Part I *Foundations*

Human Dignity in an Ethical Sense: Basic Considerations

Antonio Autiero

Seminar für Moraltheologie, Katholisch-Theologische Fakultät, Westfälische
Wilhelms-Universität Münster, Münster, Germany
autiero@uni-muenster.de

Abstract

The idea of human dignity is an ancient one. It has been the object of reflection with different approaches, during the various periods in the history of philosophical, theological, and ethical thought. This essay focuses on the most relevant approaches to the idea of human dignity in this cultural evolution, proposing a look at the ontological paradigm and its limits, the ethical paradigm and its values, and the theological paradigm and its resources. An anthropological reading concludes this essay, bringing out the relational value of the idea of human dignity. Based on this particular focus, the idea of human dignity assumes a form of critical thinking that makes us sensitive to the real inequalities between human beings and opens the possibility of ethical and political practices of recognition and emancipation.

Keywords

anti-essentialism – denaturalization – emancipation – imago Dei – ontology – recognition

1 Introductory Considerations

No other concept has had so much resonance in the history of ethical thought than that of the dignity of the person. Defining the concept, however, has caused acrimonious scholarly debates in various areas of moral reflection.¹

In the context of the themes that emerge in the field of bioethics, human dignity and its definition are foundational, both for the issues surrounding clinical ethics and also the field of biomedical research. To cite one example among many, we may consider the recent document of the *Deutscher Ethikrat* of 9 May 2019, concerning interventions on the human germ line. In this document, among the standards for ethical evaluation there is a list of eight factors, the first of which is human dignity (*Menschenwürde*). It is recognized that human dignity requires a priority of consideration, even before freedom, responsibility, solidarity, and other factors. Indeed, it can be said that human dignity is the foundation for all other ethical factors.²

The recourse to the category of human dignity is very common also in other documents, such as strictly religious, moral-theological documents. Consider the declaration by the Second Vatican Council on religious freedom, *Dignitatis Humanae* (1965), or more recently the declaration by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on some questions of bioethics, *Dignitas Personae* (2008).

In addition, against the background of anthropological, ethical, legal, and political reflections stands the thorny and dramatic problem of violence against women. The concept of human dignity must engage this issue with sensitivity to considerations and contributions that revolve around gender.³

And yet, no other concept is so difficult to define, especially when we consider its implications for specific ethical issues. For this reason, careful reflection and analysis are required both on human dignity's historical and systematic development, and on the need to contextualize its importance and meaning.

We know well that the idea of human dignity is very ancient and has its roots already in classical culture.⁴ The *dignitas romana* that Cicero writes about re-

1 Cf. Bayertz, *Die Idee der Menschenwürde*; Quante, *Menschenwürde und personale Autonomie*.

2 Deutscher Ethikrat, *Eingriffe in die menschliche Keimbahn*, p. 89–96.

3 The juxtaposition of the theme of dignity and that of violence against women has also been made for a long time in the various pronouncements of the popes from John Paul II to Pope Francis. For John Paul, cf. Magli, *Sulla dignità della donna*. In the case of Francis, the homily at the Mass on January 1, 2020 will be particularly remembered, with its incisive expression: “every violence inflicted on women is a violation of God.” (<http://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2020/01/01/0001/00001.html>).

4 For a good historical reconstruction of the concept, see Rosen, *Dignity: Its History and Meaning*. On the specific contribution of Hellenistic culture, see Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*.

flects a concept already known to Greek philosophy, although in these writings the emphasis is placed mainly on the socio-political aspects of personal action within the community. The dignity with which a person establishes and lives out his life in society constitutes the substance of his dignity.

Against this historical background, Christianity looks in depth at another dimension of human dignity, introducing a consideration that is more distinctly anthropological.⁵ In fact, the Fathers of the ancient church, Justin and Irenaeus for example, focus on the anthropological vision of the First Testament, emphasizing the wonder of God's creative work and the goodness of all creation, especially the goodness of human beings. The reference to the theme of the *imago Dei* becomes indispensable for a theological definition of human dignity. Although it moves the discourse in a typically religious-theological direction, it also contributes to an analysis directly linked to the essence of the person and therefore to anthropology.⁶

The following reflection intends to contribute to the ongoing definition of human dignity, embracing a gender sensitive perspective that leads us to emphasize the substantial and concrete character with which we should approach the theme of human dignity.

2 The Foundational Value of the Dignity of the Person

While in the past the concept of human dignity was the sole focus in defining the person, today it is understood as a foundational value and used to explain other ethical concepts, such as freedom, responsibility, and solidarity. If we observe the development of applied ethics in biology, medicine, social life, economic reality, family life, etc., the concept of human dignity always appears when we address the question of the foundation and formulation of norms. Human dignity becomes more and more a formal reality, subject to an aporia that is not easily solved; in itself, it says little, and yet it is expected to be a strong foundation for the formulation and justification of norms. This aporia is evident in a striking manner, when considering the concept of human dignity in relation to the theme of human rights. This is the most striking example of the disconnect between the foundational and comprehensive expectations of the concept of human dignity and its actual lack of content.

This is not the place to trace a history of human rights, however. The decades that separate us from the 1948 UDHR have certainly provided many occasions for reflection and analysis concerning both the problem of the theoretical

⁵ Cf. Schlag, *La dignità dell'uomo come principio sociale*.

⁶ International Theological Commission, *Communion and Stewardship*.

foundation for these rights and the historical conditions in which they are in fact recognized, cultivated, and practiced or where, instead, they are trampled underfoot and violated.⁷

In the network of considerations emerging from various ideological and cultural perspectives, there is a surprising consistency in that the only exhaustive foundation for human rights is precisely the dignity of the person. This choice for human dignity overcomes a centuries-old history of fragile references to extrinsic values, where the foundation was represented by elements rooted, not directly in the nature of the person, but rather in some of his individual, social, or collective dimensions. Agreement on the point that human dignity is the sole foundation for the rights of the person is a turning point of epochal value and brings with it a new concreteness and stability in the interpretation of human rights and in their morally binding value.

And yet, the concreteness and stability crumble when we try to define the concept of human dignity. The initial universal agreement on human dignity as a foundation for human rights becomes a point of disagreement due to particular definitions of human dignity, to such a degree that the solidarity that occurs in advocating human rights breaks up into fragmentary ideological barriers in light of those definitions. In particular, the abstractness with which one approaches the theme of human dignity and rights is alarming. It is not only the result of a disproportionate focus on the essentialist, metaphysical, ontological definition of human dignity, but it is also the tragic consequence of a neglected existential contextualization of this dignity, in the history of people, in people as subjects who have a gender identity that makes them specific and unique.

This is why the appeal that comes from much of feminist theology or queer theology today must be taken seriously. When – as for example Linn Marie Tonstad writes – the importance of “anti-essentialism and denaturalization” are recognized as starting points for a contextualized perspective, respectful of the subject specificity of every human being, then the theme of dignity enters into an area of substantial, consistent, and concrete understanding.⁸ But this sensitivity requires a process of rethinking that evolves through different philosophical and theological approaches and perspectives.

7 The relationship between dignity and human rights is not easy to understand. Tension points are well expressed and systematically analysed by P. Łuków, *A Difficult Legacy*.

8 Tonstad, *Queer Theology*, p. 70–72.

3 How Can We Understand Human Dignity?

3.1 *The Ontological Approach and Its Limits*

The first perspective we consider is an “ontological” approach (which can also be defined as “natural law”). Here, it is the nature of the person, with his or her concreteness of being, that functions as a fundamental point of disagreement on the definition of human dignity.

The qualitative leap in the ontology of the person, with respect to the being of other beings, demands the recognition of a particular dignity, which is of a higher degree than the dignity of other beings. A philosophical-metaphysical angle plays the greatest role here in deciphering the ontological and essential characteristics of the person, to emphasize the person's superiority, intangibility, in other words, her dignity. Within this ontological approach there are different nuances, deriving mainly from the way the person's essence is related to her historical, interpersonal, and social existence. One can and must speak, therefore, of an ontology that is more or less essentialist, more or less individualistic, more or less relational, etc. The essence of the person is mainly expressed in the fundamental law that is incumbent upon it, a law that derives from its nature as a person. The natural law, therefore, becomes the proper location of the dignity of the person. The need to respect human dignity runs parallel to the need to respect the natural law in which the person is situated. And the same dynamic is also valid on the part of the human subject: she cannot escape from respect for the natural law, because otherwise she offends and destroys her own dignity as a person.

From this perspective, human dignity is nothing other than the fullness of being; the *telos* of the person that is already written within her, through natural law. The perception of this fullness does not happen, however, in abstract and generically deductive terms, but is combined with the growth of the person's sensitivity, with her reaction to a scale of objective values, in a context of experience that is a viable route for raising awareness and personalizing the value of her personal dignity. In this sense, the ontological approach of some authors is completed and more accurately identified as an “inductive-ontological” approach (for example, for J. Messner),⁹ with due consideration for a positive and relevant meaning of experience, historicity, and the space-time, cultural-environmental conditioning. However, the metaphysical level remains predominant, and regarding what directly concerns human rights, there is a strong focus on their juridical aspect, as a particular representation of the natural law. The substantial gender identity of the person appears

⁹ Messner, *Das Naturrecht*.

irrelevant in this ontological approach. More specifically, this absence of reference to the specific gender of people affects the female subject, who is, so to speak, incorporated into the generically “human”, that is, male.

3.2 *Ethical Approach and Its Values*

A second perspective to define human dignity is the transcendental philosophical approach, as formulated by I. Kant.¹⁰ He sees the reason for human dignity as based on the moral self-determination of the human being, on his moral autonomy. This autonomy is “the reason for the dignity of human nature and of any rational nature”.¹¹ In fact, a being who is able to become a law to himself cannot be without dignity. Moral autonomy entails an immediate consequence: the person, in his actions, must abide by the dictates of a categorical imperative which concerns and grounds his dignity. This imperative is formulated by Kant as follows: “Act in such a way as to use the humanity that is in you and in every other person always as an end and never as a pure means.”¹² The categorical nature of this ethical requirement is in turn based on the rationality of the person. The person is truly capable of giving herself direction and moral directives, and this is her dignity.

The foundation of this dignity is not an empirical datum. It does not belong to the fluctuation of contingent experiences, but is firmly anchored in the rational nature of the human person and is expressed in the ability to translate the depth of reason into ethical terms. However, dignity does not depend on the concrete realization of the moral imperative. It can be predicated of every human being, as a subject endowed with ethical autonomy and antecedently to seeing how this ethical autonomy is exercised in the concrete. In a sense, the Kantian formulation of human dignity is also essentialist and relates to the nature of the person. This is done, however, not in relation to ontology, but rather in relation to the substantial morality of the person.

With this shift initiated by Kant, from the terrain of metaphysics to the terrain of morality, a new and relevant element for the foundation of human rights and for a more adequate understanding of their nature is introduced. Kant recovers the close relationship between the idea of law and that of duty. On the basis of a person's due dignity, the human being is the subject of inalienable rights, and their transgression would immediately lead to the human

10 Useful references are: Centi, *Il tema della dignità della ragione*; Dean, *The Value of Humanity*; von der Pfordten, *Zur Würde des Menschen*.

11 Kant, *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, p. 95.

12 Kant, *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, p. 88.

being's reduction from an end to a pure means. But on the basis of the ability to orient herself to the good and to follow the categorical imperative in her moral life, the human being is also the active subject of moral duties concerning herself and other persons.

In this predominantly ethical approach, the suspicion could easily emerge that at the root is a sort of moral optimism, of enthusiastic faith in the human ability to perceive and to follow the categorical imperative and therefore to express her dignity always and in any case. Kant overcomes the risk of this misunderstanding by emphasizing that in the person, in her historical condition, evil acts constitute a real attack on the human being, on her will and her dignity. It is only the predisposition and the inclination towards the good that establishes the dignity of the person, not the realization of good acts. With this qualification, Kant thereby salvages the possibility that the rights as a human person will be recognized and attributed even to one who is unjust and dishonest.

Human dignity consists, then, in an ontological openness of being to the good and is the responsibility of the subject, beyond the moral evaluation of her behavior. Human rights are ultimately founded on this human quality of being and becoming a subject open to the good.

However, the danger of abstractness in this vision of dignity must not be overlooked. This abstractness is connected above all with the formal character of the anthropological reference on which dignity is based. The minimal concrete specification, the insufficient level in considering the material scale of values in their genesis and in placing them as motivational instances for life practices, make the idea of human dignity ultimately evanescent, unable to affect the transformative processes of its own history and that of other people.

3.3 *Theological Approach and Its Resources*

The third perspective on human dignity is immediately related to the basic lines of a theological anthropological approach. Human dignity has its roots in the fundamental reality of the creation and salvation of the human being by God. God imprints on the human being his image and his likeness, thereby making the human being superior to all other beings who are creatures, but not creatures created in the image of the Creator. Only the human being has this original characteristic, and she alone has a specific and proper dignity, the summit of all other forms of dignity.

The theological emphasis that we see here has produced over the centuries a diversified history of the interpretation and utilization of the theme of the human being as an image of God. Recently, an ecumenical working group of Catholics and Protestants in Germany produced the text *Gott und die Würde*

des Menschen, recognizing the *imago Dei* category as the fundamental article of Christian theological anthropology and the basis for every ethical evaluation.¹³

The appeal to dignity in the patristic era had its own background and a directly parenetic and ethical use. The Christian who had to “recognize his own dignity”¹⁴ had to assume different styles of judgment and behavior than other citizens. But this limitation of the theme of the image to the ethical field is certainly not the most original contribution we find in Christianity.

Especially in theological and philosophical writings in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the theme of dignity is incorporated into a broader vision and leads to the formulation of different and correlative theses, which intend to answer the question of how and in what respect the character of the human being is manifested as an image of God. In other words: what is the dignity of the human person?¹⁵

The age of scholastic philosophy was characterized by a deliberate choice for the intellectual-rational value of the image of God, imprinted on the human being. The formulation of the *imago in speculo rationis* contains this truth. Here, we focus on the human ability to know herself and God, and this is her dignity.

But such a partial interpretation, though worthy of theoretical and systematic attention, reduced the transparency of the divine imprint, present in the human creature and concealed the nobility of the whole person, reducing her to a broken system of intelligence and will, of reason, of heart and body. To this theological anthropology is also added the belief that only the human being as man – not as woman – was the image of God.¹⁶

It is urgent to overcome this reductive vision through the recovery of a holistic anthropology that is clearly present in the Bible, even if overshadowed by the dualistic tendencies of Greek philosophy, which penetrated primitive Christianity and still remains in some circles. The dignity of the person does not concern his capacity for knowledge and conscience. Rather, it embraces the unitary and total good of his reality, of his will, of his existence in and as a

13 Bilaterale Arbeitsgruppe der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz und der Vereinigten Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche Deutschlands, *Gott und die Würde des Menschen*, no. 50.

14 Famous is the exhortation “Agnosce, Christiane, dignitatem tuam” of St. Leo the Great (Homilia in Nativitate Domini, 21, 3).

15 The Prologue to I, II of the *Summa Theologica* of St. Thomas Aquinas articulates a reflection on the theme of the image of God in the human being as the foundation of his or her profile as a free, autonomous subject, a bearer of dignity.

16 We read in the *Decretum Gratiani* (1140), q. 5, c. 33: “Mulier debet velare caput, quia non est imago Dei.” To understand this nodal point, the researchs of K.E. Børresen remain fundamental, in particular *The Image of God*, and *Subordination and Equivalence*.

body, in his capacity for intersubjective relations and in his imperfect relationship with the divine, God, without losing contact with the contingency of historical situations, which are precarious and threatened by the risk of negativity and evil.

The dignity of the person is the dignity of the whole being, because in the totality of this being God's presence lives and exists and is expressed through the imprint of his image. The human being is thus ennobled in his nature and in his history as a human subject and is as such a recipient of fundamental rights and capable of corresponding duties.

As a result of the intimate unity between the plan of creation and the plan of salvation, every human being carries within himself the image of God and derives from this identity the foundation of his own dignity, which is expressed in the right to have rights, in the claim to see them recognized and in the capacity to assume duties, exercised in responsibility.

4 Anthropology of Human Dignity

The philosophy of humanism and of the Renaissance was able to focus on the theme of human dignity in effective terms and to create a literary genre, with works collected under the title *De dignitate hominis*, among which we must certainly mention the *Oratio de hominis dignitate* of Pico della Mirandola (1486).

The effort of Renaissance humanism was to penetrate more deeply the anthropological vision, to obtain elements useful to define the category of human dignity. The path of anthropology remains the only practicable path today, if we are to reach a concept of human dignity that does not leave this an empty concept, but charges it with real meaning. Obviously, this path is also exposed to a risk: today anthropology is no longer a homogeneous reality, and there is no one single anthropology. The reality of pluralism, in the basic vision of the human being, of the world and of history, must first be assumed as a cultural horizon in which an anthropological reflection takes place. In connection with this, the art of dialogue on knowledge about the human being, and therefore on the understanding of the concept of human dignity in a pluralist context, must be developed.

Under these conditions, a composite reconstruction of the category of human dignity and the corresponding value of the human rights that are based on it becomes possible. The voices in this dialogue between persons and institutions that are sensitive to the human good and take care to stay clear of a fundamentalist vision, must have all the sufficient space they need in order to express themselves, but also the wisdom and competence to make themselves

credible. In this proposal, which undoubtedly has an emancipatory potential within it, gender sensitivity plays an important role, for only thus is it possible to redeem the category of dignity both from abstractness, and from its confinement in an ideal of non-inclusive man.

On this basis, and in order to promote a constructive dialogue, we can indicate those areas where anthropology should focus. Those areas are central elements for the understanding and self-understanding of the person as a “subject”, who is present and alive in history as “corporeity” and is open to “transcendence”. Although an analytic explanation of these intrinsic and substantial dimensions of the person is beyond the scope of this essay, we can say that the various rights that can be predicated about the person directly concern what we have set out above.

In the dignity of the person as an individual subject, as a reality in herself, as an end in herself and not as a pure means, fundamental rights to self-determination are anchored with regard to the way of organizing and structuring her life, to freedom of opinion, and to the choice of where and how to practice her profession.

In the dignity of the person, as a holistic being, far from the soul-body duality and reconciled with her own corporeality, assumed as the formal reality of her being present in the world, the inalienable rights to life, bodily integrity, and health are rooted. At the same time, rights to conditions worthy of humanity also have their location here, to guarantee well-being and safety for a person's own life: the right to housing, work, a healthy environment and a habitable planet.

And finally, in the dignity of the person as a self-transcending being that is substantially constituted as capable of relationality, of founding confrontation with the “you”, there emerges in the person's various relationships the fundamental rights to socialization, to forms of love, marriage and family relationships, as well as to participation in social life. Here we also have the fundamental right to religious freedom and to the cultural expressions of one's faith.

5 Conclusion

The theme of human dignity and human rights is a permanent challenge for everyone. We are all involved on a double front: that of growing in the personal awareness of being subjects of dignity and rights, and that of participating in the recognition of the dignity of the other and in the realization of the rights of others. Delegations or limitations of responsibility are not allowed in these

two areas, precisely because rights are not an optional good, but the structural and structuring necessity for the person's dignity.

Those who refuse to grow in the careful and relevant awareness of their rights, expose their dignity as a person to the risk of frustration, and make themselves vulnerable. Those who do not share in solidarity with the destiny of individuals and peoples who fight for their rights, equally endanger the human dignity that is present in those who share their own humanity.

From this point of view, it is significant to note the shift in perspective that can be seen in the enumerations of human rights that have progressively been made over the centuries, and in the 1948 UDHR. The unambiguous solidarity, which corrected the privatized and individualistic approach of the past and which made the *Universal Declaration on the Rights of Peoples* in 1976 possible, must be taken as a basic guideline for reflecting on, and fighting for, human rights, but also in understanding, articulating, and critiquing concepts of human dignity.

Ultimately, human dignity runs on two tracks of understanding that can and must complement each other. On the one hand, there is the substantive track, which goes back to the totality of the human person as subject, without leading to an individualistic isolation of the human being. On the other hand, there is the relational path, which opens the subject into a network of belonging and cultivates in the person an inclusive and participatory lifestyle.¹⁷ In the relational nature of human dignity is the intrinsic link between the right to one's dignity and the duty to respect the dignity of others. Today, we are particularly attentive to this relational nature of human dignity, also through the gender sensitivity and the gender culture that is expressed in the recognition and in the dynamic of caring for the dignity of the other. These factors result from the matrix of an emancipation project that is typical of modernity and that from time to time takes on political values and generates the real assumption of responsibility.¹⁸

Only the balanced balance between these two paths ensures a possible future for the theme of human dignity.

¹⁷ Zylberman, *The Relational Structure of Human Dignity*.

¹⁸ For the implications of this concept, see Siep, *Anerkennung als Prinzip der praktischen Philosophie*; Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*; Id., *Anerkennung. Eine europäische Ideengeschichte*; Schmidt am Busch/Zurn, *The Philosophy of Recognition*.

Biography

Antonio Autiero (born in Naples/Italy 1948) received his doctoral degree in moral theology at the Accademia Alfonsiana in Rome and in Philosophy at the University of Naples. 1983–1985 he was a fellow of the Foundation Alexander von Humboldt at the University of Bonn (Germany). There he was working together with Franz Böckle. In 1991 he became professor of moral theology at the University of Münster, until his retirement in 2013. In the time 1997–2011 he directed the Center for Religious Studies of Trento (Italy). Antonio Autiero has authored or edited books and articles (about 250) on fundamental moral theology, theories of the moral subject and in the field of applied ethics. Autiero is a member of the German Academy of Ethics in Medicine, the StemCell Research governmental commission in Berlin and the Planning Committee of Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church. He is also coordinator of the ethics group by COMECE (Commission of European Episcopal Conferences) in Brussels.

Bibliography

- Bayertz, Kurt: "Die Idee der Menschenwürde: Probleme und Paradoxien", in: *Archiv für Rechts- und Sozialphilosophie* 81 (4/1995), p. 465–481.
- Bilaterale Arbeitsgruppe der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz und der Vereinigten Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche Deutschlands: *Gott und die Würde des Menschen*. Paderborn/Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt/Bonifatius, 2017.
- Børresen, Kari Elisabeth: *The Image of God. Gender Models in Judaeo-Christian Tradition*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1995.
- Børresen, Kari Elisabeth: *Subordination and Equivalence. The Nature and Role of Woman in Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. A Reprint of a Pioneering Classic*, Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1995.
- Centi, Beatrice: "Il tema della dignità della ragione nel rapporto che Kant instaura tra morale critica e antropologia filosofica", in: *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa. Classe di Lettere e Filosofia*, Serie III 12 (2/1982), p. 707–747.
- Dean, Richard: *The Value of Humanity in Kant's Moral Theory*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006.
- Deutscher Ethikrat: *Eingriffe in die menschliche Keimbahn. Stellungnahme*, Berlin: Deutscher Ethikrat, 2019.
- Honneth, Axel: *The Struggle for Recognition. The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995.

- Honneth, Axel: *Anerkennung: Eine europäische Ideengeschichte*. Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2018.
- International Theological Commission: *Communion and Stewardship. Human Person Created in the Image of God*. Rome: LEV, 2004.
- Kant, Immanuel: *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* (1785), *Fondazione della metafisica dei costumi*, in *Scritti morali*, trans. by Pietro Chiodi. Torino: UTET, 1995.
- Łuków, Paweł: "A Difficult Legacy: Human Dignity as the Founding Value of Human Rights", in: *Human Rights Review* 19 (2018), p. 313–329.
- Magli, Ida: *Sulla dignità della donna. La violenza sulle donne: il pensiero di Wojtyła*. Parma: Guanda, 1993.
- Messner, Johannes: *Das Naturrecht. Handbuch der Gesellschaftsethik, Staatsethik und Wirtschaftsethik*. Berlin: Duncker & Humblot GmbH, 82018.
- Nussbaum, Martha: *The Therapy of Desire. Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics*. Princeton, NJ & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 32009.
- Quante, Michael: *Menschenwürde und personale Autonomie. Demokratische Werte im Kontext der Lebenswissenschaften*. Hamburg: Meiner, 2010.
- Rosen, Michael: *Dignity. Its History and Meaning*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012.
- Schlag, Martin: *La dignità dell'uomo come principio sociale. Il contributo della fede cristiana allo Stato secolare*. Roma: EDUSC, 2013.
- Schmidt am Busch, Hans-Christoph/Zurn, Christopher (ed.): *The Philosophy of Recognition. Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009.
- Siep, Ludwig: *Anerkennung als Prinzip der praktischen Philosophie. Untersuchungen zu Hegels Jenaer Philosophie des Geistes*. Hamburg: Meiner, 2014.
- Tonstad, Linn Marie: *Queer Theology. Beyond Apologetics*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Companions, 2018.
- von der Pfordten, Dietmar: "Zur Würde des Menschen bei Kant", in: *Jahrbuch für Recht und Ethik* (2006), p. 501–517.
- Zylberman, Ariel: "The Relational Structure of Human Dignity", in: *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 96 (4/2018), p. 738–752.