

CUET · POLITICAL SCIENCE · CLASS XI · CODE 323

Social Justice

CUET unit: Political Theory — Concept of Justice (Social Justice, Distributive Justice, Rawls)

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Snapshot

- Defines justice as "giving each person his due," tracing the idea from ancient India (dharma), Confucius and Plato (Republic) to Kant's notion of human dignity.
- Lays out three working principles of justice — equal treatment for equals, proportionate justice (rewarding effort/skill/risk), and recognition of special needs.
- Connects social justice to just distribution of goods, opportunities and resources (e.g. land reforms, abolition of untouchability, reservations).
- Presents John Rawls' "veil of ignorance" as a rational (not moral) device to justify a fair social order where the worst-off are protected.
- Closes with the free markets vs. state intervention debate over how best to guarantee basic minimum conditions of life.

Detailed Notes

2.1 Core concepts

Justice concerns "how public life is ordered" and "how social goods and duties are distributed among the members of a society"; it is therefore "of central importance for politics" (NCERT Overview, p. 53). In ancient Indian society justice was associated with **dharma**, and maintaining dharma was considered the primary duty of kings (NCERT §4.1, p. 54). In China, **Confucius** argued that kings must maintain justice by punishing wrong-doers and rewarding the virtuous. In fourth-century B.C. Athens, **Plato in The Republic** examined the question of justice through a long dialogue between Socrates and his young friends **Glaucon and Adeimantus** (NCERT §4.1, p. 54). Glaucon's challenge — that the unjust often seem better off than the just, because they manipulate rules to their advantage — is met by Socrates with the reply that if everyone manipulated rules to suit themselves, no one could be secure; it is therefore in our long-term interest to obey laws and be just. Just rulers, Socrates adds in a famous analogy, must be like doctors concerned with the well-being of their patients rather than with their own profit (NCERT §4.1, pp. 54–55).

The meaning of "giving each person his due" has evolved over time. Following the German philosopher **Immanuel Kant**, human beings possess **dignity**, and what is due to each person is the opportunity to develop their talents and pursue their chosen goals

(NCERT §4.1, p. 55). Justice therefore requires **equal consideration to all individuals**. There are three core principles of justice (§4.1, pp. 55–58).

Principle 1 — Equal treatment for equals (pp. 55–56): All humans share certain characteristics simply by virtue of being human and so deserve equal rights and equal treatment. Liberal democracies have implemented this commitment through three baskets of rights — **civil rights** (life, liberty, property), **political rights** (notably the right to vote and political participation) and **social rights** (equal opportunities for education, livelihood and similar conditions). People must not be discriminated against on grounds of class, caste, race or gender. The standard application is **equal pay for equal work** — a male and a female teacher in the same school must receive the same salary; a sanitation worker doing the same job as anyone else must receive the same remuneration regardless of background.

Principle 2 — Proportionate justice (p. 56): Equal treatment alone can be unjust. To give every student the same exam marks regardless of effort would be unfair. Justice also requires that people be rewarded "**in proportion to the scale and quality of their effort**", the skills required and the dangers involved. Miners or deep-sea divers face risk; craftsmen and surgeons require long training; policemen face danger. Equal treatment must therefore be balanced with proportionality — the same person doing two kinds of work may deserve different rewards.

Principle 3 — Recognition of special needs (pp. 56–58): A just society also takes into account **special needs** in distributing rewards and duties. This principle "extends rather than contradicts" the equal-treatment principle. Physical disability, age, lack of access to education or health care, and entrenched caste-based deprivation are all grounds for special treatment. In India, caste-based discrimination led to **reservations** for SCs and STs in jobs and educational institutions, on the reasoning that historically excluded groups cannot immediately compete on equal terms. Governments must harmonise the three principles — equal treatment, proportional reward for merit/effort, and a minimum standard for the needy — because pursuing one can sometimes work against another (NCERT §4.1, p. 58).

§4.2 Just distribution (pp. 58–59). Social justice requires not only equal treatment under law but also basic equality of life conditions and opportunities. Two concrete Indian examples: the **Constitution abolished untouchability** (a constitutional measure of redistributive justice), and state governments have undertaken **land reforms** to redistribute resources from large landlords to tillers. The reservation debate shows how distributive questions provoke strong passions in society.

§4.3 Just distribution: John Rawls' theory of justice (pp. 59–62). A fair rule, Rawls argued, can be arrived at only if we imagine ourselves making decisions about society **without knowing** our future position in it — our caste, class, family, gender, talents, religion or privilege. This thought-experiment is the "**veil of ignorance**". Under the veil, each person acts rationally in self-interest and so envisages the future society from the perspective of the **worst-off** — supporting rules that ensure reasonable opportunities

for weaker sections (education, health, shelter, livelihood). Rawls expects ordinary rational behaviour, **not heroic self-sacrifice or benevolence**: "rational thinking, not morality or benevolence" leads to impartial and fair distribution (NCERT §4.3, pp. 60–61). Policies must also benefit society as a whole — they must not weaken the better-off to a point where it is bad for everyone (p. 62).

§ 4.4 Pursuing social justice (pp. 62–65) sets out what a society owes its most deprived. Justice does not demand absolute equality — there will always be some inequality of rewards and benefits — but a society is unjust if the gap between rich and poor is so wide that the deprived have no chance to improve their situation (p. 62). A just society must guarantee a **basic minimum** of conditions — nourishment, housing, clean drinking water, education and a minimum wage — so people can lead healthy and productive lives and pursue their goals. On the **free markets versus state intervention** debate: **free-market supporters** argue that unregulated markets, where individuals freely contract and compete on prices, wages and profits, produce a just distribution; markets are "blind" to caste, religion or gender and reward only merit (pp. 63–64). **Critics** counter that markets in practice work in favour of the **already privileged**; private agencies avoid unprofitable areas (few or poor-quality schools in remote rural regions); the cost of superior private services puts them beyond the reach of the poor. Hence the state must step in to provide basic facilities (NCERT §4.4, pp. 64–65). **Ambedkar** held that a just society dissolves the ascending sense of reverence and descending sense of contempt (p. 63); **J. S. Mill** held that justice is what some individual can claim as his moral right (p. 65) — both anchoring a substantive, not merely procedural, conception of justice.

2.2 Definitions to memorise

Term	Definition	Page
Justice	Giving each person his/her due; concerns well-being of all and how social goods and duties are distributed.	53, 55
Dharma	Ancient Indian conception of justice — a just social order whose maintenance was the primary duty of kings.	54
Confucian view	Kings maintain justice by punishing wrong-doers and rewarding the virtuous.	54
Glaucon's challenge	Argument in The Republic that the unjust often seem better off than the just.	54
Socrates's reply	If everyone manipulated rules to suit themselves no one could be secure; it is in our long-term interest to be just.	54
Kant's contribution	Human beings possess dignity; what is due to each is the opportunity to develop talents and pursue chosen goals.	55
Equal treatment for equals	All humans share common characteristics and deserve equal rights and equal treatment; no discrimination by caste, class, race, gender.	55–56

Term	Definition	Page
Civil rights	Right to life, liberty, property — one basket of equal-treatment rights in liberal democracies.	55
Political rights	Right to vote, political participation.	55
Social rights	Equal opportunities for education, livelihood and similar conditions.	55
Equal pay for equal work	Standard application of equal treatment for equals.	56
Proportionate justice	Rewarding people in proportion to scale/quality of effort, skill and risk.	56
Recognition of special needs	Distributing rewards/duties with regard to disability, age, deprivation; extends (does not contradict) equal treatment.	56–57
Just distribution	Distribution of goods/services/opportunities so all enjoy basic equality of life conditions.	58–59
Land reforms	State-government measures cited as redistributive justice in India.	59
Reservations (SC/ST)	India's main application of the special-needs principle in jobs and education.	58
Veil of ignorance (Rawls)	Imagining oneself choosing the rules of society without knowing one's future caste, class, gender or privilege.	59–60
Worst-off perspective	Under the veil, rational self-interest leads to support for rules that protect the weakest.	60
Rational not moral	Rawls's claim that fair distribution arises from rational behaviour, not benevolence or self-sacrifice.	60–61
Basic minimum conditions	Nourishment, housing, clean drinking water, education and a minimum wage.	62–63
Free market	System where individuals freely own property, contract and compete on prices/wages/profits with minimal state interference.	63
State intervention	Provision of basic facilities by the state where markets fail the deprived.	64–65
Ambedkar on justice	A just society dissolves the ascending sense of reverence and descending sense of contempt.	63
Mill on justice	Justice is what some individual can claim from us as his moral right.	65

2.3 Diagrams / processes to remember

Several visual and textual devices routinely appear in CUET stems. The **blindfolded statue of Justice** on p. 58 is presented through a small dialogue-cartoon that asks

how Lady Justice, who must be blindfolded to remain impartial, can simultaneously "see" the special needs of people — an image of the tension between equal treatment and recognition of special needs. The **Glaucon margin quotation** on p. 54 ("Men do not agree to laws because they are good, but because they are not strong enough to do injustice with impunity") is a recurring attribution stem. The **Ambedkar quote box** on p. 63 — "A just society is that society in which ascending sense of reverence and descending sense of contempt is dissolved into the creation of a compassionate society" — and the **J. S. Mill quote box** on p. 65 — "Justice implies something which it is not only right to do and wrong not to do; but which some individual person can claim from us as his moral right" — are the two attribution stems most frequently quarried in MCQs.

The **"Let's Think" box** on p. 57 is a goldmine of match-the-following content. It lists five examples that map cleanly onto the three principles: extra time for a visually impaired student (special needs), extra time for a student with a limp (special needs), grace marks for academically weak students (special needs), different question papers for different capabilities (special needs / proportionate), and 33% reservation for women in Parliament (special needs / just distribution). The standard process line is therefore: **Equal Treatment for Equals** → **Proportionate Justice** → **Recognition of Special Needs** → **Just Distribution** → **Basic Minimum Conditions** → **Free Market vs. State Intervention**. Memorise the standard exemplar for each: equal pay for equal work for the first, risk pay for miners/policemen/divers for the second, extra exam time for the visually impaired for the third, land reforms and abolition of untouchability for the fourth, nourishment + housing + drinking water + education + minimum wage for the fifth.

2.5 Key Articles / Treaties / Events

Reference	Source / Subject	NCERT cite
Dharma	Ancient Indian basis of justice; kings' primary duty	p. 54
Plato, <i>The Republic</i> (4th c. B.C., Athens)	Socrates–Glaucon–Adeimantus dialogue on justice	p. 54
Confucius (China)	Justice = punishing wrong-doers and rewarding the virtuous	p. 54
Immanuel Kant	Human dignity as the basis for what is "due"	p. 55
John Rawls	Veil of ignorance and the worst-off principle	pp. 59–62
Ambedkar quote	Dissolution of ascending reverence and descending contempt	p. 63
J. S. Mill quote	Justice as what one can claim as moral right	p. 65
	Cited as redistributive justice	p. 58

Reference	Source / Subject	NCERT cite
Indian Constitution — Abolition of Untouchability		
Land reforms in Indian states	Redistribution of resources cited as social justice	p. 59
Reservations for SC/ST	India's main affirmative-action instrument under the special-needs principle	p. 58
33% reservation for women in Parliament	Cited in "Let's Think" box as a special-needs application	p. 57
Civil / political / social rights	Three baskets of equal-treatment rights in liberal democracies	p. 55
Glaucon's challenge	Margin extract from The Republic	p. 54
Doctor analogy (Socrates)	Just rulers must care about people like doctors care for patients	pp. 54–55
Free market vs. state intervention	Concluding debate on social justice	pp. 63–65

2.4 Common confusions / NTA trap points

1. **Plato vs Socrates** — it is **Plato** who wrote *The Republic*; the dialogue is **between Socrates and Glaucon/Adeimantus** (p. 54). NTA may flip authorship.
2. **Veil of ignorance** is ignorance of **one's own future position** in society — not ignorance of moral facts. It produces fairness through **rational self-interest**, NOT benevolence or moral self-sacrifice (pp. 59–61).
3. **Special needs principle extends, not contradicts**, the equal-treatment principle (p. 56). Trap options frame it as a conflict.
4. **Equal treatment for equals does NOT mean identical outcomes** — it forbids discrimination based on caste/class/race/gender, but allows different rewards for different work (proportionate justice) (pp. 55–56).
5. **Kant's contribution is human dignity** as the basis for what is "due" — not the three principles, not the veil of ignorance (p. 55).
6. **Rawls is American (modern)**, not ancient or German; the "veil of ignorance" is HIS device (pp. 59–60).
7. **Confucius is associated with China**, not Greece (p. 54); ancient Indian justice is **dharma**, not "duty" generally.
8. **Free-market supporters today mostly accept SOME state regulation** (basic minimum, helping old/sick) (pp. 63–64). NCERT does not present them as defenders of completely unregulated markets.

9. **Constitutional abolition of untouchability and reservations for SC/ST** are cited as redistributive justice and special-needs examples (p. 58).
10. **Glaucon and Adeimantus** (not Cephalus, not Polemarchus) are Socrates's interlocutors in this chapter's **Republic** extract (p. 54).
11. **"Equal pay for equal work"** is the standard example of equal treatment for equals (p. 56); **risk pay for miners** is the standard example of proportionate justice (p. 56); **extra exam time for the visually impaired** is the standard example of recognition of special needs (p. 57).
12. **Rawls expects rational behaviour, not morality** — option traps will say Rawls demands self-sacrifice (FALSE) (p. 60).

Practice MCQs

PYQ Alignment

CUET (UG) Political Science papers have repeatedly tested this chapter for the three principles of justice (especially "recognition of special needs" vs. "equal treatment for equals"), Rawls' veil of ignorance, and the free-market-vs-state-intervention debate. Expect a mix of direct recall (Plato, Kant, Rawls), statement-based questions on the three principles, and one assertion-reason or match-the-following item built around examples like reservations, land reforms or extra exam time for differently-abled students. The Ambedkar (p. 63) and Mill (p. 65) attribution stems and the Glaucon-Socrates dialogue (p. 54) are recurring anchors. For full chapter-wise PYQ mapping see [/pyq/political-science](#).