



Indignity and Old Age

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Abstract

This article examines the nature of human dignity against the background of old age and introduces the novel idea of treating human dignity as a formal principle related to the more foundational notion of indignity. The discussion starts with the objection that the notion of human dignity can be used to justify contrary positions and is therefore inconclusive. This pitfall can be averted by appealing to the notion of indignity rather than dignity in one's moral reasoning and decision-making. Cases of indignity are more primary and indicate the violation of the very core of a human being. The verifiable property of vulnerability is central to this identification of indignity, as is illustrated by reference to the experiences of elderly people. The article argues for applying the concept of human dignity to reverse the conditions that existed before a particular indignity emerged, rather than trying to define positively the notion of human dignity in the first place.

KEYWORDS

elderly people, human dignity, inconclusiveness, indignity, old age, vulnerability