

## Analysis of Rawls' Concept of Basic Good

Xiangqian Pang\*

School of Government, Liaoning Normal University, Dalian 116029, China

\*819184526@qq.com

### Abstract

**Rawls is one of the famous contemporary western political philosophers, and his theory of justice has influenced the development path of the world political philosophy with its profound theoretical connotation. His concept of basic good is the most important part of the theory of justice, which holds an important position in Rawls' theory of justice. In this paper, we firstly understand the basic connotation of Rawls' basic good, secondly analyze the fuction and practical significance of the basic good briefly, and finally summarize and dialectically reflection the basic good.**

### Keywords

**Rawls's Basic Good; Fuction; Practical Significance.**

### 1. Introduction

"Justice and good" is a common concern in contemporary political science, and Rawls is a representative of the liberal school, which believes that justice has priority over the good. He believed that the good is classified into the general good and the social good. The concept of good is defined according to the role it plays in human life. The general good refers to emotional perceptions such as passion, love, and compassion. The basic good, on the other hand, is that which is assumed to be needed by a rational person no matter what else he wants, is universally favored by mankind, and therefore justice has priority over the good. The basic good is the premise of Rawls' theoretical and logical framework for reasoning about the principle of justice, so understanding the basic good is the key to grasp Rawls' theory of justice.

### 2. The General Implication of Basic Good

In explaining the theory of justice, Rawls assumes a logical premise, the veil of ignorance, in the original state, people do not know who they are, their birth background, and their information, which ensures that people are on an equal footing. However, when this curtain of ignorance is opened, in the real world, people cannot ensure that they will be benefited in a just and fair way, and they prefer the principle of equality and freedom and expect a more equal distribution, not based on power or birth. This equal distribution is not egalitarian, but within reasonable limits of differences in income distribution, limits that both belong to the disadvantaged and are permissible. In this unfavorable situation, it is still possible to guarantee the disadvantaged people the opportunity to change their status.

In his theory of justice, Rawls describes his general view of justice as "all social values---- of freedom and opportunity, income and wealth, and the foundations of self-respect ---- should be equally distributed, unless all or any of them are unequally distributed in favor of everyone" [1]. Rawls' principle of justice is applied to the social structure, and the social structure is applied to the distribution of social values, which Rawls called the values distributed by the social structure the "basic good". He believed that the basic good consisted of rights and freedoms, power and opportunity, income and wealth, and self-respect. These basic good corresponded to his principles of justice. Among them, power and freedom correspond to the principle of

equal freedom, power and opportunity correspond to the principle of difference, and income and wealth correspond to the principle of fair equality of opportunity[1].

The concept of basic good expressed by Rawls consists of two elements: one is desire and the other is rationality. Briefly, Rawls' main idea is that the good is the satisfaction of reasonable desires. Desire is the nature of animals, so people's desires for rights, freedom, wealth, and self-esteem are basic psychological motivations that are reasonable. Just as Rawls argues that reasonable motives take precedence over justice, people pursue the basic good, and justice is all assigned under the premise of the veil of ignorance. Rawls also believes that desires possess orderliness, that is, rights and liberties take priority over power and opportunity, and power and opportunity take priority over income and wealth. The basic good has a social character. From the basic good itself, the basic good is a social value assigned by the social structure and necessarily belongs to the society. Health endowments are innate properties of individuals, and such goodnesses belong to nature, while rights and freedoms are established by social decisions and belong to society. People want to have enough basic good, but they cannot explain freedom and self-respect, so it is enough to ensure it[3].

### 3. The Function of Basic Good

The basic good occupies an important place in the theory of justice, and it also provides the basis for people to choose justice under the veil of ignorance. In Rawls' theory of justice, we can conclude that the principle of basic good plays two roles: one is to provide a criterion for distinguishing the most disadvantaged; the other is to provide the motivation for people in the original state to make a reasonable choice.

The first function is criteria for measurement. The most important premise in the theory of justice is to distinguish the most disadvantaged, and it is the most complex, and to implement the principle of difference in the principle of justice requires distinguishing the most disadvantaged. In order to avoid utilitarianism, he refuses to use precise calculation, so he distinguishes the most disadvantaged by the "expectation of the basic good" [2], that is, when the basic needs are satisfied, the people who pursue the higher level of needs expectation, and those who are below the expectation level are the most disadvantaged.

Among the three sequential combinations of basic good: rights and freedom, power and opportunity, and income and wealth. To a large extent, with power and opportunity, one has income and wealth. The group with the least income and wealth is the least advantaged group. Rawls uses two methods to identify the least advantaged, one is based on social status, that is, the average income and wealth of people at the bottom of the measure, below this standard is the least advantaged; the other is based on the consideration of income and wealth only, so that people who do not reach the middle income and wealth is called the least advantaged. Rawls believes that either method of determining the most disadvantaged is feasible, which also reflects a certain arbitrariness[4].

The another one function is motivation of choice. Rawls assumed a psychology of choice in the original state. In the principle of justice, another function of basic good is motivation. Rawls' theory of justice belongs to contract theory, in which people agree with each other to meet their own needs and keep certain agreements together. In the original state, information may be ignored, and it is crucial to make a reasonable choice in order to achieve a specific goal. The basic good is generally accepted by people and provides them with motivation, so the basic good provides psychological motivation for people in the original state to choose the principle of justice.

Rawls believed that the basic good is neutral, so it can be used as a motive. In the real world, people adopt different ways to achieve different goals, and different lives will adopt different goods. Under the assumption of the veil of ignorance, people do not know what good they will

be assigned and whether their choices are reasonable[5]. Each person's life plan is unique, and the good required is also unique, but the basic good is universal and common, no matter what goal people pursue, the basic good is necessary. Rawls replaces the individual good with the basic good and excludes all special good, so he is universal and neutral. In addition, whatever the particular plan of life is, Rawls believes that the basic good is common to all people, so the basic good is fair to all people.

#### 4. Practical Significance of Basic Good

Rawls' two principles of justice, the first of which is the principle of equal liberty, in which everyone should have an equal right to the broadest system of equal basic liberties compatible with the system of similar liberties possessed by others. The second principle: the principle of difference, that social and economic inequalities should be so arranged that they are (1) reasonably expected to suit the interests of each individual; and (2) open to all by virtue of status and position. These two principles of justice concern the existence of distributive inequalities, which are reasonably permissible as long as they benefit the least advantaged as well[6]. This is clearly an analysis of the principle of justice from the capitalist's standpoint, and does not consider the root causes of inequality, so that the benefits and drawbacks are analyzed specifically in our specific practice.

Although Rawls' theory of justice has some flaws, certain concepts have positive significance. Among them, the "principle of difference" in the two principles of justice has a positive effect on building a harmonious society, advocating fairness and justice, and realizing socialist justice in China. To achieve social justice, we need a robust material foundation, and we must vigorously develop the productive forces. To meet people's growing material and cultural needs, we must pursue and realize relative fairness and justice in the process of satisfying people's needs, and the key to realizing socialist justice is to grasp the fairness and equality of distribution.

China's historical experience proves that to achieve equality in distribution, we cannot conduct egalitarianism. After the reform and opening up, China has implemented the ownership system with public ownership as the main body and multiple ownership systems co-existing to adjust the distribution system. The distribution system of the integrated role of multiple ownership system is inevitably a certain degree of inequality, and under the national policy of bringing the rich first and the rich later, some of the factors of production were allocated to the coastal areas in priority, resulting in a certain degree of distribution inequality. With the progress of China's economy, the adjustment of the development mode, the improvement of the policy increase advocates secondary distribution, aimed at eliminating the gap between the rich and the poor, to a certain extent to alleviate the contradiction, but in essence still did not completely solve the problem, the gap between the rich and the poor still exists. Rawls advocates that the disadvantaged profit and improve their social status. China's disadvantaged are mostly people in remote areas with limited development. To improve their status and benefit, we need to develop more scientific policies to allocate social value according to local conditions and policy support for reasonable construction.

#### 5. Conclusion

In exploring the question of the basic good, Rawls distinguishes between the good and the essential good, showing that the good is a benefit, advantage, or advantage; it is something that we seek or wish to have. And that some good, the basic good, is so important that our lives would be the same without them. It also illustrates the social nature of the basic good, which requires a social system to regulate distribution.

Rawls proposed the concept of the basic good and received numerous questions from western political philosophers. Although Rawls continuously improved his basic good concept, Rawls' basic good concept always revolves around the western political philosophical discourse system and it is a theory growing out of the western historical and cultural tradition. Therefore, in the process of building socialist modernization with Chinese characteristics by drawing on the basic good concept, one should uphold a dialectical materialist viewpoint for reflection.

Rawls' basic good concept, which proposes the priority of rights over the orderliness of power, however it is deficient in the approach to the scope of rights and the response to individual rights. First of all, Rawls considers the scope of rights as the rights of freedom. But individual rights do not only refer to freedom, for example, our constitution stipulates that citizens are equal before the law and any citizen enjoys the rights granted by the constitution and the law, including political rights, the right to freedom, the right to equality, the right to freedom of religion, and so on. Secondly, Rawls' theory of justice is based on the critique of utilitarianism. He denies the utilitarians' "achieving the greatest good for the greatest number" and advocates "the greatest good for the least". The basic rights and interests of the disadvantaged groups are safeguarded, while it will easily lead to the tendency of egalitarianism and even harm the improvement of efficiency to a certain extent, so in the process of modernization in China, we should pay more attention to the relationship between efficiency and equity.

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