



Durham Human Rights and Public Law Centre

30 years of the 'new' European Court of Human Rights / 75 years of the ECHR

Thematic Workshop: The ECHR and Human Dignity

September 10th, 2026

Palatine Centre, Room PCL152 – Moot Court,

Durham Law School

This workshop, [part of an ongoing project](#) of the Human Rights and Public Law Centre at Durham celebrating the (upcoming in 2028) 30th anniversary of the 'new' European Court of Human Rights and the 75 years of the ECHR coming into force, aims to explore the evolution of the Court's case law in relation to the concept of human dignity.

Although the concept of human dignity is conspicuously absent from the text of the European Convention on Human Rights,¹ it has emerged as one of the most significant and contested principles in the Court's jurisprudence. Appearing in over two thousand judgments,² dignity has been deployed by the Court to reinforce findings of serious violations, most notably under Article 3 ECHR,³ and to bridge the Convention with broader international human rights instruments. Yet, as scholarship has shown, dignity does not operate as a stable, universally shared lingua franca. Beyond a minimum core, the recognition that every human being possesses inherent worth deserving of respect, there is little agreement, within or across jurisdictions, on what dignity substantively requires. Different conceptions of dignity, rooted in distinct philosophical and political traditions, coexist and compete, with significant implications for how the Court reasons and maintains its authority in relation to member states.

¹ Apart from a brief reference to "the inherent dignity of all human beings" in Protocol 13 ECHR abolishing the death penalty.

² Veronika Fikfak and Lora Izvorova, 'Language and Persuasion: Human Dignity at the European Court of Human Rights' (2022) 22 Human Rights Law Review 1,1.

³ Natasa Mavronicola and Elaine Webster, 'Strip searches through the lens of the prohibition of inhuman and degrading treatment in European human rights law' in Tom Daems (ed.), *Body Searches and Imprisonment* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2023).

With these issues in mind, the workshop seeks to explore the following themes:

- How has the Court's use and understanding of human dignity evolved over the past 30 years?
- In which areas of Convention law has dignity been most consequential, and are there substantive domains, such as freedom of expression, private life, where its function differs markedly from its use under Article 3 ECHR?
- What is the relationship between human dignity and other foundational values of the Convention system, such as autonomy, equality, and pluralism?
- How does the Court respond when respondent states invoke conceptions of dignity grounded in their own constitutional traditions that conflict with the Court's established jurisprudence? What strategies does it employ, and at what cost to coherence and authority?
- What future role should human dignity play in Strasbourg jurisprudence, and how might the Court develop a more principled and consistent approach to the concept?

Programme:

12:00 – 13:00: Lunch (Moot Court, Palatine Centre – **only for presenters**)

Session 1 (PCL 152 – Moot Court) Chair: Dr Dimitrios Kagiros

13:00 – 13:15: Welcome and Introduction to the themes of the workshop by Dr Jane Rooney, Dr Benedict Douglas and Dr Dimitrios Kagiros

13:15 – 13:45: Prof. Catherine Dupré, University of Exeter, *'Human Dignity and ECHR: The right to be human'*

13:45 – 14:15: Dr Stephen Riley, University of Leicester, *'Does it matter if we disagree about dignity?'*

14:15 – 14:45: Dr Benedict Douglas, University of Durham, *'Community as part of Dignity in ECtHR case law'*

Coffee Break (PCL 152 – Moot Court)

Session 2 (PCL 152 – Moot Court) Chair: Dr Jane Rooney

15:15 – 15:45: Prof. Natasa Mavronicola, University of Birmingham, *'Article 3 ECHR and human dignity after Chişinău'*

15:45 – 16:15: Dr Elaine Webster, University of Strathclyde, *'Dignity's future forms: lessons from the right to be free from inhuman and degrading treatment for a future right to a healthy environment'*

16:15 – 16:45: Prof. Veronika Fikfak, UCL, *'Dignity as persuasion in the case law of the ECtHR'*

16:45 – 17:00: Closing Discussion

