POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

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Justice as Fairness

Instructions

When doing the reading for this class, there are the two basic kinds of information you need to understand:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What are the reasons, important considerations, and evidence that lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, *it is information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support accepting one possible position on an issue, rather than another.

Reading

Rawls, J. (1999). [Sections 1, 3–4]. In *A theory of justice* (Revised ed., pp. 3–19). Belknap. (Original work from 1971)

Questions

As you read, keep these questions in mind:

1. John Rawls begins section 1 by comparing justice in social institutions to truth in systems of thought, concluding that both "truth and justice are uncompromising" (p. 4).
   What does Rawls mean by all this?
2. How does Rawls understand society, and what does it mean for a society to be well-ordered?
3. How is Rawls' approach similar to, and yet different from, what is done in political social contract theories? What are the "original position" and the "veil of ignorance" supposed to accomplish in this regard? How does Rawls justify using these constructs, especially in explaining why hypothetical agreements may still have binding force on real (i.e., not hypothetical) people?
4. How does all this come together in what Rawls calls "justice as fairness"? What does that phrase mean?

To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses. You do, however, need to be prepared to speak intelligently about these issues at our next class meeting.