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ASSIGNMENT

Read the chapter on *Rawls* (full name is: John Rawls) in the *Political Thinkers*, edited by David Boucher and Paul Kelly (ebook sent on WhatsApp) and write short explanatory notes on:

1. John Rawl's First principle,
2. The Second Principle: Distributive Economic Justice,
3. The Original Position,
4. Summarize John Rawl's idea of Justice.

INTRODUCTION

In his early adult years John Rawls found himself in an environment plagued by political institutions backed up by Fascism/Nazism and by Marxism respectively, he saw these as a challenge, as such he sought to remedy the situations. Thus, birthing his political thinking and his idea of justice, in a bid to provide a reasonably systematic alternative to utilitarianism. It is commenced by his first two principles, his original position then his idea of justice.

JOHN RAWL'S FIRST PRINCIPLE: Equal Basic Liberties

Rawls is of the belief that there is in existence, for every citizen two (2) fundamental powers and two higher corresponding 'higher order interests' in pursuance of those powers, thus, each individual citizen possesses the following;

1. Conception of good; an interest in being able to formulate and live according to a particular concept of good. Here there exist liberty of conscience and freedom of personal association
2. Sense of Justice interest; an interest in exercising one's sense of justice accompanied by freedom of political speech and freedom of personal association and being motivated by it making others to do so as well.

It is known that in a democratic society all citizens are equal and free, each being entitled to contribute to societal growth and development during their working years, having attained the 'minimum threshold level'. Some people perceived the above as standard human rights as contained in *The European Convention on Human Rights (1954)*, *The United Nations Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966)* among others and as such opine that all liberties should be developed on the notion of the individual person as well as the general association.

John Rawls' first principle of justice can be summarized thus;

"Each person has an equal claim to a fully adequate scheme of equal basic rights and liberties, which scheme is compatible with the same skill for all; and in the scheme equal political liberties..., and only those liberties are to be guaranteed their fair value"

THE SECOND PRINCIPLE: Distributive Economic Justice

Unlike his first principle, the second provides that people have different natural endowments and social circumstances in which they are born into and grew up in believing that no one can be held responsible for such circumstances in their own case. Stating further that they are the main source of inequality among people, affecting them negatively or positively.

Rawls also postulates the concept of '*democratic*' *equality of opportunity*, it is a three-step process, with an aim to minimize or bridge the gap between persons by means of accounting for starting points and end results. It entails the following;

1. To distribute, evenly, all resources and opportunities e.g. government supported education, palliatives etc. in spite of this step he still believes that absolute equality cannot be so easily achieved, by reason of starting points. Owing to the low practicability of absolute equality, he further propounds a solution known as the 'Difference Principle', adding two more remedial steps (which are the remaining steps of the three-step process). They are;
2. The principle of everyone's continual benefit restricted by the idea that, where there are several/multiple improving efficient available options.
3. Selecting the alternative most likely to reduce inequalities (measured in terms of income) between the highs and lows.

In order to attain the objectives of the second principle, the standard of mutual benefit must be satisfied, then reduce the unequal outcome/result repeatedly reaching an optimum point, until mutuality improving is impossible making existence balanced, no side suffers more than the other.

SIMPLIFYING ASSUMPTIONS

Two assumptions were made pursuant to the objective of the second principle, to simplify the process and help achieve the desired results, these assumptions are;

- i. One must first of all have a hypothetical view, that there is an actual equality among all persons.
- ii. Focus will be made on the least class of the society, in that, if they (the least class) can be improved, then so can every and any other group

Only with these assumptions can the earlier method described as the "repeated pattern" take full effect and yield the desired result of equality among persons in a society. As stated by Rawls in *A Theory of Justice*; (PL 6; see also TJ [rev. edn.], 72,266);

"Social and economic inequalities are to satisfy two conditions; firstly, they are to be attached to positions and offices open to all under conditions of fair inequality of opportunity and second, they are to be the greatest benefit of the least advantaged members of the society."

THE ORIGINAL POSITION

John Rawls had a somewhat complex contraction method of justification, only a few of its features will be mentioned as a result. The "**Original Position**" is a hypothetical situation developed as a thought experiment to replace the imagery of a savage state of nature of prior political philosophers like Thomas Hobbes.

In the original position, the parties select principles that will determine the basic structure of the society they will live in. This choice is made from behind a 'veil of ignorance', which

would deprive participants of information about their particular characteristics: their ethnicity, social status, gender and, most importantly, Conception of the Good (an individual's idea of how to live a good life personally and generally). This forces participants to select principles impartially and rationally. As a thought experiment, the original position is a hypothetical position designed to accurately reflect what principles of justice would be manifest in a society premised on free and fair cooperation between citizens, including respect for liberty, and an interest in reciprocity.

In the state of nature, it might be argued that certain persons (the strong and talented) would be able to coerce others (the weak and disabled) by virtue of the fact that the stronger and more talented would fare better in the state of nature. This coercion is sometimes thought to invalidate any contractual arrangement occurring in the state of nature. In the original position, however, representatives of citizens are placed behind a "veil of ignorance", depriving the representatives of information about the individuating characteristics of the citizens they represent. Thus, the representative parties would be unaware of the talents and abilities, ethnicity and gender, religion or belief system of the citizens they represent. As a result, they lack the information with which to threaten their fellows and thus invalidate the social contract they are attempting to agree to.

JOHN RAWLS' IDEA OF JUSTICE (Summary)

From all provisions of the above, one can infer Rawls idea of justice as thus;

John Rawls gives account of a system which benefits all sections of the society, equally. He, through his theory, proposed a system where laws and principles of justice are made by the conscious effort of the people who would be governed by those laws and principles. His idea of the veil of ignorance points out to the idea of equality, a system where each individual has equal participation in the making and where there are no biases involved. Further, through his difference principle, he had taken care of those who need special attention after the system is made. His idea is one such ideal which can be chosen to protect the rights of minorities and the least well off.