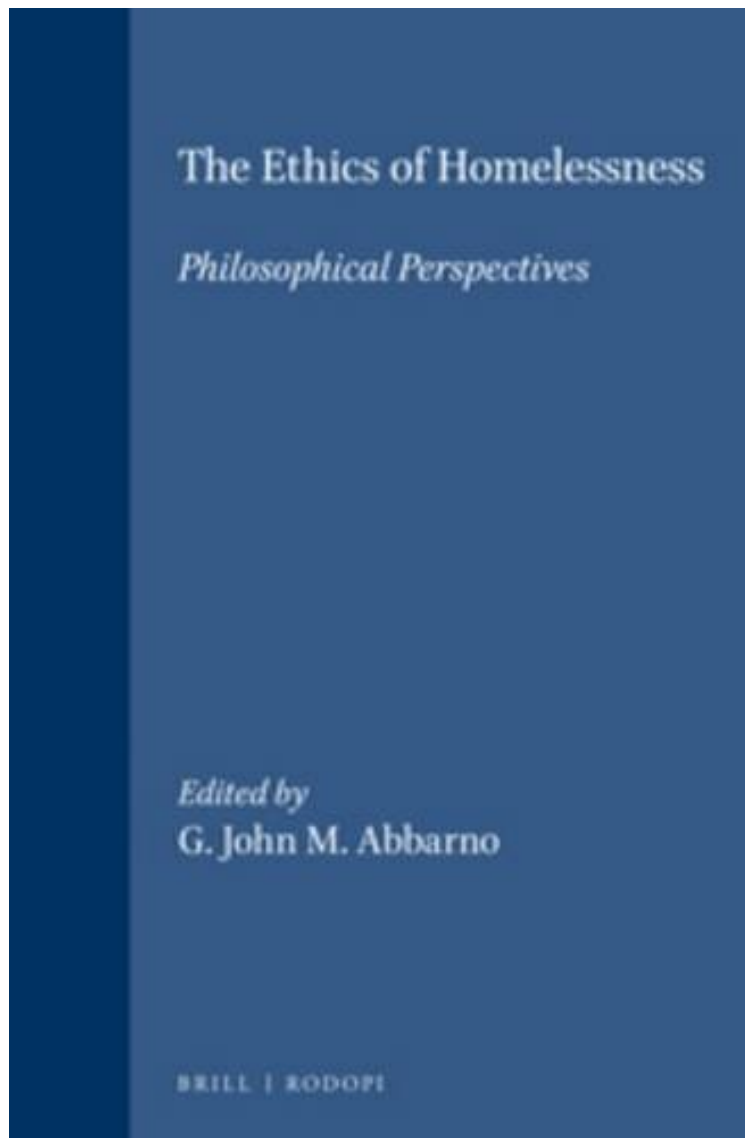


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## **THE ETHICS OF HOMELESSNESS.Philosophical Perspectives.(Value Inquiry Book Series 86)**

*G. John M. Abbarno*

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This book extends the study of homelessness beyond the need of shelter. Philosophical exploration exposes the fragility of human fulfillment in contemporary society. The authors weave the moral fabric of what it means to be human. They show how economic and political values compromise the dignity of homeless persons. They argue for recognition of rights for the homeless, who otherwise would be voiceless and without membership in the moral community. This pioneering contribution instills our moral sensitivity to the homeless condition and justifies our moral responsibility to change that condition.

About the Author G. JOHN M. ABBARNO is Professor of Philosophy at D'Youville College in Buffalo, New York. His areas of specialization include ethical theory and applied ethics, particularly in business, nursing, and psychiatry. His several journal publications include "Value and Role Responsibility" in *The Journal of Value Inquiry* (1991), and he co-authored the book *The Corporation in the Moral Community* (Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich, 1992). He is past President of the American Society for Value Inquiry (1991), President of the International Society for Value Inquiry (1998-2000), and Vice President of the Conference on Philosophical Societies (1997-1999). He remains active in several other philosophical societies.

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#### 4. Autonomy and Civic Personality

What can it mean in the modern state to lack civic personality? As already noted, in the modern state "every subject is also a citizen." Yet we have in our own history one stark example of the absence of civic personality. That example was American slavery. The slave was not a subject of the state, but the property of his or her owner. The slave, accordingly, lacked civic personality. The record of the slave's lack of civic personality is laid out in the decisions of American courts during the first six decades of the nineteenth century. Perhaps none of those decisions is as striking as that of Chief Justice Taney in *Dred Scott v. Sandford*. Courts commonly decide cases on the narrowest principle applicable to the facts of the case. In *Dred Scott*, however, Chief Justice Taney settles the case by affirming at the broadest level that *Dred Scott*, because of his African descent, lacked any of the rights granted by the Constitution to citizens of the American states: "The question then arises, whether the provisions of the Constitution, in relation to the personal rights and privileges to which the citizen of a state should be entitled, embraced the negro African race." He then answers the question by characterizing the modern history of the civic attitude that Europeans and their American descendants held toward those of African descent. They had for more than a century before been regarded as beings of an inferior order; and altogether unfit to associate with the white race, either in social or political relations; and so far inferior, that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect; and that the negro might justly and lawfully be reduced to slavery for his benefit. He was bought and sold, and treated as an ordinary article of merchandise and traffic, whenever a profit could be made by it. Chief Justice Taney goes on to note that "no distinction in this respect was made between the free negro or mulatto and the slave." An even clearer statement of the lack of civic status of the American slave was given by Judge Thomas Ruffin in the North Carolina Supreme Court's decision in *State v. Mann*: The end [of slavery] is the profit of the master, his security and the public safety; the subject, one doomed in his own person, and his posterity, to live without knowledge, and without the capacity to make anything his own, and to toil that another may reap the fruits. What moral consideration shall be addressed to such a being, to convince him what, it is impossible but that the most stupid must feel and know can never be true—that he is to labour upon a principle of natural duty, or for the sake of his own personal.