

Lecture 15 Reading Questions

“Justice as Fairness”

Readings:

Selections from “A Theory of Justice” by John Rawls.

(1) Why does the fact that a principle *would* be selected behind the “veil of ignorance” give *us*—you and me—a reason to accept it?

(2) Rawls’ second principle of justice says that inequalities of income and wealth and authority must be

(i) to “everyone’s advantage”

(ii) attached to positions “open to all.” How does Rawls think we should interpret these phrases, and why does he think that less demanding interpretations would lead to injustice?

(3) In what sense is the difference principle a “principle of mutual benefit”?

Why can’t Bill Gates (talented, hardworking, etc) claim that he deserves more income than the difference principle would allow?

(4) Describe the reasoning that would lead a person behind the veil of ignorance to select Rawls’ two principles rather than the principle of utility.

Why does Rawls think that the reasonable thing to do in this situation is to play it safe and adopt the maximin rule?

Hint: “[T]he two principles are an adequate minimum conception of justice in a situation of great uncertainty. Any further advantages that might be won by the principle of utility are highly problematical, whereas the hardships if things turn out badly are intolerable.” Why would these hardships be intolerable? Why would it very hard to agree to them in “good faith”?

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