



*Excerpted from*  
**Dignity, Technology, and Global Order**  
**New Approaches to Complex Challenges**

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*published by Johns Hopkins University*

## **A New Model**

The United States and China need to find a path out of their increasingly precarious security dilemma, and they need to do so in the geopolitical context of a global order under strain and on the precipice of enormous technological change. The aim of this paper is not simply to bring attention to this; progress requires new organizational mechanisms that encourage long-term thinking, avoid narrow, siloed approaches, and enable creative thinking beyond existing paradigms.

The previous section identified five factors essential for building an organization that stimulates innovative thinking. Four of these relate to organizational structures and incentives: a long time-horizon, a community of top talent, time and space for problem-finding and the “free operation of genius”, and patient, long-term funding. But it is important to remember that the purpose of these structural qualities is to serve an organizational vision. “Aligning the organization’s mission with a big vision that touches on deep questions about humanity” and “keeps researchers’ eyes on the horizon” requires careful consideration of what is most important—of what should be the substantive focus of the organization. For this reason, I will turn next to one possible proposed vision and initial research agenda for the organization before returning to the structural aspects.

This paper has focused on long-term futures between the United States and China, and the role that technology will continue to play in exacerbating U.S.-China strategic competition, as well as the unintended societal consequences with which all countries and societies need to grapple. But there are other acute, entrenched transnational challenges, such as climate change, social justice, migration, and public health that would also benefit from new, innovative approaches. New approaches should be about more than just organizational structures; it is critical to pose the right questions. A well-articulated organizational focus should shine a light on the underlying assumptions and questions that underpin all of these challenges. That is to say, what are the basic questions that need to be answered to make progress on all of these issues?

Cutting across and underpinning all of these complex challenges are fundamental questions about social relations and human dignity. Without a shared understanding of, and basic agreement upon, what is valued at the core of our shared humanity, progress on transnational challenges is nearly impossible. This extends to relations between nations: what should we expect of other nations and they of us? In terms of the future of the global order, a vision and set of principles that are sufficiently resilient in the face of technological change, climate change, social justice, migration, and public health must be based upon some shared assumptions about what it means to be human in society.

Despite the myriad challenges described in its assessment of the complex mid-century strategic landscape and future of the United States, the 1961 Rockefeller Special Studies Report stated unequivocally: “No challenge is more important than to give concrete meaning to the idea of human dignity.”<sup>92</sup> Sixty years later, this challenge is still unmet.

For these reasons, while there are many possible starting points for such a new organization, a first research pillar focused on human dignity, examined initially through the lens of the impacts of technology, would make valuable contributions which could then further inform and provide useful traction on a wider range of strategic issues.

While I propose that dignity be a first research pillar, looking beyond this to the organization’s overall approach and methodology, the broader focus could be on *common challenges that also offer applied opportunities to forestall conflict*. Such a mission recognizes that many entrenched, complex, transnational challenges also offer an important opportunity for cooperation, where grappling with the challenges has the additional benefit of bringing entrenched parties together. In this first case, using the lens of technology to bring human dignity into sharper focus can, if designed carefully to limit political interference, also provide the United States and China, among others, with a useful toehold for cooperation.

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92 *Prospect for America*, 341.

## Dignity: A Rationale and Research Agenda

*Will not the knowledge of it, then, have a great influence on life?  
Shall we not, like archers who have a mark to aim at, be more likely to hit upon  
what is right?*<sup>93</sup>

*-Aristotle, Ethica Nicomachea*

One of the most worrisome and entrenched sources of geopolitical conflict stems from how emerging technologies are exacerbating geostrategic competition, particularly between the United States and China, with nations seeking control over the commanding technological heights in order to harness economic and national security gains for their exclusive advantage (see earlier section). Beyond geopolitics, the impacts of emerging technologies are stressing virtually every aspect of society, from relations between individuals, families, communities, nations, to the entire global order. Societal disruptions from new and emerging technologies are being felt across all cultures and demographics, and large portions of humanity are subjected to the societal consequences of innovations created elsewhere in the world. This technological disruption is forcing us to re-examine fundamental assumptions about the nature and value of labor, the equitable distribution of goods and services, and what it means to flourish as a human being.

Despite the fact that technologies are not confined to national borders or ideologies, nor are their impacts limited to economic and national security realms, current approaches to addressing technological disruption are still very much bound within the narrow confines of national policy and geopolitics. It does not appear that any single country's political and legal systems provide significant advantage in addressing these challenges, yet technology governance is still approached primarily as a nation-based political problem, with legal and ethical bases in national laws, constitutions, and bills of rights.

The unanticipated consequences of technological change make governance a more nuanced and complex challenge than those for which political processes might be more appropriate. Near-term national interests conflict with the long view of what is good for global society, and political representa-

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93 Aristotle and Richard McKeon, "Nicomachean Ethics," in *Introduction to Aristotle* (New York: Modern Library, 1947).

tives are ill-suited to consider questions of broader humanity, as each has incentives to negotiate from the stance of their respective national economic and security interests. The language and mechanisms used for these discussions are also unavoidably stuck in the existing political order, and simple appeals to “democratic values” fall far short of the needs of citizens.<sup>94</sup> Put simply, forms of government as primary carriers of common values are insufficient in the face of the global, societal challenges from emerging technologies.

Liberal faith in Western legal systems to provide answers to these sticky moral and ethical questions is also misplaced. The American system of government was designed not to provide a moral framework, but to support a federal system by placing limits on national power. As Harvard University’s Learned Hand Professor of Law Mary Ann Glendon explains:

“The American framers’ concept of the human person, though incomplete from a philosophical or anthropological point of view, was not inappropriate for the limited purpose of designing a federal framework within which civic life could flourish under conditions of ordered liberty. What needs to be kept in sight (but unfortunately is too often forgotten) is that the liberal principles enshrined in the United States’ founding documents were political principles that were never meant to serve as moral guides for all of social and private life.”<sup>95</sup>

At the center of the American political ethos is a hypothetical “self-sufficient person” who wants to protect his/her individual interests and property. But what happens when that self-sufficient person can no longer discern his/her interests or property? When interests and property are less tangible than the ownership or exchange of an ox, a plow, a purse of gold, what then? When we don’t fully understand our own interests or even property, does the Bill of Rights or Constitution give useful guidance?

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94 In a May 26, 2021 memo to the leaders at the U.S. Department of Defense, Deputy Secretary Kathleen Hicks mentions the need to embed American values within AI development and deployment, but does not specify what those values are. Led by the Department of Defense, these are bound to be a mix of “democratic values” and pragmatic, America-centric, security considerations. See <https://media.defense.gov/2021/May/27/2002730593/-1/-1/0/IMPLEMENTING-RESPONSIBLE-ARTIFICIAL-INTELLIGENCE-IN-THE-DEPARTMENT-OF-DEFENSE.PDF>

95 Mary Ann Glendon, “Looking for ‘Persons’ in the Law,” *First Things*, December 2006, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2006/12/looking-forpersons-in-the-law>.

Yet we lack a clear alternative. As the Israeli historian and philosopher Yuval Harari has stated, “Liberalism has no obvious answers to the biggest problems we face: ecological collapse and technological disruption.”<sup>96</sup> If we are to rise to these challenges, we need a more universal foundation from which norms and global governance mechanisms can be built. We need, in the words of Pope John Paul II, “to look more deeply at man.”<sup>97</sup>

Rather than view the challenges raised by emerging technologies solely as sources of geopolitical competition and friction, these challenges present a valuable opportunity to collectively grapple with the societal impacts of technology and inform a more just and inclusive global order: *technology ethics and norms may serve as one of the most promising areas for transnational cooperation, and further serve as a focusing mechanism through which we can re-examine some basic assumptions about what we have in common, beyond national boundaries and across ideologies, including basic questions about what it means to flourish as human beings.* This exploration would likely have positive spillover effects in other areas where our “social solidarity as a species”<sup>98</sup> is needed.

Exerting control over technology, in both its positive and negative societal impacts, requires a deeper understanding and articulation of what it means to flourish as a human. At present, we lack a common understanding of and vocabulary for discussing this, let alone tools to inform policy. How can we evaluate and construct norms that direct technology to our desired uses without first determining what is necessary to protect in our common humanity? Exploring and examining the specific challenges posed by new and emerging technologies will focus our attention on what aspects of human life we cherish and would not wish to see abandoned or transformed by technological innovation. It is worth emphasizing that this holds true not only for emerging technologies, but also for our relationship with existing technologies, like the internet, computers, and smartphones, all of which are having insidious effects on our cognition and relationship with others and the world.<sup>99</sup>

This is a massive task that requires both a limiting ambit and ample freedom and space to explore. There are, of course, a huge number of important

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96 Yuval Harari, *21 Lessons for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (New York: Siegel & Grau, 2018), 17.

97 As quoted by Glendon in “Looking for ‘Persons’ in the Law.”

98 Christian Smith, *What is a Person?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 472.

99 See Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011).

issues to research about the relationship between society and technology, but all of these must rest upon some shared, basic assumptions about universal human experience. Exploring the meanings and implications of dignity, an essential common core of humanity, is a useful starting point from which a more nuanced and detailed exploration of human flourishing can begin.

## What is Dignity?

Dignity is admittedly a contentious term. Is dignity, as professor and medical ethicist Ruth Macklin has decried, a term too vague and imprecise to be useful?<sup>100</sup> Or is it, rather, essential to any conversation about what it means to exist and flourish as a human being? Or are both of those statements true?

There will be critics of using dignity as an organizing principle for this work. Some will claim that it is too much of an empty vessel, into which users can stuff any number of qualities and values. Others will claim that the word is too vague and bereft of useful meaning. It is true that dignity has a variety of linguistic uses, historical origins, and philosophical foundations. Most dignity-related scholarship tends to approach the meaning of dignity by first tracing and examining its varied historical and cultural roots, from classical Greek and Biblical traditions to Kantian ethics, Hegelian phenomenology, Axel Honneth's "recognition theory," to its usage in international agreements and state constitutions. While this approach is useful and illuminating to a degree, it doesn't result in a single, universally acceptable, pragmatic definition. And yet, in an attempt to distill all of these uses into a definition that fits with each, we could say: *dignity refers to a common aspect of our humanity that is due reciprocal moral respect.*

But if dignity is to be operationalized to inform policy and law, such a definition is inadequate. This relatively empty vessel must be filled with specifics in order to increase understanding and subsequently inform policy. It is, however, a useful starting point, providing us with toeholds and a sense of direction. First of all, it points to something "common" in each of us, regardless of race, color, religion, gender expression, age, national origin, disability, marital status, or sexual orientation. Second, it is an "aspect" of our humanity, not a virtue or value. It is something innate, rather than cultivated. Third, "due

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100 R. Macklin, "Dignity is a useless concept," *BMJ* 327, no. 7429 (2003): 1419-1420.

reciprocal moral respect” captures the critical social element of dignity. While it can be argued whether dignity is inherent in individuals or whether it arises via social interactions and recognition, the pragmatic, phenomenological importance of dignity is found in the social dimension. This reciprocal moral respect is relevant to all sizes of social groups, from two individuals, to online chat forums, to relations between nations. A more detailed discussion of the social dimensions can be found in Appendix E.

Not only will an exploration of dignity add to our knowledge of the human experience and our relationship with technology, but it is frankly hard to imagine making informed policy decisions *without* a better understanding and articulation of dignity and human flourishing. In the seminal report *Human Dignity and Bioethics*, St. John’s College tutor Adam Schulman states “it is hard to see how ethical standards for the treatment of human beings can be maintained without relying on *some* conception of what human beings are and what they therefore deserve.”<sup>101</sup> Schulman continues, “...the march of scientific progress that now promises to give us manipulative power over human nature itself...will eventually compel us to take a stand on the meaning of human dignity, understood as the essential and inviolable core of our *humanity*.”<sup>102</sup>

## Technology as a Lens

Rather than start with an overly specific, *a priori* definition of dignity that may be culturally and ideologically limiting, starting from the broad definition proposed above we can use the lens of technology to develop a more nuanced understanding of dignity, grounded in common experiences. Examining the impacts of technologies on human experience across cultures allows us to bring the concept of dignity into higher resolution and sharper focus. As these challenges are new and unprecedented, all participants in these discussions will potentially have something useful to contribute in building toward a shared understanding of human flourishing and human dignity, and how they might be undermined (or transformed beyond recognition) by the new and powerful technologies that are either already here or can be discerned over the near horizon. A deeper understanding of dignity then allows us to turn our

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101 *Human Dignity and Bioethics*, 15.

102 *Human Dignity and Bioethics*, 17.

lens back on technological innovation and consider tools and frameworks for technology evaluation and governance.

The earlier section on technology proposed six categories of technology's deleterious impact on humans: privacy, alienation, nature of humanity, labor, autonomy and agency, and justice and equity. Each of these impact areas relates to an individual's sense of social worth and belonging, concepts that are intimately connected with dignity.<sup>103</sup> As we conduct research to better understand how these impact areas are related to dignity, we may arrive at new models and tools that will help us both to understand impacts and to operationalize policy.

New models, tools, and frameworks are desperately needed. As discussed in the section on organizational inadequacies, approaching complex, transnational challenges through national frameworks is ineffective. But breaking free from national approaches is difficult without some catalyst. Global governance reforms occur typically in the aftermath of major conflicts or crises. The first two World Wars, the "ozone hole" crisis of the mid-eighties, and the global financial crisis of 2008 are examples of how crises spur changes in global governance. But technological disruption is more insidious and harder to pin down.

Technological breakthroughs arrive not as crises or threats, but as triumphs of human ingenuity and will. Each new advance in computing power, each breakthrough in genetic manipulation, each new method of harnessing the power of subatomic particles is greeted as a victory over nature, often obscuring the potentially negative impacts on society. This is not to imply that technological advances do not bring benefits; the benefits are typically significant. It is the unintended and unanticipated consequences that are a concern. Without a crisis it is difficult to stop and take time to consider technology's multifarious impacts on humanity and build tools for evaluation and control.

An examination of human dignity within the context of new and emerging technologies provides us with a meaningful starting point. Only with a common understanding and set of shared vocabulary can we provide insights and recommendations on which norms and institutional arrangements augment, protect, and encourage a respect for human dignity and human flourishing, and those which detract.

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103 See Appendix E.



## Policy Relevance

Sustainable progress on entrenched transnational challenges is virtually impossible without some sort of shared ethical foundation and vision for a desired future. Put simply, *social solidarity requires a common moral community*, which, in turn, requires new and inclusive approaches to understanding our common human experience and what it means to flourish as a human being. An exploration of various technologies' impacts on dignity and human flourishing will give us a more nuanced, complete, inclusive, and pragmatic set of meanings and vocabulary necessary to inform a shared vision of a desired future.

Current policy articulations of dignity are too general and broad to be useful in the face of technological disruption. In current public policy, dignity is most often used as a catch-all term meant to encompass essential human rights. Article 1 of the German Basic Law states "(1) Human dignity shall be inviolable. To respect and protect it shall be the duty of all state authority." Rights then flow from this general principle, but the law does not define dignity. It is purposefully vague, malleable, and inclusive. The United Nations' *Universal Declaration on Human Rights* places human dignity at its core, explicitly recognizing dignity's source as "inherent" in all people. U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken emphasized that "human rights and dignity must stay at the core of the international order."<sup>104</sup> While few would disagree with these statements, without a clearer understanding of dignity's meaning and implications, it is either too general to be practically useful or too politically laden to be universally acceptable.

Moreover, this inherent dignity approach is essentially tautological: all humans have dignity; therefore, dignity is inherent in all humans. It doesn't tell us anything about what is at the root of this concept and what detracts from and augments it. It also doesn't shed light on the social dimensions of dignity. It makes effective policy formation nearly impossible.

But technology provides a focusing mechanism through which we can examine more specific meanings and facets of dignity. Technology both reflects human values and has profound effects on our processes of cognition

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104 Secretary of State Anthony Blinken virtual remarks to UN Security Council Open Debate on Multilateralism, May 7, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-virtual-remarks-at-the-un-security-council-open-debate-on-multilateralism/>.

and what we come to value. In his book *The Shallows*, Nicholas Carr discusses Marshall McLuhan's views on technology stating, "Whenever we use a tool to exert greater control over the outside world, we change our relationship with that world. ...an honest appraisal of any new technology, or progress in general, requires a sensitivity to what's lost as well as what's gained. We shouldn't allow the glories of technology to blind our inner watchdog to the possibility that we've numbed an essential part of ourselves."<sup>105</sup> Insofar as technology decreases privacy, autonomy, and justice and equity, increases alienation, and changes the nature of work and humanity, it is affecting human dignity.<sup>106</sup>

There is a vast array of important policy questions related to technology that require a more nuanced and complete understanding of dignity. Some examples are:

- **Biomedical enhancement:** Should there be ethical limits on the use of biomedical knowledge, not to cure illness but to enhance or modify human nature?
- **Age-retardation:** Is it proper to treat aging and death as "just another challenge to be overcome by medical technology"? What are the implications for human dignity of potentially unlimited extension of the human lifespan?
- **Human cloning:** If the cloning of human beings becomes safe and reliable, should it be permissible, and within what limits?
- **Reproductive technology and prenatal screening:** What are the implications for human dignity of using in vitro fertilization and genetic screening to select "ideal" embryos for implantation, growing human infants in artificial wombs, using germ-line genetic modification to "improve" human embryos, and so on.
- **Organ transplantation:** As the technology improves and becomes more reliable, and replacement of failed organs becomes a more routine part of medicine, what rules should govern the gathering of suitable organs? Should healthy individuals be able to sell their organs to be transplanted into others?
- **Human-machine distinction:** Do people have the right to know whether they are interacting with a human or a machine/AI?

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105 Carr, *The Shallows*, 212.

106 See Appendices C and E.

- **Alternate and virtual reality (AR/VR):** How should we address alternate and varied perceptions of reality created in AR/VR worlds?
- **AR/VR data rights:** As these technologies progress to collect highly accurate personal identifiers such as “kinematic fingerprints” (motor patterns), biometric data, and behavioral data, to what extent should users exercise rights and ownership over data, digital identity, and software? What are the rights and freedoms of one’s virtual persona, especially in relation to violence and other traumatic experiences? Do the laws, protections, and social norms of the physical world carry over into the virtual world and virtual representations of real people? What is the relationship between one’s virtual and physical persona?
- **Algorithmic decisions:** How should an individual’s rights be delineated in the face of algorithmic decisions?
- **Beneficial deception:** Should AI be able to deceive a human if algorithms determine that this would work in the subject’s best interest?
- **Caregiving robotics and AI:** To what extent should humans be entitled to care by another human?

In their article on the governance of healthcare robots, researchers Zardiashvili and Fosch-Villaronga conclude:

Human dignity is the ultimate, overarching legal concept upon which all the rights are based and should be the basis of future legal intervention aimed at addressing the governance of robot technology, especially for healthcare. Therefore, we conclude by giving the policy advice to formulate an overarching, omnibus governance solution for robotics that will be based on the concept of human dignity. With this in mind, we acknowledge that furthermore, detailed research is necessary to clarify what dignity means in this connected, ever-evolving, and at the same time, diverse contemporary society and how the uses of robotics may challenge this notion.<sup>107</sup>

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107 Lexo Zardiashvili and Eduard Fosch-Villaronga, “‘Oh, Dignity too?’ Said the Robot: Human Dignity as the Basis for the Governance of Robotics,” *Mind and Machines: Journal for Artificial Intelligence, Philosophy and Cognitive Science* 30, no. 1 (January 2020): 139.

## Beyond Technology

In addition to helping us navigate the pressing challenges posed by emerging technologies, a deeper exploration of dignity would apply to other policy-relevant areas. As mentioned earlier, approaching transnational challenges solely through national political-economic frameworks is ineffective. If we tackle these challenges based not on a foundation of national sovereignty, but with a shared understanding of human dignity, it may be possible to break new ground on entrenched sources of conflict. Notre Dame sociology professor Christian Smith points out that dignity underpins the “moral and political ordering of human personal and social life.”<sup>108</sup> He states that a detailed exploration of dignity would take us largely into “uncharted territory,” with implications for virtually all aspects of social policy.<sup>109</sup> In addition to technology governance, these might include climate justice, human rights, social justice, and diversity, equity, and inclusion.

An examination of the effects of technology on dignity can help us draw deeper conclusions about dignity in general and the shared human experience. This appeal to common experience will allow for a more inclusive approach than one based on existing theories that may carry excessive political and ideological baggage. *We can find common ground based on common experiences, despite differences on principles, that may lead to benefits in other areas.* As stated earlier in this paper, the absence of a long-term vision for the world order, and more narrowly for U.S.-China relations, is a huge impediment to a peaceful future. A more nuanced and complete understanding of human dignity can inform such a vision. In short, *a globally acceptable normative vision of the good society, based on a shared understanding of dignity, could provide an essential framework for addressing a wide variety of transnational challenges.*

## Conversations in China

One of the objections that will be raised is that the United States and China have very different attitudes towards values and technology ethics. Typical American perceptions of Chinese attitudes towards technology tend

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108 Smith, 446.

109 Smith, 488.

to follow a narrative that goes something like this: in order to maintain and extend political control, the Chinese Communist Party is harnessing the powers of technology to create a surveillance state, and exporting that technology to the rest of the world in order to promote its authoritarian model of governance. These worries are then projected onto the future of the global order, as summarized by Ross Andersen in *The Atlantic*: “The emergence of an AI-powered authoritarian bloc led by China could warp the geopolitics of this century.”<sup>110</sup>

While there is some truth to such a narrative, it ignores the rich and thoughtful conversations that are happening in China over privacy, data ownership, bioethics, the metaverse, robotics, the future of work, and humans’ relationship with technology. The reality is that the Chinese government and broader society are dealing with the same questions and social challenges as are Americans, and are moving even faster on some aspects of governance. To some extent, it is understandable why such a limited understanding of the debate over technology in China persists—there are real concerns about how technology is being used to track dissidents and other purported enemies of the state—but misunderstandings are also due to the fact that these conversations are technologically complex and occurring in Chinese. For those that read Chinese and follow these conversations, there are rich and nuanced debates happening at the governmental, academic, and private levels.<sup>111</sup>

On the regulatory and governance front, China is moving more quickly than the United States. Detailed regulations covering personal information, data security, e-commerce, cybersecurity, and algorithms have all been passed

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110 Ross Andersen, “The Panopticon is Already Here,” *The Atlantic*, September 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/09/china-ai-surveillance/614197/>.

111 With the Chinese party-state utilizing technology for social control, including surveillance, discourse control, and monitoring of personal communications, the knee-jerk reaction has been for many analysts to extend techno-authoritarian views to broader Chinese society. In fact, conversations among academics and researchers in China in mirror, in many ways, the conversations happening in Silicon Valley, Brussels, and beyond. Behind closed doors, there is even robust discussion among officials about how to limit the negative impacts of technology. This will be the subject of a separate, forthcoming publication.

in the last five years.<sup>112</sup> The Chinese Supreme Court also issued an important legal interpretation last year on the use of facial recognition.<sup>113</sup>

Ultimately, the effects of new and emerging technologies are not limited by national borders. The reality is that we are all facing these issues together. Every society, including the United States and China, needs to wrestle with difficult questions relating to the right uses and limits of technology. This necessarily involves examining core beliefs about values and human dignity. Taking artificial intelligence as an example, Massachusetts Institute of Technology professor of chemical engineering Bernhardt Trout states “how AI is used isn’t just a technical issue; it’s just as much a political and moral question. And those values vary widely from country to country.”<sup>114</sup>

So, while emerging technologies will be a source of competition and friction between nations, dignity and technology ethics are areas ripe for cooperative exploration, dialogue, and discussion. The additional advantage of focusing on the ethical foundations is that such research can be de-politicized to a greater degree than if the focus were on more immediate technology norms, which are inherently political, though separating such topics completely from ideology is impossible.<sup>115</sup> At a time when other aspects of U.S.-China relations are so fraught and exchange so limited, such dialogue may also lead to unexpected breakthroughs and serve as a foundation for progress in other areas.

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112 “Xinxi baohu yu shuju hegui xiangguan falü 信息保护与数据合规相关法律 [Laws Related to Information Protection and Data Compliance].” *Zhishi chanquan yu hulianwangfa 知识产权与互联网法 [Intellectual Property and Internet Law]*. <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/6jLHQrjGFCk6cHQ79cSy5w> (accessed August 22, 2021) and “Wangluo anquan shencha banfa 网络安全审查办法 [Cybersecurity Review Measures].” *Zhongguo hulianwang xinxi bangongshi deng bumen 中国互联网信息办公室等部门 [Cyberspace Administration of China et al]*. [http://www.cac.gov.cn/2022-01/04/c\\_1642894602182845.htm](http://www.cac.gov.cn/2022-01/04/c_1642894602182845.htm) (accessed January 5, 2022).

113 “Zuigao fayuan mingque: binguan, shangchang, yinhang, deng jingying changsuo lanyong renlian shibie shu qinquan 最高法明确：宾馆、商场、银行等经营场所滥用人脸识别属侵权 [Supreme Court Makes Clear: Misuse of facial recognition in hotels, shopping malls, banks, and other business places constitutes infringement].” *Yangshi xinwen 央视新闻 [CCTV]*. [https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail\\_forward\\_13777591](https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_13777591) (accessed July 30, 2021).

114 Pappas, “Expect an Orwellian future if AI isn’t kept in check, Microsoft exec say.”

115 The nature of research institutions and the political system in China makes separating the academic from the political very difficult.

## Methodology and Research Agenda

The ultimate aim of such a project would be to give to tomorrow's policy makers a better understanding of, common vocabulary for, and policy tools to anticipate and address transnational challenges that threaten human dignity. It would be future-oriented, looking forward to a future that is worth striving for, removing presentism, parochialism, and politics from the discussion as much as possible. Technological disruption would serve as the initial focusing mechanism for exploring the core of dignity, but our hope is that this will have spillover benefits for other areas of transnational concern.

The project should provide “reliable knowledge and understanding about what kinds of social institutions and structures tend to lead toward the thriving of human personhood, on the one hand, and those that tend to obstruct or diminish it, on the other.”<sup>116</sup> Harvard professor Herbert Kelman recognized the political difficulty of such an enterprise, but stated “the debate must be continued as part of a long-term effort to evolve and test criteria whose validity is universally accepted.”<sup>117</sup>

To move beyond simply an academic discussion about dignity, it will be important to focus on tools and processes that can eventually be utilized by policymakers. Kelman suggested that some initial questions in framing policy relevance are:

- What are the necessary conditions for realizing human dignity?
- What are the criteria for assessing whether policies or institutional arrangements are consistent with human dignity?
- What are the social processes by which human dignity is extended and protected?<sup>118</sup>

We can add to this:

- In what ways is human dignity “thwarted or threatened”?<sup>119</sup>
- How can we respect cultural differences yet share a common conception of dignity?

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116 Smith, 487.

117 Herbert C. Kelman, “The conditions, criteria, and dialectics of human dignity: A transnational perspective,” *International Studies Quarterly* 21 (1977): 546.

118 Kelman, 535.

119 Gaither et al., 14.

- How does the concept of dignity map onto international relations?
- Can a shared conception of dignity result in both the “fulfillment and inhibition of nationalistic demands”?<sup>120</sup>

While these questions are at the heart of a general understanding of dignity, our approach to providing answers to them will be through the more focused and practical lens of emerging technologies. The purpose of the research would be:

- to undertake fundamental inquiry into the human and moral significance of emerging and future science and technology
- to explore specific ethical and policy questions related to these developments
- to explore possibilities for useful international collaboration on emerging technologies and their impact on human dignity
- through the lens of technology, to find common ground on the meaning and utility of dignity across cultures and disciplines

An inquiry into the ethical implications of technology would ideally go much deeper than the obvious concerns of safety and efficacy; we must prospectively consider what we wish humanly to defend and advance, rather than merely reactively consider the potential consequences of this or that particular technological innovation. The overall goal is to explore the defining and worthy features of human life—features which new technologies may serve or threaten.

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120 Kelman, 535.



## Structure and Organization

A diverse group of multi-disciplinary thinkers from a variety of nationalities and cultural backgrounds should be assembled to consider these issues. These could include people with expertise in neuroscience, cognitive science, sociology, psychology, anthropology, science fiction, law, bioscience, philosophy, medical and technology ethics, national security, and business. This group would engage in a series of projects—some solo investigations, others collaborative; some aiming at concrete policy recommendations, others more fundamental, exploratory, and philosophical. Each would bring important perspectives to these challenges. As Notre Dame professor Christian Smith states about his discipline, sociology should contribute to “the larger, shared moral and political project of pursuing the telic social good of institutionally and structurally promoting human dignity.”<sup>121</sup> Each of the other disciplines listed above should likewise be able to make contributions to these ends.

Drawing from the organizational lessons highlighted in earlier sections of this paper, an effective approach needs to allow for an appropriately lengthy research time horizon, give researchers the time and space to explore amorphous and complex issues, and provide an organizational structure or mechanism that encourages a sense of community and shared purpose. This would most likely be a multi-step process, starting with a series of planning meetings and conferences, building up a network, and then providing a more structured organizational home.

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121 Smith, 488.

There are a number of existing organizational approaches that could be used as models.

**Table 1.** Models for structurally promoting human dignity

<b>Model</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>
Janelia Research Campus	Purpose-build a permanent organization	Allows for most customized approach; most likely to result in breakthrough ideas and tools	Heavy fundraising and long planning timeline; hard to course-correct
Department of Defense's Office of Net Assessment	Host a research unit within an existing organization	Faster to establish; potentially comes with funding if parent organization is interested; direct line to policy	Incorporating into existing bureaucracy can be difficult; freedom of research and time horizon potentially limited
Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences	University-hosted research center	Provides established "brand" and infrastructure	University bureaucracies burdensome and inflexible; activities may skew academic; office space and real estate limited
Highlands Forum <sup>122</sup>	Network sponsored by existing organization(s)	Relatively easy to establish; allows for testing the waters on policy relevance	Sponsor likely looking for near-term results and reports

122 Richard O'Neill started the Highlands Forum when he was at the Department of Defense to address the difficulty of coming up with new, innovative ideas while within an existing bureaucracy. Not only did the barrage of day-to-day responsibilities overwhelm the ability to set aside time for thoughtful deliberation, but the people around him were all of the same background, giving the same types of ideas. For more information see [http://www.pirp.harvard.edu/pubs\\_pdf/o%27neill/o%27neill-i01-3.pdf](http://www.pirp.harvard.edu/pubs_pdf/o%27neill/o%27neill-i01-3.pdf).

**Table 1. Continued**

<b>Model</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>
MacArthur Research Networks	Funded research network	Easy to establish; independent; can serve as a proving ground for a new organization	Participants have other day-job responsibilities; hard to build community
Santa Fe Institute	Hybrid organization with combination of resident and networked experts	Starts with meetings and conferences to build momentum before establishing permanent home	Constant search for funding may be time-consuming; existing Santa Fe model focused more on scientific publications
Tobin Project	Flexible network with conference approach	Non-linear and flexible network; less commitment means easier to establish; less funding required	Stronger focus on reports and "output" from meetings may shorten time horizon of issues addressed

Recognizing the start-up nature of this project and practical funding limitations, a hybrid network approach might be a suitable starting point. The network aspect recognizes that participants would not be leaving their day jobs, but regular in-person meetings would build relationships, a sense of community, and allow for cross-disciplinary engagement. It could initially be hosted at an existing organization, as long as it was given sufficient autonomy and shielded from the existing bureaucracy.

One of the important lessons learned from this project is that enabling experts to break free of the "tyranny of the present" is both critical to their ability to engage in long-term thinking about complex problems and an immense challenge. Most experts currently juggle their day-job(s) with a myriad of other responsibilities, including traditional and social media appearances, consulting, and advisory positions, not to mention spending time with community, family, and friends. Figuring out how to provide participants the time and space to focus on complex, long-term problems both with others and alone while operating in a network model is a challenge.

On the one hand, experts need time to reflect by themselves on the questions they see as critical. On the other, time is needed to forge the problem-solving or visioning community essential to building sustainable momentum on both the issues and the organizational initiative. It is worth re-emphasizing the importance of in-person meetings and interactions to this process. Physical meetings between clusters of intellectually rigorous people from diverse backgrounds and disciplines is necessary to achieve innovative, breakthrough ideas and create meaningful progress. The current isolation of experts, both from each other and from experts in other fields, is a major problem—people need to come together where they have an opportunity to give their full attention to thinking about answers to the big, hard questions. For these reasons, we propose starting with a network that also meets in person on a regular, sustained basis.

One option could be to meet, for example, eight times per year for a long weekend, Friday through Sunday. This is similar in concept to a military reserve schedule: one weekend per month, plus one week per year. Participants could fly on a Thursday night to a location that minimized distractions. David Moss, of the Tobin Project, suggests that more remote locations or locations near but not in major cities are ideal, as they remove people from typical distractions and incentivize staying on site.<sup>123</sup> This could be somewhere like Wingspread in Wisconsin, which has not only a suitable location, but a track record of hosting similar conferences and workshops. Janelia Research Campus is another example, which is near Washington D.C., enabling easy transportation, but far enough away to encourage people to stay on site.

Another approach could be to meet in person for one week, four times per year. This would both allow for greater interaction and cross-fertilization of ideas and disciplines and provide enough time for deep, introspective solo work. Another important benefit of this format is that it would permit international travel, enabling participation from around the world. The location would not need to be in the United States; the Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio Center on Lake Como in Northern Italy, for example, would be well suited to this sort of endeavor. The potential downside of meeting for a week at a time is that it may be more difficult for participants to fully ignore responsibilities back home.

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123 Blanchette interview with David Moss, June 10, 2021.

In order to refine this approach, a first step could be to follow the path of the Santa Fe Institute: begin with a workshop, or series of workshops, that convenes key people to discuss both the substantive ideas and the future of the overall endeavor. This would help build momentum and strengthen the case for an extended program. For such an approach to be successful, it is important to have the right combination of people, including: a small core of prominent individuals who can serve both as substantive participants and recognizable names to attract others, a larger number of individuals from a variety of different disciplines and backgrounds who are deeply engaged in and attracted by such work, and potential funders who are interested in these issues. Many of these participants will be self-selecting, recognizing the unique opportunity to work on critical issues in an environment that will allow them to grapple, both individually and collectively, with questions that they have already been wrestling with for some time. The ideal participants are those who are doing this work already and would likely be doing it regardless, but would be more productive and focused if put in a community of similarly interested individuals with organizational and structural impediments removed.

Now is the right time for such an endeavor. Taking stock of our current geopolitical environment, the state of the world order, and the rapid pace of technological change, we are desperately in need of new ideas and new approaches. The consequences of failure are at best unappealing and at worst devastating. The world is undergoing momentous change and if we don't have a clearer idea of where we want to go, to channel Yogi Berra, we might not get there. And at the bilateral level, the relationship between the United States and China is not going to improve if efforts are not made to find common ground—put simply, finding the “we” in U.S.-China relations. With the wide array and nature of global challenges we face, from the impacts of technology, to climate change, to social justice, to global peace and stability, the same can be said of the rest of the world. Working actively towards a shared understanding of dignity, beginning with the impacts of technology, is surely not the only way, but would be a positive start.

Appendix E  
The Social Dimensions of Dignity  
begins on the following page  
(pages 100-104 in the printed book)

# Appendix E

## The Social Dimensions of Dignity

While experts disagree on the meanings and origins of dignity, I believe the practical relevance to policymakers centers on the social dimensions of dignity.

Ethical standards and norms of behavior all have a social foundation, whether in families, local communities, nations, or across religions. How we behave depends on the social feedback we receive based upon commonly accepted norms. It is our mutual acceptance of these norms that allows us to be a part of a social community. If we act and treat others within the community in accordance with those norms, then we can reasonably expect that we will be accorded the same treatment. When accepted standards of behavior are transgressed, when we are treated in a manner inferior to others within that same community, we feel disrespected, giving rise to feelings of alienation and offense. Why treat all others in one way, but treat me more harshly? Is it because I am less valued and inferior? This creates a feeling of resentment and spurs me to try to regain respect as an equal, which, in practice, is often through a concerted effort to demonstrate superiority.

But why should I feel this way? Can I be satisfied without social recognition from others? The sociological and anthropological answer appears to be no. We do not exist, in any practical sense, as atomistic individuals free from society. We are relational, social beings. H. Rowan Gaither recognized, in his 1949 report for the Ford Foundation, “Men live together whether they want to or not; all are thrust, from birth, into an immense network of political, economic, and social relationships.”<sup>129</sup>

We obtain our rights because we are considered by others to be part of a social collective which confers rights on its members: rights only matter in society and in relation to other people. This status of being recognized as an equal member of a social group, due reciprocal moral respect, is at the core of dignity. One may be able to argue that humans are born with inherent dignity, but dignity is pragmatically meaningless if it is not conferred socially through recognition or debased through insult. Dignity is felt most acutely when it

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129 Gaither et al., 19.

is injured, though a self-aware individual can also recognize the feeling of well-being and belonging when dignity is recognized.

Our identities are acquired and shaped socially. I am only a distinct person in a community of others; I have a relational identity based on a categorical status. This experience is described by Jim Davis, the protagonist in W.E.B. Du Bois's short story *The Comet*, where Jim does not feel human until he is "seen" by the woman, ostensibly the only other person then left on earth. One day he is invisible, literally feeling "not human," and the next he is revealed to her as an equal, deserving of human dignity and respect.<sup>130</sup> Another way to put this is that we are other-oriented; we have reciprocal self-definition. If we are not acknowledged by others, then our identity breaks down.

A 2014 study on the effects of solitary confinement found that without human contact individuals go through a process of self-dissolution, where, without social reference or feedback, they lose their sense of self:

"The person subjected to solitary confinement risks losing her self and disappearing into a non-existence...." It is important, however, to specify precisely what aspects of self are at stake in such a statement. Guenther (2013, p. xiii) gives a better indication when she asks: "How could I lose myself by being confined to myself? For this to be possible, there must be more to selfhood than individuality.... Solitary confinement works by turning prisoners' constitutive relationality against themselves." That is, solitary confinement disrupts the *relational self* by disrupting primary and secondary intersubjectivity, and the intercorporeality essential to social interaction.

The practice of solitary confinement is not, as some of the original prison administrators thought, a way for the prisoner to return into self—"The inmate was expected to turn his thoughts inward...."—a rehabilitation through isolation with oneself (Smith, 2006, p. 456; see Guenther, 2013, p. xvi). Such a proposal reflects a traditional concept of self as an isolated individual substance or soul that benefits from introspection. If, in contrast, the self is relational, then solitary confinement, by undermining intersubjective relationality, leads to a destruction of the self. Stripping away the possibility of

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130 W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Comet" in *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969).



primary intersubjectivity—leading to the experience of depersonalization—goes to the very basic level of the *minimal embodied self*.<sup>131</sup>

This phenomenon is at the root of an approach to identity and dignity based in Hegel, but more fully developed by German philosopher Axel Honneth, now referred to as recognition theory. In short, recognition theory posits that our identity is fundamentally socially derived; our social identity is based on recognition by another person as a being deserving equal moral treatment and respect.

Thus, dignity is both something essential in all humans and a social construct. Notre Dame sociology professor Christian Smith posits that “dignity is a real emergent property of personhood.”<sup>132</sup> It is part of the fabric of our social existence. *Dignity can thus be thought of as the socially emergent part of personhood—the fundamental essence of being human in society.* Dignity matters primarily within social contexts. A hermit living apart from society does not feel more or less dignified depending on the weather, climate, reactions from animals, or other non-human social relationships. As Aristotle stated in his classic of political philosophy, a person “who is in need of nothing through being self-sufficient is no part of a city, and so is either a beast or a god.”<sup>133</sup> From a pragmatic perspective, we don’t need to appeal to a definition or theory of inherent human dignity, either based on Western liberal values or a theistic attribute. Dignity is a construct of our social identity, and it is about that social context which policymakers should be concerned.

This social recognition theory of identity makes the concept of dignity extendable to nations and groups: it is hard to deny that social life and the social lives of countries are driven to a significant degree by concerns over dignity and respect.<sup>134</sup> The vast majority of social conflict, from the individual level to that of nations, can be traced to this drive and desire for recognition.

Bringing this back to the U.S.-China relationship, since 2012 the government of the People’s Republic of China has repeatedly called for basing

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131 Shaun Gallagher, “The cruel and unusual phenomenology of solitary confinement,” *Frontiers in Psychology* (June 2014), <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2014.00585/full>.

132 Smith, *What is a Person?*, 444.

133 Aristotle, and Carnes Lord, *Aristotle’s Politics* (2nd ed.) (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), Book I chapter 2.

134 This dynamic, as well as other implications of the desire for recognition, was explored by Francis Fukuyama in his classic *The End of History and the Last Man*.

relations with the United States on, *inter alia*, a principle of mutual respect (相互尊重). At the core of this idea is that the Chinese Communist Party needs to be first recognized as a legitimate counterparty, equal in standing and stature to the U.S. government, in order to engage in fruitful negotiation and cooperation. Due to contentious differences on human rights, ideology, and geostrategic goals, this idea of mutual respect is hard for the U.S. government to accept, but it is not surprising, based on a social theory of dignity, that the Chinese would demand this. How can Chinese representatives reasonably be expected to engage in good faith if they are constantly derided for their ideology, political system, and inferred political illegitimacy? Conducting research and exchange on dignity and technology with Chinese experts, along with those from other countries, may provide useful entry point for building a foundation of shared values that can inform a more stable political framework for U.S.-China relations and global order.

