

Rawls

1) Social and Political philosophy deals with a group of basic questions. We have talked about these the last few weeks. How ought we to distribute the benefits and burdens of society? What would a just society look like? Etc. etc.

2) Utilitarianism versus Intuitionism – Rawls rejects both. Utilitarianism has no theory of fair-shares. Intuitionism has no decision procedure. People like them but they are problematic.

3) Rawls' Difference Principle: All social primary goods (liberty, opportunity, income and wealth, and the bases of self-respect) should be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution is to the benefit of the least well off. (See second principle below).

4) Lexical Priority By lexical priority he means first principle and second principle come in order of priority – you can't switch stuff around.

First principle Each person is to have equal rights to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all. This rule establishes the importance of liberty.

Second principle Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both:

a) to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged, consistent with the just saving principle and

b) attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity. The second rule establishes the priority of justice over efficiency (maximizing the sums and advantages in society).

5) Rawls offers two arguments in support of his principles. 1) The Equal Opportunity Argument. 2) The Social Contract Thesis.

6) The prevailing ideology in our society is the Equal Opportunity Argument. It seems intuitively correct but he finds that it is unstable because it does not take natural talents into account.

7) The Social Contract Argument, he argues that standing in the Original Position behind the Veil of Ignorance one would choose his Difference Principle as the best principle to use to structure a society. The Difference principle would allow you to distributed social primary goods in a fair way. Social primary goods are things that anyone would need to live a good life (job, income, etc.). You want to maximize your minimum here; hence maximin.

Original Position
Veil of Ignorance
Social Primary Goods
Maximin

8) The primary subject of justice is the basic structure of society.

I have decided I should never have tried to do all this in one lecture – big mistake.