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**QUESTION:** Write short explanatory notes on

- I. John Rawls First Principle.
- II. The Second Principle: Distributive Economic Justice.
- III. The Original Position
- IV. Summarize John Rawls Idea of Justice.

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

A key problem for Rawls is to show how such principles would be universally adopted, and here the work borders on general ethical issues. He introduces a theoretical "veil of ignorance" in which all the "players" in the social game would be placed in a situation which is called the "original position." Having only a general knowledge about the facts of "life and society," each player is to make a "rationally prudential choice" concerning the kind of social institution they would enter into contract with. By denying the players any specific information about themselves it forces them to adopt a generalized point of view that bears a strong resemblance to the moral point of view. "Moral conclusions can be reached without abandoning the prudential standpoint and positing a moral outlook merely by pursuing one's own prudential reasoning under certain procedural bargaining and knowledge constraints."

II. 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. So I will confine myself to what he said there and to elaborations that he made over the next decade. Rawls's second principle of justice has two parts. The first part, fair equality of opportunity, requires that citizens with the same talents and willingness to use them have the same educational and economic opportunities regardless of whether they were born rich or poor. "In all parts of society there are to be roughly the same prospects of culture and achievement for those similarly motivated and endowed".

So, for example, if we assume that natural endowments and the willingness to use them are evenly distributed across children born into different social classes, then within any type of occupation (generally specified) we should find that roughly one quarter of people in that occupation were born into the top 25% of the income distribution, one quarter were born into the second-highest 25% of the income distribution, one quarter were born into the second-lowest 25%, and one-quarter were born into the lowest 25%. Since class of origin is a morally arbitrary fact about citizens, justice does not allow class of origin to turn into unequal opportunities for education or meaningful work.

The second part of the second principle is the difference principle, which regulates the distribution of wealth and income. Allowing inequalities of wealth and income can lead to a larger social product: higher wages can cover the costs of training and education, for example, and can provide incentives to fill jobs that are more in demand. The difference principle allows inequalities of wealth and income, so long as these will be to everyone's advantage, and specifically to the advantage of those who will be worst off. The difference principle requires, that is, that any economic inequalities be to the greatest advantage of those who are advantaged least.

III. The original position Rawls's contractarian method of justification is very complex. I will be able to mention only a few of its main features here. Rawls's conceptions of citizens and society

are still quite abstract, and some might think innocuous. 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 modeled 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 favor or disfavor 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 follows:

- Parties do not know:
  - o 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.
  - o The political system of the society, its class structure, economic system, or level of economic development.
- Parties do know:
  - o That citizens in the society have different comprehensive doctrines and plans of life; that all citizens have interests in more primary goods.
  - o 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;
  - o General facts and common sense about human social life; general conclusions of science (including economics and psychology) that are uncontroversial.

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 favor 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.

The design of the original position also models other aspects of Rawls's conceptions of citizens and society. For example the publicity of a well-ordered society is modeled by the fact that the parties must choose among principles that can be publicly endorsed by all citizens. There are also some assumptions that make the hypothetical agreement determinate and decisive: the parties are not motivated by envy (i.e., by how much citizens besides their own end up with); the parties are not assumed to be either risk-seeking or risk-averse; and the parties must make a final agreement on principles for the basic structure: there are no "do-overs" after the veil of ignorance is lifted and the parties learn which real citizen they represent.

Nonetheless, the things we have looked at here-his two principles of justice and the arguments for them and for preferring them to alternative theories-have tended to dominate debate and to have had the lion's share of attention.

IV. Perhaps, the most significant feature of this book is that Rawls takes the public political culture of a contemporary democratic society to be the deep background of the entire theory. Social cooperation in some form is necessary for citizens to be able to lead decent lives. Yet citizens are not indifferent to how the benefits and burdens of cooperation will be divided amongst them. Rawls's principles of justice as fairness articulate the central liberal ideas that cooperation should be fair to all citizens regarded as free and as equals. The distinctive interpretation that Rawls gives to these concepts can be seen as combining a negative and a positive thesis.

Rawls's negative thesis starts with the idea that citizens do not deserve to be born into a rich or a poor family, to be born naturally more or less gifted than others, to be born female or male, to be born a member of a particular racial group, and so on. Since these features of persons are morally arbitrary in this sense, citizens are not entitled to more of the benefits of social cooperation simply because of them. For example the fact that a citizen was born rich, white, and male provides no reason in itself for this citizen to be favored by social institutions.

This negative thesis does not say how social goods should be distributed; it merely clears the decks. Rawls's positive distributive thesis is equality-based reciprocity. All social goods are to be distributed equally, unless an unequal distribution would be to everyone's advantage. The guiding idea is that since citizens are fundamentally equal, reasoning about justice should begin from a presumption that cooperatively-produced goods should be equally divided. Justice then requires that any inequalities must benefit all citizens, and particularly must benefit those who will have the least. Equality sets the baseline; from there any inequalities must improve everyone's situation, and especially the situation of the worst-off. These strong requirements of equality and reciprocal advantage are hallmarks of Rawls's theory of justice.