

СЕКЦІЯ 2

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JOHN RAWLS' STRUCTURE OF SOCIETY

John Rawls' basic structure of society is founded on principles which supposed to be contracted by mutual consent behind so called the veil of ignorance. The author of Theory of Justice recalls a history of some individuals who were shipwrecked on an uninhabited island. They have to make decisions concerning their communal inhabitation by setting up compulsory rules. After certain time of deliberation parts of the social contract prepare final dispositions to create essential rights and regulations to all members of the community. Behind the veil of ignorance everyone has the general knowledge for establishing the principles of justice which would regulate society. In this imagined situation, decision makers do not know their place in society. They do not know what family they were born into, or what race they are part of. Nor do they know what their own competences are; whether or not they are intelligent, average, or above average. Behind the veil of ignorance, no person is in a position of any prejudicial information. The participants of the social contract cannot have the knowledge that would let them create principles which would benefit them if they knew what their position was to be [3, p. 234].

Upon such an assumption, Rawls goes on formulating principles of justice which supposed to be chosen [1, p. 53]: (1) Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a liberty for others; (2) social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both: (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage, and (b) attached to offices and positions open to all.

According to American philosopher those principles should be applied to lexical order. The first principle must be guaranteed before any inequalities are allowed in the system. Basic liberties should be satisfied foremost. Among them there are: political liberties, freedom of speech and assembly, liberty of conscience and freedom of thought, freedom of person alongside with the right to have personal property, and freedom from arbitrary arrest and seizure [1, p. 53]. But there are other goods distributed by society, which Rawls describes as social primary goods. They are subject to the inequalities of the second principle. Those goods comprise liberty and opportunity, but distinguished from basic liberties, income and wealth, and the bases of self-respect. They are to be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution of any, or all, of these values is to everyone's advantage [1, p. 54].

Although social institutions do not have completely open control over what sort of actions of individuals and associations can bring to the inequitable share of primary goods. Rawls writes: There are no feasible rules that it is practical to impose on economic agents that can prevent these undesirable consequences. These consequences are often so far into the future, or so indirect that the attempt to forestall them by restrictive rules that apply to individuals would have been excessive if not impossible burden. Thus we start with the basic structure and try to see how this system itself should make the corrections necessary to preserve background justice [4, p. 160]. This shows how strong emphasize Rawls puts on the importance of the basic structure of society and its role in supporting the conditions for maintaining a well ordered society. The author of Political Liberalism writes: The role of the institutions that belong to the basic structure is to secure just background conditions against which the actions of individuals and association take place. Unless this structure is appropriately regulated and adjusted, an initially just social process will eventually cease to be just, however free and fair particular transactions to preserve background justice, and a special condition of justice to define how these institutions are to be set up [2, p. 266 – 267]. Rawls does not advocate here any particular type of society to apply a social contract which could insure social justice. He tries to instill the institutions being able to cooperate within the basic structure of society. According to the American philosopher those institutions have to be responsible for upholding the conditions which are necessary to build a society's individuals being regarded as free and equal citizens, as well as rules and practices which decide about the characteristics of individual's life [5, p. 47].

In summary, the essential idea of Rawls' theory of justice was to create the type a foundation for basic structure of society which would guarantee a decent life for everyone, rather than utilitarian proposition of the greatest good for the greatest number of people. According to the assumptions of the utilitarianism it is possible for individuals to lose basic liberties or equal opportunities in society in the situation where such a degradation might benefit the rest of people. American philosopher was conscious that this system of justice would never be selected by any person trying to build a social contract behind the veil of ignorance. It seems that everyone who enters into primary situation would opt for a system of equal liberty and opportunity guaranteed for all members of society.

References

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