EQUALITY, DEMOCRACY AND WELFARE:
AN OVERVIEW OF THE DISCUSSIONS AT THE
IV MEETINGS ON ETHICS AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

The *Meetings on Ethics and Political Philosophy* is an annual scientific event organized by the Political Theory Group at the Centre for Humanistic Studies of the University of Minho. The event aims at bringing together junior researchers and senior scholars working in the areas of ethics and political philosophy to present both advanced and exploratory work before an open and welcoming academic audience. Each year, the group invites a prominent philosopher in the field to present his/her recent work on two different topics. A call for papers is then open, inviting relevant contributions in moral philosophy and normative political theory, with special consideration to those works addressing the problems to be discussed by the invited speaker.

Professor Peter Vallentyne has been the invited speaker of the *IV Meetings on Ethics and Political Philosophy*, which took place at the University of Minho, 20-21 May, 2013. Peter Vallentyne holds the Florence G. Kline Chair of Philosophy, at the University of Missouri, Columbia, USA, and he is currently one of the most important political philosophers in the world. His wide research interests include libertarianism (right and left), egalitarianism, rights, responsibility, or the moral consideration of nonhuman animals and children, among many other topics.

He gave two talks at the *Meetings*. In the first talk, "Left Libertarianism", Vallentyne, one of the most representative exponents of this view (along with other contemporary advocates such as Hillel Steiner, Philippe Van Parijs and Michael Otsuka), provided an overview of this position. He understands it as a theory of justice committed to both the value of private property and

the egalitarian share of natural resources. In this sense, left-libertarianism is a form of liberal egalitarianism inasmuch as it endorses some demands of material equality and some limits to the permissible means of promoting such equality. Equal Opportunity Left-Libertarianism (Vallentyne's version of left-libertarianism) is, according to the author, the best way to capture the liberal egalitarian values of liberty, security, equality and prosperity.

Apart from his work on left-libertarianism, Vallentyne also gained renown in animal ethics for being one of the few theorists who have addressed the question of what we owe to nonhuman animals from the viewpoint of egalitarianism. In the second talk, "Equality and Animals", Vallentyne revisited some of the ideas presented in one of the papers that roused more debate in this field: "On Mice and Men: Equality and Animals", initially published in the *Journal of Ethics* in 2005. He argued that given that animals have a wellbeing and that they are commonly worse off in comparison to human beings, taking egalitarianism seriously entails that we must transfer resources currently used for the promotion of human wellbeing to the improvement of the situation of nonhuman animals. He then explored possible ways to avoid the conclusion that this transfer should be massive. Nevertheless, he concluded that such reallocation of resources ought to take place, even if to a lesser extent.

The presence of Professor Peter Vallentyne in this year's edition of the *Meetings* contributed to a substantial increase in the number of attendants (three times higher than in previous editions). It also had an impact on the level of internationalization attained – sixty-six speakers (half of which were women), out of seventeen different countries, coming from the most prestigious universities in the world (University of Oxford, London School of Economics, Princeton University or Rice University, among others). They presented a total of sixty-five papers, structured around seventeen panels of discussion. Ultimately, more than a hundred scholars joined the event. Given the excellent inflow of submissions, this edition has also experienced a welcome increase in the range of topics discussed, from which the present selection of articles represents only a small sample.

This volume opens with Mats Volberg's "Persons as Free and Equal: Examining the Fundamental Assumption of Liberal Political Philosophy". There he considers one of the grounding claims of contemporary liberal political philosophy, namely, that persons are free and equal. The paper deals with conceptual issues concerning this assumption such as how free-and-equal-making properties relate to person-making properties. It then moves on to examine three broad ways how the free-and-equal-making

properties could be established. In this way, he assesses how these properties might be conceived, either as necessary, contingent or agreement based.

Continuing with the discussion of liberal egalitarianism, Jahel Queralt in "Las políticas del liberalismo igualitario: Justicia Rawslsiana *vs* Justicia Dworkiniana", stresses the diverse practical implications at an institutional level which follow from adopting different versions of liberal egalitarianism. She does this by analyzing the two central conceptions of egalitarian liberalism, namely, John Rawls' democratic equality and Ronald Dworkin's equality of resources. She then focuses on what each proposal entails regarding the protection of basic liberties, economic institutions and health care.

Next, a couple of articles come which deal with normative theory of democracy. "In search of a telos: A critique of the performative green public sphere", by Carme Melo Escrihuela, addresses the relationship between environmental politics and the green public sphere. The author focuses on Douglas Torgerson's development of these concepts and argues that his view is limited as far as a transformative environmental politics is concerned. By taking into consideration Habermas' notion of the public sphere, she then delineates an alternative account.

Secondly, in "*Phisis* and *nomos*: The nature of equality in Popper's and Strauss' readings of Plato", José Colen tackles the problem of equality and its relation to democracy as first formulated in Plato's dialogue *Menexenus*. Is democracy viable if no historical ties or common culture justify solidarity and the bearable sharing of democratic burdens? Is the social equality of citizens a condition which forces us to seek legal equality or is it rather an enemy of excellence? The author develops a fictitious debate between Popper and Strauss about the normative foundations of democracy. Colen pays special attention to the confrontation between both approaches to Plato's arguments against equality.

Focusing on more specific philosophical problems, Miroslav Imbrisevic discusses in "Carlos Nino's Conception of Consent in Crime" the concept of consent in Nino's theory of punishment. The author distinguishes among three types of implied consent and argues that Nino's conception is a form of those. Insofar as it displays features of everyday consent, it is analogous to the consent present in contracts and in the assumption of risks in tort law.

This issue ends by shifting our attention from issues in political philosophy to broader topics of normative ethics. In "Some curious cases against cognitive enhancement", Alberto Carrio deals with the moral problem of

human cognitive enhancement. He starts by examining the arguments for and against it and concludes that no sound reasons can be advanced to object enhancement from a welfarist point of view. The author grounds his defense of human cognitive enhancement by articulating a balance between personal and impersonal reasons and the postulates of a liberal society.

Finally, in "Good to die", Rainer Ebert challenges the dominant view among theorists of death (the so-called deprivation account) according to which death is bad inasmuch as it deprives us from the good things that would otherwise occur to us. The author claims that, since extrinsic badness has only to do with increasing intrinsic badness and not with decreasing intrinsic goodness, death is rather a good thing, even though often less good than not dying.

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