

Rawls's Difference Principle

1 The first statement of Rawls's principles

“First: each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive scheme of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar scheme of liberties for others.

Second: 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 positions and offices *open to all*” (Rawls 1999, 53).

2 Four systems

| | Principle of efficiency | Difference principle |
|--|---------------------------|----------------------|
| Equality as careers open to talents | System of Natural Liberty | Natural Aristocracy |
| Equality as equality of fair opportunity | Liberal Equality | Democratic Equality |

Table from (Rawls 1999, 57)

3 Milton Friedman on equal opportunity

“Inequality resulting from differences in personal capacities, or from differences in wealth accumulated by the individual in question, are considered appropriate, or at least not so clearly inappropriate as differences resulting from inherited wealth.

This distinction is untenable. Is there any greater ethical justification for the high returns to the individual who inherits from his parents a peculiar voice for which there is a great demand than for the high returns to the individual who inherits property? ...

Most differences of status or position or wealth can be regarded as the product of chance at a far enough remove. The man who is hard working and thrifty is to be regarded as 'deserving'; yet these qualities owe much to the genes he was fortunate (or unfortunate?) enough to inherit." (Friedman [1962] 1982, 164-66)

References

- Friedman, Milton. (1962) 1982. *Capitalism and Freedom*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Rawls, John. 1999. *A Theory of Justice*. Revised edition. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.