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Do All Persons Have Equal Moral Worth?: On 'Basic Equality' and Equal Respect and Concern

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In present-day political and moral philosophy the idea that all persons are in some way moral equals is an almost universal premise, with its defenders often claiming that philosophical positions that reject the principle of equal respect and concern do not deserve to be taken seriously. This has led to relatively few attempts to clarify, or indeed justify, 'basic equality' and the principle of equal respect and concern.

Such clarification and justification, however, would be direly needed. After all, the ideas, for instance, that Adolf Hitler and Nelson Mandela have equal moral worth, or that a rape victim owes equal respect and concern to both her rapist and to her own caring brother, seem to be utterly implausible. Thus, if someone insists on the truth of such ideas, he or she owes his or her audience an explanation.

The authors in this volume-which breaks new ground by engaging egalitarians and anti-egalitarians in a genuine dialogue-attempt to shed light into the dark. They try to clarify the concepts of "basic equality", "equal moral worth","equal respect and concern", "dignity," etc; and they try to (partially) justify-or to refute-the resulting clarified doctrines. The volume thus demonstrates that the claim that all persons have equal moral worth, are owed equal concern and respect, or have the same rights is anything but obvious. This finding has not only significant philosophical but also political implications.

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