

University of Munich Department of Philosophy and Munich Center for Ethics
Winter term 2014/15

Fortgeschrittenenseminar und Essaykurs

What is the point of equality?

Instructors:

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Course description

In this seminar we will critically assess and contrast two contemporary attempts to answer the question, 'What is the point of equality?': (1) the first answer stems from luck egalitarianism and claims that the point of equality is to rectify disadvantage due to brute luck, and (2) the second answer stems from social or relational egalitarianism – equality is foremost a social and political ideal which determines a certain egalitarian structure to relationships, and opposes (certain kinds of) hierarchical relationships.

If you are an egalitarian, what is it that you want to equalize? A popular contemporary answer to this question is that we should aim to eliminate (or compensate for) inequalities due to 'brute luck' (e.g. inequalities for which one is not responsible). This kind of egalitarian theory is known as luck egalitarianism or responsibility-sensitive egalitarianism.

Elizabeth Anderson has written a particularly influential critique, 'What is the point of equality?', in which she claims that luck egalitarianism undermines respect-for-persons, and that equality, foremost, does not have to do with luck, or with distributions of resources. Egalitarianism, she claims, is primarily a commitment to establishing equal relations between people, which for example, promotes equality of standing, and diminishes (at least some) inequalities in esteem and power. This general form of egalitarianism is known as social or relational egalitarianism. Critics claim, however, that it does not provide anything more than a vague notion of equality, and when it does indeed attempt to provide a more precise theory, it no longer appears to be specifically egalitarian.

In this seminar we will focus on (1) considering different formulations of each of these theories of equality – luck egalitarianism and social egalitarianism; (2) highlighting criticisms of luck egalitarianism from the perspective of social egalitarianism, and vice versa; and (3) analysing whether they are mutually exclusive. Texts will include articles by Elizabeth Anderson, Richard Arneson, J. Paul Kelleher, Samuel Scheffler, Shlomi Segall, Zofia Stemplowska.

Course requirements

Students may either write four short essays (ca. 2.200 words each) during the term or a Hausarbeit (ca. 7.500 words) during the term break. Students are expected to participate actively in class and to give a brief presentation of one of the readings.

Course schedule

Fri, October 10, 2014. Introduction

12.15–14.00

Fri, October 24, 2014. Luck vs. Social Egalitarianism

12.15–14.00 and 14.30–16.45

Arneson: *Equality and Equal of Opportunity for Welfare*

Anderson: *What is the Point of Equality?* (part I)

Fri, November 14, 2014. Social Egalitarianism

12.15–14.00 and 14.30–16.45

Anderson: *What is the Point of Equality?* (part II)

Scheffler: *The Practice of Equality*

Fri, December 5, 2014. Reconciliation?

12.15–14.00 and 14.30–16.45

Stemplowska: *Responsibility and Respect: Reconciling two Egalitarian Visions*

Arneson: *Luck Egalitarianism and Prioritarianism*

Fri, January 16, 2015. Luck and Social Egalitarianism Applied

12.15–14.00 and 14.30–16.45

Segall: *Health, Luck, and Justice*

Kelleher: *Health Inequalities and Relational Egalitarianism*

Fri, January 23, 2015. Conclusion

12.15–14.00

Reading list

- Anderson, Elizabeth. 1999. "What Is the Point of Equality?" *Ethics* 109 (2): 287–337.
- Arneson, Richard J. 1989. "Equality and Equal Opportunity for Welfare." *Philosophical Studies* 56 (1): 77–93.
- Arneson, Richard J. 2000. "Luck Egalitarianism and Prioritarianism." *Ethics* 110: 339–349.
- Kelleher, J. Paul. 2014. "Health Inequalities and Relational Egalitarianism." Unpublished ms.
- Scheffler, Samuel. in press. "The Practice of Equality." In *Social Equality: Essays on What it Means to be Equals*, edited by Carina Fourie, Fabian Schuppert and Ivo Wallimann-Helmer. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Segall, Shlomi. 2010. *Health, Luck, and Justice*. Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Stemplowska, Zofia. 2011. "Responsibility and Respect: Reconciling Two Egalitarian Visions." In *Responsibility and Distributive Justice*, edited by Carl Knight and Zofia Stemplowska. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press.

Assessment criteria for written assignments

Standardly, written assignments will be graded according to the following criteria.

1. Structure and organisation

Is the assignment well organised?

Does it have a clear introductory paragraph, thesis statement, and concluding paragraph?

Are there clear transitions between paragraphs and sections of the assignment?

2. Exposition and interpretation

Do you give a clear and charitable interpretation of the view(s) under consideration?

Do you make clear the underlying assumptions of the view(s) as well as their implications?

Do you support your interpretations with relevant citations from the text?

3. Argument and critical evaluation

Do you provide good arguments for the claims you make? Is it obvious what they are?

When critiquing a view, do you consider possible responses to that critique?

Do you show that you have thought independently about the problem in question?

4. Writing style

Is your prose style clear and easy to understand?

Are there any recurring grammatical or spelling errors?

Do you avoid awkward and confusing sentence structures?