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Essentialist Vs. Consequentialist-Based Concept of Human Dignity

Introduction

The interpretation and application of the concept of human dignity continues to feature in many scholarly discussions in disciplines like philosophy, theology, medicine, law. The source of this fundamental human value has been contested by many thinkers. Thus, the focus of this discussion will be to analyse this question: what is the base of human dignity? Or what does it mean that human being has intrinsic value call dignity?

From the outset of this discussion, it is important to state that, the foundation of all human rights is based on the unique value of human being called human dignity. Human rights are defined as rights which is ascribed to every person. Basically, dignity denotes the state or quality of being worthy of honour, value or respect, a state or quality that belong to every person.¹ This value is deeply rooted on the ontological structure of human being that defines them as being with “natural greatness,”² and giving their superior position among all creatures as the only

¹ A. Dearing, *A Justice for Victims of Crime*. Switzerland: Springer International Publication. 2017. p. 139

² K. Wojtyła. *On the Dignity of the Human Person*. In “Person and Community: Selected Essays.” Translated by Theresa Sandok, OSM. New York: Peter Lang. 1993. p. 178

being endowed with spirit, will and intellect; as well as autonomy or freedom properly understood. This inner spiritual life (soul) and nature, define the human being as a relational being among themselves and with God. This capacity characterizes human being's eternal and inherent dignity. Besides this approach, some scholars base the dignity of human person on being the only being created in the image of God (*imago Dei*). These distinguishing characteristics apply to every human being at all stages of human life, regardless of any human physical or spiritual deficiencies. Understanding the dignity of human being does not only rest on their superiority and privileged position among other creatures, it refers also to the conception of not what, but who the human being essentially is. Hence, dignity is a right and value that is accorded to every individual human person, equal to and in all human beings, not determined for and by any person, but serves as a means of self-transcendence and self-definition.

It then becomes paramount that the fundamental value of human life and dignity should constitute a priority in every consideration, that prohibits the violation of human life. Without this prohibition, no human society will survive should its members fail to recognize the dignity of human person, under any circumstance or condition. Special situations like self-defence and wars demand further clarifications which cannot be addressed in this paper.

However, the meaning of dignity has been a debatable concept among scholars. Considering that there are various approaches to the meaning of dignity, this has resulted to the controversy and ambiguity of meaning and approach to the concept. Accordingly, some scholars regard the concept of dignity as a useless, redundant, elusive and a slogan that adds nothing to an understanding of the topic,³ and so, it is difficult to apply. In

³ R. Macklin. *Dignity is a Useless Concept*. In "British Medical Journal." 2003. Vol. 327. Num. 429. Pp. 1419–20.

the 19th century, Arthur Schopenhauer argues that the concept of human dignity is a piece of rhetoric devoid of cognitive content, ‘an important sounding formula’ which, unless supplemented by further and more concrete principles, is ‘insufficient, without proper content and inherently problematic.’⁴ This argument could be based on the understanding of ‘human’ proposed by Joseph Fletcher. According to Fletcher, humanhood consists of the following lived capacity: ‘self-awareness, self-control, a sense of the future, a sense of the past, the capacity to relate to others, concern for others, communicate and curiosity.’ This understanding excludes some members of *Homo sapiens* defined only by biological facts, rather, refers to the capacity to possess certain qualities and possess them to a high degree.⁵ The ambiguity of the meaning of dignity is also attested to by the Canadian constitution which conceives the concept as confusing, difficult to apply and unrelated to human right.⁶

Nevertheless, some scholars regard the concept of dignity of human being as esteem value that applies to every member of the species *Homo sapiens*.⁷ This understanding is also the background of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. The meaning of this concept is also regarded as the basis of the regulations and guideline in biomedical practices and United Nations Human Rights regulations. For instance, the 1997 European Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine, the

4 D. Birnbacher. *Human Cloning and Human Dignity*. In “Reproductive Biomedicine Online” 2005. Vol 1. Num. 1. Pp. 50-55

5 P. Singer. *Practical Ethics*. 2nd Edition. UK: Cambridge University Press. 1999. p. 86

6 D. Schroeder. *Human Rights and Human Dignity: An Appeal to Separate the Cojoined Twins*. In “Ethical and Theory and Moral Practice.” 2012. Vol.15. Num. 3. Pp. 323-335

7 This argument follows from the determination of the beginning of human life. It states that human life is determined scientifically by examination of chromosomes in the cells of human species. It follows therefore that, human life begins with the union of human sperm with eggs, thus conceived, embryo is considered as human being. This argument also regards those with most profoundly and irreparably intellectual disability, as well as anencephalic infants, as human being with esteem value and dignity. See Singer. *Practical Ethics* (2nd Edition). pp. 85-86

1997 UNESCO Universal Declaration on the Genome and Human Rights, the 2005 Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights. Specifically, Article 5 of the European Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine recommends it as obligation to seek the consent of the patient for each health intervention. This suggests, the right to refuse treatment, as a way of respecting dignity and freedom of patient (human being). Nonetheless, implementation on the national level tends to differ based of the understanding of the concept.⁸ Thus, it is of paramount importance that we investigate into the meaning and bases of the concept of dignity for a broad regard, respect, protection and value of human being.

The above meaning and bases of human dignity which is the foundation of human rights, impose on others a certain number of positive duties. These duties which are command suggest therefore, that every rational human being who has capacity for autonomy should be treated with every form and sense of respect in their humanity. We can infer from this that the sense of dignity relates to those moral human beings who are not only endowed with such characteristic features but possess the lived capacity of them. Such characteristic features; like rationality, self-awareness, self-control, autonomy and act as moral being in human society define their dignity. In other words, dignity is understood as a consequence of possessing and exercising these features, while the non-functionality of these characteristic features in human being cannot be treated with dignity.

However, this source of human dignity has been contested by some scholars whose argument stems from the ontic structure of human person as a subject. It suggests that dignity is the fundamental value inherent and intrinsic to every human person,

⁸ R. Horn., A. Kerasidou. *The Concept of Dignity and its Use in End-of-Life Debates in England and France*. In "Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics." 2016. Vol. 25. Pp. 404-413.

gifted with spirit, will and intellect, and these are the essential defining features of human being. It therefore demands from every human being respect and recognition of the humanity of each individual irrespective of their religious affiliation, ethnicity, health, racial and sexual status.

The article features these two bases of human dignity: consequentialist and essentialist, with emphasis on Kantian consequentialist (deontological) and essentialist arguments of The Philosopher Pope, Karol Wojtyła as John Paul II.⁹ The former bases his arguments on the understanding of human being as capacity for categorical imperative,¹⁰ which belongs principally to human being with the capacity for practical rationality or a priori pure reason. Whereas the latter understands human dignity as an essential quality and value that is inherent in every human person and human life, created in the image of God and redeemed by Christ. This essentialist position will be contrasted with the consequentialist-based understanding, together with some implications of consequentialist argument, as the conclusion of this article.

Historical Development of the Meaning of Human Dignity

The meaning of the concept dignity from its Latin root '*dignitas*-worthiness' refers to every being and things, human beings, animals, material things, like the 'Pieta of Michelangelo' is said to have worth (dignity). However, the scholarly understanding of dignity strictly speaking relates to human being, not as an intrinsic quality, for social classification and status symbol. Slaves in the ancient Greek polis for instance were not treated with dignity, it was rather ascribed to men with honour,

⁹ Theological argumentation of Pope John Paul II has its base on his philosophical foundation, metaphysics and phenomenology. Thus, his whole theological discussion about human person as a subject bears philosophical character, with the understanding of philosophy as the handmaid of theology.

¹⁰ I. Kant. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Indianapolis : Hackett Publishing Company Inc. 1993. IV: 420-421, 428-429

recognition, and respect for all virtue (skill, bravery, perfection) expressed in an ideal manner. This pertained to four models: aristocrat-warrior, the citizen, the sage, and the magnanimous man.¹¹ Consequently, Homer claims that Theogenes and Pindar, the representatives of the aristocracy (αριστοί [aristoi]) are the best, and to them belong dignity.¹² Dignity was also ascribed and measured by man's perfection, either as heroes or beauty in the perfection achieved in one's deed, and for an outstanding merited position in different areas of human activities. It was later based on ethos, that is, the rights one has by participating in politics, and one who wield power, and the art of teaching (παιδεία[paideia]),¹³ thus, the philosopher-teacher has dignity for his love of knowledge. This understanding of the base of dignity denotes consequentialist approach, since dignity is not an intrinsic value of every human being, but a value for a specific class of individuals.

Socrates attributes dignity to the divine origin of human being, stating that goodness and happiness of man are found in the soul, therein is found dignity of man. However, given the weak nature of human soul, he then concludes that human dignity can only be realised through improvement of the goodness of the human soul.¹⁴ The human soul (spirit), Plato argues, since it is the highest unity of human beings, an intermediate between the divine and the mortal, the beginning and participation of human in divinity, this quality defines humans as being with dignity. Among the beings of nature, it is only human beings whose soul have rational quality and this constitutes their dignity. Besides these features, they are the only natural being who can stand erect

¹¹ P. Jaroszyński. "Dignity (*dignitas hominis*)."
Unpublished lecture on History of Philosophy. pp., 1-15.at p.5

¹² Jaroszyński. *Dignity (dignitas hominis)*. p.5

¹³ Ibidem. p.5

¹⁴ A. N. Woznicki. *The Dignity of Man as a Person: Essays on the Christian Humanism of His Holiness Pope John Paul II*. San Francisco: Society of Christ. 1987. p. 115

(*homo erectus*). The Stoic Seneca also believes that dignity has to do with virtue, self-regulation, or the conferral of respect for an honourable social status.¹⁵ Cicero in his claims argues that dignity (dignitas) of man is social and politically based. That it is ascribed to the man due to his rank, position or reputation in the society of the Roman '*res publica*.'¹⁶ In this sense and the ancient Greek polis, dignity was ascribed specifically to men as already specified.

Besides these distinguishing qualities like rational soul, free will and sense of responsibility that define human dignity, it is also a quality that belongs to human beings who have self-reflection, memory and language. Perhaps for this reason, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's argues that dignity of man lies in the human power for self-transformation, that is, in their capacity to determine their future. Thus, he affirms: "we have made a creature, neither of heaven nor 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."¹⁷ This sense shows an element of free choice of human beings to shape their future, decide their actions and that there will is not subjected to another.

The concept of dignity became a breathtakingly and popular discussion following from the aftermath of World War II. What had been social, political and ethical discussion emerges as an international rights movement and a world shaping discussion that constitutes major part of moral principle. It aimed at protecting humanity from the totalitarian regimen that violated humanity in their definition, stratification, treatment and

¹⁵ R. C. Dales. *A Medieval View of Human Dignity*. "Journal of the History of Ideas." 1977. Vol. 38. Num. 4. Pp. 557-572.

¹⁶ M. T. Cicerones. *De Officiis*. Edited by Winterbottom, M. New York: Oxford University Press. 1994. p.39

¹⁷ G. P. Mirandella. *De Dominis Dignitate Oratio*. Translated as Oration of the Dignity of Man by Robert Caponigri. Chicago-USA: Gateway Press. 1956. p.7

annihilation of human being according to ‘race’ by the Nazi, and ‘class’ by the communist. Consequently, the concept of human dignity becomes the basis of all rights in the declaration of the international constitution, as a fundamental value of human person. The UN-Charter of 1945, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and UN human right convention of 1966 advocates for freedom, justice, peace, equality and solidarity of all human beings. Dignity belongs to every member of the human family as an equal and inalienable right, because they are human, with reason and conscience, and are born equally free in dignity and right.¹⁸ It acknowledges that these rights are derived from the inherent dignity of the human person, and so, calls for the recognition and respect of this phenomenon as the found principles of action.

Consequentialist Basis of Human Dignity

The consequentialist argument for human dignity stems from John Locke’s¹⁹ definition of human being, and man’s capacity to live out such characteristic features like rationality, consciousness and autonomy (in Kant’s thought. Autonomy according to Kant is the capacity of a rational being to legislate universal laws and be a member in the kingdom of ends²⁰). These distinguishing features of human being from other natural constitute what it means to be human in some sense and qualify humans with such characteristic with dignity. This aligns with the definition and sense of human proposed by Joseph Fletcher stated above, that reduces humanhood to such capacities like ‘self-

¹⁸ Article 1: United Nations. Universal Declaration of Human Rights. 1948. <http://www.un.org/en/documents>

¹⁹ A person is “a thinking intelligent being that has reason and reflection and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places, which it does only by that consciousness, which is inseparable from thinking, and it seems to be essential to it.” See D. Kaufman. *Locke’s Theory of Identity*. In Companion to Locke. Edited by Matthew Stuart. UK: Wiley Blackwell. 2015. p.243

²⁰ Kant. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. IV: 436

awareness, self-control, a sense of the future, a sense of the past, the capacity to relate to others, concern for others, communication, and curiosity.’ This understanding fails to recognise the humanness of such members of the species *Homo sapiens* and humanness of human beings who have human nature (spirit, free will, intellect) like: embryo, mentally/intellectually disabled child, even newborn babies, terminally sick patients, modern day slavery, and so, would not ascribe dignity to them.

Inasmuch dignity is understood as an inherent quality of human being, the consequentialist believes that it is consequent to human being’s capacity to engage in cognitive activities; such capacity differentiates them from other beings of nature especially animals, even among the closest biological relation to human- the chimpanzees. As George Kateb puts it, these capacities and potentialities are indefinitely large, and can never be fully measured. Thus, only the human species is, in the most important existential respects, a break with nature and significantly not natural.²¹ Furthermore, Lockean definition supported by Fletcher affirms dignity is a quality of a self-conscious being, who is aware of itself as a distinct entity, with a past and a future. This being can engage in some functions, have rationality and self-consciousness/awareness of their activities. Comparably, to take the lives of human being with such capacities and faculties without their consent, is to thwart their desires for the future. Killing a snail or a day-old infant does not thwart any desires of this kind, because they are not capable of such desires.²² This approach is further supported by the biologist conception of dignity which claims that only sane adult human beings deserve the most complete dignity, since they possess the necessary capacities that qualify their dignity and right. Implicitly, infants,

²¹ G. Kateb. *Human Dignity*. Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. 2011. p.17

²² Singer. *Practical Ethics*. p. 90

embryo, sick old adults and mentally disabled human beings lack some of these capacities and that is why they should not be granted the corresponding rights and dignity.

Immanuel Kant moral theory of dignity is thought to have greatly influenced the development of modern and contemporary scholarly debates on human dignity, that also grounds human right to human dignity. Dignity of humanity (*Menschenwürde*) according to Kant “consists in the supreme worth that all human beings possess in virtue of their humanity, i.e., in virtue of their rational nature, as beings capable of rational thinking, autonomous choices, legislate universal laws and moral actions,”²³ Dignity of rational being is an intrinsic worth that cannot be compared with anything of priced worth or replaced by something else of its equivalent. Since it inheres in rational nature, it follows then that dignity is a fundamental and inalienable quality of human being.

However, Kant categorised autonomy as the characteristic feature of rational nature/being that possesses this value. “Autonomy” he said “is the ground of the dignity of human nature and of every rational nature.”²⁴ Autonomy from its Greek root means ‘self-legislation,’ that is, *αυτός*, meaning self, and ‘νόμος’ law. Autonomous person is one who has the capacity to govern oneself according to the maxim/principle of moral law as prescribed by the practical reason or a priori pure reason. For Kant, autonomy or freedom is “a particular kind of causality that is both non-natural and real.”²⁵ It is the capacity to legislate for oneself and for others and be governed not by natural law, but necessarily by a categorical imperative, which commands nothing more or less than this very autonomy.²⁶ Hence, dignity of rational nature/being consists in the capacity to act rationally, set end as an

²³ Kant. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. IV: 440

²⁴ Kant. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. IV: 436

²⁵ Ibidem. IV: 460

²⁶ Ibidem. IV: 440

autonomous being, and make moral laws for himself and for others. This capacity describes the internal value of human being and ranks them higher than other things and beings of nature whose worth have merely external value. So, dignity belongs to rational being who is capable of willing the principles of moral laws, and is subject to those principles. Such moral person he maintains, should be regarded and treated as an end in itself, not as a means to any end. Thus, he puts it succinctly in the second categorical imperative: “act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end and never simply as a means.”²⁷

For Kant, man’s existence has in itself an absolute worth,²⁸ and cannot be used for any arbitrary means. It is this absolute inner worth, this dignity possessed by rational human being that compels each individual to demand respect from all other rational beings. He further argues that, that which serves the will as the objective ground of its self-determination is an end, and this end is assigned by reason alone (and not by subjective desire). This end must be an end in itself, possessing absolute value (dignity) and ground for making moral laws as well as for categorical imperative; that end, Kant affirms, is man and indeed any rational being.²⁹ Hence, the capacity to set end and be end belongs to rational beings, and only to such rational being belongs dignity.

That human being is a rational being is not enough to be an end. For a being is not an end in itself simply because it is rational and capable of setting ends; if rational beings can be end in themselves, it is not only because they have reason, but because they have freedom. It is only when a rational being is free, can he/she be a law for herself/himself, and so, an end in itself possessing

²⁷ Ibidem. IV: 429

²⁸ Ibidem. IV: 427

²⁹ F. Copleston. *History of Philosophy, vol.6.* Voltaire-Kant. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc. 2003. p. 327

value (dignity). For this value defines the innerness of the human being on the basis of which the person wills his/her own acts. Therefore, dignity follows from this inner worth and as autonomous beings since they are ends in themselves.³⁰ Since this end is infinite, the person is therefore said to be the final cause of action, because the person sets end for their action and there is no other end besides the person. Since the person is the beginning and end of their actions, they are considered to possess dignity. Kantian categorisation of autonomy as the bases of human dignity, tends to align with the understanding of self-consciousness/awareness as the determining factor of human being or rational being. For we grasp from Kant's suppositions that, the capacity to legislate, set ends and be member of kingdom of ends defines the dignity of rational being.

Furthermore, Kant ascribes dignity *ursprüngliche Würde*³¹ to humans who are capable of living morally, as required by law and duty. Since morality is duty-based, man who has the capacity to live morally is said to have dignity. In this sense, the law commands everyone to treat in a dignified manner and with respect every human being who is morally capable. In his words, "morality is said to have elevated worth because of its independence from inclinations...morality is the condition under which alone a rational being can be an end in itself...he should be a legislating member in the kingdom of ends. Thus, morality and humanity who is capable of it, is that which alone has dignity."³² It is the sense of duty that has significance and real legislative authority, expressed in categorical imperative that identifies the dignity of the rational being. He categorically affirms that "the

³⁰ L. Zagzebski. *The Dignity of Persons and the Value Uniqueness*. In "American Philosophical Association." 2016. Vol. 90. Pp. 55-70

³¹ I. Kant. (1996). *Metaphysics of Moral*. Edited by M. Gregor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1996. 06: 436

³² Kant. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. IV: 435

sublimity and inner worth (dignity) of the command are so much the more evident in a duty.”³³ Besides the conception of dignity as a consequence of the capacity for these such qualities like autonomy

Essentialist Basis of Human Dignity

The essentialist, approaches dignity based on the essential feature that universally belongs to every human being. This ontic structure that constitutes the essence of real human being, is innate and intrinsic in every human person and human life. Because all humans are equally human, there is no single person whose dignity is superior or inferior to any other, and our humanness is unrepeatable, permanent and irrevocable. This understanding squares with the classical Thomistic acknowledgement that human human being possesses an exceptional, metaphysical and moral dignity, *gravitas*, and this characteristic has a bearing on understanding all human relationships as personal and on creating truly human, personal communities.³⁴ Given this strict ontic structure of human dignity, it demands therefore from all human beings as obligation, to respect and treat equally and with fairness the dignity of each person in all circumstances.³⁵ This approach to dignity recognizes the value of each human person and human life. Dietrich von Hildebrand affirms that this special value of human life, is something closely associated with the ontological structure of being.³⁶ Founded on the ontic structure of the human person, this approach affirms that human life begins from conception till the

³³ *Ibidem*. IV: 425

³⁴ T. Duma. *Great Ideas: Causes of Human Transcendence or Enslavement?* In “The Great Ideas of Religion and Freedom.” Edited by P. A. Redpath, I. Chłodna-Błach, A. Mamcarz-Plisiecki. Netherlands: Brill. 2021. p. 150 See also, Aquinas. *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 12

³⁵ Y. M. Barilan. *Human Dignity, Human Rights, and Responsibility*. London: The MIT 2012. Press. p.93

³⁶ D. Hildebrand. *Christian Ethics*. New York: McKay. 1952. p. 137

final end at natural death, and considers all lives as sacred and dignifying.

The foundational ontic approach aligns with the theological argument, which states that human being was created in the image of God (*imago Dei*). Through this Divine act, human being participates in the Divine Good and always seek good as the end of their actions, good that gears towards transcendence and perfection. Dignity therefore inherently belongs to this being who participates in the Divine Goodness and whose acts gear towards good that makes them realise transcendence and perfection.

Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II upholds this essentialist foundational base argument, which gives us broad insight about the essence and reality of who the person is, and so affirms that human being created in the image of God shares in the divine capacity through their intellect and free will. For the Divine mandate: “be fruitful and multiply, conquer the earth and subdue it,”³⁷ was addressed only to human being. Since they are endowed with reason and free will which defines their personal responsibility, they are therefore thought of as embodied spirits whose thinking, acting, and expressing depend on the body, which is integral to their human nature. For in the human person, body and soul are inseparable, in the person, the willing agent and the deliberate act, stand or fall together³⁸ Thus, the person becomes conscious of the fact that, their actions traverse their body as they choose between good and evil, and by choosing good, they remain true to their nature. Hence, the person is both a spiritual being created in the image of God, and a natural being which defines them as a moral subject. In their choices, the person either acts in accordance with the truth, goodness and beauty that express their objective moral norm or act against it. But, by acting in

³⁷ Genesis. 1: 28

³⁸ K. Wojtyła. *Acting Person*. Translated by Andrzej, J. Potocki. Holland: D. Reidel Publishing Company. 1979

accordance with the moral norm, they not only live out their spiritual and material nature, they transform their nature. For constant configuration of our being with nature leads human being to the threshold of understanding the person and the dignity of the person.³⁹ Thus, Wojtyła identifies dignity as transcendent to human person who, as the visible image of the invisible God, are therefore by their very nature the subject of rights which no individual, group, class, nation or state may violate. More still, he affirms that not even the majority of a social body may violate these rights, by going against the minority, by isolating, oppressing it or by attempting to annihilate it.⁴⁰ Hence, he regards acts that violate human life and human person like: abortion, euthanasia, and capital punishment as violation of human dignity, describing these anti-life acts as ‘modern-day’ manifestations of ‘culture of death,’ which are against the sacredness of human life. For a true culture he argues is the ‘culture of life,’ which humanizes the person, while the culture of death violates human dignity and dehumanizes the person.⁴¹

Seeking the bases of human dignity beyond the theological argument, Wojtyła resorts to the essential constituents of the human person which derives from within, which are the power of intellect and free will.⁴² In his phenomenological analysis of the human subject- in their somatic, emotional, intellectual and moral dimensions-, Wojtyła understands dignity as a quality that is universal to the one human nature which supercedes the boundaries of history and culture. It is a natural right that is inherent and inalienable to every human person and

³⁹ Wojtyła. *On the Dignity of the Human Person*. p. 178

⁴⁰ John Paul II. *Centessimus Annus*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa. 1989. No.44

⁴¹ John Paul II. Speech before Men of Culture, Rio de Janeiro. 1980. The original in Portuguese reads: “A verdadeira cultura é humanização, enquanto que a não-cultura e as falsas culturas são deshumanizantes.” See also, John Paul II, Inaugural Speech at the IV General Conference of Latin American Bishops, 12 October 1992.

⁴² Wojtyła. *Acting Person*. p.134

human life. He acknowledges in the human person one universal human nature with same moral norm which cannot be polarized. Through the power of the intellect, human being freely lives the transcendent moral norm by truly and freely seeking the objective moral order. This distinctive potential remains universal to all human being, and on this is found human dignity, and the structure of human rights, hence, the subjective and objective bases of human dignity. While the latter indicates that human person uses their intellect and will to constitute themselves, the former suggests that via the universality of human nature, every individual person has the potential for intelligent and free act since they are naturally rational beings with conscience.

Along these essential features of human person, is the concept of freedom as a constituent of human dignity. In this quality we grasp the value of individual's conscience and objective moral order. Freedom as rooted in the truth determines the transition in human action from 'knowing' to 'willing',⁴³ for the will chooses based on the truth about the objective good. It is the truth of the objective good that moves the person to act in freedom. This act of dependence and autonomous surrender to the truth⁴⁴ (with truth understood as the foundation of human apperception), belongs specifically to human being, and it is on this basis that human person is ascribed dignity. Hence, Karol Wojtyła as John Paul II writes, "freedom negates and destroys itself, and becomes a factor leading to the destruction of others, when it no longer recognizes and respects its essential link with the truth."⁴⁵ In the experience of act, the sense of truth lived in freedom manifests when the person seeks not their individual good but the objective good or good of the community.

⁴³ Wojtyła. *Acting Person* p. 143

⁴⁴ Ibidem. p. 156

⁴⁵ John Paul II. *Evangelium Vitae*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa. 1995. No. 19

He further argues for the need to use right reason in the approach to freedom, so that one chooses the objective basic goods, rather than subjective values and preferences. Although the nature of moral norm prescribes some constraints on human action and freedom, it does not negate freedom. For the true meaning of freedom implies that right reason identifies the objective basic good and pursues it through the power of free will. True freedom therefore, entails not only 'freedom from,' or 'freedom against,' but also 'freedom for,'⁴⁶ such understanding helps to remove any totalitarian and arbitrary imposition of subjective value preferences. Hence, human dignity consists in this true, positive and proper understanding of freedom, with truth as the basis of human understanding in the process of realizing the objective good and human auto-transcendence. The concept of freedom manifests a deep sense of responsibility that is specific to human person.

Another account of human dignity advanced by Wojtyła is a personalistic norm, which is prior to the material value. He articulates that personalistic norm transcends the value of human nature (physico-psychological, emotive-rational nature). For in this, the spiritual worth of human person is experienced as the person manifests himself in his actions. Personalistic value centres therefore, on the person as a subject of action and a fundamental manifestation of the person's worth; since the value of the person is prior to the value of his actions, which manifests the person.⁴⁷ On the basis of this, we understand that human person is an irreplaceable being and as well expresses them as precious creature, indispensable and irrepeatable.

For instance, in the personalistic value of love, man fulfils himself in action and completes the work of creation through his

⁴⁶ Wojtyła. *Acting Person*. Pp. 174-175

⁴⁷ D. Savage. "The Centrality of Lived Experience in Wojtyła's Account of the Person." In *Roczniki Filozoficzne*. Vol. 61. Num. 4. Pp.19-51.

action of constant loving. Love seen as the basis of man's dignity establishes in man, preservation of proper balance between him and nature, so that man becomes in charge of other creatures and things. A good example is the contemporary technology which posits a great danger to man and the natural environment. It is through the personalistic value of love that human being is treated as a subject and are not objectified or commodified. Thus, the personalistic value of love opposes the utilitarian or maximalist principle that understands the person as means to an end,⁴⁸ instead of an end. Love as natural to man and oppose to mere use is a strong base of human dignity.

Conclusion

The truth of human person remains at the centre of every scholarly discussion about the concept of human dignity as the foundation of human rights. This does not reflect in the arguments of the consequentialist concerning human dignity. Instead, it is observable in their approach the understanding of human being on the bases of *homo faber* and *homo sapiens*, that suggest functionality. This approach exposes human being to manipulation and fails to account for the integral realistic dimensions of human experiences. For in the essence of experience, we grasp the human person always as somebody and never as something. When the dignity of the person is understood as 'merely something,' then, that value of the person who is always somebody is lost together with the fundamental basic good of the person. This good can only be recognized through the use of right reason, which demands, as an obligation respect for each individual human life in all stages and circumstances of life. Thus, dignity as an essential quality of the person is based not as a consequence of

⁴⁸ K. Wojtyła. *Love and Responsibility*. Translated by Gregorz Ignatik. Boston: Pauline Book and Media. 2013. p. 7

functionality of the distinctive features, but as an inalienable character which is universal to every human being.

Basing the phenomenon of dignity on the capacity of lived experience of freedom, rationality, legislator of moral law and a member of the kingdom of ends excludes such members of *Homo sapiens* like: embryo, infants, weak, sick adults, mentally disable, adults with dementia, criminals in prison, as fully human. Every embryo-fetus is a potential child and a potential adult politician, scientist, priest, medical doctor, nurse etc. Thus, this approach fails to recognise the humanness of such categories of persons, on the bases of non-functionality of their cognitive capacity. If dignity is said to be an inherent and inalienable natural right of every human being, isolating such category suggests a lack of proper understanding of the essential existential character, and “extra-empirical and axiological reality”⁴⁹ of human person. In these definitions of human person, we understand the essence and sanctity of human life qua human life, which cannot be substituted for anything. Again, such conception of dignity like: ‘dignity of personality’ according to Adam Rodzinski, or attributed dignity according to Daniel Salmasy,⁵⁰ suggests that dignity can be lost or denied to the person by society in the event of amoral acts or loss of position of honour in the society. The practice of slavery, the undignified treatment of vicious people and criminal, and others who lost their rank in society attest to this. These expose human person and human life to the ‘culture of death’ and other anti-life activities, and distort the subjectivity of human person.

Understanding the concept of dignity as a consequence of some features of human being, gives credence to the understanding that human being is solely ‘*Homo faber*’ and

⁴⁹ G. Holub. *Human Dignity: Between the Existentialist and the Essentialist Approach*. In “Filosofija Sociologija.” 2019. Vol. 30. Num. 3. Pp. 206-214

⁵⁰ J. J. Coughlin. *Pope John Paul II and the Dignity of Human Being*. “Harvard Journal Law & Public Policy.” 2003-2004. Vol. 27. Num. 65. pp. 65-80

'*Homo sapiens*.' Such definitions have the undertone of 'use,' which by extension materializes and instrumentalizes the human being. Limiting human dignity to functionality of these features reduces human being to subjective preference and means to some desired end. Nevertheless, we must recognize that these features evolve and mature as humans grow and develop, like in the situation of infants, phenomenal changes in adults and the elderly, as well as persons with dementia. Such situations do not diminish the life in these people. For in them, we recognize full humanity and life that must be respected, protected and treated with dignity. Based on the consequentialist approach, Helga Kuhse argues that attributing dignity to these human capacities implies that not every human life or person has dignity, rather only rationality, the capacity for self-awareness, and moral agent or purposeful act have dignity.⁵¹ It implies that dignity as an inherent moral value of human persons loses its worth; and such essential qualities like incommunicability and irreplaceability of human being become baseless since these qualities can be exercised by any other person. We understand that at death, a person cannot be replaced, since the personhood of that person constitutes one subjective conscious person. And so, dignity belongs to the core of the human being endowed with spirit, free will and intellect, possessed by every human being, and these merit every individual human being with the concept 'person,' a character that is intrinsic and inalienable to every human person.

Thus, the dignity of any human being at every stage of human life remains inviolable and must be treated with utmost respect. We can say that all these acts that degrade human person: slavery, euthanasia, stem cell manipulation, abortion, terrorism and unprovoked killings are effects of the consequentialist-based approach to dignity. This article advocates for essentialist

⁵¹ H. Kuhse. *The Sanctity-of-Life Doctrine in Medicine: A Critique*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1987. p. 212

approach to human dignity giving that dignity is a fundamental aspect of human existence and core of our humanity. I propose that those involved in these acts of violation should ask themselves: ‘what if I am the one at the receiving end of these acts?’ While they reflect on this, we are all obliged to preserve this essential quality of human being, else we be in position of conflict with the purpose of human existence.

Essentialist Vs. Consequentialist-Based Concept of Human Dignity

Summary

The ontological and epistemological presuppositions of scholars about the concept of human dignity is fundamentally based on the argument that human being possesses an objective and inherent value that is inalienable. The understanding demands as right from every human being respect to oneself, others, to human life and freedom in general. However, there have been instances of violation of this right in such acts like abortion, euthanasia, rape, terrorism, medical experiments on humans and modern forms of slavery. These acts violate the truth, goodness and beauty of acts that defines human person, so, calls for proper understanding of the bases of human dignity in the contemporary time. Some scholars ascribe this intrinsic quality of human nature only to human being who have objective moral value. This approach defines as humans those who have the capacity for such features like rationality, freedom and self-awareness. That is, the ability to live out these features, thus dignity as a consequence of these features. Some thinkers however understand dignity, as innate to every human being, given the ontic structure of human being. That is, on the essential features of human being which is universal to all human being in all stages of human life, hence, the

essentialist base of human dignity. This article will consider these two positions and conclude with the contemporary challenges of the consequentialist debate.

Keywords: Human dignity, human person, rationality, freedom, personalistic norm

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