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11/15/18

Prevention of a Harrison Bergeron Society Egalitarian Essay

Imagine a society where those who are born with advantages have to restrict their natural talents. The advantaged citizens have to wear headphones that produce a sharp noise to restrain their intelligence, wear fake facial features to mask beauty, and drag heavyweights to limit strength. This idea of handicapping the naturally talented comes from the story, "Harrison Bergeron", written by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. In this short story, Harrison is a young boy with many talents. Since he has many talents, he is forced to wear extra handicaps to limit them. Egalitarian philosopher, John Rawls, believes this society to be unjust. He believes that egalitarian concepts can prevent a society like Harrison Bergeron. These concepts include 1) The difference principle, 2) The social contract, and 3) The natural lottery.

The main concept that can prevent a Bergeron society is the difference principle. The difference principle believes that the talented shouldn't be restrained and should be able to express themselves. The difference principle, according to Rawls, is to, "Encourage the gifted to develop and exercise their talents, but with the understanding that the rewards these talents reap in the market belong to the community as a whole." (Sandel, 156). This principle doesn't limit the use of natural talents but uses them for the common good. If the advantaged distribute the benefits of their talent, they would be helping themselves and the disadvantaged citizens. It would create a justified society for the whole community since everyone would benefit. Though not everyone would agree with this concept.

Critics may object that this option may disregard incentives. It may be true that those with talents won't have the motivation to work more if their talents only benefit the disadvantaged. However, Rawls's reply, "The Difference principle permits income inequalities for the sake of incentives" (Sandel, 157). This explains that the difference principle allows income inequalities -- i.e. differences based on incomes. People would be motivated to do different types of work if they were able to receive higher rewards. Nonetheless, these inequalities are required to improve the disadvantaged by allowing them benefits. Thus, the difference principle doesn't lack incentives but permits incentives that can improve economic growth, which will benefit both the advantaged and the disadvantaged.

Another concept that prevents a Bergeron society is the acknowledgement of a social contract. Rawls believes in the idea of a social contract, "a hypothetical agreement in an original position of equality." (Sandel, 141). If there were to be a social contract, the community as a whole would be able to receive the same benefits. These benefits include, not wearing handicaps, natural resources such as necessities, and even jobs. In a true egalitarian society, some would say that everyone should have equity since they all are citizens of the same community. However in the Bergeron society they are being forced unequally into wearing handicaps. A social contract will allow equality and equity in the society. It will give the advantaged the right to not wear handicaps since they are granted equality.