

Ethics and Social Justice

General Instructions:

- ☐ Answers of each part P1/P2/P3 shall not exceed 500 words.
- ☐ Answers of T1/T2 shall not exceed 800 words.
- ☐ Students are also required describe the background work in the report.
- ☐ If you disagree with any implicit assumptions in the question, please state your point of view explicitly. You'd receive extra marks for pointing out problems/objections around the questions.
- ☐ There may be no correct/wrong answers.
- ☐ No woo-woo! Please use words within proper context.

Selection Criterion:

Language: Usage of words/phrases/jargon within appropriate context.

Rigor: Are the arguments properly defined/explained?

Perspectives: alternative ways of looking at the ideas, from different stakeholders' p.o.v.

Creative Problem Solving: Novel problems/solutions/questions/answers/thought-process

P1- Social/Economic Equality

Q1 What do you think of this assumption- "All humans are born biologically equal, with a certain potential". Do you agree with this assumption? Do you think a physically handicapped person has less potential or a special person has less potential? Does every human being have equal biological potential?

Q2 There are two arguments to support the above mentioned assumption. The first argument is an ethical argument- that humans are born with a certain potential to achieve a certain aim, so why would you want to shunt them down and not let them achieve that goal. The second argument is a utilitarian argument- if you predetermine the people who get access to opportunities, you do not know who is more likely to succeed, you can never know the guys who would go on to do great things. Do you agree with these arguments?

Q3 If people are born biologically equal, why are many of them still struggling to get the basic necessities of life? Is it their fault or the system's fault, are they not working hard enough or do they not have opportunities? If people are born with equal potential, can social inequalities or inheritance(inheriting their parents' wealth) lead to socio-economic inequality?

Q4 There are two notions of equality- one where you talk of the outcome (that everyone should get equal access to resources) and one where you talk of opportunities (that every should get equal opportunities). Why do you think the former is called stronger or extreme equality? Which notion would you agree with, if at all you do?

Q5 Purity vs Equality argument: Do you think all races and all humans are equal or would some races be purer than the others? What do you think of the idea of a few races not being allowed to interact with the other races? In the United States, there was this Eugenics movement, where people of lower IQ were not allowed to mingle with people of higher IQ, what do you think of this?

P2- Social Justice

Q1 Why do socio-economic inequalities arise? Should we work towards bridging those inequalities? Who are the stakeholders who can play a role in this process? What are the political and legal processes to reduce these inequalities?

Q2 Rawls' thought experiment called- "the veil of ignorance". Rawls asks you to imagine that you were womb still to take birth and you'd be taking birth in a family, at random, through a lottery. You are not sure if you'd be born to a poor black American family or a poor and weak Somalian family. Would you agree with the rules of the game? Does this experiment want you to ask for good schools, hospitals, fair access to law and decent housing for everyone?

Q3 John Rawl's theory of Justice

"First: each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others." The basic liberties of citizens are the political liberty to vote and run for office, **freedom of speech** and assembly, liberty of conscience, freedom of personal property and freedom from arbitrary arrest. However, it is a matter of some debate whether **freedom of contract** (people can form contracts amongst themselves, without involving the government) can be inferred to be included among these basic liberties.

Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that (Rawls, 1971, p. 302; revised edition, p. 53):

(a) they are to be of the greatest benefit to the least-advantaged members of society, consistent with the just savings principle. (*the difference principle*)

(b) offices and positions must be open to everyone under conditions of *fair equality of opportunity*

Do you agree with these three rules? Would you have alternative perspectives?

Q4 Amartya Sen critiqued this theory saying that institutional fairness doesn't ensure necessarily ensure social justice. Can you have good institutions failing to ensure social justice? Amartya Sen stresses on fairness, objectivity, equality of opportunity, removal of poverty, and freedom. Sen believes Rawls understates the difficulty in getting everyone in society to adhere to the norms of a just society. He also claims that Rawls' position that there be only one possible outcome of the reflective equilibrium behind the veil of ignorance is misguided. Sen believes that multiple conflicting but just principles may arise and that this undermines the multi-step processes that Rawls laid out as leading to a perfectly just society.

What do you think of this criticism?

Q5 How would you define Social Justice? Would you look at the policy or the outcomes? Would you look at building good institutions to ensure Social Justice or would you focus on getting the society to "adhere to the norms of a just society"?

P3- Merit or Privilege

Q1- Role of chance: How would you like to look at the role of chance in deciding somebody's future. Can somebody's professional and personal success depend on the family he/she is born into? Does somebody's life-expectancy depend on chance? Can we do something to mitigate the role of chance or is it beyond human control?

Classroom Context- A group of friends are going on an adventure trip. One of the five friends would get more thirsty than the others and can't carry so much water. Should the group leave it to chance, that the boy is not physically fit or can they solve the problem collectively and manage to take him for the adventure trip? Would the boy be a burden to the group? What if you were the boy in question?

Q2- Herbert Spencer had come up with the phrase "survival of the fittest", after reading Darwin's "On the Origin of Species". This was eventually called Social Darwinism- with Darwin's Theory of Evolution being applied to human society. Social Darwinists argued that welfare asylums were actually allowing "inferior/weaker" races to survive and propagate faster than "superior" races and if nothing is done, society would be filled with "inferiors". This eventually led to Reformer Darwinism movement, with US Constitution being changed accordingly. The Eugenics used Darwin's theory to justify racial superiority by claiming that "Anglo-Saxons" were a superior race. Biologists later showed that humans are different from animals and that both biology and environment influence a human being. Do you think it is possible to argue that a few people are purer or better than the others? Would those argument help in building a good human society?

Classroom Context: A coaching institute proves that some students are intellectually stronger compared to the others and gives better teachers to a few. Later on, a research institution proves that their arguments hold no water and that you can't predict the intelligence levels of students. In between this whole story, how do you think the students would have been affected? Is it alright to consider a few students to be superior to the others?

Q3- Would it make sense to predetermine capabilities and provide education accordingly? What if person A gets a course X and can't complete it due to his/her inability to understand, would it have been better to have person B take it instead? Do you think one can predict this before-hand? What are the pro/cons of determining a profession at birth? Do you think a person's profession can or should be biologically determined?

Classroom Context example: The school has to select a student to undergo a month long programming workshop and eventually represent the school at an international programming competition. Should the school give some time, say 2-3months, for students to work on some problems and prove their interest levels/competency or should the teachers decide the students based on classroom performance? Can the capability of the student be decided even before he/she starts to learn problem solving/programming? Would it save time and help the school in preparing the selected student even before the workshop starts or should the school give time for students to prove themselves?

Q4- John Rawls had critiqued the Great American Dream- that people can succeed in life, though hard-work, irrespective of their socio-economic background. He says that the number of rags to riches stories are too few. Do you agree with the argument? Does the system provide opportunities to everyone, if yes, how would you explain the wealth inequalities, life-expectancy differences and the fact that very few socio-economically disadvantaged people have done financially well?

Classroom Context: A teacher promises the students that the best project would be selected, to represent the school during the annual day. However, 90% of the projects selected, over the last ten years, were prepared by the students who typically score top-5 ranks in the class. Would it be the flaw of the system or the students? Did the students prepare bad projects or was the selection procedure biased against the academically weaker students?

Q5 Would competition or notion of merit in conventional sense help in solving the socio-economic inequalities and in ensuring social-economic justice? Is competition fair, between a student coming in from a bad socio-economic background, who would have been discriminated against, all through his/her childhood and a student hailing from a family which enjoys not only access to resources but also respect in the society? Can the conventional notion of merit imply privilege to a few?

Classroom Context: You have fifteen players in your soccer team. Ten of them cannot run. You devise a selection procedure around running abilities- stamina and speed. Would this help in selecting the best players who'd be placed in important positions? But would this leave behind the other players? Are the other players slow due to lack of effort or could there be other reasons? If a few players get access to all the opportunities, how would that affect the overall strength of the soccer team? If everyone gets access to opportunities, would that not hurt the good players? What should the coach or the captain do?

Synthesis Themes

Theme1: Your ideas for inclusive development. How can you make sure that everyone develops while the country/economy develops. For instance, if the tribal lands are acquired for development, how would you ensure that the tribals' livelihood isn't affected? Why does development usually clash with human development? How do we balance that? What can you do about it and what can the government do about it?

Theme2: Your ideas for ensuring Social Justice. What can you do about it, to ensure everyone gets equal access to opportunities and to ensure that discrimination ends? How can we build systems to ensure Social Justice, to bring all the Indian citizens on an equal platform, to realize their potential? What is your role in this process and what is the role of the government?