

Groups in Conflict

Equality versus Community

Groups in Conflict takes up the challenge of trying to work out a moral picture that has room for the value of both equality and community. It is a significant, striking and refreshing contribution to the developing debate about the possible justification of partiality.

Professor Jonathan Wolff, University College London

We differ in every valuable attribute. Why then do we insist that we are equal? And why should it bother us?

In his groundbreaking new book, Donald Franklin finds answers at once profound and disturbing to the conundrum of equality. He argues that the intrinsic value that we share equally lies in what we can each achieve through the free exercise of the will, but that most ethically valuable achievement is systematically dependent upon support from others. This dependency creates powerful obligations to loved ones and strangers impartially.

Yet compromise with impartiality is inevitable, for creation of relationships and communities is an essential aspect of ethical flourishing, and relationships of value involve a knowledge of the other that demands special concern for their needs. When we insist upon impartiality as a cardinal political virtue, what place do we leave for loyalty to family and to compatriots?

Political philosophers (including Rawls) and communitarian ethicists (such as Walzer) have sought to sidestep this value conflict by reserving impartiality to the political sphere, leaving personal loyalties immune from impartialist critique. Donald Franklin demonstrates the incoherence of this approach, and shows how individually and collectively we can and should weigh the claims of strangers against what is of true value in our relationships and communities.

The author:

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