
P A R A D I G M S

How Is Equality Possible? An Analysis of the Idea of Intrinsic Equality

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*“Everybody to count
for one, nobody for
more than one.”*
(Bentham)

AS ‘EQUALITY’ is used in many different senses, it would not be reasonable to expect that a single analysis could clarify it entirely. It can be claimed, though, that among the many meanings of the term one is particularly important: namely, the one that inspires the general principle that all human beings, as human beings, *are equally important*, or *do count equally*, and *deserve equal respect*. It is precisely upon this kind of moral equality—on which political and social equality are based—that the present analysis shall focus.

The idea that persons are fundamentally equal implies that the divisions ‘superior men’ vs. ‘inferior men’ or ‘elites’ vs. ‘mob,’ as general divisions, taken in an absolute sense, are invalid and illegitimate.¹ These convictions are quite characteristic for the modern world, and they serve as pillars for both the modern democratic regimes and the received models of ‘contemporary civilization.’

Despite this wide consensus, the meaning of the concept of ‘equality’ is

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still under dispute, and the clarification of the idea that ‘fundamentally, humans are equal’ is far from being complete. The aim of the present analysis is to contribute to this process of clarification.

The Confusion between ‘Empirical’ and ‘Typological’

LEAVING ASIDE the Christian roots of the Western idea of equality, the foundations of the modern versions of this idea have been laid by the great liberal founders of the Enlightenment, especially by Locke² and Kant.³ It is of utmost importance to acknowledge that these thinkers never claimed that human beings are equal empirically, i.e. that their empirical traits, abilities or performances are strictly identical—that humans are, e.g. equally clever, good or active. Their claim was only that humans are typologically equal. Locke, for instance, claimed that men have “the same advantages of Nature, and the use of the same faculties,” as they are “of the same species and rank.”⁴ For Kant, the typological equality of men is implied in the following ideas: that all humans share the advantage of being rational beings, not things; and that “rational beings are called *persons*, because their nature already marks them out as ends in themselves.”⁵ Kant also insists that “all human beings anywhere on earth belong to the same natural genus.”⁶ Both thinkers insist upon the fact that humans belong to the same ‘natural kind,’ or to the same species, and have the ‘same nature.’ It is also obvious that both Locke and Kant include in their characterization of human nature a value judgment: being human is a *rank* (Locke) and a *dignity* (Kant).

Now, once these particularities of the classic conception of equality have been acknowledged, it is easy to see that what we have frequently to do with is a confusion between *empirical* equality and *typological* equality. Most of the authors that reject the equality principle (“all human beings are fundamentally equal”—hereafter *E*) justify their position by invoking all sorts of empirical differences that have actually been, or could easily be, confirmed to exist among the members of the human race. The controversy between the advocates and the enemies of this principle is in very many cases reduced to a ‘dialogue of the deaf,’ as the defenders of *E* refer to a typological equality among men, while its critics refer to an empirical equality (the existence of which they of course deny): the defenders insist that human beings belong to the same ontological type and thus deserve the same respect and equal treatment, while the critics insist that human beings are so different as regards their empirical traits that equal treatment cannot be justified.

The Confusion between ‘Empirical’ and ‘Normative’

IN MANY cases—perhaps in the most banal ones—a confusion between *empirical* and *normative* looms behind this dispute. The pillars of modern equalitarianism are normative: Bentham’s principle “everybody to count for one, nobody for more than one,” the principle of equal respect for all human beings and the principle of equality before the law all have a normative meaning. The enemies of *E* who believe that empirical differences between men directly falsify *E* and consequently jeopardize these principles simply neglect the distinction between ‘empirical’ and ‘normative’ and the obvious truth that empirical facts, in themselves, neither confirm nor disconfirm norms. Where philosophical education is lacking, the error goes unnoticed. But, as a well-known American analyst of equality and discrimination says, it is quite easy to see that the ideal of equality does not imply at all the existence of an empirical equality; on the contrary, it can be said that the very meaning of the requirement of ‘equal treatment’ depends upon the fact that persons are not empirically equal:

Equality as a legal or political principle does not depend upon a belief in empirical equality of any sort. Quite the contrary. . . . If every person had exactly the same intelligence, strength, aggressiveness, organizing ability, etc., there would be no need for the law to protect one from another, because one would never be in a position to successfully take advantage of the other. . . . It is precisely the inequalities of people which makes equal protection of the law so important—that there must be an overwhelming organized force ready to be thrown into the balance, so that a weak little old lady have as much right to live as the most stalwart young man.⁷

The example above can help us clarify the error made by many enemies of equality. This error does not consist simply in deducing from proposition *p* (‘human beings are empirically unequal’) the conclusion *Np* (‘it is necessary that *p*’); the critics of *E* do not simply say that the little old lady and the stalwart young man are unequal and thus it is necessary that they are unequal. In the language of ‘possible worlds,’ their claim is not that the little old lady and the young man are unequal in our world and thus they are unequal in all possible worlds. The matter is a little bit more complicated. In order to clarify it, let us start from the argument for equality that is implicit in the above quotation. Sowell claims that (i) ‘persons are unequal as regards their traits and performances’—which is an empirical statement; (ii) but ‘they have the same right to live’—which is a normative statement; (iii) and thus ‘they should enjoy equal respect and equal treatment’—which is a normative statement; (iv) and consequently ‘an overwhelming force should be created in order that these equal rights be ef-

fectively protected⁷—which is again a normative statement. It is clear that in this argument the statement (iii) is not directly deduced from statement (i), but from a conjunction between statement (i), which is an empirical statement, and statement (ii), which is a normative one. The error of some anti-egalitarian authors is to have presupposed that (iii), which expresses the principle of ‘equal treatment,’ could be based exclusively upon the *opposite of (i)*, i.e. on an assertion that human beings are empirically equal. As soon as one acknowledges the truth of (i), i.e. as soon as one admits that men are not empirically equal, the anti-egalitarians exult, being convinced that the whole support of statement (iii) has broken down: ‘humans are not equal and consequently they should not be treated equally—egalitarianism has fallen into pieces.’ But such exultation is premature and unjustified: since the principle of equal treatment, (iii), is not based upon the opposite of (i), but on (i) and (ii) together, acknowledging the truth of (i) does not jeopardize this principle at all. As it is certain that norms cannot be based on mere empirical facts, the error of believing that (iii) was exclusively deduced from, or supported by, the opposite of (i) is quite obvious.

The Confusion between ‘Natural’ and ‘Empirical’

SOMETIMES A confusion is made between ‘natural equality’ and ‘empirical equality.’ Here is an example, offered by a libertarian author, William A. Niskanen:

the case for a liberal society cannot be based on an assumption of the natural socio-political equality of all humans. Every person in a liberal society should be treated as having equal rights, not because he or she was born equal, but because that is what defines a liberal society. In that sense, the equality of all persons in a liberal society is a created equality, not a natural equality. Also in that sense, a liberal society is a created society—created by the limits on the effective franchise, some social re-enforcement of the rule of reciprocity, and some tolerance for those who do not follow this rule—and one for which a natural equality of all humans is neither necessary, nor sufficient.⁸

Niskanen does not make the elementary confusion between empirical equality and normative equality, but he tends to identify empirical equality with natural equality. This identification is arguably wrong. The classics of modern thinking have never postulated the natural character of empirical equality, but the natural character of typological equality. Locke and Kant believed in ‘the natural equality’ of all humans not because they entertained the illusion of a complete

empirical equality, but because they were committed to the idea of typological equality, i.e. because they were convinced that all humans belonged to the same ‘natural kind’ or ‘natural type.’ If this conviction is sound, then it would be wrong-headed to claim that there was no such thing as ‘natural equality’: natural equality among humans does exist, but this equality is a typological one, not an empirical one.

This nuance is very important and useful, especially if we accept the meta-principle that ‘there must be a non-normative equality among men, on which their normative equality relies upon,’ since equality of treatment would be hard to justify in case that no natural, non-normative, similarity among men existed. Let us consider the methodological principle ‘similar cases should be treated similarly’ (principle *M*). The existence of an objective similarity between cases is a necessary condition here for the decision to treat them similarly. Now let us suppose that the principle of equal treatment of all human beings is a particular variant of *M*: similar beings should be treated similarly (e.g., given similar rights). It is clear that the existence of a natural similarity is a necessary condition for similar, i.e. equal, treatment here: the obligation to treat humans equally is conditioned by the presence of some natural similarity among them (although, of course, cannot be deduced *exclusively* from it).⁹ Some sort of natural equality must thus exist. The empirical one cannot play this role, because—as everyone agrees—there simply is no such empirical equality among humans. But typological equality can play such a role, and that was precisely how the classics have interpreted things: Locke and Kant believed in a natural, non-normative equality, but in a typological not empirical one, starting from which the claim to equal rights made sense. Sometimes this typological equality is also labeled ‘*intrinsic equality*,’ with the following meaning in mind: human beings are intrinsically equal, as beings of the same kind or of the same type, even though they are empirically very different.

The Confusion between ‘Intrinsic Equality’ and ‘Equality As an Intrinsic Value’

WE NOW need to warn against another possible confusion. The terms ‘equality’ and ‘intrinsic’ are used together most often in debates on whether equality is or is not an intrinsic value. Such debates focus on a dilemma concerning the *status* of equality as a human value: is equality an intrinsic value for men (i.e., a value important in itself, important as an end) or is it only an instrumental value (important only as a means to reach other ends)? This dilemma has preoccupied many authors and it remains of perennial inter-

est. For a long time, equality as an intrinsic value has been considered to be just an ideological option of leftist thinking. More recently, some politically neutral, non-ideological, analyses have revived this idea, as, for instance, in the case of Andrei Marmor's work in the philosophy of law.¹⁰

When we talk about intrinsic or typological equality we do not refer to equality as an intrinsic value: in such cases, we are not interested in the *status* of equality (as a value playing the role of a final end or as a value playing merely the role of an instrument); what we are actually interested in is a *particular form* or a *variant* of equality—typological equality. In other words, when we talk about intrinsic equality we have in mind that human beings are intrinsically equal, in the sense that they share the same 'nature,' or belong to the same 'natural type,' even if they are not empirically equal. Obviously, both the concept of 'human nature' and the idea of 'natural type,' as well as the distinction between 'internal nature'—'external empirical traits,' can be, and have been, contested as being wrong-headed. But we do not need to discuss this matter here; various opinions exist, and what is relevant in the present context is just that pleading for fundamental or intrinsic equality among human beings might imply some commitment to the idea of 'human nature' or 'natural type'—how wise such a commitment is does not need to bother us here.

The Distinction 'Intrinsic–Empirical'

NOW WE face a major objection, perhaps the most important objection that enemies of egalitarianism can raise. The authors that reject the idea of a fundamental equality among men can ask: do we really need a metaphysical idea of human equality, be it 'fundamental,' 'typological' or 'intrinsic'? Why shouldn't we think about equality in purely empirical terms? In other words, why shouldn't we approach the matter in the following manner: we consider human traits, abilities, achievements and so on; we compare them by reviewing all empirical facts that we know; we do find that human beings are always very different in all the relevant respects, because there always are infinitely many differences between their traits and performances. And consequently we draw the conclusion that there is no such thing as a 'fundamental' or 'intrinsic' equality among men. In some particular cases, excellent qualities and achievements prevail, so that we are entitled to talk about 'superior human beings.' In other cases, we find that defects and failures prevail, so that we can talk about 'inferior people.' If the bottom line is sometimes clearly positive, and some other times clearly negative, why shouldn't we be justified to apply the 'superior–inferior' distinction? Why would empirical, undeniable, facts not be sufficient for

reaching a conclusion upon human beings? Isn't it the case that transferring the discussion from the empirical, verifiable, field of facts to the 'metaphysical' field of 'typological' or 'intrinsic' equality boils down to a stratagem meant to lead to some predetermined conclusion dictated by some kind of 'politically correct ideology'?

This objection might seem very sound, but it is in fact based upon the supposition that comparing people by reviewing all the particular empirical facts is a completely unproblematic task. This premise is downright false, because while all sorts of particular comparisons can be made quite easily, a general comparison, relevant enough for reaching a final conclusion about equality or inequality of men is extremely hard to make, indeed impossible; many computations can be made, but to reach an undisputed bottom line is almost impossible.

In answering this objection, one should start from the fact that what we are interested in is in our case a general and conclusive proportion of value between every human being and all the other ones, estimated completely and finally (i.e., by using all the possible relevant criteria)—and not merely some particular proportions between individual achievements, judged from some particular point of view or relying upon some particular criteria. In other words, the hierarchy that is needed in the framework of this debate on equality should be general, objective and final, not particular, subjective and provisional. As soon as one takes into consideration this fact, it becomes obvious that not every empirical finding or measurable achievement can be deemed relevant for the conclusion we would like to reach. Men cannot be conclusively and generally labeled 'superior' or 'inferior' on particular, partial, contingent or accidental reasons. Musical or mathematical talent, or a certain particular success in a competition shall never be enough for a final general conclusion as to whether a person is 'superior' or 'inferior.' Moreover, achievements are always influenced by *luck* or *misfortune*, by *when* and *how* we measure them, so that all evaluations that we make are to a large extent *relative* and *of limited relevance*. When we aspire to a final conclusive hierarchy among men, of the kind meant to prove that some are 'superior' and some others are 'inferior,' we cannot rely upon evaluative results that have been perturbed by all sorts of accidents and contingencies, because what we aim at is to weigh *human beings as they really are*, not *as they happened to be* due to morally irrelevant influences; nor *as they are for the time being* (with no certainty of what they can achieve in the future). One cannot be labeled 'inferior' when his/her environment prevented him/her from learning German, Greek or Latin, even if we consider the capacity to use German, Greek and Latin as culturally and educationally essential. Transferring the discussion from the empirical realm, where various particular inequalities can be detected, to the area of intrinsic equality/inequality, where accidental/contingent/irrelevant elements are eliminated appears

to be a must, as long as we need to reach final evaluative conclusions, and not merely local, partial and relative ones.

Roughly speaking, when we are interested in intrinsic equality we are after an absolute, not after a relative, evaluation. Why is that? The reason is that our aim is a moral one: since we need to establish whether in general all men do count equally and deserve equal respect, no relative and partial evaluation can be enough. We are simply in the field of ethics, which, as Ludwig Wittgenstein pointed out, is a field of absolute value judgments, not one of instrumental, relative, ones.

The distinction between ‘absolute’ and ‘relative’ judgments of value has been discussed by Wittgenstein in his famous lecture on ethics.¹¹ According to him, relative evaluations depend on some particular aims and rely on some particular standards. But when we are not interested in some particular aims and fields of human excellence, but in a general view of mankind, relative evaluations are useless. When we need to know how men are in general, *as men*, and not in some particular respects, relative conclusions are never enough; what we need is a complete, final, objective, and thus absolute, representation of human worth.

Types of Relativity

RELATIVITY AS PARTIALITY

ALMOST ALWAYS our evaluations of human achievements and performances are partial, because we consider some traits and fields of excellence and not others. Taking into account all the traits and all these fields is almost impossible, since they are too many—infinately many. We evaluate with a certain particular aim, and we consider only the qualities and achievements that are relevant to that aim. That is why our conclusions are relative: we can reach the conclusion that person X is inferior to person Y *in something*, or *relative to the field of excellence N*, but not a general conclusion that X is a ‘superior’ being and Y an ‘inferior’ one. There is no legitimate way of deducing the absolute conclusion ‘X is superior’ (in general) from the relative premise that ‘X is superior to Y in something.’ If X is superior (as a writer, for instance) to Y, that only shows a relative proportion; but it can never prove that *X is intrinsically superior to Y and Y intrinsically inferior to X*.

RELATIVITY AS SUBJECTIVITY

BUT WHY couldn’t we make global and complete hierarchies? Why couldn’t we make bottom line comparisons and evaluations? Isn’t it possible to first make such evaluations in particular fields and later on to aggregate

them in a bottom line, final, complete evaluation? Unfortunately, for those who are fond of final human worth hierarchies, the answer is in the negative.

There are three main obstacles to such final hierarchies.

The first one is that we always have to deal with *dissenting evaluations*. Some experts will say that Bach is a greater composer than Vivaldi, but there will still be some who claim that Vivaldi is greater (while still others will claim that the very comparison is meaningless). Moreover, in some periods of time Bach can be considered the best, while in other periods Vivaldi can win the highest prize. But then who is really the greatest? How can we escape from the subjectivity and the provisional character of such evaluations?

The second obstacle is *incommensurability*. Traits and achievements can sometimes be compared in a global manner, but it is very hard to measure them and to estimate the exact differences. But exact differences can be very important, even decisive, especially when we have to balance various achievements in various fields. Suppose that Bach was a greater composer than Vivaldi, but Vivaldi was morally superior to Bach. In a final hierarchy, we need to know to what extent (in what proportion) was Bach superior as a composer and to what extent (in what proportion) was Vivaldi superior morally. Do we have the possibility to make such precise evaluations? Obviously not.

The third obstacle is created by *the difficulty to assign axiological weight* to every field of comparison. Suppose that we have concluded that Bach was 70% superior as a composer to Vivaldi, while Vivaldi was 50% morally superior to Bach. Can we simply aggregate (arithmetically) these evaluations, to conclude that Bach was 'superior' to Vivaldi? Of course not. It all depends upon how important musical creativity is, as compared to moral capacity. In some *Weltanschauung*, creativity is more important than morality; in others, it is the other way round. As Thomas Sowell says, "equality' over all depends upon what weights are arbitrarily assigned to the various traits in which one or another predominates. So too would any general notion of 'superiority' or 'inferiority.' All these attempts to sum up disparate characteristics ignore the diversity of personal values which makes it impossible to have objectively recognized, fungible units in which to add up totals."¹²

This is not just a particular opinion. The difficulty to aggregate preferences and hierarchies has been scientifically proven. Kenneth J. Arrow has demonstrated the first theorem on the limits of aggregation, his so-called 'impossibility theorem' (1951),¹³ and in the next half of a century many other similar scientific results have been reached. A global, final, objective hierarchy can only be built if we accept some restrictions which, from a moral point of view, are arbitrary and unacceptable. To that one should add the difficulty of finding a unique system or hierarchy of values.¹⁴ It is not only that such a system has never been reached,

but it is in principle excluded due to the fact that there is no consensus between various human beings and every *Weltanschauung* that such beings adopt. A religious man will highly value obedience and devotion, while secular minded people will prefer autonomy and non-conformism. Conservatives will estimate respect for the past as an important value, while modernists will consider it an atavism. How can a unique, complete and final, as well as an objective, hierarchy be built? All scales of value are subjective, partial, and hard to compare, if at all possible. As Hayek contended, “nothing but partial scales of values exist—scales that are inevitably different and often inconsistent with each other.”¹⁵

This conclusion might seem defeatist and emotional. But it is not, actually: the scientific results are very telling. Even the simplest classification of empirical objects into classes depends upon assuming some subjective preferences, as the famous ‘ugly duckling theorem’ developed by Watanabe has shown;¹⁶ there are no purely objective, absolutely general, ontological classifications. And it is obvious that scales of value are even more difficult to construct, due to the variability of human evaluations.

RELATIVITY AS CONTINGENCY

WHEN WE evaluate abilities, traits and achievements, we are bound to evaluate performances—which are the only set of data that is available to us. But performances are always dependent on various contingencies: particular, favorable or unfavorable, circumstances, period of time, luck or the absence thereof, etc. Performances thus tell us what persons *managed* to achieve in some particular contexts, but never what they could achieve (in more favorable circumstances) or how (talented, capable, etc.) they are *intrinsically*. All performances, and consequently all evaluations based upon them, are thus relative (to the circumstances in which they have been reached) and of only limited relevance for what a person is or can be (according to his/her intrinsic possibilities). But when we are interested in intrinsic human worth we cannot be content to sum up relative results. What we actually need are absolute data—which, in fact, are never available.

That the distinction between the relative plane and the absolute plane is fundamental can be shown by noting the following conceptual differentiation: achievements and performances are rewarded with *prizes*, while intrinsic possibilities require the granting of *rights*. Various achievements should be rewarded by various prizes; but people who have equal possibilities in principle, because they belong to the same ontological type and, as Locke said, have the same natural advantages, should enjoy equal rights. Only if we had absolute data about some people, showing their lack of possibilities and advantages, were we entitled to diminish their rights. As long as what we actually have are relative data, i.e.

proofs of diminished achievements, what we are entitled to do is simply to diminish or eliminate the prizes. But rights should remain untouched.

How Is then Equality Possible?

THE FOUNDATION of the equality principle is typological or intrinsic equality, which implies the obligation of equal respect for all beings of the same kind. Accepting this principle does not presuppose the existence of some final, objective, hierarchy of empirical achievements which showed that all people are equal (according to empirical evaluations).

The enemies of equality ignore this fact and adopt the following strategy. First, they admit some sort of typological equality, because they keep talking about people; the very division they make ('superior people'–'inferior people') implies the acceptance of the fact that all these people are in the same category (even if that category should be later on divided in two sub-categories).

Second, they claim that people, although typologically equal, manifest their traits and possibilities in very different ways and reach very different achievements.

Third, this differentiation is taken as sufficient proof that people should be divided into 'superior' and 'inferior.'

But how can they justify the move from the second to the third step? Only by giving many examples of empirical differences between men and by postulating that these differences prove the existence of a 'superior–inferior' hierarchy. But there are two mistakes here. On the one hand, the empirical differences are not *relevant* for an intrinsic characterization of human equality, which is based not on empirical characteristics, but on typological ones. On the other hand, the supposition that such empirical differences can be aggregated into a single, final and conclusive, hierarchy, proving the existence of a distinction between 'superior' and 'inferior' people, is *wrong*. Aggregation is, in such a case, impossible.

The principle of intrinsic equality is thus justified by this failure of the anti-egalitarian arguments brought against it. Some authors have already suggested that the support of our egalitarian ideas is not a positive proof, based on empirical data and measurements, but a negative one: "Most people who are considered equal are usually regarded as such because they have *offsetting inequalities*—that is, neither of them is superior in every aspect, nor are they equal in every aspect."¹⁷

In other words, intrinsic equality is not based on exact evaluations showing that all people are exactly on the same place in a unique final hierarchy of human worth, and thus deserve equal respect. It is rather based upon 'indirect' proof:

since there are no decisive data showing that some people are intrinsically superior to others, we have to stick to the typological equality and give everybody equal moral credit. We cannot have the right to treat some people with less respect (in general) than others, as long as there can be no final, objective, hierarchy proving that some are inferior to others. The principle of intrinsic equality is thus based not on direct proof of equal worth, empirically attested, but on the ‘negative’ fact that we do not possess concluding reasons, based on certain factual data, that some people are inferior to others and should be treated with less respect.

But someone could think that such a conclusion is based on a trick. Since we do not have a clear direct proof of intrinsic equality, we try to justify it by invoking the failure of the attempt to prove the existence of the division between ‘superior’ and ‘inferior’ people. But is uncertainty about such a division a sound reason for straightforwardly rejecting it? Does lack of proof for inequality amount to a full-fledged proof of the existence of intrinsic equality? Lack of proof (both for intrinsic inequality and for intrinsic equality) should perhaps compel us to some sort of agnostic position, but not to a direct assertion of equality.

These questions are based, once again, on a confusion. When asking them, one is supposing that the defenders of intrinsic equality should have provided empirical data proving that human beings are equal, exactly as the enemies of equality were required to provide data proving empirical inequality; and that egalitarians should have produced a hierarchy in which all human beings were shown to have exactly the same rank—exactly as inegalitarians should have produced a hierarchy indicating the ‘superior’–‘inferior’ division. These suppositions are misplaced. The defenders of equality cannot be expected to provide a hierarchy showing that all people are equal empirically, and thus deserve equal respect, simply because they do not claim that there can be such a hierarchy. What they actually claim is that such a hierarchy is impossible. On the contrary, the enemies of equality can be asked to produce such a hierarchy, since they imply that it actually exists. The situation of the two camps is thus not symmetrical. The egalitarians dismiss the very idea of a hierarchy susceptible to prove that human beings are empirically equal; they claim that we do not need such a hierarchy, and that we should stick to the typological equality, remaining agnostic about the exact proportion in which some people can reach superior performances while others cannot do the same. On the contrary, the anti-egalitarians imply that such a hierarchy exists and could be discovered. But they fail to deliver. And it is precisely this failure that gives meaning to the egalitarian position.¹⁸



Notes

1. Which, of course, does not imply that *relative* divisions, based upon particular performances in particular fields, cannot be made. Obviously, someone can be inferior to someone else as regards athletic achievements, or as regards mathematical abilities, without being, in general, an ‘inferior human being.’
2. John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government*, Book II, Chapter 2, § 4.
3. Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysic of Morals*, Chapter 2, electronic version, <http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/pdf/kantgrou.pdf>.
4. Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government*, Book II, Chapter 2, § 4.
5. Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysic of Morals*, 28–29.
6. Immanuel Kant, “Of the Different Human Races,” electronic version, http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic97823.files/I_/Sept_27/KANT.pdf.
7. Thomas Sowell, *Knowledge and Decisions* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 126–127.
8. William A. Niskanen, in a review to James Buchanan’s *Why I, Too, Am not a Conservative*, in *The Cato Journal* 26, 3 (Fall 2006): 613–614.
9. Some appear to believe that one could unproblematically adopt, simultaneously, both the idea that ‘humans are never equal’ and the principle of equal human rights. But it is hard to see how one could justify the equal rights principle in the absence of *any kind* of natural equality among men. If human beings are unequal from all points of view, does it still make sense to advocate equal human rights?
10. Andrei Marmor, “The Intrinsic Value of Economic Equality,” in *Rights, Culture, and the Law: Themes from the Legal and Political Philosophy of Joseph Raz*, eds. Lukas H. Meyer et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 127–141.
11. Ludwig Wittgenstein, “A Lecture on Ethics,” *Philosophical Review* 74, 1 (January 1965): 3–12.
12. Sowell, 127.
13. Kenneth J. Arrow, *Social Choice and Individual Values* (New York: Wiley, 1951).
14. Cf. Friedrich A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago–London: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 78.
15. *Ibid.*, 59.
16. Satoshi Watanabe, *Knowing and Guessing: A Quantitative Study of Inference and Information* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1969), 376–377.
17. Sowell, 127.
18. Comments are welcome at ailiescu@gmx.net.

Abstract

How Is Equality Possible? An Analysis of the Idea of Intrinsic Equality

The present study focuses on a particularly important meaning of the term *equality*, namely, the one that inspires the general principle that all human beings, as human beings, are equally important, or do count equally, and deserve equal respect. While the idea that people are fundamentally equal is nowadays almost taken for granted, the meaning of the concept of ‘equality’ is still under

dispute, and the clarification of the idea that ‘fundamentally, humans are equal’ is far from being complete. This stems from certain confusions that are being made in this context between concepts like ‘empirical’ and ‘typological,’ ‘empirical’ and ‘normative,’ ‘natural’ and ‘empirical,’ and between ‘intrinsic equality’ and ‘equality as an intrinsic value.’ The author then goes on to examine the unavoidably relative nature of the value judgments applied to human beings, in its multiple facets.

Keywords

equality, equality principle, human rights, relativity, Locke, Kant