

Rawls's Principles of Justice

Rawls modifies and amends his principles of justice throughout the book. This is his final statement of what they are.¹

1 First Principle

Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all.

2 Second Principle

Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both:

- a. to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged, consistent with the just savings principle, and
- b. attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity.

3 First Priority Rule (The Priority of Liberty)

The principles of justice are to be ranked in lexical order and therefore the basic liberties can be restricted only for the sake of liberty.² There are two cases:

- a. a less extensive liberty must strengthen the total system of liberties shared by all;

¹ *A Theory of Justice* (revised edition, 1999) §46, p. 266.

² By "basic liberties," Rawls means "political liberty (the right to vote and to hold public office) and freedom of speech and assembly; liberty of conscience and freedom of thought; freedom of the person, which includes freedom from psychological oppression and physical assault and dismemberment (integrity of the person); the right to hold personal property and freedom from arbitrary arrest and seizure" (*A Theory of Justice*, (1999), 53.

- b. a less than equal liberty must be acceptable to those with the lesser liberty.

4 Second Priority Rule (The Priority of Justice Over Efficiency and Welfare)

The second principle of justice is lexically prior to the principle of efficiency and to that of maximizing the sum of advantages; and fair opportunity is prior to the difference principle. There are two cases:

- a. an inequality of opportunity must enhance the opportunities of those with the lesser opportunity;
- b. an excessive rate of saving must on balance mitigate the burden of those bearing this hardship.