



# Homo Dignus: A Dignified View of Human Nature for Economics?

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*Abstract.* Western thought has developed a view of human nature—which we call *homo dignus*—which focuses on human dignity as the core of human existence. Human dignity (related to human rationality and morality) entails a moral calling, on the fulfilment of which human flourishing depends. Incorporating the idea of dignity could enrich economics' view of human nature. Economics has already widened to include insights from institutional economics on the cultural and natural circumstances that delimit human life. Moreover, behavioral economics and ethics have shown that both rationality and morality are bounded. These forces delimit and bind human choice. Despite these limits, theology informs us that choice is moral, and should adhere to the vocation to love. This paper therefore pleads a view of economic decision-making that brings value judgment to the forefront, thereby allowing a greater contribution to human flourishing.

*Keywords:* human dignity, vocation to love, view of human nature, value judgment

## 1. Introduction

The economic view of human nature is typified by the *homo economicus*—an economic being generally supposed to be self-interested and perfectly rational. This view of human nature has led to the development of a view of decision-making which assumes that all relevant information is known, and that optimization will lead to the best decision. However, this view of human nature, and the decision-making associated with it, are increasingly being called into question. In Western thought, it is rather the idea of human dignity (*homo dignus*) that is the most important appraisal of what it means to be human (Biemond 2024). In the light of human dignity and boundedness, a different view of economic decision-making is required, which is focused on value judgment.

The first thinker to name dignity was Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, the Renaissance philosopher who dedicated his *Oratio de hominis dignitate* (2008 [1486]), his Oration on the dignity of man, to this idea. He argues that human dignity originates in moral freedom, in the ability to do either good or evil (52-63). The human being has not been created as an angel or

beast but has been bestowed with a free will. Putting this free will to good use will lead to human flourishing. This freedom and the responsibility associated with it are the source of human dignity, according to Mirandola.

Rather than communicating a new insight, Mirandola's work expands on old theological and philosophical ideas. The Roman thinker Cicero already published an extensive discussion of human dignity in *De natura deorum* (On the nature of the gods, 1967 [45 B.C.]). He mainly grounded human dignity in human rationality. The church fathers connected this concept with the *imago Dei*, the idea that the human being is created in the image of God. Lactantius (for instance, in *De opificio Dei* (On Gods masterwork), 303) connects this rationality to the moral responsibility to do good. Dignity is not only a bestowal, but also a command. Only fulfilment of this moral responsibility leads to human flourishing. Augustine states that human dignity resides in the human spirit, which has been created in God's image (2016 [390], par. 1.27). Dignity arises from the human will, mind, and reason.

Mirandola builds on this ancient and Christian tradition. In doing so, he provides an expression of the view of human nature which is still relevant and informative. In this article we sketch a view of human nature based on human dignity and defined by the notion of human limits. We call this perspective the *homo dignus*, following the good custom that calls a view of human nature by a Latin name<sup>1</sup>. The paper proceeds to first define human dignity. This is followed by a discussion of the ethics of vocation, which is implied by the notion of human dignity. Thirdly, we discuss at length the different forces that influence the individual person in this world. All these things come together in the concept of procedurally rational decision-making, a model that acknowledges the imperfection of this world but strives to harmonize it with the vocation of human dignity. The model implies that a rational decision procedure should focus on value judgment and reckon with human bounds and limits.

## 2. Dignity

The view of human nature known as *homo dignus*, in concordance with Mirandola and Augustine, understands human dignity as the value of the human person. This value is grounded in human rationality, morality, and the cosmic order. Human dignity is *universal, given, and active*. Moreover, human dignity implies the vocation to love.

### *Foundations of dignity*

The first foundation of human dignity is human rationality or reasonableness. Human beings, unlike animals, have a reason and can therefore make rational or rather reasonable choices. Although they are subject to passions, they do not have to give in to them and are free to

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<sup>1</sup> The masculine term *homo dignus* which is used in this essay, along with an occasional 'he' for ease of exposition, does not imply anything gender-specific but is meant to be understood inclusively.

make other choices. At the same time, this reasonableness is bounded, and one does not always arrive at the best choices.

The second foundation of human dignity is human morality. The human being is a moral being endowed with moral freedom and responsibility. This morality entails not only insight into good and evil but also the responsibility to choose good over evil. The human mind is able to weigh different choices according to the extent to which they are not merely useful, but also good. Nevertheless, human morality is bounded, and people too often make the evil choice instead of the right one.

The third foundation is the cosmic order in which human beings are placed. Human beings are not only special in themselves, but in the Western tradition it has always been assumed that the human being has been assigned a special place in the whole of the world and cosmos. The conviction that the world is ordered with an important place for mankind was an important support for human dignity. With the Enlightenment, however, the conviction that 'the world is ordered' passed away. Instead, the world came to be seen as a set of natural laws, of which mankind is a passive object like all other beings. This undermined the idea of human dignity. Pascal (2011 [1669]) found a new foothold for human dignity in divine grace. Next to that, nature and culture still have the potential to point people to their position in this world.

#### *Characteristics of dignity*

These foundations of dignity imply a certain characterization of dignity: that it is *universal*, *given*, and *active*. According to the Western tradition, human dignity is *universal*. Everyone shares in human dignity, no one excepted. This perspective stands in stark contrast to many others in different places and at other times, which set certain conditions to the possession of full human dignity.

Secondly, dignity is *given*. Theologians are convinced that God has bestowed every human being with dignity, which conviction is central to the Western tradition. Every human being has received dignity that does not depend on merit. This "gift" character is related to the universality of dignity: because nothing needs to be done for it, there is no criterion of merit that can be used to exclude anyone or any one group.

It is finally crucial that this dignity is an *active principle* and no passive quality. This means that while human dignity is given in essence, it should be realized both passively and actively. Dignity requires actualization: actively, by realizing dignity in one's loving actions, and passively, by respecting the dignity of others. We proceed now to expand on these implications.

#### *Definitions*

These three foundations—and in particular the three properties—of dignity entail the

following definition: *human dignity is the special value of every human person*. It is in the idea of *the human person* that dignity is expressed—in contrast to the concept of *the individual*, which is derived from *indivisible* (that which cannot be divided). The *individual* is the singular, a human being as the irreducible atom of the social mass, the object of the social laws of nature and causal necessity. The *person*, on the other hand, is the unique human being, endowed with special qualities of morality and rationality, and called to make good choices. This is the idea of the *homo dignus*, the valuable human person. The *homo dignus* is a generic anthropology, pertaining to all human beings, which does not delve into distinctions such as gender, faith, etc. This concept of dignity leads to the following proposition:

PROPOSITION 1: Human dignity is the value of the human person that:

- (1) Is based on rationality, morality, and the cosmic order;
- (2) Is universal, given, and active;
- (3) entails the vocation to do good.

#### *Dignity's moral implications*

Regarding the human being as *homo dignus* has moral implications. During the last century it became customary to focus on human rights arising from human dignity. The main source of inspiration was the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), which bases various human rights on human dignity. However, this approach has an important shortcoming (Den Hartogh 2014, 202-206). Scant attention is paid to the fact that rights of one human being necessarily imply duties for another. Universal human rights necessarily imply the existence of universal human duties. Human rights cannot be fulfilled without fulfilling human duties. These duties constitute the active side of human dignity. Kant argues that the fulfillment of these moral duties should be accompanied by "love and respect" (1907 [1797], 449). Fulfillment of the obligations of dignity is therefore not to be seen as some frigid devotion to duty. On the contrary, it should take place within human relationships characterized by love and respect.

Rather than speaking of human rights and duties, we prefer to speak of the human vocation. Human dignity implies the calling to do good, to fulfill the general commandment to love, and thus to realize dignity and flourish as human beings. The moral appeal of dignity is not restricted to an exhaustive list of human rights and corresponding duties, or Nussbaum's (1997, 287-8) ensuing list of capabilities. It is far more meaningful to speak of the general vocation of the *homo dignus* to assume responsibility and do the right thing. In certain contexts, this calling does of course imply specific duties and rights. Nevertheless, this vocation is general in nature.

*Ethics of vocation*

Van der Kooy (1961; 1978; 1979) has developed the idea of the human vocation into an ethics of vocation. The human being, the *homo dignus*, is called to do good and fulfill the commandment of love. The one who calls is God, in Whose image the human being is made. Van der Kooy subdivided this general vocation into one to know, trust, and serve God, the self, fellow human beings, and the objects<sup>2</sup> (Hengstmengel 2019b, 212). This generates a twelvefold calling (see appendix). The human vocation and the moral standards of this calling are universal and thus known to the personal and collective conscience (van der Kooy 1978, 27-8). This conscience calls on everyone to respect these norms and fulfill the vocation. In fulfilling this vocation, the *homo dignus* will flourish.

We can specify these *ethics of vocation* by analyzing the first human vocation. God entrusted Adam and Eve in the so-called “vocation of culture” (Schilder 1948, 55) not only with dressing and keeping the garden of Eden, but also with multiplying and exercising dominion. This first and universal vocation is to cooperate with the creative work of God and thereby to realize human dignity. The gift of human dignity implies the vocation to work, to cultivate the earth and construct a society. Broadly interpreted, this vocation comprises all parts of van der Kooy’s twelvefold vocation (1961, 128-37).

This vocation clearly applies to the economic domain and the performance of labor (whether paid or unpaid)—in the first place because work is an important way to fulfil the general vocation. Labor is obedience of the aforementioned “vocation of culture,” and part of serving God. Good work fulfils the vocation to know, value, and have dominion over the objects, that is, nature (van der Kooy 1961, 134-6). Labor generates knowledge or science about the objects, teaching us to value the objects in their economic usefulness. Finally, it is a way of having dominion over the objects, by disposing of them and using them. So, labor is the way to fulfil the vocation regarding the objects.

Moreover, labor can be a way to obey the vocation with respect to the self. It offers the opportunity not only to practice self-knowledge, self-love, and self-renunciation, but also to promote self-actualization<sup>3</sup> (Rupert et al. 2016, 85-7). Labor enables knowledge of one’s capabilities, abilities, and possibilities. Profiting from labor is an exercise in self-love. It requires self-renunciation to serve a higher goal like a firm. It also offers the possibility to actualize oneself by using and developing one’s talents. In these ways, labor contributes to the fulfilment of the vocation to the self and one’s own flourishing.

Furthermore, labor offers the chance to practice community, love, and justice with respect to one’s fellows (Rupert et al. 2016, 93-5). The vocation to have community is fulfilled by cooperation, which also leads to knowing each other. Cooperation makes it possible to love

<sup>2</sup> Under ‘objects’ (Dutch: *dingen*) Van der Kooy grouped everything else in creation, both other forms of life and inanimate matter.

<sup>3</sup> Rupert et al. (2016) understand self-actualization theologically, as human beings developing their God-given talents and serving the well-ordered whole. A secular understanding, as according to Maslow (1943), focuses on realizing one’s potential and becoming more and more what one is.

and to have loving relationships. Finally, one can serve one’s fellows by sharing the fruits of labor. Fulfilling the vocation contributes to the flourishing of others as well.

Thus, it is important for human beings to fulfil their vocation in labor. This was also understood by Marx, who gave labor a central role in his thought. He envisioned the alienation which arises if the human vocation cannot be fulfilled in labor, and human dignity is not respected (1844). This will happen if laborers are only used as a production factor. Labor, when it is merely performed for wage-earning, cannot fulfil the multifold vocation and will become meaningless and unsatisfactory. Therefore, the ethics of vocation as applied to labor imply the following:

PROPOSITION 2: The human vocation is fulfilled, and human dignity and flourishing realized in labor if one’s work:

- (1) leads to knowledge, valuation, and disposition of the objects;
- (2) encompasses self-knowledge, self-love, and self-actualization;
- (3) complies with the norms of community, love, and justice.

### 3. Five forces

Conclusively, the ethics of vocation provide a clear pathway to the fulfilment of the vocation in labor. However, it is not self-evident that the vocation will be fulfilled in the daily life, that the human being will flourish. The homo dignus<sup>4</sup> is exposed to several forces, which might both help and hinder in fulfilling the vocation. The first force is the moral power of the vocation itself, coupled with the motivation of *caritas* (the love that searches for both the good of oneself and the other), which exhorts a person to fulfil the vocation. Two distinctions provide insight into the other forces that influence the homo dignus: on one hand, the distinction between normative and positive forces, and on the other hand, the distinction between individual and collective or common forces. The combination of these distinctions yields a 2x2 matrix:

<i>General</i>	1. Vocation of human dignity	
<u>Level of analysis</u>	<u>Scientific domain</u>	
	<i>Positive</i>	<i>Normative</i>
<i>Collective/common</i>	2. Delimiting nature	3. Delimiting culture
<i>Individual</i>	5. Bounded rationality	4. Bounded morality

Table 1. Five internal/external forces influencing dignity

<sup>4</sup> The term homo dignus is used in-text to refer to the human being, who is ideally subject to the five forces and answers the vocation of dignity.

At the level of the individual homo dignus, there are two bounds, which are related to his dignity: the boundedness of his rationality and of his morality. He will not be able to completely fulfil his vocation but will be bounded in his possibilities to realize this ideal. The realization of human dignity and flourishing will remain imperfect. The homo dignus is bounded in his ability to decide not only on the domain of ethical considerations but also on the domain of cognitive capabilities. Homo dignus therefore does not always arrive at the best choice, a point to which we return later.

On top of that, the homo dignus is no atomistic individual, but rather is part of a community, and subject to many circumstances and institutions which he cannot influence. We call this the delimitating force of the human environment, which delimits human possibilities (some of which are determined before birth). One can distinguish delimiting nature and delimiting culture. We define nature as the material, physical condition in which the homo dignus is born. Cultural circumstances are the formal and informal institutions which structure the ways of a person's society. So, human possibilities are delimited: on the one hand, in the natural and material sense, and on the other hand, in the cultural and moral sense.

The next part of this paper discusses the details of these forces, beginning with the collective forces of delimiting circumstances and delimiting culture, then addressing the individual forces of bounded morality and bounded rationality. The vocation of human dignity is the motivating force, which has been discussed extensively above. The discussion of these forces concludes with a consideration of the implications of these limitations for a model of economic decision-making.

### *Delimiting nature*

The concept of the homo dignus reckons with the fact that the human being is born in delimiting natural circumstances. A person might have some influence on these circumstances, but they will largely delimit the possibilities to fulfil his vocation. Decision-making does not take place in an abstract vacuum, but in the concrete, natural, and delimiting reality (Georgescu-Roegen 1975, 354-6).

Natural circumstances have both an accidental and a more structural side. All kinds of accidental circumstances greatly influence a person's fate and dignity in the complex reality (Frank 2016). These circumstances can be identified as *providence*, or *fortune*. They cause uncertainty and unpredictability, and are in principle beyond the scope of causal analysis, in contrast to structural forces. The concrete possibilities offered by nature also influence the homo dignus. Climate, resources, and geography importantly influence his life and dignity.

These natural conditions are a reflection of the cosmic order. They remind the homo dignus that he is part of a greater whole, a world that rises above him and is outside his control. His fate turns out to be linked to the developments within the larger whole. Thus, human dignity is embedded in the natural environment. As a physical being, biologically

having an animal body, the human being is a part of and dependent on nature. At the same time, no living being has such a far-reaching influence on the natural environment (Georgescu-Roegen 1975, 372). Thus, natural conditions can be, next to a determining force, a mirror which reflects human dignity.

### *Delimiting culture*

In addition to the possibilities of homo dignus being delimited by natural conditions, people are delimited by the cultural conditions of society (see also Bowles & Gintis 1993, 89-98). Both informal and formalized circumstances have an influence, which are usually called institutions. These have been instituted by society to reduce the uncertainty flowing from natural circumstances, and bring predictability and clarity to life (North 2006, 48-52). These institutions might be either social, economic, or political in nature. They are ordered hierarchically: changes in one institution therefore affect related institutions. Since the society of the homo dignus is shaped by institutions that have been established before he came on earth, the range of possible outcomes with respect to dignity has been delimited.

There are two kinds of institutions: formal and informal (North 1990, 3). Formal institutions are established on purpose and exert a large influence on human choice. Next to that, there are informal institutions: implicit rules, ethics, values, and norms which inform and guide behavior. These have not received a formal status, but are safeguarded and transmitted by society itself, and are much more enduring (North 1990, 36). Whereas formal institutions can be changed at whim by those in power, informal institutions change only gradually and are more resilient to change. Formal and informal institutions therefore evolve differently over time.

The fact that these institutions delimit one's possibilities, and can hardly be changed by a single person, explains the importance of the historical course of events. The homo dignus is born into a society which has been shaped by anterior, historically determined institutions. There exists so-called path dependency: the institutions of the present depend on choices in the past (North 1990, 94; 2006, 59). Often, there is so-called 'institutional lock-in': a certain organization has historically been founded to shape a certain institution (like courts are designed to uphold the rule of law). Such an organization can only exist by virtue of a certain institution and will therefore try to maintain it, even if a better alternative arises (North, 1990, 6). Current institutions are often better explained by history, therefore, than by cost-benefit analysis. Indeed, it is doubtful whether they are optimal at all in such situations.

The institutional economists Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) address this doubt. To that end, they distinguish between *inclusive* and *extractive institutions*. Consequently, institutions can be judged on two criteria: their inclusivity and their extractivity. Inclusiveness asks: to what extent does a certain institution include people? The more people have access to an institution, the better it is. Assuming that institutions promote human flourishing, inclusive institutions are preferable.

Nevertheless, it is important to remain aware of the imperfection of the *condition humaine*: not everyone will be able to access and participate in a given institution. There will always be some outsiders. For instance, infants will never participate in politics, and the disabled will not be able to (fully) access the labor market. However inclusive institutions might be, they will never enable everyone to participate (actively). It is therefore relevant how an institution treats not only the insiders, but also the outsiders.

This induces the second criterion: to which extent are institutions extractive? Institutions that aim at providing their advantages only to the insiders, have an extractive character (Acemoglu & Robinson 2012, 81). A monopoly, for instance, profits at the expense of those who failed to obtain it. But rather inclusive institutions can also be quite extractive, such as a free labor market which leaves those who cannot work out in the cold. The question of extractiveness addresses the question of justice. The moral question is whether everyone gets what is due them, or whether the insiders appropriate everything—in which case, no justice is done and human dignity is violated.

In addition to the question of whether the formal institutions are just, another important topic regards the informal rules. Which norms, values, and ethical considerations are leading in a certain culture? These cultural conditions determine the extent to which formal institutions are dignified, and informal morality also influences the form of the formal institutions. In the best case, the informal morality is an expression of the general vocation to love. If not, cultural influences will make it more difficult for homo dignus to follow his calling.

Several scientists, mainly psychologists from the field of *behavioural ethics*, have shown that the social environment strongly influences individual behavior (e.g. Schweitzer et al. 2004, 429-30; Kern & Chugh 2009, 379-82). People mirror their behavior to that of others (Gino & Bazerman 2009, 19-24). For instance, corruption is a collective process (Ashfort & Anand 2003, 4-15) in which all individuals play a small role, but one corrupting individual might start a vicious circle of corruption. Leaders might influence individual morality through their influence on the collective ethic (Sims & Brinkmann 2002, 327-36). The delimiting culture of someone's social environment will significantly influence one's own ethics. The homo dignus might try to sustain an individual ethic but will nevertheless be influenced by his environment.

Even more dependent on environment is the extent to which the homo dignus will be respected. If the informal, delimiting culture generally respects human dignity, this will generally extend to the homo dignus. If it does not, it is likely to depend on his social standing. Furthermore, the behavior of the homo dignus towards others will also influence the respect he receives. If he treats others respectfully, it is more likely that he will receive respect himself. The passive realization of his dignity is thus partially dependent on the active one.

In short, culture and nature both delimit human choices. Natural resources and a loving and respecting culture might provide a rich ground for human dignity to flourish. On

the other hand, scarcity and negative reciprocity might undermine dignity. Cultural and natural circumstances thus have an important influence on human dignity and flourishing.

PROPOSITION 3: Nature and culture delimit the possibilities for human dignity and flourishing, which will be more realized if:

- (1) Natural circumstances are favorable;
- (2) Institutions are inclusive and just;
- (3) Cultural norms and values promote human dignity.

### *Bounded morality*

Apart from emphasizing the importance of culture, the concept of the homo dignus also posits a personal morality and responsibility. While these are not independent, a distinction should certainly be made with the collective morality. As expounded above, this morality starts with the idea of vocation. The fulfilment of the vocation is complicated by human imperfection, which we indicate by the term *bounded morality*. This is characterized by the fact that while most people consider themselves highly moral beings, they regularly transgress ethical boundaries. Theology designates the transgression of objective moral standards as sin. It has developed an extensive set of instruments to confront people with the violation of objective moral boundaries (Van Geest, 2021, 99). Human beings regularly violate not only objective moral boundaries, but also their own subjective moral boundaries, as shown by research within *behavioral ethics*. In order to keep their self-esteem intact, though, most people keep their transgressions limited (Mazar et al. 2008, 634-5).

This structural moral imperfection, which has been acknowledged for centuries in the Judeo-Christian and other religious traditions, has been clearly proven by *behavioral ethics*, which made clear that there are many ways in which human beings condone and ignore their ethical transgressions. This is generally called *moral disengagement* (Moore et al. 2012, 2-6). Ethical transgressions are condoned by the use of euphemistic language, moral justification (the ends justify the means), avoiding responsibility, denying negative consequences, or blaming the victims. Moral disengagement is thus a combination of bounded morality and a moral self-image.

On top of that, bounded morality reveals many other quirks of the human mind. Human beings are inclined to present the moral side of their behavior more positively than may be warranted (Tenbrunsel et al. 2010, 157-65). Bounded rationality might prevent people being aware of the importance of moral considerations (Tenbrunsel & Messick 2004, 229-31; Chugh et al. 2005, 86-92). This can result from exhausted cognitive energy and self-control. However, internalization of a moral code can prevent this ethical fading (Gino et al. 2011, 193). In short, ethical decisions do not result from rational cognitive considerations, but from the complex functioning of the human mind.

Despite the boundedness of his morality, the homo dignus has a vocation to do good. Fortunately, morality is no predetermined outcome, and the homo dignus can actively engage with his bounds. Exercising norms and values will result in virtues, which enable subconscious moral behavior. Moreover, consistently internalized virtues will guard one from *moral disengagement*. Nevertheless, the human being remains imperfect and will not always exercise these virtues.

Another question is whether the homo dignus, despite his bounded morality, can realize human flourishing in good relationships (see also Waldinger & Schulz 2023, 27-53). This is possible through exercising the virtue of love. The virtue of love enables one person to handle the imperfection of the other. From the perspective of justice, it is right to respond in kind to a violation of one's dignity in order to obtain satisfaction. But if bounded morality hinders the offender from seeing his guilt, that person will consider the request for satisfaction as unjust, leading to resentment and damage the relationship.

Offering a better solution is the motivation of *caritas*, which does not require justified vengeance and satisfaction. On the contrary, *caritas* exhorts to retain a good relationship with the offender, although a violation of dignity cannot be ignored. Therefore, if the offender repents, this will enable the offended to forgive the violation and thus reconcile the violator and the violated (see McCullough et al. 1997, 332-4; Warmke 2016, 571-6). In this way, the homo dignus has the possibility to repair the relationships that have been damaged by bounded morality.

In short, human morality, which is intimately connected to human dignity, is not always benevolent. It is not self-evident that the vocation of dignity will be fulfilled, as bounded morality is a large hurdle. But there is room to improve fulfilment of the vocation: by reinforcing the virtues, focusing on duties, and emphasizing the importance of love.

### *Bounded rationality*

It is assumed in the social sciences that human beings have *rationality* or *reasonability*. It was shown before that dignity is closely related to rationality. This implies that the human being is rational and acts on the basis of motivations and drives, rather than being guided like an animal by *stimuli* and *instincts*. However, the concept *rationality* implies a very specific interpretation of what it is to be reasonable: rational choice is understood as a cognitive process in which the value of all different outcomes is calculated, and the most valuable course of action is chosen. Research in cognitive psychology and behavioral economics emphasizes that most choices are not made in this way, even when it could perfectly be executed. Hengstmengel (2019a) explicates that the predecessors of this *homo rationalis* possessed a much richer reasonability, which has been lost in the course of theory development.

Behavioral economics therefore departs from the view of human nature as a “rational” *homo economicus* to a perspective on renewed “reasonable” being, sometimes called *homo*

*psychologicus*. Not only are many choices made subconsciously, but also reason itself is not completely calculating. Human beings are not inclined to calculate the advantages of every decision but avoid doing this as much as possible: from the perspective of Kahneman (2011, 46), this is a kind of constitutional laziness; from the perspective of Gigerenzer and Brighton (2009, 107-10), this is a mental optimization. According to Simon (1976, 65-85), they merely search for a satisficing choice. They prefer rules of thumb or heuristics, which are easier to use than calculations. These heuristics are imperfect and might lead to wrong decisions. On top of that, emotions have a strong influence on decisions, which might lead to irrational behavior from an economic point of view.

Furthermore, people have limited self-control (Mullainathan & Thaler 2000, 4). Controlling oneself and repressing visceral influences requires mental energy, which can be depleted. Such ego depletion reduces self-control (Kahneman, 2011, 42). Moreover, most people have too much self-confidence (Kahneman 2011, 209). They assume that their intuition and heuristics are right, whereas humility would suit them better. Thus, they often overrate their own opportunities.

Another non-rational but important tool in decision-making is intuition: by regularly assessing comparable situations, an expert learns to recognize certain circumstances. This requires predictability and repetitiveness; otherwise, presumed intuition is merely excessive self-confidence (Kahneman 2011, 240). Intuition consists of associative power and the recognition of contexts, in order to associate certain circumstances with an appropriate action. This is a kind of reasonable thinking but has little to do with rational calculation.

Conclusively, the human being is boundedly rational. Considering a person's limited cognitive capabilities, this might not be a problem. Many economists, however, have wondered how human beings could be induced to behave more 'rationally'. Other economists judged that rationality should be defined differently but did not agree on the correct approach. The concept of the *homo dignus* orients itself on a richer understanding of what it means to be reasonable. Reasonability is much closer to the idea of *ratio* envisioned by the aforementioned philosophers and theologians when they considered it a foundation of dignity. Although this reasonability is bounded as well, a fair understanding of human reason is not helped by comparing it to an economic interpretation of rationality. It seems that the idea of *procedural rationality* is most suited to the idea of the *homo dignus*.

#### **4. Decision-making in the context of the *homo dignus***

The *homo dignus* should take account of the bounds and delimiting circumstances in his decision-making. Behavioral economics stimulated the development of many models of decision-making which try to do so. All these models are characterized by a certain kind of 'rationality,' which wants to take the reality of human life into account. The model of *procedural rationality*, as developed by Simon (1976), fits the concept of the *homo dignus*

well. Interpreted in a way that both incorporates goal- and value rationality, it can take into account all elements which are important from the homo dignus perspective.

Simon (1976, 65-85) proposed the concept of *procedural rationality*. He meant (Barros 2010, 463-6) that people choose rationally, but not in the way of rational choice-theory. Human beings do not optimize, but search for satisfaction. They search for information until they have found a course of action that is sufficient or satisficing. They judge the alternatives they find by simple heuristics. According to Simon, human beings are rational in a procedural way.

For the homo dignus, a well-ordered procedural rationality can integrate Weber's (1925, 18) *goal rationality*, which asks how certain goals can be best attained by the available means, and *value rationality*, which questions whether means and goals are in accordance with a certain value. The homo dignus tries to integrate these two modes of rationality into one complete rationality. This rationality sets fulfilling the general vocation as its moral goal, and consequently wonders how human action can best contribute to this goal. The homo dignus thus strives for dignity, to which both means and goals should conform.

When dignity is the goal of which human flourishing results, calculation and optimization are no longer central elements of a decision procedure. Dignity does not allow for monetization or willingness-to-pay comparisons. *Some things have a value and no price*, as Kant famously wrote (1906 [1785], 79). The homo dignus must therefore perform a much harder task: that of value judgment. Values are not commensurable. Whether a certain choice is preferable from the principle of dignity and the ensuing vocation, can only be ascertained by judging the alternatives from the different values that are relevant to the choice at hand. When comparing the alternatives, reasonable judgment will be needed regarding which value trumps the others. This appreciation of human bounds leads to the following proposition:

PROPOSITION 4: Human boundedness thwarts the realization of human dignity and flourishing, which will be more realized if:

- (1) Moral boundedness and guilt are acknowledged and forgiven;
- (2) The ideal model of decision is not rational optimization, but reasonable judgment;
- (3) Despite his boundedness, the homo dignus does not refrain from the vocation of dignity.

## 5. Conclusion

Homo dignus is the name of the view of human nature which considers human dignity as the central aspect of being human. This dignity, grounded in the human person and its intellectual and social capacities, is universal, a gift, and active. This definition is based on the notions in the Christian tradition about human beings, who have been created in God's image and are therefore loved by Him.

This dignity is no passive property but is a vocation requiring realization. This vocation of conscience relates to God, fellow beings, the self and the objects—which all ought to be known, served, and loved. Realizing this vocation will lead to human flourishing. The economic sphere and the labor done there is one of the important domains of this vocation. This realization stands in contrast to Maslow’s understanding of self-actualization, which focuses on some internal force, whereas realizing one’s dignity takes place through answering the external vocation.

Answering this vocation and realizing one’s dignity are not self-evident for the homo dignus, whose possibilities are delimited by the natural and cultural circumstances of his context, and whose moral and intellectual capabilities are not unlimited but bounded. The vocation is thus not always fulfilled, which characterizes human imperfection.

To handle this boundedness, determination and imperfection well, balanced decision-making based on reasonable judgment is indispensable. A *rational procedure* can provide for this, which puts value judgment at the heart of the procedure. Moreover, guilt needs to be acknowledged and forgiven, in order to restore damaged relationships. The homo dignus is therefore far from helpless in the face of bounds, delimitations, and imperfection, but rather is able to search reasonably for the best decisions and strive to flourish.

## Appendix

This appendix is an exposition of the twelvefold vocation to love, as defined by T. P. van der Kooy. Hengstmengel (2019b) described them in the following, clear table (translated):

	<i>God</i>	<i>Fellow</i>	<i>Self</i>	<i>Objects</i>
<i>Know</i>	Harmonious life: simultaneous realization of all norms	Social norm of community	Self-knowledge	Knowledge of nature and culture goods
<i>Trust (love)</i>	Eschatological expectation: expecting the arrival of the kingdom of God	Ethical norm of neighborly love	Self-love and self-denial	Valuation according to the economic norm of efficiency
<i>Serve</i>	Cultural progress: obedience to the cultural mandate	Legal norm of justice	Self-actualization	Have dominion over and dispose of

Van Geest, Rupert, Hengstmengel, Biemond & Commandeur (2019) described in the next table what happens if the vocation to love is not fulfilled, but neglected:

	<i>God</i>	<i>Fellow</i>	<i>Self</i>	<i>Objects</i>
<i>Neglect</i>	Disharmonious life	Alienation	Self-estrangement	Technocracy
<i>Distrust</i>	Confinement to the present	Disdain	Self-despeciation Self-glorification	Economism
<i>Dominate</i>	Loss of cultural values	Domination	Self-destruction Selfishness	Materialism

These tables depart from a theistic worldview, like the entire concept of the homo dignus. But even if we leave the higher vocation out of the picture, the other nine vocations retain their power for the sublunar world. The human being—irrespective of his convictions—is always and everywhere called to love his fellows, himself and the objects.

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