УДК 341.215.4 341.231.14

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REFLECTION OF HUMAN DIGNITY FROM THE DESCRIPTIVE TO THE CONSTRUCTIVE APPROACH

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Abstrakt

One of the most significant achievements of the «anthropological turn» of XIX-XX centuries philosophy, as well as of modern sociology, law and other disciplines is the development of the idea and images of human dignity as a value-ideological foundation of social development, a tool to cope with and manage conflicts in the society. Implicit contradictions of modern concepts of human dignity (undeveloped nature of dignity, mixing up the dignity and the assessment of merits, the primacy of the activity approach, etc.) hinder the implementation of the principle of dignity as a regulator of social practice. We need a new theory of dignity (may call it constructive theory), which is expected to replace the descriptive approach and aims to synthesize the idea and images of human dignity into a single value-rational and emotional complex supported by the mechanism of self-consciousness of the individual and the human community, and by the reflection of dignity.

Keywords: human dignity; activity approach; descriptive theory of human dignity; constructive theory of human dignity; self-perception; introspection; self-understanding; reflection of dignity.

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РЕФЛЕКСИЯ ЧЕЛОВЕЧЕСКОГО ДОСТОИНСТВА: ОТ ДЕСКРИПТИВНОГО К КОНСТРУКТИВНОМУ ПОДХОДУ

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Аннотация

Весомым достижением «антропологического поворота» философской мысли XIX-XX вв., а также современной социологии, теории права и др. дисциплин является разработка идеи и образа человеческого достоинства как ценностно-мировоззренческого основания социального развития, преодоления конфликтных ситуаций в обществе. Имплицитные противоречия современных концепций достоинства человека (неразработанность природы достоинства, совмещение достоинства с оценкой, примат деятельностного подхода и др.) затрудняют имплементацию принципа достоинства как регулятива социальной практики. Необходима новая (конструктивная) теория достоинства, которая должна прийти на смену дескриптивным подходам и призвана синтезировать идею и образы человеческого достоинства в единый рационально-ценностный и эмоциональный комплекс, поддерживаемый механизмами самосознания личности и человеческого сообщества, и в частности, рефлексией достоинства.

Ключевые слова: человеческое достоинство; деятельностный подход; дескриптивная концепция достоинства; конструктивная концепция достоинства; самовосприятие; интроспекция; самопонимание; рефлексия достоинства.

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1. Introduction

Latest developments in post-Soviet space as well as in the Mid-East area, especially the Ukrainian crisis and the atrocities of the "Islamic state", demonstrate how acute is the risk of rapid dehumanization, massive violence in the course of civil conflict. Despite the thorough theoretical work over the concepts and value complexes of humanism, mutual understanding, non-violence etc. in modern philosophy, sociology, conflictology, ethical studies, these concepts to a considerable extent fail to serve as landmarks and moral criteria of social life.

Contemporary humanities are still in need of some pivotal idea or concept that would be based on a solid philosophic and argumentative ground, would be in correspondence with traditional religious outlook and values and would also possess a developed system of theoretic and pragmatic implications, moral and emotional supplements that would hopefully stop the humanity from avalanche-like beastification. One of such concepts that has the peculiar tradition of problematization and at the same time deserves a more thorough transdisciplinary approach is the idea and notion of human dignity.

Theoretical arrangement associated with this idea is one of the most significant achievements of the "anthropological turn" in post-classical philosophy. At the same contemporary tradition in the understanding of human dignity inherits the spirit and topical fields of reasoning dignity in Plato's, Aristotle's and the stoics' teachings, and reflects certain traits of Renaissance humanism, French Enlightenment and of course the German transcendental school. In the meanwhile, it was merely the post-classic era that established the possibility to argue that the i*dea* of dignity and its theoretic *definitions* must be supplemented with a deliberate *imagery* of dignity to become the true and effective regulation of social life.

2. Research findings

Deliberating the idea and image of dignity, post-classical philosophy does close a sort of historical "circle". In ancient philosophy, we start with a visual demonstration of dignity in the mindset and "modus vivendi" of a thoroughly thinking (philosophizing) person. Over time, we come to the idea, typical for Modern-era thought, that dignity is a theoretical principle, rational basis of life and human interaction. Dignity as a principle fits into the concept of the "world as it must" necessary for the expedient transformation of the "world

that is". Finally, the post-classical philosophy, from Schopenhauer and Nietzsche to the existentialists and Marxists, speaks of dignity as precisely the ability to synthesize the idea and the image, to embody the intelligible principle in the practice, seeking to convert, organize, subordinate to the moral law chaotic, often absurd, unjust or inauthentic world. Dignity is therefore more than a principle and more than a behavioral trait: it is merely the human capacity for responsibility (first of all, to the self) and for "wholeness" of life provided by (and supplied with) the internal moral law, the criterion of right and justice.

One may say that such understanding of dignity is not exclusively "humanitarian" anymore. It can be interpreted broadly – as far as to say that dignity is in general a quality of a structural unit in a system of relations mediated by symbolic exchange, such as communication mediated by *values*. Such dignity is an attribute of person (merely a person capable of communicating and cooperating with others and at the same time of deliberate isolation from them) but may also be a sign of a cultural phenomenon, an ideology, a scientific discipline or a teaching. No wonder that the modern Russian researcher A. Bikbov entitled his essay in the sociology of philosophical knowledge (or exactly on how philosophers promote themselves in the scientific community) «Philosophical dignity as an object of study» [1]. And for example Harvard professor M. Rosen in his book "The dignity of history and meaning" [2] analyzes dignity as a concept entwined in the disciplinary and cultural ties, including philosophy, law, politics, ethics, theology and specific religious beliefs. Moreover, he sees dignity as a means of clarifying the legal, political, ethical and religious discourse by placing it in a particular social context.

Below, we will still focus on the most obvious mode of dignity – the dignity of the human being. Post-classical humanities boast rich variety of paradigms of the human in which notions of human dignity are also different. In particular, we may notice the similarities and differences between the existential-phenomenological philosophy, which perceives through the German neo-Kantianism essential features of Kant's approach to the phenomenon of humanity, and socio-critical tradition (including neo-Marxism and post-Marxism), focused on the distinction between true and alienated human existence. Substantial contribution to the understanding of the dignity is made by structuralism

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and post-structuralism, with its attention to symbolic determinants of self-identification.

For contemporary Russian authors, it is typical to understand dignity as "a characteristic of a person from the standpoint of his intrinsic value, correspondence to one's predestination" [3]. This definition unveils the paradox: to what extent can we talk about "predestination" of a person having not determined the ontological grounds of his dignity (and of his, to say so, "destiny" as well)? And if we even put such goal before ourselves, doesn't it mean that the ontology of dignity relies on the notion of "predestination" as some transcendental condition, irrational entity, something like "αμαγκη" or "dao"?

To circumvent this difficulty, post-classic thought states that the source of dignity is to be searched for in no impersonal environment but in the ontology of individual. Under this approach, we would rather replace "predestination" with "vocation" and thus get the notion of dignity as thinking, behavior and values of the self-actualizing personality. Self-actualized people, – says A. Maslow – involve into something that is outside themselves. They are committed to this business, it is something very valuable to them – a kind of vocation (see: [4, p. 110]). From here follows the idea of the activity-related nature of human dignity: it is not a prerequisite of human existence, but above all the *opportunity* and *goal*. Human activity that meets certain criteria does objectifiy and event *thingify* dignity; thereby the activity itself acquires the status of worthiness. On the other hand, the lack of activity is sometimes harmful for dignity.

Linking the ideas of human dignity and activity, we see that in post-classical conceptual contexts dignity appears in two ways: first, as a phenomenon (a feature of a person, an integral indicator of one's self-understanding and self-perception), and then, as a principle (an essential trait of human co-existence, enclosing an imperative of behavior). It is important that dignity involves not only the self-determination in social reality (the latter is always given to a person in a certain view and implicitly guides the mind in a certain direction), but also in the wider frame of reference. This is self-identification within history, in politics and culture, in the context framed by the image of "all mankind", the sense of humanity and its destiny. That's probably why Kant spoke of the value constitution of culture due to the fact that the existence of values as such is only possible by virtue of the human relationship to the world, "as a measure of humanity and free-

dom" (see: [5, p. 7]), and "morality, and humanity as capable of it, is that which alone has dignity" [6, p. 212].

Apart from them the mentioned "predestination paradox", which is more or less eliminable by the activity approach, some more difficulties exist.

First, it is the question of nature and (or) socio-historic and anthropological genesis of human dignity and rights, dialectics of their relations. Activity approach is the attitude that merely unites the question of dignity with the problem of human rights. In other words, the notion human rights gets its precise sense due to the fact that the human being, representing activity, involves in communication, cooperation and possible contradiction with the other. Still, as M. Rosen notes, attention to human rights does not only make the problem of dignity more distinctive, but paradoxically draws attention away from the non-codified right of some other nature – the right to perception and acknowledgement of one's dignity in the other's mind, emotions and world-outlook (apart from what he or she is actually doing). In fact, the matter is of the "right to be respected", which derives from dignity and stands for premise of "worthy relation" to the other both in thought and deed.

In a most clear way this correspondence between dignity and rights is demonstrated by the "Statement of Ethical Principles" adopted by the International Federation of Social Workers. It is stated there that social work is based on the "... inherent worth and dignity of all people, and the rights that follow from this" [7]. This is quite a bold declaration, because dignity is not just mentioned along with the rights, but is uniquely determined as a source of rights (hence there's only one step to the understanding of dignity as a source of law in general).

Dignity is often described as the human's constant attribute. But, as R. Apresian in particular argues, the idea of dignity forms in the course of history as not exactly as estimative but more as an imperative characteristic. Human being is *granted* dignity (this is the attitude of Christianity in private) and he *must* be worthy of this divine gift. Thus the notion of inherency of dignity intertwines with the notion of "endowment". The latter doesn't always necessarily mean possession, at least not the one we can explicitly state. S. Darwall writes that "although Kant sometimes conceives of dignity as involving a standing every person has to demand, or 'exact' respect, Kant also treats dignity as a value we can all achieve, but only when we properly

exercise our capacity for moral choice" [8, p. 8]. As a result, dignity in contemporary thought is first of all potential of a human and a peculiar task for him, a test for the whole mankind. Not accidentally M. Heidegger emphasized that "higher humanistic definition of a human being has not yet reached the true dignity of man" [9, p. 328].

Another difficulty arises as the question about the scope of implementation of dignity as a principle. They sometimes speak about "dignity of human" and "dignity of person / personality" as of notions that differ in degree of generality. Sociological case studies introduce the idea of corporate, or group, dignity derived from the phenomenon of group solidarity and mutual coincidence of personal dispositions of members of the group (see: [10]). The concept of the "dignity of human life" evolve in the context of modern bioethics, etc.

Still more difficulties are caused by the necessity to introduce the idea of human dignity to the topical area of axiology. The Preamble of the United Nations Charter places into the one synonymous row "faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and in the equal rights of nations large and small". It is peculiar that "dignity and worth" act here as mutually supplementary attributes. The logic of the authors of the document is probably that it's scarcely enough to nominate respect for the individual through the "dignity" or "value" alone, but only through their synthesis.

There is certain history behind this thought. The idea of dignity is intertwined not only with the concept of value, but also with the idea of evaluation: that means to "evaluate" oneself, to look for evaluation (appreciation) from the other, to take an external estimate as adequate or abandon, to overcome it. Self-assessment of one's dignity, especially critical one, seemingly confers person to certain moral advantage or "power". And nevertheless, according to many philosophers of post-classical era, it is important to completely separate *evaluation of dignity* from the *recognition* of it. Even if a person is recognized in his / her dignity, not every such recognition is all right, for it can be even humbling, as when awarded conditionally («He is worthy because he is such a... / has done something...»). "It is time to understand, finally, that acknowledging something as "value" deprives the evaluated of its dignity, – M. Heidegger writes. – This means: because of assessing something as a val-

ue the estimated object begins to exist only as a subject of human evaluation" [9, p. 34-344].

But no matter how we try to protect the idea of "pure dignity" within its own theoretical field, in practice this approach is not quite applicable. As, for instance, J. Habermas notes, in actual problematic situations the sense of human dignity inevitably involves pragmatic connotations – not central, but certainly significant. They are connected with the idea of actually checkable value, primarily through the self-esteem of a person, but also in the context of assessments given by others. In philosophical and political discourse human dignity and its socially acceptable personality treats (some "personal achievements" or "merits") are quite often identified with each other. Based on this principle, in particular, the ideology of meritocracy, the origins of which are contained in the works of M. Young [11]. However attractive in itself, his ideas leave many questions in what concerns implementation. Their popularity testifies to the problem state of the political and legal identity of society, the discrepancy between self-esteem and its regulatory mechanisms, such as representative democracy. Even in a democratic society, and merely in it, "the appearance of meritocratic discourse that resembles that power should belong to the worthy is a sign of an impending crisis of legitimacy" [12].

The mentioned difficulty is driven by the effort of many thinkers and public figures to lead the idea of dignity out of the shadows on intuitive notion of "natural" hierarchy of merits as a system of more and less "worthy" social statuses. This is not an easy task to fulfill, because the status hierarchy, observable in the animal world as well, is apparently deeply rooted in the psyche of a human being. And still many modern social philosophers, say for instance J. Waldron and M. Dan-Cohen in their work "Dignity, Status and Rights", note that it is more productive to speak of dignity in terms of achieving equally high status for as much people than to abandon the discourse of statuses at all (see: [13]).

Here it should be mentioned again that activity approach is also related to understanding of human dignity as a source of social action and the basis of law. This approach is reflected in particular in the Article 1 of the Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany of 1949. It stated that the inviolability of human dignity and human rights is a peremptory basis "inviolable and inalienable human rights as the basis of every community, of peace and of justice in the world". More concise

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formulation is given in the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus (Art. 25 – "The state shall ensure the freedom, integrity and dignity of the person"), of the Constitution of the Russian Federation (Art. 31 – "Human dignity shall be protected by the state. Nothing can be the basis for its derogation"). Ultimately, modern researchers note: despite very different understandings of what is included in the set of inalienable human rights and to what divisions ("generations") they should be systematized, we find the point of convergence of multiple legal traditions and systems in the very understanding of what dignity is and how it should be protected. This implies that the dignity is in fact a catch-all category, even more applicable for understanding and dialogue between civilizations and legal cultures than "human rights" in their European sense.

We would specifically comment on the approach implemented in the Constitution of the Republic of Poland, where it is said that "the natural and inalienable dignity of the person is the source of rights and freedoms of human and citizen. It is inviolable and its respect for and protection are the responsibility of public authorities". The self-applying reflexive ratio is remarkable here: dignity is "the main motive and justification for the existence of rights and freedoms" [14], but the very notion of dignity is introduced primarily by reference to the rights and freedoms. One of the first who put these concepts in such a "reverse" order was J.-J. Rousseau, who famously remarked that "give up one's freedom means to renounce one's human dignity, abandon one's human rights and even his duties". Due to this ratio human dignity is often spoken of as primarily the *civil dignity* – readiness for civil action aimed at protecting one's and common rights.

But doesn't this in the long run imply that dignity is a metaphysic substance or a simulacrum of sort, always constantly appearing and being referred to in its otherness but having no own true being? To answer this partly provocative question we must mention the problem of "scope" or "limits" of human dignity at the conceptual, practical and reflexive level. The history of mankind gives us many examples of what can be called "acquisition" of dignity in thought, action, decision. It is easy to recall instances when frankly inhuman treatment did not deprive the victim of "inner core", which meant for him/her following the internal criteria of authenticity and correctness. But there are also numerous examples where people in similar circumstances

demonstrated complete loss of such a criterion, so to say, betrayed themselves.

Search for some common rule in each of such cases determines the request for transition from *descriptive* concept of dignity to *constructive* one. Characteristic feature of the first is the description and interpretation of "dignity experience". The second focuses on the formulation of the decisive conditions of dignity, the transition from the experience of "non-esteem" to "dignity" and also (which surely cannot be omitted from study) from esteem back to indignity. Samples of the descriptive approach are there in the theories of G. Pico della Mirandola, B. Pascal, in post-classical era – for instance, in H. Bergson's works. The constructive approach derives primarily from the works of I. Kant. Among the thinkers who sought to follow this pattern in post-classical era was M. Heidegger with his idea of dignity as "putting the humanity at the service of man". Echoes of this idea can be heard particularly in the theory of L. Fuller who talks about the "inner morality of law", which implies such qualities of legislation as clarity, consistency, immutability of the language, the orientation for the future. Dignity should therefore be seen not just as a prerequisite for the law, but also as a criterion of "effective humanism" of legislation. A theory based on the constructive concept of dignity would describe the principles of activity, communication, management that would make human dignity true regulation of social life.

Relying on considerations that have been given about the image and idea of human dignity, can we formulate the most crucial requirements for the constructive theory of human dignity?

First of all, such theory should be formulated on the basis of the analysis of peculiar cognitive-and-value environment in which dignity grows, especially the analysis of *dignity-value* complex. This environment is in fact nothing but *self-consciousness* or self-awareness of a personality, a social group, a nation.

Merely in the context of self-consciousness dignity ceases to be perceived as an abstract goal, or some transcendentalia. Instead, it can be mastered as an important *motive* of concrete actions of personal, professional and primarily sociopolitical scope. Mind the eloquent citation from V. Stolin's work: "As phenomena of consciousness, duty, responsibility, honor, dignity, conscience... concretize for social individual... such moral values... as good, justice, and humanity. These phenomena

are... a form of expression of the most important feature of the motivational sphere of the human, because they relate to the fact that with their highest moral content these motives lead outside his individual existence... and connect with the problems of epoch, of society in a whole" [15]. Not by chance the most advanced human rights codes historically evolved in those cultures where the matrix of philosophical understanding of the world and human's place in it used to rest on the idea of sovereignty of *self*, on special ontological status of the active subject.

Second, identifying of dignity should be based on the understanding of relations between *the idea* and *the image*. For that sake the constructive theory of dignity must in its own turn differentiate modes (or levels) of self-consciousness. It is justified to consider at least three of them: self-perception, introspection and self-understanding.

At the *self-perception* level dignity is represented as a special mode to relation to the self; a personal or a collective setting on self-esteem connected with posting some certain moral requirement or criteria to the self. This process involves the formation of a stable self-esteem stemming from a fairly rigid, sometimes critical, self-assessment and internal design of measures to improve it, that is some "working on self".

At the *introspection* level (mind that we should not mix this with psychological introspection which means registering changes in one's emotions or thoughts) through witnessing the process of self-esteem growing, its variations and crises, a person primarily generalizes one's image of dignity to become an idea or concept. The latter then can act as the integral principle of evaluating both the self and the others. In other words, the feeling of dignity transforms in some *conceptual definition* of dignity, possessing a repertoire of verbal and image connotations. In a personal scale this generalization can bear expressive emotional and aesthetic coloring (evaluation of actions in terms of "beauty", "style", etc.). In a group scale it is also implemented in the artistic, fiction discourse filled with symbols and allegories of qualities preferred for this community.

At the *self-understanding* level the separate verbal definitions and figurative connotations of human dignity fit into the conceptual structure of dignity as a universal principle applicable for the design of large-scale forms of personal, social, group, national, civilizational development. It is undoubtedly the most complex level, because on its way to the universal principle the *idea* of dignity should, in a sense, escape from the close interconnectedness with a repertoire of *images*, but not to stay in this bloodless theoretical formula.

Third, what must provide an increase in self-awareness in the transition to still higher level is the *reflection of dignity*. Its theoretical expression should be such a structural concept, in which the idea of dignity-values does not substantiate it in private images, "cases", examples, but stays significant and justified in itself, and at the same time embodies in visual images, eloquent stories, parables etc. needed for educational work.

3. Conclusions

Constructive theory of dignity should surely take into account the benefits of the activity approach, while avoiding its limitations. Human dignity cannot be reduced to its readiness to fulfill social functions. Universal correlate of human dignity could be generalized as a notion of the *human person as the creator of history, civilization and culture*, the "author" of a set of good and useful artifacts that fill the life-world of mankind: from stone tools to the modern technologies. It means that the activity approach developed by contemporary philosophic anthropology and other disciplines can be modified with the reference to the concept of *human creativity*. Human dignity is increasingly provided by the creative potential of the whole mankind, its ability to find adequate answers to the global and local challenges, to demonstrate movement to a more equitable, harmonious social and socio-natural world.

Thus, the theory of human dignity is no longer a derivative, side branch of a philosophical of sociological doctrine. On the contrary, the discourse of dignity often serves as some tool for adjusting a doctrine, some kind of "test for humanity". The problem of dignity in its modern interpretation does not imply a purely conceptual, theoretical solution but focuses on the development of syntetic approaches involving law, sociological, anthropological, medical, psychological and pedagogical knowledge, relevant forms and methods of educational work, and art, technology, public communications as well.

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