

Finding dignity. The philosophical, social and legal contexts of crisis in human dignity

Daria Bieńkowska, University of Social Sciences and Humanities in Warsaw, Poland

Ryszard Kozłowski, Pomeranian University, Poland

Abstract: In contemporary world there are a lot of idea of dignity and we can observe many differences in the perception and interpretation of it. One can find many reasons for this discrepancy. While focusing on the most important human rights, the authors want to demonstrate that, despite the many changes that have occurred in recent decades, the idea of human rights is essential to human dignity. For these reasons, we believe that the nature of human rights require its re-examination in the prism of human dignity. Analysis of philosophical, cultural and legal contexts in which a concept of dignity occurs, may contribute to a better understanding of what dignity is and what is not. Above all, may allow reflection on the crisis of dignity of the XXI century human. Dignity is a type of value that co-creates the sense of human life, directs to a specific goal, and also regulates interpersonal connections. Here, the authors analyze dignity in the context of specific concepts of man to show the relations between dignity and the eternal question: "who am I in the light of my rights?" Secondly, we show how crucial contextual and hermeneutical thinking is, while studying fundamental concepts of human experiences such as dignity. The analysis of the subject carried out by experts in fields of legal and philosophical sciences, based on the common foundation, which is an individual and his life, points to many critical issues that need to be thoroughly evaluated, as long as the subject is approached holistically.

Keywords: human dignity, person, human rights, personalization of law, inviolability of human life

Introduction

Philosophical studies have led to better understanding of human's life. There are studies of man's life as a person, as an individual, as a member of human community, society, nation and state (Kobierzycki, 2001). The phenomenon of a human has already been analyzed by Homer, Plato and Aristotle; it has been explored by philosophers in medieval and modern era, and today, it is one of the main topics of social and political studies. In the subject literature there are many valuable answers to the basic question: "Who is a human?" At the same time, it appears that categories such as dignity, inviolability of the person, his uniqueness, and specificity, join the contemplation on the essence of man and his human nature. It must be clearly stated that it is impossible to accurately talk about human aside from the social and axiological dimension of his existence. However, one will not get a full answer to the question "Who am I" when he liberates himself from the in-depth reflection on the essence of dignity, and also the sacredness and immortality of the human being. Therefore, it is worth following a few concepts of man in twenty-first century which describe the essence of human dignity. For every human feels that he is special and unique, and that he has his dignity, however, certain factors may weaken his inner 'feeling' (Spaemann, 1966). Where are the reasons for this lack of 'feeling' of himself, the loss of sensitivity to oneself and to others? How to identify the causes of the crisis of dignity? Currently, I am of the opinion that philosophy gives us a lot of

interesting diagnostic tools (Stein, 1991), several of which will be looked closely at in this text.

1. The main problem: the essence and nature of human dignity

The crisis regarding the sense of human dignity can proceed through various facets and levels of existence. While writing about human dignity, one should mention three things: the ontological value of human, the moral and laudable virtues, and the honorable social position. At this point, it needs to be emphasized that each of the recognized aspects of dignity does not occur separately, but they bind into one unit. They relate to and depend on each other in such a way that if a human feels his ontological value, if he feels himself, and if he got to know himself, then he is someone who has a certain level of moral life. In other words, the source of the moral life is the inner feeling of self (and other people). This 'inner feeling', empathy, is dignity (Stein, 1917).

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1.1. Ontic dignity

The primary human dignity as a person derives from the fact that he is already “someone existing.” Similarly, one can talk about dignity of every being that exists. Plants, animals, universe, matter, and even time and space have their dignity. This type of dignity comes from the very fact of existence, the exit beyond nothingness, as well as the fact of internal logic, beauty and freedom. Each material thing bears some special beauty and goodness, not only when it serves a man, but because it simply is.

The dignity of every human being is, however, a particular type of dignity: it results from life. Today, one needs to be reminded about this fact and be able to distinguish between the concept of “life” and the philosophical concept of “existence”. The concept of existence (Gr. hyparcho, Lat. existentia) is a derivative concept to the concept of “life” (Gr. Bios). Bios expresses the primary human relationship with the natural world and life in general. So when one thinks about human dignity, he automatically expresses the belief that dignity is granted to a man together with his life. The essence of human dignity is life, not just some distinguished way of existence, which is only one of its aspects.

Following contemporary philosophical and political debates about dignity, one can quickly come to the conclusion that while speaking about a man and his life, the concept of “life” is not as frequently used as the concept “existence”. This attitude has been probably acquired from existential philosophy. Although the term “existence” is very interesting and scientifically fruitful, it narrows the area of human life to the specific modes of being, in order to conduct further analysis in these designated 'fields'. As a consequence, one concentrates on the “way of existence” of a person, and not on his whole life. Therefore, human dignity is in fact the dignity of his life, and not only the dignity of one or another way of existence.

Philosophy of dignity frequently refers to Kant's thesis, who said that a man can never be considered as a means (tool), but is always the aim for himself. If one agrees that dignity stems from life, than Kant's theory is not complete (Kant, 2013). Man as a person is primarily oriented towards others, towards the world, towards God; he participates in the life of other people and things. Because all beings are involved in the same life, each of them is equal and has its dignity, and in that way, no one can be either a means nor an aim to anyone. However, because a man is a person, and therefore someone special, and enjoys his personal dignity and

status, he can serve others and be a gift to others. Being a gift to others does not annihilate his dignity, nor the dignity of another person, as long as everyone enjoys their lives.

Referring to the above reflections, one can say that the contemporary crisis of dignity includes numerous misunderstandings in the concept of life. Reductionist anthropologies separate man from life in order to operate different forms of existence. It can be clearly noticed by analyzing various stages of human life, including the prenatal stage. Attempts to move the “beginning” of life to a certain moment in time, deny life itself, and choose one of its forms. Maximalist anthropologies extend the concept of life beyond the boundaries of historical time and space, beyond the bios, and introduce categories of immortality and eternal life. According to maximalist anthropologies, eternal life is also a source of life understood as bios. Thus, the essence of human dignity moves on forever; it results from eternal life, the life that does not close in time and space, in history, in the current *hic et nunc*.

1.2. Moral dignity

Dignity of a person is expressed in his moral life (moral dignity). The sense of dignity is the source of human morality. While this feeling is shaken, man becomes weak in the area of his moral life, and also indirectly, in the area of religious life. He weakens to this point that he becomes inhuman and often lacks generosity and magnanimity. While staying in this mode, a Delphi motto comes to mind that encourages one to get to know himself. It can be altered and formulated in this way: “Get to know yourself, get to know your dignity”! Getting to know man's own dignity is a path to himself and others (Kozłowski, 2011).

Moral dignity has also another side: moral life is an update and fulfillment of personal dignity. Without the moral life, man would remain a “dead” being. In terms of moral life, man creates beauty and goodness, lives the truth of his existence, and is nourished by the truth of another man. This broadens the horizons of his life up to infinity. Characteristic feature of moral dignity are the values which man pursues (Scheler, 1913). These values attract a man, animate his existence, and give it a new meaning. Existential philosophers described the absurdity of human life with great maturity and precision. The basic truth they teach is that where there is lack of higher values, humanistic and religious values, man experiences the absurdity of existence; as if he diverged from himself, from another man, and above all, from God. In this light, values are a factor integrating inner being of a human, his life, and even his fate.

Thus, while one formulates for instance, human rights, conventions, which protect man and his human fate, it is necessary not only to recall the very idea of dignity, but it is also necessary to fulfill the dignity with the values and morals. Dignity devoid of values is a fictional idea that doesn't bring anything to human life, doesn't organize and regulate anything, but becomes another trap of a human intellect and human ambition.

1.3. Social dignity

Since man is a social being, his human dignity has a social dimension. In this context, the dignity is identified with social status of a man, the role he plays in the community, and the function he performs in a particular group. Good group performance depends largely on a sense of distinguished social dignity. It is known that with the loss of feeling of dignity, the value presented by the group, relationships in the group (family, company etc) get weak.

Where are the causes of the crisis of this type of dignity? Certainly, there are many reasons for that, but one of the clearest and the most convincing arguments in philosophical diagnosis

is the one which weakens the sense of value and dignity of a person. The weakening of the individual in favor of community opens the door to the degradation of a man, including the sense and development of his individuality (Maritain, 1988: 327-345). It is not good to promote individualism or subjectivism either. Both attitudes will not create a “strong man”, as it has already been demonstrated in the text of H. Marcuse in “One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society” (Marcuse, 1964).

One of the preferred solutions to this matter on the personalistic ground, is to adopt a concept of a man, in which the aspect of individuality and relatedness is exposed (Bartnik, 1995). In the light of this concept, to be a man means to be someone individual, and at the same time, to be a person (a being) in relation to others. The balance between individuality and relatedness strengthens the sense of individual dignity, and thus social dignity.

1.4. Religious dignity (sacred)

Religious dignity of the person completes and develops natural dignity. Great world religions such as Judaism, Islam, Christianity (Protestantism, Catholicism, Orthodoxy) and many others take on this theme. Religious dignity should be understood and interpreted as a 'sense of the sacred'. According to these religions, man is “a religious being”; even “a sacred being.” In this context, dignity is a “sense of the sacred”, “feeling God in oneself”, feeling oneself in relation to God.

The sense of the sacred dimension of a being is important for man as long as he strives for the full truth included in his individual being. Romanian religious expert Mircea Eliade, pointed at the sacred dimension of humanity (and life). In his study, “The Sacred and the Profane”, Eliade analyzed both dimensions of being, and existence of a man. The profane dimension means a way of existence that is not fully achieved; it is a some sort of a “pre-existence”, while the existence in the realm of the sacred, means the relevant being, the relevant life (Eliade, 1961). Human self (ego) “moves” between the sacred and the profane, eventually to become integrated. Dignity is the process of integration, and at the same time, its finale. A sense of dignity stems precisely from that integration.

Analyzing the phenomenon of dignity from that side, it is found that one of the causes of the crisis of dignity is a loss of sensitivity to the realm of the sacred in favor of “real” life. Perhaps this belief can be better expressed, when one invokes Karl Rahner, who then followed Andrée Malraux, and said that a Christian in the twenty-first century will either be a mystic or he will not exist at all. The attitude of the religious belief directs a human being to the realm of a sacred space in the spiritual depths of himself. Following this path, man can rediscover himself, enjoy the presence of others, and joyfully experience the beauty of this world. Environmental movements would benefit from this way of thinking about man and the world.

2. Dignity of a person in the prism of selected concepts of a man

The issue of dignity of a person has rarely been a subject of direct reflection carried out by a particular philosopher. It often occurred on the sidelines of analysis devoted to man, and sometimes detailed analyses were conducted by the thinkers in the field of philosophy of law.

At this point, attention will be drawn to the works of a few philosophers, through which the roots of the crisis of the sense and respect of human dignity will be more closely presented. The crisis of dignity is in fact a manifestation of a deeper crisis: a crisis of a human, a crisis of

understanding of a human, and a crisis of experiencing oneself as a human in all human's richness and beauty.

2.1. Existential dignity

Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980), winner of the Nobel Prize in the field of literature, belongs to those philosophers who reluctantly use a phrase “existentialist”. In his literary and philosophical works, Sartre describes many important themes of human existence, of which the most important one seems to be freedom. Human, according to Sartre, is doomed to freedom; human doesn't choose freedom, he is chosen by it. That is why, as a free being/entity, he constantly needs to choose himself. Sartre wrote that “creation of oneself”, “going beyond nothingness”, creation of oneself as worthy, unworthy, meaningful and meaningless is constantly being carried out in man's life (Cf. Sartre, 1964).

Sartre, in his dramas presents dignity in many ways, however, he never directly writes about it (Sartre, 1944). In an excellent text depicting the symbolic hell (“No Exit”), Sartre describes a gathering of several people who cannot communicate with each other, who cannot and do not want to listen to one another, and distort narrated stories of their lives presenting themselves at their best. They misrepresent their lives and pretend in front of others that they are innocent, while are guilty of death and many other serious crimes. That is how the hell between people is born. Hell is this type of human experience, in which human is deprived of dignity and deprives others of it. That is why perhaps in conclusion, Sartre writes that hell is other people.

Does Sartre want to say that only dignity can save a man? Is dignity this untouchable truth about a man, which determines his unique position in the human world?

2.2. “Axiological I”

In Poland, J. Tischner is a creator of an original philosophical trend known as “the philosophy of drama.” Analyzing different areas of human existence, he created an interesting and inspiring concept, “Axiological I”. In this phrase Tischner reveals essential truth about a human: my “I” by its very nature is a value, the type of a value that a human being carries within himself, which he discovers and experiences. My “Axiological I” is expressed in “I the philosopher”, “I the poet”, “I the doctor”, “I the teacher” (Tischner, 1998).

By interpreting the concept of dignity according to the “Axiological I”, one can notice a significant association between I-person and values such as goodness, truth and beauty. My “I” is always turned towards specific values because their desire is a part of my “I's” existence. Beyond values, beyond good and truth, it dies. In this sense, one can understand dignity as a value, a value of an individual person and other people. Dignity as a value makes human existence a drama; it shows that life is not just about “having”, but “being somebody” (Fromm, 1976). The drama happens when a man is faced with the choice: either he will choose himself as a “something”, or as a “somebody”. In this realm, a fight for dignity takes place; in fact, it is a dramatic fight for man's own dignity.

2.3. Dignity of an individual and a person

In Europe, Jacques Maritain (1882-1973), was a respected philosopher-personalist. He was a co-author of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, GA Res 217A (III), UN Doc A/810, at 71, 1948). This remarkable scholar of the Middle Ages in many of his texts analyzes the most important metaphysical structures of human being (Maritain, 1936). In one of his texts (Maritain, 1940), he shows the difference

between a man understood as an individuality and a personality. While a man-individual can be interpreted as a material being, a man-personality, fully becomes himself only when he is turned toward the spiritual dimension of his existence.

Maritain refers all of his philosophical achievement to social issues, and shows a wide range of possibilities of applications of examined metaphysical categories. He notices that, when the complete person enters a given society; he seems to blend in with others, but he always remains an individual, remains himself. To this day, societies based on totalitarian doctrine do not comprehend this fact. For Maritain, in this particular aspect, the good of the whole (society) is something superior to the good of an individual man, to the private good. However, these “common goods” must be fairly distributed between each member of the community. In other words, the good of the whole must be beneficial to the individuals and should be split between them because of their rights and dignity (Maritain, 1940).

Referring to the Maritain idea, it can be said that dignity is a fundamental category regulating the relations within the human community. External legal regulations can be illegible and ineffective when the sense of dignity in each of the members of the community is weakened. Therefore, once again, one witnesses the come back of not only the idea of dignity, but also some sort of “pedagogy of dignity”, which every man should give in to.

2.4. Perspectives

As far as the above statements are concerned, it can be stated that dignity demands a precise definition, but also it 'escapes' definitions. The term dignity is referenced in a number of legal documents, declarations and conventions. Most often, it serves to secure uniqueness, integrity and inviolability of being, which is constitutes every person.

Dignity can be included in so-called primitive concepts such as love, person, goodness, freedom. The permanent value of every human being, even human life loses its meaning without those concepts. Dignity comes from life, and secondarily, it comes from morality, or any “social contract”. Dignity is the light and prism through which human's existence is analyzed; it is the “key” (the spirit) of human rights and responsibilities. It does not replace love or sense of justice, but gives them a definitive value.

At this point, it is worth looking at human rights in the *acquis communautaire*, as well as the jurisdiction of the Court of Justice of the European Union, where so-called 'fundamental rights' dominated throughout the history. After the Lisbon Treaty (Treaty of Lisbon amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community, created in Lisbon on 13 December 2007, Journal of Laws of 2009 No. 203, item. 1569), however, the name of those rights has been replaced by 'human rights', and their scope was elevated to the rank of constitutional rights. Moreover, the rights were extended by the axiological scope, where one of the central places is the dignity of the human as a value subject to special protection. This means that the dignity of the human person, which is a credo of personalism, was also adopted by the international community. This also means that dignity is a kind of an absolute foundation of the idea of human rights. This approach corresponds somewhat with the first sentence of the preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, where the United Nations stated that the recognition of the inherent dignity is the foundation of the rights and freedoms of all people, and in further articles it consistently recognized that all human beings are born free in dignity (Art. 1 UDHR). (Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world”, statement from the Preamble of the

Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 2, § 1, sentence 1 states: "Everyone's right to life shall be protected by law." in the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, 4 November 1950, UNTS vol. 213, 221, available at: <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/en/Treaties/Html/005.htm>).

It can be concluded that dignity penetrates the legal system, calling for a man, inquiring about him, saving him and protecting him against enslavement of heartless laws. As an absolute, it is irrelevant in relation to all aspects of human life, as it belongs to him by virtue of being a human, acting as the essential and constitutive element of human existence (but the discourse is still open, por. D. Kretzmer and E. Klein, *The Concept of Human Dignity in Human Rights Discourse*, 2002).

Such an approach of dignity should always be a prevalent legal principle in the prism of resolving any type of problems, not so much legal ones, but ethical, moral ones, and even those related with the development of biomedical science and biotechnology. (The Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Dignity of the Human Being with regard to the Application of Biology and Medicine: Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine (ETS No 164) was opened for signature on 4 April 1997 in Oviedo, Spain).

Perhaps such a rule will allow to bypass the discourse on the issue of human subjectivity in certain stages of its development. Nature of a being significantly determines and implies legal protection, and is directly related to the time frame and a certain degree of protection. This is somewhat reflected in the verdict of the soft law, where the Bioethics Committee attempted to deal with the prevailing philosophical positions regarding the dispute about the nature of the embryo from the fundamental views on the moral status of the fetus (Strong, 1997: 457). Not to get entangled in the details on the scope of philosophical approaches on unborn human, one should focus on the concept of equal dignity given to a man regardless of the stages of his development. Only such a concept can help to protect every being given his priority value, which is his dignity. Since the constitutive feature of a human being is his identity (in accordance with the provisions of the European Convention on Bioethics), while protecting a specific being, one automatically refers to his dignity which demands respect and protection. Therefore, dignity is this "something", this vague and indefinable essence that cannot be put in any framework. This fact makes it more powerful as it remains open to maneuvers of the normative systems. Dignity is somewhat *sine qua non* of human rights and the rule of law (Schulman, 2008: 13); it does not get relativized because it is absolute, unnameable and non-transferable.

3. Sources of the crisis of the sense of dignity

By reaching deep into the history of philosophy, one finds a close relationship between the functioning of the concept of a "person" and the concept of "dignity". Weak interest with the personal dimension of human existence, as a consequence alters the recognition of dignity itself. These links will be presented by analyzing several cases of medieval and modern history.

3.1. Dignity as individualism

Medieval reflection on the phenomenon of a person begins with the works of Boethius (480-524), who first formulated his definition. In one of his major works he wrote that "persona est naturae individua substantia." In this case, analysis of the essence of human dignity refers to defining the concept of human individuality. For Boethius, to be a person means to be an

individual being, separate from others. Thereby Boethius faces the problem of the relationship, which can not answer to.

The interpretation of the experience of dignity places dignity in the right context; dignity truly is an expression of human individuality, an individuality which is relatively absolute. At the same time, falsely understood individuality distorts the concept of dignity, which is only dignity of a being (person), and even a “private dignity” (in fact, it is detached from others, from culture and society).

Recalling these few remarks, one of the current sources of the crisis of experiencing dignity should be more closely examined. It is the individualistic form of dignity that takes the form of “my dignity”, “your dignity”, “our dignity.” In fact, most frequently, it is about “my self”, “your self”, and “our self”. With such an attitude bio-ethical or intercultural discourse is absolutely impossible.

3.2. Dignity as “being somebody”

Philosophers and theologians of the Middle Ages (Richard of St. Victor and Thomas Aquinas), analyzing the reality of the human person, pointed out the fact that to be a person means to be “somebody”. That further meant that a man as a person is by its very nature incommunicable. From the beginning, it needs to be highlighted that thinkers meant ontological incommunicability, not a personal one. In this light, dignity of a person is the dignity resulting from the existence, however it is also “incommunicable dignity” (in a personal sense). Incommunicability of dignity means to recognize the ontological fact that every human is himself, that he is independent in experiencing of who he is, and that he relates who he is in a unique and a special way (Cf. Kozłowski, 2006).

In the twenty-first century, despite the fact that so much is being said and done about interpersonal communication, its fundamental principles are notoriously violated. Communication is understood as freedom and openness to another person, freedom in establishing and developing relationships without clear boundaries that determine person's world. In fact, it is not about interpersonal communication, but a violent intrusion into the world of another person. Fading boundaries (determined by the physicality and spirituality) weaken the sense of personal dignity, to the extent that the individuality and privacy are accounted for as a “closing”, whereas an “opening” is a betrayal of who one really is for himself. Therefore, instead of dignity of existence, we speak of dignity of the non-existence; it is better not to be (yourself) than to be (yourself).

3.3. Apparent dignity (individualism, voluntarism, pantheism)

While in the Middle Ages the reality of a person, and therefore human dignity, was a very firm foundation for developing natural, theological and philosophical sciences, in the modern era, the fascination with this internal dimension of human is much smaller. Man radically abandons the metaphysical and maximalist attitude to, in accordance with the laws of history, develop his fascination in the spirit of extreme individualism and voluntarism. “Ego” takes the place of “a person”, and “I think” is replaced with “I want”. This approach significantly changes the status and interpretation of dignity.

The critical period began John Duns Scotus (1266-1308). He was neither an intellectual, nor an existentialist, but but voluntarist and essentialist (formalist). He proclaimed that the reality is made up of independent individuals, separate entities and substances, related to each other only externally, by the will of God (fideism). In the philosophy of a human, he stressed that

the most important thing is the will ("I want") which makes a man independent and free from another man. Ontically, nothing connects one person with another; there is a gap between individuals that only God can bridge.

This kind of philosophy not only takes away the sense of dignity, but also distorts its very essence. No one knows where dignity leads a man, and which way it directs his life. Also, talking about a man in the categories of will, deprives him of the dimension of rationality. Man does not ask about the meaning of life or truth of action, but he only functions because he simply wants or does not want to. Dignity, however, is the reality in man, which refers in his existence and action more to the realm of rationality than the will.

John Duns Scotus by distorting the image of man, also distorted the image of human dignity. Dignity is not a fixed parameter of the human being, but a mysterious game of God, to whom a person is addicted, whether he wants it or not. This approach is found in many texts, in which the issue of dignity is present. Recognition of God as the only subject of dignity is a form of fideism, which resigns from rationality and critical thinking. By introducing the existence of God in the depths of reflections on dignity, one does not have to make God the only one who grants it. Dignity does not need a transcendental source; it is enough that one recognizes the human in all his humanity, and feels the dignity standing face to face to another human.

The reference to the nominalism of William Ockham (1300-1349) allows to examine the source of yet another crisis of the sense of human dignity. According to nominalism represented by Ockham, such terms as a person, human nature, dignity, are the only names, empty concepts. They do not have the characteristics of reality. This means that the mind can neither investigate nor speak about the individual and the nature of dignity, as they belong to the domain of faith (religious one). A person is the way he is because of God's will. Without going into details on Ockham's reflections, it needs to be said that this view is both naive and dangerous. Firstly, based on the main thesis of nominalism, metaphysical and spiritual depth of the person simply does not exist. Secondly, man is taken away the opportunity to question the meaning of life, his value, and therefore, his dignity. Nominalism is today one of the arguments against metaphysical, maximalist and religious thinking.

It seems that this way of thinking is present even today which contributes to the crisis focused around the issues of dignity. Nowadays, philosophers of law proclaim that the concept of dignity depends on a worldview, or a religious faith – typically, it is Christianity. The construction of argument is as follows: person-God-dignity. And to put it more descriptively, dignity is a kind of a 'trace' of God in a man; it comes from God; the divine dignity is the divine hallmark given to the man by God. If one agrees to this type of solution, the issues of dignity are reduced to the level of faith, and even replaced by the religious faith. The difficulties with dignity and its importance for human life begin when one does not develop a personal relationship with God. In this case, the legal and anthropological reflection loses the concept of dignity, or at least, it becomes vague and irrelevant.

For pantheism, represented by Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677), human is only an epiphenomenon of God's person. According to Spinoza, all one can think and say about a man is illusive. Illusive is freedom and dignity. Man illusively creates the meaning of his life; illusive are values and goals. Everything comes from God and aims towards God; human merges with God. Meanwhile, the critical philosophy of dignity presents a completely different way of thinking: the idea of dignity (human, personal and individual dignity)

protects human against this type of naive pantheism. Dignity, one could say, not only protects a man against another man, but also “protects” the man against God. Dignity, as suggested by the contemporary philosophy of the Christian religion (Cf. Tillich, 2000), makes man a partner of an encounter and a dialogue with God. It is not about leveling a person with God, but it is about an agreement to communicate with God on “the principle” of dignity. By developing such a way of thinking, one deepens the importance of immanent dignity, and drafts its transcendent lines. The history of religions shows that the false immanence creates false transcendence (the illusion of dignity).

3.4. The dignity of moral life

I. Kant's moral philosophy focused on the category of “transcendental personality”. A person is a metaphysical structure in a man, which he pursues and which he embodies, especially in moral and ethical activities, which are the goals of his life. Although the idea of a person cannot be fully comprehended, it expresses itself in acts of cognition, decision and freedom. To the concept of transcendental personality scholars eagerly incorporate the concept of dignity. Dignity, in the context of Kant's discourse, is this kind of a vision of a man which disagrees to regard him as a means, because the man in himself is already an aim. However, such an interpretation of the concept of dignity, and especially the concept of a person, is incomplete. Man is, on one hand, an individual being, but on the other, he is also a member of the human community. As an “element” of the collectivity he may be some kind of “means”, however, he always remains a person, with all his personal domain (absoluteness). As the element of the collectivity, he is not reduced to it (as totalitarian regimes dictated), but he remains “at the service” of the community; he serves the community using to his skills and abilities. With reference to the above statements, this type of dignity is a value, and even a norm that regulates the internal references of the individual person to the community.

The work of Kant's philosophy of man clearly introduces a metaphysical element, which is unknowable and transcendental. As mentioned above, in addition to a perfect person, there is an equally perfect being which is dignity. Such an approach provides some inspiring conclusions, especially the ones, thanks to which one can diagnose the crisis of the idea of dignity. The idea of dignity, similar to the idea of the person, manifests itself in certain human moral decisions. While examining the concept from this standpoint, dignity is set to act as a target. Meanwhile, from the point of view of the maximalistic philosophy, dignity is also the source of man's moral activity; and not only a moral activity, but all kind of spiritual and existential activity, into which category fall questions such as: “who am I?”, “what is the purpose and meaning of my life?”, “am I finite or infinite being?” etc. In this sense, dignity cannot only be a perfect being which “manifests” itself, but is an ontological, “real being”, from which man and society thrive.

Thanks to the work of German idealist J G Fichte (1762-1814), dignity can be analyzed from a different perspective. The focus remains within the reflection centered around a person, and more precisely, self. Fichte develops the science of a man based on three principles: 1) the basis of everything is my “thinking I”; 2) when my consciousness is focused on “ego”, it then discovers a “non-self”; it is important to distinguish here between subject (which I am), and the object (which also I am); being a subject and object is happening at the same time, it is the same experience; 3) by reliving myself as a subject and an object at the same, I find that I am one person with two images: “thinking I” and “absolute I”; in other words, as a person I am someone unrealized, undiscovered, unexplored to the end. In addition to the above conclusions, there is another, particularly interesting one, which says that a man is a still a “becoming” being” (in statu ferii), a being of infinite aspirations and desires. Desires and

aspirations are based not so much on a reason, but on the will, which is the weakness of the presented concept of man (Fichte, 1945).

Perspectives

Dignity, as a concept used by man on a daily basis, and as a philosophical and ethical category in the twenty-first century, occupies a relatively high position. Not much is written about dignity; it is more often discussed and applied in reality, especially in situations where ethical and moral dilemmas occur, and also in legal situations. For these and many other reasons, systematic reflection on the issue of dignity is necessary (Wciórka, 1986).

While observing and analyzing the functioning of a human in society, especially in difficult and extreme situations in terms of ethics, worldview and religion, one can notice a clear crisis of experience of dignity. On one hand, there is a lot being done for a human, and on the other, there is a dramatic departure from him; society remains unmoved to his calling for basic material and cultural goods. Due to these reasons, the topic defining philosophical and cultural contexts of human dignity crisis was undertaken. By tracking particular human concepts and defining axiological environment of his existence, one can observe these sensitive points where a man betrays himself and betrays others, and therefore betrays his dignity. Much more difficult to examine are the contexts of the crisis of dignity. The difficulty lies in the fact that the researcher is completely immersed in a particular culture and a certain style of thinking. Nevertheless, he is not condemned to failure. The fact of asking the question of dignity, of human greatness, the value of his life, death and disease, is already a bold move, even if it does not bring ready-made solutions. If the above text is a part of this agenda, then it has already fulfilled its role.

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