

The Constitutive Value of Distributive Equality

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Abstract: What kind of value attaches to the fact of a particular good being distributed equally rather than unequally? This paper argues that distributive equality has non-instrumental value in virtue of its relation to basic equality – that is, the fact of the relevant individuals being equals in some morally basic sense. This fundamental kind of value of distributive equality can be characterized as ‘constitutive’ value, inasmuch as distributive equality is understood as constitutive of a distinctively egalitarian kind of proportional justice. The paper distinguishes this view of the value of equality from several others with which it can easily be mistaken: the ‘redundancy’ view, according to which proportional justice is doing all the normative work, so that equality has no non-instrumental value; the opposite view that equality has intrinsic value; the view that distributive equality has non-instrumental ‘contributory’ value; and the view that it has ‘conditional’ value. Finally, the paper clarifies the differences and similarities between the view defended here and ‘telic’ egalitarianism, on the one hand, and ‘deontic’ egalitarianism, on the other.

Keywords: Distributive equality, Basic equality, Intrinsic value, Constitutive value, Contributory value, Proportional justice, Telic egalitarianism.

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