POLITICAL & SOCIAL THOUGHT

The Original Position

Instructions

When doing the reading for this class, there are the two basic kinds of information you need to understand:
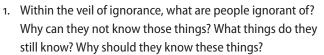
1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What premises, assumptions, reasons, evidence, and other important considerations lead the author to accept that conclusion?

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 section 24–26.)

Questions

1. Within the veil of ignorance, what are people ignorant of? Why can they not know those things? What things do they still know? Why should they know these things?
2. Since the original position is hypothetical, how can we tell what people would agree to when in it?
3. Why does John Rawls think everyone in the original position would reach a unanimous decision about what principles of justice ought to govern the basic structure of society?
4. In what sense are members of the original position rational?
5. What is Rawls' argument that those in the original position should be mutually disinterested?
6. Rawls provides two arguments justifying why those in the original position would agree to the two principles of justice and their relative priority. The first is informal and intuitive, and the second is based on a discussion of the "maximin" choice rule.

    What are these two arguments?

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.