

Call for Abstracts

The Foundations of Human Equality

22-23 September 2020, Bern (Switzerland)

Most of us feel strongly committed to the basic moral equality of all human beings. Yet, none of the existing attempts to locate a non-arbitrary ground for this commitment have proved fully convincing. What is it in virtue of which all – though maybe not only – human individuals have a moral claim to have their interests equally taken into account against those whose actions might affect them?

One challenge that theories of human equality are often taken to face is to accommodate human individuals who belong to either of the following groups: individuals who do not yet have the capacities that are considered to be relevant for moral equality, or who have lost these capacities, or who do not have the relevant capacities at any time in their life (e.g., people with congenital ‘severe’ or ‘profound’ cognitive impairments). We encounter similar difficulties in all debates about basic normative categories, such as *dignity*, *moral value*, *status*, *standing*, *considerability* or *recognition* and *respect*. Nevertheless, these concepts are often used in grounding moral and legal claims, they play important roles in legal texts and declarations as well as in contributions from political and moral philosophy. Therefore, sharpening the discussions about the scope of these basic normative categories is an important desideratum.

The aim of the workshop is to provide an occasion for discussing central questions linked to the concept of human equality, such as:

- How can we justify or explain our commitment to the idea that every human individual should be regarded and treated as a moral equal?
- What exactly does it require to treat someone as a moral equal? Answers to this question often refer to an individual’s interests. But how should we understand an individual’s interests in this context, what content can they have, and how can we determine the class of interests that is relevant to being treated as a moral equal?
- Is it more plausible to draw the boundary of the community of moral equals based on specific *capacities* of or based on a specific *relation* among the members of that community? How can we argue for the moral relevance of one or the other?
- Can we specify a way of relating to other human individuals that is not merely instrumentally valuable and whose value does not depend on reciprocity? Might the social needs of human individuals point us to such a valuable relation?
- Some accounts of the community of moral equals also include non-human individuals. Should those accounts allow for differential treatment of those who are part of the community? If so, how can specific proposals meet this requirement?

The workshop will feature three invited speakers: Kimberley Brownlee (University of Warwick, via skype), Matthew Liao (New York University) and Andrea Sangiovanni (King’s College London/Euro-pean University Institute).

We invite submissions for additional talks. If you are interested, please send an **abstract of 800–1,000 words** (suitable for a 30 minute talk) as a PDF attachment to ws.foundations.human.equality@gmail.com by March 15, 2020. The abstract should be suitable for blind review, i.e. it should not contain any information that may identify you as the author. You will be notified about the decision by the beginning of April 2020. Please make sure that the e-mail to which the abstract is attached contains your name and institutional affiliation (if applicable). Researchers from underrepresented groups in academic philosophy are especially encouraged to submit.

We will provide hotel accommodation for all accepted speakers. In addition, there is a limited budget for covering some of the travelling expenses of those whose home institutions do not bear these expenses. We also hope to be able to arrange for professional childcare during the workshop. Please contact us for more information on this.

The workshop is hosted by the Institute of Philosophy at the University of Bern and organized by Stephanie Elsen and Andreas Müller. If you have any questions, please write to ws.foundations.human.equality@gmail.com.