionated

大げさ　(おおげさ　ohgesa) - exaggerated, exaggerates, over-dramatic.[[10]](#endnote-10)

In a quiet cooperative culture (typical of bands or lower-level tribal structures) the emphasis is above all on avoidance of disorder or instability in interpersonal relations. With individualism comes elevated competitiveness with louder expressions. Intermediate societies are ‘mixed’ when identifiable groups reflect quiet on the one hand and loud(er) on the other. The ‘intermediate-composite’ sub-type implies that quiet and loud are thoroughly intermingled and broadly distributed throughout the culture. The loud societies are therefore those that have without question left quiet standards struggling, and where loud traits are accepted throughout the culture with little muss or fuss.

**Cooperative Quiet traits[[11]](#endnote-11)**

**Collective honor**

All have the right to seek and claim honor; individuals represent the honor of their respective groups; success or failure reflects on the group and vice versa; one is neither ‘boss’ nor ‘better’ than anyone else; egalitarian principles are adhered to; all are entitled to food and shelter; cooperation is the desired way to achieve corporate goals; decisions on group action are usually expected to be unanimous.

**Compulsive conformity**

Parsimony, humility and modesty ground conformity; there is minor (if any) emphasis on dominance, achievement, aspiration or initiative; nails are pounded down (standing out is discouraged); criticism is unstated or understated.

**Composition and discord**

These groups are typically without political leadership factions; kin groups or interpersonal agreements effectuate customs; from quarrels to serious breaches of code, the object of social structure is peace and tranquility; there is a premium on the avoidance of risk and especially of discord and dysfunction; wrongdoers ask for and receive forgiveness; envy, jealousy and competitiveness are discouraged.

**Us versus them attitudes**

There is self-glorification and contempt for strangers; outsiders and the upper-classes are subject to a degree of criticism bordering on antagonism; there can be isolationism and xenophobia; strangers may also, however, offer opportunity to demonstrate hospitality.

**Authority without power**

True authority reflects an obligation to society and executive prerogative is absent, authority influencing instead through respect;[[12]](#endnote-12) ‘powered’ authority enters from outside and is inherently dangerous; material power requires spiritual power.

**Status and respect**

Respect builds honor; status derives from it and is granted indulgences. Elders usually earn the highest status and the greatest respect; respect and cooperation are a composite of quiet traits working through kin and para-kin groups; thin-skinned disposition is generally dependent on the degree of individualism.

**Work ethic**

A siesta approach to work and rest; patient expectation for reality to act; indifference to time or punctuality; tendency to leave matters unfinished or unrepaired; disapproval of high aspiration as being a challenge to fate; indiscriminate use of money; ‘Some things just happen.’

**Ideals**

Independence and autonomy; generosity; hospitality; not quarrelsome, not aggressive, not striving; behaves properly regarding rules determining both his own nature and society as a whole.

This corresponds reasonably well with Rousseau’s description (in *The Social Contract*) of a democratic moiety, one in which there are comparatively few members, let us say up to a few hundred, and where most people know one another. There we will find, as Rousseau describes it, “great simplicity of manners, to prevent business from multiplying and raising thorny problems; next, a large measure of equality in rank and fortune, without which equality of rights and authority cannot long subsist; lastly, little or no luxury – for luxury either comes of riches or makes them necessary; it corrupts at once rich and poor..; it sells the country to softness and vanity, and takes away from the State all its citizens, to make them slaves to one another, and one and all to public opinion” [Bk. III, ch. 4].

Individualism is related to competitiveness: I have said elsewhere that “Over time individualism is not only favored but becomes endemic; as it colors effort and economy, it likewise tends toward *competition*, especially where the immaterial values of honor, prestige and status are at stake. The two societies to be discussed below meet these criteria, making our task one of defining and distinguishing the cooperative from the competitive features common to the respective ‘quiet’ classes.”[[13]](#endnote-13)

The mountain Arapesh serve as an example of the cooperative quiet society. The Canadian Ojibwa will represent the quiet competitive classification. As reported by Margaret Mead, the Arapesh leader is one who “shows an all-round capacity for devotion to the community ends, one who is able and willing to lead in spite of a native dislike for leadership, one who is hospitable, wise, gentle, unquarrelsome, and intelligent in the sense that he is able to understand the ends of his society and to carry them out.”[[14]](#endnote-14) Sanctions in Arapesh are levied against those who provoke anger.[[15]](#endnote-15) In growing up they are not taught to take initiative or to take charge of their environment.[[16]](#endnote-16)

**Competitive Quiet Traits**

**Collective honor**

No one is either ‘boss’ or ‘better’ than anyone else. One is limited to the right to expect respect with merit, but no further, for competition presumes status differentials, especially where the group has become tribal. Egalitarian norms are, in principle, still adhered to: all are entitled to food and shelter. Cooperation remains the desired way to achieve corporate goals, but pure democratic decision-making is now the exception rather than the rule. Individual as well as social independence and autonomy, generosity, and hospitality remain or become still more important.

**Conformity**

Humility and modesty are admirable but no longer ground conformity. There is varying emphasis on dominance, achievement, aspiration or initiative which supervenes over strict conformity; standing out is no longer discouraged in knee-jerk fashion; criticism is evident but subdued.

**Composition and discord**

It seems that competitiveness is frequently correlated with some mode of formal governance; kin groups or interpersonal agreements effectuate customs; from quarrels to serious breaches of code, the object of social structure is peace and tranquility; avoidance of risk and especially of discord and dysfunction is subdued; envy and jealousy are now an understated norm; serious quarrels are still handled by families but now there are likely to be mediators associated with local governance.

**Us versus them attitudes**

Status is increasingly relevant; criticism is more common, and more frequently results in outright antagonism; there is less isolationism and more involvement with neighboring groups; xenophobia remains; strangers may also, however, offer opportunity to demonstrate hospitality.

**Authority without power**

True authority still reflects an obligation to society but executive prerogative is now occasionally apparent.

**Status and respect**

This remains much the same as before. Respect builds honor; status derives from it and is granted indulgences. Elders still earn the highest status, but for all others respect and cooperation are influenced by the presence of competitiveness.

**Work ethic**

There remains a siesta approach to work and rest but with more expectation to see initiative; there is still indifference to time or punctuality, and a tendency to leave matters unfinished or unrepaired; disapproval of high aspiration is no longer a challenge to fate.

**Ideals**

Personal ideals mesh with social ideals. Security and stability are somewhat less important than previously. The means for food, and peace with neighbors, are ideals. With competitiveness, private goods production increases and gradually, for some societies, becomes an ideal. Private property is born.

The Canadian Ojibwa are ‘quiet-competitive’, an intensely individualistic society stressing private ownership of everything from hunting grounds to songs and dances. The evidence that they are a quiet society is revealed in these points:

1) Authority is respected, not feared; power or coercion are rare or nonexistent. The captain of a war party has no authority to compel participation in a raid.

2) The Ojibwa avoid so much as a disagreement: Notes anthropologist Ruth Landes, “It is unlikely, however, that a woman would seed rice if her husband objected strenuously, not because she felt his authority, but because she would choose to avoid ill-feeling in the household.”[[17]](#endnote-17)

3) Those with more to offer are expected to give when asked.

As is common in quiet-competitive societies, pride in winning or victory is a boon to self-respect and confidence. Landes: “A boy’s life is full of never-ending incentives to personal achievement. A man aspires for renown in the male activities of shamanism, hunting, and war, in all or in some of these; and loses status if he is permanently unsuccessful. Only heedless young men...are foolish enough to guffaw at one another.”[[18]](#endnote-18) This “point-of-honor” reaction presupposes competitiveness which is also presumed from the existence of joking relationships. These reflect the need to maintain relationships between people whose interactions would otherwise be banned by a taboo.[[19]](#endnote-19) Marriages reflect competition in being brittle, “fairly short and very stormy.”[[20]](#endnote-20) Men feel humiliation keenly and will devote themselves to revenge. Common, and indeed essential to the “quiet” classification is the presence of institutional means of severely truncating “loud” behavior. This will not be characteristic of the next category.

**The Intermediate Class: Composite and Mixed Sub-types[[21]](#endnote-21)**

The composite designation refers to groups who combine quiet and loud behavior across the society. The mixed sub-type indicates two (or more) sub-groups within the society, the one which is predominately quiet, and the other that is without question “louder”.

The Ammassalik Eskimos of Greenland are matriarchal and, like most Eskimo groups, are also individualistic. They belong to the intermediate **composite** class. They combine quiet and loud traits throughout their culture. Quiet traits include the usual lack of political structures; headmen are severely limited in the extent of their authority. Unlike other Eskimo groups, the Ammassaliks do not engage in competitive sports, nor in shamanistic contests. But the ideal Eskimo is, as anthropologist Jeanette Mirsky reports, “one who is outstanding in skill, in strength, in power, a man who expresses his personality fully and without being deterred by economic, social, or supernatural sanctions. Such a man can take what he wants without fear, he can do as he pleases without being checked or ostracized, he is at once a terror and a pride.”[[22]](#endnote-22) Clearly, these are endemic loud traits. That they constitute an *ideal* indicates that the tendency is culture-wide.

The more powerful men partake of wife-stealing in a culture where she is a categorical necessity. “By far the greater number of marriages are concluded by the simple act of a man’s taking a woman, whether it be from her father or her husband. Women are taken by force, with the rewards going to the most powerful man,” observes Mirsky.[[23]](#endnote-23)

As an example of a **mixed** sub-group, the Lakalai is a traditional people on New Britain, a volcanic island. It features a majority with quiet traits and a smaller distinct faction characterized by their loud traits, recognized as such by the majority group. In Charles A. Valentine’s 1963 study the loud contingent are, in his words –

individuals who become angry frequently, easily, or without appropriate cause. Such persons are quick to take offense, ready to participate in quarrels, and easily moved to physical violence. [These] individuals [are] regarded as being highly sexed, greatly interested in sexual activities, and uninhibited in their expression of this interest. It is said that persons in this category may spend so much time and energy in intercourse that they become tired out, hollow-eyed, and even ill.[[24]](#endnote-24)

As for men of shame and silence, these words together connote, according to Valentine –

‘a man who sits silent.’ Their more general significance can be represented as ‘a man who is not talkative,’ ‘a man who conducts himself *quietly*’. From one point of view, ‘man of propriety’.... the idea of ‘good conduct’ which is expressed here evokes explicit approval and positive ethical valuation.[[25]](#endnote-25)

It need not be stressed how perfectly this fits with the ‘quiet’ style.

**The Loud Class: Cult of Dignity and Caudillo[[26]](#endnote-26)**

**Loud traits**

**Individual honor**

Honor fulfills ideal behavior, not average expectations; the honorable man is the ‘protagonist’ of his group; results and success may take precedence over downstream effects on others; he looks others in the face and applies mannered proprieties to avoid arguments or feuds; he will often feel it necessary to guard against slights.

**Personality**

Insecurity of constant public evaluation may breed a flood of self-assertion; these people are risk-friendly: rogues and adventurers are welcome. Working from agonistic values one can possess boundless self-confidence; the stress on competition breeds jealousy; one asserts superiority or the right to equal esteem; prerogative is the desire to overcome a rival; and at the maximum level immodesty, humility and meekness are appropriate only for women.

**Individuality**

There is indulgence toward boastful conduct; dependence is greatly feared; oaths expose one to public oversite; the individual personality is of the highest value; and as a general rule private ownership of property is the norm.

**Ideals**

The core ideals come from the same collection of societies used above, with the addition that the objective of society is often to ensure the maintenance of power in the upper class and/or governing factions. It is also the case that many societies value political independence and a socially oriented system of governance.

We will deal first with **The Dignity Cult**

A criterion of the loud honor-based society is that it collectively buys into loud behavior. For the Ifugao of the Philippines, loud is marked by aggressiveness and the antics of shrewdness, often accompanied by behavior reflecting points of honor. What distinguishes the Ifugao cult of dignity from the intermediate class is the evidence of group-based defense of privilege sometimes with the advertisement that such dignity has been purchased – and thus their prestige vouchsafed. “The very wealthy,” notes anthropologist Irving Goldman, “have validated their position by giving elaborate and costly feasts to their poor neighbors.”[[27]](#endnote-27)

A second frequently observed characteristic is that little or no attempt is made to limit downstream negative influences upon lower classes, *who actually value and respect wealth and status*. In traditional society the cult is usually the land-owning group, whereas in modern societies it is likely to be the governing or commercial groups. The cult presumes a special dignity unto itself: whereas the cult may assess as high as a 100% interest rate on outsiders, such does not apply within and between the wealthy groups. “’And don’t charge me interest,’ wrote one wealthy Canaanite to another, in a tablet dated 1200 B. C., ‘after all, we are both gentlemen’.”[[28]](#endnote-28) The club secures itself at all cost and represents the “cult of dignity” (see below). It is well to remember that such D-B cults can characterize H-B societies as well as D-B. After all, they are derived from cults of honor, which had their origin in honor-based societies. At first, however, these honor cults represent the highest values of society. They represent the best of the professions of all sorts, as well as other trusted and highly respected high-impact social groups.

Having just introduced the “cult of honor”, let me briefly add some remarks on these “cults”. The best way is with an example, noted in Figure (1) below.[[29]](#endnote-29) Charles S. Peirce (1839-1914), the American philosopher, described the dignity cult: “The old-fashioned political economist adored, as alone capable of redeeming the human race, the glorious principle of individual greed, although, as this principle requires for its action hypocrisy and fraud, he generally threw in some dash of inconsistent concessions to virtue, as a sop to the vulgar Cerberus. But it is easy to see that the only kind of science this principle would favor would be such as is immediately remunerative with a great preference for such as can be kept secret....”[[30]](#endnote-30)

**cult of honor**

1) *Universalism* – objectivity reigns

over personal aspiration;

2) *Communality* – collaborative en-deavors where “reward for… achieve-ment should be restricted to recognition and esteem”

3) *Disinterestedness* – no explanation required

4) *Organized skepticism* – each scien-tist held responsible for self- and other-accountability

(a)

**cult of dignity**

1) *Particularism* – “[He who] proved the superiority of…a rival research society would rapidly find himself ostracized…

2) *Miserism* – “[It is] necessary to be a miser and hoard one’s own findings to prevent use by rivals”

3) *Interestedness* – “Or, ‘Are you kidding?’”

4) *Organized dogmatism* – “Above all, one must not raise significant questions about previous [in-house] research... it is behavior best described as traitorous”

(b)

**Fig. 1.**

This is the cult that glorifies money and power over every other value and serves to radiate disenchantment among today’s fledgling democracies, those that are H-B or H-B transitionals. Rousseau went so far as to question the value of a money-based economy[[31]](#endnote-31) – an option which risks going too far in the other direction even while for many it is an aspiration that can be legitimately claimed simply by forming a commune. But if he could speak to the cult, he would mention that in worshipping money, the cult claims a right to dignity over everyone without access to a fortune. Yet the values of democracy are shouted from the rooftops and the responsibility for the evident social downsides is not only not a matter for concern but is generally kept as a closely guarded secret.

**The Caudillo**

The caudillo pattern is actually an example of what appears to be similar to an *ad hoc* office, meeting the chief criterion that a concentrated authority or power is put in place (often temporarily, not of course, by the caudillo’s choice) to accomplish for society what otherwise would not be possible. As with other offices (both civil and professional) it is an ‘institution’ for influencing society at large. Specifically, the caudillo pattern features potential clients who offer their allegiance in return for occasional favors. These are not, however, favors as a considered social obligation, but instead acts that ordinarily (with exceptions) reassure the client that his dependence on the caudillo serves the ends of personal and family security in an uncertain world.

This has resulted in an epithet for the institution: ‘the mendicancy of influence’. Given the nature of authority to aggrandize upon the powers of office, however, we might as well add to mendicancy the more dangerous term ‘mendacity’. As Jean-Francois Revel spent a great deal of effort detailing,[[32]](#endnote-32) this kind of mendacity absent any real sincerity accounts for most totalitarian motivations. Having originated deep within the bowels of culture, these institutions are not easily evaded, let alone overcome (even though any given caudillo may be overthrown).

When these offices were translated into military terms – armed militias under a common landlord – the last major step was in place such that men on horseback (cadillos) could now constitute the hub of a social pattern, that of *caudillaje*, the four features of which are:[[33]](#endnote-33)

1) The repeated emergence of armed patron-client sets, cemented by personal ties of dominance and submission, and by a common desire to obtain wealth by force of arms;

2) The lack of institutionalized means for succession to offices;
3) The use of violence in political competition; and
4) The repeated failures of incumbent leaders to guarantee their tenures as chieftains.

In elective politics there exists a collective presumption favoring a given caudillo: the assurance of order. Says anthropologist Peter H. Smith, “The authority...like that of all the caudillos...was based on the *unconscious suggestion* of our majority. Our people...instinctively followed the strongest, the bravest and the smartest, whose personality had become a legend in the popular imagination and from whom the people expected absolute protection”[[34]](#endnote-34) Seemingly ‘free and fair’ elections thus produce dictators.

Stalin and his Russia serve as an example of the caudillo type, less the reliance on horses. We note that Russia was, then and now, an intermediate composite class of H-B society with a cult of dignity at the top level of society and governance. The following trait descriptions are from one of my prior papers.[[35]](#endnote-35)

Quiet traits: 1) a conscious preoccupation with trust v. mistrust; 2) apprehension that people may not be what they outwardly seem; 3) penitent for acting out, they were not punitive toward themselves for such failings; 4) authority will begin with persuasion; 5) they feel their way through idealistically-focused situations rather than rigorously thinking them through; 6) dependence on loving protection and security...in relations with formal authority figures, and above all 7) a profound acceptance of group membership and relatedness along with a preoccupation with offering food together with hospitality

Loud traits: 1) not at all of a compulsive disposition to or for regularity, order or self-control; 2) high degree of expressiveness and emotional ‘aliveness’; 3) typified by great volubility with emphasis on singing (occasionally seen also in quiet groups, however); 4) an outstanding trait is said to be ‘contradictoriness’ and ‘ambivalence’; 5) willingness to offer and entrust confidences despite the risks, and 6) open willingness to offer criticism or express anger.

Stalin could expect and exact dependencies from his minions (Vasily Blokhin, e.g.). And because the caudillo prerogatives reflect long-standing cultural habits, it is taken for granted that the caudillo has the right to assert an elevated dignity and to expect immunities. In addition, Stalin undertook excursions with the vilest forms of violence. Only a caudillo gets away with that (Hitler also comes to mind).

**The modern H-B societies[[36]](#endnote-36)**

**Insecurity and bravado**

There are examples of the ‘Cargo’ mentality: a fancied deservedness for desirables that advanced cultures have not truly merited and which they should share or otherwise make available – as good an explanation as any to account for China’s determination to thieve intellectual property by any means possible.

There is a premium on the self-respecting, high-souled, generous, proudly ambitious man; The ideal is for leadership, nobility of manner and honesty in personal dealings; placing one’s good name, social image and rank above all else; wealth reflects importance, while the misdeeds of the wealthy often remain invisible.

A marked disinclination to air dirty laundry (the Western position allows this as expected from a doctrine of accountability, as least as an ideal).

A motto appropriate for Russians and various South American elites: ‘Eat the cake, keep it, sacrifice little and change even less’ (also a great motto for a cult of dignity)[[37]](#endnote-37)

Once having learned the Western concept of ‘dignity’ the honor-based come to thoroughly identify with it, as if it encapsulated much of their cultural Weltanschauung.

A disposition to strongly identify with national figures and groups earning prominence; states will ape Western constitutional ideals and then occasionally ignore them.

Persons or groups will occasionally goad a dignity-based person or group into uncomfortable or discomfiting positions as a game of one-upmanship.

**Institutions and statism**

Institutions tend to be populist, oligarchic, and/or dogmatic and are typically plagued with social and racial prejudices. Class inequalities may or may not become prominent.

Status differentials are often stressed even in the absence of discrepancies in living standards.

They are moderate to very nationalistic; there is occasionally a felt deservedness to cut a figure on the international stage; they can be found willing to accept remarkable deficiencies in basic rights in order to achieve a perceived stability and order in a difficult world. Perceived identity is increasingly important.

An occasional predilection for cultivated overt or indirect aggression to achieve goals;[[38]](#endnote-38) other advanced cultures – just because they *are* advanced – are sometimes seen as a threat to security or culture.

Many of today’s *transitional* (or in between) H-B cultures favor the D-B politico-legal forms that guarantee rights, while favoring a communitarian lifestyle. They remain in part H-B owing to a continuing special reliance on respect, trust and merited worth.

**Personality and relations**

A happy-go-lucky Weltanschauung is sometimes easily punctured by projected slights. It is occasionally common to seek control over others though manipulation. An especially solicitous regard for children that makes a few dignity-based persons seem Puritanical or uncaring. Personality more closed in cooperative, more open in competitive.

A love of expression, especially eloquence, dance and song. A strong tendency to utilize symbolism to reveal deep feelings.

Self-help is the established method of avoiding dependence and expressing independence. Independence also implies staying out of others’ disputes and expecting them to care for themselves. In some societies the poor and beggars are not infrequently removed from public areas, and the ailing (in public) are frequently ignored.

Quarrelsomeness is expected in some quiet competitive groups as well as the intermediate and loud classes.

The following passage is a bit severe, but carries some truth. Note that the first word of each pairing is more characteristic of the D-B. Margaret Mead notes that “Those forms of behavior which involve self-control rather than endurance, measurement rather than unstinted giving or taking, or calculation rather than immediate response to a situation [are] extremely undeveloped.”[[39]](#endnote-39)

In today’s honor-based societies the ideals are much the same as those of the dignity-based, but the motivation in the former is aimed at personal and social/cultural integrity whereas in the latter it is derived from principles of inherent worth. The problems of the honor-based society will reflect cultural aspirations as much or more than personal, whereas culture plays a lesser role in the dignity-based groups, whose major concern, individually and socially, lies more with universal rights. Visit an honor-based society today and you are likely to eat out at the same tables as others. It tends to be a community atmosphere. In bars you might take in a group song from time to time.

Always to be remembered, however, is that every person and culture have both traits, but in a way that either the honor-based or dignity-based are more favored. The typology doesn’t fail because some thirty percent of Americans socially dance on a regular basis (a trait more associated with the honor-based groups). Nor does the honor-based culture change its designation because their constitution protects some basic human rights. Further, many, many societies are transitional, between honor and dignity, sharing a rough equivalency of traits between them. Some are progressing to the dignity-based status, others not.

**Part III**

**Dialogue**

Why should we be so concerned about an honor-dignity divide? Why do I consider honor and dignity as the source of ultimate conflict between “civilizations”? The short answer is also the simple one: the D-B societies, in securing and protecting what they call “universal” rights, are in various ways viewed as interfering with cultural requisites of honor-based society. While that is not the intention of the dignity-based people, their active advocacy of gay rights and the rights of women, or the rights of immigrants and refugees for example, appear to an honor system as violating core elements of honor and/or dignity as they view it. Added to these are the twin aspects of democracy and a capitalist system of financial markets with capital in the hands of individuals rather than the government.

It should be born in mind that every society started out H-B, and survival needs governed the organization of life. It made sense that democracy and community-owned resources dominated the organization of bands, the first to ensure transparency and integrity, and the other to prevent disparities in worth since without that it could hardly be possible to assure a feeling of equality when required to act in the face of environmental pressures. Tribal systems evolved as a more effective means to deal with the hardships that confronted early society. Only with much more security did we come upon the leisure to experiment and evolve goods and services never before imagined. The great ancient civilizations materialized.

Greece and Rome were proto-dignity-based, the former only for a period, and Rome only gradually came to that stage with legal developments that would serve as the basis for many modern systems. With the fall of Rome and the gradual delimitation of the Hellenic period honor resumed its control. Only with the Enlightenment Period did we see the sudden and worldwide development of true dignity-based civilization. And so today the world remains perhaps 85 percent honor-tending and only 15 percent dignity-tending.

But the developing dignity-based societies materialized into economic powerhouses that left the honor-based societies in the dust, only gradually realizing advances which now compare favorably with those of the dignity-based peoples. In short, there has been a long-lasting conflict between the two “civilizations” that is looked upon as grossly unfair by the honor-based. But these complaints come to ring somewhat hollow. If they wanted advanced goods and services badly enough in the past to assess their situation as having been taken advantage of, how can they still hold that posture now that they claim to disparage and disregard Western products?

Westerners often do not appreciate that a part of the honor-based Weltanschauung is to feel slighted even at imagined insults. An example: felt disrespect by the Western powers. The best policy, understanding this, is not to appear superior; to express surprise that your auditor believes that Western powers have somehow devoured other’s cultures (they haven’t, but it *is* true that public and private agents try mightily to push their products wherever a market exists). In short, pay them the respect they have always and still do deserve. If they demur at our products, leave them be, but perhaps feel obliged to help them develop their own capacity to bring forth the products they do desire. That is how to make friends with the H-B contingent, though one can also expect them to take ripe advantage of the opportunities put forth, so strings are advised along with opportunities.

Today the competition is intensified by the clash between the rights espoused by dignity and the traditionalist practices of honor. What is not realized by either camp is that there is commonality between these two civilizations and that only dialogue and cross-cultural modifications can resolve an increasingly dangerous division between the two sides. But such changes require an educated people on both sides of the great divide. And that education requires respect for the cultural niceties of one another’s habits and morals. In philosophy the approach is called “relativism”.

Allow me to take as an example the division within American society between the dignity-based liberals and the honor-based conservatives. What can work here can work on the larger world stage since the principles are the same just on a larger scale. There are benefits that each society can derive from the other cultural order. The honor-based bring a *charm* to life, and the dignity-based offer some *graces* worthy of note.

The conservatives do indeed possess a culture of their own, and one thing history teaches quite clearly is the extent to which any people will go to defend their own culture. This led to the great Civil War in the 1860’s of American history. What we need is to avoid this specter on the world stage. In the Civil War the dignity-based north valued the human right to be free of slavery. The honor-based South viewed slavery as the cornerstone of their culture. Dignity won that contest, yet conservatives today are still in some instances wary of the blacks who they had once enslaved. They elaborate laws that dimmish the voting rights of minorities, for example.

But I have lived among these conservatives and was even raised in a conservative family, so I happen to have a great deal of first-hand experience with the values that shape our society. I am now an advocate of a liberal dignity-based approach which nonetheless sees and respects the value in the honor-society’s way of life. Most people anywhere in the world today will recognize that the dignity-based North was right to win that civil war. Slavery is anathema to anyone valuing human rights. Gradually, the world is going to ultimately recognize all of the other rights that presently stand in the way of cross-cultural understanding. Take my word for it. It will happen. Dignity is inexorable. What is needed is to smooth that path and remove the difficulties that result in conflict between the two great “civilizations”, those of the honor-based and the dignity-based.

Allow me then to describe some of the charms of our conservative honor-based America. But it will be wise to first offer the perspective that the vast majority of our conservatives are motivated largely by religious issues. Gay rights and women’s rights to control their bodies are pervaded through and through with (negative) religious valuations. In the present-day schema the attempt of conservatives to legally delegitimize these rights amounts to a gigantic violation of the Doctrine of Church-State Separation.

In colonial America (and I might add that many societies of each type have this in their pasts) each state could promote its own religion and enforce its values at law. If you lived in such a state but would not worship that religion it could, at the extremity, set you up for a jail sentence. No small part of the rationale for our Constitutional Convention was to rid us of this deleterious arrangement. A few observers even suggest that the First Amendment makes it illegal for not only the federal government, but *for any state* to establish a religion. Whether true or not, it is called the “Separation of Church and State” clause for a good reason.

The attempt to delegitimate human rights is accordingly a violation of what is implicit in our Constitution. But conservatives get away with it because the harms that were responsible for insisting on the first amendment clause regarding religion were *not* made illegal. Only the establishment of religion was made so. Thus, the forcing by law of a religious precept upon non-believers is, if not a violation of our Constitution, certainly a violation of the spirit of the doctrine. Just as dignity is inexorable, so this legal compulsion to join the religiously inspired constraints upon human rights cannot long last. And it will be a very clearly demarcated halt when that day comes. In the meantime all that can be done over time is to elect liberal presidents who will put liberal judges up and down the court system.

Now let me speak to the charm of the conservative qua religious way of life. I will relate my own experience. The assistant head of the department of nursing at a southern Baptist medical school received from her superior, as a complete gift, a new Cadillac. And I, who made her oatmeal every morning at a local restaurant and had become close with her, received, gratis, the car she had been driving, a high dollar Oldsmobile. This was not unusual in those circles, to gift someone totally gratis.

I took that car on sales trips through parts of Texas. One day outside of Alice Texas the ball bearings, which had been worsening for some time, gave out. I had pulled into a Walmart service station and there the entire wheel fell off of the car and rolled across the lot and into a ditch. I stared down at it, wondering just how I was to get back to Corpus Christi, having little cash on hand and no credit card to my name.

Just as I was pondering an impossible situation, I was accosted by a kindly man who had his Cadillac in the shop. He told me that the parts of the Olds that I drove were interchangeable with those of his car and would I mind if he bought my car for $100 and gave me a ride where I needed to go. Thirty-five years ago it was most generous, both in the amount and in the offer to take me to Corpus. But before that he needed to get back to his home to do a chore and then we could depart. The laundry I had in the back seat they demanded to wash for me, and they fed me what was by my standards a gourmet meal. This was southern religious hospitality at its best.

It is just one of many charms of these honor-based folk. These are the people who feed the poor and fill the sandbags in periods of flooding. They are also, be it noted, the ones on the phones for their conservative candidates and they are far outpacing others in running for local boards of education where, when in the majority, they press their religious beliefs still further. Today libraries in the honor-based South are finding all manner of books being banned for violating tenets deemed important to the religiously inspired honor-based culture.

Their beliefs are not my beliefs, but they have their right to them – and who am I to complain? Rights are rights, after all. Every culture deserves to maintain itself against outside forces. But there are limits to be respected here. What the conservatives fail to understand is that the dignity-based have rights too, and are in the majority. It is hypocritical of them to believe that liberals wish to terminate their culture, when it is liberal values that seek to guarantee that very culture! Clearly, they know little about liberalism. And few liberals will have had experiences such as I have had with a southern honor-based culture.

I personally get along with conservatives because I understand them. But I also let them know something about liberal values while I’m at it. No conservative who knows me will make war with me. There’s just no sense in it. We all want basically the same things from life, and we exist in part to ensure that everyone gets their slice of the pie. As long as we all do what is right, no one has reason to complain overmuch. Some do find that more difficult than others, of course. But on the whole, there is room for understanding and understanding can bring about success in our cross-cultural exchanges. And that can in turn reduce tensions.

This applies full well to the world scene; and while we can look to a glad future for dignity, we must acknowledge that it is in trouble at the present time. And despite how angry one can feel, it is imperative to understand the other side, and indeed to steelman their positions in order better to appreciate our own. More, those charming aspects of the honor-based cultures should be emulated, and they in turn can certainly benefit by emulating the dignity-based legal system’s adherence to civil rights (if not so much the others). Where everyone stands to gain, conflict subsides over time. Dialogue is the primary requisite.

**Notes**

1. Charles Herrman, “Belief & Reliance: Mythic Ground for an Honor-Dignity Binary”, Mar 2016. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/297757760\_Belief\_Reliance\_Mythic\_Ground\_for\_an\_Honor-Dignity\_Binary. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. See Willian Lad Sessions, *Honor For Us: A Philosophical Analysis, Interpretation and Defense* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 226 pages. See also Charles Herrman, “William Sessions on Honor”, *Eidos: A Journal for Philosophy of Culture*, 1 (7) 2019. DOI: 10.14394/eidos.jpc.2019.0011. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. “Both honor and dignity are concepts that bridge self and society... Honor is a direct expression of status, a source of solidarity among social equals and a demarcation line against inferiors...Dignity, as against honor, always relates to the intrinsic humanity divested of all socially imposed roles or norms.” See Peter Berger, “On the Obsolescence of the Concept of Honor,” in *Revisions: Changing Perspectives in Moral Philosophy*, eds. Stanley Hauerwas and Alasdair MacIntyre (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1983),176, 174, 176. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. See Samuel P. Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72 No. 3 (Summer 1993): 22-49. doi:10.2307/20045621. See also his *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996). [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. See Francis Fukuyama, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity* (London: Hamlish Hamilton, 1995). See also Edward C. Banfield, *The Moral basis of a Backward Society* (New York: The Free Press, 1958). [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1946). [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Henry Sumner Maine, *Ancient Law: Its Connection with the Early History of Society and Its Relation to Modern Ideas* (New York: Peter Smith, 1970 [1861]), 164-5. “If then we…avoid applying the term [status] to such conditions as are the immediate or remote result of agreement, we may say that the movement of the progressive societies has hitherto been a movement from Status to Contract.” [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Harry C. Triandis, *Individualism & Collectivism* (San Francisco: Westview Press, 1995). [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. What follows is modified from Herrman, “The Honor-Based Society, Past and Present”. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/369944246\_The\_Honor-Based\_Society\_Past\_and\_Present. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Maki (Blogger), “Americans are Big and Loud. Blog, Hungry for Words: Mostly Japanese.” http://maki.typepad.com/justhungry/2009/03/americans-are-big-and-loud-.html Accessed 9/22/2016. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Modified from Herrman, The Classification of Honor-Based Societies, (2017), 9-10. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/312213912_The_Classification_of_Honor-Based_Societies>. This paper was cited by the editor of the journal *Anthropology and Archeology of Eurasia* (2019). I was pleased to be in the company of S. A. Arutiunov, a leading (if not *the* leading) Russian expert on the topic. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Walter B. Miller, “Two Concepts of Authority,” *American Anthropologist*, 1955, 57 (2, pt 1), 271-289. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Modified from Herrman, Classification, 10. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Margaret Mead, “The Arapesh of New Guinea,” in Margaret Mead, ed., *Cooperation and Competition among Primitive Peoples* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961b) 20-50, 40. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Ibid, 42. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Ibid, 47. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Ruth Landes, “The Ojibwas of Canada,” in Margaret Mead, ed., *Cooperation and Competition among Primitive Peoples* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 87-126, 96. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Ibid., 114, 118, 123. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. A. R. Radcliffe-Brown informs us that the ‘joking’ relationship – “can be regarded as a kind of friendliness expressed by a show of hostility. The mutual abusive behavior would be simple hostility in other connections, but the joking relatives, ruled by convention, and the friendliness is exhibited in the readiness not to take offence but to respond in the same way. The social separation of the man and his wife’s relatives is symbolically represented in the sham hostility, ruled by convention, and the friendliness is exhibited in the readiness not to take offense.” See A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, “Introduction,” in *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*, ed. A. R. Radcliffe-Brown and Daryll Forde (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950), 57. See also his *Structure and Function in Primitive Society* (New York: The Free Press, 1952), 90-116. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Landes, Ojibwas, 104. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. The classification of the intermediate class is reversed here from what it is in the article The Classification of Honor-Based Societies. In the present article the “composite” subgroup distributes quiet and loud traits intermixed throughout the entire group and does not restrict loud traits to a specific and identifiable subgroup. In this presentation the “mixed” subgroup has two separate and distinct subgroups one of which is loud and the other of which is quiet. I believe the change makes good sense and will eliminate a degree of confusion. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Jeanette Mirsky, “The Eskimo of Greenland,” in Margaret Mead, ed., *Cooperation and Competition among Primitive Peoples* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 51-86, 73. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Ibid, 67. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Charles A. Valentine, “Men of Anger and Men of Shame: Lakalai Ethnopsychology and

Its Implications for Sociopsychological Theory,” *Ethnology* Vol. 2, no. 4 (1963): 445. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Ibid, 446, my emphasis. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Modified from Herrman, Classification, 8. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Irving Goldman, “The Ifugao of the Philippine Islands,” in Margaret Mead, ed. *Cooperation and Competition among Primitive Peoples*, 153-179 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 161. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House, 2011), 86. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. From Robert Boguslaw,(1968). Values in Research Society, in eds. Evelyn Glatt and Maynard W. Shelly, *The Research Society* (New York, NY: Gordon and Breach, 1968), 51-66. He quotes from the following authors: Robert K. Merton, *On Theoretical Sociology: Five Essays Old* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1968), 604-615, and Norman W. Storer, *The Social System of Science* (New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1966), 78-9. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. Charles Sanders Peirce, *The Collected Writings of Charles Sanders Peirce*, eds. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931), §1.75. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Government of Poland*, trans. Willmoore Kendall (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1985), 73-4. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. Jean-Francois Revel, *The Flight from Truth: The Reign of Deceit in the Age of Information* (New York: Random House, 1992). [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. Eric R. Wolf, and Edward C. Hansen, “Caudillo Politics: A Structural Analysis,” in Hugh M. Hamill, ed., 62-71 *Caudillos: Dictators in Spanish America* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 63. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. Peter H. Smith, “The Search for Legitimacy,” in Hugh M. Hamill, ed. *Caudillos: Dictators in Spanish America*, 87-96. (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992) 93. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. Herrman, Classification, 25. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. Modified from Herrman, Classification, 8-10. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. Claudio Véliz, *The New World of the Gothic Fox: Culture and Economy in English and Spanish America* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1994), 203-4. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. Peter Gay, *The Cultivation of Hatred* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1933). [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. Margaret Mead, “Soviet Attitudes Toward Authority,” in Margaret Mead, Geoffrey Gorer & John Rickman. *Russian Culture,*161-279 (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2001), 191. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)