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John Rawls's First Principle

Clearly as one can see and understand from the reading of Rawls's first principle in chapter 28, it talks about justice and equal basic liberties. Drawing from Rawls's 1980 Dewey and 1982 Tanner lectures, Rawls claims that there are two fundamental capacities or powers for every individual citizen and correspondingly, two higher order interests in the realization of those capacities, i.e. every person has over his/her entire life (i) an interest in being able to formulate and live according to some particular conception of the good and (ii) an interest in exercising one's sense of justice and being motivated by it, provided others do so as well. Basically the concept of the two powers of the citizen is understood to include the idea that in a democratic society, citizens are both equal and free. At a sufficient level each person is conceived as having the two powers to be able to be a fully contributing member of the society over that person's entire adult life.

Rawls uses the idea of the two powers and the corresponding interests of the citizen to ground his elaboration of the concrete basic liberties that each citizen is to have equally. Rawls offers liberty of conscience and freedom of personal association as examples of liberties justified under

the first interest (the conception of the good interest). He offers freedom of political speech and of assembly as examples under the second interest (the sense of justice interest).

The Second Principle: Distributive Economic Justice

Unlike the case with Rawls first principle, he thought that the account and formulation of his second principle of justice as found in a theory of justice (1971) was substantially sound.

Rawls began his account with the fact that people have different endowments and are born into and also grow up in different social circumstances. These are factors that no one is responsible for in their own case. Factors such as natural endowment and initial social circumstance are not negligible. They powerfully affect a person's life prospects positively for some and also negatively for others. And these may be the main sources of inequality between people.

He first develops the idea of 'democratic' equality of opportunity-conceived as (1) the taking of remedial steps, conscientiously, to reduce the initial differential in advantages that accrues to individuals, arbitrarily, from their starting points in life. The leading idea here is to try to make people somewhat less unequal at the point where they actually enter into adult life, as citizens and as workers. And to make sure that everyone there, so far as possible, has the basic capabilities required to be contributing members of society. Rawls believes that an absolute equality of opportunity with respect to such starting points can never be achieved. Rawls introduces a further idea to complement equality of opportunity and complete the line of argument. Rawls calls this new idea the 'difference principle'; it adds two further remedial steps to the picture; it adds (2) the principle of everyone's continual benefit, which in turn is constrained by the idea that, where there are several mutually improving and efficient options available, (3) we should choose that option which most reduces the resultant inequality in

outcomes (as measured in terms of average income over a five-year period, say) between the topmost and bottom-most groups. The object of this three-step process is to reduce, ideally to minimize, the gap between persons by taking account of both starting points and end results. Rawls's final specification of the difference principle can be gotten to by repeatedly employing the set of ideas just sketched. The difference principle can be represented, then, as proceeding through a series of stages each one of which embodies a conscientious effort at achieving equality of opportunity and each one of which then repeats the same theme: first satisfy the standard of mutual benefit (or of efficiency) and then reduce differences in outcome between the topmost and the bottom-most group. the argument just sketched becomes logically conclusive if we make certain simplifying assumptions. We must first assume, as does Rawls, that we are starting from a hypothetical point of strict equality between people. This 'zero point' does not, of course, describe the way things actually are; rather, it is used merely to orient and clarify our thinking. And, secondly, we must assume that so long as the benefit of the least well-off group could possibly be higher, that of the other groups could also be higher, right on up to the optimum or goal point.

Finally, Rawls's argument for his second principle of justice, remains now only to state that principle succinctly: 'Social and economic inequalities are to satisfy two conditions: first, they are to be attached to positions and offices open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity and second, they are to be to the greatest benefit of the less privileged members of the society.'

The original position

One feature that is often emphasized-and that Rawls continued to include even in his later writings-is that the 'parties' to the contract are placed (in what he calls the 'original position') behind a thick veil of ignorance. Here they are instructed in their subsequent reasoning to ignore their own particular traits to be unaware of (or to ignore) their actual place in the society, to be unaware of their society's place in history or in institutional evolution, and so on. The original position is an arena for deliberation and decision about principles of justice; its various features are meant to frame and constrain the debate about such principles.

The idea of the original position is to set up a fair procedure so that any principles agreed to will be just Rawls envisions two main roles for the original position. In the first role the original position is to serve as a screening device for the candidate principles, that is, principles taken from a short list of main, historically available theories of justice-such as Plato's republic, various versions of utilitarianism, and so on. Here the features of the original position serve as a checklist against which the candidate principles are to be measured and to be assessed. The second main role of the original position is to rank the remaining eligible candidates, after the preliminary screening has been accomplished also in performing this second role of ranking, the parties rely on the balance of reasons (determined in light of assessments that could be reached in the original position) to decide which of the remaining eligible candidates is best. If they can do so unanimously, there should be no real doubt about that particular ranking.

Summary

Rawls idea about justice is that although, people have their different endowments and are born into different social circumstances, they should be able to live freely and equally having in mind that they need each other (basically cooperation and understanding) in order for the society to move forward.