

Reading Questions for March 2

These questions cover excerpts from a book by John Rawls called “A Theory of Justice.” The answers do not have to be turned in. You will probably have to read more than once to get the answers.

*Background:*

We are now looking at debates regarding redistributive taxation. In other words, we are asking whether it is morally acceptable for the well off to be taxed and for the money to be redistributed to those who are less well off. This debate is closely connected to one we have seen already when talking about whether there is a right to health care. We will be looking at two theorists who were mentioned during that debate – John Rawls and Robert Nozick. Today we will be looking at John Rawls, who is in favor of redistributive taxation.

*Questions:*

1. On pages 514-5 (ending in the last full paragraph on 515, with “The initial situation must be characterized by stipulations that are widely accepted”, John Rawls outlines his conception of justice. What are the key features of his view? Do you think his conception of justice is a plausible one?
2. Starting on the first full paragraph on page 516, Rawls states two principles that he thinks persons in the original situation would choose. He then repeats them in the section called “Two Principles of Justice” starting on 519 and ending on 522. What two principles does he think they would choose? Is he right? What would Rawls’s principles say about redistributive taxation?
3. In addition to his theories of justice, Rawls is also somewhat famous for his views about how we should go about figuring out the correct answer to moral questions. We have already talked in class a little bit about

whether we should work by starting with general theories or particular examples. Rawls thinks a combined approach is best. He lays out his view in a paragraph that stretches from 518-9. What is his view? Is it plausible?