NAME: BELLO YEWANDE. O

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QUESTION: *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.*
5. **John Rawls First Principle.**

Rawls intended his Theory of Justice to provide a 'convincing account of basic rights and liberties, and of their priority'. Unfortunately he did not successfully achieve this objective until years later.

Rawls claims (in these lectures3) that for every individual citizen there are two fundamental capacities or powers. Thus, each person has; (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. Meaning 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. He identifies that liberties would be among the basic constitutional rights. He also identifies liberty of conscience and freedom of personal association. The main argument here, then, is simply that people could not live cooperatively with fellow citizens, on terms of equality and mutual respect.

For Rawls, then, all the liberties (and non-injuries) just specified should be counted among the basic constitutional rights. Thus we arrive at Rawls's first principle of justice: '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.

1. **The Second Principle: Distributive Economic Justice.**

Unlike the 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 on this principle begins with the fact that people have different natural endowments and are born into and grow up in different social circumstances. Therefore, no one can be said to be responsible for these factors on their own case. He develops the idea of democratic equality of opportunity conceived as; the taking of remedial steps to reduce the initial differential in advantages that accrues to individuals, arbitrarily, from their starting points of life, the principle of everyone’s continual benefit, which is in turn is constrained by the idea that, where there are several mutually improving options available.

Rawls believes that an absolute equality of opportunity with respect to such starting points can never be achieved. 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.5 We can get to Rawls's final specification of the difference principle by repeatedly employing the set of ideas just sketched.

1. **The Original Position.**

The original position is a hypothetical scenario in which a group of persons is set the task of reaching an agreement about the political and economic structure of a society which they are, once an agreement has been reached, to occupy. Each individual, however, deliberates behind a "veil of ignorance." Each lacks knowledge, for example, of his or her gender, race, age, intelligence, wealth, skills, education, and religion. The only thing a given member knows about himself is that he is in possession of the basic capacities necessary for him to fully and willfully participate in an enduring system of mutual cooperation; each knows he can be a member of society.

Rawls believes there are two such basic capacities which the individuals know themselves to possess. First, each individual knows that he has the capacity to form, pursue, and revise a conception of the good, or life plan. Exactly what sort of conception of the good this is, however, the individual does not know. It may be, for example, religious or secular, but the individual in the original position does not know which. Second, each individual understands himself to have the capacity to develop a sense of justice and a generally effective desire to abide by it.

Knowing only these two features of himself/ herself, each individual will deliberate in order to design a social structure that will secure herself maximal advantage. The idea is that proposals we would ordinarily think of as unjust - such as that blacks or women should not be allowed to hold public office - will not be proposed in the original position because it would be irrational to propose them. Rawls also assumes that these hypothetical people would be conservative risk takers and in a situation of uncertainty would obviously opt for the least disadvantageous outcome in any choice presented to them. Hence, they would choose those principles which would maximize the position of the worst-off, assuming that when the veil is removed, they themselves would turn out to be the worst-off.

1. **Summarize John Rawls Idea of Justice.**

Rawls expressed his ideas of justice as fairness in his two principles of justice:

First Principle: Each person has the same indefeasible claim to a fully adequate scheme of equal basic liberties, which scheme is compatible with the same scheme of liberties for all;

Second Principle: Social and economic inequalities are to satisfy two conditions:

a. They are to be attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity;

b. They are to be to the greatest benefit of the least-advantaged members of society (the difference principle).

The first principle of equal basic liberties is to be used for designing the political constitution, while the second principle applies primarily to economic institutions. Fulfillment of the first principle priority over fulfillment of the second principle, and within the second principle fair equality of opportunity takes priority over the difference principle. The first principle affirms for all citizens familiar basic rights and liberties: liberty of conscience and freedom of association, freedom of speech and liberty of the person, the rights to vote, to hold public office, to be treated in accordance with the rule of law, and so on. The principle ascribes these rights and liberties to all citizens equally. Unequal rights would not benefit those who would get a lesser share of rights, so justice requires equal rights for all in all normal circumstances.

The second distinctive feature of Rawls's first principle is that it requires fair value of the political liberties. The political liberties are a subset of the basic liberties, concerned with the rights to hold public office, the right to affect the outcome of national elections and so on. For these liberties Rawls requires that citizens be not only formally but also substantively equal. That is, citizens similarly endowed and motivated should have the same opportunities to hold office, to influence elections, and so on regardless of their social class. This fair value proviso has major implications for how elections should be funded and run, as described below.