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3/26/20

QCQ 12

Quotation:

“Among the essential features of this situation is that no one knows his place in society, his class position or social status, nor does anyone know his fortune in the distribution of natural assets and abilities, his intelligence, strength, and the like…The principles of justice are chosen behind a veil of ignorance. This ensures that no one is advantaged or disadvantaged in the choice of principle by the outcome of natural chance or the contingency of social circumstances” (p. 11).

Comment:

This quote comes after Rawl’s discusses a hypothetical situation of determining justice in a social setting. In justice as fairness, the foundational ideas are not specific principles but instead, rather, the conditions under which those deciding arrive at such principles, according to Rawls. These people, Rawls contends, are in the “original position” and they are to hold a meeting to choose the principles that will specify and form the structure of the society. As explained in the aforementioned quote, these people are “under a veil of ignorance.” That is, they do not know anything specific to each other or themselves regarding their interests, goals, talents, intelligence, etc. It is this veil of ignorance, Rawl suggest, which creates a condition of equality as without such a veil the principles and the condition under which these principles are made would not be equal. As they are all mutually “disinterested” they are moved not by compassion but they work to advance their own interests. I think this is interesting because the idea that in order to create a society or a system of principles to guide what is just or unjust there needs to be a “veil of ignorance” seems almost ironic, or at least incongruous with the condition I would think would decide. I also thought that it was interesting to note that like Utilitarianism, which works to promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people, this theory works to also advance the interests and the beliefs of the majority (though I suppose Rawls never mentions majority and his point seems more to be that it is for all as otherwise there cannot be equal ideas regarding and enforcement of justice).

Question:

How does Rawl’s theory relate to Utilitarianism?