

Contemporary Moral Problems

Chapter: A theory of justice

Amazonlink:

<http://www.amazon.com/Contemporary-Moral-Problems-James-White/dp/0534517242>

What I expect to learn:

- To learn what is a theory of justice

Quote:

“In justice as fairness the original position of equality corresponds to the state of nature in the traditional theory of the social contract. This original position is not, of course, thought of as an actual historical state of affairs, much less as a primitive condition of culture. It is understood as a purely hypothetical situation characterized so as to lead a certain conception of justice.”

Book Review:

John Bordley Rawls was an American philosopher and a leading figure in moral and political philosophy. His work in political philosophy, dubbed Rawlsianism, takes as its starting point the argument that “most reasonable principles of justice are those everyone would accept and agree to from a fair position.” Rawls employs a number of thought experiments – including the famous veil of ignorance – to determine what constitutes a fair agreement in which “everyone is impartially situated as equals,” in order to determine principles of social justice.

The author appeals to the social contract. Justice as fairness is thus offered to people who are neither saintly altruists nor greedy egoists. Human beings are, as Rawls puts it, both rational and reasonable. Because we are rational we have ends we want to achieve, but we are reasonable insofar as we are happy to achieve these ends together if we can, in accord with mutually acceptable regulative principles. Rawls gives us a model of a fair situation for making this choice (his argument from the original position and the famous veil of ignorance), and he argues that two principles of justice would be especially attractive.

Rawls held that these principles of justice apply to the “basic structure” of fundamental social institutions, a qualification that has been the source of some controversy and constructive debate. Rawls further argued that these principles were to be lexically ordered, thus giving priority to basic liberties over the more equality-oriented demands of the second principle. Finally, Rawls took his approach as applying in the first instance to what he called a “well-

ordered society designed to advance in the good of its members and effectively regulated by a public conception of justice". In this respect he understood justice as fairness as a contribution to "ideal theory," working out principles that characterize a well-ordered society under favorable circumstances" Much recent work in political philosophy has asked what justice as fairness might dictate for problems of "partial compliance" under "nonideal theory".

What I have learned:

- This reading reinforced my perception that all people does not think the same
- I learned about the two principles of justice

Integrative Question:

1. What is justice?
2. What is the theory of justice?
3. Why do we need to have equality?
4. What are the two principles of justice?
5. When does equality should be considered?

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Rawls