

POLITICAL & SOCIAL THOUGHT

Distribution, Entitlement & Merit

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 14, 41, and 48.)

Questions

1. What are the differences between perfect procedural justice, imperfect procedural justice, and pure procedural justice? (Hint: John Rawls' examples of fairly dividing up a cake, a criminal trial, and gambling should all be helpful.) Which one of these types of procedural justice does Rawls believe is needed to determine the proper distribution of the benefits of social cooperation? Why?
2. What does Rawls mean by "political economy"? Why does it require moral and political considerations and not merely economic ones?
3. If the basic structure of society itself shapes my desires and wants, how does Rawls think it is possible for me to assess that very same basic structure without bias? (Hint: Rawls is trying to show how he specifies an "Archimedean point" where a person may judge different basic structures without bias.)
4. What gives rise to legitimate expectations, and how are these different from moral deserts? Why does Rawls believe that distribution according to moral merit would not be agreed to in the original position?

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.