IRD 320 ASSIGNMENT

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COURSE TITLE: Political Thought Since Hobbes

QUESTION: 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 explanatory notes on;

ANSWERS

1 John Rawl’s First Principle

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. Thus, each person has, over that person's entire life. The first is, an interest in being able to formulate and live according to some particular conception of the good and the second is, an interest in exercising one's 'sense of justice' and being motivated by it, providing others do so as well. After this saying by Rawl, 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. 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'. these liberties are rather standard civil rights, of the sort that would be found, for example, in the European Convention on Human Rights (1954) or the United Nations' Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966, entered into force in 1976), or on a list of important rights in current American constitutional law.

2 The Second Principle: Distributive Economic Justice

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. Rawls's account begins with the fact that people have different natural endowments and are born into and grow up in different social circumstances. 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. Rawls believes that an absolute equality of opportunity with respect to such starting points can never be achieved. It 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 least advantaged members of society'.

3 The Original Position

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. In the Original Position, the people are instructed in their subsequent reasoning to ignore their own particular 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. 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. In the second role, the original position is to rank the remaining eligible candidates, after the preliminary screening has been accomplished. This transition would certainly carry more conviction for the parties in the original position. The idea is that, even after mutual benefit is assured, one should continue to use equal shares of primary goods as a standing constraint on beneficial options, as a tie-breaker of sorts. Rawls's view is that utilitarian’s and others, especially in the setting afforded by the original position, would allow the sacrifice or the serious weakening of some of the demands of justice as fairness, or would do so for some people at least.

4 Summarize John Rawls idea of justice

**Rawls** offers a new solution to combine social justice and liberalism in the Theory of Justice. His conception of morality is rooted in **Kant’s ethics**. Everyone is an individual and, as such, there is no individual who more or less valuable than another. Discrimination is unethical. We must all have the same rights. According to Rawls theory, there are two principles, which are the first principle and the second principle, and these principles are hierarchical: the principle of equal liberty has priority over the other two and the principle of equal opportunity has priority over the difference principle. Rawls says that the only logical system for upholding justice is one that treats people equally, regardless of gender, class, and race. Rawls also talks about how his theory of justice would affect modern institutions. He also talks about how positive effects that an equitable justice system can have on society.