

Publication

## Is Vulnerability the Foundation of Human Rights?

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The chapter begins by describing the various understandings of vulnerability in ethical and legal discourse. The discussion then proceeds to outline the central place of vulnerability in the work of some contemporary thinkers such as Levinas, Ricoeur, Rorty, Goodin, and Turner. This is followed by asking whether vulnerability can be regarded as the foundation of human rights. It is argued that, although the devastating nature of the Second World War led to a heightened awareness of human vulnerability and played an important role in the recognition of universal human rights, it is not vulnerability as such but human dignity that provides the normative foundation for human rights. Finally, the chapter claims that the notion of vulnerability can be applied not only to existing individuals, but also to humankind as a whole. Techniques like germline interventions and human reproductive cloning may indeed jeopardize basic features of the human species and our understanding of what it means to be "human."

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