

The idea of human dignity in western philosophy and culture

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Abstract. This article is an analysis of the change in attitude to the concept of human dignity in historical retrospective. The author traces the content of the term "dignity" in different periods of Western philosophical thought. It is shown how in the course of historical development the power dignity understanding was replaced by an essential one, became universal, although it had different connotations in the culture of different eras, and over time it acquired the significance of social status. Considering the transformation of attitudes towards people, the author comes to the conclusion that only religious culture is able to maintain an understanding of dignity for all participants in society at a single level.

The recent civilization crisis demonstrates the failure of moral imperatives. A picture of the world with the expected behavior patterns of people in society is crumbling with news of the humiliation of human dignity, the violation of the defenseless trust, and violence against unrequited wards.

The relevance of human dignity idea considering is dictated by the recently revealed attitude of society to socially unprotected layers of the population, as well as to people who find themselves in difficult life situations. This group includes the poor, homeless underprivileged people, fire victims, lonely elderly people, patients with a psychiatric spectrum of diagnoses, etc. Today, it is necessary to search for moral guidelines that would allow maintaining a human attitude in society under any circumstances. This can only be done in a system of unshakable, not dependent on the moral coordinates conjuncture. With this consideration, philosophy becomes the real means to improve interpersonal relationships in society.

For the purpose of this search, it seems interesting to us to trace the development of the human dignity concept in historical retrospective, especially during the Renaissance, when human dignity was ascended to heaven, and the development of anthropocentric ideas reached its zenith.

The theme of human dignity, been a part of society, was already visible in the ancient world - in the legal foundations of the ancient Greece states construction. The unification of several clan communities on one territory led to the fact that representatives of different clans, each with their own level of dignity, were close, so there was a need to regulate community relations.

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Through trade, people exchanged information, mutually enriched cultures. However, handicraft successes and borrowing the achievements of other peoples did not give that high rise to the Greek state, which the poets dreamed about. The stagnation in the development of a polis democratic society was a direct result of the lack of real incentives: a man's subjugation of natural forces through the technological progress of the transition from copper to metal stopped due to a man's subjugation of another person. On the one hand, wars led to the appearance of slaves - a special class of people who did not have any rights in society [1]. On the other hand, the struggle of those in power for their influence was realized through the artificial suppression of the private property development, production, and democratic institutions.

One of the prerequisites for the development of the dignity idea was the understanding of the problem of humiliation, stratification of society. Of course, not everyone used their power to squeeze out everything that was possible from the slaves, but, nevertheless, free people treated slaves as things. Although treating a person as an expensive thing to be protected was desirable, there were often cases of violence.

V.V. Kuznetsov writes that the whole history of mankind is the history of uprisings, revolutions and riots, which were the reaction of the masses to the attitude of those in power who did not correspond to human dignity [2, 35–42]. We can talk about the existence of a certain basic natural level of relations in society, which is embedded in the consciousness of every person. When this level is violated, such an attitude, without inclusion, is perceived as humiliation with a natural defensive reaction in the form of indignation.

Aristotle also noted the versatility of the dignity concept, showing the social origin of the term [3, 151]. Just as material values were reduced to the amount of payment for them, so the value of a person began to be determined by the level of dignity. According to the ancient Greek philosopher, dignity is an indicator of the human behavior conformity to the ideals of the group to which the assessee belongs. Dignity is, as it were, a regulator of human behavior, not allowing something that goes beyond accepted in this community.

With the advent and spread of Christianity, the idea of human dignity gained serious support in the divinity of anthropogenesis and Christ's renewal of human nature, due to which the ethnic, social and legal aspects began to fade into the background. Even the gender factor, which was one of the most important legal criteria, is pushed aside: "There is no longer a Jew or a Gentile; there is no slave or free; there is no male or female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Epistle of Paul to Galatians 3:28). Responsibility for a good attitude towards another person is imposed on a person, and only one who keeps the commandments of love for one's neighbor is worthy in the eyes of God. The call to abandon atrocities and embark on the virtue path is permeated with all of Scripture, and it clearly stipulates the inaccessibility of eternal good life for those who violate the high moral Divine law.

However, over the centuries, Christian doctrine was subjected to reflection and systematization, and, despite the difference from philosophy and religious studies by the presence of a Divine source of knowledge, the emerging theology became speculative science, replacing theology as a practice of communion with God. The vector of attention was shifted from the immediate love of one's neighbor to self-abasement and self-reproach. The afterlife was declared the only valuable and significant, and the earthly life was so unimportant that in order to obtain a "real" otherworldly life, you need to abandon everything in this, and consider yourself nothing. Human nature damaged by sin was declared a source of temptation and death, which led to the doctrine emergence of natural human insignificance - a doctrine that placed a person "below the worm" as Pope Innocent III wrote in his treatise "On Contempt for the World, or About the Insignificance of the Human State" [4, 117].

As a reaction to the demand to believe without reasoning, a scholastic trend of philosophy arose, representatives of which, in contrast to the “blind” faith, praised the mind and showed how, with the help of the mind, one can achieve knowledge of the truth. But, despite the attempt to achieve truth without the Church, the direction remained the same - theological. Subordinating theology to the philosophical dialectical apparatus, the scholastics tried to justify with the help of his formal logic the same official teaching of Rome.

Tired of humiliation, other medieval thinkers declared the scholastic path an error, as in principle the entire doctrine of the papal throne. They did not reject faith in God, but the absolutized significance of church authority over the religious feeling of people, which has a depressing effect in order to subordinate papal authority [5]. The starting point of their reasoning was not dogma, but man himself - the measure of all things, as the ancient Greek thinker Protagoras once said. Due to human orientation, this line of thought was called humanism.

The founder of a humanistic worldview is Francesco Petrarch, who placed at the center of philosophy an understanding of the man origin and the purpose of his existence [6, 78]. While singing the culture, Petrarch was convinced that it was with its help that the development of both an individual person and the whole society was carried out. Turning to the experience of ancient thinkers, he tried to transfer their experience to the society of his time, using not so much logical constructs as poetic works. However, he failed to see the fruits of his labors - the influence of church dogma and scholasticism at that time was too strong.

The path begun by Petrarch was continued by Giovanni Boccaccio, who understood the social educational significance of literary works - to lead humanity along the path of perfection through the chanting of beauty, in parallel with a philosophy that does the same with logical inferences. It can be said that humanists thereby enriched dogma and scholasticism with aesthetics and sensuality, which was close to ordinary people. Of course, one can see here the indirect proclamation of the right for every person to eternal life, even a commoner who wants to comprehend the truth and reach for the Absolute, but does not have the developed thinking necessary for reading philosophical texts [7, 83].

Gianozzo Manetti in the treatise "On the dignity and superiority of man", confirms the foundation of human dignity in the universal achievements of culture, craft and civilization as a whole [8, 65–74]. Man becomes the same creator as God, creating beauty in the world subject to him. The very management of the world, power over nature is already an indicator of the high dignity of man, with which God endowed him [9, 245].

Dignity can be interpreted with respect for a person due to the presence of the cultural, labor and moral potential of all mankind, on the basis of the commitment with the great community that created everything, and can create much more. Having this basis of respect, a person can develop a culture even higher, as if receiving the achievements of previous generations by relay. Without such a reason, a man has nothing to start with; most likely, he will eke out a miserable existence.

Potential is opportunity, but implementation depends on everyone. Coluccio Salutati, using the power of words and the beauty of thought, in his speeches argued that the will is the main weapon in the fight against evil, because, using the will, people strive for good. Human dignity is being raised to a new level, because he became not just a recipient, but a creator of goods for those around him — a new person [6, 105].

The idea of personal freedom is central to the philosophy of Giovanni Pico from the Italian city Mirandola. In his mind, man was not only created in the image and likeness of God, but he was given the power to continue his creation further, that is, to become a co-creator of himself. The originality of thought lies in the fact that a person does not just create beauty around himself, speaking himself in a finished form, he begins creativity from

himself, completing the work begun by God. This creativity is manifested in the self-determination of a person to his development: a person has the power to become like a god and has the power to become like an animal. The Italian thinker clearly shows that it is man's actions based on his aspirations that reveal the inner essence of everyone, because no matter how socially high a person was initially, if he gives himself into slavery to animal desires, he himself becomes an animal [10, 13-20].

Indeed, people have various talents and powers by nature, grow up in a certain environment, perceive the influence of society, therefore there are no specific laws and formulas by which the development result could be determined in advance. What guidelines to use, where to strive, how to live? All these unanswered questions against the backdrop of the postulate of absolute freedom can only disorient a person. Therefore, Pico still does not oppose Christian dogma and indicates that it is better to strive for what each person is predetermined to - the highest happiness of Divine revelation and knowledge of God [6, 227].

Unfortunately, not everyone strives for moral heights, sometimes people's actions become public, revealing their low dependence on pleasures. Therefore, the mere presence of freedom cannot be an indicator of dignity, since it is not always used by a person to grow.

So, Lorenzo Valla argued that the highest moral principles (honor, duty, dignity) are empty sounds, but his goal is sensual pleasure, declaring it a reward for virtue [6, 137]. So begins the bias towards selfish utilitarianism, although in creativity Valla is not a violation of public order and morality, because he compares and harmonizes the pleasure of one and the benefit of all, although at one time the Roman speaker Cicero (who was also often quoted by humanists) wrote that carnal pleasure is so hostile to the spirit, it may, in inciting and completely crush the spirit, thus depriving him of reason [11, 17-18]. On the contrary, human dignity is determined by sobriety, abstinence, self-strictness, and judicious frugality. In other words, to reveal dignity, it is necessary to overcome selfish aspirations and to refrain from craving for pleasures.

How to refrain from pleasures that can deprive a person of dignity? Indeed, to one degree or another, pleasure accompanies all the natural processes taking place in the human body. Considering in more detail the cause of the craving for pleasure, we can see that a person experiences hedonistic desires and falls into passionate states against the background of idleness and unemployment. Leon Battist Alberti reveals in detail the meaning and significance of vices and virtues, explaining ways to deal with negative manifestations, warning of the harmful effects of following them - both personal and public [6, 184]. Reaffirming the importance of freedom, Alberti praises work and condemns idleness, revealing dignity in the presence of at least some respectable occupation. Continuous work contributes to a truly blissful state, and only honest work brings happiness. Pointing the way to a harmonious life, he calls for keeping oneself free, including from self-interest. Alberti sees the main happiness in public recognition and the immortal glory of the name (gaining dignity), which are achieved through work for the benefit of all fellow citizens.

The Florentine humanist Poggio Bracciolini, in his Book on Nobleness, reflects on the fact that the foundation of dignity and glory is not in the external environment of a person with things and wealth, because they can be obtained by heinous deeds and robbery, but in his work - good deeds. Working hard in the name of good for the benefit of others, a person becomes noble not by origin, but by his own merits [4, 157]. In the form of a dialogue between Niccolo Niccoli and Lorenzo Medici, Poggio gives examples of useless and selfish studies and shows how the concept of nobility and dignity can be an empty word and can only be a title that does not reflect the inner essence of things. Unlike Valla, who claimed void of dignity in fact, Bracciolini reveals the inner beauty of dignity, and condemns ways

to manipulate this important term. Only excellence in work, valor and public good reveals the nobility of the individual. Thus, the basis of human dignity is a good personal act for the benefit of the neighbor, and this does not depend on his family tree. Everything external can only become an aid, an instrument.

The beauty of the most perfect noble deed is undeniable, but what should be the motivation for it? After all, in order to do something for the good of the neighbor, you must have a goal both outside yourself and outside this neighbor.

The development of the dignity idea continued in the Enlightenment: the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who studied the phenomenon of social inequality, showed that his conscience, which has a supra-natural, transcendental origin, drives a worthy person [12]. It was in religion that Rousseau believed the basis for ethics, which somewhat knocked out a galaxy of enlighteners who considered religion (mainly Christianity) a source of delusion and error [13]. Rousseau did not accept both atheistic reasoning and dogmatism, sometimes engaging in disputes with both philosophers and churchmen. According to the deep inner conviction of the existence of God, he set love as the main principle of life, motivating a person to a worthy treatment with each of those around him. While the Enlightenment thinkers tried to find the basis of dignity in egoism, Rousseau showed that love is such a basis - this inexplicable multifaceted moral and ethical component of God-created human nature [14, 128].

But what should be done for those who cannot, for whatever reason, work selflessly for the good of society? Having grown up without education or deprived of health is unlikely to be able to do much useful. Will the name of such a person die? Is he really going to end his days without getting a good attitude from others?

The answer to such a question was the development of the dignity problems in German classical philosophy by Immanuel Kant, who examined the concept of dignity in isolation from the very essence of man. According to him, human dignity has nothing to do with actions, that is, dignity cannot be lost even through the commission of a crime. Declaring dignity an integral attribute of human nature, Kant elevates a person to a degree of ultimate value. Proclaiming the inadmissibility of using a person as a means to achieve any goal, the philosopher puts all other values - even social and state - below the value of a particular person.

A certain high position obliges the person himself to realize his dignity and form the correct self-esteem. Respect for oneself as a representative of humanity becomes a person's duty to himself [15, 374]. The level of self-esteem should be such as not to kneel before anyone, even before the heavenly forces. Such an idea is quite natural for Kant, because a person has an unshakable sense of duty, on which the German philosopher bases his reasoning, is for him the basis of human religiosity as such. He even deduces the idea of God from the simple logic of the necessity of His existence - as if the human mind creates ideas for itself about the higher world, as well as moral laws in general [15, 379]. Although, as if he himself was afraid of such a thought, the philosopher then asks himself: is this not pride? Despite sometimes openly atheistic ideas, some researchers see in Kant's work the completeness of the synthesis of theology, humanism, and philosophy [16, 310].

Following the general direction of humanism, Kant shows that the dignity of a person as a representative of mankind stems from the ability to moral actions, that is, there is a certain natural difference from the entire surrounding animal world. These moral inclinations embedded in the nature of man make him worthy [15, 373]. Gianozzo Manetti dignity was based not just on ability, but on facts confirming these abilities. In Kant's philosophy, we see the assessment of man, not only regardless of origin and social status, but even regardless of his aspirations and actions.

Thus, the following stages of the human dignity idea development can be distinguished. In the Ancient World, dignity was status: it was sold and bought, captured by force and lost

overnight, inherited or became a reward. With the advent of Christianity, the dignity equality of everyone who respects God's law of love for one's neighbor was proclaimed. The development of church dogma led to the emergence of the doctrine of the natural unworthiness of each person, which caused the emergence of a reciprocal humanistic direction of philosophy. Overthrowing the dogmatic yoke, the humanists remained religious, not seeing any other source of the dignity of human nature, except God. During this period, the modern content of the dignity concept begins to take shape: the basic natural dignity of a person does not depend on anything and cannot be alienated, and the name of a person in society is earned by labor for the benefit of society. In the Enlightenment, wanting to completely get rid of the idea of God, atheistic philosophers tried to justify dignity with selfishness, but there were those who continued the religious line. The completion of the development of the dignity idea can be seen in modern times, when anthropocentricity has put human dignity to an absolute level, displacing the idea of God into the background. The concepts of conscience, love and sacrifice also appeared in the shadow. Dignity is understood as self-respect, with each imposing an imperative obligation to respect each other. Developing the idea of dignity in the absence of an Absolute Regulator, mankind subsequently came to the ideas of the superiority of individual groups (races, nations, classes, etc.), which in the XXth century embodied in world crimes against humanity. In fact, after the rejection of the idea of God, there was a return to the forceful method of operating with dignity, which was observed in the ancient world.

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