

Equality, Desert, and Distributive Justice

Spring 2008

Phil 780

Objective

Egalitarianism – in one form or other – has been a major force in thinking about distributive justice over the past 35 years. Prominent figures in moral and political have contributed to the literature on this subject. So, it is useful for any normative theorist to know a bit about it. We will familiarize ourselves with selected important articles on egalitarianism, including those by Parfit, Dworkin, and Arneson. We will focus on two questions: (i) why, or why not, equality? And: (ii) if equality, equality of what? Our discussion of (ii) provides a segue into a discussion of desert. Egalitarians increasingly include a place for considerations of choice and responsibility in their theories. We will ask whether, in doing so, they are incorporating desert into their theories. This will require some discussion of the nature of desert. At the end of the seminar, participants should have a sense of what some of the major debates about egalitarianism and, to a lesser extent, desert are.

Contact information

Professor: Jeffrey Moriarty

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Office hours: Monday, 11:50 a.m. – 12:50 p.m., and by appointment.

I may have reason to email you during the semester. The easiest way for me to do this is via the MyBGSU web portal. This system typically uses your BGSU email address by default. So, you must either occasionally check that address, or set it up so that it forwards messages to the account you normally use.

Meeting times and places

1:00 – 4:20 p.m., Monday. 317 Shatzel Hall.

Required texts

Articles marked with an 'IE' below come out of the book, *The Ideal of Equality*, eds. Clayton and Williams (Palgrave, 2002), which has been ordered for the bookstore. Copies of the remaining articles will be made available to you in the usual place.

Assignments

1. Paper, 15-20 pages: 75%.
2. Presentation, about 20 minutes: 15%.
3. Discussion points (5 total): 10%.

** Philosophy auditors are required to do either a class presentation (on a topic close to the course's topic) or the discussion points. That's all.

Paper. You are required to turn in a paper between 15 and 20 pages long that deals with the readings and issues we discussed during the semester. Try not to go too far below or above these page requirements. Definitely do not go too far above.

Presentation. I've reserved the last two weeks of class for student presentations. Your goal here is to present what is effectively a rough draft of your paper. Each session will last about 30 minutes. Take 15-20 minutes to present your work. The next 10 minutes will be questions from the audience. We will have a short 5 minute break and then move on to the next presenter. You can either read your paper or talk through it. You are free to use (or not) handouts, powerpoint, or the chalkboard.

Discussion points. Five times during the semester, you are required to turn in a "discussion point" to me. At least three must be turned in before spring break. A discussion point is a paragraph or two (approx. 200-250 words) describing a part of the assigned reading you think we should discuss in class. You should briefly say what the (part of the) reading is about, and then say why you think we should discuss it. Aim for a robust issue. Ideally, raise an objection to the reading which we can examine in class. Avoid parts of the reading which you simply don't get. (Though sometimes failing to understand an argument indicates that it is confused and ripe for objection. Here you will have to use your best judgment.) You can, if you like, raise two points for discussion in your discussion point, but do try to stay within the 200-250 word limit. These are due to me Monday by 10:00 a.m., though I am happy to accept them earlier. Each discussion point is worth 2% of your final grade. I will grade them on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the best grade. I expect everyone to get very high marks on this portion of the course.

Attendance policy

Attendance will not be taken, nor will it count as part of your final grade. However, I expect you to attend class regularly, and to contribute to discussions in class.

Academic integrity policy

I doubt you need to be reminded of this, but don't plagiarize. At this level, what's the point? Just in case, BGSU's official policy can be found here:

http://www.bgsu.edu/catalog/Acad_policies/Acad_policies2.html

Late policy/missed exam policy

Presentations must be done on time. If an unavoidable conflict comes up, then you will be allowed to do your presentation on an alternate day. Otherwise, be prepared to present on the day you are assigned.

Plan to turn in your final paper(s) by Friday, May 2nd. If you can't get it done by then, you must get in touch with me to work out an alternative arrangement. The department is quite concerned about the number of incompletes graduate students have. Don't expect too much leniency.

Withdrawal policy

The university's withdrawal policy can be found here:

http://www.bgsu.edu/catalog/Acad_policies/Acad_policies15.html#withdraw

Readings

Below is a *tentative* list of readings. These are subject to change, depending on time and class interest. You are expected to have completed the relevant readings *before* class meets.

Week 1, 1/7: Introduction – no reading.

Equality, sufficiency, priority

Week 2, 1/14: Rawls, “Replies to Alexander and Musgrave.” IE
Scanlon, “The Diversity of Objections to Inequality.” IE

Week 3, 1/21: MLK Day – no class

Week 4, 1/28: Nagel, “Equality.” IE
Frankfurt, “Equality as a Moral Ideal.”

Week 5, 2/4: Parfit, “Equality or Priority?” IE

Week 6, 2/11: Temkin, “Equality, Priority, and the Leveling Down Objection.” IE

Equality of what?

Rawls, selections from *A Theory of Justice*.

Week 7, 2/18: Dworkin, “What is Equality?”, Parts 1 and 2 (extracts).

Week 8, 2/25: Cohen, “On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice.”
Arneson, “Liberalism, Distributive Subjectivism, and Equality Opportunity for Welfare.” IE

Spring break, March 3rd – 9th.

Week 9, 3/10: Anderson, “What is the Point of Equality?”

Desert, responsibility, and equality

Week 10, 3/17: Feinberg, “Justice and personal desert.”
Miller, *Principles of Social Justice*, ch. 7.

Week 11, 3/24: Rawls, selections from *A Theory of Justice*.
Scheffler, “Responsibility, reactive attitudes, and liberalism in philosophy and politics.”

Week 12, 3/31: Sher, *Desert*, ch. 3.
Valentynne, “Brute Luck Equality and Desert.”

Week 13, 4/7: Kagan, “Equality and Desert.”
Olsaretti, “Unmasking equality? Kagan on Equality and Desert.”

Student presentations

Week 14, 4/14: TBD.

Week 15, 4/21: TBD.