

Liberalism

Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*

Original Position Thought Experiment

- Suppose people chose the rules that govern society behind a veil of ignorance i.e. all parties in the original position are ignorant of their particular circumstances.
- The parties have no knowledge of
 - talents, sex, race, ethnicity, economic standing
 - career: artist, athlete, scientist, factory worker, janitor
 - opportunities in society
 - moral, religious views
- What type of economic distribution scheme would they choose?

Maximin

	Joe	Mary	John
1.	10	8	1
2.	7	6	2
3.	5	4	4

- What is the rational position to choose from the veil of ignorance?
- Rawls: choose (3); why? Because maximin principle is a rational principle to follow
- **maximin principle:** choose the setup in which your worst outcome is better than your worst outcome in any other setup; in other words, maximize what you would get if you wound up in the worst off position; Note: avg utility of (1), (2) are higher than 3

Choosing Specific Principles

- What does it mean to choose 5:4:4 scheme?
- Wealth is redistributed from wealth Joe, Mary to John to ensure 5:4:4 scheme
- The schemes still allocates higher income to Joe (the talented) to provide incentive

Two Principles of Justice

1. ***The Liberty Principle:*** Each person has an equal claim to **some basic rights** and liberties compatible with the same scheme for all
 - a. E.g. right to vote, run for office, due process, free speech, mobility
 2. ***The Difference Principle:*** Social and economic inequalities are to satisfy two conditions :
 - a. they are to be to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged members of society
 - b. they are to be attached to positions and offices open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity
- Note: Liberty principle takes precedence; it must be met before economic resources are distributed

Rawls on the Just State

- Justice as fairness
 - A just society is one run on fair principles
 - Fair principles are those principles chosen in original position under veil of ignorance
- Each member of society is afforded basic rights: right to vote, free speech, equal opportunity to hold office/job
- Allow for economic inequalities in society only if they benefit least well off; E.g. CEOs get higher income fair as long as the talents of the CEO contribute to a company that benefits the least well off
- Economic redistribution from wealthy to the least well off by taxation

Prevailing View of Economic Justice

- Rawls' Liberalism (Two Principles of Justice + Just State) is supported by his original position thought experiment.
- Rawls also **rejects** the prevailing view of economic distribution
- **Prevailing View** = Inequalities of income and prestige are justified just in case there was fair competition in the awarding of the offices and positions that yield those benefits
 - Rawls thinks this is sensible because it ensures that people's fate is determined by their choices, rather than by their circumstances. We want success to be determined by performance rather than race, class, sex. Success is earned not given; Success is result of merit, and those who get it deserve it.
 - However, he still wants to reject this view

Objection Against Prevailing View

- The prevailing view seems to allow for higher income if someone works harder at something to achieve their goals; it doesn't accept higher incomes on the basis of race, gender. Rawls thinks that in many cases it is natural born talent that contributes to their success, not hard work.
- Examples:
 - Professional athletes; fashion models
 - Talented scientists, mathematicians
 - CEOs, entrepreneurs
- Is it justified that athletes and models are paid (much) higher incomes? Does someone deserve to get higher salary just because they were born with a high IQ, or deserve less of a salary because they were born handicapped?
- Why is it wrong for environmental factors to influence success but alright for biological factors? If people's fates are determined by biological factors – why are these people any more deserving – then someone who is handed down privileged status due to birthright.
- Natural talents, and social circumstances are both matter of luck, so neither individual should be rewarded on the basis of that fact

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- The prevailing view only recognizes difference in social circumstances, while ignoring difference in natural talents (or treating them as if they were one of our choices)
- **Compare Gender and Talent:** If our society were such that people of a certain class (sex, race, etc) got a much higher income, we would say that we were not given equal opportunities, or that the individuals in a “higher” class do not deserve higher incomes. Well, our society is structured so that people with higher talent are paid more but this is just as much not the doing of the person, as is the sex, race, or class one belongs to. What talents one has, what sex, race or class one belongs to are accidents and no one should be given higher income or denied income.
- People should be rewarded economically for effort and work, enough at least to provide for an incentive to get CEOs, models, and athletes to do their job, which are admittedly more grueling than other jobs in society. But, this does not require paying them exuberant amount of money – just slightly higher than the rest of us.

Objection Against Original Position

- Some people would choose a distribution scheme that allows them the possibility for enormous wealth, no matter how unlikely it might be
- They prefer at least the possibility of being extremely wealthy, no matter how unlikely it might be, even if it is likely that they would live in poverty
- According to Rawls, this is irrational; a rational person is governed by the maxmin principle.

Objection Against Original Position

- Rawls treats all of these features as accidental to who we really are: we are not men or women, not CEO or laborers, we are essentially rational agents
- Rawls thinks that these “accidental features” make us biased toward schemes that are favorable to ourselves
- But, many people think that we are not essentially just rational agents; we are men or women, members of a race or ethnicity, country, we are CEO or laborers, etc. These are important aspects of who we are. So, those features shouldn't be discounted in formulating the rules of society

Objection Against Difference Principle

- Even if highly productive, and talented individuals are paid more than those who are not productive, it does not seem right that we should take a portion of their income (via taxation) and allocate it to those who are not contributing to society at all.
- Compare the Tennis player and the Gardener

Tennis Player and the Gardener

- **Objection:** Two people, equal talent, same social background: One plays tennis all day, works at a farm just enough to survive, and buys a piece of land for a tennis court. The other wants to buy the same land to make a garden to produce and sell vegetables for herself and others. Both start from equal distribution of resources, which is enough for each person to get their desired land, and start their tennis and gardening
- The gardener will quickly come to have more resources than the tennis player, if we allow the market to work freely. The Gardener use her initial share in such a way as to generate a steadier and larger stream of income, whereas the tennis player gain no income from his labor, barely survives. Gardener chose income over leisure, Tennis player chose leisure over income.
- In a Rawlsian society, the Gardener will get paid more, but a portion of his income will go to the least well off, including the tennis player. So, what the tax does is subsidize leisure that does not benefit anyone except the tennis player. The tennis player then is a free loader and is rewarded for it.
- **Reply (Rawls):** If there turns out to be too many tennis players, then we should provide a higher incentive – higher pay for those in productive occupations. At some point, the tennis player might have to rethink the choice he is making, and opt instead for the life of the Gardener. If he still wants to play tennis, he won't get a higher income but will still receive some income from the Gardener.