

From the Editors

Should we consider and treat others and ourselves as equals? If so, when, where, and why? Basic moral equality connotes an intriguingly elusive moral concept. Philosophical and theological accounts about moral equality, human dignity, the general right to equal concern and respect, and opacity respect, exemplify attempts to explicate the meaning, function, and possible justification of similar moral concepts. They share seemingly paradoxical core properties, such as strong obligatoriness, and prescriptions of comparative equality of, some kind of non-equivalent social status, in virtue of which humans allegedly are vulnerable to humiliation and therefore need protection. Stones and computers do arguably not need the same protection.

Conceptions of basic equality pervades many contemporary normative and political arguments, in one way or another. Occasionally as an explicit normative starting point, at other times as an implicit principle, something taken for granted. Yet, it is a disputed concept. Should we understand it as a substantial politically relevant moral principle? Or, in terms of justification, as a relevant reason for substantial moral convictions? The latter path necessitates investigations about whether it should be interpreted as an axiomatic starting point, or as valid in virtue of its position in an allegedly coherent web of ideas. There are interesting debates about which kind of reason basic moral equality or human dignity can be. Do these notions of moral equality, like, e.g., Rainer Forst argues, offer procedural criteria, such as reciprocity and generality, for a morally informed idea about political justification? Or should they rather be understood substantively, as implying specific moral and political principles about social justice or human rights, for example. Both alternatives presuppose intriguing investigations into criteria for determining the comparative reasonableness of alternative accounts of basic equality. These are ongoing and by no means settled issues.

Furthermore, change is a fact. Ethical outlooks, as Rosalind Hursthouse names them, that serve as backgrounds for arguments of about practical rationality change too. In spite of the philosophical pervasiveness of ideas about humanity as sufficient for deserving equal respect, today ethnocentric ideas of national identity have become increasingly popular suppliers of ideational material for political visions. They inspire social policies that alter core institutions of liberal democracies, like the relations between the state and courts of law, culture or media. Furthermore, political skepticism towards granting asylum permeates the political climate of contemporary Europe. Political arguments in favor of equality of all humans before the law are increasingly rare in mainstream media debates, as well as not tacitly taken for granted as valid, as they used to be in, for example, Sweden. Ethical responses towards these trends are urgent for many reasons. Suffice it to say, ideas about human dignity and accounts about its justification must be relevant for the task. The meaning of relevance can be morally ambiguous though. Ideas can serve the purpose of legitimating current orders, but also offer tools for explications of political critique. Human dignity can be and has been interpreted as an abstract and empty “word of honor”. Still, viewing any other as a being of incomparable

worth appears to be interestingly incompatible with how states sometimes treat some human beings, and with many instances of how we humans tend to regard each other.

In summary, there is a combination of urgent normative, practical, and theoretical reasons for coming to terms with problems pertaining to ideas about basic equality. This issue of *De Ethica* seeks to address these intriguingly composite quandaries.

In his paper, Philip Strammer investigates the grounding of equal moral status, and proposes a phenomenological approach to the question. He argues that in order for talk of equal status to be meaningful, it must be thought of as grounded in the individual's responsiveness to the Other. To be responsive in this way is not just having one's attention directed in a certain direction, towards a certain person, but also being able to grasp the moral weight of that person's circumstances. If such an account is correct, then what grounds basic equality is not fundamentally the empirical properties of people, but the phenomenological properties of encountering another person.

One approach towards grounding basic equality takes metaphysical naturalism as its starting point. James Orr argues in his article that this line of reasoning does not succeed in giving an account of basic equality. His approach resembles Strammer's. However, Orr's position on the grounding of basic equality is different. He argues that a broadly theistic account of moral equality provides the way forward. If basic equality is about God's relationship to each human being than there allegedly is a ground for equality.

Kevin Jung's article can be read as continuing the Theistic line of thought. Jung investigates neo-Aristotelianism, Kantianism and Theism as alternative accounts of basic equality. By doing so, he not only provides us with a broad overview of possible positions, he also sets the stage for his positive argument. Jung argues that a theistic approach inspired by the work of Robert Adams provides the most plausible account of basic equality. The core idea is that we could think of goodness as a sort of resemblance to God. One advantage of this theory is, Jung claims, that it handles, e.g., the Wrong Kind of Reasons objection, often raised against the fitting attitude theory of value, well.

Lars Sandman guides us down from the heights of metaphysics to the practice of treating others as moral equals in health care. He argues that a traditional (thin) formal equality principle is useful for priority setting, both as a heuristic for achieving consistency, and for dealing with cases that are underdetermined by other factors. The article goes on to investigate more robust versions of formal equality and argues that a "thick" formal equality principle assists us with handling cases where problems of health care distribution is brought about by factors outside the health care system. However, as Sandman points out, such a principle will bring to the fore difficult questions of responsibility ascriptions and economic trade-offs.

The discussion of the theory and practice of basic equality will continue, in *De Ethica* and elsewhere.

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