

differentiate himself from the group, thus creating the fragmentation of the collective consciousness⁸³.

The subject of collective consciousness has been studied by various disciplines, especially in the field of cognitive psychology. In my opinion, starting from the mere assumption that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts (an idea also found in psychosocial literature), the collective consciousness is something more than the sum of the single individual consciousnesses.

17.2.4 *Conscience and Crisis*

The spiritual crisis is the main crisis we are experiencing today. It can well sum up any other type of crisis. The process of the gradual death of consciousness, in fact, is at the root of any crisis. Economic crises, for example, are generated by human greed and pettiness. The networks of power that generate these crises are in turn the result of a crisis of conscience. These networks have, in fact, slowly suppressed the voices of their respective consciences, in view of utilitarian gains to the detriment of others.

Today, consciousness is increasingly critical terrain. Catherine Ternynck denounces the loss of the symbolic depth of human consciousness, which generates the drying up of relationships and spiritual limits amounting to a cognitive nihilism, for which only capital and market exist, and everything else is ephemeral and relative⁸⁴.

The disasters generated by climate change are also determined by human selfishness, which has contributed to causing this same change. The climate crisis, therefore, is the consequence of a crisis of conscience (individual and collective). Conversely, the effects of “other” crises, such as climatic or economic crises, contribute to aggravate crises of conscience, to the extent that they become a cause of despair that produces the loss of hope and faith in God. But not all evil comes to harm. In fact, certain

⁸³ Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, cit.

⁸⁴ Mancini, *Ripensare la sostenibilità. Le conseguenze economiche della democrazia*, cit., p. 112.

critical events could on the contrary generate an awakening of consciences. These have the power to open the heart up and allow everyone to look within, deeply examining their own conscience and thus allowing an awakening, which I would like to describe as “transfigurative”. The awakening of conscience never occurs with the strength of man alone. Indeed, the door of the heart must be left open to make room for a transfiguration of the soul. Only this way can the conscience awaken in the face of various crises, such as epidemics and famines.

Each of us has his/her own conscience, which we can hear or not. In a decidedly chaotic world, like the one we live in, the sound of consciousness should be sought within ourselves, through a silence that knows how to look beyond. Pursuing a higher state of consciousness is important in order to free thought, conditioned by oppressive forces which prevent the full development of the human person⁸⁵.

Thinking oneself out of oppression, through processes of inner awareness, generates new creativity of individual and collective thought. The study of conscience is fundamental, in order to consolidate a collective change, capable of defending freedom as an essential human value, or as a moral good which, as such, also presupposes an intrinsic relational character.

In addition to trust and conscience, dignitary justice is also a fundamental element of transfigurative ethics. To speak of dignity as human justice, therefore, it is necessary to define a brief introductory theoretical framework of justice.

18. *Justice*

Justice concerns the method of facing the contradictions that tear at everyday life and heal compromised situations. Only to the extent that dynamics of restitution of denied rights and dignity are initiated, can there be “justice”.

⁸⁵ Moreover, removing the obstacles that impede the full development of the human person is what is prescribed by the principle of equality in the “substantive” sense, pursuant to art. 3 of the Italian Constitution.

As Maria Zambrano reminds us, there is justice when we manage to treat others better than they deserve⁸⁶. Mancini stresses that it is appropriate to pose justice as the true foundation of society from the perspective of the pluralization of freedom⁸⁷.

The ancient Romans used to say that justice is about giving everyone his own equitable sharing of goods and resources: do not give more than you have and, at the same time, do not subtract. It is the dimension that also allows the development of other dimensions of ethics, such as harmony and tolerance.

The concept of justice follows the different philosophical schools that have followed one another over time⁸⁸. For example, in the three pre-Socratic schools we find three different concepts of justice. For the Ionian school, justice is an aspect of that necessity that governs the physical world; for the Eleatic school, it is a manifestation of the *logos* and therefore an aspect of that logical and metaphysical necessity that makes the absurd impossible; for the Pythagorean school, however, justice consists of an aspect of order and harmony from which the universe is generated.

Socrates manages to find a distinction between the just and the unjust only by placing man in his natural environment. With Plato, on the other hand, justice becomes a social virtue “*par excellence*”, it places unity in diversity, it prevents disorder between men and between the different parts of the same man. In Aristotle, again, the sociality of justice becomes stronger. It detaches itself from empty harmony, but rather resides in something positive or negative. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he argues for the ambiguity of the terms “just” and “unjust”.

Justice, whether general (i.e., pertaining to respect for the “*ius*”) or particular (distributive-commutative justice) sums up every virtue well. According to John Rawls, justice is the first virtue of social institutions and it denies that the loss of freedom for some can be justified by greater benefits enjoyed by others.

⁸⁶ Maria Zambrano, *Delirio y Destino*, Madrid, Mondadori Espana, 1999.

⁸⁷ Mancini, *Filosofia della salvezza*, cit., pp. 268-269.

⁸⁸ See e.g.: Ferdinando D’Antonio, *La Giustizia. Studio di Filosofia Giuridica*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1938.

In this writer's opinion, the concept of justice should be completed in Levinas's ethical vision⁸⁹, since it focuses on the relationship with the "other", where the primacy of sense and of meaning, originates from the other. From this point of view, justice concerns the distribution of my responsibility towards the many faces that question me. In fact, in front of me there is not a single "face", the face of the "you", but always also the face of the "third", namely, of the many others who "look at me through the eyes of others". Moreover, the ethical dimension concerns itself with gathering the other's instance within oneself, without ever feeling "absolute", separated from the rest, as this would lead to a delusion of omnipotence. If I do not internalize the other in me, if I do not feel part of it, I would undoubtedly end up feeling "everything". The relationship of otherness is the fundamental dimension of ethics. Without otherness there would be no ethics. Only through a right relationship of otherness, therefore, can men truly meet.

Acting ethically in the right relationship between oneself and the other requires a deontological approach⁹⁰ of justice. In other words, each of us must assume their responsibilities, regardless of the effects that will be produced, balancing in the best way the extremes that are rooted within us: those that lead us to accept our passions, generating destruction and prevarication of the other and those that lead towards a construction, generating the encounter with the other, where each becomes the neighbour and guardian of the other. The dimension of custody arises towards the other only if I feel responsible for his life. This responsibility is the highest element that characterizes ethics. Aristotle for example said that virtue lies between extremes.

⁸⁹ Giovanni Ferretti, *La filosofia di Levinas. Alterità e trascendenza*, Torino, Rosenberg & Sellier, 1996; Emmanuel Lévinas, *Altrimenti che essere o al di là dell'essenza*, ed. by S. Petrosino and M. T. Aiello, Milano, Jaca Book, 1983, pp. 191-203.

⁹⁰ Duties and rights should command our respect regardless of the social consequences. Instead, according to a consequentialist approach, the morality of an action depends on the consequences it produces.

18.1 *Dignity as Human Justice*

Transfigurative ethics requires a dignitary vision, that is, a vision where respect for dignity is necessary for the transfiguration of power and consciences to occur. The concept of dignity originally referred to a merit (a position that conferred a social elevation) and not to a moral status, capable of attributing a value to humanity or to the individual person. Dignity mainly concerns that set of qualifications that allow us to define ourselves as “human”.

Immanuel Kant, even without referring to this theme, stated that we have a categorical duty of treating people as ends in themselves. Considering the person as a means, in fact, would mortify the very concept of the person and therefore human dignity itself⁹¹. From this point of view, dignity is inherent in identity. George Kateb, for instance, sees dignity as an existential value concerning the identity of a human being⁹².

However, it extends beyond the human race, because it also concerns the whole natural world and finds its explicit declination in the inter-human bond and in the relationship that is established between men and creation. In Hans Jonas' perspective, respect for dignity extends to all living creatures in their tension towards life, therefore also towards the natural world⁹³.

Dignity also extends over time and affects future generations, as well as people who have already died. Indeed leaving degraded natural resources for posterity means degrading the dignity of those who will live in the world in the future. The dignity referring to those who have already left this land, on the other hand, derives above all from respect for life that continues after death.

The link between dignity and vulnerability is certainly a strong one. In fact, vulnerability is a condition in which dignity

⁹¹ Immanuel Kant, *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, Riga, Hartknoch, 1785.

⁹² George Kateb, *Human Dignity*, Cambridge (MA) and London, Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2014.

⁹³ Jonas, *Il principio responsabilità*, cit.

often fails. Just think of the condition of those who do not have a job or those who live in precarious sanitary conditions (without safe water to drink, for example): we understand well that these conditions lack a certain important degree of dignity.

The concept of dignity is fully part of the ethics of responsibility. As the philosopher Roberto Mancini recalls, humanity in everyone is given by the dignity of responsibility⁹⁴. The ethics of dignity, therefore, becomes the authentic life of conscience. Karl-Otto Apel highlights the principle of respect for dignity in every member of the universal human community. It is understood as the cornerstone of a universal foundation (*Letzt-Begrundung*) of ethics, which cannot be denied, as otherwise some contradiction would emerge. In the opinion of Apel, in fact, respect for the dignity of everyone is the fundamental criterion for a political macroethics that can guide humanity in the face of the planetary challenges it must face⁹⁵.

The ethics of dignity, however, is lost in the face of the anthropological-relational disintegration that occurs due to post-modernity. In this sense, for example, Hannah Arendt paints a picture of essential human faculties⁹⁶.

Losing one's dignity in the face of catastrophe or critical situations in general would necessarily mean losing one's own identity as a consequence. Human identity has been studied very well by the philosopher Maria Zambrano, who highlights the theme of risky existence, which nevertheless remains capable of leading us towards ourselves, acquiring an identity of its own⁹⁷.

The phenomenology of dehumanization, moreover, manifests itself clearly in the market society in which we live. Adorno, for

⁹⁴ Mancini, *Ripensare la sostenibilità*, cit., p. 52. Certainly bearing in mind that this humanity, or rather the human condition also consisting of vital relationships, identifies a specific quality in ethics. An ethics oriented to the values of life, as well as human dignity, the natural world and the common good is for Mancini a macroethics of dignity and the common good (Mancini, *Ripensare la sostenibilità*, cit., p. 56).

⁹⁵ Karl-Otto Apel, *Transformation der Philosophie*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, Vol. II, 1973, pp. 358-436.

⁹⁶ Arendt, *Vita Activa*, cit.

⁹⁷ Maria Zambrano, *Verso un sapere dell'anima*, Milano, Raffaello Cortina, 1996.

example, defined anguish as the claustrophobia of a society that has become a system⁹⁸.

In this regard, Mancini explains very well the processes of victimization of people in the face of isolation, the privatization of every good, the uprooting, the precariousness, the trivialization and the polarization of every living space by the system founded on capital. The distance between people becomes more and more dilated and the digital connection becomes an attempt to fill the void of real encounters between people⁹⁹. Similarly, Simone Weil spoke of an “uprooting” as the result of modernization¹⁰⁰. This uprooting inevitably leads to the loss of roots, and therefore to the loss of identity. Catherine Ternynck spoke in this sense of “pulverization”, and used the metaphor of the man of sand, which perfectly captures the disintegrated subjectivity due to the loss of vital bonds, useful for the construction of human identity¹⁰¹.

Faced with the spiritual inability to interpret critical life events, and in the face of the illusion of self-determination with one's own strength, emotional relationships seem to increasingly lose their authenticity. Bauman argues about “liquid love”¹⁰².

From another point of view, Anthony Elliot and Charles Lemert speak of a new generation individualism, where the ego pluralises itself by losing integrity, conscience, responsibility, communion, cohesion and solidarity, stability, openness to the future, and freedom¹⁰³. Roberto Mancini, however, states that the backbone of human identity and its unconditional dignity is made up of uniqueness, relationality, openness, integrity and responsibility¹⁰⁴.

⁹⁸ Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialettica negativa*, Torino, Einaudi, 2004, p. 24.

⁹⁹ Mancini, *Ripensare la sostenibilità*, cit., p. 85.

¹⁰⁰ Simone Weil, *La prima radice. Preludio a una dichiarazione dei doveri verso la creatura umana*, Milano, Edizioni di Comunità, 1980, p. 43.

¹⁰¹ Catherine Ternynck, *L'uomo di sabbia. Individualismo e perdita di sé*, Milano, Vita e pensiero, 2013.

¹⁰² Zygmunt Bauman, *Amore liquido sulla fragilità dei legami affettivi*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2005.

¹⁰³ Anthony Elliot, Charles Lemert, *Il nuovo individualismo. I costi emozionali della globalizzazione*, Torino, Einaudi, 2007.

¹⁰⁴ Roberto Mancini, *Trasformare l'economia. Fonti culturali, modelli alternativi, prospettive politiche*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2014, pp. 97-134.

Regardless, however, of a certain inclination that we want to attribute to the concept of dignity, in my opinion we should recognize that there is no dignity without the aspiration of something greater, which I personally identify in the Love of God. Only by welcoming or living this Love, both in the relationship with the “Most High” and in the relationships we live among ourselves and with the natural world, could we call ourselves children of God and thus acquire a new dignity, which should be true “Dignity”, that is to say the only status that makes us free in a relationship of love, which from vertical (“Love” between God and men) becomes horizontal (interhuman love and between men and all other creation). This dignity allows us to truly feel ourselves creatures belonging to the Creator, who wants the best for his children.

Man’s search for infinity or the ideal destination is an essential component of a worthy life. The dignity that is acquired in the awareness of being children of God is not just any such one, but it is Dignity that gives meaning to all other dignities and gives meaning to life itself. In a sense, we could define it as a “macro-dignity”. Dignity can be obscured by a narrow and simplified vision of the human being that ignores almost all of our complex ways of being.

As Mancini points out in this regard, we are “utopian creatures”¹⁰⁵, which tend to a fulfilment that is currently lacking. If the study of the human ignores this special constitution, we arrive at the fragmentary and reductive anthropology of the adjective (*homo sapiens*, *homo economicus*, digital man, the posthuman subject)¹⁰⁶.

If we really have to consider an adjective, we should consider that of “*homo felix*”. By this expression we mean the man who has matured and transfigured his ability to love, thanks to encounters, passions, revelations and learning¹⁰⁷.

Often the theme of suffering has been left aside in favour of the principle of being, of the absolute. According to Mancini,

¹⁰⁵ Mancini, *Filosofia della salvezza*, cit., p. 35.

¹⁰⁶ Ivi, p. 35.

¹⁰⁷ Ivi, p. 36.

the consequence of this dulling was that of no longer being able to listen to the need for salvation of the living and the desire and expectation that are involved in this same need¹⁰⁸.

Where evil is affirmed, the human substance of our being is annihilated, while where good is confirmed, humanity flourishes among living beings. Buber, in the work *Paths in Utopia*, outlines the meaning of salvation, which is understood as the true path of humanity¹⁰⁹.

Man's path to salvation cannot be resolved in saving himself. Man is required to see himself as a starting point, and not as a goal: he does not end with himself¹¹⁰.

Transfigurative ethics, through its constituent elements, is characterized by two matrices, which represent the engine of the "ethical transfiguration". One relates to love and its ontological value; the other to Light and its phenomenological representation.

19. *An Ontology of Love: For a "True Human Justice"*

A real human justice should pursue love, without which we cannot speak of justice, humanism or humanity.

In Maria Zambrano and Hannah Arendt's perspective, love is the most supreme faculty of the human being. It follows that when it is not well developed, inhibited or – worse still – deviated, the inhuman is manifested. Love gives us back to ourselves and it is the way to participate in life, which is understood as communion.

Love is not a gift reserved for the good, but the foundation of everyone's life and of a truly civil society. God's Love embraces everyone, that is to say, everything that was created by love. Love holds the authentic dimensions of formation. It is demanding, it sacrifices itself in order to make one ready for life. This sacrifice,

¹⁰⁸ Ivi, p. 34.

¹⁰⁹ Martin Buber, *Paths in Utopia*, Syracuse (NY), Syracuse University Press, 1996.

¹¹⁰ Ivi, pp. 98-99, 101.