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THE IDEA OF DIGNITY IN CONTEMPORARY SCIENTIFIC DISCOURSE

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Abstract

The article presents the philosophical analysis of the basic aspects and specificity of conceptualization of the idea of dignity in the contemporary intellectual discourse. The discussion of the issue of dignity is topical due to the urgent need to develop new strategies of social interaction which would correspond to the new sociocultural and civilizational conditions and would take into consideration the specificity of human life and at the same time would establish basic moral intentions of human behavior and identity. In the process of investigation the following methods were applied: dialectical, hermeneutical, phenomenological, and comparative. The analysis has proved that the contemporary intellectual discourse represents dignity as the multifaceted phenomenon that has distinctive ethical, psychological, economic, legal aspects and still preserves its conceptual ambiguity. The idea of dignity proves to be significant not only in the moral, spiritual sphere, but is equally vital in social-political, economic spheres of social life as well as in the everyday human interaction and communication. Dignity is regarded as the value concept, the characteristic feature of a person determined by various and often opposite behavioral imperatives in different sociocultural environments. The idea of dignity inevitably depends on the set of socially meaningful norms and principles that provide the recognition of the self-value of an individual and determine his/her social worth. The research has proved that the unified conceptual definition of dignity in the contemporary reality may become possible only providing the distinct understanding of the sociocultural and worldview grounds for the whole range of dignity connotations. The review of the contemporary theoretical discourse on the issue of human dignity has proved that the concept of dignity is far from being clearly defined; therefore, its clarifying still remains as the significant challenge to the contemporary philosophy.

Key words: human dignity, value, personality, freedom, justice.

Ідея гідності в сучасному науковому дискурсі
Анотація

У статті з філософських позицій проаналізовано основні аспекти та особливості концептуалізації ідеї гідності в сучасному науковому дискурсі. Це зумовлено гострою необхідністю розробки відповідних новим соціокультурним та цивілізаційним умовам стратегій соціальної взаємодії, які б враховували своєрідність людського життя, водночас закладаючи основні моральні інтенції людської поведінки та ідентичності. В процесі роботи над статтею було використано як загальнонаукові, так і філософські методи дослідження (діалектичний, феноменологічний, герменевтичний, компаративний).

Встановлено, що в сучасному науковому дискурсі гідність постає багатоплановим поняттям, яке має виражений етичний, психологічний, економічний, правовий виміри, що істотно нівелюються за умови, коли гідність розглядається як ціннісна характеристика людини, яка визначається відмінними і навіть протилежними імперативами поведінки у різних соціокультурних середовищах, ідея якої незмінно передбачає набір соціально значимих норм та принципів, які забезпечують усвідомлення самоцінності людини та визначають її суспільну цінність. Доведено, що цілісне концептуальне окреслення ідеї гідності у вимірі сьогодення. може стати реальністю тільки за чіткого розуміння соціокультурних та світоглядних витоків цілого спектра змістових конотацій ідеї гідності. Виявлено, що у сучасному інтелектуальному дискурсі концепт гідності людини ще далекий від з'ясованого, саме тому його прояснення продовжує залишатися серйозним викликом для всієї сучасної філософії. Запропонована стаття, в цілому, носить теоретичний характер.

Ключові слова: гідність людини, цінність, особистість, свобода, справедливість.

Идея достоинства в современном научном дискурсе
Аннотация

В статье с философских позиций проанализировано основные аспекты и особенности концептуализации идеи достоинства в современном научном дискурсе. Это обусловлено острой необходимостью разработки соответствующих новым социокультурным и цивилизационным условиям стратегий социального взаимодействия, которые бы учитывали своеобразность человеческой жизни, в то же время, закладывая основные моральные интенции человеческого поведения и идентичности. В процессе работы над статьей было использовано как общенаучные, так и философские методы исследования (диалектический, феноменологический, герменевтический, компаративный).

Установлено, что в современном научном дискурсе достоинство фигурирует как многозначное понятие, которое имеет выраженное этическое, психологическое, экономическое, правовое измерения, что существенно нивелируется при условии, когда достоинство рассматривается как ценностная характеристика человека, которая определяется отличными и даже противоположными императивами поведения в разной социокультурной среде, идея которого неизменно предполагает набор социально значимых норм и принципов, которые обеспечивают осознание самоценности человека и определяют его общественную ценность. Доказано, что целостное концептуальное обоснование идеи достоинства в измерении нашего времени может стать реальностью только при условии четкого понимания социокультурных и мировозренческих истоков целого спектра содержательных коннотаций идеи достоинства. Показано, что в современном научном дискурсе концепт достоинства ещё далек от определения, именно потому его прояснение продолжает оставаться серьёзным вызовом для всей современной философии. Данная статья, в целом, носит теоретический характер.

Ключевые слова: достоинство человека, ценность, личность, свобода, справедливость.

Introduction.

The idea of dignity is one of the most essential and motivational ideas in the history of the humankind that has never lost its significance. Careful consideration of the historical events, starting with the Biblical myth about the fall of man and moving forward through the ages of history, makes it obvious that, in fact, this idea emerges as the invariant trigger of history – the history of separate people as well as the history of the whole communities.

It is the idea of dignity that directs human activity in the contradictory conditions of the objective reality, and makes people ignore their

individual interests and even the basic instinct of self-preservation. Social actions which are based on dignity have often led to the formation of new social realities, suddenly contradicting the traditional social determinants.

The idea of dignity is significant not only in the moral, spiritual sphere, but is equally vital in social-political, economic spheres of social life as well as in the everyday human interaction and communication. It has invariably remained as the worldview and ethical principle, basic for the individual self-determination in social, cultural, historical and other realities. Thus it has shaped the image, meaning, and fate of a person at various stages of historical development in different social-cultural environments.

In the complicated conditions of the life in the contemporary society the idea of dignity emerges as an important and often the only possible key to agreement and consolidation, as well as the urge to common actions toward the perfection of the existing system of social relations.

The idea of dignity reveals its exceptional topicality within the contradictory process of the development of civil society in Ukraine and establishing its independence. In times of the permanent worldview and political crisis and the increase in external pressure the issue of human dignity is by no means devalued; on the contrary, it becomes existentially urgent. This tendency is not surprising at all, since the development of any society, science, and culture is impossible to imagine without free and confident people who are aware of their dignity. Considering this fact, the investigation of the basic principles of the idea of dignity, as one of the central concepts in philosophy, is important due to its considerable influence on the worldview and its power to predetermine the possible ways of overcoming the contemporary social crisis in Ukraine.

Despite the fact that the concept of dignity has been mentioned in plenty of international and national documents and laws, up to now there has been established no clear and univalent definition of this concept. That is why some terminological ambivalence is still present not only in the intellectual discourse, but also in the everyday communication.

Thus, on the one hand, this notion is used to denote a certain social worth of a personality, whereas, on the other hand, it correlates with the qualities that are not measured by worth. Recently this notion has been more and more used in the contexts that mention the right of every person to make independent decisions, the demand to be treated with respect, and the inadmissibility of humiliation.

Alongside with this, it should be pointed out that in the contemporary intellectual discourse the concept of dignity is highly used by believers and atheists, by conservatives and liberals, by the adherents and the opponents of euthanasia, abortions, trans-humanism, etc. In any of these contexts a person grounds his/her own interpretation of the concept of dignity which is usually incompatible with the arguments of the opponents.

Review of recent publications.

The topicality and the opportuneness of the investigation into the idea of dignity from the synchronic perspective are reinforced by the obvious lack of theoretically-generalizing works within the sphere of philosophical anthropology, as well as in the history of philosophy. Certain aspects of the problem have been discussed in the works by Hannah Arendt, Jeremy Waldron, Jürgen Habermas, Leon Kass, George Kateb, John Macready, Stephen Pinker, Michael Rosen, Ralf Stoecker, Herbert Spiegelberg, Doris Schroeder, Qianfan Zhang, et al. These thinkers have laid the fundamental principles of investigating dignity as the category of ethics and law from different worldview and methodological perspectives. Though they did not manage to solve the problem of the connotative ambiguity of this complex phenomenon, and it still exists in the contemporary intellectual discourse.

The aim of the article is to define the basic aspects and the specificity of conceptualization of the idea of human dignity in the contemporary scientific discourse.

The Discussion.

We totally agree with Ralf Stoecker on the point, discussed in *Humiliation, Degradation, Dehumanization: Human Dignity Violated (2010),* that human dignity becomes one of the key concepts in the Western scientific research:

in philosophy, law, political science, biomedicine, as well as in the everyday life. Though, the issue of dignity is highly contentious in moral philosophy. This fact, as the scholar concludes, gives hope for developing the philosophically oriented conception of dignity, however, three crucial turns that lead to it are to be considered. In R. Stoecker's opinion, the first one is the negative turn which demands to start the inquiry with those aspects of human life where human dignity is violated. The second one – the inductive turn – raises the need to consider the whole range of applications of the concept of human dignity in different spheres of ethics. And finally the historical turn, which appears to be the most important for our present research, requires that the historical bonds between human dignity and the traditional conceptions of dignity should be taken into account. Taken together these three turns reveal the direction of an understanding the human dignity as universal nobility [Stoecker 2011: 7].

Admitting the reasonableness of the research scenario on the idea of dignity in general, suggested by Ralf Stoecker, we should disagree on the point that the inquiry should start from the negative turn, namely, those cases where dignity is consciously violated. We cannot totally agree that this approach is fully reasonable, providing that, first of all, the very concept of dignity has a distinctive paradigmatic nature. This fact leads to the requirement to consider historical, paradigmatic, and sociocultural background every time we deal with the situation of violation of human dignity. The need to take into account these factors makes is difficult to unambiguously define those cases where dignity violation really takes place. Dignity is not only ethic category, but also a psychological phenomenon, emerging in the process of self-identification within a certain system of sociocultural values. Thus, conscious violation of dignity in some worldview and sociocultural environment can be treated as its utmost manifestation in another environment.

Obviously, the sociocultural predetermination of the concept of dignity tends to be the reason for its controversial interpretations. For instance, some scholars consider dignity to be an inborn metaphysical quality, equally characteristic of every human being and functioning as the fundamental basis of moral (see the works of Qianfan Zhang [Zhang 2016: 2], Leon Kass [Kass 2004: 204], George Kateb [Kateb 2011: 6], Martha Nussbaum [Nussbaum 2011: 31], Ralf Stoecker [Stoecker 2011], Herbert Spiegelberg [Spiegelberg 1986]). Whereas others consider any attempt at discussing the issue of dignity to be vain (Ruth Macklin [Macklin 2003], Stephen Pinker [Pinker 2008], Doris Schroeder [Schroeder 2012]).

Taking into account the controversy in the contemporary intellectual discourse, we fully agree with John Macready [Macready 2017] on the point that the contemporary philosophy suggests various views and ways of solving the problem of dignity. On the one hand, as John Macready points out, this concept is criticized and its heuristic potential is devaluated (see the works of Stephen Pinker [Pinker 2008]), on the other hand, its outstanding role in the process of manifestation of human value is defended and grounded (Jeremy Waldron [Waldron 2009], George Kateb [Kateb 2011], Robert Spaeman [Spaemann 2012]). Those scholars who are the most skeptical about the necessity of the research into the concept of dignity believe that the ambiguity of its interpretations is the result of its conceptual vagueness. Thus, it cannot serve as a basic concept for ethic discussions without its content being clearly defined (Stephen Pinker [Pinker 2008], Doron Shultziner [Shultziner 2007]).

This approach has made some theorists conclude that the content of the notion of dignity is defined by a certain cultural discourse and political regime, and, therefore, is culturally and socially motivated (Rhoda Howard, Jack Donnelly [Howard, Donnelly 1986; Howard 2010]). Rhoda Howard in *Human Rights in Cross-Cultural Perspectives: A Quest for Consensus (2010)* considers dignity to be the particular understanding of the inner moral worth of a human being, determined by the cultural and social background. Every society and every culture develops its own particular understanding of dignity that reflects the moral aspect of humanity. The scholar points out that one cannot claim to be worthy of respect merely because one is human, since dignity can

be granted at birth or on becoming a part of the community, where a person receives one's particular ascribed status. Dignity, according to this approach, can be earned during the life of a person who accepts his/her society's values, customs, and norms, i.e., who accepts normative cultural constraints on his or her behavior. Thus, the individuals who do not accept or neglect these norms are considered unworthy and lose all their honour (or dignity) [Howard 2010: 83].

Such an approach is sure to have rational background, but without the paradigmatic consideration of the issue it may undermine the fact that dignity can serve as the normative premise behind human rights. Thus, as John Macready points out, admitting sociocultural predetermination may lead to the situation when the dignity of some individuals or even social groups is not recognized because of certain cultural or ideological estimation. Nazi Germany is the most representative in this regard [Macready 2017: 2].

Certainly not all the researchers tend to assume that the ambivalence of dignity refutes its normative character. For instance, Norel Lickiss, Jeff Malpas [Lockiss, Malpas 2007] consider dignity as the initial concept that functions like other fundamental categories, such as truth, justice, beauty, that don't need to be defined. This approach is in opposition to the other approach that regards truth, goodness, justice, beauty as the historically variable categories that obtain totally different content in various historical and ideological conditions.

Despite the fact that in the contemporary intellectual discourse the deficiency of scientifically and ideologically unbiased approaches to interpreting human dignity is obvious, we should not ignore the tendency of contemporary researchers to prove the necessity to develop the metatheory with the notion of dignity in its core (Ramy Debes [Debes 2009], Herbert Spiegelberg [Spiegelberg 1986]). Obviously, this approach presupposes absolute faith in the possibility of the conceptual defining of dignity as the central element of human being. We believe that this approach still does not take into account that the contemporary stage of sociocultural development puts forward identity as the central element of human being, since it determines the extent to which the worldview, cultural, and axiological features of the community influence a person. Thus it may claim to be the primary paradigmatic directive in the contemporary intellectual discourse.

The present variety of interpretations of the concept of dignity is combined with the distinctive dominance of the metaphysical approach. This approach obtained its conceptual frame in the works of Immanuel Kant who was among the first thinkers to substantiate the self-value of an individual. From this perspective, according to John Macready, dignity is explicated as the unique status of the human species in nature and the correlative status of equality shared by every individual [Macready 2017: 2]. Thus, dignity is recognized as the characteristic feature of every representative of the human species, and therefore, the legislative documents demand worthy treatment of every person, even the criminals who have committed the worst crimes. Obviously, this approach was criticized by some researchers, and John Macready justifiably asks: "What is it about the human species and individual human beings that gives them this unique status?" [Macready 2017: 2].

Undoubtedly, the question asked by John Macready is the central philosophical question raised in the process of investigating human dignity. To meet the challenges which appear in this process, Herbert Spiegelberg in *Human Dignity: A Challenge to Contemporary Philosophy (1986)* offers eight points which he calls "prolegomena" for the philosophy of dignity. Specifically they are:

"1. The idea of human dignity plays a decisive role in today's social and political thought and action, even more so than commonly realized; 2. This idea in its present sense is relatively new; 3. Our ordinary way of talking about it is confused and vague to the point of contradictoriness; 4. The idea of human dignity is vulnerable to attack; 5. The philosophical treatment of the idea thus far is inadequate; 6. The way to a better philosophy of human dignity requires certain basic distinctions such as those between dignity in itself and the grounds of dignity; 7. Human dignity in itself is a phenomenon within our expe-

rience; 8. The basis for human dignity can lie in several grounds related to different philosophies" [Spiegelberg 1986: 175].

Agreeing with Herbert Spiegelberg's point of view, the scholars emphasize that this challenge raises a range of questions, namely: "What is the nature of human dignity? Are there universally normative grounds for the claim that all human beings as such have this value? Are these grounds sufficient enough to justify human rights?" These questions determine the range of issues to consider for every philosopher who investigates dignity, especially in its correlation with human rights [Macready 2017: 2].

In the context of the issues discussed above, the typology of dignity, introduced by Daniel Sulmasy in *The Varieties of Human Dignity: a Logical and Conceptual Analysis (2013),* focuses on the problem of conceptual clarifying of the notion of dignity. The scholar singles out three types of dignity according to the spheres of this notion's explication, namely: intrinsic, attributive and inflorescent types [Sulmasy 2012: 938-939].

The intrinsic dignity indicates the value that human beings have simply by virtue of the fact that they are human, not due to any biological, psychological, social, economic, or political conditions (for instance, the term "dignity" is used in this meaning in the context of speaking of racism as violation of dignity). The intrinsic type of dignity is primary to the second two types and is fundamental from the perspective of morality.

The attributed dignity indicates a created one. It is determined by the conventional (social) estimation of every individual. It can be the result of subjective estimation, for instance, when people attribute worth or value to those who they consider to be dignitaries, those who carry themselves in a particular way, or those who have certain talents, skills, or powers (this type of dignity is explicated in the phrases "worthy candidate" or "dignified behaviour", etc.).

Inflorescent dignity refers to the worth of human excellence. Daniel Sulmasy uses the word "inflorescent" [meaning blossoming] deliberately to indicate the individuals who are flourishing as human beings, who develop their virtues (this meaning is implied when we use the word dignity in the contexts like "he faced the situation with dignity") [Sulmasy 2012: 938-939].

The recent researches on dignity mark the turn in the intellectual discourse to the metaphysical approach that considers dignity to be the inborn quality of every person even the immoral one. The remark made by Jürgen Habermas that dignity is the upper rank of value fully represents this point. The scholar mentions that dignity is the specific "seismograph" of the political community; this is the conceptual link between the morality of equal respect for everyone and the democratic rights ascribed in the declarations [Habermas 2012].

The similar idea has been suggested by Leonid Yevmenov who believes that the idea of human dignity reflects the phenomenon of human dignity [Yevmenov 2013: 62]. The scholar defines dignity as the integrative phenomenon that correlates with a person's moral self-identification and is revealed in certain psycho-emotional state as well as in actions. This idea proves to be reasonable, provided that the psycho-emotional state of a person depends on the full realization of his/her moral, legal, and social demands. Thus the idea of dignity correlates with the basic human rights, and in this regard, the moral demand of respect for every individual should be embodied in state legislation. The scholar is sure to be aware of the fact that equality and dignity have been discussed before. Yet in Antiquity the notions of *dignitas* and *persona* tightly correlated. Though, the discussion on the inviolability of dignity of an individual was not provided during the previous epochs, and the idea of individualization has been shaped only in the contemporary society, thus, consolidating the absolute value of an individual and his/her moral dignity.

Generally speaking, the idea of dignity and human rights has turned into the specific categorical imperative that forbids treating a person as a means of achieving any aims and recognizes his/her autonomy as a reasonable being. In this context the social self-value, and dignity, of every individual obtains respect and recognition.

The similar approach is supported by Hannah Arendt who discusses the category of dignity in the context of limitation of a person's polit-

ical freedom and ability to act [Arendt 1998], tyranny, and dangerous forms of non-humanity [Arendt 2017]. From this perspective dignity correlates with the right to action and the right to opinion and should be guaranteed by the state as "the right to have rights" [Arendt 2017: 296].

This opinion is supported by Qianfan Zhang in *Human Dignity in Classical Chinese Philosophy (2016)*, who points out that particularly after great atrocities committed during World War II, the United Nations appealed to the "recognition of the inherent dignity and of equal and inalienable rights of all members of human family" as the "foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world" that was proclaimed in 1948 in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The scholar mentions the importance of the concept of dignity in the new millennium when economic expansion and technological advancements quickly unite the peoples of diverse cultures. It creates opportunities for mutual understanding and cooperation, but it also creates occasions for conflicts and distrust leading to violent confrontations. The cultural and political conflicts happen mainly because human dignity is not similarly interpreted in different cultures. So, in order to guarantee the world peace and prosperity the scholar emphasizes the importance of creating a global constitutional order based on the moral discourse of human dignity [Zhang 2016: 2].

During the last century the main confessions, states, and international organizations have declared human dignity to be the fundamental and legal value and the term "dignity" has appeared in the Constitutions of 157 countries [Barilan 2012: 2].

The absence of a distinct and univalent approach to the interpretation of dignity is accompanied by the increase in the amount of research works that define dignity as the premise for the constitutional rights and freedom of an individual (Jeremy Waldron [Waldron 2009], Rhoda Howard [Howard, Donnelly 1986; Howard 2010], Paulus Kaufmann, Hannes Kuch, Christian Neuhäuser, Elaine Webster [Kaufmann, Kuch, Neuhäuser 2011], Matthias Lutz-Bachmann [Lutz-Bachmann 2016], Edward Sieh, Judy McGregor [Sieh, McGregor 2017]. Yechiel Barilan believes that this increase is caused by the shift from the language of the good to that of the right, from talking about dignity as encompassing the moral expectations of people to talking about the duties owed to people merely because they are human. As the scholar emphasizes, it is a transition from agent-centered (virtue-ethics, Kantianism) to recipient-centred (utilitarianism) ethical discourses [Barilan 2012: 9].

Discussions on the legal aspect of dignity as the constitutional value in the constitutional right are represented in the research work of Aaron Barak [Barak 2015]. The opposite point of view is supported by Doris Schroeder who does not consider dignity to be the premise for human rights [Schroeder 2012]. Jeremy Waldron points out the necessity to clearly define the concept of dignity, since the term retains many of the characteristics that make religious language irrational, namely: "pomposity, a lurch towards transcendence, a lack of definition, grand-sounding equivocation, and so on" [Waldron 2014: 6].

Today the concept of human dignity is even more controversial that the concept of human rights. Some scholars believe that these two concepts should be separated. In other words, the question "Why should all human beings have certain rights simply by virtue of being human?" demand a more sufficient answer than a mere "due to human dignity" [Schroeder 2012: 326-327].

The bioethics ideas on dignity have been rather popular recently: in these works dignity is interpreted in the context of the issues of bioethics, genetics, etc. (Fabris Jotterand [Jotterand 2010], Daniel Sulmasy [Sulmasy 2008], Ernst Bloch [Bloch 1996], David Chan [Chan 2015]). Besides, the concept of dignity is discussed in the context of the conception of trans-humanism, since many issues of the future will be connected with the appliance of new technologies in order to change the human nature and organism [Jotterand 2010: 45].

Another research work, meaningful in the context of our research, is the collective monograph *Logic of Dignity and Freedom of an Individual (2016)* [Yevmenov 2016] which presents an attempt at overcoming the conceptual chaos

and framing the general scheme of the development of knowledge about dignity, tracing the dialectical connection between the ideas of dignity, freedom, responsibility, human rights, and demonstrating their correlation. The main result of this monograph is the grounding of the cultural and anthropological premises for human dignity which is considered to be the initial point, the substantial basis, or the constituent point of the existence of the "human world". In this regard dignity emerges as the foundation for the human rights and freedom. The significance and the theoretical value of this research work leave no doubts, though, some aspects of human dignity are represented superficially, and the historical-philosophical retrospection is not included. Thus, the further research into dignity both as the concept and as the phenomenon is highly topical.

Among the range of the scholars in the post-soviet intellectual discourse who have done complex researches on the idea of dignity and interpret it as the ethic category and moral phenomenon we can mention the works of Viktor Malakhov [Malakhov 2001], Ruben Apresyan [Apresyan 1995], Abdasalam Huseinov [Huseinov 2013], et al. Some legal aspects of the concept of dignity were discussed in the following works of contemporary Ukrainian scholars: Oksana Hryshchuk [Hryshchuk 2007], Nataliya Krestovska [Krestovska 2018]. The historical-philosophical perspective of the idea of dignity has been discussed in the works of the following Ukrainian and foreign scholars: Aaron Barak [Barak 2015], Maksym Doichyk [Doichyk 2018], Marek Piechowiak [Piechowiak 2016], Tetyana Prodan [Prodan 2015], Maryna Savel'yeva [Savel'yeva 2018], et al.

Conclusion.

The contemporary intellectual discourse represents dignity as the multifaceted phenomenon that has distinctive ethical, psychological, economic, legal aspects and still preserves its conceptual ambiguity. It is considered to be the value concept, the characteristic feature of a person determined by various and often opposite behavioral imperatives in different sociocultural environments. The idea of dignity inevitably depends on the set of socially meaningful norms and principles that provide the recognition of the self-value of an individual and determine his/her social worth. The review of the contemporary theoretical discourse on the issue of human dignity has proved that the concept of dignity is far from being clearly defined; therefore, its clarifying still remains as the significant challenge to the contemporary philosophy.

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