

Grounding Basic Equality

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Although egalitarianism has been the dominant orthodoxy in Anglophone social and political philosophy for many decades, there have been surprisingly few attempts to account for the axiom on which it rests, namely that human moral worth does not come in degrees. This article begins by rehearsing and evaluating two families of approaches to the grounding problem. The first favours accounts that seek to preserve consistency with metaphysical naturalism, while the second relies on more philosophically contentious claims about the metaphysical status of the human person. I then outline reasons for supposing that none of these accounts of basic equality offers a convincing theoretical foundation for egalitarianism. I conclude by sketching permutations of a theological account before arguing that one of these variations satisfies many of the explanatory criteria that a successful solution requires.

Introduction

Few propositions are more tightly woven into the moral imaginary of modernity than the claim that we are one another's equals. Appeals to equality in public discourse are still more convincing candidates for the status Ronald Dworkin once famously ascribed to rights: the demand for equal treatment operates as a 'trump' across even more swathes of public policy, from distributive justice to employment law.¹ So it is all the more paradoxical that the virtually unanimous support for egalitarianism among political philosophers and policy-makers is founded on a moral proposition—namely, that every human being possesses an equal moral worth—that has received scant philosophical elaboration or defence among moral philosophers or religious ethicists. What explains the asymmetry between the attention given to social or economic forms of moral egalitarianism?² Pragmatic agnosticism on these questions is attributable in part to the influence of John Rawls' well-known insistence that 'comprehensive doctrines' in metaphysics should be

¹ Dworkin 1977: ix. Central to Dworkin's thought is the insistence all members of a political community are to be treated with equal respect and concern; but he never offers to explain the theoretical justification for treating this abstract principle as foundational. It is posited without argument as 'The Deepest Moral Assumption' (Dworkin 1977: 184).

² The small handful of treatments to emerge in the last five or six decades would include Berlin 1960; Williams 1973; Spaemann 1977; Lloyd Thomas 1979; Pojman 1997; Waldron 2002; Berman 2008; Carter 2011; Sher 2014; Waldron 2015; Arneson 2015; and Sher 2015. Almost all these approaches to the problem of grounding equality either conclude that it is futile or offer an extremely tentative sketch of what a successful account might look like.

bracketed when formulating the principles of an ideally just society.³ Yet the entire edifice of *A Theory of Justice* rests on at least one comprehensive doctrine, namely that basic equality is true. Rawls does not explain why his injunction does not apply to basic equality, even though it is no less comprehensive and historically contested a proposition than those he does not refrain from bracketing.⁴ That this contradiction at the heart of so influential a project is persistently ignored indicates that, as an axiomatic assumption of Anglophone political philosophy, moral egalitarianism has come to resemble nothing less than a secular dogma.⁵

Yet it turns out that grounding basic equality is a remarkably difficult philosophical task. The chief source of the challenge can be stated straightforwardly enough. If basic equality is true, there must be some feature that all human beings equally possess that justifies moral concern. But there does not seem to be any *descriptive* feature that all human beings equally possess that justifies moral concern. Human beings differ on almost every plausible metric one could apply, whether it prehensile strength, cognitive ability, physical height, and so on. As Rawls himself concedes, '[t]here is no natural feature with respect to which all human beings are equal, that is, which everyone has (or which sufficiently many have) to the same degree ... We still need a natural basis for equality.'⁶ So basic equality is false. If basic equality is false, then the many and various forms of egalitarianism that take it for granted lack any fundamental justification. At this point some philosophers would insist that the quest for grounding basic equality presupposes a naïve objective account of human nature and that hopes of resolving it are vestiges of a foundationalism that represents, in Richard Rorty's words, a world well lost.⁷ On this view, what is needed is not a solution to the problem of basic equality, but rather its therapeutic dissolution.⁸ In a similar vein, Kai Nielsen has suggested that since basic equality is a historically emergent and contingent proposition, the best that can be hope for in the wake of foundationalism's collapse is a coherentist justification of it, a reflective equilibrium

³ E.g. Rawls 1993: 13. There have of course been many and various kinds of egalitarianism developed and defended in recent decades, but Rawls advances what is plausibly the most influential and systematic egalitarian theory of distributive justice.

⁴ Rawls' tacit reliance on basic equality was noted early on by Dworkin 1977: 179-83.

⁵ Rawls might respond to this objection by claiming that basic equality is one of 'the conditions embodied in the description of the original position ... that we do in fact accept' (Rawls 1971: 19; cf. Rawls 1971: xx: '[E]quality as it applies to the respect which is owed to persons irrespective of their social position ... is fundamental'). He goes on to suggest that 'if we do not, then perhaps we can be persuaded to do so by philosophical reflection.' This article is an attempt to engage in the kind of philosophical reflection Rawls recommends; but, as we shall see, any such reflective exercise cannot be conducted without getting caught up in assessing the competing merits of comprehensive metaphysical frameworks. In other words, the tools needed for the task of clarifying basic equality, the most important constitutive principle of his project, are precisely the ones Rawls excludes from his methodology.

⁶ Rawls 1971: 444. Rawls offers an extended discussion expressly titled "The Basis of Equality" (Rawls 1971:

§77), but far from setting out foundations for basic equality that section parses it as a label for the total constellation of conventional rights to be ascribed to each citizen in Rawls' ideal society. That leaves us with an account of basic equality that is not 'basic' in the relevant sense: it consists only in the strength of the social contract to which a particular society decides to bind itself, if indeed the members of that society accept the need for a social contract in the first place.

⁷ Rorty 1972.

⁸ Rorty 1998. Rorty here presses his rejection of foundationalism—and, indeed, metaphysics *tout court*—into the service of critiquing efforts to find a substantive justification for human rights.

‘widely accepted over cultural space and historical time,’ in which the principle of equality plays a regulative function.⁹

My assumption in what follows is that these sceptical strategies are ill-founded: the absence of a substantive justification for basic equality should concern those who insist that civic and legal doctrines of egalitarianism are enabling conditions of a morally flourishing society and culture. The first half of this article takes up two families of approaches to the puzzle. Section 1 explores solutions elaborated within the compass of metaphysical naturalism while Section 2 considering approaches that draw on more metaphysically contentious assumptions. None of these approaches, I contend, offers a promising way forward: a comparative analysis merely casts into sharper relief the intractability of the problem of grounding basic equality. The difficulties motivate the argument of Section [3], which surveys and assesses how theological frameworks might yield a solution to the problem of basic equality that avoids the pitfalls of secular approaches.

It is not the aim of this paper to establish or defend a particular account what constitutes human value as such. That question is not at all irrelevant: a convincing defence of basic equality must presuppose some workable account of human worth if the claim that human beings are equal is to be a morally substantive one.¹⁰ But since the problem has received sustained attention in recent decades, notably in the course of many epicycles of debates on the nature of human rights,¹¹ for the most part I shall simply assume that each approach to basic equality I consider offers a moderately plausible analysis of human value. Where I do question the merits of a particular analysis, I simply note it as an additional explanatory burden for the relevant account to discharge rather than attempting a comprehensive critique of why it cannot do so. My focus is not on the nature of human value as such, but on the different theoretical challenge of finding a basis for human value that does not come in degrees that renders intelligible the widespread intuition that moral egalitarianism is true.

1. Naturalistic Basic Equality (I): An Austerity Model

I suggested earlier that one obvious explanation for the neglect shown towards the problem of basic equality is a Rawlsian allergy for anchoring social and political ideas in contentious theoretical foundations. But there is, perhaps, another contributory factor, namely the dominant commitment of many Anglophone philosophers to metaphysical naturalism. The reason it may be a factor is that a naturalistic ground for basic equality would need to be formulated in scientific terms – or, at least, in terms reducible to scientific terms – and it is not at all clear what scientifically describable features every human being possesses equally that could also justify moral concern. The intuition that variations in the empirical features of persons could never count as criteria for differentiating their moral worth has brought about some of the most consequential moral revolutions in history. Yet

⁹ Nielsen 1988: 67-9. Nielsen advocates something like a ‘Moorean Shift’ in defending basic equality: we know that basic equality is true more firmly than we know the premises of any sceptical argument to the contrary. It is hard to reconcile that strategy, which implies that intuitions about basic equality run as deep as the intuition that the external world exists, to his claim that basic equality is a historically contingent idea that continues to be much more widely contested than a realist stance towards external reality.

¹⁰ For a trenchant critique along these lines of the quest for basic equality, see Westen 1982.

¹¹ This body of literature that is now quite extensive: see, for instance, Gaita 2000; Perry 1998; Ruston 2005; Wolterstorff 2008; and O’Donovan 2009.

if the intuition that empirical features could not be relevant to adjudicating moral worth is true, then given that naturalism rules out appealing to any nonempirical features that are irreducible to empirical ones, it is hard to see how it could offer any defence of basic equality.

One strategy that the naturalist might adopt is to specify a *threshold* for an empirical property beyond which possession of the property to varying degrees ceases to count in the estimation of moral worth. This is the well-known proposal developed and endorsed by Rawls.¹² The basic idea is to transform a *scalar* property that would be intrinsically unsuited to grounding equality into a *binary* property by introducing a boundary on the scale, thereby turning it into a *range* property, namely a scalar property that, by ranging across every point on the scale above a particular threshold, can be treated as a non-scalar property. Statutory restrictions on age operate in a similar way: taking a citizen's age as a scalar property, a statutory restriction stipulates a threshold above which a particular activity is legal, thereby introducing a binary distribution between citizens who are and who are not legally permitted to engage in that activity. At the same, the law specifies a range within which no point is treated in scalar terms, so that citizens are treated with parity whether they exceed the legal age by two years and or two decades.

As a method for incorporating characteristics that are always likely to be dispersed in different degrees among human beings into a formula for moral equality, this approach is undeniably ingenious; but there are at least three reasons for thinking that this solution is not in fact as promising a solution to the problem as many egalitarians suppose. In the first place, since the moral salience of the threshold would be derived from some other more fundamental property, it is not clear why that more fundamental property should not be preferred as the basis for moral worth, even if it is a scalar property (that is, one capable of being possessed to different degrees). Second, the threshold cannot be introduced by fiat: there must be some clear and principled rationale for doing so.¹³ Third, even if a plausible candidate could be identified it would still not explain why that property would confer moral worth on a person if possessed up to a specified degree but cease to confer greater moral worth on those who possessed it to a greater degree.

A more radical response would be to embrace the paradox and abandon attempts to ground basic equality between human beings altogether. Peter Singer, for instance, invites us to infer from the fact that empirical facts could not ground equal moral worth between human beings as a reason for concluding that that there could not be any moral justification for excluding nonhuman animals from the parameters of equal concern. But that approach risks reducing basic equality to an entirely trivial moral proposition, since it would not explain why the parameters of equal concern should not be extended to include inanimate objects as well.¹⁴ Singer anticipates this objection by identifying *sentience* as the property limiting the scope of equal moral worth to animals alone:¹⁵

No matter what the nature of the being, the principle of equality requires that its suffering be counted equally with the like suffering—insofar as rough comparisons can be made—of any other being. If a being is not capable of suffering, or of experiencing enjoyment or happiness, there is nothing to be taken into account. So the limit of sentience ... is the only defensible boundary of concern for the interests of others. To mark this boundary by some other characteristic like intelligence or

¹² Rawls 1971: 444-5.

¹³ Waldron 2002: 76.

¹⁴ On this point, see Sher 2015: 18.

¹⁵ Singer 2002: 8-9.

rationality would be to mark it in an arbitrary manner. Why not choose some other characteristic, like skin color?

There are a number of problems with Singer's approach, but for our purposes by far the most pressing objection is that sentience does not seem to be a feature that is equally dispersed among the beings whose moral worth it is supposed to justify. Whether or not every sentient being – including sentient beings that belong to the same species – possesses the same determinate degree of sentience as every other is a highly contested question. But since sensory states vary so widely in terms of their content, intensity, and duration, sentience seems an unlikely candidate for constituting *equal* moral worth between all the beings that possess it, even if one accepts that it could constitute moral worth. Whatever the merits of Singer's proposal, most philosophers hold that determining the moral status of nonhuman animals does involve a different set of considerations, even if there is disagreement on the question of how to apply a fine-grained scale of value to the animal kingdom and even if it is granted that human exceptionalism is true – that is, even if it is granted that human animals should be located at the highest level of that scale of value. It seems reasonable to assume that those considerations would involve features that would not apply in the same way – let alone to the same degree – as they would to human persons.

Some naturalists might be tempted to ground basic equality in the kind of nonempirical features that other approaches invoke for the task, but to construe them in a naturalistically acceptable way. They might, for instance, endorse the proposal that basic equality consists, as George Sher has argued,¹⁶ in our equally possessing a distinct centre of subjectivity. Alternatively, they might attempt to naturalise a Kantian conception of equal human worth based on the free agency or rational capacities of human beings. But sort of strategy would only leave naturalists with a dilemma. For if they advance accounts of subjectivity, freewill, or rational capacity ontologically robust enough to ground equal moral worth, that would cut sharply against their metaphysical commitments.¹⁷ If, on the other hand, the relevant ingredient is analysed reductively in terms of natural facts, those commitments are preserved, but at the cost of generating the problem of the variability of empirical features with which we began: basic equality would be grounded in an unfathomably complex matrix of physiological states on which the relevant feature was treated as supervening, a matrix that would need to be quantitatively identical for every human person.

¹⁶ Sher 2014: 81: '[W]e are moral equals because we are equally centers of consciousness ... The fact that we are equals in this respect ... explains why each person's interests are of equal moral importance.'

¹⁷ Perhaps it does not place *intolerable* constraints on naturalism, at least to the extent that more ontologically expansive theories of the mental are taken to be consistent with it. Take, for example, a property-dualist analysis of subjectivity as a candidate for grounding basic equality. Suppose one could work out a convincing account of mental properties according to which they were construed as ontologically irreducible to physical states without undermining the principle of causal closure of the physical on the basis that mental states were related to physical states by logically necessary supervenience relations, such that any change to the subvening physical states entailed a change to supervening mental states. The same problem arises: a chief attraction of subjectivity for grounding basic equality is that it is a *binary* property, one that does come in degrees. A person either is or is not a centre of subjectivity. But given the strength of the supervenience relations linking subjective states to underlying neurological states, in the final analysis subjectivity would be analysable in terms of an empirically available set of *countable* physical states, states that would have to be arithmetically equal from person to person to be plausibly constitutive of basic equality.

A final worry: even if a naturalistic ground for basic equality could be identified, the overall account would ultimately need to be reconciled to an exclusively evolutionary account of the origins and development of human persons. Since differences in the adaptive fitness of human beings are intrinsic to the evolutionary account of human development, it seems odd to suppose that those inequalities should suddenly cease to be relevant. And, more generally, naturalistic basic equality would also need to find a way of addressing the kind of sceptical arguments from evolutionary theory against realist conceptions of value advanced in recent years by Sharon Street and others.¹⁸ It may well be possible to defend basic equality without relying on a realist stance towards moral value, but antirealist candidates for the relevant grounding property would have to be ones that are ascribed to every human being (and only human beings) in equal measure. It is simply not clear what those candidates could be.¹⁹

2. Naturalistic Basic Equality (II): An Inflationary Model

If an austere rendition of naturalism seems an unprepossessing approach to the problem, perhaps a more expansive model could deliver the explanatory goods. One obvious way of relaxing the metaphysical constraints would be to turn to Aristotelian doctrine of categoricals, suitably reprinted. When applied to biological species, that doctrine states roughly that there is a set of characteristics that individual members of a species ought to possess in order to be a flourishing instance of it, where the normative force of that judgment is rooted not in what is statistically normal for members of the species, but in a teleological propensity that is intrinsic to each individual in virtue of belonging to that species. Since sheep are quadrupeds, every sheep in world *ought* to have four legs, even if it happened to be the case that, as a matter of descriptive fact, none of them do. Since Aristotelian categoricals provide a normative basis for forming normative judgments about biological organisms, they might also support an axiologically substantive basis of basic equality, one that offends the fewest possible naturalistic scruples. Following Michael Thompson and Philippa Foot, we might suppose that basic equality consists in the fact that every human being qualifies as a member of the same species through sharing a common 'life form,'²⁰ an essence that, as the animating principle of a human person, is constitutive of that person's soul.²¹

The approach has undeniable attractions. It has the theoretical resources for fixing the scope of equal concern in a more principled way than austere naturalism: there are objective biological criteria for treating human beings as distinctive from other beings. It also seems to offer a basis for making evaluative judgments in relation to human beings. But there are, I think, reasons to hesitate before endorsing this approach. One problem is that evaluative judgments about what traits human beings ought to possess are simply not the same kind of judgments as evaluative judgments about the moral worth of human beings. That Priscilla ought to have thirty-two teeth is a judgment that might ground deontological judgments ('Priscilla ought to visit the dentist'); but it does not belong to the same category of judgment as an evaluative judgment about Priscilla's overall moral worth. To evaluate human beings against a teleological horizon of biological or

¹⁸ Street 2006.

¹⁹ Carter 2011: 542.

²⁰ Thompson 1995 and Foot 2001: 38-51.

²¹ For Aristotle himself, of course, ensoulment is a property shared by every living organism: what distinguishes human from non-human organisms is their *rational* ensoulment.

physiological or rational flourishing simply does not yield an immediately obvious justification for treating them with moral concern. And even if it did, that would not explain why moral worth would not be commensurable with the varying degrees to which different human beings happen to attain that horizon.

That would seem to be the approach taken by Aristotle himself, who measured human worth against the benchmark of moral achievement that involved maximising goods such as greatness-of-soul or philosophical contemplation.²² That seems to be why Aristotle endorsed slavery even though he also held that since human beings belong to the same species they are of the same substance,²³ and that since there are no degrees to being a substance, no human being can be more or less of a human being than any other.²⁴ Although he subscribed to a formal doctrine of equality – since he believed that slave and serf, no less than master and ruler, possessed a soul endowing them with a bare capacity for reason – Aristotle also insisted that differences in the exercise of that capacity justify stark differences in their legal and social status. As a way out of our predicament, a strategy that recognises a formal but morally vacuous equality between human beings in this way is plainly doomed to failure.

Space prohibits rehearsing some of the more familiar objections to the metaphysical commitments of expansive naturalism as formulated along Aristotelian lines, but they are not trivial.²⁵ In the final analysis, it does provide a way of explaining normatively distinctive features of human beings; but while all human beings do share equally in that status, it no more explains why moral worth is equally distributed than the fact that every human person possesses chromosomes unique to human beings. Relaxing the constraints of the reductionist rendition of naturalism does yield a clear metaphysical basis for delimiting the scope of basic equality, but at the cost of reducing basic egalitarianism to the vacuous claim that human beings are equal to human beings because human beings are human beings. What began as a conundrum has turned into a banality.

3. Kantian Basic Equality

Faced with the difficulties of securing basic equality on naturalistic foundations, we might prefer to abandon our egalitarian intuitions altogether. There may, of course, be naturalistic solutions that I have not considered, though the startling scarcity of attempts by contemporary philosophers to reconcile naturalistic and egalitarian intuitions would suggest otherwise. But abandoning the quest at this stage would mean overlooking the figure of Kant, who supplies the ingredients for what is the most widely endorsed strategy for grounding basic equality. Transcendental idealism is often put quietly to one side by those who draw inspiration from Kant for approaches to problems in moral and political

²² As MacIntyre 1998: 51 puts it, '[Aristotle's] great-souled man's characteristic attitudes require a society of superiors and inferiors in which he can exhibit his peculiar brand of condescension. He is essentially a member of a society of unequals ... He is very nearly an English gentleman.'

²³ *Metaphysics*, 1058a29-b25; 1017b23-6; 1018a4-12.

²⁴ *Categories*, 3b33-40. Reconciling Aristotle's account of human nature to his acceptance of natural slavery is not straightforward, but his justification seems to have been that collective social flourishing may legitimise the unequal treatment of human beings for social ends even if it is recognised they also have equal moral standing.

²⁵ Defenders of immanent universals, for example, defend the existence of an entity—the universal property of rational ensoulment, for example—that is capable of instantiation in multiple locations at the same time, while a realist stance towards natural kinds implies a strong essentialism about species that many philosophers of biology who are open in principle to metaphysical essentialism would reject.

philosophy,²⁶ but given the importance of finding a nonempirical ground for basic equality, one might be tempted to make the most of the noumenal realm. One obvious solution would be to treat moral worth as equally distributed to all human persons analysed as noumenal selves, confining observable variations from person to person to the phenomenal realm.²⁷ Still, an immediate concern is that even if it would be plausible to treat Kant's domain of noumenal selves as an egalitarian realm, the fact remains that moral behaviour occurs in plainly empirical circumstances. These scenarios would therefore need to be evaluated in observable ways conducive to public justification, which would not be case were basic equality to rely on a metaphysical thesis as contestable as the existence of noumenal selves. And if basic equality does after all consist in capacities exercised causally in the phenomenal realm, then the Kantian approach returns us to the original problem of grounding equal human worth in empirical features that will vary from person to person, though saddled with considerably less parsimonious commitments than on the naturalistic approaches. Moreover, although the noumenal self's capacity to act freely in a pervasively mechanistic world is a highly distinctive feature of the framework Kant's conception of human nature, it does not follow that it is *also* distinctive in endowing the noumenal self with intrinsic moral worth, which is what a successful account of basic equality requires. This basic strategy would also involve weighty metaphysical commitments, most notably acceptance of a noumenal realm as axiologically fundamental, that few accepted in Kant's day, and fewer still would accept in ours, including many political and legal philosophers who might otherwise adopt Kantian stances on less theoretically fundamental questions. In sum, I think it is fair to suggest that there are few who would reject Bernard Williams' assessment that '[t]he very considerable consistency of Kant's view is bought at what would generally be agreed to be a very high price.'²⁸

A more conventional version of Kantian basic equality might focus less on the noumenal self as a convenient vehicle of value, but rather on the value constituted by our freedom as moral agents equipped with the capacity to discern through practical reason what the moral law demands of us. Now in invoking nonempirical features once again, this approach would once again preserve a theoretical advantage over naturalistic accounts. Yet the worry immediately arises that freedom can be circumscribed to different degrees for different agents and that a capacity for moral deliberation will also vary considerably from person to person. To observe that some of us make good moral decisions and others appallingly bad ones is not much less contentious than it would be to note difference in our empirical features. Some human beings are so cognitively impaired that they are incapable of moral deliberation or rational action. If the axiological status of a person is taken to be rooted in these capacities, we would expect variations in those capacities to generate corresponding changes in that status; and, if that is correct, it is hard to see how Kantian egalitarianism so construed could get off the ground. Even if it is granted that a capacity for moral reasoning and action is itself constitutive of moral worth—a claim that unhappily elides deontic and axiological considerations—the Kantian account would still need to explain how to identify particular uses of a given capacity as a distinctively moral one. After all, some capacities will be more salient to living a moral life than others; and these same capacities may be just as conducive to success in nonmoral scenarios and, in those scenarios, would be likely to vary from person to person in just the same way that other natural capacities would vary.

²⁶ E.g. Strawson 1962.

²⁷ Sangiovanni 2017: 48-50.

²⁸ Williams 1973: 235.

One final worry: the mere possession of some capacity does not in itself qualify as a sufficient criterion for basic equality, even if that capacity were equally distributed to every person. For it must be the case that there is equality not only in the simple possession of a feature, but also in the degree to which it is possessed. It could be said of two sprinters, for instance, that they equally possess the capacity for locomotion. But that would be a trivial form of equality. If both sprinters were equally fast—that is, if the capacity were always exercised to the same degree—there would be a substantive form of equality between them. Which of these two forms of equality more accurately describe the Kantian person's capacities for freedom and practical reason?

I suggest that although the capacity for action is a necessary condition for right action, it could not be a sufficient ingredient for any substantive form of equality. One can make sense of the notion that freedom has an instrumental value, especially if one accepts Kant's claim that fulfilling our moral duties presupposes that we are free to do so. Yet how plausible is the claim that freedom is not only a *condition* for bringing about moral value but actually *constitutive* of the moral value of the person who possesses it? One might be tempted to attribute moral worth to a person who consistently used his freedom to act rightly and reasonably, but since not all human beings use their capacities this way, moral worth would not be equally distributed. Kant himself insists that a good will is the only unqualified good. But if that is correct, what is the basis for attributing the same value to a person in possession of a good will as to a person in possession of a bad one?²⁹ Considered on their own terms, free agency and practical reasoning are instrumental goods inasmuch as they are the conditions for morally meaningful agency, but they are not intrinsic to or constitutive of moral worth.

4. A Cartesian Coda

One approach that bears some resemblance to the first Kantian strategy would involve grounding basic equality in a Cartesian conception of human personhood. Cartesian souls are metaphysically simple: not being made of any parts, every human person shares equally in a qualitatively identical kind of entity. Since the Cartesian ego is more straightforwardly constitutive of what it is to be a human being than the Kantian self, ensoulment on this view would also fix the scope of equality to include every human being and exclude every nonhuman one. Since the ontological status of the Cartesian ego as Descartes articulates is, in fact, more straightforwardly immaterial than the Kantian self, it would also insulate an account of basic equality against objections from the variability of empirical properties. While substance dualism certainly does not exercise the influence it once did among philosophers, this approach boasts an interesting historical pedigree, especially in the late seventeenth century.

Cartesian egalitarianism was astutely deployed, for instance, by the philosopher Mary Astell (1666-1731), who used it to argue that biological sex could not be relevant to determining the scope of basic equal concern, since the locus of a person's value resides not in physical features, including secondary sexual characteristics, but the soul.³⁰ The

²⁹ Wood 1999: 133; cf. Wolterstorff 2008: 327-8.

³⁰ Detlefsen 2017: 196: Astell's equality feminism starts from a commitment to a Cartesian ontology of the human, specifically his dualism of soul and body according to which the thinking soul is the mark of the divine within each of us and is our human essence ... Since sex attaches to bodies and not to souls, women's human essence is identical with—and thus equal to—that of men. This is the bedrock of Astell's feminism, and it informs her prescription for how women ought to treat themselves.

Cartesian case for the equal treatment of women drew much of its strength from a suspicion of scholastic philosophy's tendency to infer truths about the immaterial nature of human beings from their observable physical characteristics, an inference that the clear metaphysical distinction proposed by substance dualism between mental and material substances did not need to invoke.³¹ Similar arguments were advanced by François Poulain de la Barre (1648–1723), who, like Astell, argued for a radical version of substance dualism according to which God grafts sexless souls into bodies and, since ensoulment is a binary rather than graded property and bodies not souls that possess secondary sexual characteristics.³² He added that since the immaterial mind is equal for all beings regardless of the significance of what it is directed towards, and since it functions in the exactly the same for all beings endowed with one, there could be no relevant evaluative difference between men and women.³³ Since that reasoning can be generalised to all minded human beings, Cartesian egalitarianism may strike some as an attractive strategy, even if it may in the end prove too much, since it would seem to follow that any being possessing an immaterial mind—including angels and even God—would be on par in evaluative terms with every other minded being.

Both Astell and Poulain de la Barre accounted for the axiological status of souls in theological terms. They did not assume that souls possessed an intrinsic (equal) moral worth independently of a divine bestowal of value on them.³⁴ But to repeat a point raised earlier in the context of the noumenal self, while it might be tempting to suppose that the value of a Cartesian soul consists in its metaphysically distinctive status, the fact that it transcends spatial constraints, temporal flux, and mechanistic processes does not entail that it is axiologically distinctive. After all, if they exist at all, geometric forms transcend space, time, and mechanistic processes; but it does not follow that they are evaluatively significant denizens of abstract reality. Immaterial objects are not intrinsically more valuable than material objects, even if it is more plausible to infer equal status between immaterial objects belonging to the same kind. In other words, it is not clear how a Cartesian defence of basic equality could explain why the equal possession of metaphysically distinctive souls should have a bearing on their axiological status any better than a Kantian one.

5. Theistic Basic Equality

We have scrutinised several possible attempts to a coherent and convincing account of basic equality. Naturalism was vulnerable to objections from the variability of empirical properties and from the reducibility of plausibly normative candidates—in particular subjectivity, capacities, freedom, and reasoning—to empirical ones. The other three candidates we considered—Aristotelian categoricals, Kantian noumenal selves, Cartesian souls—were more weakly committed to empirical properties as the ground for equality and therefore more plausible than austere naturalistic egalitarianism; but for all of their

³¹ Clarke 2013: 38–41.

³² My thanks to John Cottingham for drawing my attention to this text.

³³ Poulain de la Barre 2013: 157–8.

³⁴ In Book 8 of *On the Trinity* Augustine offers a theological argument for the claim that women no less than men bear the *imago dei* on the basis of the impropriety of supposing that God could be imaged in material form. The claim that it is the immaterial mind or soul that is the locus of value and not any bodily feature plainly anticipates the one taken by Astell and Poulain de la Barre.

respective advantages, each of these struggled to defend a perspicacious moral egalitarianism.

Taken together, it seems to me that these difficulties should motivate the dispassionate egalitarian to consider a religious basis for basic equality. For many philosophers, especially within the Anglophone tradition, metaphysical theism may be still more contentious than transcendental idealism and substance dualism. Yet the claim that basic equality is a distinctive theological contribution to the history of moral thought is hardly a historically contentious claim.³⁵ As Richard Arneson has noted, '[s]o far as the Western European and Anglo-American philosophical tradition is concerned, one significant source of [basic equality] is the Christian notion that God loves all human souls equally.'³⁶ But the various historical treatments of the origins and development of theological egalitarianism have not touched on the reasoning underpinning it and there remain, moreover, strikingly few contemporary attempts by theologians to defend it.³⁷

But where might such an account begin? There is a cluster of theological ideas that connote basic equality. Scripture endorses *hamartiological* egalitarianism: all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.³⁸ There is also an *eschatological* egalitarianism: God desires that all shall be saved from the sin in which all have a share.³⁹ In his letter to the Galatians, Paul elaborates a *Christological* basic equality that insists differences in ethnicity, legal status, and sex are abolished for all those who are 'in Christ.'⁴⁰ There is a scriptural basis for *circumstantial* egalitarianism, according to which basic equality is grounded in the universal vicissitudes of human experience from which even moral probity is no shield, since God makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.⁴¹ Finally, there is *existential* basic equality between human beings, who are all creatures dependent for their existence at every moment on God, who has an equal concern for all of them.⁴²

In a tentative recent defence of one version of theistic basic equality, Jeremy Waldron argues that there are likely to be several constitutive ingredients in a religious account of basic equality, cautiously refusing to specifying one conceptual lodestar on the basis that no single idea could sustain a sufficiently comprehensive theory of equal dignity.⁴³ Following Waldron's proposal, it might seem appropriate to weave these egalitarian threads in scripture together into a single cumulative case. But while his arguments for which elements should be included in such a theory are among the most careful and insightful in contemporary debates on basic equality, Waldron's holistic strategy strikes me as misguided. In a different dialectical context, Anthony Flew once remarked that if one leaky bucket cannot hold water there is no reason to suppose that ten

³⁵ Siedentop 2017: 64-5: 'For Paul, the gift of love in the Christ offers a pre-linguistic solution, through a leap of faith—that is, a wager on the moral equality of humans ... [I]n Paul's writings we see the emergence of a new sense of justice, founded on the assumption of moral equality rather than on natural inequality.'

³⁶ Arneson 2013.

³⁷ Notable exceptions would include Forrester 2001 and O'Donovan 2005: ch. 3, though each of these treatments focuses almost exclusively on the concrete application of egalitarian ideals to social and economic concerns.

³⁸ Rom. 3:23.

³⁹ Ez. 18:23; Matt. 23:37; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9.

⁴⁰ Gal. 3:28.

⁴¹ Matt. 5:45.

⁴² Mal. 2:10.

⁴³ Waldron 2015: 203-5.

can. And it turns out that many of the most theologically tempting approaches to formulating a theological case for basic equality are far from watertight.

Consider in the first instance basic equality parsed in harmatological terms. That human beings are all equally sinners before God is a perfectly coherent claim and, for the Christian theist, a true one. But sinfulness seems an odd basis for ascribing value to human beings, even if it could qualify as a reason for treating them equally; Christian soteriology is historically consistent on the point that God loves human beings *despite* their sinfulness.⁴⁴ And since Christian theism is committed to the claim that some sins are worse than others,⁴⁵ hamartiological measures would be an unconvincing benchmark for equal human worth. What about eschatological or Christological basic equality? Both approaches seem vulnerable to the worry that Christianity's salvific economy is structurally unequal: some human beings are saved, others are not; some are 'in Christ,' others are not. That certainly seems a compelling worry if God is understood to destine human beings to unequal eschatological ends independently of foreseen merit along the lines Calvin seems to suggest.⁴⁶

An obvious rejoinder for the theist would be to rule out double predestination in favour of some other way of reconciling creaturely freedom and divine sovereignty. Suppose the theist could successfully defend one of these solutions, perhaps by arguing that eschatological egalitarianism obtains even if the eschatological destinations of human beings differ on the basis that God equally bestows on human beings the freedom to choose their destination. In that case the theist faces the same challenge as the Kantian egalitarian of explaining why freedom is generative of human worth rather than an instrumental means for achieving it and why an instrumental means that can be used for ends that are not plausibly constitutive of human value is not evaluatively inert. What, finally, of circumstantial and existential egalitarianism? These approaches seem to be the weakest avenues for a solution since they do not explain why the scope of equal concern encompasses *only* human beings, since the circumstances of all creatures include goods and evils (and to varying degrees), and all creatures by definition depend existentially on God's sustaining agency. As I have already suggested, if there is no non-arbitrary way to delimit the scope of equal concern, basic equality ceases to be a substantive moral ideal.

Since the various modes of theological reasoning considered so far have not yielded any perspicuous dialectical advantages over other accounts, the problem is perhaps better approached more obliquely. Considering two brief passages from what can justly be claimed to be one of the most notable defences of basic equality in this history of moral theology. Gregory of Nyssa's fourth homily on Ecclesiastes is arguably the first sustained critique on an institution that exemplified more sharply than any other just how unintelligible basic equality once was as a moral proposition:⁴⁷

What did you find in existence worth as much as this human nature? What price did you put on rationality? How many obols did you reckon the equivalent of the likeness of God? How many staters did you get for selling the being shaped by God? God said, let us make man in our own image and likeness (Gen 1.26).

⁴⁴ Rom. 5:8

⁴⁵ Matt. 5:19; Matt. 12:32; 1 Jn. 5:16-18.

⁴⁶ John Calvin, *Institutes* III §3: 'All are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation; and, accordingly, as each has been created for one or other of these ends, we say that he has been predestinated to life or to death.'

⁴⁷ Gregory of Nyssa, *In Ecclesiastem* §4 (Hall 1993: 74).

As a theological justification for the intrinsic human worth, the rationale that Gregory advances has an undeniable force, one that any secular theorist of human rights might envy. By foregrounding the claim that human beings are created in the *imago dei*, he injects a special momentum to his objection against the commodification of human beings. As an idea, the *imago dei* can claim to have catalysed more shifts in the moral imagination of the West than perhaps any other,⁴⁸ and it continues to be the most common way of articulating a religious metaphysical justification for contemporary rights-based doctrines.⁴⁹ But could the *imago dei* support the intuition that human moral worth is *equally* distributed?

One immediate problem with appeals to the *imago dei* is that despite its clear scriptural pedigree in Judaism and Christianity, it is a persistently indeterminate idea. Neither dogma nor doctrine, it is at best a theologoumenon, a useful conceptual touchstone for formulating anthropological doctrine.⁵⁰ Often it seems to function as a kind sacral gloss to secular accounts of human value.⁵¹ Gregory's own preference is to identify the *imago dei* with the rationality of human beings, a rationality reflective of divine reason. That connection was, to be sure, a common interpretation of the motif, one that was made by both Augustine and Aquinas.⁵² And there is some degree of plausibility that comes with recognising a divine spark in human reason: divinised reason would certainly constitute human worth more convincingly than reason alone.

Still, as a basis of basic equality this particular theological approach is, I suggest, underwhelming. Divinised reason might qualify as a threshold property along the lines discussed in Section 1; but that would not explain why it should ground moral worth up to the relevant threshold and cease to do so beyond it. And if possessing the *imago dei* means being endowed with a divinised rationality, we are forced to return once again to the objection that confronted a Kantian account of basic equality, namely that the rational capacities of human beings, divinised or not, are capacities that are possessed and exercised by different persons to different degrees. Bernard Williams once described the role of respect owed to each person as a rational agent in Kant 'as a kind of secular analogue of the Christian conception of the respect owed to all men as equally children of God.'⁵³ To identify the *imago dei* with rationality would involve the reverse move, since it would turn the idea into a theistic analogue of the Kantian conception of reason as constitutive of human worth.

A little further on in the same homily, Gregory sets out more explicitly a rhetorically powerful theological defence of moral egalitarianism:⁵⁴

⁴⁸ Justice McLean's reasoning in the landmark case of *Dred Scott vs. Sanford* (1856) at the US Supreme Court makes express use of the idea when claiming that a 'slave is not a mere chattel. He bears the impress of his Maker.'

⁴⁹ See e.g. Perry 1998; Ruston 2004; Wolterstorff 2008; O'Donovan 2009; Waldron 2010.

⁵⁰ My suspicion is that the widespread appeal of the *imago dei* is partly explained by its definitional vagueness and uncertainty regarding its theological authority. No tradition in the history of Christianity has contested the idea and many traditions have deployed it as a political idea and rhetorical motif (see Willis 2009: 114-32).

⁵¹ For the same worry, see Waldron 2010: 220: 'I want to insist on due caution and counsel against just grabbing at the doctrine [of the *imago dei*] because it seems like an impressive bauble to produce as a distinctive religious foundation.'

⁵² Augustine, *On the Trinity*, Book 14, §4 ('the human person is 'made after the image of God in respect to this, that it is able to use reason and intellect in order to understand and behold God'); and Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* IaIIae, q.100, 2 ('man is united to God by his reason or mind, in which is God's image').

⁵³ Williams 1973: 235.

⁵⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, *In Ecclesiastem* §4, PG 338:14ff. (Hall 1993: 75).

I see no superiority over the subordinate accruing to you from the title other than the mere title. What does this power contribute to you as a person? Not longevity, nor beauty, nor good health, nor superiority in virtue. Your origin is from the same ancestors, your life is of the same kind, sufferings of soul and body prevail alike over you who own him and over the one who is subject to your ownership—pains and pleasures, merriment and distress, sorrows and delights, rages and terrors, sickness and death ... If you are equal in all these ways, therefore, in what respect have you something extra, tell me, that you who are human think yourself the master of a human being.

Here Gregory advances two general arguments for basic equality; but it seems to me that neither inches us any further towards a convincing version of theistic basic equality. The first approach looks like an argument from the biological—or, perhaps more precisely, Adamic—kinship of human beings. That delimits the scope of equality correctly, but it does in itself explain why biological solidarity is axiologically significant. The second argument looks like a version of the argument from sentience, which, by identifying a ground for basic equality that would expand the scope of equal concern to all sentient organisms, returns us to the objections confronting Singer's account discussed in Section 1. We are, it seems, no further forward.

6. Divine Love and Basic Equality

If it is to offer a more watertight case for basic equality, Christian theism would need a determinate, transparent, and authoritative conception of equal human value and, ideally, one that could be endorsed by the many and various strands of its disparate theological traditions. Before I turn to sketch the outlines of a solution, let us briefly take stock of the criteria that have emerged so far that a successful defence of basic equality would need to meet. We noted early on the broad consensus that since there are no empirical features that are plausibly constitutive of human worth and invariant from person to person, the basis for basic equality could not be an empirical one. That requirement, as we saw, appeared to rule out naturalistic solutions. Second, the basis for basic equality must be universal in scope: all human beings must fall within the parameters of equal concern only in virtue of being human. Strategies appealing to rational capacities or subjective awareness as constituting basic equality could rightly claim to be invoking non-empirical features, they could not explain how human worth could be grounded in those features given the obvious variations in the degrees to which these features are possessed and the phenomenon of human beings with severe cognitive disabilities. Third, it became clear that basic equality applies distinctively to human beings: a convincing account must explain not only why all human beings are included in the scope of equal concern but also why only human beings should be included. An obvious attraction of Aristotelian, Kantian, and Cartesian approaches were their respective theories of ensoulment as the basis for including human beings in a discrete metaphysical class. Since being ensouled is a binary property that constitutes a person, what grounds basic equality is not the possession of features—empirical or otherwise—that vary from person to person. Finally, difficulties in discerning how ensoulment could itself be constitutive of human value made it clear that the ground of basic equality must be one that motivates moral concern.

The theological authority invested in the claim that God is love is unimpeachable. As Simon May has put it, it is in the New Testament that love is first introduced as 'the

fundamental principle of the moral universe.⁵⁵ For God to love a person is for God to endow that person with moral worth.⁵⁶ And, since God shows no partiality to his creatures,⁵⁷ divine love does not vary from person to person: there are no differences in the degree of moral worth that God's love constitutes in every human being. To the extent that God is understood a maximally perfect being and the ultimate source of value, there is no value a person could possess that could supersede the value bestowed on him by God's love for that person. To borrow the description by Bernard Williams of the theologically modulated humanism of the Reformation:⁵⁸

The human condition is a central concern to God, so central, in fact, that it led to the Incarnation, which in the Reformation context too plays its traditional role as signalling man's special role in the scheme of things. If man's fate is a very special concern to God, there is nothing more absolute than that: it is a central concern: period.

Could this simple sequence of uncontroversial theological claims ground basic equality? To what extent does it satisfy our theoretical criteria? It does not, of course, locate equal moral worth in anything empirical. It applies the scope of equal concern universally to every human being: God's love for human beings is not conditional on any of their contingent capacities, abilities, or accomplishments. And while it is true that God has a loving regard for everything he has created, it seems plausible to suppose that God's love tracks differences in the classes of objects of he loves – that is, that God's love for human beings is qualitatively distinct. There is, after all, significant scriptural support that God's regard for human beings is distinct from his concern for other creatures and that it elevates human beings above other beings in creation.⁵⁹ If that approach is correct, the theist has a non-arbitrary reason internal to a particular tradition circumscribed by credal and scriptural orthodoxy for supposing that whatever degree or kind of value attributable to nonhuman animals, divine love grounds human worth in a metaphysically distinctive way.

Finally, an account along these lines deflects the objection that the basis for equality is axiologically empty, since on the model proposed here the metaphysical equality of human beings is grounded in the possession of whatever criteria a being has to possess for God to recognise that being as a human being. It is virtue of this conception that it takes an agnostic stance towards the question of what those criteria might be. Perhaps it is naïve to suppose that those who reject Kantian noumena and Cartesian egos as metaphysically extravagant are any more likely to tolerate the metaphysical commitments of theism; but to the extent that transcendental idealism and substance dualism are rejected for reasons of plausibility, or for lack of internal coherence, this particular theistic account remains viable. That is because equal human worth is constituted by God's equal loving regard for every human being, whatever the correct metaphysical account of human nature. If human beings are Cartesian egos, God has an equal loving regard for Cartesian egos; if they are hylomorphic composites or noumenal selves, those are the respective objects of equally distributed divine love. Even an outlandishly physicalist conception of human beings would be consistent with this approach. If that conception is correct, then basic equality

⁵⁵ May 2011: 85.

⁵⁶ For a similar approach, see Wolterstorff 2008: 357-61.

⁵⁷ Acts 10:34.

⁵⁸ Williams 2006: 136.

⁵⁹ This, I take it, is what explains the adverbial intensifier in Genesis 1:31, where the addition of human beings to creation renders it 'very good.' For scriptural attributions of a unique or exalted status to human beings, see: Gen. 5:1; Gen. 9:6; Ps. 8: 3-8; Ps. 115:16; Ps. 144:3; Mk. 2:27; Jas. 3:7.

consists in the equal worth bestowed by God's equal loving regard for every sum of physical parts that constitutes a human being.⁶⁰ While theism's dialectical flexibility on this point is not commonly recognised by its critics,⁶¹ it does provide an obvious theoretical advantage that may for some offset the theoretical cost of its other assumptions.

Conclusion

Whether a theological defence of basic equality along these lines is more convincing than non-theological accounts will, of course, depend on one's prior metaphysical assumptions. However internally coherent it may be, few who do not already share the theological backdrop informing it will be willing to pay the additional price of the commitments it entails. Some may be tempted to invoke a *reductio ad theologiam* by way of response: if theism is the price to be paid for basic equality, so much the worse for basic equality. In its absence, it might be suggested that we fall back on Rorty's pragmatist strategy of retreat. On this quietist view, there is no difficulty in (i) accepting that an egalitarian approach to distributive justice, no less than rights-based jurisdictional edifices, is an idea that rests on metaphysical quicksand and (ii) denying that we should not be troubled by that fact.

Others may be tempted to abandon what Ian Carter has called the 'wild-goose chase for defining characteristics'⁶² and follow Richard Arneson's advice that '[i]n this area of thought, the alternative positions are all bad.'⁶³ For Nietzsche, of course, egalitarianism was the clearest evidence of *ressentiment* of society's weaker members.⁶⁴ His rhetorical posture can make it tempting to overlook the arguments that animate it, but they are not so implausible that basic equality does not need to be buttressed philosophically. It is not self-evidently misguided, at least, to worry that egalitarianism undermines the common good by valorising the mediocre over the exceptional, by reducing the natural diversity and distinctiveness of human beings to a monotonous sameness,⁶⁵ or by erasing individuality in favour of a kind of homogeneity that may well be a catalyst for social decline.⁶⁶

⁶⁰ I have in mind here the various provocative defences of the compatibility of traditional theistic commitments and a bodily criterion of personal identity advanced in recent decades by George Mavrodes, Peter van Inwagen, Trenton Merricks.

⁶¹ Sangiovanni 2017: 34 claims that a theistic account of human dignity is unworkable either because it relies on Thomistic hylomorphism or a conception of the soul as an immaterial substance, which would be 'highly sectarian.'

⁶² Carter 2011: 547

⁶³ Arneson 2015: 52.

⁶⁴ As Leiter 2019: 392-3 argues, Nietzsche correctly predicted a slow dislocation between the metaphysics of Platonism and Christianity, which was largely repudiated by the end of the nineteenth century, and its moral framework, which persisted in the moral egalitarianism explicit or implicit in Kant, Bentham, and Marx, and continues in self-consciously secular moral egalitarians such as Peter Singer and Derek Parfit.

⁶⁵ Nietzsche 2002: 57: 'Christianity has been the most disastrous form of arrogance so far ... [P]eople who were not noble enough to see the abysmally different orders of rank and chasms in rank between different people. People like this, with their "equality before God" have prevailed over the fate of Europe so far, until a stunted, almost ridiculous type, a herd animal, something well-meaning, sickly, and mediocre has finally been bred: the European of today'; cf. Nietzsche 2006: 232: '[T]hus blinks the rabble—"there are no higher men, we are all equal, human is human, before God—we are all equal" Before God!—Now, however, this God has died. But we do not want to be equal before the rabble.'

⁶⁶ Nietzsche 2005: 212: "'Equality" (a certain factual increase in similarity that the theory of "equal rights" only gives expression to) essentially belongs to decline: the rift between people, between

Absent convincing arguments for belief in basic equality, there is no reason to suppose that a commitment to it will simply endure as a conventional platitude in virtue of its pragmatic social benefits. That is especially true if contemporary conceptions of human nature continue to win support that are functionally akin to a Nietzschean one. To return to an earlier example, if a Neo-Darwinian account of the origins and development of human beings comes to be seen as a comprehensively true philosophical picture of human nature, historically contingent intuitions about basic equality will be uprooted from the metaphysical soil in which they grew and will soon cease to have any traction in our moral culture. And since traction of that sort is a crucial factor in determining the criteria of public reasonableness—criteria that Rawls assumes could float free of a society's moral imaginary—public justifications of human value may quickly be analysed exclusively in terms of adaptive fitness. Of course, as Jeremy Waldron has noted, the hope that religious premises can be bracketed without undermining basic equality is indispensable to the success of political liberalism and crucial for secular liberalism more generally.⁶⁷ But the chief burden of this article has been to suggest bracketing those premises *does* undermine it and that those who take the moral proposition of basic equality as paramount should weigh theistic options more carefully.

In his contribution to an important recent collection of essays on the equal moral worth of human persons, Héctor Wittwer has claimed that '[o]nce the religious dogma that all human beings were created in God's image has been excluded from scientific and philosophical discourse, there is not good reason left for assuming that all humans *qua humans* do possess an inherent moral worth.'⁶⁸ I have noted some reasons why the theist should prefer grounding basic equality in divine love rather than the more perplexing and indeterminate notion of the *imago dei*. But the thrust of this article has been to suggest that theism—and Christian theism in particular—offers better prospects of success for those seeking to underwrite our egalitarian intuitions than is usually acknowledged. Since those intuitions are rooted more firmly in the historical hinterlands of Christianity than the other accounts we have considered, that may not be an especially surprising conclusion. Christian theism may or may not offer the best explanation of why human beings possess moral worth.⁶⁹ One may indeed take the view that its explanation of why they do is the least convincing of the many and various philosophical approaches to that question. What I have sought to argue is that on the assumption that theism can advance a minimally plausible account of human moral worth, it does explain more convincingly than its rivals why human worth does not come in degrees. If that judgment is correct, the claim that we are one another's moral equals is not a reflexive secular piety, but a substantive religious truth about ourselves.

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classes, the myriad number of types, the will to be yourself, to stand out, what I call the *pathos of distance*.'

⁶⁷ Waldron 2002: 44-5.

⁶⁸ Wittwer 2015: 81.

⁶⁹ While this article has paid special attention to the resources of the moral theology and anthropology of Judaism and Christianity, I should note that the basic explanatory architecture of the solution I have examined can be found in Islam as well, even if certain modifications would be necessary and even if some of the points of inflection would be different. For discussion of the role of egalitarianism in the early history of Islam, see in particular Marlow 1997: 13-30.

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