

The Basis of Equality

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Abstract

This thesis provides an organising framework for the recent and growing debate on 'the basis of equality'. This debate is concerned with the question of whether there is any empirical feature that people possess, in virtue of which they count as equals, and are due an equal share of goods. Liberal writers, especially, appeal to the claim, as a grounding premise, 'Each person has the same basic moral status'. Does this statement serve as a platitude, or is it a substantive truth that forms the foundation of our ideas about a just society? Certain non-egalitarian positions deny it altogether, and instead emphasise the descriptive differences between persons. I argue that there is a problem in justifying 'basic equality', and that appeals to religion, humanity and respect are unsuccessful in this regard. However, I show how the successful resolution of this debate lies in a more thorough understanding of the concept of what makes a person's life go well. The principal finding of the project is that scepticism about equality can be assuaged if we give central importance to a more sophisticated understanding people's interests.

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