

The Contemporary Paradigm of Human Dignity in the European Union Context

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Abstract The European Council adopted a strategic agenda for the period 2019-2024 focused on protecting citizens and freedoms while promoting European interests and values on the global stage. In this regard, the concept of human dignity is crucial given that the first article of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU states »Human dignity is inviolable. It must be respected and protected«. This chapter presents traditional and contemporary paradigms of human dignity relying on its cultural and historical aspects and highlights its relevance in the context of the EU today.

Keywords: • human dignity • European Union • human rights • democracy • pluralism • human being • Charter of Fundamental Rights • Lisbon Treaty

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1 Introduction

One of the European Union's cornerstones is the agreement on a set of shared values, such as respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and observance of human rights. These principles are reiterated in the EU's main strategic documents and in its founding (constitutional) framework. A core tenet of the EU - human dignity - is directly mentioned in the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights. It is also embedded in the Lisbon Treaty, which acts as the European Union's founding document. Human dignity serves as an indispensable dimension of the Union's architecture.

Human dignity is not simply some abstract idea or theoretical concept but instead actively guides the EU's policies and legislation. All EU policies and actions are underpinned by the fundamental premise of human dignity. The concept of human dignity is pivotal, serving as a compass guiding legislative, judicial and human rights-related endeavours taken by the European Union. Many human rights are based on it, which implies respect for every individual's intrinsic worth and autonomy.

The way the EU approaches both internal and external actions clearly builds on this idea. Respect for human dignity extends beyond the EU's internal affairs, where it governs how member states treat their populations and their interactions with each other. It also shows up externally in how the EU and its population interact with non-member populations, influencing migration policies, trade policies, international cooperation, different areas of diplomacy etc.

For several reasons, it is vital to comprehend the cultural and historical facets of human dignity. First, from a legal perspective, the idea of human dignity is the foundation of the EU's legal system. Understanding how this concept has been shaped may offer insights into the interpretation and application of European Union law and policies. Second, from a historical perspective, major historical occurrences like the Second World War and the Cold War have profoundly impacted Europe's understanding of human rights and dignity. Knowing about this historical progression is useful for grasping the basis for the EU's dedication to human dignity. Third, comprehension of the cultural and historical facets of human dignity is beneficial for development and implementation policies concerned with migration, integration, education, social inclusion etc. Finally, the European Union is characterised by the promotion of cultural diversity, pluralism, tolerance and unity. While following these guiding principles, the EU must recognise the distinctions between the member states and its citizens and consider them when drafting and implementing EU legislation and policies. These efforts can be strengthened by comprehending human dignity, ensuring respect for cultural variety, taking the different experiences and characteristics within the Union into consideration.

The aim of this chapter is to explore the traditional and contemporary paradigm of human dignity on the theoretical level while illustrating the importance of the individual human

in the European Union context, relying on the concept of dignity, itself made up of initial and realised dignity. In this respect, the chapter considers a few aspects of the human dignity concept that are relatively ignored, yet at the same time essential for the individual and their functioning as well as for future research.

2 Historical Overview of the Human Dignity Concept

2.1 Antique Beginnings

The Greeks used the terms "axia" (lat. dignus) and "axioma" (lat. dignitas), which were connected with value, merit ("worth", "desert", "value" – see Echeñique, 2012; Lebech, 2004; 2009; Owens, 1971), on whose basis one counted either more or less so (Lebech, 2004). The term "axia" was also used by Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics* in which he follows the principle of distributive justice. According to Aristotle, dignity must be earned because it does not exist by itself. (Lebech, 2004) notes that Aristotle does not convey the idea that all human beings, simply because they are members of the human species, possess the same "axia". Instead, says Lebech, human beings are not equal and do not have equal status. The justice of existence in distribution is thus determined by their different "axia" (ibid.). (Kraynak, 2008) explains Aristotle saw man as a rational being with a human soul, and is therefore at the top of the hierarchy of the conscious beings. Yet, Aristotle did not see human beings as unique absolute beings within the cosmos of unlimited value as the celestial bodies are more perfect than human.

According to (Siedentop, 2014), in ancient times the centre of society was represented by the family, which was not only a civil but also a religious institution, headed by the "pater familias" who held the role of family judge and priest. The family's greatest concern was to prevent its extinction and conserve its worship - the family represented an instrument of immortality. Caring for one's fellow man was not considered a virtue and probably would not have been understood in that way at the time. The ancient citizen enjoyed a special honour, which according to Ober (2012) means that during classical antiquity dignity in most communities was based on privileges. Hence, according to (Siedentop, 2014), ancient thought was based on natural inequality and hierarchical order. The exception was Athens following the introduction of Athenian democracy, where 'civic dignity' was the norm within a democratic system in which mutual respect and public participation were encouraged (see Millett, 1989).

In Roman society, dignity (dignitas) was related to social reputation, position and status, people were basically not equal to each other, but had to achieve a certain level of dignity. (McCrudden, 2008) states that at the time honour and respect were given to a person who was worthy of these two due to their special status. For example, the appointment of an individual to a particular public office also brought dignity with it. In this sense, dignity was closely related to social honour.

The concept of human dignity was somewhat expanded by the Stoics with the basic principle of equality. Thus, in the circle of the Stoics dignity was not tied to the status of the individual (Ivanc, 1999). Possibly under the influence of Stoicism (see Rosen, 2018), (Cicero, 1913) mentions the term "dignitas humana", albeit very rarely. Today, it is considered an important early source of dignity (Bloch, 1986). According to some authors, Cicero was the first to use the term dignity in order to express the idea that all human beings are endowed with dignity and that therefore human beings hold a superior position in the universe (Sensen, 2011). The described articulation of dignity (as an inherent and universal characteristic) was, however, not the majority opinion at the time of the Stoics (Glensy D., 2011).

2.2 Influence of Christianity

The Christian thinking that has dominated the West since the late Roman Empire thus placed the idea of the human being at the centre. Human beings are created in the image of God and hence endowed with human dignity (Erhueh, 1987; Kraynak, 2008). It is not essential that God is the creator of human beings since this does not yet distinguish man from all the rest of creation. What is important is that God created man in his own image, and it is exactly this element that enables the rise of human dignity and for humans to be distinguished from the rest of creation (Dan-Cohen, 2011). The essence of the Christian tradition is described by (Siedentop, 2014) who explains that following Jesus' crucifixion and his resurrection from the dead, the individual was given the opportunity to submit to the mind and will of God. Thus, the place of the ancient family with its characteristic of immortality was replaced by the individual. According to Christian teaching, human beings occupy a unique place in the universe (Grant, 2007).

When researching Christian thought and the Christian idea of human dignity, we must not overlook the Pope of the Roman Catholic Church, Leo I, also known as Leo the Great, his sermons and his two-part conception of dignity. (Miguel, 2002) says that Leon the Great categorises dignity as an ontological category, without moral content – man is born with a special value and accordingly all human beings have the same dignity. Similar to Cicero, Leo the Great bases this dimension of dignity on the special abilities of man, i.e., reason, which gives the individual the ability to control sensory stimuli. Unlike Cicero, Leo the Great connects human dignity with God and claims that human beings are created in God's image.

2.3 The Renaissance period

During the Renaissance, the importance of man, his value and his essence came to the fore, leading to many works emerging on the meaning of human dignity. Some authors (Donnelly, 2013) characterise Renaissance humanists and their ideas as predecessors of modern ideas about human dignity. Italian Renaissance author Giovanni Pico della Mirandola dealt with human dignity and should in particular be emphasised in this

context. From the point of view of human dignity, his work *De hominis dignitate* (English title: *Oration on the Dignity of Man*) from 1486 is worth mentioning. This work is often called a manifesto of Renaissance humanism. Pico della Mirandola sees human dignity in man's freedom to create his own destiny and essence. Man can degenerate into a lower vegetal or animal nature or elevate the soul to the angelic and divine level (Pico della Mirandola, 1997). With the aim of elevating the soul, Pico della Mirandola encourages man to suppress the stiffness and aggressiveness of the lion lurking within (Pico della Mirandola, 1997); therefore, man is encouraged to repress his own passionate tendencies and control the fury of the lion within himself. When Pico della Mirandola tempts a man to motivate him to attain dignity on the divine level, he actually elevates the human being to the level of divine creations and places the human alongside God and the angels.

The Christian Church, on the other hand, contradicts Pico della Mirandola by stating that people's actions are guided by God and people should follow the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures since this is the way to avoid the influence of the Devil and a pernicious life. Pico della Mirandola, in contrast, leaves man alone while giving him the power to make the most of himself with the help of the actions he is willing and able to do. In this context, Pico della Mirandola does not lead a man to a certain life path, but leaves a free path without guidelines for him at the same time as he generally believes that man will stay on the path.

When reading Pico della Mirandola's *De hominis dignitate*, one can perceive the beginnings of the process of individualisation, which then disappeared and flourished again a few centuries later. Still, these days we are certainly witnessing it more than happened at any time in history. Pico della Mirandola's encouragement of man to create oneself, one's essence and one's identity is more than a cue for the process of individualisation, which (Habermas, 2010) stresses in relation to human dignity. The existentialism of modern man, the individual's search for meaning, the search for an answer to the question of what a human being is, the pursuit of man's goals and plans - these are all typical questions that today occupy every individual and inspire many authors. (Habermas, 2010) explains that historically in terms of the original idea of the universality of human dignity (i.e., the idea of the equal dignity of all human beings) joined by the idea of the development of the human personality, their individual freedom, autonomy and self-improvement. Today's concept of human dignity thus combines the two: on one hand, the universality of human dignity and, on the other, it preserves the human being's uniqueness (see Kateb, 2014). This means that, first, the idea of equal human dignity of all is given to all human beings and, second, each individual is still interwoven with the idea of the individualisation process, i.e., self-realisation and the pursuit of one's goals or perfecting one's personality.

2.4 Enlightenment

In relation to the Enlightenment period, Immanuel Kant's philosophy is key to understanding the concept of human dignity. Immanuel Kant is described as the father of the modern concept of human dignity (Bognetti, 2005). While dignity in the Christian tradition is based on the idea that man is created in the image of God, in Kant's thinking human dignity is based on autonomy and reason. Kant's seminal work to be considered when explaining human dignity is the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (Kant, 2018). According to Kant, while human dignity is based on human reason or autonomy, a person must act according to the practical imperative, and when exercising their autonomy, they must always regard themselves as well as their fellow human beings as the purpose of their actions. This means that man is always the goal (and not only the means) of human action, in relation to both his fellow man and himself.

Kant characterises dignity as an intrinsic, unconditional and incomparable value. (Donnelly, 2013) states that, according to Kant, a human being is a creation with value (dignity) that is truly beyond measure and is found outside the domain of the instrumental values. Many authors (e.g. Donnelly, 2013; Shell, 2003) contend that he had a significant influence on later ideas in human rights documents, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as the modern liberal mindset.

3 Traditional and Contemporary Paradigm of Human Dignity

Above, we described the 'traditional' paradigm of human dignity that has dominated throughout history and is primarily tied to the views of thinkers like Cicero, Leo the Great, Pico della Mirandola, and Immanuel Kant. (Sensen, 2011) analysed the philosophy of these thinkers and found certain similarities between them. Thus, Sensen describes how, in the traditional paradigm, human beings differ from the rest of nature or creation by their possession of certain abilities (reason, freedom, autonomy), which are either given to humans by nature or by God. These abilities vary according to author). Based on these abilities, human beings are guaranteed a special or exalted position in the universe (ibid.).

The contemporary paradigm of human dignity, in contrast to the traditional paradigm, did not exist before the 20th century and today can be seen in documents of the United Nations and other similar sources. This paradigm does not offer connections between human dignity and reason, the autonomy or any other traits of the human being. Namely, it is significantly different from the traditional paradigm that can be recognised in the philosophy of some of the above-mentioned thinkers. (Sulmasy, 2008) similarly claims that dignity cannot be defined on the basis of some characteristics or attributes of human beings, such as the capacity for rational decision-making and freedom, because that would mean that dignity does not belong to all living beings (e.g., not to mentally disabled people etc.).

In the contemporary paradigm, human dignity can today be understood as a concept with two dimensions, initial and realised dignity. Initial dignity, the first dimension of human dignity, implies the respectable status of a human being, or the status of the individual's absolute inner value. It indicates the dimension of human dignity that belongs to the individual only by virtue of the fact that they are placed in the group of the human species. It originates from human nature as such and distinguishes human beings from the members of other species. It thus means a kind of metaphysical element that is inseparably connected with man and hence exists in every time and space (Kleindienst, 2017). Considering that all human beings are endowed with inherent dignity, since they are human beings, we may conclude that it is initial dignity that represents the essence of a human being. We can say that the original dignity constitutes a human being and may therefore be characterised as a constitutive element of such a creature (Kleindienst & Tomšič, 2022). The inseparability of this element from a member of the human species makes a human being exceptional and ascribes them with a special value. Initial dignity thus goes hand in hand with some of Kant's designations of dignity as an internal, unconditional and incomparable value. For Kant, if an individual has human dignity they cannot be valued and he does not recognise any equivalent (Kant, 2018).

We can denote initial dignity as a characteristic that exists independently of anything else, i.e., a "non-relational property" (Sensen, 2011) as an objective and inherent value characteristic of a person that cannot change in any circumstances in which a person finds themselves. A human being who possesses this characteristic has a special immanent and objective value as a result, which enables them to make demands to assert their rights vis-à-vis other people.

In terms of meaning, initial dignity is close to Cohn's understanding of human dignity: dignity is associated with man's exceptional position in nature and with a synonym for the value of a human, which represents their inherent excellence that differentiates them from other living beings (Cohn, 1983). It is a permanent, stable dignity that does not have different levels. Man simply carries it within himself, and its extent is unmeasurable; it belongs to every individual to the exact same extent: to the extent that makes humans exceptional and excellent. Being human thus means being the bearer of initial dignity, which means that it is their inalienable humanity that brings respect to the individual (Kleindienst, 2017; Kleindienst & Tomšič, 2022).

Initial dignity is inevitably associated with position or status of a human being. This allows a person to demand respect from his fellow man and respectful conduct and behaviour. In other words, such a position for a person brings with it the starting point of asking other people to treat them accordingly with the virtue of humanity. From this, the need to respect every human being arises simply due to the existence of the individual's initial dignity (Kleindienst & Tomšič, 2022).

Realised dignity is a dimension of human dignity that reveals the extent to which human dignity is achieved in the case of a certain individual. This means that it is not necessary that every human being naturally endowed by initial dignity at the same time also enjoys realised dignity. Unlike initial dignity, realised dignity is impermanent and unstable (it can only be temporary). It can have different degrees, which means that a given person has a larger or smaller volume of realised dignity than their fellow man. When we say agree that someone has lost their dignity, we are talking about their realised dignity (Kleindienst & Tomšič, 2022).

4 Human Dignity on the European Union Level

With references to human dignity and fundamental rights starting to increase in international legal acts after Second World War, the trend continued on the level of the Council of Europe. On this level, we should especially mention the very relevant document the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), which, despite its preamble referring to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, does not explicitly refer to human dignity. Unlike the text of the ECHR, human dignity is much more distinctly mentioned in the case law of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), which has denoted human dignity as the very essence of the Convention. This is, for example, emphasised in the ECtHR decision *Pretty v. United Kingdom*. Human dignity is also mentioned in certain later documents of the Council of Europe such as the European Social Charter (1996), the Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine (1997) etc. (Kleindienst, 2017).

The beginnings of the European Union (the then European Community) may be characterised by the avoidance of human rights in the founding treaties rather than protecting them. Economic and political reasons were in particular at the forefront of the European integration, while the protection of fundamental rights was not so prominent early on. The European Union, which, compared to its member states and the Council of the Europe, for a long time did not have developed standards in place for the protection of human rights, later began to acknowledge that the development of its own standards for the protection of fundamental rights was inevitable for such an entity.

Only with the Treaty on European Union, i.e., Maastricht Treaty, in 1992 did culture appear on the edge of the ‘third wave’ of European integration (Akaliyski et al., 2022). The aim of the EU’s increased interest in culture, as identified by some scholars (e.g., Jarausch, 2010; Karlsson, 2010) was to strengthen European identity and increase the legitimacy of EU institutions by promoting shared values (Lähdesmäki, 2016; Akaliyski et al., 2022).

In the European Union context, human dignity is nowadays regarded as a general principle to be followed by all member states. In the primary law of the EU, human dignity was explicitly mentioned (in writing) only after the Lisbon Treaty (2007) was

adopted (Kleindienst, 2017). The Treaty on European Union provides that the Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities which are »common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail« (Article 2). Some scholars argue that the values stated in Article 2 of Treaty on the European Union are not just lofty ideals but hold the status of legally binding principles and fundamental principles of EU law (Kochenov, 2017). In the preceding treaties, the wording had remained principles; only with the Treaty on European Union did the term values appear (Akaliyski et al., 2022), which led to some terminological confusion from a legal point of view (Kochenov, 2017).

Human dignity is also referred to in the preamble of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights; moreover, its first article is entitled »Human dignity«: »Human dignity is inviolable. It must be respected and protected«. Human dignity is also mentioned in secondary European Union law and the case law of the European Court of Justice (ECJ). However, the first explicit formal recognition by the ECJ of human dignity as part of the general principles of the EU was observed in case C-377/98 *The Netherlands v. European Parliament and the Council*.

In the above-mentioned Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union (2007), respect for human dignity is positioned next to the following principles: freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. Article 2 also mentions that these principles are common to the member states in a society in which six principles prevail: 1) pluralism; 2) non-discrimination; 3) tolerance; 4) justice; 5) solidarity; and 6) equality between women and men. In the rest of this chapter, we shall analyse the relevance of the human dignity concept in relation to some principles stated in Article 2 with a view to identifying their interconnections and relations.

Some authors (e.g., Plato, Aristotle, Rawls) identified freedom as the essence of democracy and equality (see Ober, 2012; Rawls & Kelly, 2001; Robinson, 2011). Yet, developments since the end of the Second World War further led to placing human dignity at the centre of the democratic system. This is not only evidenced by legal documents, but by the increasingly frequent use of the concept of human dignity by the constitutional courts that refer to it in connection with fundamental democratic issues and describe it as the essence of democracy. (Dupré, 2012) states that the special role of human dignity in connection with democracy dates back to the end of the Second World War when the protection of human rights was very much in the centre. The status of dignity and its connection with democracy was strengthened in every wave of democratisation in Europe; first in the south upon the fall of the military regime in Spain, Greece and Portugal, and then with the collapse of communism in 1989 in Central and Eastern Europe (Dupré, 2012; 2013; *The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights*, 2014). This led to the

creation of appropriate institutional forms within which the people have control over political power and where human beings are given a central place. This principle, as stated by Dupré (2012; 2014), also included the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights in the preamble, states that the European Union places the individual at the heart of its activities and thus characterises human dignity as the essence of European democracy.

The human dignity concept is closely related to two processes: universalisation and individualisation. First, the contemporary idea of human dignity can be connected to the universalising of the status held by human beings, i.e., the egalitarian idea that all human beings are equally endowed with human dignity for the mere fact that they belong to the human species. In this regard, human dignity is considered to be a natural endowment of all human beings. Second, (Habermas, 2010) explains that while the egalitarian idea is surely the result of the universalised position of human beings, the process of universalisation was followed by the process of individualisation. Hence the idea of the universality of man was joined by the idea of the development of the personality, individual freedom, autonomy and self-realisation of every individual. This new perspective concerning the development of the human being which came to the surface gave impetus to the values of self-expression (Inglehart & Welzel, 2001). Today's concept of human dignity combines the universality of human dignity on one side, while preserving the uniqueness of the human being on the other (see Kateb, 2014). This means that it features on one side given the idea of the equal human dignity of all human beings, but also on the other side since each individual is still part of the individualisation process, i.e., self-fulfilment, the pursuit of one's goals or self-realisation of one's personality.

The combination of the universality of human dignity and individualism is a very good starting point for encouraging the application of human dignity as a two-dimensional concept. Scientific literature implies the existence of two dimensions of human dignity, even though these dimensions are often interpreted in different ways. For example, (Waldron, 2007) states that human dignity expresses something related to status, position; yet, at the same time it also raises the demand that this status or position must actually be respected. Similarly, (Becchi, 2019) points out two meanings of human dignity: the first adopts the sense that, at least as a matter of principle, human beings possess it as a natural endowment. The second meaning refers particularly to the results of activities or services performed by certain individuals, but not by others. Whilst dignity is absolute in the first meaning in the sense it cannot be enhanced or reduced, it is conversely relative in the second in that it can be both acquired and lost (Becchi, 2019). Dignity is thus inevitably needed to follow the concept of human dignity consisting of the initial and realised dignity described in the third chapter.

As described in previous chapters, initial dignity is the essence or a constitutive element of a human. By placing initial dignity at the core of the democratic system a person is given the opportunity to realise their ability to determine their own goals (see Kant, 2018), develop their identity, or their self-fulfilment/self-realization. According to (Maslow,

1970), self-realisation means realising the essence of an individual's existence. As we are living in a pluralist society, there are many possible ways for the individual to engage in self-realisation. Yet, as stated in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union (2007), pluralism is supposed to prevail in the member states. Pluralism must be separated from plurality since pluralism also predicts the recognition of the rights of other members of society and striving for the common good of society. Considering some authors (e.g., Dworkin, 2011; Rhonheimer & Murphy, 2013), we cannot talk about a truly democratic society if it represents a collection of egoistically oriented individuals and individualistic tendencies. Instead, a democratic society prefers to build on achievement of individual goals in a valuable way; in a manner that considers the common good and respect for one's fellow man. According to (Dworkin, 2011), it does not only mean the maximised self-realisation of the individual, but first of all, it is necessary to develop a critical attitude, to pursue good and to create one's own life in a meaningful way. A meaningful way to shape one's own life also includes some restrictions that are in line with the realisation of the human dignity of every individual. This allows us to conclude that initial dignity is the basis from which the tendency for pluralism in the European Union derives from, whereas the realised dignity of every individual is the final goal of pluralism and European democracy as such.

5 Conclusion

Throughout history the meaning of the human dignity concept was sometimes related more to initial and other times more to realised dignity. The overview of the historical development of human dignity in this chapter shows that without relying on history it would certainly be unable to develop patterns of thinking about human dignity as it appears in the contemporary paradigm. It was shown that human dignity was interpreted differently in various historical periods. Cicero was the first to visibly begin to spread the idea of the universality of human dignity. However, his ideas did not prevail in the society of that time. Christianity continued with the contribution to that idea, combining it with the fact that God created a human being in his own image and thus a human being is endowed with human dignity. It was the Renaissance with its emphasis on the excellence of man and his nature that indirectly led to the idea of a two-dimensional concept of human dignity, as reflected in the works of Renaissance authors. This is perfectly illustrated in the work of Pico della Mirandola (see Kleindienst, 2019). Pico della Mirandola indirectly revealed the importance of initial dignity. The latter was not related to the creation of man in God's image, as typical for medieval Christian thought, but to the freedom and excellence of man. At the same time Pico della Mirandola also implies the importance of realised dignity, yet in this respect he remains reserved as he seems to trust man to realise his dignity. It can be argued that Pico della Mirandola clearly indicated that human dignity is not to be understood as merely a one-dimensional concept. In the Enlightenment era, Immanuel Kant relates human dignity to man's capability for moral actions and reason. In the context of Kant, human dignity dictates a life of personal autonomy and empowerment. Donnelly states that Kant has not only offered a more

extensive and complete concept of human dignity, but has had a significant impact on later ideas and international documents concerned with human rights, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Although human dignity is placed next to some other values and principles listed in Article 2, it is clear that much more is to be attributed to human dignity. Not only should human dignity not be equally positioned alongside some other values and principles that pervade the European Union, but it should be understood as the origin of these values and principles and the objective to which they return. Therefore, the placement of human dignity in the first article of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of European Union is more reasonable since the greatest importance is ascribed to human dignity in the context of its placement within the document.

According to the Treaty on European Union and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, from the legal point of view it is crucial that human dignity is respected and protected. Still, when considering the contemporary paradigm of human dignity we should not overlook the relevance of the realisation of human dignity (i.e., realised dignity) in the actual life experience of the individual. As this chapter has shown, the level of respect and self-respect of an individual is closely linked to their realised dignity. We may conclude that respect of human dignity of one's fellow man is the first step to the realisation of human dignity. Thus, one's feeling of being respected and a level of self-respect is essential while evaluating one's realised dignity in concrete life cases. In order to assess one's level of realised dignity, especially qualitative studies should be conducted as they are suitable for the in-depth study of cases (Ragin, 2007). Such efforts will enable a thorough understanding of the researched phenomenon, particularly if it is inevitably connected to the individual's perceptions and feelings. When researching the degree of realised dignity, a complete, detailed and content-rich picture of the individual's sense of dignity, notably its central elements of respect and self-respect, must be created. That can primarily be achieved through the application of qualitative research methods.

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