



**Understanding John Rawls: Justice as Fairness
(excerpt)**
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Author's Notes

This guide explains Rawls's concept of 'justice as fairness'. It covers such topics as the two principles of justice, the principle of fairness, and the difference principle, as well as examining some of the criticisms levelled at Rawls's arguments. Look out for other Reluctant Geek guides including *Jürgen Habermas and Deliberative Democracy*, *John Rawls and Deliberative Democracy*, *John Dryzek and Deliberative Democracy*, *Deliberative Democracy Basics*, *Ricoeur's Hermeneutic Arc and the Internet*, and *The Propaganda Model and the Internet*. All of which are available through Amazon, The iBookstore, Smashwords, and all good ebooks vendors.

Cover Image: Scales of Justice by John Sullivan.

Chapter 1

New Chapter

The release of John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* marked a turning point in the history of practical philosophy, bringing to the fore moral questions about equality and justice in modern democratic societies (Habermas, 1998, p. 49). A central tenet of Rawls's arguments in *A Theory of Justice* was his concept of 'justice as fairness', which he formulates in order to establish a moral and ethical foundation for the distribution of the products and benefits of a cooperative society. This guide will explain how Rawls uses a critique of utilitarianism to arrive at his the two principles of justice and the principle of fairness that make up the central tenets of 'justice as fairness', as well as some of the criticisms levelled against his arguments.

Philosophers, theorists, and commentators from all over the world, representing a range of ideological standpoints, hailed Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* as a milestone in modern philosophy when it was first released. German sociologist and philosopher Jürgen Habermas said Rawls 'restored long suppressed moral questions to the status of serious objects of philosophical investigation' (Habermas, 1998, p. 49). Herbert Hart, an English political theorist and barrister, said that Rawls's text stirred his thoughts on the subject of justice more deeply than any other work (Hart, 1975, p. 230). Central to Rawls's arguments in *A Theory of Justice* was his concept of 'justice as fairness', which was his answer to the weaknesses he saw in the concept of justice derived through classic utilitarian ethical thought (Rawls, 1999, p. 13). He begins his arguments by showing that a concept of justice that equitably distributes the products of a cooperative society to the participants in the cooperation is necessary.

In formulating his concept of justice, Rawls is concerned with the way that social institutions divide the 'spoils' of a co-operative society,

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. Then, although a society is a cooperative venture for mutual advantage, it is typically marked by a conflict as well as by an identity of interests. There is an identity of interests since social cooperation makes possible a better life for all than any would have if each were to live solely by his own efforts. There is a conflict of interest since persons are not indifferent as to how the greater benefits produced by their collaboration are distributed, for in order to pursue their ends, they each prefer a larger to a lesser share (Rawls, 1999, p. 3).

In cooperative societies, all collaborators want to share in the benefits of their efforts. Rawls argues that these societies face a problem in just how to justly distribute those benefits, because each individual collaborator wants to maximize his or her share (1999, p. 6). He tries to solve this problem by formulating a definition of justice that adequately and fairly distributes resources to those who are involved in the creation of the resources by taking into account their role in the collaboration. The first step in formulating his answer is a critique of classic utilitarianism (1999, p. 3) and the, according to Rawls, inadequate concept of justice that it provides.

Rawls has two main objections to a conception of justice derived through classic utilitarian ethics. First, he argues that bias, bigotry, or discrimination can be ethical if viewed from a utilitarian perspective as long as they promote the greater good. He illustrates his argument by using slavery, where one individual's needs and desires are totally subordinate to the needs and desires of another, as an example,

[classic utilitarianism] permits one to argue... that slavery is unjust on the grounds that the advantages to the slaveholder as slaveholder do not counterbalance the disadvantages to the slave and to society at large burdened by a comparatively inefficient system of labor (Rawls, 1967, p. 152).

By highlighting the fact that classic utilitarianism allows a debate to take place on the concept of slavery, Rawls demonstrates a fundamental flaw in utilitarian rationality. He argues that a debate about the ethical dimensions of slavery should be unnecessary and irrelevant because rational beings would never willingly enter into such a contract. He continues his argument by showing that not only can classical utilitarianism cannot wholly discount slavery as unethical, but also justify its use.

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From the same author on Feedbacks

Deliberative Democracy Basics (sample) (2010)

This guide covers the basics of deliberative democracy by canvassing a spectrum of theories on the subject. It explains what is unique about deliberative theories of democracy, what they all have in common, as well as how they differ. An excellent introduction to an emerging stream of democratic theory.

Understanding Essay Writing: A Guide to Writing Essays by Someone Who Grades Them (Sample) (2010)

An informative guide on how to write a good essay (written by someone who has graded a heck of a lot of them), it contains essay writing strategies, helpful tips, and a step-by-step process guide. Learn how to get the highest grade possible for your work and avoid the mistakes that so many students make.

Jurgen Habermas and Deliberative Democracy (sample) (2010)

Jurgen Habermas is one of the most influential thinkers of our time. This easy to understand guide summarises his theory of deliberative democracy and covers many of the central concepts such as communicative reason, communicative power, and the ideal speech community. A must for students of Habermas and those with an interest in contemporary democratic thought.

John Rawls and Deliberative Democracy (sample) (2010)

This guide is a clearly written, in-depth analysis of John Rawls' deliberative democracy theory. Covering such important concepts as the idea of public reason and the politicised public sphere, it is an invaluable guide for students of political science or for anyone has an interest in current democratic thought.

John Dryzek and Deliberative Democracy (sample) (2010)

John Dryzek uses a radical definition of citizenship to outline a transnational public sphere where politics occurs at one remove from the institutions of government. This concise, clearly written guide examines Dryzek's arguments including key concepts such as the de-traditionalisation of societies through globalisation, and the transnational public sphere.

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This guide examines Kant's theory of knowledge, specifically his arguments for separating human thought into concepts and intuitions. Based on the Critique of Pure Reason, this guide covers his critique of empirical and rational thought, and explains key concepts such as a priori judgements, analytic and synthetic judgements, and the difference between pure and empirical concepts.

Understanding Descartes: I am, I exist (2011)

In Meditations on First Philosophy, René Descartes uses rational thought to argue that his essence exists in his thoughts alone. He reasons that the mind and body are distinct and separable, and that the mind, as the originator of thought, is what defines the person. This guide will outline the reasoning Descartes' uses in establishing his theory of knowledge that he argues is necessary to form a 'proper foundation' for the sciences and move it away from the medieval systems that were the prevailing orthodoxies of the time.

Understanding Freud: The Unconscious Mind (2011)

A concise guide to Freud's theory of the unconscious mind as outlined in his Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis. Topics covered include the role the unconscious plays in 'parapraxes', the dream-works, neurotic diseases and symptoms, and it's central part in psychoanalysis.

Accounting Fundamentals: Financial Statements and the Accounting Equation (Sample) (2011)

This study guide covers the fundamental accounting concepts that form the foundations of the discipline. Using easy to understand language, it deals with basic assumptions, the role and structure of financial statements, and the relationship between assets, liabilities and owner's equity in the accounting equation.

Accounting Fundamentals: The General Journal and the Ledger (sample) (2011)

This study guide explains the roles played by the General Journal and the Ledger in the accounting recording process. Using easy to understand language, it deals with journalizing transactions, posting to the ledger, and the preparation of a trial balance.

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There are several reasons why an account may need adjustment - to correct an error, for example, or to update a balance before preparing financial reports. However, the nature of accounting requires that every adjustment must be transparent, verifiable, and justifiable. In other words, anyone looking through the accounts should be able to easily identify an adjustment to an account and understand why it was necessary. This guide explains when it is permissible to adjust an account, and how to make that adjustment. It explains the time period assumption, the accrual basis of accounting, as well as the procedure used to 'close the books' at the end of an accounting period.

Accounting Fundamentals: Inventories and Retail Operations (Sample) (2012)

Retail operations and the accounting tools used to deal with them are the focus of this essay-length study guide. Arranged in three sections - inventory control methods, accounting for retail operations, and cost flow methods - it explains and demonstrates a range of concepts including perpetual and periodic inventory systems, FIFO and LIFO inventory costing methods, and gross profit.

Virtually Real (Chapter 1) (2012)

Otto was having trouble relating to people, which is why the virtual world of Sword of Valour was so appealing. Here was a world where excitement replaced tedium, where you could kill

annoying individuals, and where the level cap kept you from growing old. It seemed like virtual heaven. Sadly, it wasn't. In *Sword of Valour*, you could be whoever you wanted to be. What was puzzling was that everyone seemed to be exactly the same as they were in the real world. The same hang ups, the same egos, the same bloody mindedness. The only real difference, as far as Otto could tell, was that if you killed someone, instead of rotting, he or she complained. It was enough to make a conservative young man unsheathe the virtual daggers and go rogue. A tale about who we think we are, who everybody else thinks we are, who we really are, and who we wish we were.

Love Lust and Petty Crime (Chapters 1 and 2) (2012)

Emmet Storch was an unemployed sponger who thought he had no calling in life. All that changed when he landed a job in the call centre at the monolithic Star Insurance where, from the very first day, he was magnificent. It was as if the very essence of insurance ran through his veins and he and his telephone were as one.irate policyholders found comfort in his soothing words; recalcitrant contractors became polite and respectful.

It would have been perfect if not for his lecherous and treacherous hormones.

A humorous look at love and lust in the iAge where consumerism runs rampant and integrity can go and get stuffed.



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