

SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY

READING GUIDE #13

THE NATURE OF EGALITARIANISM

WHEN doing the reading for this class, there are the two basic kinds of information you need to understand:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What are the reasons, important considerations, and evidence that lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, *it is information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support accepting one possible position on an issue, rather than another.

READING

Scheffler, S. (2003, January). What is egalitarianism? *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 31(1), 5–39.

QUESTIONS

As you read, keep these questions in mind:

1. What is meant by luck egalitarianism? Why might such an account of equality have intuitive appeal?
2. In what ways does Samuel Scheffler see luck egalitarianism as overlapping and yet diverging from what he calls “the prevailing political morality” (p. 5)?
3. In section I, Scheffler seeks to explain why people might think John Rawls is committed to luck egalitarianism.
What are the two arguments made by Rawls that are seen as evidence of his commitment to luck egalitarianism? What are the two ways in which Rawls’ difference principle is seen as contradicting that commitment?
4. In section II, Scheffler argues that luck egalitarianism possesses some serious flaws and ought to be rejected.
The first major flaw is that “the degree of weight that the luck egalitarian places on the distinction between choices and circumstances seems, on its face, to be both philosophically dubious and morally implausible” (p. 17).
What is Scheffler’s argument that this distinction is philosophically dubious? What is his argument that it is morally implausible? Why do responses by luck egalitarians to these concerns only seem to create further difficulties?
5. The second major flaw is that “the luck-egalitarian conception of equality diverges from a more familiar way of

understanding that value [of equality]” (p. 21). Scheffler calls that more familiar understanding the “*social and political ideal of equality*” (p. 22).

What is this social and political ideal of equality? How does that differ from the luck-egalitarian conception? Why is that a problem for luck egalitarians?

6. In section III, how does Scheffler try and show that Rawls may be understood as deriving an account of distributive egalitarianism from a social and political ideal of equality?
7. In section IV, why is Scheffler not impressed by attempts—like that from Ronald Dworkin—to derive luck egalitarianism from a more substantive conception of equality?

To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses. You do, however, need to be prepared to speak intelligently about these issues at our next class meeting.