

AN ANALYSIS OF RAWLS' THEORY OF JUSTICE

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ABSTRACT

John Rawls, an US philosopher well known for his contributions to liberal thought, revitalized the study of political ideologies in the contemporary era with the concept of justice. In his masterpiece, A Mode of fairness, he proposed that a just society is distinguished by a specific set of characteristics. Justice is seen as the fundamental value of a well-ordered community. Although Rawls' theory is a cornerstone of political science, it has been criticized from many viewpoints. This paper will study the notion of justice and provide a critical review of it. Additional study reveals that many objections to Rawls' theory stem from misinterpretations of his ideas. Rawls attempted an effort to weave multiple moral theories into his justice postulate. A few elements of these ethical frameworks are frequently perceived as contrasting with one another. Libertinism, equality, and the concepts of community are all incorporated within Rawls' concept of justice.

KEY WORDS

Justice as fairness; original position; veil of ignorance; liberalism; equality; difference principle; Rawls; political philosophy; social contract.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The method of research used in this study is qualitative, analytical, and explanatory. Along with secondary educational critiques, it looks at Rawls' significant works, such as Political Liberalism and A Theory of Justice. Rawls' philosophical arguments can be contrasted with counterarguments from other ideological traditions as part of the approach. This study offers a thorough scholarly analysis of Rawls' notion of justice as fairness through incorporating many points of view.

RESEARCH GAP

Despite extensive work on Rawlsian philosophy, many analyses fail to present Rawls' ideas within a structured research framework that connects his theory with contemporary debates on equality, liberty, and distributive justice. Furthermore, existing literature often isolates Rawls' principles from their broader ethical and social implications. This paper addresses this gap by offering a consolidated and research-oriented evaluation of his theory.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

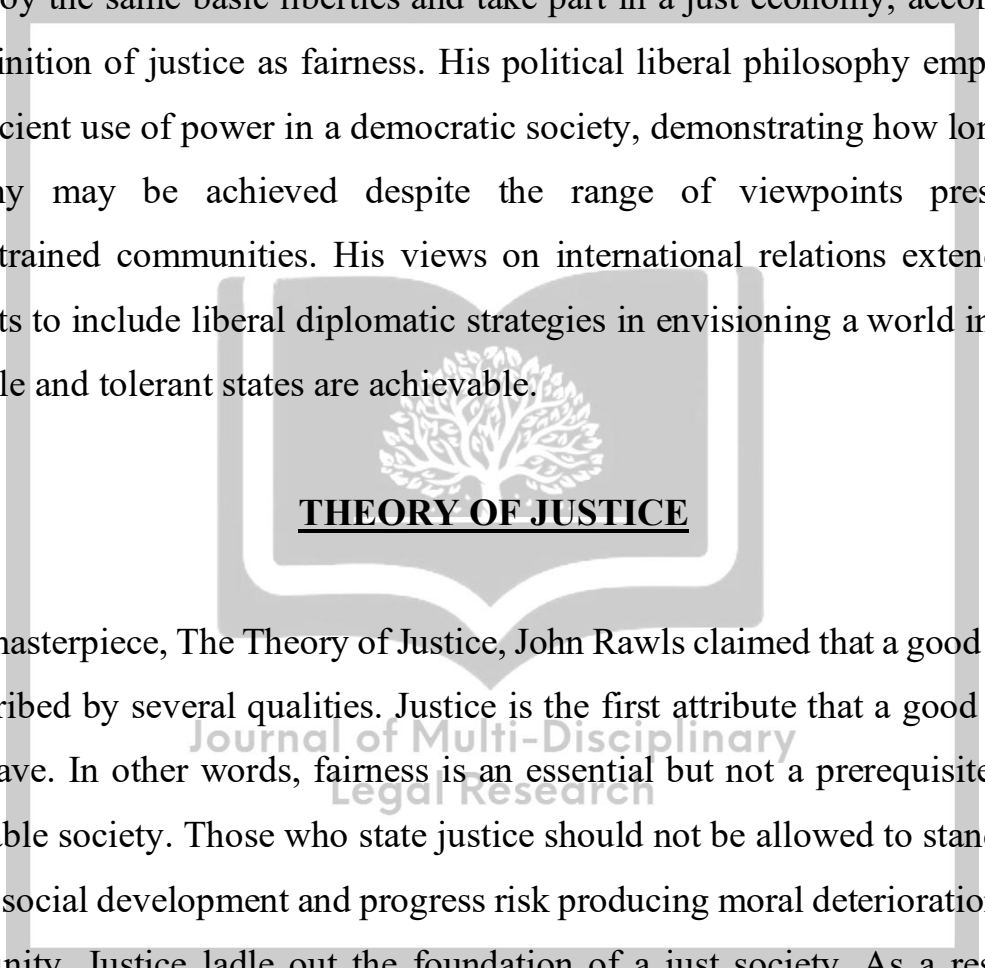
By placing Rawls' theory of justice within the larger context of political philosophy, this study aims to provide a thorough comprehension of the idea. It aims to clarify how Rawls uses the original position and the veil of ignorance to construct his model of justice as fairness. The project also will look into how Rawls' two principles of justice influence the development of social, political, and economic institutions. Studying the main philosophical objections made to Rawls by academics from the libertarian, Marxist, feminist, and communitarian traditions is another goal. In addition to evaluating Rawls' theory's current applicability and practical implications in resolving issues of equality, fairness, and social justice, this examination aims to highlight Rawls' important contribution to liberal philosophy and democratic governance.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The goal of this research is to investigate the philosophical underpinnings of Rawls' notion of justice as fairness, with a particular emphasis on the ways in which the original position and the veil of ignorance function as tools for gaining generally acknowledged principles of justice. It also looks at how important Rawls' two principles—the difference principle and equal basic liberties—are to the organization of political and economic institutions in a democracy. The paper also examines the objections made by feminists, communitarians, libertarians, and Marxists, evaluating how they contradict Rawls' presumptions regarding justice, equality, and the moral foundation of social cooperation. Lastly, it seeks to comprehend Rawls' theory's continued applicability in discussions of distributive justice, democratic government, and the quest for a more just social structure.

JOHN RAWLS: AN BRIEF INTRODUCTION

John Rawls, a US-born political thinker associated with the liberal school, reignited modern interest in political ideologies with his theory of justice. Inspired by Locke's philosophical ideas, Rawls developed the principles of justice through liberalism and the social contract. He envisions a society where everyone can enjoy the same basic liberties and take part in a just economy, according to his definition of justice as fairness. His political liberal philosophy emphasizes the efficient use of power in a democratic society, demonstrating how long-term harmony may be achieved despite the range of viewpoints present in unconstrained communities. His views on international relations extend these concepts to include liberal diplomatic strategies in envisioning a world in which amicable and tolerant states are achievable.



THEORY OF JUSTICE

In his masterpiece, *The Theory of Justice*, John Rawls claimed that a good society is described by several qualities. Justice is the first attribute that a good society must have. In other words, fairness is an essential but not a prerequisite for an acceptable society. Those who state justice should not be allowed to stand in the way of social development and progress risk producing moral deterioration in the community. Justice laid out the foundation of a just society. As a result, all executive and legislative actions should be modified to meet the standards of fairness.

Rawls' book *A Theory of Justice* advocates for a righteous balancing of liberty & equality.¹ At the center of this work is an investigation of events of the fairness, influenced by David Hume, as well as a just decision-making scenario for persons

¹ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* 3–4 (rev. ed., Belknap Press 1999).

coping with these conditions, which reflects some features of Immanuel Kant's approach. Individuals' behavior is influenced by fairness principles. These organizations have moderate shortages and are neither essentially selfless nor completely selfish. They have aims that they want to advance, but they prefer to do so by working with others under mutually agreed-upon circumstances.

Rawls proposes a theoretical scenario (the original position escorted by veil of ignorance) in which people embrace fair principles of justice without understanding their specific conditions. Provided these restrictions, Rawls believes that parties will find his preferred of justice particularly compelling, beating out other options such as utilitarian and right-libertarian theories.

THE ORIGINAL POSITION

Rawls conveys his ideas by separating common people from their economic and social contexts with a 'veil of ignorance'. One of the most popular ideas in Rawls' Theory of Justice is a well-versed thought trail known as the "original position." Identifying the right perspective that individuals should take while considering justice dramatically improves political philosophy. When working to establish a just environment for people, certain traits like as hair or eye color, , race, and so on are ignored in favor of other qualities. Rawls' definition of the initial stance reflects our feelings about which elements of justice are important and which are not. ²

The original position portrays a storyline in which a group of people must reach an contract on the political and economic framework of a future society. Every individual makes decisions without fully understanding their situation. Everyone has a partial awareness of their gende, age, intelligent Quotient , wealth, educational-abilities, and religion. Every member understands that they possess

² John Rawls, Political Liberalism 15–16 (Columbia Univ. Press 1993).

the essential abilities to engage in continuing productive relationships and understands their ability to positively influence society. Rawls argues that persons are aware of two inherent capacities. At first, each person recognizes their power to shape, pursue, and adjust their vision of what is desirable, as well as their life plan. The individual is uncertain of what type of concept of good this is. For example, it could be anchored in a belief system or lack thereof, yet the individual is unsure about the specifics. Furthermore, each individual feels confident in their ability to foster a sense of equity and is deeply committed to maintaining it.

Furthermore, everyone believes they can nurture a sense of justice and a strong commitment to upholding it. Established only on these two criteria, each person will precisely consider creating a society that will guarantee them the maximum rewards. The thought is that proposals that we generally deemed unfair, such as advocating that africans or women be excluded from seeking government office, will not be made in the initial position since it is illogical to do so. Rawls also believes that these imaginary individuals are risk-averse and that when confronted with uncertainty, they will naturally choose the alternative with the fewest negative effects. As a outcome, they would choose ideals that would improve the circumstances of the least advantaged, believing that once the veil is raised, they will find themselves in that position.

THE TWO PRINCIPLES OF JUSTICE

John conveyed his theory of justice as fairness in his two prominent principles of justice:

- i) A society “as one designed to do the good of its person and effectively managed by a public conception of justice”.

- ii) “ it is a society in which everyone accepts and knows that the others accept the same idea of justice and the basic social norms satisfy and are known to satisfy these principles.”³

The initial argument guides the design of the political body, whereas the second is primarily concerned with economic institutions. Prioritizing the first principle is more important than prioritizing the second aspect, and equality of opportunity takes priority over the difference principle within the latter. The fundamental idea ensures that every citizen has certain essential rights and freedoms. The idea ensures that every citizens have equal rights and liberties. In normal circumstances, justice requires that everyone have equal rights because uneven rights are not beneficial to those who would have fewer privileges. Rawls' basic assumption is consistent with common opinions about the need for basic and alike fundamental rights and freedoms. This main principle differentiates itself via two additional characteristics. Its primary objective is to secure that fundamental rights and liberties are not surrendered in favor of other community benefits. The first principle restricts a policy that offers draft exemptions to college students to guarantee the educated civilians contribute to economic growth. The execution of a draft conflicts with fundamental liberties, and if one is implemented, it must affect all individuals who are capable of serving equally.

Another important aspect of Rawls' first concept is the requirement for equal value of civil rights. Civil liberties are an aspect of fundamental freedoms, emphasizing the right to run for political office, vote in central elections, and so on. Rawls believes that citizens must be equal in both form and substance to enjoy these freedoms. That is, individuals with equivalent abilities and objectives should have equal opportunities to run for office, influence elections, and follow other opportunities, regardless of their socioeconomic status. This fair value condition has substantial execution for election funding and operations, which is

³ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* 3–4 (rev. ed., Belknap Press 1999).

explained later. Rawls's second aspect of justice has two components. Just equality of opportunity demands that people with equal talents and motivation have equal access to education and financial opportunities, regardless of their socioeconomic condition at birth. Assuming that innate abilities and motivation are evenly shared among children from all socioeconomic classes, around one-fourth of individuals in any occupation should come from the top 25% of income, another quarter from the next 25%, and so on for the remaining 50%. Because one's class of origin is a morally random aspect of their identity, fairness requires that it not result in unequal access to education or meaningful employment.

The disparity principle establishes how wealth and income are assigned. These items can enhance output by addressing disparities, such as paying higher wages to support training and education and inspiring individual to pursue high-demand jobs. Under the principle of difference, social systems should be organized in such a way that the least advantaged individuals benefit from any wealth or income inequalities. The difference principle states that financial inequities must benefit everyone, particularly the least advantaged.

A CRITICAL APPRAISAL

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Numerous schools of thought have critiqued Rawls' theory of justice. Robert Nozick wrote the book *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* in 1974, as a justification of libertarian justice⁴. Following their seminar collaboration, Michael Walzer and Nozick co-authored *Spheres of Justice*, which supports communal political philosophy. In a similar argument, Michael Sandel wrote *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*. He contended that *A Theory of Justice* eliminates justice from our underlying values and ideas that determine our identities and perspectives on justice. Collectivists suggest that Rawls discovered a foundation for clarifying the

⁴ Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* 160–64 (Basic Books 1974).

current capitalist structure. He has proved that enabling the wealthy to accumulate wealth will inevitably benefit the poor. Despite rigorous devotion to his fair equality of opportunity premise, the vast discrepancies between the wealthy and the disadvantaged will persist. A minor advancement in the lives of the most marginalized groups will be interpreted as justification for allowing significant social and economic disparities.

Understanding Rawls: A Critique and Reconstruction of A Theory of Justice was written by Robert Paul Wolff, who questioned Rawls from a Marxist point of view. In this piece, Wolff advocates that Rawls' ideas upholds the current order of affairs by basing justice on current practices and rejecting the notion that there could be unjust concerns within capitalism social relations, private property, or the marketplace.⁵

Feminist critics, like Susan Moller Okin, critiqued Rawls' failure to address inequities and hierarchies in family dynamics. Rawls claimed that justice should only apply to the base structure of community. Feminists criticized Rawls for failing to confront injustices in patriarchal systems, emphasizing his idea that "the personal is political."⁶

Social interactions and how obligations are allocated according to gender, particularly within the household. Some egalitarian opponents have expressed fear about Rawls' emphasis on primary social goods. Amartya Sen contends that it is critical to evaluate both the allocation of fundamental goods and their effective utilization to achieve objectives. Amartya Sen, a previous Rawls pupil, examines and seeks to regenerate A Theory of Justice in his 2009 book The Idea of Justice. He praises Rawls with reigniting enthusiasm for the concept of justice, which has its foundation on fairness, impartiality, equal opportunities, poverty

⁵ Robert Paul Wolff, *Understanding Rawls: A Reconstruction and Critique of A Theory of Justice* 5–9 (Princeton Univ. Press 1977).

⁶ Susan Moller Okin, *Justice and Gender: An Unfinished Debate*, 72 *Fordham L. Rev.* 1537, 1540–42 (2004).

reduction, and liberty.⁷

Despite this, Sen criticizes the contractarian tradition, saying that ideas of a perfectly equal society fail to recognize actual disparities. Sen argues that Rawls' emphasis on institutions for justice ignores the impact of human behavior on these institutions' ability to uphold a just society. Sen feels that Rawls underestimates the difficulties of ensuring that all members of society follow the ideas of justice. Sen also claims that Rawls makes a mistake in believing that there is just one potential result of the reflective equilibrium beneath the veil of ignorance. Sen contends that the appearance of opposing yet fair principles can disrupt Rawls' series of steps toward creating a truly just society.

CONCLUSION

Further investigation reveals that there are many criticisms of Rawls' theory arise from biased interpretations of his work. Rawls attempted to create his theory of justice by combining several value systems. Some of these value systems' principles are thought to be conflicting. Rawls' theory of justice incorporates basic values of liberty among individuals, equality among people, and socialism. To begin, Rawls identifies as a liberty because he believes that individuals in the original position will prioritize their self-interest when negotiating. This is consistent with the libertarian viewpoint. Furthermore, his basic principle of justice prioritizes freedom, which cannot be swapped for any other benefit.

Rawls believes in equality because he believes in and promotes equal freedom for all. In addition, he believes that socioeconomic gaps are proper as long as they follow the concept of equal justice for all. Once again, he discovers that any reward for hard work and worthy achievements must meet the condition that results in the most advantages for those who are least fortunate. What is the

⁷ Amartya Sen, *The Idea of Justice* 52–55 (Harvard Univ. Press 2009)

rationale for the deserving to consider the needs of the least privileged? Rawls discusses the concept of a 'chain connection' that exists between different persons. He illustrates that by improving the weakest aspects of society one at a time, society as a whole may become stronger.

The concept of combining chains indicates that Rawls' thinking is essentially communitarian. In his recently released books, Rawls focuses on ensuring political stability in a diverse or multicultural society. Rawls' second book, *Political Liberalism*, provides the most extensive explanation of his present focus and fresh concept of justice.



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