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Friedrich Schleiermacher and Semyon Frank: On Religion and Dignity

by Annette G. Aubert

This article contributes to efforts to situate modern Russian and German ideas related to human dignity within a comparative framework. It examines the works of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834)—one of the most influential Protestant theologians in the history of Christian thought—as an alternative to the Kantian secular approach by analyzing texts that highlight his perspectives on dignity, religion, and aesthetics. It further compares and contrasts Schleiermacher’s views with those of the Russian philosopher, Semyon Liudvigovich Frank (1877–1950). To date, no scholarly studies have explored the similarities between Schleiermacher’s and Frank’s perspectives on anthropology and human dignity, despite Frank’s familiarity with Schleiermacher’s Protestant religious thought. Unlike Kant, who emphasized morality as the essence of dignity, Schleiermacher and Frank connected the ideas of religious experience and human creativity to the concept of human dignity.



Keywords: human dignity, anthropology, aesthetic, creativity, self-consciousness, human soul, Romanticism, individuality



Friedrich Schleiermacher and Semyon Frank

On Religion and Dignity

Annette G. Aubert

Scholars of Russian culture have long acknowledged the importance of situating ideas and cultural norms within broader comparative frameworks.¹ In his classic *Spirit of Russia* (1918), philosopher and politician Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk noted the “incontestably great” influence of Europe on Russia,² with varying influences from specific foreign-based sources,³ such as German theological texts.⁴ In their recent discussion of exploring Russian ideas across diverse fields in the global age, Vlad Strukov and Sarah Hudspith advocate an approach that presents Russia as a transnational space.⁵ While the term “transnational” is more frequently found in the social sciences and history than in religious, philosophical, or related studies,⁶ English-language scholarship can benefit from studying interactions between Russian religious philosophers and nineteenth-century theological ideas from Germany. Scholars have explored the impact of German idealism on Russian thought,⁷ but further investigation is required to under-

1. Iver G. Neumann, *Russia and the Idea of Europe: A Study in Identity and International Relations*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2013). Parts of this article were presented at the conference *Religion, Human Dignity, and Human Rights: New Paradigms for Russia and the West* at the Hamilton Center for Classical and Civic Education, University of Florida, Gainesville, November 2024. I thank the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments and suggestions.

2. T. G. Masaryk, *The Spirit of Russia: Studies in History, Literature and Philosophy*, trans. Eden and Cedar Paul, vol. 2 (London: Allen & Unwin, 1919), 559, 560. See also Donald Mackenzie Wallace, *Russia* (London: Cassel, 1886), 397.

3. For a recent study on the cultural transfer between Russia and Europe, see Nikolaus Katzer, “Kulturtransfer zwischen Russland und dem Westen vom späten 17. bis zum beginnenden 20. Jahrhundert,” in *Band 6 Deutsch-russische Kulturbeziehungen im 20. Jahrhundert. Einflüsse und Wechselwirkungen*, ed. Horst Möller and Aleksandr O. Cubar’jan (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 1–9.

4. In the 1840s the libraries of educated Russian priests were filled with books written by German theologians such as Friedrich Schleiermacher, August Neander, and David Friedrich Strauss. J. G. Kohl, *Russia: St. Petersburg, Moscow, Kharkoff, Riga, Odessa, the German Provinces on the Baltic, the Steppes, the Crimea, and the Interior of the Empire* (Kiribati: Chapman & Hall, 1842), 268.

5. Vlad Strukov and Sarah Hudspith, eds., *Russian Culture in the Age of Globalization* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

6. Andy Byford, Connor Doak, and Stephen Hutchings, eds., *Transnational Russian Studies* (Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press, 2020), 6.

7. Recent examples include Oksana Nazarova, *Das Problem der Wiedergeburt und Neubegründung der Metaphysik am Beispiel der christlichen philosophischen Traditionen: Die russische religiöse Philosophie* (Simon L.

stand fully the west-to-east flow of ideas produced by German intellectuals such as Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), frequently described as “the father of modern Protestantism.” This article compares his ideas concerning human dignity with those of the Russian philosopher Semyon Liudvigovich Frank (1877–1950).

In her study of theological ethics, Lydia Lauxmann describes human dignity as a “central theological concept.”⁸ While Catholicism has placed a greater emphasis on human dignity,⁹ multiple discussions of the topic are nevertheless also found in the German Protestant tradition,¹⁰ as well as in Russian philosophical texts written by figures such as Frank.¹¹ However, recent scholarship in Protestant perspectives on dignity has mostly passed over Schleiermacher’s ideas,¹² preferring instead to analyze the views of Immanuel Kant.¹³ Unlike Schleiermacher and Frank, Kant deemphasized religion when arguing that morality is at the core of dignity.¹⁴ To illustrate post-Kantian perspectives on dignity in modernity, it will be shown how Schleiermacher and Frank used a theo-

Frank) und die deutschsprachige neuscholastische Philosophie (Emerich Coreth) (Munich: Herbert Utz Verlag, 2017); Thomas Nemeth, *Kant in Imperial Russia* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2017); Vladislav Lektorsky and Marina Bykova, eds., *Philosophical Thought in Russia in the Second Half of the Twentieth Century: A Contemporary View from Russia and Abroad* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019); and Konstantin Abrekovich Barsht, “Filosofskaya teologiya F. Shleiermakhera i religioznoe reformatorstvo v proizvedeniakh I. V. Kireevskogo i F. M. Dostoevskogo,” *Filosoficheskie pis'ma. Russko-evropeiskii dialog*, vol. 4, no. 1 (2021): 57–79. See also the classic account in Nikolai Berdyaev, *The Russian Idea*, trans. R. M. French (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne, 1992).

8. Lydia Lauxmann, *Die Entdeckung der Menschenwürde in der theologischen Ethik* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2022), 1.

9. Jadwiga Guerrero van der Meijden, *Person and Dignity in Edith Stein's Writings: Investigated in Comparison to the Writings of the Doctors of the Church and the Magisterial Documents of the Catholic Church* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019); Regis A. Duffy and Angelus Gambatese, eds., *Made in God's Image: The Catholic Vision of Human Dignity* (New York: Paulist, 1999); David G. Kirchhoffer, “Benedict XVI, Human Dignity, and Absolute Moral Norms,” *New Blackfriars* 91, no. 1035 (September 2010): 586–608; Alejo José G. Sison, Ignacio Ferrero, and Gregorio Guitián, “Human Dignity and the Dignity of Work: Insights from Catholic Social Teaching,” *Business Ethics Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (October 2016): 503–528.

10. See, for example, Jürgen Moltmann, *Menschenwürde, Rechte und Freiheit* (Stuttgart: Kreuz-Verlag, 1979) and Oswald Bayer, “Martin Luther’s Conception of Human Dignity,” in *The Cambridge Handbook of Human Dignity: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. M. Düwell, J. Braarvig, R. Brownsword, and D. Mieth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 101–107.

11. For a fine study on Russian philosophy and human dignity, see G. M. Hamburg and Randall A. Poole, eds., *A History of Russian Philosophy, 1830–1930: Faith, Reason, and the Defense of Human Dignity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

12. For recent books that deal with the Protestant tradition of human dignity but overlook the contribution of Schleiermacher, see R. Kendall Soulen and Linda Woodhead, eds., *God and Human Dignity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006); Lauxmann, *Die Entdeckung der Menschenwürde in der theologischen Ethik*; John Loughlin, ed., *Human Dignity in the Judaeo-Christian Tradition: Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant Perspectives* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019).

13. A notable exception to this is Jörg Dierken and Arnulf von Scheliha, eds., *Freiheit und Menschenwürde: Studien zum Beitrag des Protestantismus* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005). The authors reference Schleiermacher, but they do not offer a detailed analysis of his views. For a study focused on Schleiermacher and the concept of dignity in his published sermons, see Annette G. Aubert, “Human Dignity in the Sermons of Friedrich Schleiermacher,” in *Sermons and Human Dignity*, ed. Paul E. Kerry and William Skiles (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

14. Michael Rosen, *Dignity: Its History and Meaning* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 20–25; Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, ed. and trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 4: 434–35.

logical lens (as opposed to Kant's more secular approach) to identify religious experience and human creativity in relation to human dignity.

Frank, whom Vasily Zenkovsky described as Russia's greatest philosopher,¹⁵ was born more than forty years after Schleiermacher's death. To date, no scholarship has examined similarities in Schleiermacher's and Frank's views on human dignity, even though Frank was clearly familiar with Schleiermacher's work on Protestant religious topics, describing Schleiermacher as someone who could "serve as a teacher of life for us,"¹⁶ and writing a detailed sketch of Schleiermacher for Russians who were unfamiliar with his views.¹⁷ In his "Friedrich Schleiermacher's Personality and Worldview," Frank called him "a genius of life" on the basis that Schleiermacher's religious-philosophical opinions created "the foundation and starting point of the entire German Protestant theology ... [and noted that] his historical philosophical research, alongside Hegel's philosophy of history, laid the groundwork for the entire German philosophy of history."¹⁸ Frank (who was proficient in German) was so impressed by Schleiermacher's religious-philosophical opinions that he translated some of his texts into Russian. His first project, completed in 1911, was Schleiermacher's 1799 *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, which Frank considered to be a highlight of the Romantic movement and a core text during his own lifetime.¹⁹ As Frank translated *On Religion*, he came under the intellectual influence of Schleiermacher, especially his romanticist-idealist-pietistic views.²⁰ The translation project supported Frank's immersion in Schleiermacher's ideas on religion and anthropology in a modern context, including foundational connections among religion, human consciousness, and the creation of humanity.²¹

15. V. V. Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, trans. George L. Kline, 2 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1953), 2: 853, 872.

16. S. L. Frank, "Persönlichkeit und Weltanschauung Friedrich Schleiermachers," in *Werke in acht Bänden*, vol. 8, *Lebendiges Wissen: Aufsätze zur Philosophie*, ed. Peter Schulz, Peter Ehlen, Nikolaus Lobkowitz et al., trans. from the Russian by Vera Ammer (Freiburg: Karl Alber, 2013), 128.

17. Scholars have commented on Frank's efforts to translate Schleiermacher's work only briefly. Philip Boobbyer, *S. L. Frank: The Life and Work of a Russian Philosopher, 1877–1950* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1995), 78, 79. For a study on Frank's use of W. Dilthey's interpretation of Schleiermacher, see K. M. Antonov and M. A. Pylaev, "Vliianie knigi *Leben Schleiermachers* V. Dil'teia na interpretatsiiu *Rech'i o religii* F. Shleiermakhera u S. Franka," *Studia Religiosa Rossica* 4 (2021): 14–31. For research on Russian philosophers, such as Sergius Bulgakov, and his connection with Schleiermacher, see Edmund Newey, *Children of God: The Child as Source of Theological Anthropology* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2016).

18. Frank, "Persönlichkeit und Weltanschauung Friedrich Schleiermachers," 106, 98.

19. Frank, "Persönlichkeit und Weltanschauung Friedrich Schleiermachers," 99.

20. Frank's work is shaped by various influences, including Plato, Plotinus, Nicholas of Cusa, Neo-Kantianism, and German Idealism, as well as Goethe and Spinoza. Philip J. Swoboda, "Semën Frank's Expressivist Humanism," in *A History of Russian Philosophy, 1830–1930: Faith, Reason, and the Defense of Human Dignity*, ed. G. M. Hamburg and Randall A. Poole (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 210. H. Moore, "German Idealism and the Early Philosophy of S. L. Frank," *Studies in East European Thought* 75 (2023): 525–42. For a study on the influence on Hegel's thought on Frank, see George L. Kline, "The Hegelian Roots of S. L. Frank's Ethics and Social Philosophy," *The Owl of Minerva* 25, no. 2 (1994): 195–208; George L. Kline, "The Religious Roots of S. L. Frank's Ethics and Social Philosophy," in *Russian Religious Thought*, ed. Judith Deutsch Kornblatt and Richard F. Gustafson (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 213–33.

21. Another translation project was *Monologen*, which resembled J. G. Fichte's *The Vocation of Man* (1799). Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *The Vocation of Man*, trans. William Smith, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company, 1910).

A review of Schleiermacher's early writings reveals similarities and differences with Frank's definitions of human dignity. These definitions were based on "religious consciousness" frameworks rooted in "the personal piety of believers," as opposed to Enlightenment definitions based on intrinsic moral values.²² Moving away from the ethical considerations that preceded them, Schleiermacher and Frank used an anthropological focus that stressed aesthetics and creativity as central to any effort to understand human dignity. Both followed Christian tradition by emphasizing the *imago Dei* concept of human creation, but with a notably stronger Christological emphasis. This essay first introduces Schleiermacher's views on human dignity, then describes parallels with Frank's religious philosophy in a post-Kantian context.²³

Schleiermacher frequently referred to "*Menschenwürde*" or "*Würde der Menschheit*" ("human dignity") in his writing but never devoted an entire book or essay to the topic. He first addressed the concept in *On Religion* when describing "the dignity of humanity."²⁴ This text on "Romantic piety" formed Schleiermacher's anthropology and ideas about dignity; this work is considered a primary example of Schleiermacher's influence.²⁵ Schleiermacher articulated the theme of human dignity both directly and indirectly in collections of academic lectures and dogmatic works: *Aesthetics*, *Dialectics*, *Ethics*, and *Christian Faith*. Schleiermacher grounded his concept of dignity in an anthropology associated with human identity,²⁶ human consciousness, and the soul. Since Frank never wrote a monograph focused solely on human dignity, to uncover his views on dignity and related topics within a religious framework, we must examine texts such as the posthumously published *Reality and Man: An Essay in the Metaphysics of Human Nature* (1956), *God with Us* (1946), and *The Light Shines in Darkness: An Essay in Christian Ethics and Social Philosophy* (1949).²⁷ Frank used the word "dignity" much more frequently than Schleiermacher, especially in texts expressing Frank's "mature philosophy of religion."²⁸

22. Randi Rashkover, *Nature and Norm: Judaism, Christianity, and the Theopolitical Problem* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2021).

23. For religious humanism and Frank in Russia, see Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, "Religious Humanism in the Russian Silver Age," in *A History of Russian Philosophy, 1830–1930: Faith, Reason, and the Defense of Human Dignity*, ed. G. M. Hamburg and Randall A. Poole (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 227–47.

24. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion: Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern* (Berlin: Johann Friedrich Unger, 1799), 18. A similar reference appears in the fourth edition of *On Religion* (1831). Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion: Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern*, ed. Günter Meckenstock (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1995), 24.

25. Günter Meckenstock, "Historische Einführung," in Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion, Monologen*, ed. Günter Meckenstock (Berlin: De Gruyter 1995), vii.

26. Ruedi Imbach, "Human Dignity in the Middle Ages," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Human Dignity*, ed. Marcus Düwell, Jens Braarvig, Roger Brownsword, and Dietmar Mieth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 64.

27. As Philip Boobbyer notes, "it was in emigration—[Frank] was forced into exile in 1922—that his religious ideas emerged in their most developed form." Philip Boobbyer, "Semyon Frank," in *The Oxford Handbook of Russian Religious Thought*, ed. Caryl Emerson, George Pattison, and Randall A. Poole (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 495.

28. According to Philip Swoboda, there are "significant differences between the philosophical opinions Frank held in 1904, and those he defended in his mature books." Philip J. Swoboda, "'Spiritual Life' versus Life in Christ: S. L. Frank and the Patristic Doctrine of Deification," in *Russian Religious Thought*,

Details on Schleiermacher's attempts to comprehend human beings appear in his engagement with both Christian and Romantic traditions and portray human dignity through a combination of Romantic aesthetics, religious self-consciousness, and Christian theology. His unique status as a nineteenth-century mediating theologian enabled him to integrate elements from both Christianity and Romanticism into his views of human dignity and identity.²⁹ Close readings of his lectures and dogmatic work show how his approach to human dignity was based on an understanding of human nature in a post-Enlightenment context. In discussing religious consciousness, Schleiermacher described an indirect connection between human dignity and identity, using the "feeling of absolute dependence" formula involving human dignity and religious experience. According to Schleiermacher, the essence of humanity consists of an absolute dependence on God, with piety as its source,³⁰ and a strong God-consciousness. This post-Kantian idea distinguished his views from those based on morality.³¹

Human Dignity and Aesthetics

Schleiermacher's concept of human dignity combined ideas from religion and aesthetics when offering insights into human identity.³² He was not the first to consider the topic of dignity in terms of aesthetics: Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805) had integrated the concept into his moral psychology in his *Grace and Dignity* (1793).³³ Long before the nineteenth-century humanist renaissance, thinkers such as Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494) and Marsilio Ficino (1443–1499) analyzed dignity as the essence of creative beings. Schleiermacher applied an artist metaphor to explain human creativity, describing God as "the great artist" who created humans in his own image, endowing them with the necessary powers to act as creators and shapers of their worlds.³⁴ Similar to some Renaissance humanists, he used a creativity lens to describe a humanity created in God's own image.

ed. Judith Deutsch Kornblatt and Richard F. Gustafson (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 235, 241.

29. For Schleiermacher as mediating theologian, see Annette G. Aubert, "Schleiermacher and Mediating Theology," in *The Oxford Handbook of Friedrich Schleiermacher*, ed. Andrew C. Dole, Shelli M. Poe, and Kevin M. Vander Schel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 505–21.

30. As Maureen Junker-Kenny notes, "Piety which has its seat in *feeling* is in itself something entirely different from morality." Maureen Junker-Kenny, *Self, Christ and God in Schleiermacher's Dogmatics: A Theology Reconceived for Modernity* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), 32.

31. Philip M. Merklinger, *Philosophy, Theology, and Hegel's Berlin Philosophy of Religion, 1821–1827* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 128.

32. He considered ideas associated with aesthetics, especially regarding aesthetic feelings and human nature. Holden Kelm, "Philosophy of Art: With Special Regard to the *Lectures on Aesthetics*," in *The Oxford Handbook of Friedrich Schleiermacher*, ed. Andrew C. Dole, Shelli M. Poe, and Kevin M. Vander Schel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 207. For a study on Schleiermacher's anthropology and aesthetics, see Dorothea Meier and Holden Kelm, *Der Mensch und die Kunst bei Friedrich Schleiermacher: Beiträge zur Anthropologie und Ästhetik* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2023).

33. Rosen, *Dignity*, 35.

34. Enno Rudolph, *Theologie – diessseits des Dogmas: Studien zur systematischen Theologie, Religionsphilosophie und Ethik* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1994), 75.

A closer examination of Schleiermacher's *Lectures on Aesthetics* (delivered at the University of Berlin in 1819) reveals the romanticist framework of his views on human dignity, especially the ways in which he connected human dignity and identity with aesthetic characteristics and religion. Similar to other early romanticists, in *On Religion*, Schleiermacher discussed the idea of "art as religion" (*Kunstreligion*) when discussing human dignity.³⁵ Unlike Schiller, Schleiermacher viewed human beings as imitating and possessing the consciousness of God³⁶—that is, his perception of aesthetics treated religion as a "general psychological connection" reflecting human religious consciousness.³⁷ He described music as having the closest connection to religious consciousness, which he expressed as a "feeling of absolute dependence."³⁸ As Frederick Copleston notes in *A History of Philosophy*, Schleiermacher viewed "religious consciousness" as more closely related to "aesthetic consciousness than theoretical knowledge," with its most salient feature being the "feeling of absolute dependence on the infinite."³⁹

Schleiermacher's aesthetic reinterpretation employed the arts as a framework for understanding the concept of dignity, similar to the broader intellectual descriptions of "human dignity through art" (*Menschenwürde durch die Kunst*) offered by Schiller and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe.⁴⁰ As a *Bildungsbürger*, Schleiermacher (who valued both art and culture) perceived art as the door through which the value of an individual is recognized, arguing that "only together with art [do] we become conscious of the dignity of man (*Würde des Menschen*)."⁴¹ His conception of human dignity stressed the importance of human freedom as well as religious consciousness, acknowledging art as being both diversionary and also fulfilling an essential role for humanity. He described art as the only way for humans to attain both an "awareness of freedom" and "an independent, permanent consciousness of the divine within; everything is only ennobled

35. Frank notes this connection between art and religion in his interpretation of Schleiermacher's *On Religion*. Frank, "Persönlichkeit und Weltanschauung Friedrich Schleiermachers," 113. For a study on art and religion in Schleiermacher, see Anne Käfer, *Die wahre Ausübung der Kunst ist religiös. Schleiermachers Ästhetik im Kontext der zeitgenössischen Entwürfe Kants, Schillers und Friedrich Schlegels*, Beiträge zur historischen Theologie 136 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006). For a discussion on *Kunstreligion*, see Jan Rohls, "Sinn und Geschmack fürs Unendliche—Aspekte romantischer Kunstreligion," *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 27 (1985): 1–24.

36. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Vorlesungen über die Aesthetik*, ed. Rudolf Odebrecht (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1931), 67.

37. Eugen Huber, *Die Entwicklung des Religionsbegriffs bei Schleiermacher* (Leipzig: Dieterich'sche, 1901), 215–17. Frank, in particular, emphasized the significance of Schleiermacher's "psychological description of his religious consciousness." Frank, "Persönlichkeit und Weltanschauung Friedrich Schleiermachers," 111. For a recent discussion that engages with Schleiermacher's reduction of religion to psychology, see Matei Iagher, *The Making and Unmaking of the Psychology of Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2024).

38. Albert Blackwell, "The Role of Music in Schleiermacher's Writings," in *Internationaler Schleiermacher-Kongreß Berlin 1984*, ed. Kurt-Victor Selge (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1985), 439–48, esp. 445.

39. Frederick Charles Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. 7: *Modern Philosophy: From the Post-Kantian Idealists to Marx, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche* (New York: Image Books, 1963), 152.

40. Egbert von Frankenberg, *Die geistigen Grundlagen der Theaterkunst* (Weimar: Kiepenheuer, 1910), 65.

41. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, ed. Holden Kelm, KGA II/14 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), 215 (Kollegheft 1819).

42. Schleiermacher, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, 215.

when it comes in contact with art.”⁴² In this way, he promoted art and creativity as vital components of human dignity.⁴³

Art and dignity occupied central positions in Schleiermacher’s lectures on ethics, underscoring the connection between aesthetics and creativity that he described in his *Lectures on Aesthetics*. Specifically, he emphasized the intrinsic value of each individual through the lens of art. In *Grundriß der philosophischen Ethik (Outline of the Philosophical Ethics)*, he suggested that life can be viewed as a form of art in which every action embodies expressions of creativity—an ontological notion also found in Frank’s work. Schleiermacher believed that this creative component can be identified in the sounds and gestures of human infants who express “the peculiar character of the outer person ... formation of the imagination shows itself early, and from it the peculiar character of the inner person develops by which the individual appearances are conditioned.”⁴⁴

In his *Lectures on Aesthetics*, Schleiermacher added interactions among art, nature, and creativity to his description of human dignity, linking the three elements to the divine and God’s creation, and arguing that “just as humans are creative (*schöpferisch*), so God is artistic in the creation.”⁴⁵ As a romanticist, Schleiermacher gave particular attention to the relationship between creation and art (*Schöpfung und Kunst*), believing that creation and art are essentially intertwined components. By doing so, he elevated human dignity, emphasizing the intrinsic value of human creativity in the context of divine creativity. His central idea was that delight “in divine art is always the highest destiny for humans,” thus motivating them to act creatively. In short, Schleiermacher understood creativity as being central to humanity, an idea that Frank also endorsed.⁴⁶

Much like Schleiermacher, Frank addressed the relationship between human creativity and dignity in his *Reality and Man: An Essay on the Metaphysics of Human Nature*, in which he presented a refined version of a philosophical system he had been developing for more than forty years. To address the creative essence of humanity, Frank moved beyond Augustine’s opinions that only God can be viewed as a creator and that no human being is capable of creating something. Specifically, while identifying God’s acts of creation as miraculous, he also described an inherent human “creativity” in artistic, cognitive, moral, and political domains.⁴⁷ For Frank, “all creativity bears an artistic stamp ... in so far as [an individual] strives for it and achieves it, he is an artist.”⁴⁸

In their respective discourses on human creativity, Frank and Schleiermacher argued that the spiritual dimension of creative expression is an important aspect of human

43. For a discussion on the aesthetic concept of dignity in Friedrich Schiller’s work, see Rosen, *Dignity*, 31. Similarities are found with Renaissance writers whose ideas resurfaced with German idealism; see W. Norris Clarke, *The Creative Retrieval of Saint Thomas Aquinas: Essays in Thomistic Philosophy, New and Old* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 214.

44. Friedrich Schleiermachers, *Grundriß der philosophischen Ethik (Grundlinien der Sittenlehre)*, ed. August Twisten (Berlin: Reimer, 1841), 114, 115.

45. Schleiermacher, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, 43.

46. Schleiermacher, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, 43.

47. S. L. Frank, *Reality and Man: An Essay in the Metaphysics of Human Nature*, trans. Natalie Duddington (London: Faber & Faber, 1965), 153.

48. Frank, *Reality and Man*, 153–54.

nature. Frank posited that an innate artistic force drives humans to express themselves through poetry, music, painting, and other modes. For Frank, the personification of human creative expression had a strong spiritual feature—he wrote, “man’s inner being is spirit.”⁴⁹ Frank regarded creativity as an example of “the divinely-human nature of man,” and argued that humans engaging in creative activity experience both freedom and a “dependence upon a transcendent spiritual reality.”⁵⁰ He described how artists perceive their unique artistic nature as a manifestation of a “super-human spirit” that is inseparable from a human metaphysical position.⁵¹ According to Frank, even though artists might not explicitly mention “God’s action,” during moments of artistic inspiration, it was impossible for individuals not to encounter God as a “creative principle and thereby as the source of his own creativeness.”⁵² In short, Frank believed that occurrences of creative inspiration were made special by the distinctive connection between individuals and “the creative power of God.”⁵³ This view has important metaphysical implications that fit with Schleiermacher’s description of God as the creative source for all beings. Frank perceived God as “the supreme transcendent principle in the human spirit,” who bestowed his creative power upon humanity.⁵⁴ In other words, Frank’s anthropological perspective implied a God who “creates creators,” and “creates derivatively-creative beings and grants His creatures a share in His own creativeness.”⁵⁵ This view underscored the uniqueness of humanity by emphasizing God’s presence in the human spirit.

Frank used this relationship between the creative and religious to construct a model of human dignity that included an artistic characteristic—that is, a “superhuman creative principle” in which individuals are cognizant of their status as creators. This awareness, which connects them to the principal sources of their artwork, supports their participation in an enigmatic ontological “process of creation.”⁵⁶ Frank declared that creative humans were “co-partner[s] of God’s creativeness”—a key point in his perception of human dignity.⁵⁷ He viewed intrinsic creativity as a fundamental aspect of human existence associated with the divine, with humans actively, freely, and consciously engaging in God’s creative process rather than simply obeying his commandments. Frank described God’s will as inherently creative rather than governed by rigid laws producing uniform outcomes, enabling individuals channeling their creativity to express themselves uniquely. Frank believed that human identity and dignity are grounded in a cre-

49. Frank, *Reality and Man*, 154.

50. Frank, *Reality and Man*, 155.

51. Frank, *Reality and Man*, 156, 160. In *Man’s Soul*, similarly, Frank explains that the entire “domain of spiritual life” in relation to culture and art is a realm where human beings instantly “experience and are conscious of the creative activity of the human spirit.” S. L. Frank, *Man’s Soul: An Introductory Essay in Philosophical Psychology*, trans. Boris Jakim (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1993), 263.

52. Frank, *Reality and Man*, 156.

53. Frank, *Reality and Man*, 156.

54. Frank, *Reality and Man*, 157.

55. Frank, *Reality and Man*, 156, 157.

56. Frank believed that artists as “creators” understand they are made in the image and likeness of God.

57. Frank, *Reality and Man*, 156.

ative collaboration with God, rather than in the execution of divine obligations and duties.⁵⁸

Turning to Schleiermacher, a romanticist reading of the interplay between religious art and religious emotions clearly shaped his understanding of human dignity. His initial views reflected Romantic aesthetics in the artistic approach to religion that he expressed in *On Religion*.⁵⁹ As a synthesis of art, religion, and human experience, this perception conflicted with the rationalist framework of Enlightenment thinkers. Notable parallels exist between Schleiermacher's ideas and those of the influential early Romantic writer Wilhelm Wackenroder, especially in their shared use of religious sentiment to explain the connection between the arts and religion.⁶⁰ In Wackenroder's *Herzensergiessungen eines kunstliebenden Klosterbruders* (1797), the degree of unity between art and religion is said to produce "the most beautiful stream of life," thus contributing to Wackenroder's description of religion and art as "the great divine beings" serving as the best guides for our earthly and spiritual lives.⁶¹ In contrast to Frank, both Schleiermacher and Wackenroder emphasized the notion of God in their conceptualizations of dependence, an idea that Schleiermacher reiterated in his description of the essence of humanity.⁶² He argued in favor of an inherent connection between human dignity and religious sentiment as marked by an absolute reliance on the divine—that is, a strong connection between religious spirituality and human dignity.

Schleiermacher's Romantic orientation explains both his understanding of human identity as linked to art and the human emotions at the center of his anthropology. While he believed that all art has its roots in human creativity, he made distinctions between different art forms, arguing that some serve as direct expressions of feelings, while others are based on indirect expressions—for example, music and imitation art (*Mimik*).⁶³ In *On Religion*, he referred to the "music of sublime feelings"⁶⁴ when suggesting that music, as the language of emotion, could not be considered separately from religion. In his *Aesthetic Lectures*, he described humans as possessing "the identity of nature in an active way, particularly modified, which expresses the unique relation-

58. Frank, *Reality and Man*, 159.

59. Holden Kelm "Historische Einführung," in Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, ed. Holden Kelm, KGA II/14 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), xxv. Schleiermacher declared that "religion and art stand beside one another like two friendly souls." Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, ed. Richard Crouter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 69.

60. In *On Religion*, Schleiermacher alludes to Wackenroder's work. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion. Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern* (1799), ed. Günter Meckenstock, KGA I/2 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1984), 173. Albrecht Beutel, "Aufklärer höherer Ordnung? Die Bestimmung der Religion bei Schleiermacher (1799) und Spalding (1797)," in *200 Jahre "Reden über die Religion": Akten des 1. Internationalen Kongresses der Schleiermacher-Gesellschaft, Halle, 14.–17. März 1999. Anhang: Spalding, Johann Joachim. Religion, eine Angelegenheit des Menschen. Leipzig 1797*, ed. Ulrich Barth and Claus-Dieter Osthöfener (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2000), 289.

61. Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder, *Herzensergiessungen eines kunstliebenden Klosterbruders: Phantasien über die Kunst für Freunde der Kunst* (Weimar: Kiepenheuer, 1918), 122, 123.

62. Philip Stoltzfus, *Theology as Performance: Music, Aesthetics, and God in Western Thought* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), 75.

63. Schleiermacher, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, 196.

64. Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 92.

ship of human being[s] to [their] kind.”⁶⁵ Schleiermacher believed that a general view of human identity could be achieved only if *Volksdifferenz* (“distinctions between people”) were eliminated. At the same time, he acknowledged closer connections between certain types of people or nations and greater distances between others, albeit with fluctuations. Schleiermacher understood such “variable boundaries” as proof that “ethnicity belongs to the essence of art.”⁶⁶

Another example of Schleiermacher’s sense of aesthetics serves as evidence of a romanticist influence: he encouraged human beings to explore the world around them and take on a creative role in their relationship with nature. In his aesthetic lectures, he asserted that humans should “gradually rise to [become] the master[s] of nature” and become “knower[s] of the world.”⁶⁷ Schleiermacher believed that if this self-cultivation were realized, the result would be a human creativity devoid of inventive influence, appearing in the form of “a mere renewal of things” in which learning without discovery would be a mere tradition leading to something “mechanical, where human dignity could not manifest itself.”⁶⁸ Frank’s discourse on creativity resonated with Schleiermacher’s emphasis on a creative role for humanity—that is, the fusion of scientific and philosophical ideas resulting in “the creation of something new.”⁶⁹

The concept of nature has often appeared in scholarly discussions of creative human expression, as well as in Romantic literary productions such as Goethe’s *Natur und Kunst* (*Nature and Art*).⁷⁰ In their respective lectures on aesthetics, Schleiermacher and F. W. J. Schelling described an organic connection between art and nature. Based on his belief that nature is inherently connected to art, Schleiermacher described humans as recreating forms that already exist in nature.⁷¹ In the same manner, Frank argued that “human creativeness in all its forms is obviously profoundly akin to [the] cosmic creativeness” found in nature.⁷² Frank distinguished between natural and human forms of creative power, thus echoing Schleiermacher’s view concerning the connection between nature and human creativity, describing the first as depersonalized and the second as marked by “a personal self-conscious spirit.”⁷³ In his analysis of human creativity, Frank argued that humans are conscious of their creative actions; therefore, creativeness represents an expression of an independent self—in short, the presence of a higher power is what separates them from other creatures.

65. Schleiermacher, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, 67.

66. Schleiermacher, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, 67.

67. Schleiermacher, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, 64.

68. Schleiermacher, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, 64.

69. Frank, *Reality and Man*, 153.

70. Robert J. Richards, *The Romantic Conception of Life: Science and Philosophy in the Age of Goethe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 469–70. On Schleiermacher’s reading of Schelling, see Schleiermacher, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, 1. F. W. J. Schelling, “Ueber das Verhältniß der bildenden Künste zu der Natur” (1807), in *Philosophische Schriften*, vol. 1 (Landshut, 1809), 341–96.

71. Friedrich Schleiermachers *Ästhetik*. Im Auftrage der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur – Archiv – Gesellschaft zu Berlin nach den bisher unveröffentlichten Urschriften zum ersten Male herausgegeben von Rudolf Odebrecht (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1931), 9.

72. Frank, *Reality and Man*, 157.

73. Frank, *Reality and Man*, 157.

It is important to note that the ontological aspect of Frank's aesthetic anthropology is aligned with Schleiermacher's belief that all humans are creative beings. According to Frank's *Reality and Man*, creativity is better viewed as an ontological rather than a mere artistic category, with creativeness being a fundamental aspect of human nature rather than a quality reserved for a small number of gifted artists. According to Frank, "every human being is to some extent or potentially a creator. Wherever the purpose of activity springs from the depths of the human spirit, there is creativeness."⁷⁴ He argued that creativity is an intrinsic part of human identity—similar to Schleiermacher, he viewed humans as participants "in God's creativeness."⁷⁵

Religion and Human Dignity

Whereas Kant promoted moral value as an essential component of human dignity,⁷⁶ Schleiermacher endorsed religion as its transcendental foundation. In *On Religion*, he introduced the idea that humans possess "a consciousness of God" inherently experienced through emotions.⁷⁷ In his analysis of Schleiermacher's religious philosophy, Frank paid special attention to the connection between emotions and "religious experience alongside personal self-consciousness with the moment of the individuality in human life."⁷⁸ Schleiermacher imagined a collective "consciousness of humanity" entailing ethics and education,⁷⁹ while positing a disposition linking religion with humanity and human dignity.⁸⁰ He described the spiritual dimension of human dignity as rooted in a dogmatic description of God's image. As part of his consideration of how Christianity is most conscious of God, Schleiermacher emphasized how the first Christians saw "the outlines of the divine image" in humanity and a hidden "heavenly germ of religion," despite the distortions of this image.⁸¹ While agreeing with Augustine's assertion that the image of the divine is greatly tarnished in human nature,⁸² he also maintained that traces of the original (though distorted) images were observable, and that humanity had always possessed "a divine character."⁸³ He used this idea to promote religious sentiment as an essential aspect of the human experience, one in which the idea of dependence occupied a central position among religious emotions. Similar to other Romanticists, he deemed the presence of the divine as an essential aspect of human identity.⁸⁴

74. Frank, *Reality and Man*, 158.

75. Frank, *Reality and Man*, 157.

76. Rosen, *Dignity*, 144.

77. Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion*, 119.

78. Frank, "Persönlichkeit und Weltanschauung Friedrich Schleiermachers," 120.

79. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Monologen* (2.–) 4. Auflage, ed. Günter Meckenstock, KGA I/12 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1995), 342; Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion*, 115.

80. Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion*, 156, 24.

81. Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion*, 287.

82. Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion*, 285, 287.

83. Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion*, 115.

84. Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion*, 121.

Unlike Kant, both Frank and Schleiermacher used a religious foundation to address human dignity. In a treatise entitled *God with Us* (written during his exile in France due to political and religious oppression), Frank expressed great interest in the idea of “the religion of personality.”⁸⁵ In the foreword to the first edition, he wrote, “I am concerned with showing that the fundamental truths of the religious, and, particularly, of the Christian consciousness answer the eternal questions inherent in the very nature of the human spirit.”⁸⁶ The text shows a clear preference for an understanding of anthropology that favors Christian over Enlightenment values, especially in his understanding of human personality and the soul. When critiquing the assumptions of the German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach’s anthropological approach, Frank clearly agreed with the early church father Tertullian in his description of the human soul as inherently Christian.⁸⁷ For Frank, Christianity is an “adequate and perfect expression of this direct insight into the ontological basis of human existence.”⁸⁸ His views on personality could not be separated from the core tenets of the Christian faith, or insights derived from Christian revelation.⁸⁹

Frank’s formulation of human dignity extended beyond secular humanism. When discussing humans and characteristics of God in their likeness, he emphasized a Christian interpretation of the concept of dignity, describing it as an “*organic connection* between God and man.”⁹⁰ He believed the “divine likeness” of human beings and their affinity with God were “in a sense the very essence of Christianity.”⁹¹ Frank traced this notion of likeness to the Old Testament, which he incorporated into his understanding of human creation and dignity. In his analysis of Genesis 1:26–28, he described humans as set apart from “the rest of creation,” arguing that the source of the distinction was the idea that “human life is the spirit of God.” He claimed that their likeness to God elevated humans to “a higher order” that set them apart “from all other [beings].”⁹² In an 1817 sermon, Schleiermacher alluded to Genesis 1:26 when proposing that human beings are “the actual goal and end of creation,” thus portraying them as “lord[s] over all things,” and asserting that individuals display God’s image as far as possible.⁹³

Similar to Schleiermacher, Frank analyzed the importance of God’s image in relation to humanity in terms of “the revelation of Christ,” which served as a vital basis for cultivating a new consciousness.⁹⁴ Frank’s concept of dignity, as expressed in *God with Us*, echoes Schleiermacher’s statement that the image of God is revealed in Christ. This

85. S. L. Frank, *God with Us: Three Meditations*, trans. Natalie Duddington (London: Jonathan Cape, 1946), 140.

86. Frank, *God with Us*, 11.

87. Frank, *God with Us*, 138–39.

88. Frank, *God with Us*, 139.

89. Frank, *God with Us*, 140.

90. Frank, *God with Us*, 154.

91. Frank, *God with Us*, 152.

92. Frank, *God with Us*, 152.

93. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Predigten, 1816–1819*, ed. Katja Kretschmar, KGA III/5 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 314.

94. Frank, *God with Us*, 154.

Christological interpretation underscores Frank's emphasis on God's love for humans and God's kingdom as the dwelling place for the human soul. In support of this argument, he pointed to the organic fusion of the Old Testament view of human dependence on God with the Hellenistic ideas of human "dignity" and "kinship with God." Frank believed these two positions converged in the notion of love defining the relationship between God and humans—"that God himself is love." Frank posited that this "divine principle of love is the very root of human existence," one that added existential meaning to human dignity.⁹⁵

Much more so than Schleiermacher, Frank took great care in explaining how "the divine-human ground of human existence" injected new dignity into humanity.⁹⁶ He clearly wanted this emphasis on the divine-human connection to move beyond a simple anthropocentric understanding of human identity, and sought to highlight the profound significance of the good news of the gospel, which he believed added a new dimension to human dignity. In this context, Frank highlighted Schleiermacher's idea of "religious experience" over dogmatic theory, suggesting that the significance of this preference stems from the sense of the good news that transforms all human feelings and self-awareness. Frank concluded that every human being, even those who are utterly sinful, is God's child, "born from above" and "from God." Citing Acts 17:28, Frank echoed Paul's assertion that "we are ... his offspring" to suggest a new relationship between God and humanity,⁹⁷ and described "God ... the Father [as] the inner foundation of our own being."⁹⁸ Frank clearly believed that the fundamental nature of human existence did not depend on a dualistic view of "separateness and heterogeneity between God and man," but on "kinship, unity, [and] the *unbreakable connection* of God and man."⁹⁹ Frank felt it was essential to demonstrate the perpetual grounding of human existence in the "*Divine-human being*."¹⁰⁰

Human Dignity and Individuality

One characteristic of Schleiermacher's description of humanity is a strong connection between human dignity and individuality.¹⁰¹ An example of the transition from an older honor culture to a modern dignity concept is Schleiermacher's view that all individuals are indispensable for achieving a complete understanding of humanity. According to his understanding of personhood, "All that is human is interwoven and made dependent on each other ... every individual is, according to its inner nature, a necessary harmo-

95. Frank, *God with Us*, 155.

96. S. L. Frank, *The Light Shineth in Darkness: An Essay in Christian Ethics and Social Philosophy*, trans. Boris Jakim (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1989), 63.

97. Frank, *The Light Shineth in Darkness*, 63.

98. Frank, *The Light Shineth in Darkness*, 63–64.

99. Frank, *The Light Shineth in Darkness*, 64.

100. Frank, *The Light Shineth in Darkness*, 64.

101. Frank's analysis underscores that Schleiermacher's foundational belief is that individuality represents the unique characteristics of each human being. Frank, "Persönlichkeit und Weltanschauung Friedrich Schleiermachers," 120.

nizing piece for the perfect view of humanity.”¹⁰² He also emphasized the influential roles that all individuals play in the human tapestry, thus articulating the centrality of dignity in human relationships.¹⁰³ However, in his University of Berlin lectures on ethics, he stated that it was important to acknowledge the differences contributing to each person’s uniqueness. In agreement with Romanticist principles, Schleiermacher identified “human originality” as the agent of human dignity,¹⁰⁴ and described diversity as fundamental to a sense of human completeness.¹⁰⁵ In his depiction of a framework in which the duality of individuality and relationality could be acknowledged, Schleiermacher described personal identity as constructed according to a mix of isolation and engagement, resulting in human differences that complemented each other.¹⁰⁶ His emphasis on the significance of all individuals within a collective identity honored both personal and communal moral dimensions.

Although Frank also acknowledged the uniqueness of individuals, he observed a shared effort toward “the attainment of perfection and purity of the inner life.” Rather than describe this pursuit as an example of a collective ideal of human perfection, he argued that “everyone must have [his] own special perfection.”¹⁰⁷ In explaining his belief in a “personalistic religion,” Frank noted that while Christianity focuses on the significance of personal ethical experiences, it prioritizes human personality over strict moral rules. Unlike Kant, whose views on dignity were heavily focused on morality, Frank’s Christian understanding influenced his conclusion that in matters of dignity, the real “human being is more valuable to it than the principles of moral goodness.”¹⁰⁸

Also, unlike Kant, who understood personhood itself as “morally foundational,”¹⁰⁹ Frank and Schleiermacher took salvation into consideration when embracing the idea of human value. Frank mentioned Martin Luther but not Schleiermacher in his discussion of personality, which is interesting in light of their shared emphasis on the importance of Christ’s salvific work, which offers release from the demands of perfect and absolute morality.¹¹⁰ For Frank, since Christian consciousness takes precedence over the moral,¹¹¹ human dignity should not be based on moral value alone. Schleier-

102. Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion*, 98.

103. A similar view can be seen in Martin Luther. Bayer, “Martin Luther’s Conception of Human Dignity,” 103.

104. Christian König, *Unendlich gebildet Schleiermachers kritischer Religionsbegriff und seine inklusivistische Religionstheologie anhand der Erstauflage der Reden*, Collegium Metaphysicum 16 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 234. Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion*, 18.

105. *Friedrich Schleiermachers Grundriß der philosophischen Ethik* (Berlin: Reimer, 1841), 84.

106. *Friedrich Schleiermachers Grundriß der philosophischen Ethik*, 84–85.

107. Frank, *God with Us*, 143.

108. Frank, *God with Us*, 144. Swoboda notes that “Frank’s thinking about human dignity and self-realization can be described as ‘expressivist humanism’, in the sense that Frank came to believe that the moral task of each individual was to develop his own unique spiritual individuality and that he generally rejected abstract rules of conduct.” Swoboda, “Semën Frank’s Expressivist Humanism,” 212.

109. Rosen, *Dignity*, 81; cf. Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 4: 428.

110. Frank, *God with Us*, 144, 147.

111. Frank, *God with Us*, 148.

macher connected salvation with “Christian consciousness”¹¹² in the form of an “inner consciousness of God” in human beings.¹¹³ In positing that all individuals possess a religious consciousness linked to Christ, Schleiermacher expressed an intrinsic sense of connection between God and human dignity—a view that Frank shared.

Human Dignity and Self-Consciousness

Vorlesungen über die Dialektik, Schleiermacher’s collection of lectures on dialectics that served as the foundation for his philosophical system, provides insights into his understanding of human dignity. He used the concept of self-consciousness to position human dignity as part of human nature, emphasizing a religious rather than moral approach to dignity, and arguing that “the presentation of the deity in analogy to the human consciousness cannot be avoided, because one must take the view of religious self-consciousness as [the] only way possible.”¹¹⁴ Schleiermacher differed from Kant in asserting that “transcendent determination of self-consciousness now is the religious side of it or the religious feeling, and in this, therefore, the transcendent ground or the highest being itself is represented.”¹¹⁵ He felt it was essential to connect this feeling to our consciousness of God because he believed that religious feeling represented an absolute consciousness in human beings.¹¹⁶

Frank likewise connected human dignity to human self-consciousness. He knew that Schleiermacher had recognized “the mature human consciousness of the nineteenth century that transcended the rationalism of the eighteenth century, acknowledged its religious elements, and penetrated into the intellectual heritage of European culture.”¹¹⁷ In his work Frank highlighted what he called “the new human self-consciousness” emerging from the good news of the gospel, which he described as providing meaning and security for human existence, and as giving humans their status as spiritual beings.¹¹⁸ He linked God’s “image and likeness” rooted in the Old Testament tradition with a Pauline understanding of God’s revelation of the divine spirit (1 Cor. 2:10). Accordingly, he believed that human existence possesses a spiritual dimension in the sense of a secure grounding “in the holy primordial source of being.”¹¹⁹ In his perception of humans, Frank characterized them as supernatural beings whose existence depends on God. He argued that a revelation in Christ offered insights into what constitutes a person, thus helping individuals understand their inner being.

According to Frank, the personhood concept was established in the later stages of the development of Christianity and is not found in the Old Testament or other Old

112. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Predigten: Fünfte bis Siebente Sammlung*, 1826–1833, ed. Günter Meckenstock, KGA III/2 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 444.

113. Schleiermacher, *Predigten: Fünfte bis Siebente Sammlung*, 325.

114. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Vorlesungen über die Dialektik*, ed. Andreas Arndt, KGA II/10.1 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2002), 573.

115. Schleiermacher, *Vorlesungen über die Dialektik*, 572.

116. Schleiermacher, *Vorlesungen über die Dialektik*, 267.

117. Frank, “Persönlichkeit und Weltanschauung Friedrich Schleiermachers,” 102.

118. Frank, *The Light Shineth in Darkness*, 65.

119. Frank, *The Light Shineth in Darkness*, 65.

World texts.¹²⁰ For Frank, the most profound meaning of the good news idea was based on “ontologically grounded roots of [humans] as persons,” denoting “a wholly new consciousness of dignity.”¹²¹ This argument shares similarities with Schleiermacher’s understanding of human identity, which suggested self-consciousness based on an assumption of a “communion of life with Christ.”¹²² However, for Schleiermacher, a deep association existed between self-consciousness and “absolute dependence”—an expression that Frank did not embrace.¹²³ Schleiermacher elaborated on the idea in his *Christian Faith*, indicating continuity with his earlier Romantic views and Pietism. Based on his understanding of religious self-consciousness, Schleiermacher stressed the idea of absolute dependence in his theory of religion, especially as regards the human person. In his words, “If the feeling of absolute dependence, expressing itself as consciousness of God, is the highest grade of immediate self-consciousness, it is also an essential element of human nature.”¹²⁴ Since for Schleiermacher religious self-consciousness was an innate predisposition of the human soul,¹²⁵ one of his central concerns was showing “that piety is of the essence of human nature,” based on his view that the human soul is inherently inclined toward both “knowledge of the world ... [and] consciousness of God.”¹²⁶

As expressed in his *Christian Faith*, Schleiermacher’s anthropology reflected a Romanticist perception of absolute dependence, with all individuals aware of a subjective feeling “first awakened in [them] in the same way, by the communicative and stimulative power of expression or utterance.”¹²⁷ Although he considered such feelings individual, he also believed they contained a collective element, which explains his argument that this core component of human nature is best understood as a communal experience. His view of dignity included a collective awareness of religious self-consciousness built on a universal “feeling of absolute dependence,” rooted in unconditional and universal human nature. Schleiermacher believed this universal nature “contains in itself the potentiality of all those differences by which the particular content of the individual personality is determined.”¹²⁸ Whereas Schleiermacher described human awareness as a dependent and innately religious concept, Frank portrayed human self-consciousness in terms of a “primordial connection and interwovenness with God”—in other words, the presence of God in the nature of human beings.¹²⁹ As Frank saw it, human beings

120. For a study on S. L. Frank and personhood, see Randall A. Poole, “‘The Kingdom of Spirits’: Semyon Frank and Russian Religious Personalism,” *Northwestern University Studies in Russian Philosophy, Literature, and Religious Thought* 1 (2024): 244–65.

121. Frank, *The Light Shineth in Darkness*, 65.

122. Schleiermacher, *Predigten. Fünfte bis Siebente Sammlung*, 165.

123. Peter Ehlen, *Russische Religionsphilosophie im 20. Jahrhundert: Simon L. Frank. Das Gottmenschliche des Menschen* (Munich: Karl Alber, 2009), 53.

124. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, trans. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Steward (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928), 26.

125. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, 22.

126. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, 171.

127. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, 26.

128. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, 134.

129. Frank, *The Light Shineth in Darkness*, 66–67.

are from the beginning associated with God and “are so organically and inseparably interwoven with Him that *we are in Him and He is in us*.”¹³⁰

Frank’s description of religious consciousness in *The Light Shineth in Darkness* is similar to Schleiermacher’s image of religious feelings tied to human awareness of God. According to Frank, “the idea of the all-powerfulness of God is given wholly immediately and with utter self-evidence in religious experience”¹³¹—that is, a profound connection between humanity and God in which “a higher power flows into and acts in the world through the invisible depths of the human heart.”¹³² Frank recognized the centrality of this idea in Schleiermacher’s *On Religion*,¹³³ especially the way in which that feeling was portrayed as a principal component of religion—in Frank’s words, a “primary unity” marked by a “feeling of harmony.”¹³⁴

Human Dignity and the Human Soul

There is no universal, pan-religion definition of “soul” regarding dignity, beyond a recognition of the existence of a “nonempirical spiritual substance in human beings.”¹³⁵ In *On Religion*, Schleiermacher referred to “the condition of the pious excitement of the soul.”¹³⁶ Arguing that religion originates with the soul,¹³⁷ he described “holy souls” as always being “penetrated by the glow of religion” under “the direct influence of the Deity.”¹³⁸ In the second speech of this collection, he expressed his view that all human feelings are found in the human soul.¹³⁹

Frank’s understanding of the soul in his later writings, such as *Reality and Man*, is firmly grounded in theological rather than philosophical principles. The mystical religious sources that Frank applied help to explain his criticism of Nietzsche’s rejection of God’s transcendence in the human soul.¹⁴⁰ Frank’s appreciation of “mystical experience” and “the presence of the deity in the human soul” fit with Schleiermacher’s description of the presence of God in the soul.¹⁴¹ Frank was clearly referring to Christian doctrine and New Testament beliefs regarding the human soul when asserting the living presence of Christ in humans.¹⁴² He believed that the soul, “as a reality revealing itself ... as the inmost depth of being” indicates that “God is immanent and dwells ‘in

130. Frank, *The Light Shineth in Darkness*, 64.

131. Frank, *The Light Shineth in Darkness*, 41.

132. Frank, *The Light Shineth in Darkness*, 44.

133. Frank, “Persönlichkeit und Weltanschauung Friedrich Schleiermachers,” 111, 102.

134. Boobbyer, S. L. *Frank: The Life and Work of a Russian Philosopher*, 79.

135. Matthew Petrussek and Jonathan Rotchild, *Value and Vulnerability: An Interfaith Dialogue on Human Dignity* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2020), 11.

136. Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion*, 147.

137. Martin Redeker, *Schleiermacher: Life and Thought*, trans. John Wallhauser (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973), 35.

138. Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion*, 212, 283.

139. Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion*, 143.

140. Frank, *Reality and Man*, 129.

141. Frank, *Reality and Man*, 141.

142. Frank, *Reality and Man*, 140.

me', while remaining distinct from me."¹⁴³ Frank's understanding of the relationship between the soul and God took two forms: as God's presence in humans, and as rooted in Him. In other words, Frank believed that "God as a reality" transcended humans as an intrinsic essence of their very existence.¹⁴⁴

In the context of his discussion of the soul serving as an "eternal homeland," and of suffering as inherent in our human experience, Frank wrote of the importance of the kingdom of God.¹⁴⁵ He believed that humans were aware of their status as "homeless wanderers." His view of human nature entailed a "contemporary metaphysical feeling based on unfaith [existing] in the consciousness of our utter desolation."¹⁴⁶ He perceived this collective sense of desolation as shaping human identity and understood the message of God's kingdom as a longed-for "eternal homeland" as offering a foundation for human transformation. Accordingly, he believed that the kingdom of God was an "already attained (or rather the eternally present) possession of man—namely, the homeland of his soul."¹⁴⁷ In alignment with the Platonist tradition of philosophy, Frank adopted the idea of "the homeland," a notion that Schleiermacher never specifically expressed. Frank also used this image in his work *The Unknowable: An Ontological Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*,¹⁴⁸ and discussed self-consciousness and self-realization in *Man's Soul* to suggest that the internal soul must be perceived in light of "its return to [a] 'heavenly homeland.'"¹⁴⁹

This gospel element Frank considers to coincide with Plato's teaching of "the ideal world, of heavenly being as the true homeland of the human soul."¹⁵⁰ However, Frank moved beyond this Platonic explanation when emphasizing the distinction between "the religious spirit of Platonism and the good news of Christ": the first expresses "a closed aristocratic character," while the second is "freely accessible to every human soul."¹⁵¹ Frank viewed Christ's revelation as offering shared ownership of God's kingdom "to every human soul that seeks it."¹⁵² Frank drew on Matthew 11:25 when stating that all human souls eventually find themselves in "inviolable nearness to the heavenly Father ... in whose image and likeness it is created."¹⁵³ He contended that this understanding of the good news of Christ and the kingdom of God was directly related to human dignity as shaped by their affinity with God.¹⁵⁴

143. Frank, *Reality and Man*, 144.

144. Frank, *Reality and Man*, 144.

145. Frank, *The Light Shineth in Darkness*, 58.

146. Frank, *The Light Shineth in Darkness*, 59, 60.

147. Frank, *The Light Shineth in Darkness*, 60.

148. S. L. Frank, *The Unknowable: An Ontological Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, trans. Boris Jakim (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1983), 192.

149. Frank, *Man's Soul*, 223.

150. Frank, *The Light Shineth in Darkness*, 62.

151. Frank, *The Light Shineth in Darkness*, 62.

152. Frank, *The Light Shineth in Darkness*, 62.

153. Frank, *The Light Shineth in Darkness*, 62.

154. Frank, *The Light Shineth in Darkness*, 66.

When discussing what he felt were the superior characteristics of Christianity, Schleiermacher mentioned activities of the soul in the context of aesthetic religions, offering a unique view involving “a peculiar form of inward beauty” in humans. He added detail to this idea in *Christian Faith*, asserting that in Christianity, God’s consciousness—as it exists in the human soul—“is always related to the totality of active states in the idea of a Kingdom of God.”¹⁵⁵ He used this premise to critique the notion of the beauty of the soul, which he viewed as formed by natural and worldly influences that were unrelated to Christianity.¹⁵⁶ In this work, he analyzed the human soul in a dogmatic context, describing it as inherently inclined to seek both an understanding of the world and a connection with a consciousness of God.¹⁵⁷ Further, he discussed sensible self-awareness of the soul in relation to an “uninterrupted sequence of religious emotions” connected to a consciousness of God in human beings. He maintained that “a religious soul laments over a moment of his life which is quite empty of the consciousness of God,”¹⁵⁸ associating this consciousness with a “feeling of absolute dependence” that varied in intensity. He acknowledged that “there will naturally be moments in which a man is not directly and definitely conscious of such a feeling at all.”¹⁵⁹

To maintain consistency in his theological methodology, which was centered on Christian self-consciousness, Schleiermacher considered awareness of sin in light of the human soul and recognition of “the personal self-consciousness which attests [to] an inner state as sin.”¹⁶⁰ According to Schleiermacher, the absence of this consciousness would constitute an “additional sin.” He was convinced that “the consciousness of sin never exists in the soul of the Christian without the consciousness of the power of redemption”¹⁶¹—a belief that aligned with his perception of sin and grace as interwoven.¹⁶²

Conclusion

This article makes a contribution to efforts to position Russian ideas within a broader comparative context, specifically by demonstrating how German theological texts contributed to the transfer of ideas to Russian scholars. Frank’s work in translating Schleiermacher’s *On Religion* and *Monologues* was an important influence on his later ideas. Even though Frank did not directly mention Schleiermacher in his later writings, he did engage with Schleiermacher’s views on human consciousness and religious feelings, views that influenced his own interpretations of religious experience and intuition

155. For Schleiermacher, the essential Christian concept of God’s kingdom states that fundamental life experiences are only considered religious when associated with piety and God’s kingdom. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, 43.

156. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, 43.

157. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, 171.

158. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, 24.

159. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, 25.

160. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, 271.

161. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, 272.

162. Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, 265–66. For a fuller treatment, see Annette G. Aubert, *The German Roots of Nineteenth-Century American Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 49.

that underscored human dignity and God-consciousness. Similar to Schleiermacher, Frank synthesized ideas in a post-Enlightenment environment in which he combined his religious philosophical positions with Neo-Platonism when analyzing Schleiermacher's work. Frank synthesized ideas in a post-Enlightenment context, blending his own religious-philosophical views with insights drawn from Schleiermacher's work. His conclusion was that despite the limitations of "Schleiermacher's ideas, his living consciousness, which in the religious and moral sphere connects subjectivism and objectivism, individualism and universalism, offers a greater wisdom of life and is closer to the ideal of an all-encompassing worldview than the doctrines of more consistent thinkers."¹⁶³

Schleiermacher's concept of human dignity arose from his subjective religious and anthropological views, his Romantic-Pietistic understanding of dignity, and his assumptions of humans' aesthetic capacity—a capacity associated with the feeling of absolute dependence (on God). While Frank did not adopt Schleiermacher's notion of absolute dependence, both Frank and Schleiermacher included notions of creation and art into their human dignity analyses. An important idea found in the work of both is that creativity is an essential part of human existence and dignity, with creativity serving a central role in human efforts to imitate God. Both Schleiermacher and Frank emphasized the significance of God's image in relation to humanity, and asserted that this image is ultimately revealed to human beings through Christ, who serves as a fundamental foundation for a new consciousness of human dignity.

Though they did their work during different periods in the modern era, both Schleiermacher and Frank responded to Enlightenment ideals by underscoring the spiritual aspects of human dignity, shifting the focus away from moral values to religious (especially Christian) consciousness, which they felt was essential to the concept of human dignity. Schleiermacher and Frank came from different intellectual and geographic backgrounds, but their shared religious foundation and worldview were essential to their views on human dignity. While Frank's connections with Eastern Orthodoxy¹⁶⁴ and German Idealism are important to understanding his anthropology, his intellectual affinity with Schleiermacher is evident in his views linking religion with human dignity.



163. Frank, "Persönlichkeit und Weltanschauung Friedrich Schleiermachers," 128.

164. Swoboda, "Spiritual Life," 235.

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