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JAN ZE TRZCIANY'S REFLECTIONS OVER THE CONCEPT OF HUMAN DIGNITY IN *DE NATURA AC DIGNITATE HOMINIS*, 1554

...For our mind is free. With help of our thoughts the spirit is moving throughout different places, looking at them and reflecting about everything. Here we are in Poland, but despite this we are wondering about events happening in East and West, perceiving as we were there following those who left. We discuss with those, who are far away and even wake up dead humans to converse with, holding them, as if they were alive, with love, in our arms.¹

These words were written by Jan ze Trzciany, Arundinensis, a Polish philosopher at the University of Kraków. It is a fragment of his Latin treatise concerning human nature and dignity, published in Kraków 1554. Arundinensis in this citation emphasises the greatness of the human mind, which for him is the quintessence of human dignity.

Jan of Trzciana – Joannes Arundinensis was born about 1510 in Trzciana near Jasło, in the Kraków diocese. In 1526, he enrolled at the University of Kraków. His studies coincided with the strongest humanist movement at the University. Arundinensis worked with seminars until 1556, lecturing and commenting on Aristotle, Cicero and Suetonius. In 1548, he had lectures in comparative grammar concerning Hebrew, Greek and Latin. In 1554, he published a treaty on human nature and on the human dignity *De natura ac dignitate hominis*. In 1556, he left the University and as a theologian he went to Lvov where he became a canik in the Cathedral of Lvov. In 1563, he published a religious script in the form of a dialogue where a Pole, a German, a Russian and a Latinist converse, *De religione sacrosancta, de ecclesia ac ceremoniis eius dialogus*. This work should be a voice as a polemic against reformation. Yet Arundinensis was very far from Orthodox Catholicism. He was even accused of sympathy for the Protestants.² Arundinensis died in 1567 in Lvov and handed over his entire library to Lvov's Cathedral.³

¹ Jan ze Trzciany (Arundinensis), *Historiam Theologiae in Polonia Exculpatae spectantia ii: De Natura Ac Dignitate Hominis, Textus Et Studia Fasc. 2*, Akademia Teologii Katolickiej, Warszawa 1974. Publikacja oryginału, Cracoviae [Kraków] Published by Marek Szarfenberg (14.-1545) – Dziedzice, Druk.

² H.J. Dąbrowski, P.S. Dunin, *Polski słownik biograficzny*, Polska Akademia Umiejętności, Kraków 1939-1946, s. 485.

³ *Ibidem*, s. 485.

Firstly, I will provide a short literature review followed by a brief history of the concept of dignity until the Renaissance. Afterwards, I present a concise picture of Polish culture and society in the 16th century. Further, I will analyse various parts of the work concentrating on Trzciana's approach to the attributes of human dignity. I will present Arudinensis' sources of inspiration and compare them to the author's version of human dignity. I will provide a consist approach to foundation around the concept of human dignity from Renaissance toward current situation concentrating mainly on the changing image of the concept, and where Trzciana's ideas stand in current debate perceiving dignity as a universal value through the human reason and the existential way of being human.

There exists extensive literature regarding the general concept of dignity, together with specific works and scientific articles concerning the concept of dignity within the Renaissance. Examples include Michael Rosen's *Dignity: Its History and Meaning*⁴, as well as more general works on the Renaissance such as Paul Kristeller's classical work, *Renaissance Thought and its Sources*⁵, or Eugenio Garin's *Lúmanesimo Italiano, Filosofia e vita civile nel Rinascimento*.⁶

Several articles deal with the concept of dignity during the Renaissance and focus on Western Europe; for example, *The Image of the Man: A Study of the Idea of Human Dignity in Classical Antiquity, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*⁷.

The Polish Renaissance in its European Context presents a series of articles concerning various aspects of Polish Renaissance culture, politics and art.⁸ It highlights political history and Polish art, especially sculpture, Polish Renaissance poet Jan Kochanowski, and University of Kraków's role during the Polish Renaissance. Harold Segel's *The Renaissance Culture in Poland: The Rise of Humanism, 1470-1543* focuses on the Polish cultural and philosophical climate.⁹ Segel mentions the reason for the cultural and economic expansion of Poland and emphasizes the role of the University in Kraków, established in 1364.

The University of Kraków attracted humanists from different places, that could share the same sense of cosmopolitanism.¹⁰ Segel also states that the Polish Renaissance

⁴ M. Rosen, *Dignity: Its history and meaning*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2012.

⁵ P. Kristeller, *Renaissance thought and its sources*, Columbia University Press, New York 1979.

⁶ E. Garin, *Lúmanesimo italiano, Filosofia e vita civile nel Rinascimento*, 7th edition, Laterza 1994.

⁷ H. Baker, *The image of the man: A study of the idea of human dignity in Classical Antiquity, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, Forgotten Books, London 2018.

⁸ *The Polish Renaissance in its European context*, ed. S. Fizman, Indiana University Press, New York 1988.

⁹ H. Segel, *Renaissance culture in Poland: The rise of Humanism, 1470-1543*, Cornell University Press, New York 1989.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, s. 3.

was not a matter of massive cultural indebtedness. As the Renaissance began in Italy, the Polish Renaissance is no more derived than the German, French, English or Spanish.¹¹ He mentions several important figures that influenced the Polish Renaissance movement, including an Italian Neoplatonist called Callimachus.¹² Jan Czerkawski is the main author that analysed Trzciana's work in Polish and wrote as well several works concerning human dignity in Renaissance.¹³ Another work on Polish Renaissance, edited by Danilo Facca and Valentina Lepri, consists of separate chapters dealing with Polish artistic exchange with Western Europe, Polish religious tolerance, and Platonic and Aristotelian inspirations.¹⁴ Different aspects of Renaissance philosophy can be found in *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Philosophy*, which considers various subjects such as humanism, scholasticism, Platonic philosophy or a new vision of cosmos.¹⁵

Dignity Concept – Historical Approach

The concept of dignity, *dignitas* in Latin, is an abstract noun derived from the adjective *dignus* and this in turn has an etymological connection with the verb *decere* and nouns *decus* and *decor*. *Decere* means 'fitting', 'harmonious', or 'be right'.

The concept of *dignitas hominis* soon obtained new formulations; 'dignity and excellence', 'dignity and prosperity', or 'dignity and nobility'.¹⁶ The oldest equivalent of the concept of dignity derives from the Greek word *timée* (τιμή).

Timée shall be understood as a hereditary, natural value, particularly of social affinity that corresponds to the material and spiritual virtues. Important in this context was *aidos* (αἰδώς), shame feeling in front of the peers and the need to individually distinguish oneself from the group – *aristeia* (ἀριστεία).¹⁷

Dignity obtained a special position in Sophocles' *Antigone*, Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, Manilius' *Astronomica*, or Cicero's writings. In the conclusions to Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, the poet praises the man's divine descent, his eyes looking towards heaven. These standards concerning human greatness will be often mentioned in history, sometimes

¹¹ *Ibidem*, s. 2-3.

¹² *Ibidem*, s. 72.

¹³ Jan ze Trzciany (Arundinensis), *De Natura ac Dignitate Hominis*, wyd., wstęp i komentarze J. Czerkawski, Warszawa 1974.

¹⁴ *Polish culture in the Renaissance: Studies in art, culture, and political thought*, eds. D. Facca, D.V. Lepri, Firenze University Press, Firenze 2013.

¹⁵ J. Hankins, *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2007.

¹⁶ J. Domański, *Z dawnych rozważań o marności i pogardzie świata oraz nędzy i godności człowieka*, Instytut Filozofii i Socjologii Polskiej Akademii Nauk, Warszawa 1997, s. 75-76.

¹⁷ M. Środa, *Idea godności w kulturze i etyce*, Wydział Filozofii i Socjologii Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa 1993, s. 15.

in polemical context. The divine reason helps the human being to penetrate the whole Cosmos. Marcus Manilius (fl. 1st century AD), in his poem *Astronomica*, presents human possibilities in the typical Stoic spirit.¹⁸ According to Manilius, reason liberates human from the deterministic *fatum*:

Why wonder that men can comprehend heaven, when heaven exists in their very beings and each one is in a smaller likeness the image of God himself? Are we to believe that man is born of aught but heaven? All the other animals lie prostrate on the earth or submerged in water, or else hover in the air; alike have only sleep and food and sex for their delights; the strength of an animal is measured only by its size and value by its limbs, and since it has no intelligence it lacks speech, too. The breed of man who rules all things, is alone reared equal to the inquiry into nature, the power of speech, breadth of understanding, the acquisition of various skills: he has left the open air for city-life, tamed the land to yield him his fruits, made the beasts his slaves, and laid the pathway on the sea; he alone stands with the citadel of his head raised high and, triumphantly directing to the stars his star-like-eyes, looks ever more closely at Olympus and inquiries into the nature of Jove himself.¹⁹

In *Genesis*, created circa 1300-1000 BC, we find mainly two ways to pay tribute to man: humans were created as an image of God and they are similar to God himself, and that they should rule over the Earth. However, there is obviously a clear ambiguity concerning man's sin. Augustine (354-430), continues the discussion about sin. Sin, he says, is possible thanks to the free will of a human. Human being is like God, but there is a considerable difference, in terms of freedom. God's freedom is perfect, because it is limited by the divine nature. God cannot choose evil. Human freedom, referring thereto, continues Augustine, is imperfect and therefore unlimited.²⁰

These early speculations are important for the future debate of human nature that will flourish in Florence during the 15th century.

Probably the earliest work on human dignity was created by pseudo-Ambrose, *De dignitate condicionis humanae naturae* (1015-1018).²¹ According to him, human dignity consists of man's capacity as an image of God and the divine soul. Bernard of Clairvaux, (1090-1153) on the other hand, emphasized the human ability to create his own nature. In *Cabbala* and Neoplatonic writings human magical forces are compared to 'light', 'nature', or even 'God'.²² However, a new era began during the Italian Renaissance. Coluccio Salutati (1331-1406), Leonardo Bruni (1370-1444), and Lorenzo Valla (1406-1457), Quattrocento's thinkers, stood out to glorify civic life. Man could freely

¹⁸ Manilius, *Astronomica*, LOEB Classical Library, https://www.loebclassics.com/view/manilius-astronomica/1977/pb_LCL469.293.xml (6.09.2021).

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, s. 293-295.

²⁰ J. Domański, *Z dawnych rozważań o marności i pogardzie świata oraz nędzy i godności człowieka*, IFiS PAN, Warszawa, s. 98.

²¹ *Ibidem*, s. 105-106.

²² *Ibidem*, s. 103-113.

build his earthly State. A series of treaties about human dignity were published there and the Polish thinkers became influenced by some, first and foremost of Giannozzo Manetti and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. Giannozzo Manetti (1396–1459), in *De dignitate et excellentia hominis*, from 1446, finds human dignity, not only in the soul, but also in the body. However, the most original is probably the chapter which associates human dignity with the task as a citizen and humans' extraordinary creativity. Manetti pays great attention to human freedom, which is a prerequisite to create an even more beautiful world that God has created; the role of a righteous citizen is also a sign of man's dignity.²³

Marcilio Ficino (1433-1499) wrote in his most important work in 1474, *Theologia Platonica de Immortalitate Animorum*, that the very important reason for human dignity is the soul independent from the inferior material world; to refine one's soul through contemplation becomes human's great dignity.²⁴ In 1486, Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494) created *De hominis dignitate*, which would be a prologue to 900 philosophical and theological thesis-Conclusions.²⁵ *De hominis dignitate* was a philosophical work, where he wanted to prove the consistency of all known philosophical and religious doctrines and also reconciling Aristotelians with Platonists. They should be discussed at a large consilium in Rome, but consilium was cancelled. Pope Innocentus VIII found several heretical elements in Pico della Mirandola's speech. In this speech Pico della Mirandola praises man's freedom to choose one's own nature:

Neither a fixed abode nor a form that is thine alone nor any function peculiar to thyself have we given thee, Adam, to the end that according to thy longing and according to thy judgement mayest have and possess what abode, what form, and what functions thou thyself shalt desire. The nature of all other beings is limited and constrained within the bounds of laws prescribed by Us. Thou, constrained by no limits, in accordance with thine own free will, in whose hand We have placed thee, shalt ordain for thyself the limits of thy nature. We have set thee at the world's centre that thou mayest from thence more easily observe whatever is in the world. We have made thee neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, so that with freedom of choice and with honour, as though the maker and molder thyself, thou mayest fashion thyself in whatever shape thou shalt prefer. Thou shalt have the power to degenerate into the lower forms of life, which are brutish. Thou shalt have the power, out of thy soul's judgment, to be reborn into the higher forms, which are divine.²⁶

In the early 16th century, the free Republics lost their power. In 1527, Rome was destroyed and eventually lost the Italian Renaissance, its central role. Humanistic ideas spread to Northern Europe, Germany, France, England, Poland and other countries.

²³ E. Garin, *op. cit.*, s. 69-74.

²⁴ J. Domański, *op. cit.*, s. 117.

²⁵ G. Pico della Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, [in:] E. Cassirer et al., *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1956, s. 217.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, s. 224-225.

In France in 1529, Bartholomew Chasseneuz (1480-1541), wrote an extensive chapter on human dignity in his *Catalogus gloriae mundi*. In his work we can find much of Pico's impact.

Pico della Mirandola's enthusiastic tribute to freedom and man's absolute independence of the deterministic *fatum* were adopted by French thinkers such as, Charles de Bovelles (1475-1655). An entire chapter in Bovelles *Liber di Sapiente*, from 1509, devotes to philosopher's true freedom, which according to him, is the total lack of specific, limiting characteristics of human beings.²⁷

Polish Society and Culture During the 16th Century

Various philosophical discourses that existed in different strata of the political and social life were closely connected to the political system and its economic conditions. Polish nobility supported reformation in their fight against ecclesiastical privileges. That fact was of great importance for religious tolerance in the country. During most of the 16th century and first half of the 17th century, religious freedom was defended by the Catholic Kings. In 1573, Poland was the first major European nation to have religious freedom recorded in its Constitution. The 98 signatories (of which 41 were Catholics), signed it. The *Warsaw confederation* undertook under oath and honour to keep peace concerning religious differences, honorary detention, imprisonment or exile because of it, as well as to cooperate with everyone to protect it. Polish kings had to swear to keep the confederations under all regulations.²⁸ Noblemen could participate in political life and undertook studies in Poland and abroad. The most important academic institution in Poland was University of Kraków, where philosophers aimed to reform the University to change curriculum and develop *artes liberales*.²⁹ They wished to abandon the scholastic exegeses of the human soul in comments to Aristotle's *De anima*. They also wanted to use Aristotle's texts, regardless of the scholastic comments.

Those changes pointed to the gradual consolidation of the *studia humanitas*. At the end of the 1540s and in the early 1550s, an apogee of the humanist movement occurred at the University. In 1551, Simon Maricius (1516-1574) published *The scholis seu academiis libri duo*. The same year Andreas Fricius Modrevius (1503-1572) published the most important political work in the Polish Renaissance, *De Republica Emendanda*, (*Five Books of Commentaries on the Improvement of Commonwealth*).

²⁷ L. Sozzi, *La dignitas hominix dans littérature française de la Renaissance*, „Humanism in France at the end of the Middle Ages and in the early Renaissance”, Barnes & Noble, 1970, s. 177-178.

²⁸ H. Kamen, *The Rise of Toleration*, McGraw-Hill, New York-Toronto 1967, s. 120-121.

²⁹ L. Szczucki, *Filozofia i myśl społeczna XVI wieku*, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Warszawa 1978, s. 12.

Adalbertus Novicampianus (1504-1559) created *Fabricatio hominis* together with *Oratio de laude physics*. In 1554, Arundinensis published *De natura ac Dignitate hominis*.³⁰

De Natura ac Dignitate Hominis

The treaty written by Arundinensis is divided into 38 chapters, including the prologue and the epilogue. I shall briefly explain the content of the text. I dwell on certain themes such as the soul, body, and mind together with chapters that deal with human dignity. Among the 21 chapters devoted to human dignity 8 praise the body above all, and 13 celebrate the fortunes of the soul. In the introduction, Arundinensis explains the purpose of his work.

He complains that there are many who care more for the body than for the soul and some thinkers that claim that we should live life while it is here and that we will all die just like the animals. Moreover, they deny the existence of eternal life. Therefore, says Arundinensis, he decided to write about human dignity³¹. By gaining the support of Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, the Bible and Fathers of the Church, who previously wrote of human dignity, he would awaken the understanding of a true human dignity.³² Arundinensis states that it is not possible to learn other things without getting to know ourselves and he praises the contemplative life higher than the active. He mentions Pythagoras, Democritus and Anaxagoras, who first participated in political life and later left it and devoted themselves to the pleasure of contemplating the knowledge.³³ All is created by God from nothing, visible, changeable and eternal, says Arundinensis. He quotes several non-Christian thinkers, such as Hermes Trismegistus, 'the divine Plato', and Aristotle.³⁴ Then he presents the four levels of being, the things that exist only, those that exist and live, those who live exist and perceive, and finally, those who live, exist, perceive and understand.³⁵ Human, Arundinensis notes, has incorporated all these levels and through the soul becomes his dignity almost like that of angels.³⁶ Humans reign over all creation, because they possess an awareness of their own dignity. A human can understand contemporary matters, plan the future, and remember the past. Everything can be arranged by humans' will and the role of reason

³⁰ *Ibidem*, s. 14.

³¹ Jan ze Trzciany (Arundinensis), *De Natura ac Dignitate Hominis*, s. 233.

³² *Ibidem*, s. 233-234.

³³ *Ibidem*, s. 234-235.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, s. 238.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, s. 239.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, s. 240.

plays for human dignity. God, continuing Arundinensis, delivered the noblest gift to humans, that is reason. Just as God is one in being (*essentia*) and triune in persons, so is the soul one in its essence and consists of the memory, the will and the reason.

The definition of the soul is elaborated within several chapters. I will point out the most important elements of the debate on dignity. Arundinensis describes the soul as consisting of three different components, the sensible, the sensual and the vegetative.³⁷ He claims that it is not possible to say that there are three souls, instead there is a soul that is responsible for different areas. Arundinensis begins his analysing of dignity features with presenting a dignity that consists of composition. In this chapter, he wants to demonstrate the dignity of the body and the soul and that man is the conglomerate of different aspects.

Our body has a changing harmony where different 'humours' are freely mixed.³⁸ The next attribute of human dignity arises thanks to the upright position. Nature, Arundinensis says, created man straight, so that he could contemplate the divine things. All body parts are placed so that the worthiest are highest. Highest is in man the head that is held against the highest in the world. He mentions Aristotle and cites Ovidius *Metamorphoses*.³⁹ We shall recall that by our posture we separate us from lower beings. The head also becomes an object of dignity. Arundinensis compares the head to the first sphere of heaven, which shines with its beauty. Similarly, the higher the celestial spheres are, the more perfect their substance and the greater the power they gain. Likewise, the head reigns over the rest of the body. The head is for the body as heaven for the earth, adorned with the stars, it decides on everything that surrounds us. Thus, the head determines over our humanity, gives orders to other body parts, ensures that duties are fulfilled.⁴⁰

Arundinensis dwells on the human face as a sign of dignity. Only on the human face shines all virtues. With the eyes, you can see if a human is calm, fair, strong or mean.⁴¹ Senses, continues Arundinensis, also testify of human dignity. The eyes see everything and the ears can hear different sounds, not only those coming from the outer world, but also from the Saviour. Then Arundinensis mentions the speech and the language that separates humans from the animals. Thanks to language, we can perceive the secrets of the soul, learn what we do not know, and establish friendships with others. Smell and taste can give us different experiences and various sensations. Further on, Arundinensis describes the different parts of the body and mentions

³⁷ *Ibidem*, s. 248.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, s. 257-258.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, s. 258-259.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, s. 262.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, s. 266-267.

hands. It is only in man, he says, that hands are used not only for defence purposes but also to perform various duties. With our hands we can write, paint, sculpt, and play instruments. If we didn't have hands, how could we build cities, castles, houses or temples, Arundinensis asks rhetorically. Another, important aspect of human dignity depends on the salvation of Christ and the fact that we resemble God that is love. Man has been created to acquire love and live with God.⁴²

Human inventiveness is celebrated widely. It becomes for Arundinensis a result of the mental components of wonderful harmony: desire, memory and intellect. In this way humans could create: languages, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, law and theology. Let me quote a few lines from Chapter XXVII that praise human reason:

Quis signa stellarum varias figuras distinxit? Quis gradus coeli ac terrae mensus est? Quis domos, tecta, muros, civitates, urbes, maenia invenit? Quis praesidia varia? Quis cultum vitae? Quis Artes non solum mechanicas, sed liberales, naturales, supernaturales, medicinae, iuris theologiae invenit, nisi animus humanus.⁴³

In English,

Who distributed stars through different constellations and acknowledged their different shapes? Who have measured Earth and the Heaven? Who invented clothes, houses, temples, walls, fortifications, states and cities? Who invented medications? Who invented the culture? Who invented arts, not only mechanical but also free, natural and supernatural: law, medicine, theology? Only human reason, (My translation).

Removing cooperation between people, he continues, removing art and reality would become dark and gloomy. Men shall help each other and be amicable so that peace, fellowship, and love could prevail on earth.⁴⁴ This humanist and pacifist manifesto with love for the community as a motive appears in several places in the text and bears influences from Erasmus of Rotterdam Christian humanistic ideas.⁴⁵ Human dignity also includes man's actions to fulfill his civil duties in the active life and contemplate the divine things to achieve even greater bliss in eternal life.⁴⁶ The emphasizing of the rational soul and contemplation gives us a clear influence of Neoplatonic philosophy with Marcilio Ficino as its main representative. Ficino in *The Five Questions Concerning Mind* argues that the rational mind is the most powerful part of the soul. The

⁴² *Ibidem*, s. 271-273.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, s. 280.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁵ J. Czerkawski, *Renesansowe koncepcje godności człowieka*, „Roczniki Filozoficzne” 1987, t. 35, z. 1, s. 262.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, s. 281-282.

rational mind comprehends all things but even contemplates itself. The goal of the contemplating mind is seeking for truth and goodness.⁴⁷

In Chapter XXX, Arundinensis describes the miraculous in humans. The wonderful in man is his mind that is fast, indestructible and changeable like chameleon who occupies various forms,

Et si multa miracula sint in hac universitate rerum ab opifice Deo producta, tamen nihil adeo nobis mirandum venit praeter mentem humanam. Et si plures chameleonem admirantur, cum diversas in se induerit formas: multi torpedinem cuius tactu in rete manus trabentium torpescunt; multi elephantem, cuius vastitas immense etiam turres ac armatos fert: mentem tamen hominis nihil ducunt, quae omnes formas omnes colores immateriales, rerum in se induit, omnia partier sentiendo ac intelligendo. (...) Nihil itaque animo velocius, nulla est celertias, quae posset cum animi contendere.⁴⁸

In English:

Although God had created many unusual things in the world, there is nothing to be compared to human reason. Despite this, there are many who admire the chameleon who occupies different shapes or an electric eel that paralyzes fishermen's hands with its touch, or the elephant, which, thanks to its size, lifts the huge towers and soldiers. However, they don't bother about the reason that takes different shapes and the forms of intangible things and just as well perceives and understands everything. (...) So, there is nothing more mobile than that and nothing can be measured with it in terms of speed.

Pico Della Mirandola (1463-1494) uses the comparison of human self-transforming nature to chameleon in his *Oration on human dignity*, 'Who would not admire this our chameleon?'⁴⁹

The last chapters of Arundinensis' work concern the highest position of the soul, its immortality, central place, mastering of minds and bringing harmony.⁵⁰ In the epilogue, Arundinensis sums up his thoughts on the good Christian life and love. It is important that both the soul and the body are happy for the whole man to be satisfied with life. The last words are a prayer to God to give us the great happiness that is with Him.⁵¹

Several of Arundinensis' ideas concerning human dignity and its attributes can be traced to Cicero's two works, namely *De natura deorum* and *De legibus*. In *De natura*

⁴⁷ M. Ficino, *Five Questions Concerning Mind*, [in:] E. Cassirer et al., *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1956, s. 191.

⁴⁸ Jan ze Trzciany, *De Natura ac Dignitate Hominis*, s. 284-286.

⁴⁹ Pico della Mirandola, *op. cit.*, 225.

⁵⁰ Jan ze Trzciany, *De Natura Ac Dignitate Hominis*, 284-286.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, s. 308-309.

deorum, Cicero praises the human body and states that all 'its beauty is evidence of divine providence'⁵².

In his treatise, Arundinensis emphasises several times the human ability to choose according to our own knowledge and reason. Arundinensis was as well influenced by Italian Renaissance thinker Giannozzo Manetti's *De dignitate et excellentia hominis* and Pico's *Oration*, works that were found at the Jagiellonian Library, and Trzciana, together with other professors, most probably had read them.⁵³

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) agreed after Boethius and Aristotle that humans are rational beings however, he did emphasize another feature of being a human, namely that human is a 'person'.⁵⁴

Let me cite Thomas Aquinas from *Summa Theologiae*;

And yet an even more special and perfect way we are dealing with it is that is particular and that is individual within rational beings, that have a power over their actions and not only something is happening to them as to others but they act by themselves and actions are realized in what is particular.

And for that reason, among other substances a being of rational nature has a special name. And this name is a 'person'.⁵⁵

Thomas Aquinas emphasizes the freedom of choices being the core of human beings together with the particular way of being as an individual. The person is existing to realize her individual goals, existing for itself, *propter seipsum*.⁵⁶ Reason, according to Thomas Aquinas, is very important for thanks to the human reason and more clearly, the intellect a person obtains a general concept of the good and the evil and thanks to the reason humans can compare and choose.⁵⁷ In both, optimism is associated with a perception of the world as a rational and hierarchical building, which can be seen through with the help of human understanding. The best method to find a proper way of life was according to Arundinensis to practice self-reflection. His optimism concerning the possibility of fully getting to know the universe can be compared to

⁵² Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*, trans. by H. Rackman, eds. W. Heinemann, London-New York 1933, <https://ia800906.us.archive.org/29/items/denaturadeorumac00ciceuoft/denaturadeorumac00ciceuoft> (6.05.2013). Many further illustrations could be given of this wise and careful providence of nature, to illustrate the lavishness and splendour of the gift bestowed by the gods on men. Firstly, she has raised them from the ground to stand tall and upright so that they might be able to behold the sky and so gain the knowledge of the gods., 264.

⁵³ J. Czerkawski, *op. cit.*, s. 146.

⁵⁴ M. Piechowiak, *Tomasza z Akwinu egzystencjalna koncepcja osoby i jej godności. Komentarz do Summy teologii*, cz. I, kwestia 29, artykuł 1, [in:] *Szkice o godności człowieka*, eds. M. Piechowiak, T. Turowski, Oficyna Wydawnicza Uniwersytetu Zielonogórskiego, Zielona Góra 2012, s. 37.

⁵⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, a. 29, 37.

⁵⁶ M. Piechowiak, *Tomasza z Akwinu...*, s. 42.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, s. 43.

Pico della Mirandola's view of human intellectual accomplishments. Both thinkers associated a perception of the world as a rational and hierarchical building. Arundinensis' exemplar citizen is a person who combines the idea of contemplative life with eagerness to fulfil his civil duties.

Concept of Dignity After Renaissance

At the end of the 16th century, man's elevated position is in doubt and sin is highlighted clearly, in contrast to Arundinensis optimistic view on human nature. The religious wars and the Protestant progress could be some reasons for the change. Renaissance philosophers like Pico della Mirandola wanted to unite the Pagan and Christian human image. They wished to smooth over differences between the natural and the supernatural. Reformers wanted instead to distinguish them. Renaissance philosophers did not deny fall but took no special notice of it. Both Luther and Calvin emphasised the importance of fall and human propensity to sin. According to Calvin the vanity was a reason for man's fall.⁵⁸ At the beginning of the new era, the question of who man is turns into finding a general human theory based on empirical facts and logical conditions. The new heliocentric order becomes the basis of the new anthropology. In Stoic and Christian philosophy, human life is determined by divine providence. In the new system, human's claim to be at the centre of the universe loses its support. She is found in the infinite space surrounded by the silent universe that is indifferent to her demands. Seventeenth century philosophers tried to prove that the new cosmology does not challenge the high position of reason in human, but reinforces it.⁵⁹

The first philosopher who showed the way to other systems was Giordano Bruno (1548-1600). The characteristic feature of Bruno's philosophy is the term 'infinity'. According to Bruno, infinity is not something negative, difficult to master, as it was considered in Ancient Greece, instead it is something positive. This view brings new opportunities for human reason. In order to overcome the intellectual crisis that Copernicus discovery brought forth, according to Cassirer, several influences from the 16th century philosophers were needed. Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) believed that in mathematics a human achieves the pinnacle of all possible knowledge, and his understanding is perhaps not weaker than God's reason. Leibniz (1646-1716), who discovered the differential calculus and integral calculus, believed that mathematical reason connects man to the entire universe.⁶⁰ Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) was the

⁵⁸ E. Gilson, *Chrystianizm a filozofia*, Instytut Wydawniczy PAX, Warszawa 1958, s. 18.

⁵⁹ E. Cassirer, *An Essay on Man. An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture*, New Haven-London 1963, s. 13-14.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, s. 15-16.

first to establish a foundation for human dignity independent of both the religious position and naturalistic ideas. It builds an anthropology in which the foundation is a radical contradiction between man and things, antagonizing the axiological dependence on God. Human dignity has a similar nature to the divine but does not come from God and is not his gift. Dignity is the independent trait of man.⁶¹ Rachel Bayefsky presents another approach to Kant's narratives concerning human dignity. The idea that the bearers of dignity are required to behave in a certain way especially toward the state could appear unsuitable to the human rights idea. So, this notion is contrary to the common idea that Kant's understanding of the concept of morality is grounded in respect for dignity and integrity. Instead, this way of thinking could include a feeling of humiliation to discipline people to obey rules accepted as common sense.⁶² In the modern debate of humanism, we see all those who fight anthropocentric humanism from religious positions and those who, like Marxists, Freudians and post-structuralists (Derrida), in various ways contests an idea that there would be a transcendent foundation for the existence of the theocentric world. Opponents of the religious worldview reject the divine foundations of humanism and dignity. Their perception of human beings is a result of different theories of 'human nature'. Regarding Kant, Stoics or phenomenologists, both anthropology and axiology acquire an autonomous character even though they are not based on a belief.⁶³ In the article '*Plato and the Universality of the Dignity*' Marek Piechowiak presents a new approach to understanding the concept of dignity reading Plato's dialogue *Timaeus*.⁶⁴ According to Piechowiak, an important argument in favour of recognising cultural relativism and against universality of dignity and human rights, is the claim that the concept of dignity is a genuinely modern one.

An analysis of a Demiurge's speech in *Timaeus* reveals, however, that Plato reflected on the qualitative difference between gods, humans and things and what forms the ground for a special treatment of those beings that using our contemporary language could be described as dignity. Those attributes seem to match the nature of dignity we use today. Plato explains as well that dignity is an existential perfection, rooted in a perfect manner of existence based on a unity of being. Dignity is primordial to specific features and independent of their acquisition or loss. According to Plato, for

⁶¹ M. Środa, *op. cit.*, s. 89.

⁶² Saurette, 288 cited in: R. Bayefsky, *Dignity, Honour, and Human Rights: Kant's Perspective*, „Political Theory” 2013, 41/6, s. 809-837, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0090591713499762> (23.04.2021).

⁶³ M. Środa, *op. cit.*, s. 72-73.

⁶⁴ M. Piechowiak, *Plato and the Universality of Dignity*, „Themis Polska Nova” 2015, 2/9; see also *idem*, *Plato's Conception of Justice and the Question of Human Dignity*, 2nd edition, Peter Lang, Berlin 2021.

that reason, people should be treated as ends in themselves, an approach that prevents the treatment of people as objects. Finally, both the state and law are subordinated to the good of the individual, rather than the individual to the good of the state.⁶⁵ According to Piechowiak, Plato's reflection on dignity is an argument in favour of recognizing the universality of dignity, recognizing that it is something "given", existing independently of culture, although comprehended and understood by means of culturally conditioned concepts.

Antonio Pele presents a Foucauldian approach to the concept of human dignity during the Renaissance. He states that the subjectivity of human dignity narrative was created at some points of conflation between Renaissance episteme and the Christian pastorate. It has taken away confession from the truth obligation about oneself and produced instead 'spiritual counter-subjectivity' within Christianity. The *dignitas hominis* narrative according to Pele, was addressing the problem, from a Foucauldian perspective of 'being governed and of 'governing oneself' better and differently.

Author states:

Indeed, human dignity should not be seen 'simply' as the intrinsic worthiness of the human being but also as a 'critical' and 'counter' entry on how individuals and populations are now governed in their minds and bodies.⁶⁶

National constitutions, documents and declarations include the ideal or goal of human dignity in their reference to human rights.⁶⁷ Many times, however, we do not find any explicit definition of 'dignity of a human person' in international or national law. Its intrinsic meaning can be understood mostly through an intuitive approach depending on cultural factors. However, when we consider human dignity in relation to material needs the distributive justice would at least be met of the essential needs of humans.

Nevertheless, the counter argument could be that such a distributive procedure would excessively limit individual liberty. When we continue to look closer to the definition given in many legal documents, we recognise the phrase 'inherent dignity'. Inherent dignity is a very important factor as it means that dignity is not given by any authority and, therefore, cannot be taken away and human rights concludes every person.

There exists however sceptics stating that there is difficulty oftentimes to determine the exact definition of human dignity. They argue that dignity is a very vague and

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, 14f.

⁶⁶ A. Pele, *Human dignity in the Renaissance? Dignitas Hominis and spiritual counter-subjectivity. A Foucauldian approach*, „Philosophy and Social Criticism” 2019, 45/6, s. 753-776, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights> (26.07.2021).

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, s. 269.

ambiguous term. Further on sceptics assume that dignity is a subjective norm and that dignity was as well used to justify legal moralism and paternalism.⁶⁸

Tarunabh Khaitan defends the concept of dignity as being useful, however, he suggests that it needs to be understood as an expressive norm. So, the question is whether an act disrespects somebody's dignity depends on the meaning that such act expresses.⁶⁹ David Kirchhoffer finds human dignity universal for all humans. He argues in his work *Human Dignity* that the concept even though being complex and multidimensional still has a value but we need to clarify the term and revitalize it. Kirchhoffer states that human dignity is a useful descriptive category and normative moral criterion.⁷⁰

Conclusions

Arundinensis' work aims to remind the contemporaries to get in touch with their own dignity, because many, according to him live rather as cattle than as human beings. Humans would trust in their intellectual ability and not be guided by their senses. Arundinensis was convinced that it's enough for us to know what is right and understand our dignity in order to automatically act correctly. Arundinensis admires the human body in a typical Renaissance way, he praises the upright position, the perfect proportions and the external beauty of the body parts. The mind gives order to the body; however the body is important as the executor of the rational mind.

Arundinensis holds the same great appreciation of the human mind as Pico. Arundinensis, however similar, to Manetti prizes as well the beauty of human body. The work of Manetti is as also more adjusted to the political life of the republic of Florence as Arundinensis' to the political life of Polish Commonwealth. The goal for those two works was to ignite the intellectual enquiry among young individuals and to teach them to act as a valued citizen. Both Trzciana and Manetti accept the active and the contemplative life advantages. Both are very optimistic regarding the possibilities of human mind and that the human dwells in the centre of the universe.⁷¹

Regarding the problem of human being a goal in oneself we don't find any explicit formulation about this matter in the Arundinensis' work. However, writing extensively

⁶⁸ O. Schachter, *Human Dignity as Normative Concept*, „The American Journal of International Law” 1983, 77/4, p. 848-854, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2202536>, s. 848 (4.06.2021).

⁶⁹ A. Bagaric, (2006) cited in T. Khaitan, *Dignity as an Expressive Norm: Neither Vacuous Nor a Panacea*, „Oxford Journal of Legal Studies” 2012, 32/1, s. 1-19, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41418847> (9.05.2021).

⁷⁰ D.G. Kirchhoffer, *Human Dignity in Contemporary Ethics*, Teneo Press, Amherst-New York 2013, s. 317-318.

⁷¹ Z. Kalita, *W renesansowym Regnum Hominis*, Wrocław 1981, s. 27-28.

about humans 'exceptional position, placed in the centre of the word and possessing the greatest rank among the earthly creatures we could probably assume that the human according to Arundinensis possess the inherent dignity as being given it by God. Arundinensis' human acquires a great dignity thanks to miraculous mind, and an ability to self-reflection to keep own dignity alive and be useful and a creative member of the society.

Giving all those arguments under consideration we could most probably assume that Arundinensis would support the idea that the concept of human dignity possesses an universal value.

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JAN ZE TRZCIANY'S REFLECTIONS OVER THE CONCEPT OF HUMAN DIGNITY IN *DE NATURA AC DIGNITATE HOMINIS*, 1554

S u m m a r y

This article sheds light on an important aspect of Polish and European history of thought; namely, how ideas of the humanist movement that were born in Renaissance Florence spread to western and central Europe, being adopted at various universities north of the Alps. The specific notion of human dignity in Polish Renaissance philosophy influenced ideas of tolerance and enriched the political and philosophical debate in Poland. Jan of Trzciana, Arundinensis, (I will use his Latin name in the article), philosophy professor at the Academy of Kraków wrote a treatise on human nature and dignity, *De Natura Ac Dignitate Hominis* (1554). The article will unfold Arundinensis' sources of influence Ancient, Medieval and Renaissance, and will try to establish a connection to the later and contemporary discussion concerning foundation of human rights where the concept of dignity plays the crucial role.

Keywords: human dignity, Polish Renaissance, Renaissance philosophy, Jan of Trzciana, Arundinensis, humanist movement, Human Rights

JANA ZE TRZCIANY KONCEPCJA GODNOŚCI CZŁOWIEKA ZAWARTA W PRACY *DE NATURA AC DIGNITATE HOMINIS*, 1554

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Jan ze Trzciany, Arundinensis, profesor filozofii na Uniwersytecie Jagiellońskim napisał traktat dotyczący natury i godności ludzkiej, *De Natura Ac Dignitate Hominis*, który został opublikowany w 1554 roku. Najważniejsze atrybuty, które według Trzciany dotyczą godności ludzkiej, to rozum ludzki, ciało i dusza ludzka. Artykuł zestawia również idee dotyczące godności głoszone przez Trzcianę, szczególnie jej uniwersalność, ze współczesną debatą nad fundamentami godności człowieka.

Słowa kluczowe: godność ludzka, polski renesans, filozofia renesansowa, Jan ze Trzciany, prawa człowieka