

RAWLSIAN DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE AND THE PHILIPPINE AYUDA PROGRAM DURING THE PANDEMIC

Ivan Efreaim A. Gozum
Angeles University Foundation, Philippines

Jove Jim S. Aguas
University of Santo Tomas, Philippines

This paper discusses the philosophical concept of John Rawls on distributive justice and how it can be applied as a possible guide in the Philippine ayuda distribution during the COVID-19 pandemic. First, it discusses how the pandemic affected the Philippine economy and the complaints on the ayuda program regarding the ayuda distribution in the country. Second, it explains Rawlsian distributive justice and Rawls' ideas, such as the veil of ignorance, liberty, and difference principles. Lastly, it discusses Rawls' notion of distributive justice as a guide in the ayuda distribution to provide a perspective on the equitable and just distribution of benefits given the limited resources. The main point is that the distribution of financial assistance or ayuda can be guided by Rawls' notion of distributive justice, which prioritizes the well-being of the least well-off or disadvantaged.

Keywords: John Rawls, COVID-19 pandemic, ayuda program, distributive justice

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically affected human life around the world. Alarming levels of spread and severity of cases challenged governments regarding their preparedness for a global health crisis. Since its outbreak, many lives were lost around the globe. Millions of confirmed cases and deaths were reported worldwide (World Health Organization, 2020). As of writing, the Philippines has already tallied 3,242,374 confirmed cases (Department of Health Website). While vaccines were already developed, the mutation of the virus into different variants and the hesitancy of many people to get vaccinated compound the problem. Through these figures and the severity of the disease, the Coronavirus caused a great scare and

affected different facets of human life. For this reason, the pandemic forced many countries to impose severe lockdowns that changed human operations.

Since the pandemic compelled the government to impose lockdowns in the country, different effects were experienced by the citizens. Some adverse consequences of the pandemic involve problems on physical health, mental health, accessibility to education, and financial stability. However, this paper only focuses on the economic standpoint during the pandemic, especially on how the Philippines government addressed the economic difficulty of the people. Due to lockdowns, there has been a gamut of financial and economic problems, especially resource allocation. To aid the people in lockdown, the government made an *ayuda* (assistance or help) program in which the people were given financial assistance. However, there are complaints about the unfair distribution of the *ayuda*; some people claim that they received less than the others, while others claim they did not receive anything (Tribune Admin, 2020). Citizens claimed different reasons, such as corruption and favoritism for the unjust distribution of financial aid (Chavez, 2021).

THE PHILIPPINES AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

On December 31, 2019, the first novel coronavirus case from Wuhan, China, was reported. After which, there were numerous reports of patients from other countries that prompted the World Health Organization (WHO) to declare it as a pandemic. In the Philippines, the Department of Health (DOH) informed the citizens about the first COVID-19 case in the country (Paris, 2020).¹ Alerted by the dangers of the said virus, there were several suggestions to the government to implement a travel ban to prevent potential virus transmissions caused by people who are entering the country. However, President Rodrigo Duterte declined the suggestion regarding such a ban (The Inquirer Staff, 2020).²

Months after the country's first COVID-19 case, President Rodrigo Duterte placed Luzon into an enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) and halted travels entering Manila (Petty & Lema, 2020). Due to this announcement, many people did panic buying to hoard goods from grocery stores, drug stores, and convenience stores in anticipation of the duration of their stay at home. With this restriction, stores were forced to implement guidelines concerning the limit of allowed supplies to be bought by customers (Madarang, 2020).³ These guidelines were done to ensure no shortage of resources as the whole country is locked down. Moreover, the quarantine placed Filipino citizens in a situation where almost all their activities were to be done in their homes. Education transitioned from face-to-face classes to online or blended learning. Students were asked to use gadgets in order for them to attend their classes. On the other hand, educators were obliged to learn various online platforms and devices and uncover new avenues to deliver their lessons. Thus, the educational system during the pandemic was transformed into home education (Tinga, 2020).

Since the people were asked to observe physical distancing and stay at home during the ECQ, many establishments were temporarily closed to prevent the further spread of the virus. The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) released a statement on September 28, 2020, that around 90,000 business firms are still closed at the time

(Ramos, 2020). Along with this, the Asian Development Bank reported that the business operations in the Philippines are the most affected compared to its neighboring countries (Rivas, 2020).⁴ These reports show that the country's economic system suffered and continues to suffer because of the pandemic.

During the initial stages of the lockdown, the temporary closures of establishments and people staying at home resulted in small businesses and employees, who work on a no work, no pay agreement, to have low to no income generation. In a news report on June 2020, the Philippine economic situation reflected an increase in the unemployment rate (de Vera, 2020).⁵ These numbers continued to rise relatively in the following months (Ordinario, 2020).⁶ These reports cited the implementation of the enhanced community quarantine due to the pandemic as the reason for the decline in the economy.

With this economic situation, the government responded to the needs of the people who were left with no stable income, as the state must respond to their needs. The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) came up with a Social Amelioration Program (SAP). SAP is the emergency subsidy program of the government to help those who are greatly affected by the financial difficulties brought about by the pandemic. However, during the distribution of the cash aids, complaints from the citizens started to surface. There were clashes between the sentiments of the middle-class workers and the recipients of the *ayudas*, as the administration deemed them (Venzon, 2020). In the succeeding sections, we will look into the social implications and the principles that can serve as a guide in implementing the allocation of resources during a crisis. In times when resources are limited, how should the state properly allocate the said resources? How can there be a fair allocation of government assistance during a crisis?

JOHN RAWLS' THEORY OF JUSTICE

The American philosopher John Rawls discussed his perspective on justice in his works *A Theory of Justice, Political Liberalism, and Justice as Fairness*. In his work, *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls (1999, 3) states, "Justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought." For him, justice is central in one's perception of society. Rawls has stressed in his philosophy that justice is crucial in structuring a social institution. In his philosophical thought, he accentuated that in forming a theory of justice, there is the involvement of individuals who views justice as necessary in the way they live with other people. He (1999, 3) adds, "Each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override."

With this perspective, Rawls implies that the society, to attain justice, must consist of individuals who are cooperating. He (1999, 4) proposes, "Let us assume, to fix ideas, that a society is a more or less self-sufficient association of persons who in their relations to one another recognize certain rules of conduct as binding and who for the most part act in accordance with them. Suppose further that these rules specify a system of cooperation designed to advance the good of those taking part in it." This statement by Rawls implies that society consists of people who abide by such

standards. The said idea posits a social contract. During that time, the social contract theory is heavily influential. For this reason, Rawls does not deny that his concepts are under the said tradition. Lovett (2011, 7) explains, “By no means did Rawls invent his theory of justice as fairness from whole cloth. Indeed, though this considerably understates his achievement, he denied that his theory was especially original.”

Following the social contract tradition, Rawls suggests that principles of justice are what binds human persons to co-exist in social institutions. How do we establish this? To support this claim, Rawls (1999, 10) writes:

In order to do this, we are not to think of the original contract as one to enter a particular society or to set up a particular form of government. Rather, the guiding idea is that the principles of justice for the basic structure of society are the object of the original agreement. They are the principles that free and rational persons concerned to further their own interests would accept in an initial position of equality as defining the fundamental terms of their association. These principles are to regulate all further agreements; they specify the kinds of social cooperation that can be entered into and the forms of government that can be established. This way of regarding the principles of justice I shall call justice as fairness.

From Rawls’ discussion, we can learn that justice is the common good that drives a society. It is not about being in the original position that sets up a particular form of government but geared towards producing a state that promotes justice as fairness to its free and rational citizens (Aguas, 2019, 165). In addition, Scheffler (2015, 2) explicates, “In John Rawls’s political philosophy, the reconciliation is achieved by insisting that the basic structure of a society—its major social, political and economic institutions—must ensure the fairness of the conditions under which people carry out exchanges with one another.” Through this perspective, justice has been the aim of living together. A society’s structure must lean towards the promotion of justice. By reconciling the ideas of free and rational citizens with fairness, Rawls’ ideal points to a notion of a society that is a fair system of cooperation among free and equal citizens. Aguas (2019, 165) explains, “Justice as fairness tries to formulate principles of justice whose realization in social institutions would make a reality of this ideal of a society that is fair to all its citizens, who are free and equal.” This pursuit of having a just society is anchored on the political and ethical aspects of society. This is the reason why even though some may look at Rawls’ approach as economic, the idea of politics and ethics are always involved.

The “Original Position” and “Veil of Ignorance”

In establishing this ideal society, Rawls enumerates the ideals of fairness, freedom, and equality as essential in providing a landscape for social justice. He (1999, 4) writes, “These principles are the principles of social justice: they provide a way of assigning rights and duties in the basic institutions of society and they define the

appropriate distribution of the benefits and burdens of social cooperation.” Understanding the provided claim, Rawls determines that social justice is to be attained through providing rights to citizens to express their liberties and fair distribution of shares. To better comprehend Rawls’ principles of justice, Rawls proposed a thought experiment that he called the “original position” through the metaphor of the “veil of ignorance.” This thought experiment is rooted in the concept of an original position, which is similar to John Locke’s natural state. Michelbach et al. (2003, 524) simplify, “He proposes a thought experiment in which he asks what principles would be chosen behind a “veil of ignorance” where individuals do not know their social standing, attributes, etc.” To add, Rawls (1999, 11) writes:

The principles of justice are chosen behind a veil of ignorance. This ensures that no one is advantaged or disadvantaged in the choice of principles by the outcome of natural chance or the contingency of social circumstances. Since all are similarly situated and no one is able to design principles to favor his particular condition, the principles of justice are the result of a fair agreement or bargain. For given the circumstances of the original position, the symmetry of everyone’s relations to each other, this initial situation is fair between individuals as moral persons, that is, as rational beings with their own ends and capable, I shall assume, of a sense of justice.

The veil of ignorance is a metaphor used by Rawls to explain the original position which he implies. In the veil of ignorance, we are placed behind a veil that removes all our possessions and talents. This veil of ignorance somehow works as a barrier between the self and their life in the real world. In here, everyone is of equal status. No social stratification or division is implemented. Rawls posits, in this thought experiment, that the commonality that can be seen from the people behind the veil of ignorance is that they are mutually self-interested, rational, and know their interests and similar in their needs, interests, and capacities (Aguas, 2019, 166). Having this in mind, Rawls asks a question that concerns the people’s formulation of the principles of justice if they were behind the veil. Rawls (1999, 13) contends, “I shall maintain instead that the persons in the initial situation would choose two rather different principles: the first requires equality in the assignment of basic rights and duties, while the second holds that social and economic inequalities, for example, inequalities of wealth and authority, are just only if they result in compensating benefits for everyone, and in particular for the least advantaged members of society.” So, basically, after understanding these principles, Rawls gives emphasis on equality. To support this claim, Michelbach et al. (2003, 524) explain, “Rawls suggests that individuals in the original position would first choose equality of basic political and social rights.” With this, Rawls (1999, 53) provides two principles of justice, namely:

The first statement of the two principles reads as follows. 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.

Liberty Principle and Difference Principle

The first principle of Rawls' theory is deemed as the liberty principle. In *Political Liberalism*, Rawls (1996, 5) writes, "Each person has an equal claim to a fully adequate scheme of equal basic rights and liberties, which scheme is compatible with the same scheme for all; and in this scheme, the equal political liberties, and only those liberties, are to be guaranteed their fair value." To explicate this, Freeman (2002, 44) writes:

The main idea of the first principle is that there are certain basic rights and freedoms of the person that are more important than others and that are needed to characterize the moral ideal of free and equal persons. With the first principle, Rawls aims first to define a democratic ideal of free citizens who have equal civic status with powers to fairly and effectively influence legislation and take part in public political life.

In this principle, all persons, who are free and equal, are given basic rights and freedoms that are to be used in society. These rights or liberties are given equally to everyone. No person can remove these rights from citizens since they are entitled to these liberties. Aguas (2019, 167) adds, "The first principle, called the liberty principle, means that people in the original position would expect each person participating in a practice or affected by it to have an equal right to the greatest amount of liberty that is compatible with a like liberty to all." What are these liberties? Rawls (1999, 53) states:

Important among these are 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 as defined by the concept of the rule of law.

These liberties, as Rawls explicates, are higher than other liberties. This is why he suggested that these are basic and should be given equally. The abovementioned liberties are considered morally protected rights. They are to be protected because it established fair equality of opportunity in terms of basic fundamental rights. Also, Rawls suggests that these basic liberties are to be protected and given by the states unless they commit serious crimes because "...it is because the basic liberties (and justice as fairness as a whole) are based in a moral ideal of persons as free and equal self-governing agents who have an essential interest in maintaining their freedom, equality, and independence" (Freeman 2002, 51).

After knowing the liberty principle, let us now look at Rawls' difference principle. To understand this principle, Rawls (1999, 53) contextualizes:

The second principle applies, in the first approximation, to the distribution of income and wealth and to the design of organizations that make use of differences in authority and responsibility. While the distribution of wealth and income need not be equal, it must be to everyone's advantage, and at the same time, positions of authority and responsibility must be accessible to all.

Rawls formulated the difference principle to show that amidst inequalities in society, there can be a way to promote fair equality of opportunity. Rawls (1999, 266) adds, "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."

Van Parijs (2003, 200) explains, "The core of the principle is a simple and appealing idea: that social and economic inequalities should be evaluated in terms of how well off they leave the worst off." This explication tells us that Rawls' idea of the difference principle allows inequalities as long as the society is in a situation in which the least advantaged can still get certain benefits. This idea presents to us that the state should provide fair equality of opportunity to those who are in need. Aguas (2019, 167) further simplifies, "In the first articulation of the second principle, while the distribution of wealth and income must not be equal, it must be to everyone's advantage, and at the same time, positions of authority and responsibility must be accessible to all." Furthermore, in the difference principle, distribution of wealth and income must be aligned or consistent to both basic liberties and equal opportunities. Van Parijs (2003, 204) adds, "In other words, all that is needed to justify an inequality, however large, is some improvement, however tiny, for the worse off, relative to the conceivably very depressed counterfactual situation of total equality between the expectations of the more fortunate and the less fortunate."

Even though Rawls recognizes inequality, his difference principle does not promote such. Instead, the difference principle only allows the society to experience such inequalities if it can be for *everyone's advantage*.⁷ It is true that social stratifications and other forms of inequality are hard to abolish. However, Rawls proposes that it is the duty of the state to form a social institution in which one can work out these inequalities to make the structure of the society advantageous to everyone. The difference principle is an avenue to give fair equality of opportunities even though the situation does not seem to exhibit one.

Who are the least advantaged? Rawls explains that the least advantaged are those who cannot fully claim that they experience or possess the basic primary goods of society. What are these basic primary goods? Rawls (2001, 58-59) enumerates:

(i) The basic rights and liberties: freedom of thought and liberty of conscience, and the rest. These rights and liberties are essential

institutional conditions required for the adequate development and full and informed exercise of the two moral powers (in the two fundamental cases). (ii) Freedom of movement and free choice of occupation against a background of diverse opportunities, which opportunities allow the pursuit of a variety of ends and give effect to decisions to revise and alter them. (iii) Powers and prerogatives of offices and positions of authority and responsibility.) Income and wealth, understood as all-purpose means (having an exchange value) generally needed to achieve a wide range of ends whatever - (v) The social bases of self-respect, understood as those aspects of basic institutions normally essential if citizens are to have a lively sense of their worth as persons and to be able to advance their ends with self-confidence.

To simplify this, Weatherford (1983, 65) explains, “The first step would have to be to identify those who are, vaguely, less well off, as determined by “the relevant measures based on social primary goods.” This step is necessary because it is (at least theoretically) possible that one could spring from relatively poor origins, have modest natural endowments and worse than average luck, and still, through diligent and earnest labor (or through illegal means?) work one’s way up above the level of well-being of the average citizen.” Weatherford explained that this step is crucial to Rawls precisely because it is an avenue for the state to identify the ones to be assisted. Rawls (1999, 84) adds:

Now it seems impossible to avoid a certain arbitrariness in actually identifying the least favored group. One possibility is to choose a particular social position, say that of the unskilled worker, and then to count as the least favored all those with approximately the income and wealth of those in this position, or less. Another criterion is one in terms of relative income and wealth with no reference to social positions. For example, all persons with less than half of the median may be regarded as the least advantaged segment. This criterion depends only on the lower half of the distribution and has the merit of focusing attention on the social distance between those who have the least and the average citizen.

Thus, determining who are the least advantaged is a big consideration in promoting fairness.

RAWLSIAN DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE AND THE ALLOCATION OF *AYUDAS*

The economic difficulties brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic left many Filipinos in a difficult situation. The pandemic gave the people a reality check and presented these difficulties in the health and economic sectors. De Castro et al. (2020, 2) state:

The COVID-19 pandemic has caught a lot of people, governments, and health agencies by surprise. Health authorities throughout the world have been aware for some time that contagious viruses could strike anytime and had prepared contingency measures before SARS-CoV-2 manifested its effects. But even the best-prepared authorities have been stunned by the speed and ease with which the infections have been transmitted among individuals and across national boundaries.

A pandemic like the COVID-19 can happen anytime and make even the most powerful nations stumble. It is no surprise that the Philippines is struggling to cope with the pandemic. The Philippine economy is trying to recover what was lost due to the pandemic. This economic decline during these trying times somehow portrays what a failure of the Malthusian theory of demand and supply (See Eltis, 1980) is. The lockdown demonstrated low demands in the economy. As the Malthusian theory explains, there is insufficient demand due to the lockdowns on manufacturing establishments, banks, malls, schools, etc. Also, since people are staying at their homes, workers are not allowed to go out of their homes, resulting in no income from the transportation sector. These situations resulted in an economic imbalance. Several experts have already provided their expectations of the economic inequality during the pandemic (Tantuco, 2020). An increase in the poverty rate is expected because many people lost their jobs, and businesses were forced to close. This increase in poverty is just one of the effects that the pandemic has had since the implementation of the ECQ. To mitigate the possible increase in the poverty rate, these workers and other members of the society must be aided by the state since it creates a domino effect that impacts their families and the businesses who incur income through the said members of the society.

The Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) and Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) states that financial assistance must be given to the affected low-income families throughout the ECQ wherein the local government officials, from mayors to barangay captains, are the one in charge of distribution (Department of the Interior and Local Government, 2021). Throughout the ECQ and until now, many Filipinos who lost their jobs have heavily relied on their savings. This is why the SAP or *ayuda* program has been relevant to the affected individuals. The government must be responsible for distributing these financial aids properly since the people, especially the poor, rely on the supposed support. However, this is not well implemented. People, from the middle to lower classes, complained that they could not receive the said *ayudas* (Tribune Admin, 2020). A report stated that the first tranche of the Social Amelioration Program (SAP) worth P93.276 billion was in the hands of local government officials since April 3 (Department of Social and Welfare Development, 2020). However, news reporters reported that "...only P59 billion has been distributed amid complaints that the financial rescue is not being given to those who are in real need... Failure of the LGU to complete the distribution of the financial relief and the misuse of the funds, in which some are complaining are being distributed based on political instead of economic considerations, would be a recipe

for unrest which would be a bigger problem than the impact of the virus” (Tribune Admin, 2020). Also, many people from different regions claimed that corruption and favoritism are evident in *ayuda* distribution which is why many citizens do not receive financial assistance (Chavez, 2021).

With these complaints, how can the Philippine government allocate *ayuda* or implement the *ayuda* program? The task of just distribution seems complicated since the Philippine government has had corrupt officials for a long time. The problem of corruption in the Philippine government results from poor governance, which involves weak accountability, and a lack of transparency and citizen participation (Naher et al., 2020). Until now, and even during a pandemic, Filipinos complain that the Philippine government has been corrupt in managing resources (Baclig, 2021).

Rawls’ notions of the original position and veil of ignorance can hardly be applied to this situation. Rawls’ theory of justice is based on a thought experiment wherein he offers a workable method for solving problems of social morality. His theory attempts to maximize the lot of those minimally advantaged. The theory’s ideal or most fundamental idea is a society with a fair system of cooperation among free and equal citizens. Moreover, Rawls claims that this ideal, with its component ideals of fairness, freedom, and equality, is implicit in the public political culture of a democratic society. As mentioned, the political and social condition in the Philippines is far from ideal. In the midst of the pandemic, it is not the time to think about the original position, and definitely, the veil of ignorance is out of the question. While justice as fairness tries to formulate principles of justice whose realization in social institutions would make this ideal of a fair society to all its citizens, who are free and equal, we can only dream of this reality. Still, it is not wrong to dream even in the midst of a pandemic.

However, perhaps there is something in the theory of Rawls that we can use or apply to the present situation. In order to respond to this recurring problem, it is proposed Rawls’ distributive justice as a guide in allocating limited resources fairly. The difference principle can be applied in our present situation to show that amidst inequalities in society, there can be a way to promote fair equality of opportunity, especially in the distribution of *ayuda*. As mentioned, Rawls stresses that social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that the greatest benefit goes to the least advantaged. Rawls promotes a society wherein the least advantaged will access the government’s help. The government can give *ayuda* fairly if they identify and prioritize the least advantaged. Who are the least advantaged?

It is essential to identify the least advantaged because they have the right to receive the primary goods of society. Rawls (2001, 60) explains, “Primary goods, then, are what free and equal persons (as specified by the political conception) need as citizens.” The primary goods must be accessible to everyone since this makes justice as fairness. Rawls (2001, 61) adds, “Our thought is not that primary goods are fair to conceptions of the good associated with comprehensive doctrines by striking a fair balance between them. Rather, primary goods are fair to free and equal citizens: these goods enable them to advance their permissible conceptions of the good (those the pursuit of which are compatible with justice).” Thus, if the citizens can access the basic primary goods of society, we can achieve a sense of fairness. Also, the least advantaged

have the right to receive the basic primary goods of the society because the state must provide resources to the needy. Freeman (2002, 87) states, “A society has an ongoing duty to fairly distribute income and wealth among people engaged in social and economic cooperation, without regard to whether they are poor or not.”

Having said this, the least advantaged are the ones who are experiencing the basic primary goods the least. The least advantaged are the poor and ordinary workers or ordinary citizens, the not influential, who are the ones who are most affected financially during the pandemic. They are the ones who lost their jobs because of company closure, workers who have no salary because of the no-work, no-pay scheme, unemployed citizens, owners of small businesses, private school teachers whose workplace closed, the agricultural sector, flight attendants, Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs), workers of manufacturing establishments, jeepney and tricycle drivers, and real estate renting owners (See Technical Education and Skills Development Authority, 2020).⁸ These are the people who are not experiencing the basic primary goods. Hence, they are the least advantaged during the pandemic. They are the ones whom the government should prioritize in *ayuda* distribution.

Nevertheless, the *ayuda* program is an example of the state’s duty to help the marginalized sector of the country, especially in times of crisis. If the government adequately implements this program, they align with Rawls’ idea of distributive justice wherein the state prioritizes the well-being of the least well-off (Rawls, 2001). Moreover, during a situation in which there are limited resources, the state should prioritize the unemployed, poorest of the poor, and middle-class workers who stopped working (given that they are in a no-work, no-pay scheme) to allocate fairly. Moreover, the state must include the members of the indigenous group since some of them also do not experience basic liberties.

Rawls’ theory of justice may not be perfect, and as Rawls assumed, it is applicable in a genuinely democratic society. However, its principles, especially its admonition to prioritize the least advantage, can serve as a guide for any government during a pandemic. Through this, distributive justice plays its role in times of pandemics. The ECQ imposed, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, indeed affected the lives of the people on many levels. From an economic standpoint, these lockdowns affected those who did not have full access to the basic primary goods. Rawlsian distributive justice promotes distributing aids or *ayudas* based on prioritizing the least advantaged. This is more expedient, especially because there are scarce resources; the allocation of these goods must prioritize those who are in need. The state, through the government, must always consider the welfare of the least advantaged to attain a society that manifests justice as fairness truly.

The injustice on *ayuda* distribution is just the tip of the iceberg regarding the social inequalities that Filipinos experienced during the pandemic. Some people do not have access even to online education and the health care system. These problems show how a large number of Filipinos are least advantaged. The ECQ, during the early stage of the pandemic, brought about human rights risks to different individuals (See Cepeda, 2020). Unfortunately, during a crisis like this pandemic, it is always those in the margins who are severely affected. The pandemic has brought to the fore inequality in society, especially in the Philippines. Those in power, influential and well-off are

the ones who not only survive but gain more out of the situation. The pandemic is a big challenge, but if people cooperate and have a sense of solidarity, this challenge can be overcome. Hence, apart from Rawls' theory of justice, the Filipinos ought to practice solidarity during the pandemic. Through solidarity, a shared responsibility among different social groups is needed to get through this pandemic. Thus, through being responsible with one another, we can help others amid social inequalities.

CONCLUSION

The *ayuda* program was the Philippine government's response to the economic difficulty of the people during the early stage of the pandemic. However, complaints about its unfair implementation abound due mainly to corruption and favoritism regarding distribution. Needless to say, many factors affected the *ayuda* program's implementation and contributed to its poor or unfair implementation. Admittedly, Rawls' theory of distributive justice, especially the difference principle, is just one of the theories that can be applied in this situation to serve as a kind of foundation in implementing the program. This paper maintains that to address the issue of unfair distribution *ayuda* Rawlsian distributive justice can serve as a guide in knowing whom to prioritize in implementing the program. Rawlsian distributive justice prioritizes the well-being of the least advantaged and promotes fairness in society. The least advantaged are the ones with the lowest expectations for/ access to "primary goods" = "what free and equal persons need as citizens." Thus, through the government, the state must promote the well-being of these people – the poor and marginalized, the ordinary workers and unemployed, the public transportation drivers, and informal settlers, by identifying and prioritizing them. While social justice does not favor anyone, social and economic inequalities cannot be avoided; thus, it is required that we prioritize those who are in the peripheries. The well-being of the marginalized, those who are at the bottom of the social and economic ladder, must be the priority, especially during a crisis like this pandemic.

NOTES

1. "Duque said the patient is a 38-year-old woman who traveled to the Philippines from Wuhan, China, via Hong Kong on January 21. She is currently in a government hospital, where she was admitted on January 25, but was no longer showing symptoms" (Paris, 2020). After reporting the first COVID-19 case, DOH started reminding the people to wear face masks, proper hygiene, constant washing of hands, and proper coughing. These precautionary measures were suggested and implemented later on to prevent the virus scare brought about by COVID-19.

2. "President Rodrigo Duterte said he was not inclined to order a ban on tourist traffic from China, but was willing to repatriate Filipinos in China who want to come home amid an outbreak thereof a new coronavirus that had already killed more than 130 Chinese and sickened nearly 6,000 others. Mr. Duterte was asked what he thought of suggestions for a travel ban. He said he would not support any

recommendation for a travel ban, as it would be unfair” (The Inquirer Staff, 2020). This decision has been one of the most talked-about issues in the country since the confirmed cases of the novel coronavirus increased weeks after the first case.

3. “Many Filipinos, especially in Metro Manila, are hoarding alcohol, toilet paper, and other supplies from supermarkets following the surge of confirmed cases of the novel Coronavirus in the country... These posts prompted a number of public figures to warn their followers against the consequences of such activities in times of crisis... Supreme Court Associate Justice Marvic Leonen also expressed the same sentiment on Twitter, saying that this behavior during difficult times is ‘unethical.’ ‘Hoarding during times of crisis is unethical. It is a practice that privileges those who can afford callously depriving those whose resources only allow them to survive on daily minimum wages the nourishment and protection for their own families,’ Leonen said.” (Madarang, 2020). The article stated how hoarding has resulted in a shortage of supplies during the early stages of the pandemic.

4. The readers may look at this news report by Rivas to see how the Philippines is performing economically during the pandemic.

5. “The jobless rate climbed to a “record-high” of 17.7 percent at the height of the COVID-19 lockdown in April, the government reported Friday. Citing the preliminary results of the Philippine Statistics Authority’s (PSA) labor force survey (LFS), National Statistician Claire Dennis Mapa told a press conference that 7.3 million Filipinos were unemployed last April, up from 2.3 million a year ago and 2.4 million a quarter ago” (de Vera, 2020). This article showed the decline in the employment rate of the country. The report also traced that the lockdown heavily influenced the said decline.

6. The word ‘relatively’ is used because even though the employment rate is improving compared to the April 2020 report, the rate is still lower in comparison with the previous year’s report.

7. Emphasis is on “everyone’s advantage” to stress that Rawls’ idea explains that inequalities are not to be tolerated if they will not be advantageous to everyone.

8. “The entire island of Luzon has been on enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) since March 15, 2020, and will be until April 30, 2020. The initial estimate of NEDA on economic losses on a 1-month ECQ of Luzon is a cumulative loss of PHP428.7 to PHP1,355.6 billion in gross value added (in current prices), equivalent to 2.1% to 6.6% of nominal GDP in 2020. But for a 45-day ECQ, the amount of losses is estimated to be roughly PHP1.1 trillion, or equivalent to 5.6% of GDP. The Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) estimates the Philippine economy may lose between 276.3 billion (best case) and PHP 2.5 trillion (worst case) due to COVID-19. With the ECQ extended, though a modified one, in Metro Manila, Laguna, and Cebu City, from May 16 to 31, it is anticipated that more losses will be incurred. As to employment, the ADB estimates total employment to be reduced from -0.82% up to - 1.69%. NEDA estimates employment losses to be at 116,000-1,800,000” (Technical Education and Skills Development Authority, 2020). The readers may check on this report to have an insight into the Philippine economic situation regarding the effect of the pandemic.

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