

Our Catholic brothers and sisters (who are also our patients) have a right to practice their religion within the context of their Catholic beliefs. They also have a right to receive medical care which is completely consistent with their Catholic moral and ethical principles. In that regard, the very foundation of the *culture of life* has, at least as one of its pedestals, the physician who practices at the beginnings of life within the full context of a Catholic anthropology.

My testimony today is only to alert you to the *utter need* for programmatic and organized development in these areas. It is now being done on a small scale. It needs to be developed on a *much wider scale* and, while responding to the Catholic population, will eventually also meet the needs of many people who are not Catholic and we will give a sense of credibility back to the Church as a whole. In other words, *we must act out our theology, our philosophy and our anthropology* in a way which Christ commanded us to reach out to others as He has reached out to us. We must take the more abstract notions of philosophy, ethics and theology and make them *concrete and applicable to everyday life*. As we work to respond to the call of Christ, we must develop new approaches that will be as effective, if not more so, while being fully consistent with the teachings of the Church. We will have difficulty developing a culture of life when the physicians who work at the origins of life are so much a part of the culture of death. This is a very real and practical problem. It is one that needs to be corrected. The physicians must be converted to be a part of the civilization of love. But this cannot be accomplished without research and education so that the very tools of the physician are themselves a reflection of the civilization of love. If we are serious about developing a culture of life through the development of a civilization of love this must be one of our commands; this must be one of our responses.

## Towards a definition of human dignity

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The expression *human dignity* consists of the predicate *human*, qualifying the noun *dignity*. The adjective *human* is used to qualify the kind of dignity in question, in the same way as when it is used to qualify the kind of being in question, when we are talking about a human being. Human is related to the Latin for earth, *humus*, making human mean what is "earthly" – as an adjective, or "earthling" – as a substantive. In fact it means what is proper to rational animals, in particular referring to their kindness and their fallibility.

*Dignity* comes from the Latin adjective *decus*, meaning "appropriate", "fitting", or "being decorated with". It is a substantive. *Decet* is the verbal form, which has survived in English language in the adjective *decent*. Dignity means the standing of one entitled to respect, axiomatic status, and it refers to that which in a being induces or ought to induce respect, axiomatic value.

When *human* and *dignity* are used in conjunction, they form the expression *human dignity*, which means the axiomatic status of human beings entitling them to respect. It refers to their axiomatic value.

Value is disclosed to us in feeling: the higher the value, the deeper the feeling. The value of a loved person affects us at the deepest possible level, so much so that it is felt as constitutive for our selves. The respect we have for those we in love allow to constitute us, is the mold in which our respect for humanity is formed. The value we perceive in our loved ones reflects the value to be set on humanity.

Human dignity is experienced in its purity when we realize, that what we have felt in the friend to be constitutive of our selves, is present in others as well. This is likely to happen when other values (usefulness, agreeableness, beauty) are simply absent (in the miserable), or are seen in their relativity to the person (in friendship). Experience of human dignity in its purity is common in connection with extreme weakness, injustice or moral bravery, and it is, when I am able to accept it, uplifting, because it reaches my own depths and reflects my own axiomatic value. It can, however, also be rejected, when I cannot accept that my own axiomatic dignity does not reside in my strength, beauty or justice. Then the meeting with the miserable disturbs my own self-

image, even if he or she does not require my help. Generally we are enabled to overcome the resistance to recognizing human dignity through the experience of love and friendship. Here we learn to feel at home with axiomatic value, to let depth call upon depth, and to understand that dignity perfectly reflects who we are. We recognize our own axiomatic value in the attitude of kindness displayed by the other self. And we recognize the value of his or her individuality, as we come to understand how deeply it is constitutive of our own. The idea of human dignity is the conceptualization of this experience, and the principle of human dignity is the affirmation of its universal meaning and implications for all human beings.

When formulated, the principle affirms the axiomatic value of human beings as such. It enjoys general acceptance as a basic ethical and legal principle, because it draws upon the intimate and universal experience of friendship and love. This is also the reason why its implications are understood, even with some variations, throughout the differing cultures of the Globe.

#### THE APPROACH

The principle of human dignity, as a universal affirmation that human beings have axiomatic value, does not have a history, because a universal statement is meant to have limits neither in space nor in time. But the idea of human dignity has been accounted for in various ways.

The expression "human dignity" seems to emerge rather slowly from a context where the term "dignity" is used to appreciate the importance of human individuals. It probably becomes part of current usage at the same time and for the same reasons as the expression "human person". The *Declaration of Human Rights* from 1948 testifies to the currency of both terms, but a systematic usage of the term "human dignity", however surprising this may seem, was not the object of philosophic investigation before then.<sup>1</sup> But then, within the Human Rights tradition flowing from this document, the term of human dignity is constantly used to express the basic intuition from which human rights proceed. It is from now on meant as the basic principle upon which human rights rest. It is said to be inherent in all and every person and also to be inalienable.

<sup>1</sup> It was, however, a predominant theme in the papal encyclicals from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards.

There are, roughly speaking, four stages of development of the idea of human dignity leading up to this late flowering. These four stages presuppose one another, as one historical period presupposes the previous, but each is expressed within a time-typical framework, which also exemplifies a logical plausibility. Cicero represents Antiquity's cosmo-centric framework, which explains human dignity on the basis of nature. Thomas Aquinas represents the Middle Ages' theo-centric framework, which explains human dignity in relation to God. Immanuel Kant represents the logo-centric framework of modernity explaining human dignity as a tribute to reason. Mary Wollstonecraft, finally, represents the polis-centric framework of post-modernity, which explains human dignity in relation to social acceptability. Each of these ways of accounting for human dignity can also be understood as a source of the idea as it appears in the *Declaration of Human Rights*.

A change in framework is induced by the introduction and development of new technology, leading to changes in traditional patterns of social organization. This in turn provokes a new understanding of social status and its requirements (the virtues), and finally changes the way things are accounted for. A framework is a world-view so widely shared or publicised, that it is not questioned effectively in its presuppositions during the period. It is an empirico-systematic structure, consisting in a series of presuppositions (or conventions) which defines a way of living, with its – sometimes considerable – practical and theoretical problems.<sup>2</sup>

#### THE COSMO-CENTRIC ACCOUNT

The term *dignity* is of course Latin in its origin. *Dignitas* was the standing of the one who commanded respect in the Republic as well as in the Empire, whether because of political, military or administrative achievements. The Greeks had perhaps another term for a like reality: *axia*, meaning the worth whereby someone counts for more or less. This term is at the root of our *axiom*, because it denotes a claim to have other claims follow from it, and also

<sup>2</sup> The idea of a time-typical framework is inspired by the 'moral frameworks' developed by Charles Taylor in his *Sources of the Self*. The presuppositions or conventions of the framework can be classified as ethical, political and metaphysical. Ethical conventions involve virtue, status, rights and duty; political conventions involve the nature of law and society; and metaphysical conventions concern the place and destiny of the human being in relation to nature and the divine. This classification lies beneath the developments in 6.

of the discipline of *axiology*, the theory of value. Aristotle in fact defines *axia* in the *Nicomachean Ethics* as "a term of relation. It denotes having a claim to goods external to oneself" (1123 a 18). *Axia* in turn depends both on character and evaluation by society and is therefore tending towards equalization within the relationship of friendship, as it both educates character and appreciates the equal worth of the other. But Aristotle does not seem to entertain the idea that human beings, because they are human, all possess *axia*. Indeed, *axia* is precisely what distinguishes them, they are not equal or entitled to the same status, and justice consists in distributing according to their different *axia*.

Cicero, on the other hand, and probably due to the influence stoicism had had on him, refers to the idea of a *dignitas humana*, if only once (*De Officiis*, 6,106). This special status is due to the superior mind of humans, which obliges them to stay superior to the beasts. "From this we see that sensual pleasure is quite unworthy of human dignity, and that we ought to despise it and cast it from us; but if someone should be found who sets some value upon sensual gratification, he must keep strictly within the limits of moderate indulgence".

To Cicero dignity is, as it was for any Roman, a very important concept. It is defined as what merits respect (*De Inventione*, II, 166), whether mediated by an office or by the sheer excellence of virtue. In turn it defines justice (as *axia* did for Aristotle): "Justice is the habit of mind which gives to everyone according to desert (*dignitas*) while preserving the common advantage" (*De Inventione*, 159). So, the fact that humans have dignity not only obliges them to stay superior to the beasts, but it also entitles them to rule the world. This is so because there is nothing more divine than reason, in fact human beings share with the gods this marvelous power. Gods and humans also share justice and law as a consequence (*De Legibus*, I, VIII, 22) and thus live and share in the same commonwealth which is the Universe.

However, whereas humans in some way – namely in relation to the brutes and to the gods – are equal, they are not equal in all respects. There exist inequalities in nature, which makes some more deserving than others. This is why a democracy without distinctions in rank would be inequitable (*De Republica*, I, XXVII, 43) and would not last. Like Aristotle before him, Cicero was in favour of an aristocracy built on merit, this merit preferably being acquired by action in conformity with what is fitting (*decus*). Thus dignity should be obtained and respected by justice. Natural law, right reason or the law respected by gods and humans alike, would admit of this form of aris-

toocracy, which Cicero considers as natural. The universe of the ancients was hierarchically ordered.

Cicero thus was, despite his stoicism, not quite an egalitarian. The kind of society he lived in was of course also far from being so, it admitted of slavery and afforded no political participation to women. The human dignity referred to by Cicero implied equality before the gods and the brutes, obliging humans to self-respect and proper behavior, and it ought to be the basis for the laws of the Republic, as Cicero saw it.

In the cosmo-centric framework, dignity refers to the prerogative of governing, i.e. to the status of the one who is in command, either of himself, of his household or of some office within the State. The corresponding virtue in women is beauty, and thus Cicero seems, in accordance with the cosmo-centric framework, not to have made up his mind as to the human dignity of women (*De Officiis*, I, 106). The case of slaves is not even argued. Whether therefore human dignity to Cicero was universally inherent and inalienable in the individual, and whether it entailed the right to political status is not clear. It is possible that his understanding would not differ much in intension from the one current in the Human Rights tradition, but that it, considering this tradition's emphasis on eradication of racism and sexism, would differ in extension. This highlights a peculiar feature of the idea of human dignity, namely that its intension seems only vaguely to determine its extension. This would seem to imply that the intension also is vague. It is probable, however, that the apparent vagueness stems primarily from economic interest: it is not always profitable to recognize human dignity in every human being. Indeed the subjection of some can be the foundation of an entire economic system.

#### THE THEO-CENTRIC ACCOUNT

Throughout the Middle Ages, the expression *dignitas humana* is not in common usage. But another related turn of phrase: *conditio dignitatis humanae*, meaning the dignity of the human condition (or creation) may have had some limited currency. It inspires the title of a book attributed to Ambrose, which is, however, more likely to have been written by Alcuin: *De condicione dignitatis humanae*. This book uses *dignitas* interchangeably with *person*, and may be the source of the anonymous scholastic Master, to whom both Thomas Aquinas and Albert the Great refer, and who defines person as a subject distinguished by dignity.

This understanding of personal dignity, or the understanding that the person is a *dignity*, is related to the use of the term *dignitas* in medieval logic. Thomas, like other Scholastics before and after him, used *dignitas* as a translation of the Greek *axioma* (axiom). A fundamental or self-evident principle, upon which the sciences (mathematics, ethics) rely, would therefore be termed "a dignity". The term "principle" in modern day English has in fact similar connotations as something (or someone) of basic importance.

Thomas defines person-hood as Boethius did (*persona est substantia individualis rationalis naturae*), but also, with the anonymous Master, as *hypostasis propriae distinctae ad dignitatem pertinentem*. Whether this should be translated as "a subject distinguished by dignity", or by "a subject distinguished by a property pertaining to dignity", is immaterial for our enquiry, but it remains that dignity is the predicate which determines the subject. Thomas argues that if dignity would be abstracted from the *hypostasis*, the person would be abstracted with it. Dignity, thus, like person-hood, defines the subject in its individuality, while its rational nature determines its universal "whariness" (S.T., I, II, 29,3). Dignity, in other words, is essential to the person.

Like Cicero, Thomas Aquinas uses the phrase *dignitas humana* very rarely; in the *Summa Theologiae* only once (II, II, 64,2). Here he argues that human beings can lose their human dignity if they deviate from the rational order by sinning, and that it is not necessarily bad to kill such sinners, even if killing an innocent in possession of natural dignity is an evil. The possession of human dignity must therefore to some extent depend on remaining free and rational, or "existing for oneself" (resp. obj. 2). Rationality may be a natural endowment, but it is not inert; it is demanding and must be adhered to. Acting against one's rational nature is degrading. In this Thomas is not very far from Cicero. Human dignity, for the latter, should also prevent someone from giving in to sensual pleasure and acting like the brutes: it was an ideal, which had to be conformed to.

But did Aquinas really think that irrational behavior, or sin in his understanding, could destroy person-hood? If he did, he thought it could also be redeemed and restored in Christ to the dignity of a child of God. Human dignity is a high degree of dignity in relation to the animals, but it is not the ultimate one. It is for example the basic one compared to the degrees of dignity in which superiors can be constituted. All degrees of dignity, in fact, deserve an appropriate level of respect (II, II, 102,1-3), because they, along with authority, are derived from God.

The theo-centric (Christian) framework could explain fundamental things, such as the importance of being human, in terms of the shared belief in a God made man in Christ. This shared belief also made it sustainable that human dignity to some extent was understood as destructible, because it was given twice: first in Creation and again, but now even better, after it was marred by sin in Redemption. This, perhaps, entailed that the status of non-Christians was uncertain. Despite this, the Christian message of love of neighbour contributed decisively to the recognition of the personhood and human dignity of everyone, and indeed it continues to do so. Without this remainder of the absoluteness of love and of its availability, it is doubtful if faith in human rights is sustainable.

#### THE LOGO-CENTRIC ACCOUNT

The experience of the reformation and the religious wars following it made a lasting impact on all modern thinkers. They could afford to take few things for granted as traditions and authorities were questioned, and it was discovered that even the new institutions put in their place (such as the nation-state), also had to stand the wind of criticism. The new world-view – the enlightenment – endeavored to explain everything and anything in relation to reason.

Pico della Mirandola was the first to explain the dignity of man in relation to his ability to choose what place or level he would occupy in the universe (*Oration on the Dignity of Man*).<sup>3</sup> But already Hobbes dampens these new ambitions, as he makes clear just what the weight of social constraints is, once the gravity of an ordered universe has stopped determining what is up and down. He contends that dignity only is the "worth of a man", i.e. the price society sets on him (*Leviathan*, 10). If he has no predetermined kind or essence, he cannot either have any predetermined value independent of social evaluation of his usefulness.

It is against this background that Kant develops his idea of dignity, usually taken to be the main theme of the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. He, however, like Cicero and Aquinas, only uses the concept of

<sup>3</sup> This work, whose title was chosen by the publishers, does not use the expressions "dignity of man" or "human dignity". The idea that dignity consists in freedom to choose one's manner of existence, and that this is characteristic of man is however perfectly attributable to Pico.

human dignity (*Würde der menschlichen Natur, Würde der Menschheit, Menschenvürde*) relatively scarcely, in fact four times in the whole of *The Metaphysics of Morals*.<sup>4</sup>

*Menschenvürde* is only used once in connection with a discussion of the vice of arrogance. Here it is said that arrogance differs from pride, because pride is concerned with “not yielding anything of one’s human dignity in comparison with others”. *Würde der menschlichen Natur* is also used only once. Here it is said that autonomy is the reason for it, i.e. that it is because humans are autonomous (can legislate the moral law unto themselves), that their nature is dignified. It is therefore not so far away to speak about the dignity of humanity, and to understand humanity itself as a dignity (II, 38). *Dignity*, however, is often used on its own, without the qualification *human*. It is associated with the ultimate object of respect: the categorical imperative. Respect for humanity relies on this, and so does respect for human dignity.

The members of civil society, the citizens, ought to be the same as those to whom the categorical imperative applies, namely all who are capable of originating it. This, however, seems so far from political practice, that Kant find himself forced to distinguish between an active and a passive citizenship, the last form reserved to dependants of various kinds: slaves, serfs, women, children. Whereas the possession of dignity therefore does entitle to legal status and to citizenship, it does not entitle to political participation. However, Kant still maintains that “only the united and consenting will of all the people – in so far as each of them determines the same thing about all, and all determine the same thing about each – ought to have the power of enacting law in the state”. It therefore seems to be implied that a distinction in kinds of citizenship and legal rights can be maintained only when it is to the common advantage.

Sometimes the logo-centric framework is called anthropo-centric. This designation is fitting because of the association of modernity and anthropocentrism and because Kant regards humanity itself as a dignity. It is also asked because Kant explains the importance of man in relation to reason, hereby exemplifying the rationalism of the enlightenment. The identification of man with the citizen and of reason with the justification of republicanism has inherent problems, which in turn provokes the rise of the post-modern framework. As a source of human rights, however, the logo-centric account,

<sup>4</sup> Including the *Grundlegung*, the *Rechtslehre* and the *Tugendlehre*.

with its accentuation of autonomy as the principle of humanity, is often relied upon. But as autonomy is either an invisible (moral) or a negotiated (political) reality, the extension of human dignity is left without an objective criterion, unless it is attached to human nature, in which case the problems of a vague extension are the same as with the cosmo-centric account.

#### THE POLIS-CENTRIC ACCOUNT

It may seem an anachronism to make the enlightenment philosophy of Mary Wollstonecraft represent the post-modern era, which is generally taken to begin much later. It is justifiable from the facts that she on the one hand shows signs of consciously stepping out of the framework of her times and on the other inaugurates a new way of reflecting on or speaking about human dignity. In a certain way both of these steps out of the older order are taken by the fact that she is a woman speaking in public about who is to count as a citizen. She finds her voice by means of a *utopian* vision of the world where all human beings are happy. Her account can in this sense be called Polis-Centric, because it is dependent on a vision of the just, if only future, State.

However, like Kant, she explains human dignity first in relation to reason. It is because of the gift of reason that man has dignity, and indeed that woman has it. But Wollstonecraft’s rationalism is tempered by a social realism, which displays itself throughout her work, especially in the polemical nature of her two Vindications: *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790) and *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). These are both addressed to politicians involved with the French Revolution: the first to Edmund Burke, who defended aristocracy,<sup>5</sup> and the second to Bishop Talleyrand-Perigord, a leader of the Revolution. *A Vindication of the Rights of Man* was written in defense of the rights proclaimed by the Revolution and *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in disappointment over the lack of recognition of the rights of women displayed by the revolutionaries. Both works are thus about what we today – as a consequence – call human rights.

Wollstonecraft, however, does not employ the term “human dignity”. But she launches the concepts “the native dignity of man”, “dignity of character” or “dignity of virtue”,<sup>6</sup> in order to provide an alternative to the then current

<sup>5</sup> *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, (1790).

<sup>6</sup> These expressions are common in the two works.

understanding of dignity. The common understanding was that dignity was inherited through liberal descent or acquired by Royal decree, and was thus a prerogative of the aristocracy. She argues that dignity belongs to all who care to be just and sensible, and thus uses the term polemically to appeal for a political change towards republicanism or even democracy and towards social inclusion of women. She vindicates the right of common men and women to be recognized in their native dignity because of their dignity of character, and also their right not to be held in slavery; whether this slavery takes the form of physical labour or sexual exploitation. Wollstonecraft sees in education the key to improve the status of the different members of society, but she is not expecting social change to happen quickly. When people are taught to be aware of their "conscious dignity", they are less likely to let themselves be held in slavery of any kind, but breaking the habits of bondage is a long-term enterprise. This is why she looks to the future with expectations in such a manner that she detaches herself from the Modern framework and steps into another.

Post-Modernity, however, is often associated not only with polis-centrism but also with social constructivism. The life experience of Mary Wollstonecraft was that an idea of dignity could be forged by society, and pass as its natural basis, even if it contradicted the regulative idea of equality. The rejection of Modernity as ideological clearly has this kind of explanation: common people, whose point of view had been overlooked for centuries, gained a voice and brought with them the experience of being ignored. They had lived with a discrepancy between rhetoric and reality for a long time, and this had made them astute analysts of the relationship between rationality and social conditions. The idea of human dignity was the linguistic tool by which they themselves gained self-esteem and political influence, and it became therefore part of the Post-Modern framework as axiomatic for democracy and human rights.

This could be the reason why this framework does not easily accommodate those people who account for the idea of human dignity by reference to something other than that of the conservation of contemporary democratic society. Religious people, whether Jewish, Christian or Muslim, because of their type of social organization not identical to that of the democratic State, have such an alternative. These differences make themselves most felt whenever the human being is most burdensome for society. Then society dispenses itself of a principle it regards as a means to its own preservation, and attacks those who wish to strain its resources. Inconsistencies do not of themselves

undermine the pluralistic society which thrives on them, but the appeal to a transcendent reality *ipso facto* conditions the poly-point-of-view of the framework.

The four accounts of human dignity may have been developed each in their own historic context, but they coexist as a matter of fact in contemporary debates, and often confront each other, especially in the areas where their extensions do not overlap. The question therefore arises whether there is one common account of human dignity. Is there at all a definition of human dignity?

#### IS THERE A DEFINITION OF HUMAN DIGNITY?

The experience, idea, and principle of human dignity have to be presupposed for us to talk about different accounts of it. But it is obvious from the differences between the four accounts that the axiomatic value of human beings is taken to consist in different things.

In the cosmo-centric framework human beings are thought to have axiomatic value because they have dominion (over their passions, their household or group, or over the brutes). It is to the end of maintaining moral dominion that human beings acquire virtue, and by this acquisition that they are able to participate in social life and found law and society. But it is nature, which has assigned the human being a superior place in the cosmos, by granting reason for the task of dominion. It is the responsibility of the human being that this moral dominion does not fail. If it does, it is uncertain what happens to human dignity. Moral dominion in accordance with nature is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for the possession of human dignity. The possessor must also be of the human kind. But then again: it is because humanity is considered to be characterized essentially by moral dominion, that moral dominion in turn can be taken as a criterion for human dignity.

In the theo-centric framework human beings are thought to have axiomatic value because they are made in the image and likeness of God, and therefore reflect the creator-God, in whom all things have their being and value. But the axiomatic value of humans is also affirmed by the incarnation of the Son of God as man, and even restored through his death and resurrection. The axiomatic value of human beings does therefore not so much consist in their rationality or dominion, but in their God-likeness and in the

relationship with God, which this likeness effects. It is this likeness which enable human beings to acquire virtue and live in community, and which therefore in turn founds society and its laws. God's relationship must be accepted in love, however, if not, it is uncertain what happens to human dignity. Divine relativity is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for the possession of human dignity. The possessor must also be human. But then again: it is because humanity is considered made in the image and likeness of God that this reflexive likeness can be taken as a criterion for human dignity.

In the logo-centric framework human beings have dignity because of reason, or, with a Kantian expression, because they are capable of understanding the implications of a universalisation of the maxims of their actions. Virtue, in this scheme of things, is the characteristic of the kind of acts, the maxim of which is universalisable according to the categorical imperative. Reason, also, is enough to certify status, account for law and found society, even if the ultimate destiny of man and his reward depends on God. No guarantee apart from reason is needed for human dignity in this life. If reason fails, however, it is uncertain what happens to human dignity. Reason is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for the possession of human dignity. The possessor must also be human, of the human kind. But then again: humanity is itself considered a dignity because of its rationality and this is the reason why reason can be considered a criterion for human dignity.

The polis-centric framework was the result of the political experience of "reason" being used ideologically by those in power to make assumptions as to who was to be counted reasonable. The polis-centric framework was born in rejection of the one and unique point of view, and is therefore also poly-centric and poly-morph. Virtue is defined in relation to the function it has in society (for example its usefulness), and status is understood in its aspect of relying on political decision. Society, in turn, is increasingly experienced as the basic, inescapable reality, which needs no founding, because it is everywhere, just like nature was for the ancients. Thus law becomes the rules society gives unto itself through its mechanisms of government, whereas the destiny of the individual is to be the point of society's metabolism. Human dignity is what society ought to recognize, ideology notwithstanding. If recognition fails, it is uncertain what becomes of human dignity. Recognition is a possible consequence but not a necessary condition for the possession of human dignity. The possessor must also be of the human kind. But then again: it is because personal identity is understood to consist essentially in social relations, that recognition could be a criterion for human dignity.

Human dignity as the axiomatic value of human beings is common frameworks treated, yet each understands it to rely upon or to be conditioned by, different features of human reality: human nature, divine relativity, the utility of reason or recognition in society. This is because they understand human to consist in different things and consequently takes the axiomatic value of the human being to be indicated by various aspects of its being human being exists in and through these aspects, which characterize her essentially. Axiomatic value, however, pertains to the *existence* of the vital human being, and not merely to his or her nature, reason or acceptability. Because existence is individual there cannot exist any other criteria for the possession of human dignity than that the possessor should be a human being.

The definition: "Human dignity is the axiomatic value attaching to the existence of the individual human being" is merely formal, however, account for the content of human dignity we are referred back to the essence of it in friendship, in love and in the miserable. Once the formal definition achieved, however, the theory of human dignity is henceforth the theory of the constitution of the human person. This constitution happens in reciprocal recognition, when the one I constitute as my "other" in turn constitutes me. This is the dynamism trained and enlarged in friendship. In it my personal identity is formed as I learn to identify with the aspects, which constitute my human being and explain it.

Nature accounts for my physical and psychic structure, my abilities and powers, it is symbolically intelligible in my genetic constitution and accounts for the material exchange with my surroundings in growth and decay. If I did not identify myself with my nature, I could account for these my physical attributes. Idealistic, solipsistic or dualistic tendencies would depreciate this explanatory factor, with the result of being unable to account for my individuality as a person.

Reason accounts for the integration of all these elements into an essential unity and for their administration by conscience and will in the building character. It also accounts for the kind and level of communication and activity, which integrates society. All this relies on access to ideal reality through abstraction, intuition and discursive reasoning, it relies in words on reason. If I did not identify myself with reason, I could not account for any of my rational abilities. Materialist, naturalist or psychologistic tendencies underestimate this explanatory factor, with the result of being unable to account for my transcendence as a person.

God accounts for the joining of nature with the realm of reason in the individual rational soul, which has powers to move in the physical world as well as powers to access the ideal world. Only a power exceeding both could effectuate such synthesis, which also accounts for the spiritualisation of appetite in emotion and evaluation. If I did not identify myself with this synthesis, I could find no reason to act in accordance with universal laws and no reason to realize the good. Some might not call this power God. Some Darwinists stretch natural selection to the point of accounting for the integration of nature and reason. This form of Darwinism is materialist in tendency, and have the same deficiencies as mentioned above. Many agnostics leave the integration of nature and reason as a mystery not to be accounted for. They neither accept nor reject the idea of a source of this integration, and consequently don't call it God. Most theists, on the other hand, without subtracting from the mystery, accounts for the mysterious integration of nature with intellect by the explanatory factor which they name God. Tendencies disregarding the mystery of the person would not contemplate accepting the possibility of an explanatory factor for it, with the result of being unable to account for the integration of nature and reason in the person, or for the existence of the person as personal.

Society accounts not only for the effectuation of the systematic and purposeful training of all natural abilities but is itself the purpose for the sake of which this training takes place and makes sense. Community makes demands on all dimensions of the human person: natural, rational and spiritual by the means of reward and punishment. If I did not identify with others and with my role in the community, I would not be able to synthesize my abilities or know who I am. Individualistic tendencies disregard this explanatory factor, with the result of being unable to account for the *telos* of the person.

All the explanatory factors are essential in the formation of personal identity; at different times we may rely on different factors to various degrees. The essential connections between the types of explanation means that neither can account on their own as a sufficient condition for personal identity and consequently for human dignity. Matter and form are opposite principles which crave one another in order to be; they are joined by the efficient cause, and they are so for the sake of the end.

It is only when I identify with what lies beneath or supports my nature, reason and social integration, – i.e. with my existence –, that I open up the depths of the person. Only from this depth can I identify the axiomatic value of the other human being as the value of his or her existence, beyond, but not

independent of his or her nature, reason and social integration. We call the pure appreciation of the individuality of the other self for love. Love sees potential everywhere, even where great effort is needed to bring it to fulfillment. It also bears disappointment and understands where only rudiments of meaning seem to exist. It advocates the rights of the weak, the young and the old and protects them against abuses by the stronger. On this background it is not so strange that it is only in love that we adequately identify the other, and therefore not so strange that we should have to rely on it in practice to give content the idea of human dignity. What we say when we claim the principle of human dignity to be the basis of the international world order is that it should be a civilization of love.

#### CONCLUSION

The experience of human dignity in reciprocated love or friendship underlies the idea and principle of human dignity. Human dignity was, however, conceived to consist in different aspects of the human being, in its nature, relativity to God, reason or social integration. These differing accounts were identified and analyzed in different historically based frameworks (the cosmo-centric, the theo-centric, the logo-centric and the polis-centric frameworks), which also exemplified various plausible ways of conceptualizing and accounting for human dignity. Whereas the explanatory factors of the various frameworks indicate the essentially human, neither of them provides us in isolation with a *sine qua non* or a *fortiori* with a sufficient condition for human dignity. As indicators of the human they point towards the being whose existence is of axiomatic value.

The definition underlying the accounts embodied in the various frameworks is merely formal. It is that human dignity is the axiomatic value of the existence of the individual human being. For the content of the idea of human dignity, we must turn to the experiences of love and friendship in which the constitution of the person has the most favorable conditions. Here we learn to respond out of our own depth to the axiomatic value of the other.

As an expression "human dignity" refers beyond criteria to the axiomatic value of the existence of the individual human being. It means the fullness of the experience of the value of the existence of all and every human being.