



Mains Practice Question

Q. Analyse John Rawls's concept of justice as fairness.

25 May, 2021 GS Paper 4 Theoretical Questions

Approach

- Start the answer by briefly explaining what you understand by justice as fairness.
- Discuss the John Rawls theory and its significance.
- Conclude Suitably.

Introduction

John Rawls does not discuss general ethics, but examines a particular aspect of ethics, namely, justice. He presents theoretical arguments about general principles which can form the basis of a just society, which he calls "Justice as Fairness".

John Rawls's concept of social justice gives emphasis to fairness, it must be fair to all, to the most talented as well as the most disadvantaged section.

Body

John Rawls argues that the adoption of two fundamental principles of justice would guarantee a just and morally acceptable society:

- Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all.
- Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both:
 - to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged, and
 - attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity

Significance of John Rawls Theory

- The first principle ensures civil liberties to all and the second principle is similar to what is called 'positive discrimination'.
- Rawls tries to show (by imaging a hypothetical situation) how such principles would be universally adopted, and in this way, moves partly towards general ethical issues.
 - He introduces a theoretical "veil of ignorance".
 - It ensures that all the "players" in the social game would be placed in a particular situation. Rawls calls it the "original position."
 - In this position, everyone only has a general knowledge about the facts of "life and society".
 - Therefore, each player is to make a "rationally prudential choice" concerning the kind of social institution they would enter into contract with.
- Rawls argues that given his assumptions people would prefer liberal societies with freedoms and

liberties based on equality of opportunities, but with due allowance to the problems of various disadvantaged groups.

Conclusion

Rawls theory of justice can find concurrence with the one of the basic premises of the Indian constitution that has provided for reservation to equalize the differences, and attempted to undo the historic injustices meted out to certain communities.

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