

Plea for Human Dignity

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ABSTRACT: Dignity highlights value, honesty, moral merits, the degree of appreciation as well as a person's rank in society. In Christian teaching, human dignity is regarded as a divine gift that whatever the circumstances in which the person lives, takes God's given Model as an example of life and attitude. Term form of dignity in a society can also be understood as the autonomy and freedom of thought as well as the behavior of an individual. Human dignity is very much linked to the sense of honor because a worthy man always inspires respect both to himself and to those around him, to his values and the values of others.¹ Thus, the term dignity means the quality to be worthy, prestige, moral authority, dignified attitude, greatness and self–esteem. When talking about the esteem granted to a person we must understand the respect and consideration for human worth and dignity of each person in itself. Dignity cannot be represented without honesty, responsibility, fairness, courage, duty, honesty, etc., values which it integrates. The disregard of the human being, regardless of the reasons from which it springs, brings damages to human dignity, and as such must be regarded as inhuman and reprehensible acts. Human dignity requires the credit or trust that should be given to each person.

KEY WORDS: worth, dignity, human condition, humanistic conceptions, virtue, honesty, respect, responsibility, moral authority.

Getting started

Dignity is a quality that exclusively claims the human condition, being par excellence a human value, but also a *sui generis* revealing of the humane, which naturally will have a cultural specification and through which its, *de facto*, defined both history and its own manners of being.² “Human dignity is both a source and foundation”³ Dignity, therefore, is the fundamental criterion of man and that because “not being a simple *homo faber* (the maker being), but a *homo sapiens* (the thoughtful being), man thinks his future and define his existence by a project. As a participant in social relations he is creator of history and bears full responsibility for his acts.”⁴

Being an immanent quality in the human being, “dignity manifests itself both morally and from a legal perspective, the last meaning at the same time the fullness of rights, freedoms and fundamental duties inherent to man. So freedom belongs to people as superior beings and they can not be alienated without affecting its essence, namely dignity.”⁵

A page of real literary beauty, written by Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola⁶, is found in the vast literature of the Renaissance period, written in the introduction titled *Oratio de dignitate hominis*⁷, to his famous work, the 900 theses on all possible philosophical and theological themes at the time, theses gathered under the title *Conclusiones philosophicae, cabalisticae et theologicae*.⁸ This introduction of Pico Della Mirandola, *Oratio de dignitate hominis*, would later become one of the most famous philosophical texts of Italian humanism.⁹ Thus, in this introduction there are his basic concepts about man and his purpose on earth, expressed in the following words: “We have given you, Oh Adam; no visage proper to yourself, nor any endowment properly your own, in order that whatever place, whatever form, whatever gifts you may, with

premeditation, select, these same you may have and possess through your own judgment and decision. The nature of all other creatures is defined and restricted within laws which We have laid down; you, by contrast, impeded by no such restrictions, may, by your own free will, to whose custody We have assigned you, trace for yourself the lineaments of your own nature. I have placed you at the very center of the world, so that from that vantage point you may with greater ease glance round about you on all that the world contains. We have made you a creature neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, in order that you may, as the free and proud shaper of your own being, fashion yourself in the form you may prefer. It will be in your power to descend to the lower, brutish forms of life; you will be able, through your own decision, to rise again to the superior orders whose life is divine.”¹⁰

These humanist concepts are actually “an ambitious summary of the Scholastic–Aristotelian tradition with the new themes of humanism. Pico della Mirandola sees this synthesis in the neoplatonician philosophy, establishing a hierarchy of existence, from the dead bodies, climbing several steps to the Supreme Being, God. God created man and put him in the center of the world, therefore, man is neither mortal nor immortal, nor earthly or celestial. It is entirely in his power to choose in which direction of the existence to develop. Man differs from other creatures by not being tied to a particular destiny or a particular law; on the contrary, he has the ability to freely determine his manner and form of existence, to stoop to an animal stage, or to approach the divinity, which lies at his own origin.”¹¹ Thus, according to the author, the path leading towards this end is to release man from his own human instincts and senses and his purification through continuous meditation and contemplation of the existing reality as well as the divinity, where the origin of humanity occurs.

According to the text presented by the Florentine humanist, man has acquired his human dignity by the very fact that he is free to choose between good and evil, between what is worthy or unworthy of him. Thus man's own choices will demean him or raise him, they will decrease his prestige or will enhance his dignity.¹²

Getting terminology

The term "dignity" is derived from the word "dignified" which means that a person is worthy, virtuous, upstanding or capable. Thus, the term dignity means the quality of being worthy, prestige, moral authority, dignified attitude, greatness and self-esteem. When talking about the esteem granted to a person we must understand the respect and consideration for human worth and dignity of each person in itself.¹³

The origin of the term "dignity", according to Corssen, is the term "dec" in ancient Sanskrit, which has the meaning of to show, to indicate. The term came into the circulation of Indo-European languages, with a number of derivatives, such as: in the late Sanskrit "dacas" (meaning renown, fame); in Latin "dignus" "decere" "decus-oris" (meaning brightness, distinction) in Greek "deiknumi" "dakein", "doxa", with clear reference to the high quality that states man; in French "digne" in English "werth", in German "wurde", in Russian "dostoinstvo".¹⁴

In various languages, the notion of "dignity" in order to take a moral aspect, it is necessary that it be conjugated with other linguistic expressions or moral qualities. In Latin, for example "dignitas", "dignitatis" has the meaning of dignity, but it also means value, price. The expression *Laudare aliquem pro dignitate* not always has the sense to praise, to highlight the merits or achievements of someone because he is worthy in general and ethical sense, but primarily because the person is a man of good standing a great dignitary, a

personality that enjoys, thanks to its achievements and merits, a high reputation, a high prestige and recognized fame. Also in Latin there is the superlative of the word dignus, namely “dignissimus”, meaning to be most worthy.¹⁵

Defining issues of dignity

Dignity sums up the characteristics of all positive virtues put together, without being able to reach it, just acquired exclusively and separated from the moral virtues. Dignity can not be achieved without a cover in virtues. Dignity, by itself, is not a moral quality, if it doesn't over ordonates a number of other qualities and attributes, able to accredit and to reveal its existence. Dignity can not be represented without honesty, responsibility, fairness, courage, duty, honesty, etc., values that it integrates structuring the configuration of their novelty equilibrium. Dignity can not be confused or dissolved in moral qualities, which on an axiological scale is below its value due to the fact that these do not subsume to them, but conversely, that they it. To exemplify this axiologically aspect with the fact that the worthy man is always courteous, while that which is courteous is not always amiable and worthy. Dignity sums up the characteristics of all positive virtues together, but every virtue in order to maintain valid and not alter in its process of manifestation, has need of dignity's guardianship to guarantee its purity. Thus, all the moral virtues need dignity as a referential, which over ordonates them in their unbreakable unity, purity and high value. Dignity is the only one that avoids moral gap that is allowed by the so-called mental reserve from the well known Machiavellian adage¹⁶ “the end justifies the means.” So without this tutelary central organ which activates, coordinates, correlates and maintains the virtues, man can not reach self-consciousness

or moral conscience, the only one that allows him to deliberately enable his attitude in various circumstances of life.¹⁷

Human dignity is not something static, but something dynamic, something in action, something that manifests imperatively and objectively, because dignity is attitude, and when there is no attitude this is just expectative and means nothing. Man, as a broadcaster of virtue, needs at least one person or society to be able to exteriorize his courtesy, honor, honesty and other such moral virtues, which cannot effectively prove their existence if they don't meet someone to receive them when they are released. The man truly worthy is not a *homo per se* as Erasmus was saying, a man only for himself but also for others because no one can be good, kind, honest, generous, magnanimous, generous, only with himself without relating to his peers. As light needs something to be reflected in, so it becomes light, so these moral traits they also need someone, like a final address, where to stop to showcase and to accredit their objective validity. According to Durkheim and Albert Bayet dignity belongs to the so called "faite sociaux" or "faite moraux". Thus, dignity is a concrete moral fact that remains even after the action taken in order to achieve it was consumed. Just the thought materialized into a concrete fact, as aim of moral intent, determines the ethical level of the doer and the man only through this "fact" demonstrates his moral personality, because this "fact" gives man the possibility for him to stay in others, and only this "deed" prolongs the existence of its doer, in all those where it remains alive even after his disappearance.¹⁸

Dignity means to relate value to value

Human dignity requires a conscious and sustained concern for potentiating human values and the conscious distancing of human from inhuman as well as social values of everything that is antisocial, non-value and mediocrity. For a man to be worthy

means to live up to what the values of 'to be' require, morally realized, and to which he will be supported by his moral (spiritual) and physical powers. To be worthy means having the knowledge and power to avoid everything that would degrade or compromise the value of a man. To be worthy means to build and maintain good relationships and relations with others, which is not to be achieved by duplicity or by exploiting the weakness of others. To be worthy means to persuade others that you cannot be respected unless you do it first, meaning to respect others. Dignity means to relate value to value, being resistant to the anti-value temptations, devaluating any anti-value authority. Dignity always requires to be yourself putting into practice the best intentions and deeds. Thus dignity in all these meanings and significances, requested the fulfillment of the moral quality to the highest possible levels of elevation.¹⁹

Dignity—relating to the community

Dignity also receives functionality through its reporting to other spheres of incidence, much wider than the individual. Thus, in its correlation with the affirmation moral imperatives of family, school, village, town, etc. dignity becomes the dignity of the family, the school dignity, the dignity of the city, etc. Each socio-human subsystem forms part of the global system and a specific manifestation of its character. Society specifically makes its exchange with the individual, maintaining the daily dialogue from its global assembly to the social and individual micro-assembly. Dignity shaped in the social profile mold manifests according to the specific social group within which it asserts itself, including class categories. In the relationships between nations, dignity expresses the confidence in the ability of each people to build its live as it wants after its own vocations and without external

constraints.²⁰ Therefore each individual is responsible for his own dignity and through it the dignity of his family, the nation and the entire humanity.²¹ In these conditions “national dignity is the supreme value of any people. It is related to the historical past, the truth and, of course, it motivates and determines the continuance of a people in history.”²²

“Dignity is a necessary means to make our personality.”²³ Dignity is not an aggressive attitude towards oneself, on the contrary is an ethical condition to defend our own convictions. Dignity is neither an exaggeration of self-consciousness, but a natural consequence of it, when it operates in satisfactory spiritual condition. Each manifestation of dignity in society is a social lesson.²⁴

Every man carries dignity in himself because each of his acts include a moment of freedom as a necessary component, which is a social and objective report, and the main terms of this report, man and society are also equally determined. Man lives in a society that has a certain legal, political, administrative, economic, religious, etc., structure along with a certain level of knowledge and social practice, so consequently establishing certain relationships between all these social actors. Freedom is essentially the particular way in which man relates to reality or the extent of his power over that reality, and freedom in relation to dignity is the *sine qua non* condition for the affirmation of human dignity. Responsibility stems from man’s condition of freedom, forcing man to give or to give himself account of his participation in the various social reports of the social process. Thus the responsibility towards dignity serves a middle-value role and dignity in relation to responsibility serves an end-value role. This report is however not unequivocal, as dignity in turn becomes middle-value to dignity, because while dignity integrates its responsibility and generates it at the same time, responsibility in turn is a subjective condition of maintaining human dignity.²⁵

A first condition of personality is dignity, which “is a feeling, or rather, a certain consciousness of the individual to acknowledge his own value, regardless of the social group to which he belongs, the situation he is in, available wealth, the family from which he comes, a value that he recognizes to himself as a man, as a creature endowed with intelligence and reason. Spiritually, dignity is a complex attitude in which take part all conscious faculties of the individual. It does not happen at once, but through a long, complicated, process, in which the emotional inclinations must find the means to harmonize with the elaborations of reason.”²⁶

According to academician Dimitrie Gusti²⁷, the worthy man has a sense of self worth, which gives him a certain security, almost heroic. He will want to be useful to the community, but he can not give it up. He clearly and critically appreciates all eventualities that his attitude may lead him to, whether these are positive or negative. The worthy man is not fascinated by the sure victory, but he is also not disoriented by the hardships consciousness. The life goals which he pursues and serves them will determine on him a moral authority.²⁸

The opposite of dignity is the cult of incompetence. Thus from the concept of dignity emerges great ethical requirement, namely that no personality is to be used in the social and cultural life for certain purposes that would be foreign to it. Any man, who does not realize to give his whole dignity to all his actions, is an inferior man from a morality point of view. Alongside these ideas, presented above, D.Gusti also extends the sphere of the concept of dignity over the social groups in which the individual may belong, saying that personalities can be not only individuals, but everything that has a will and is inspired by the need of a creative action. Given this observation, personalities can become social units (social groups, social communities, institutions), the nation and even humanity.²⁹

Racial discrimination should be firmly condemned, because it is an act of humiliation and disregard for the human being. Before

God and before the law all people are equal. Treating someone in a discriminatory manner on account of race, language, nationality or religious beliefs, are acts that violate human dignity, and as such must be regarded as inhuman and reprehensible acts. Also chauvinism of all kinds falls under the same category of antisocial and inhumane behaviours. The disregard of the human being, regardless of the reasons, brings damage to human dignity. Such attitudes and acts happens when some people take advantage of the superiority of their material, intellectual or positional (occupation, rank, service) status in society. An attitude that causes someone to put a lower price on human beings, attitude manifested by indifference to the needs, sufferings or even human rights³⁰, is a false and wrong attitude, no matter who it is and what status the one exhibiting the contemptuous attitude has.³¹

Conclusions

Human dignity also reclaims the credit or trust that should be given to each person. Every man has the right to be granted trust until proven otherwise. It is an unjust and humiliating process for someone to always be suspicious and always inclined to believe that the discussion partner deceives him, or live with the suspicion that the one you are talking to simply lies to you. Dignity says it's even wiser to err in granting trust to someone unworthy of it, rather than suspecting everyone else around us. The respect that we owe to human dignity requires this attitude, to be as open to good faith³² and as narrow in bad faith towards our fellow men. If we pursue steadfastly the respecting of each person's dignity, we ourselves will prove to be worthy of the name we claim, favoring around us a gentle, respectful and peaceful climate, which will reverberate like light or sound waves in the society in which we

live and operate in, contributing to some extent to the good and happiness of those around us.³³

In our view, therefore, we try to find that human dignity is that quality of the human being which is endowed by the Creator, quality signifying the moral authority of man to be of himself as the owner of the rights, freedoms and fundamental duties legally sanctioned and legally protected both domestically and internationally.³⁴

Human dignity currently acquires new meanings as a result of the social framework in which every man operates. It can be seen, in these conditions, in the evolution of building of the human society as an upward progression, the effort of many people to achieve a high class ideal in an imperfect world, enrolled in a historical ongoing, in which the very imperfection of this world is a serious invitation for man to put into value the abilities given by the Creator and the endeavor to live and act with dignity of the created being, but aspiring to restoring the relationship between Creator and creature. Thus it is very important the awareness of each person over the place and the role it has to play in human society. Advocacy for human dignity, pursuing the same goal, ends leaving room for personal reflection, with the hope that the reader has acquired or has reminded a more clear meaning of his dignity, along with a much deeper motivation on how live needs to be lived.³⁵

It would not be worthy to end a plea for dignity without resorting to the words of Him who is Flawless in dignity and a Model in everything that is good for us as human beings: "I therefore...beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."³⁶

NOTES

¹ <https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demnitate>; <https://www.tpu.ro/adolescenti/ce-este-demnitatea/>, acc. 14.12.2016.

² Victor Popescu, *Demnitatea umană. Contribuții filosofice la cunoașterea de sine (Human dignity. Philosophical contributions to self-knowledge)*, (Târgoviște: Editura Macarie, 1998), 9.

³ A. Potângă, Gh. Costachi, *Asigurarea drepturilor omului în lume (Ensuring human rights worldwide)*, (Chișinău: Editura "Epigraf", 2003), 16.

⁴ N. Popa, *Teoria generală a dreptului (General theory of law)*, (București, 1992), 184, in Alexandru Arseni, „Demnitatea—calitate imanentă a ființei umane” (Dignity—immanent quality of the human being), in Ion Mereuță, *Demnitatea—valoare supremă a omului și națiunii. Materialele Conferinței științifice “Demnitatea Umană și Națională în contextual integrării europene a Republicii Moldova”* (Dignity—the supreme value of man and nation. Scientific Conference materials „Human and National Dignity in the context of Moldova’s European integration”), (Chișinău: Elan–Poligraf, 2004), 123.

⁵ Alexandru Arseni, „Demnitatea—calitate imanentă a ființei umane” (Dignity—immanent quality of the human being), in Ion Mereuță, *Demnitatea—valoare supremă a omului și națiunii. Materialele Conferinței științifice “Demnitatea Umană și Națională în contextual integrării europene a Republicii Moldova”* (Dignity—the supreme value of man and nation. Scientific Conference materials „Human and National Dignity in the context of Moldova’s European integration”), (Chișinău: Elan–Poligraf, 2004), 124.

⁶ Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola, (b. 24 februarie 1463, Mirandola -d. 17 noiembrie 1494, Florența), Italian philosopher and humanist scholar from the Renaissance period.

⁷ *Speech about human dignity.*

⁸ *Philosophical, theological and cabalistic conclusions.*

⁹ https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giovanni_Pico_della_Mirandola, accesat 13.12.2016.

¹⁰ Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, a gateway edition, transl. by A. Robert Caponigri, (Chicago, Illinois: Henry Regnery Company, 1956), 7–8.

¹¹ Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. Opera filozofico-teologică. https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giovanni_Pico_della_Mirandola, accessed 12.13.2016.

¹² Wilhelm Moldovan, “Pastorul și demnitatea umană” (The pastor and human dignity), *Curierul Adventist (Adventist Courier)*, (București: 1976, LIV), 9.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Victor Popescu, *Demnitatea umană. Contribuții filosofice la cunoașterea de sine (Human dignity. Philosophical contributions to self-knowledge)*, (Târgoviște: Editura Macarie, 1998), 9.

¹⁵ Ibid., 9–10.

¹⁶ Peter Singer (ed.), *Tratat de etică (A Companion to Ethics)*, Vasile Boari, Raluca Mărincean (trad.), (București: Polirom, 2006), 404–406.

¹⁷ Victor Popescu, *Demnitatea umană. Contribuții filosofice la cunoașterea de sine (Human dignity. Philosophical contributions to self-knowledge)*, (Târgoviște: Editura Macarie, 1998), 14–16.

¹⁸ Ibid., 16–17.

¹⁹ Ibid., 18.

²⁰ Ibid., 21

²¹ Alexandru Arseni, “Demnitatea—calitate imanentă a ființei umane” (Dignity—immanent quality of the human being), in Ion Mereuță, *Demnitatea—valoare supremă a omului și națiunii. Materialele Conferinței științifice “Demnitatea Umană și Națională în contextual integrării europene a Republicii Moldova” (Dignity—the supreme value of man and nation. Scientific Conference materials „Human and National Dignity in the context of Moldova’s European integration”)*, (Chișinău: Elan–Poligraf, 2004), 124.

²² Ludmila Ețco, Ștefan Gațcan, “Demnitatea umană” (Human dignity), in Ion Mereuță, *Demnitatea—valoare supremă a omului și națiunii. Materialele Conferinței științifice “Demnitatea Umană și Națională în contextual integrării europene a Republicii Moldova” (Dignity—the supreme value of man and nation. Scientific Conference materials „Human and National Dignity in the context of Moldova’s European integration”)*, (Chișinău: Elan–Poligraf, 2004), 128.

²³ Dimitrie Gusti, *Spre o etică vie a națiunii noastre (Towards a living ethic of our nation)*, Op. vol. II, (București: Editura Academiei RSR, 1969), 296.

²⁴ Victor Popescu, *Demnitatea umană. Contribuții filosofice la cunoașterea de sine (Human dignity. Philosophical contributions to self-knowledge)*, (Târgoviște: Editura Macarie, 1998), 92.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 23–24.

²⁶ Dimitrie Gusti, *Spre o etică vie a națiunii noastre (Towards a living ethic of our nation)*, Op. vol. II, (București: Editura Academiei RSR, 1969), 295.

²⁷ Dimitrie Gusti (b. February 13, 1880, Iasi–d. October 30, 1955, Bucharest) was a Romanian philosopher, sociologist and esthetician. Member of the Romanian Academy in 1919, president of the Romanian Academy (1944–1946), Minister of Public Instruction, Cults and Arts between 1932 and 1933, professor at the Universities of Bucharest and Iasi. Dimitrie Gusti is considered to be the creator of Romanian sociology. https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dimitrie_Gusti; <http://sociologie.dreamstyler.ro/gusti.htm> accessed 12.14.2016.

²⁸ Victor Popescu, *Demnitatea umană. Contribuții filosofice la cunoașterea de sine (Human dignity. Philosophical contributions to self-knowledge)*, (Târgoviște: Editura Macarie, 1998), 92.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 93.

³⁰ For more details see: John Warwick Montgomery, *Drepturile omului & demnitatea umană (Human Rights and Human Dignity)*, (Oradea: Editura Cartea Creștină, 2004).

³¹ Wilhelm Moldovan, „Pastorul și demnitatea umană” (The pastor and human dignity), *Curierul Adventist (Adventist Courier)*, (București: 1976, LIV), 10–11.

³² About good faith and bad faith see: André Comte–Sponville, *Mic tratat al marilor virtuți (Petit traité des grandes vertus)*, Dan Radu Stănescu, Bogdan Udrea, Corin Hădăreanu (trad.), (București: Editura Univers, 2006), 214–216.

³³ Wilhelm Moldovan, „Pastorul și demnitatea umană” (The pastor and human dignity), *Curierul Adventist (Adventist Courier)*, (București: 1976, LIV), 11.

³⁴ Alexandru Arseni, “Demnitatea—calitate imanentă a ființei umane” (Dignity—immanent quality of the human being), in Ion Mereuță, *Demnitatea—valoare supremă a omului și națiunii. Materialele Conferinței științifice “Demnitatea Umană și Națională în contextual integrării europene a Republicii Moldova”* (Dignity—the supreme value of man and nation. Scientific Conference materials „Human and National Dignity in the context of Moldova’s European integration”), (Chișinău: Elan–Poligraf, 2004), 125.

³⁵ Victor Popescu, *Demnitatea umană. Contribuții filosofice la cunoașterea de sine* (Human dignity. Philosophical contributions to self-knowledge), (Târgoviște: Editura Macarie, 1998), 96–97.

³⁶ King James Bible, Ephesians 4:1–3.