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**Course Title: Political Thought Since Hobbes**

ASSIGNMENT: Read the Chapter on Rawls (Full Name is: John Rawls) and write short explanatory notes on:

1. John Rawl's First Principle;

2. The Second Principle: Distributive Economic Justice;

3. The Original Position;

4. Summarise John Rawls Idea of Justice

**John Rawl’s First Principle**

Rawls claims that every individual citizen has two fundamental capacities or powers and two 'higher-order interests' in the realization of these capacities. He claims that every 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. The second point means 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.

These the two powers of the citizen are based on the idea that in a democratic society citizens are both equal and free. It is assumed that each person has 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 and in having these powers at a certain level, all the citizens are basically equal. This is what Rawls's meant when he suggests that the citizens are equal: they are equal in having reached what might be called this same minimum threshold.

Rawls used the idea of the two powers and their corresponding interests of the citizen to establish his explanation of the concrete basic liberties that each citizen is to have equally. He goes further to identify which 'liberties' should be among the basic constitutional rights, by considering what he calls 'two fundamental cases'. This means that those liberties that are part of or a means of achieving the first interest which is 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 interest which is the sense of justice interest, constitute the second of the two fundamental cases.

Rawls illustrates this by offering liberty of conscience and freedom of personal association as examples of liberties justified under the first interest. The argument here is simply that people would not be able to have or live according to their own particular determinate conception of the 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. He goes on to offer freedom of political speech and of assembly as examples under the second interest. Here, the main argument is that people cannot not live cooperatively with fellow citizens, on terms of equality and mutual respect without having a practice of free political speech in place there.

Also, some liberties do not fall under case directly but are still necessary for the proper and adequate exercise of those that do so fall. An example given is the due process rights to such things as fair trial or the rights to bodily integrity, are justified as necessary to the full flourishing of the liberties justified in the two fundamental cases.

In conclusion, Rawls argues that all the liberties that have just been specified should be counted among the basic constitutional rights. These basic liberties and rights are not founded 'on basic (or natural) rights', but instead, Rawls says, they are founded on conceptions of the person and of social cooperation that is most likely to be congenial to the public political culture of a modern democratic society. Essentially, Rawls's first principle of justice states that 'Each person has an equal claim to a fully adequate scheme of equal basic rights and liberties, which scheme is compatible with the same scheme for all; and in this scheme the equal political liberties [e.g. the right to vote and to campaign], and only those liberties, are to be guaranteed their fair value'.

**The Second Principle: Distributive Economic Justice**

Rawls's account starts with the fact that people have different natural endowments and are born into and grow up in different social circumstances. People are not responsible for these factors in their own case. Regardless of this, factors such as natural endowment and initial social circumstance are not insignificant because they powerfully affect a person's life prospects by putting some people in an advantageous position and others in a disadvantageous one. He argues that this may be the main source of inequality among people.

Rawls first of all develops the idea of 'democratic' equality of opportunity-conceived as (1) responsibly taking remedial steps to reduce the initial differential in advantages that accrues randomly to individuals, from their starting points in life. A good example of such a step would be state-supported primary and secondary education of good quality and at no cost to the individual student. Here, the idea 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 has the basic capabilities required to contribute to society.

More so, Rawls actually believes that an absolute equality of opportunity with respect to such starting points can never be achieved which is precisely why equality in starting points is not fully and strictly achieved which cannot further reduce the inequality of resultant outcomes is in order. Therefore, Rawls introduces an idea to complement equality of opportunity and complete the line of argument and he calls this new idea the 'difference principle' where it adds two further remedial steps to the picture; the first being the principle of everyone's continual benefit, which in turn is constrained by the idea that, where there are several mutually improving options available, (the second step is that) we should choose that option which most reduces the resultant inequality in outcomes measured in terms of average income over a five-year period between the topmost and bottom-most groups. The objective of this three-step process is to minimize the gap between persons by taking account of both starting points and end results.

In order to reach Rawls's final specification of the difference principle, we have to repeatedly employ the set of ideas just sketched. The difference principle can be represented, then, as proceeding through a series of stages where each one incorporates a rigorous effort at achieving equality of opportunity and each one then repeats the same theme, first by satisfying the standard of mutual benefit and then by reducing differences in outcome between the topmost and the bottom-most group. This repeated pattern continues at each stage until an optimum point is achieved, at which no further mutually improving moves are possible and 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 their greatest benefit.

However, for this argument to become logically conclusive, we have to make certain simplifying assumptions such as assuming that we are starting from a hypothetical point of strict equality between people, for the sole purpose of orienting and clarifying our thinking. We must also 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. The purpose of this second assumption is to identify a zone or context in which the procedure can operate, with full effect, to achieve its intended end.

**The Original Position**

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.

The original position is a hypothetical situation: Rawls asks what social rules and institutions people would agree to, not in an actual discussion, but under fair conditions, where nobody knows whether they are advantaged by luck. Fairness is achieved through the veil of ignorance, an imagined device where the people choosing the basic structure of society have morally arbitrary features hidden from them: since they have no knowledge of these features, any decision they make can’t be biased in their own favour. The point of the metaphor of the veil is to indicate that the parties should remove sources of bias and irrelevancy from their deliberations.

The original position aims to move from these abstract conceptions to determinate principles of social justice. It does so by translating the question: “What are fair terms of social cooperation for free and equal citizens?” into the question “What terms of cooperation would free and equal citizens agree to under fair conditions?” The move to agreement among citizens is what places Rawls's justice as fairness within the social contract tradition of Locke, Rousseau and Kant.

The strategy of the original position is to construct a method of reasoning that models abstract ideas about justice so as to focus their power together onto the choice of principles. So Rawls's conceptions of citizens and of society are built into the design of the original position itself. Rawls's intent is that readers will see the outcome of the original position as justified because they will see how it embodies plausible understandings of citizens and society, and also because this outcome confirms many of their considered convictions about justice on specific issues.

The original position is a thought experiment: an imaginary situation in which each real citizen has a representative, and all of these representatives come to an agreement on which principles of justice should order the political institutions of the real citizens. This thought experiment is better than trying to get all real citizens actually to assemble in person to try to agree to principles of justice for their society. Even if that were possible, the bargaining among real citizens would be influenced by all sorts of factors irrelevant to justice, such as who could threaten the others most, or who could hold out for longest.

The original position abstracts from all such irrelevant factors. The original position is a fair situation in which each citizen is represented as only a free and equal citizen: each representative wants only what free and equal citizens want, and each tries to agree to principles for the basic structure while situated fairly with respect to the other representatives. The design of the original position thus models the ideas of freedom, equality and fairness. For example, fairness and equality are modelled in the original position by making the parties who represent real citizens symmetrically situated: no citizen's representative is able to threaten any other citizen's representative, or to hold out longer for a better deal.

The most striking feature of the original position is the veil of ignorance, which prevents arbitrary facts about citizens from influencing the agreement among their representatives. As we have seen, Rawls holds that the fact that a citizen is of a certain race, class, and gender is no reason for social institutions to favour or disfavour her. Each representative in the original position is therefore deprived of knowledge of the race, class, and gender of the real citizen that they represent. In fact, the veil of ignorance deprives the parties of all facts about citizens that are irrelevant to the choice of principles of justice: not only facts about their race, class, and gender but also facts about their age, natural endowments, and more. Moreover, the veil of ignorance also screens out specific information about what society is like right now, so as to get a clearer view of the permanent features of a just social system.

Behind the veil of ignorance, the informational situation of the parties that represent real citizens is as such that parties do not know: the race, ethnicity, gender, age, income, wealth, natural endowments, comprehensive doctrine, etc. of any of the citizens in society, or to which generation in the history of the society these citizens belong. Thy also do not know the political system of the society, its class structure, economic system, or level of economic development. However, parties do know that citizens in the society have different comprehensive doctrines and plans of life; that all citizens have interests in more primary goods. They also know that the society is under conditions of moderate scarcity: there is enough to go around, but not enough for everyone to get what they want.

The veil of ignorance situates the representatives of free and equal citizens fairly with respect to one another. No party can press for agreement on principles that will arbitrarily favour the particular citizen they represent, because no party knows the specific attributes of the citizen they represent. The situation of the parties thus embodies reasonable conditions, within which the parties can make a rational agreement. Each party tries to agree to principles that will be best for the citizen they represent (i.e., that will maximize that citizen's share of primary goods). Since the parties are fairly situated, the agreement they reach will be fair to all actual citizens.

**Summarise John Rawls Idea of Justice**

Rawls sets forth to determine the essential principles of justice on which a good society may be based. He explains the importance of principles of justice for two key purposes: first, to provide a way of assigning rights and duties in the basic institutions of society and secondly, to define the appropriate distribution of the benefits and burdens of society. He observes that, by his definition, well-ordered societies are rare due to the fact that what is just and unjust is usually in dispute. He further notes that a well-ordered and perfectly just society must be formulated in a way that addresses the problems of efficiency, coordination, and stability.

Rawls proposes that the most reasonable principles of justice for a society are those that individuals would themselves agree to behind the “veil of ignorance”, in circumstances in which each is represented as a moral person, endowed with the basic moral powers. What this position supports is that while each person has different ends and goals, different backgrounds and talents, each ought to have a fair chance to develop his or her talents and to pursue those goals – fair equality for opportunity. It is not a race or contest where the talented or gifted prevail, it should be complete cooperation among all so that there may be reasonable life for all.

What the “veil of ignorance” brings out is that we can accept utilitarianism as a public conception of justice only if we are prepared to let someone be subject to conditions we would not be prepared to subject ourselves. However, it is not the responsibility of one’s actions to ensure the fulfilment of another person’s goals. These principles create an equal distribution yet it is not attainable unless pursued or strived for. There is no room for idle observation, meaning, that while we all possess equal opportunity as we all are equally moral persons, the choice of what you wish to possess materially as well as intellectually is at the discretion and capability of the individual.

Primarily, these principles promote equality among all. Each individual has the same basic liberties and opportunities. Each individual has a moral obligation to accept the existence of every other human being. In doing so, all people become equal in their position and desires. We are equal in that each has the basic powers of choice and on acting on a sense of justice. The responsibility of procedure and growth relies on each and every individual his/her self. By doing so we may create a level playing field. This is a form of competition in the sense that what is desired must be achieved by one and desired by many perhaps. A benefit of competitive circumstance is the betterment of all parties involved as they must evolve in order to surpass one another.