Justice or Equality?

JOHN-STEWART GORDON

The paper has two aims. First, I discuss the most important arguments in the 'Why-Equality' debate with respect to the egalitarian and prioritarian point of views on the relation between justice and equality. This entails: the by-product objection of equality, the objection of inhumanity, the objection of complexity and the argument of the presumption of equality. Second, I give on the basis of the analysis of the main arguments a short outline of an own account on the relation between justice and equality. It follows that justice and equality are closely connected and that a sound egalitarianism has to pay more attention to the objections of the prioritarians, although a sophisticated version of pluralistic egalitarianism seems to be superior to prioritarianism.

Keywords: Egalitarianism, Prioritarianism, Justice, Equality

Introduction

The two most important classical analyses in the history of philosophy on the nature of justice are due to Aristotle (Nichomachean Ethics, V.) and Mill (Utilitarianism, V.). Both philosophers, and this should be no surprise, clearly state, that 'justice' and 'equality' are closely connected. In the last decades, the prioritarians, instead, dispute the close relation between justice and equality in their criticism on the egalitarian view in the 'Why-Equality?' debate. The very question is, if equality is the most or one of the most important part(s) of justice or if it has no or nearly no importance for the nature of justice at all. The aim of this paper is to review the main arguments on both sides to end the trench combats and, maybe, to mediate between the two groups successfully. So, in the first part, I will make some short remarks on the 'Why-Equality' debate and give a description of the egalitarian and prioritarian view. In the second part I will discuss the most important arguments in the debate and I will present, in the third part, a short outline of an own account on the relation between justice and equality on the basis of the analysis made in the second part. The last part ends with some closing remarks.