

# **John Rawls and Deliberative Democracy**

Hercules Bantas

A Reluctant Geek Academic Guide Sample

Buy the entire guide from Amazon, Smashwords, or [www.reluctantgeek.weebly.com](http://www.reluctantgeek.weebly.com)

## Author's Notes

This guide is for all those who have an interest in democracy, but it should prove especially useful for students who are grappling with the finer points of John Rawls's political thought. That's right, I spent over ten years researching John Rawls's writing so that you don't have to. The page numbers are for citation purposes only and may not coincide exactly with printed versions of this guide. If you enjoyed this ebook, look out for *Jürgen Habermas and Deliberative Democracy*, *John Dryzek and Deliberative Democracy*, *Deliberative Democracy Basics*, and *Deliberative Democracy Essentials*. All of which are available through Amazon, The iBookstore, Smashwords, and all good ebooks vendors.

## Rawls and Deliberative Democracy

Rawls's deliberative democracy theory draws heavily from liberal political thought. He argues that the deliberative process need only apply to problems of a constitutional nature or of fundamental political importance. This restriction requires that only citizens who are involved in constitutional or governmental matters be included in political deliberation—namely, judges in courts of law, political candidates, or government officials. Consequently, Rawls's deliberative democracy theory encourages a passive form of citizenship in that the majority of citizens exercise political power only periodically, during government elections.

## An Ideal Constitutional Democracy

Rawls's deliberative democracy theory derives from his conception of an ideal constitutional democracy. He articulates his theory of deliberative democracy when he attempts to answer the question, 'what would a reasonably just constitutional democracy be like under reasonably favourable historical conditions?' (Rawls, 1999, p. 11) He labels this ideal a 'realistic utopia' and argues that a deliberative democracy and a well-ordered constitutional democracy are one and the same,

Here I am concerned only with a well-ordered constitutional democracy- a term I used at the outset- understood also as a deliberative democracy. The definitive idea for deliberative democracy is the idea of deliberation itself. When citizens deliberate, they exchange views and debate their supporting reasons concerning public political questions. They suppose that their political opinions may be revised by discussion with other citizens; and therefore these opinions are not simply a fixed outcome of their existing private or non-political interests. It is at this point that public reason is crucial, for it characterises such citizens' reasoning concerning constitutional essentials and matters of basic justice (1999, p. 137).

Three elements form the core of Rawls's theory. The first and defining element is the idea of public reason, which establishes a common principle for deliberation. The second is a constitutional framework that establishes the necessary regulatory institutions. The third, a general acceptance of the idea of public reason, establishes a foundation of commonality within pluralistic societies. In addition, Rawls argues that the only way to assure a deliberative democracy is to meet a further three conditions (1999, p. 139). First, the funding

1

of elections must be public. Second, there should be allowances made for orderly and public deliberation of the issues under consideration. These deliberations should not depend upon funding that could taint the deliberation, whether public or private. Third, Rawls argues that the public should be educated in the basic processes and procedures of constitutional democracy, and have access to information about problems requiring political deliberation. By arguing that a deliberative democracy is an ideal constitutional democracy, Rawls adopts a liberal orientation for his deliberative democracy theory, and establishes structures and institutions usable by citizens who are rational individuals.