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SYMPOSIUM ON MICHAEL SANDEL'S *THE TYRANNY OF MERIT*

The Editors

What do proponents of “equality” really want?  
Equality of opportunity?  
Equality of results?  
Equality of what?

Many observers see meritocracy as deeply equalitarian. They contrast competition open to talent favorably to hierarchies determined by attachments to inherited social status. But “meritocracy” can mean strikingly different things and thus prompt dramatically different assessments. According to one use of the word in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a meritocracy is a society in which “everyone with skill and imagination may aspire to reach the highest level.”<sup>1</sup> According to one definition, a meritocracy is a society dominated by “a ruling or influential class of educated or skilled people.”<sup>2</sup> This moment of deep unease about fundamental precepts undergirding Western liberal democracies has witnessed an outpouring of writings about meritocracy and its discontents. *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?*, a recent book by Michael Sandel, who is one of the world's leading political philosophers, affords both illumination and provocation. The *American Journal of Law and Equality* elicited comments on Sandel's book from a wide range of scholars and shared their reactions with him. In the symposium that follows, Sandel describes his project with the critiques he had read in mind. The commentators offer their observations—provided in the order addressed by Sandel's response. Sandel's concluding response anchors what we hope will be a generative contribution to an ongoing conversation.

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1 *Meritocracy*, OXFORD UNIV. PRESS, <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/meritocracy> (last visited May 5, 2021).

2 *Id.*