

POLITICAL & SOCIAL THOUGHT

Two Principles of Justice

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 premises, assumptions, reasons, evidence, and other important considerations 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 and justify accepting the author's conclusions as opposed to other ones.

Reading

Rawls, J. (1999). *A Theory of Justice* (Revised ed.). Cambridge, MA: Belknap. (Original work from 1971.)
(Excerpts are from sections 11–13, and 17.)

Questions

1. What are John Rawls' two principles of justice? (For the full expression of the second principle, peek ahead to page 72.) What is the relative priority of the two principles? Of what general conception of justice are these two a special case?
2. What does Rawls mean by "the system of natural liberty"? (Hint: this is very similar to Robert Nozick's entitlement theory of justice.) What injustice does Rawls identify with this system?
3. What is meant by "the liberal interpretation" (or "liberal equality"), and how is it supposed to be an improvement on the system of natural liberty? (Hint: some of this should be familiar from our discussion of Thomas Scanlon's "linkage" argument.) Why is Rawls still not satisfied with the liberal interpretation?
4. What is "natural aristocracy", and why is Rawls not satisfied with it either?
5. Why does Rawls believe that his principles of justice conform satisfactorily (though not necessarily perfectly) to the principle of redress and with a conception of reciprocity?

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 (unless you miss or are late to class, and must then submit a written reading question review).

You do need to be prepared to speak intelligently about these issues at our next class meeting. You may, during the following class, be randomly selected to present answers to these if selected to do so for a verbal reading question review.