KEME FAVOUR KUROTIMI

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IRD 320

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND DIPLOMACY

**QUESTION: write short explanatory notes on**

* John Rawl’s first principle
* The Second principle: Distributive Economic Justice;
* The Original position
* Summarize John Rawl’s idea of justice

**ANSWERS**

**John Rawl’s first principle:**

In Rawl’s first principle, the foundation behind Rawls's belief is that all the citizens are equal: they are equal in having reached what might be called this same minimum threshold level. Rawls claims that for every individual citizen there are two fundamental capacities or powers and, correspondingly, two 'higher-order interests' in the realization of those capacities. This explains that 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. Rawl used the powers of citizen to illustrate the power of democracy, where people have political freedom and equality. In a democratic system each person has powers to be a fully contributing member of a society.

**The Second principle: Distributive Economic Justice;**

In Rawls second principle he states that people have natural endowments and that some people are born into different classes (social group) and no one can be responsible for that because social circumstances are non negotiable and they affect a person’s life in a good way and vice versa, Rawl also states that social classes maybe the main source of inequality between people. Rawl developed his idea of Democratic equality of opportunity, and from this he developed his argument, this idea involves 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 main idea of this argument 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.

**The Original position**

The idea of the original position is to set up a fair procedure so that any principles agreed to will be just. One feature that is often emphasized 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. 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.

**John Rawl’s idea of Justice**

Rawls attempted to justify his two principles of justice, a procedure that centers on the belief of an 'original position' for deciding about candidate principles of justice has, I think, important defects. For one thing, Rawls's theory seemed to rule out from serious consideration certain rival candidates to his own two principles. Rawls's theory is not, on its own terms, an acceptable or accredited theory of critical moral justification. For the screening procedure it employs does not satisfy its own goal: of wielding a set of objectively based considerations for fairly assessing rival principles of justice.

A second criticism, a lesser one, is that Rawls never succeeds in making an adequate case for the priority of the first principle of justice over the second-of the equal basic liberties over elements in the second principle (elements that include policies designed to achieve fair equality of opportunity, in all its aspects, and to achieve maximization of the level of goods

and services available to the least well-off income group ). Rawl intended to explain his principles because he did not like the direction they took in 1961.