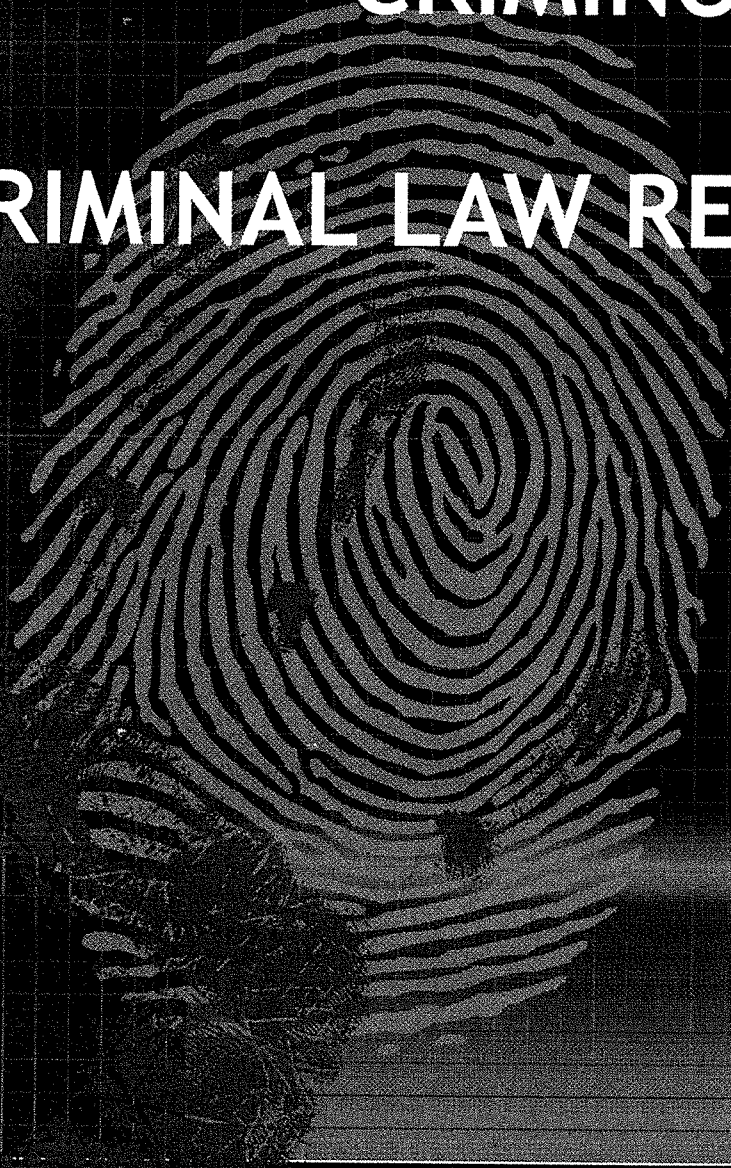




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RIGHTS OF PRISONERS AND HUMAN DIGNITY

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Abstract

The present work presents the sanctioning system that society has been building in recent centuries in order to stem and contrast the forms of delinquency and criminality that disturb the order of civil coexistence is centered on the prison sentence. The main reason is to be recognized in the fact that the law and the institutions of the criminal and penitentiary juridical field continue to be marked by a retributive punitive justice which identifies in the prison sentence the most suitable instrument for its implementation. This retributive justice finds expression in the principle that a *malum poenae* must correspond to the *malum culpae* and that between the two evils there must be a relationship of equivalence, albeit in an analogical sense, since the literal implementation of the *lex talionis* is not possible, that of the retributive logic represents the most radical and rigorous embodiment (with what penalty should rape or pedophile crimes be punished?).

Keywords: rights of prisoners, human dignity, justice, prison sentences.

The sanctioning system that society has been building in recent centuries in order to stem and contrast the forms of delinquency and criminality that disturb the order of civil coexistence is centered on the prison sentence. The main reason is to be recognized in the fact that the law and the institutions of the criminal and penitentiary juridical field continue to be marked by a retributive punitive justice which identifies in the prison sentence the most suitable instrument for its implementation. This retributive justice finds expression in the principle that a *malum poenae* must correspond to the *malum culpae* and that between the two evils there must be a relationship of equivalence, albeit in an analogical sense, since the literal implementation of the *lex talionis* is not possible, that of the retributive logic represents the most radical and rigorous embodiment (with what penalty should rape or pedophile crimes be punished?). The prison sentence, due to its measurability in days, months and years, makes it possible to adjust the severity of the sanction to the seriousness of the crime according to a mathematically quantifiable criterion of proportionality. The logic of retributive justice and its implementation through the prison sentence is so deeply rooted in the social feeling and in the legal culture of the criminal law area that it is considered as an unavoidable and definitively acquired fact. For this reason, the search for alternative solutions in the way of conceiving and organizing the company's response to criminal actions has not so far received a development equal to the social relevance of the problems that characterize the criminal and penitentiary fields. Yet, evident criticalities emerge in it, especially if we analyze the results achieved in relation to the need to activate forms of commitment to remove the factors that favor criminal choices, or in relation to the need for recovery, re-

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education and resocialization. of the subjects responsible for offenses, or in relation to the need to reduce the phenomenon of recidivism.

It was pointed out that the infliction of the evil of the prison sentence, as a consideration for the evil represented by the crime according to a criterion of proportionality, leads to a distorted perception of the social phenomenon of crime, which manifests itself in an overestimation of the gravity of the crimes punished with prison sentences and an underestimation of the seriousness of unlawful conduct not sanctioned with detention (such as economic crime offenses). Furthermore, it leads to not exploiting alternative instruments, less striking but perhaps more effective to target the interests that fuel criminal activities (such as the confiscation of assets, the joint call of entities and legal persons). Above all, however, he proves to be powerless to pursue an effective crime prevention strategy, because he only strengthens intimidation without providing reasons for a free choice in favor of compliance with the rules, which represents the surest way to neutralize violent behavior. And finally, last but not least, it returns to society people with little possibility of social reintegration, and therefore almost inevitably exposed to relapse.

Indeed, faced with these critical issues, it cannot be said that, on a scientific level, the attempt to develop new interpretative perspectives to overcome the impasse of a punitive and penitentiary system in crisis of solid foundations has been completely lacking. In recent times, the principles of punitive justice have been challenged in the context of an emerging orientation that aims to develop canons and methods of restorative justice deemed more suitable and more productive. Furthermore, serious study approaches have been developed on the distortions, manipulations and exploitation that lurk in the punitive apparatus of society and in the functioning of social control agencies, which have led to theorizing, in the field of criminal and criminological sciences, alternative forms of diagnosis and therapy of the social phenomenon of deviance and delinquency.

There was talk of "minimum criminal law" and of prison as a last resort to be adopted in the response of the institutions to crimes and the disorder of illegality. But these attempts, despite having introduced useful elements of analysis on a theoretical level, have not affected the punitive system based on the prison sentence on a practical level, which has remained solid in its structure up to now, although it has been subject, in recent decades, to review and reform processes. We do not intend, in this short contribution of reflection on the prison world, to enter into the merits of the paradigms of the criminological and criminal sciences that have problematized the function of punishment in society and elaborated a critical vision of traditional punitive and penitentiary systems.

Much more modestly we intend to show how, as an alternative to the pursuit of the maximum objective of overcoming the punitive system centered on prison detention and its replacement with more humane and productive forms of treatment and recovery of subjects responsible for antisocial behavior, the need for respect for human dignity, which cannot undergo derogations even with regard to deviant and criminal subjects, has in the meantime found forms of implementation in the context of the prison world, resulting in a progressive humanization of the treatment of inmates, although the results achieved in this direction are still partial and incomplete. The juridical instrument that allowed to activate virtuous processes of civilization of life in prisons was that of human

rights, which have found, also in this area, as well as in civil life, a fertile field of application, proving suitable to mitigate the situations of degradation, isolation, violence, brutalization which, by ancient and general practice, are there. Therefore, the objective pursued in these pages is to reconstruct the paths and processes through which the moral request for the protection of the dignity due to every man, beyond any connotation of race, language, culture or religion and from every concrete state of life, which has been expressed and concretized at a political and legal level through the category of human rights, has been used to resolve and overcome the inhuman living conditions of prisoners, causing significant changes in the organization of penitentiary institutions, with a particular eye on the Italian situation.

In this perspective, it should be noted immediately that an important turning point in the structure of the prison regime in our country is represented by the 1975 law reforming the prison system, which profoundly modified the previous legislation dating back to 1931, introducing innovative principles concerning the relationship between prisoners and penitentiary institutions and affirming the idea that inmates do not cease to be holders of fundamental rights, even if they are in detention for having suffered criminal convictions. In the previous phase, which includes the liberal, fascist and, limited to the first decades, also the republican period in the history of Italy, the prison regime involved a clear separation between life inside the prison and the free world, legitimizing the use of violence in towards prisoners and adopted a centralized and top-down system of the prison administration. The philosophy that inspired him centered on the idea that suffering and deprivation were essential elements for the purposes of repentance of inmates, who, therefore, once subjected to the prison regime, found themselves deprived of the rights due to free people, emptied of active subjectivity and completely subject to the prison authorities.

The regulatory change of 1975 is not determined by chance, but is part of a general process of improvement in the living conditions of prisoners triggered by various international and national factors attributable to the new sensitivity for respect for human rights that has been spreading in the second postwar period to prevent the relapse into Nazi-fascist barbarism, and which found, at first, consecration in Universal Declarations, in International Conventions, in Constitutions, and, later, implementation in ordinary laws of the State, in executive regulations and in jurisprudential judgments.

The complex system of protection and protection of human rights, which has thus been established at an international and national level, has exerted pressure over the years also on the penitentiary structures, which have not been able to escape from the general humanizing tendency they conveyed, with the effect that even in the prison world more effective forms of protection of the dignity of the person and recognition of fundamental rights have been provided. Among the international documents produced in the UN that constitute milestones for the protection of human rights in general, but also of persons deprived of personal freedom, one cannot help but recall the solemn Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the 1948 where it states: "No individual shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment"; or the Draft Principles, adopted by the UN in 1962, which stipulate that "every person, arrested or detained, at the time of his taking into custody, must be immediately informed of all his rights and obligations and how to use his rights" and sanction for the first time the provision of a specific treatment for the accused awaiting trial, as marked by a different

status from the convicted in these terms: "since preventive detention is not a penalty, it must be prohibited in its course the impression of any provision or restriction not dictated by the need for investigations or the maintenance of order in the place of detention as well as any other harassment "; or the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which states that "no one can be subjected to torture or cruel and degrading treatment or punishment", that "any individual deprived of his or her liberty must be treated with humanity and with respect for the dignity inherent in human person ", and that" the penitentiary regime must involve treatment of prisoners whose essential purpose is their repentance and their social rehabilitation "; finally, the 1984 Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment, which represents the first binding directive at international level. To these fundamental documents of a general nature must be added various and more specific resolutions approved by the General Assembly of the United Nations concerning principles and minimum rules on the treatment of detainees, which include, among other things, the provision to inform prisoners of their rights. and duties upon entry into the penitentiary institution and the recognition of the right to be able to lodge complaints not only with the prison authority but also with the judicial authority, or regarding alternative measures to detention.

The regulatory indications contained in these important documents of international importance for the definition and protection of human rights have undergone over time a process of regional variation to reconcile the universality of their value with the need for adaptation to a plurality of cultural worlds. , studded with considerable diversity of religion, philosophical conceptions, ethical convictions, political arrangements. This evolutionary trend has led to the issuance of further relevant human rights regulations which have developed in the various continental areas and which have specified the methods of implementation in relation to the different contexts. In Europe, the reception and adaptation of universal directives on human rights has produced particularly fruitful results. In addition to the fundamental legal texts that have sanctioned the commitment of European political structures in favor of human rights such as the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, which re-proposes the principle that "no one can be subjected to torture or punishment or cruel and degrading treatment ", and the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, it is necessary to point out specific initiatives concerning the prison world, such as the establishment in 1957 of a Steering Committee for criminals, which in 1968 received the task of adapting the Minimum Rules issued by the UN to the European context and encouraged the Council of Europe to adopt a Resolution containing Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners and Recommendations on the European Penitentiary Rules, documents which reflect more advanced positions with respect to the UN legislation regarding d rights and the treatment to be reserved for prisoners. In synergy with supranational sources, the Italian Constitution has proved to be a further determining factor in changing the management criteria of penitentiary institutions.

Above all the solemn pronouncements: "The Republic recognizes and guarantees the inviolable rights of man, both as an individual and in the social formations where his personality develops"; "Personal freedom is inviolable"; "No form of detention, inspection or personal search is permitted, or any other restriction of personal freedom, except by a motivated act of the judicial authority and only in the cases and methods

provided for by law"; "Any physical and moral violence against persons in any case subject to restrictions of freedom is punished"; "The penalties cannot consist of treatments contrary to the sense of humanity and must aim at the re-education of the condemned", have been a spur to the change in living conditions in prisons, which has materialized with the approval of the aforementioned law on the Penitentiary System of 1975, which revolutionized the criteria of penitentiary treatment. This legislation is of great importance in the first place because it responds to the legal reservation provided for in article 13, c. 2, of the Italian Constitution, filling a void, and, secondly, because it shifts the level of recognition of rights from the abstractness of solemn formulations to the concrete realization, defining contents, implementation methods, structures and control authorities. The study of the history of rights, in general, teaches that the moment of codification of the same in ordinary laws of the State represents an important stage for their implementation: in the absence of rules and regulations that clearly define which rights can be claimed, which subjects holders, such as the concrete circumstances of their practicability and the conditions of their justiciability, such as authorities, functions and administrative resources, the process of positivisation of rights on which their concrete effectiveness depends does not take place. In the absence of this passage, there is an inevitable risk that rights will remain noble ideals, bombastically proclaimed, but of little effectiveness: spirit without strength, according to the terminology of an acute theorist of rights.

With the launch of the Law and the related Penitentiary Regulations, a complex legislative system has been formed to safeguard the rights of prisoners, consisting of principles, criteria and provisions that can be traced back to different regulatory sources, which, however, constitutes a unitary set of elements that recall, integrate and limit each other. The existence of an inevitable gap between the normative provisions, which must necessarily be general and abstract, and concrete life, which presents a wealth of cases and situations not easily pigeonholed into the provisions of the law, has favored, in concomitance with the application process of the rights of prisoners, the development of a theoretical reflection on their nature, in order to clarify further useful elements for their correct use as an instrument for protecting the dignity of prisoners. In fact, legal theory has developed concepts, qualifications and categorizations of rights that can be used in the prison world in order to specify the dimensions of ownership and the circumstances of implementation.

These rights, therefore, have been interpreted and classified according to the different sources and application situations as rights *uti persona*, *uti civis* and *uti captivus*: *uti persona*, when they are constitutive of the value of human dignity and are attributed to the subject regardless of the specificity of his status as a free man or prisoner; *uti civis*, when their concrete exercise is linked to being part of a political community and to a legitimate state of citizenship, which is not lost in the condition of prisoners; *uti captivus*, when they refer to subjects who can exercise them only insofar as they are in a state of detention. To these distinctions is added the differentiation between accused rights and detained rights, which is based on the different conditions in which those who are imprisoned because awaiting trial find themselves, and therefore not yet sentenced to serve a sentence, and those who they are imprisoned following a definitive sentence, and therefore must be subjected to treatment activities by virtue of the rehabilitation function of the sentence.

Although such conceptualizations are often effective in establishing the mandatory nature of rights and in clarifying the areas, conditions and assumptions of their concrete enforceability, an excessive and meticulous application of these distinctions could lead to dangerous divisions and raise critical issues regarding the need to reduce the distance between the world within the walls and the world outside the walls, which must remain one of the main objectives in view of the humanization of life in prisons. From the content point of view, the rights most brought into play for the humanization of the prison world concern, on the one hand, inviolable needs for every human being, and on the other, entitlements linked to the treatment of subjects as subjected to imprisonment. The first category includes the right to personal freedom, which in the prison system can be limited but not annulled, as clearly established in a well-known sentence of the Constitutional Court which states: "whoever is in detention, even if deprived of most of his freedoms, he always retains a residue of them, which is all the more precious as it constitutes the last sphere in which his individual personality can expand ». Connected to this irrepressible need, the right to personal identity must be considered, the affirmation of which combats the risk of depersonalization and cancellation of the imprisoned subject, and various other collateral rights, which affect the freedom to maintain family relationships, to cultivate forms of correspondence and of communication with the outside world, to exercise religious thought and worship.

Furthermore, the right to health is also fundamental, which is expressed concretely in the rejection of any violation of the psycho-physical integrity of prisoners, in accessibility to health treatments, in health self-determination and in the possibility of living in healthy environments. Alongside these rights, the violation of which affects dimensions of the dignity due to man as such (*rights uti persona*), it is necessary to consider the rights more specifically linked to the treatment of condemned in view of the objective of resocialization (*rights uti captivus*). In this context, there are the rights to pursue educational objectives, of course interpreted as an element of development of the person's personality and not as forced indoctrination, to carry out cultural, recreational and sports activities, to practice work duties and to enjoy the corresponding welfare and social security benefits.

As regards the rights of this last category, which are mostly configured as social rights, it must be pointed out that they reflect the perplexities expressed by some theorists about the question of their full legal effectiveness. In fact, some scholars have supported the thesis that social rights, due to their nature of services provided by the State that require the use of large economic and financial resources, have a different applicability status than the rights of freedom, in the sense that they are feasible only in the presence of certain circumstances of economic prosperity and administrative organization that it is not always possible to find. Social rights would require substantial interventions on the part of the State for their protection, in any case a *facere*, while the rights of freedom would imply an attitude of non-interference, therefore a *non-doing*, more easily achievable. It follows that social rights would not be fully constitutive of the status of citizenship like other types of rights and would not even be real rights as they cannot be executed; it would only be programmatic concepts.

These positions are counterbalanced by the conceptions of scholars who instead support the thesis of the groundlessness of the contrast between rights of freedom and social rights with respect to the modalities and the mandatory nature of their protection,

indeed they affirm the reciprocal implication of the two categories of rights in view of their concrete implementation, based on the conviction that social rights broaden the dimensions of freedom in the state, and the rights of freedom lay the foundations for social benefits to be realized in the form of subjective rights. This second line of interpretation is undoubtedly more consistent with the spirit of the international documents on human rights and the national normative texts that acknowledge their directives and is providential as regards the objective of the humanization of life in prisons. The thesis of the non-prescriptiveness or optional nature of the social rights provided for in the legislation governing the organization of the prison world would significantly compromise the value of rights as an instrument of protection of dignity for those subjected to a prison regime. The most convincing doctrine on the concept of human rights, however, is the one that rejects the reductionist views and considers as fundamental rights all the various types that have been theorized first on the ethical-philosophical level and then concretized on the political-juridical level as fundamental rights. and social rights are an essential part of this story.

If, however, as we have tried to show, the affirmation of human rights has inspired and favored in recent decades the creation of an articulated and solid regulatory system aimed at the protection of human dignity in the contexts where detention takes place, we must not delude ourselves that this automatically produces their effective application. Empirical studies, field research, experiences, attest that the rights of prisoners risk remaining solemnly proclaimed in the legal texts and substantially disregarded in practical life if a concurrence of active commitment by all those involved in the organization of life does not intervene in prisons, from surveillance magistrates to prison directors, from educational staff to prison staff, from the guarantor for the rights of prisoners to lawyers, from volunteers to inmates themselves, so that the multiple obstacles, sometimes of a theoretical nature and concerning problems, are removed interpretative of legislative texts and regulations, but much more often of a bureaucratic-administrative nature, which risk nullifying the humanizing effect of rights in places of detention made possible by the legal instruments available.

It would not be out of place to reflect on the possibility of creating new professional figures to be entrusted with the task of facilitating the exercise of human rights in prisons and helping to dissolve the many practical impediments that prevent inmates from accessing the entitlements provided for in the regulatory texts. Last but not least, incisive and incisive work on the part of cultural agencies and the media that influence the formation of public opinion is needed to combat the belief that offenders deserve exclusion and segregation from social life for having violated the rules of the social contract and to spread the idea that inmates, despite having been sentenced to prison for infringing assets protected by law, remain fully entitled to men and citizens with rights who continue to be members of the social forum in to which they must be helped to reintegrate after serving their sentence. In this regard it is worth quoting a warning that comes from one of the most authoritative voices of ethical-philosophical culture: "I cannot refuse all respect for the vicious himself as a man, because the respect due him for his quality as a man in any case cannot be deprived although by his conduct he makes himself unworthy. There are thus infamous punishments that degrade humanity itself [...] and which [...] also make the viewer blush to belong to a species that can be treated in this way ».

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