

## Inequality

*On the perils of misconceiving the human condition*

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### Abstract (500 words)

The condition man is born into is ambivalent. On the one hand it is one of poverty, want, and ignorance. Left to itself the newborn infant will quickly perish. So, what calls for explanation is not: Why is there poverty? Why want? Why ignorance? Rather, it is how man manages to lift himself out of the meagre circumstances he finds himself being thrown into. That is the topic of *human progress*. On the other hand, the condition man is born into is one of inequality, diversity, and difference. It is a myth long debunked that raised under the exact same circumstances two given newborn infants will grow to become virtually indistinguishable persons. Nature itself sees to it that no two persons are exactly alike: We enter this world as individuals. Hence, what calls for explanation is not: Why is there inequality? Why diversity? Why difference? Rather, we should ask ourselves where there should be equality and why, what, if anything at all, is wrong with diversity, and whether the exigencies of difference can be reconciled with a world thought of as constituted by peers, and if so, how. That is the topic of human *flourishing*. Thus, there are two types of aspects to the human condition, and that is why it is ambivalent: In order to live a good life there are hardships to overcome and opportunities to seize. Poverty is among the former. Diversity is among the latter.

As an exercise in descriptive metaphysics, it is not central to the line of thought presented whether the human condition really is as described. What is central is that we conceive of ourselves in this way. Descriptive metaphysics is thus not the same as ontology. It is the enquiry into our conceptual scheme understood as the shared and fundamental way we make sense of ourselves and the world we take ourselves to live in. However, it is beyond the scope of this essay to discuss the human condition in its entirety. The aspect I intend to focus upon is one where a confusion seems to have befallen the general public which is not easily removed. Attracted by the lure of high-spirited utopian visions of man and society many of the brightest minds of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries succumbed to a view where difference, diversity and inequality, or, for that matter: roses by other names, add to the hardships of life. Man, the tale goes, would be best served if equality prevailed.

This paper argues that this view is incoherent and mistaken. It suggests that it leads to a distorted picture of human progress and flourishing apt to serve as a pretext for dangerous social engineering. The main worry, however, is that the concern for equality leaves us with a surrogate spoiling the real moral concern just like bad money drives out the good. Thus, the perils of misconceiving the human condition are real, and they are important for our conception of the good and how to attain it.

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## References

*To be added*