NAME: DANIEL ANDREA

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ASSIGNMENT: Read the chapter on Rawls and write short explanatory notes on:

1. John Rawls First Principle
2. The Second Principle: Distributive Economic Justice
3. The Original position
4. Summarize John Rawls Idea of Justice

**John Rawls first principle**

his first principle of justice, the principle of equal basic liberties. Rawls talks about 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. In my own understanding it talks about how should live 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.

Rawls also talks about how in a democratic society citizens there are both equal right.

**The Second Principle: Distributive Economic Justice**

. 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: 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. 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, 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: 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

With these two assumptions in place, we have completed our account of Rawls's argument for his second principle of justice, the principle of distributive economic justice. It remains now only to state that principle succinctly: 'S 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

**The original position**

Rawls's contractarian method of justification is very complex. 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.

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. We have already noted that one of the main features of the original position is the veil of ignorance. the transition from the idea that nobody is responsible for their own starting points in life to the idea that people should use their natural endowments and their social origins (where these things are advantageous) in such a way that everybody benefits would surely go more smoothly behind the veil of ignorance, Behind the veil of ignorance and given the high degree of uncertainty there, each individual thinks that, since they don't know how or where they might end up, they should set things up in the principles they select, each one having a veto, so that the worst controllable outcome for anyone of them is the best of a bad lot, the best, that is, of the set of worst outcomes.

Rawls idea of justice

Rawls attempted to justify his two principles of justice-a procedure centering on the notion 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 (especially those candidates, such as Platonic aristocracy or Nietzschean elitism, that did not take the equality or liberty of individuals as fundamental). Rawls had simply stacked the deck in the original position against these perfectionist theories. Arguably, the only principles of justice that could survive scrutiny by the 'parties'-by the body of fellow citizens (or their representatives), each one of them having equal status and an equal voice and full veto power-are principles that treat people as substantive equals. The point, then, is that 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. lo 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.