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Department Political Science

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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 and write a short note on

1. John rawls first principle.
2. The second principle:Distributive Economic Justice
3. The original position
4. Summarize John Rawls Idea of Justice
5. Although Rawls intended his Theory of Justice to provide a 'convincing account of basic rights and liberties, and of their priority', Rawls admits he did not successfully achieve this objective until ten or so years later . Accordingly, I will draw on Rawls's 1980 Dewey Lectures and his 1982 Tanner Lecture as providing the best account of, and arguments for, his first principle of justice, the principle of equal basic liberties. Rawls claims (in that for every individual citizen there are two fundamental capacities or powers and, correspondingly, two 'higher-order interests' in the realization of those capacities. Thus, each person has, over that person's 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, providing others do so as well. Let me amplify this second point a bit: each person has, over that person's entire life, an interest in living cooperatively with fellow citizens, on terms of mutual respect and reciprocal benefit, under a unified and stable scheme of basic political and economic institutions organized by a shared set of principles of justice which each citizen can affirm. The notion of the two powers of the citizen is understood to include the idea that in a democratic society citizens are both equal and free. Here each person is conceived as having the two powers at a sufficient level to be able to be a fully contributing member of society over that person's entire adult life (or, at least, the working years). In having these powers at some such level, all the citizens are on the same footing. This, then, is the grounding idea behind Rawls's notion that the citizens are equal: they are equal in having reached what might be called this same minimum threshold level . 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. He identifies which 'liberties'-which ways of acting or of not being injured-should be among the basic constitutional rights, or among the most weighty such rights, by considering what he calls 'two fundamental cases'. Thus, those liberties that are part of or a means of achieving the first interest (the conception of the good interest) constitute the first of these cases and those that are a part of or a means of achieving the second (the sense of justice interest) constitute the second of the 'two fundamental cases'. By way of illustration, 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). The argument here is simply that people would not be able to have or live according to their own particular determinate conception of good, whatever it was, and in particular would not be able to revise any such conception, without liberty of conscience or freedom of personal association.
6. Unlike the case with his first principle, Rawls thought that the account and formulation of his second principle of justice, as found in A Theory of Justice (1971), was substantially sound. So I will confine myself to what he said there and to elaborations that he made over me next decade. Rawls's account begins with the fact that people have different natural endowments and are born into and grow up in different social circumstances. No one can be said to be responsible for these factors in their own case. Nonetheless, factors such as natural endowment and initial social circumstance are not negligible; they powerfully affect a person's life prospects, advantageously for some and disadvantageously for others. Indeed, they may be the main sources of inequality between people. Rawls's argument sets out from this point. 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. State-supported primary and secondary education (of good quality and at no cost to the individual student) would be an example of such a step. 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. And it is precisely where fundamental equality in starting points is not fully and strictly achieved, or cannot be, that concern for reducing the inequality of resultant outcomes is in order. Thus, Rawls introduces a further idea to complement equality of opportunity (point 1 above) 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 (that is, 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. We can get to Rawls's final specification of the difference principle 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. This repeated pattern continues at each stage until we reach an optimum point, at which no further mutually improving moves are possible: at this point we have minimized the difference in question (without making any group worse off in the process), and those least well off have here their greatest benefit.
7. Rawls's contractarian method of justification is very complex. I will be able to mention only a few of its main features here. 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 (traits that distinguish them from most or, at least, many other people), to be unaware of (or to ignore) their actual place in society, to be unaware of their society's place in history or in institutional evolution, and so on. The point of the metaphor of the veil is to indicate that the parties should remove sources of bias and irrelevancy from their deliberations. Other features are important as well. The parties understand that they are deciding about principles of justice (principles for distributing certain primary goods-such goods as liberties, opportunities, income, and wealth-to individuals) and that they will have to live, for their entire lives, under the principles they have selected. Accordingly, they would want the principles selected to be clear and intelligible to all, with nothing hidden from view and everything up front and accounted for. (This Rawls calls the 'publicity requirement'.) Such principles, when looked at from a variety of perspectives, ought to be acceptable to persons in each of those perspectives-this Rawls calls the 'unanimity requirement'. (Rawls's main discussion of the original position is found in A Theory of Justice, chapter 3, and a very helpful summary of its main features is found In simplest terms 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 its 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. Let me illustrate the force of this first role (screening) with an example, admittedly a rather extreme one. An avowedly racist principle would probably not pass through the filter afforded by the features of the original position. Thus, if people contemplated living in a multiracial society under that principle, it is clear that some of them would be seriously disadvantaged, indeed deeply harmed, by its operation. Everyone who took on, by hypothesis, the role of these injured parties would have to veto the racist principle; thus, it could not meet the unanimity requirement. Since anyone (given the veil of ignorance) could be in such a role, the racist principle would be decisively ruled out. For similar reasons it is likely that caste system principles or slavery principles would not survive the initial screening either.
8. This original position is not, of course, thought of as an actual historical state of affairs, much less as a primitive condition of culture. It is understood as a purely hypothetical situation characterized so as to lead to a certain conception of justice? Among the essential features of this situation is that no one knows his place in society, his class position or social status, nor does anyone know his fortune in the distribution of natural assets and abilities, his intelligence, strength, and the like. I shall even assume that the parties do not know their conceptions of the good or their special psychological propensities. The principles of justice are chosen behind a veil of ignorance. This ensures that no one is advantaged or disadvantaged in the choice of principles by the outcome of natural chance or the contingency of social circumstances. Since all are similarly situated and no one is able to design principles to favor his particular condition, the principles of justice are the result of a fair agreement or bargain. For given the circumstances of the original position, the symmetry of everyone's relation to each other, this initial situation is fair between individuals as moral persons, that is, as rational beings with their own ends and capable, I shall assume, of a sense of justice. The original position is, one might say, the appropriate initial status quo, and the fundamental agreements reached in it are fair. This explains the propriety of the name "justice as fairness": it conveys the idea that the principles of justice are agreed to in an initial situation that is fair. The name does not mean that the concepts of justice and fairness are the same, any more that the phrase "poetry as metaphor" means that the concepts of poetry and metaphor are the same. Justice as fairness begins, as I have said, with one of the most general of all choices which persons might make together, namely, with the choice of the first principles of a conception of justice which is to regulate all subsequent criticism and reform of institutions.