

Jeremy Waldron. *One Another's Equals: The Basis of Human Equality.* Belknap Press 2017. 280 pp. \$29.95 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9780674659766).

This volume is an amended transcription of the six Gifford Lectures delivered by Jeremy Waldron in February 2015. Waldron's topic is human equality, specifically, the philosophical foundation for a 'basic equality' that all human beings qua human beings share, which accords them inherently and irrevocably equal moral worth. This is an unquestionably important topic with significance to civil society, politics, and law, yet one that, as Waldron points out (10-11), has received scant scholarly attention.

As Waldron ably demonstrates in this rich, rewarding book, it is not at all easy to identify what makes all humans equal. Differences among people—'of appearance,' 'of ability,' 'of income and power,' 'of status' (4-5)—are ubiquitous even in modern societies that claim to vie for the elimination of discrimination and prejudice. Thomas Jefferson famously wrote into the Declaration of Independence that the proposition 'all men are created equal' is 'self-evident.' While it is true that the Judeo-Christian Scriptures tell that all humans are descended from Adam and Eve, a blanket assertion of human equality, as Jefferson well knew, was unthinkable before the 17th century, when it was first articulated by Thomas Hobbes, then appropriated by John Locke to create the original formulation of classical liberalism, and later reinterpreted and restated by a host liberal thinkers, most crucially Immanuel Kant.

Waldron, and the many scholars with whose work he engages, almost invariably approach the question of equality from within this classical liberal tradition. He shows no interest in broadening the discussion to include non-Western strands of thought on equality, nor in addressing the critiques of liberalism's purported egalitarianism advanced by Karl Marx and other socialists, feminism, post-structuralism, post-colonial studies, queer studies, and more. Well into the 21st century, a thinker of Waldron's caliber should at least recognize the limitations inherent in his Eurocentrism and his wholehearted embrace of the liberal worldview.

Within his chosen purview, however, Waldron does impressive descriptive and analytic work. He begins by identifying two distinct elements that come together to form basic equality. The first he calls 'continuous equality,' that is, that there are no 'moral distinctions or differentiations among humans like those ... commonly made between humans and other animals' (30). The second, 'distinctive equality,' posits that humans 'are one another's equals on a basis that does actually differentiate them from other animals' (31). Waldron devotes the majority of Lecture 1 to defending continuous equality against the arguments of Hastings Rashdall, who stands in for 'philosophical racism' (20-9). Waldron understands that few among his intended audience will show any sympathy to Rashdall's position. Nevertheless, he presents a systematic case that not only rejects 'discontinuities' among people, but also builds up to a preliminary outline of Waldron's understanding of human nature. Humans, he believes, are special, and equally special, because they possess 'an apparatus of understanding and sensitivity' that 'does not differ greatly from one individual or social context to another' and involves the ability 'to listen to people and descry love, hope, ambition and expectation as well as pain, loss, fear, bereavement, defeat, humiliation, and devastation in terms that [make] sense to those who [experience] them' (33-34). Whether this is sufficient to support distinctive equality is a question he waits until Lecture 6 to attempt to answer.

Lecture 2 establishes the parameters for Waldron's understanding of basic equality. First, he addresses the descriptive/prescriptive distinction. Is human equality an empirical fact (or facts) about human nature that can be used as the basis for moral thinking? Or is it a moral principle adopted by

convention? Waldron leans toward the view that ‘there is no factual implication that is going to compel a belief in human equality’ (57) since ‘there is nothing in our common humanity that compels any moral principle’ (59). Rather, ‘we come into the discussion with a rough conviction that we are one another’s equals ... and that informs the way we look for ... the properties on which, upon reflection, we say that equality is based’ (65). At the same time, he is adamant that a prescriptive notion of equality must rely on actual facts about human beings that explain why ‘our principle of basic equality applies to humans (or perhaps all rational creatures) but not to teapots or tadpoles’ (58). Second, he engages with the ‘redundancy thesis’ (95), which holds that equality may not be necessary for a morality that treats all people with concern and respect. Waldron ultimately rejects this option, concluding that ‘human equality is at the very least a morally necessary heuristic’ (82).

It is in Lectures 3 and 4 that Waldron finally offers his outline of which specific human traits and/or capacities constitute the basis for equality. These include rationality, the moral capacity, free will, and the ability to love. Waldron understands each as a ‘range property,’ which is ‘a relationship between two associated properties’ such that one is binary – ‘either you have [it] or you don’t’—and the other scalar—i.e., ‘admitting of differences of degree’ (118-9). The fact that, say, one person is more rational than another is unimportant to whether the two are morally equal, but the fact that both partake of the quality of being a rational being is crucially important. At the same time, the degree to which a person has a specific trait or capability may be important for other ethical purposes. A morally complete use of equality requires a capacity Waldron names ‘scintillation,’ which is ‘the way our attention moves back and forth between the relevant range property ... and the particularity of its manifestation in each individual case’ (157). That way, people can be treated as equals, and in doing so ‘we are respecting the very capabilities they have whose exercise will lead inevitably to differences of appraisal-respect’ (168).

Lecture 5 slightly deviates from the principal argument to focus on the relationship between the classical liberal worldview and the Judeo-Christian tradition. This section feels the most obligatory—Lord Gifford, the original patron of the lecture series, explicitly instructed that the philosophical explorations be informed by Christianity – and the most perfunctory. Though Waldron repeatedly refers to himself as a religious believer (e.g., 177), he does not seem inclined to rely on Biblical exegesis or divine revelation to support his views. Instead he maintains, following Kant once more, that ‘no divine authority can provide a ground for ethical ideas or moral rights’ (181).

Unfortunately, he does not seem to realize how much he relies on the traditional Judeo-Christian worldview to defend the principle of distinctive equality in Lecture 6. Here, Waldron argues that his view of equality must include all human beings, including those so profoundly disabled that they lack some or all of the traits and capacities on which basic equality relies, while at the same time excluding all non-human animals. He manages this intellectual sleight of hand by appealing to a teleological conception of nature (237): human beings lacking the capacity to reason or to make moral choices deserve human-level worth and dignity because the members of the species to which they belong have the potential of developing those capabilities, while even the smartest non-human animals can never partake in this ‘species potential.’ Animal rights advocates such as Peter Singer and Tom Regan have argued that this position does little more than proclaim humans the Crown of Creation.

To a large degree, then, *One Another’s Equals* is preaching to the choir, yet it is still valuable as a wide-ranging exploration of its topic. Waldron is a master explicator who presents his arguments in exceptionally clear, jargon-free prose. For those well accustomed to philosophical argumentation the book will be a breeze to read. Waldron, however, intends to be accessible to the general public and in this he is less successful. He often apologizes for treating ‘logical and philosophical matters

that may be more familiar to specialists than to ordinary readers,' (41) but then rushes through complex arguments with no regard for whether non-specialists can keep up. He unnecessarily introduces terms like 'supervenience' as 'a technical concept used in philosophy,' (61) but then employs others such as 'epiphenomenal' (63) and 'teleology' (237), which likely are not familiar to most non-specialist readers, without comment. More problematically, he uses far fewer examples to illustrate his points than comparable books that genuinely have the general reading public in mind.

Though highly informative and nuanced, this volume does not advance the case for a belief in equality significantly further than Kant did more than two centuries ago, when he distinguished between a human being as 'part of the system of nature' and therefore 'of ordinary value' and a human being 'regarded as a *person* ... exalted above any price' (100). Still, the implications of the liberal view of equality, as Waldron takes pains to show, are momentous and deserving of attention. It commands, for instance, that one not afford one's own brother more significance (in the moral sense) than one's bitter enemy, that Adolf Hitler be treated as possessing equal worth and dignity as Albert Schweitzer or Mother Teresa, that the noblest and most loyal of dogs be assumed morally inferior to a child rapist. Is such a view convincing, given the facts about the world available to us? Waldron answers yes, but only, he admits, as long as we wish it to be.

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