

## PSIR Power 50 – Day 4 Capsule: Equality + Practice Qs

Here, I give you the summarised version of everything that I taught you in this topic in PSIR Optional Foundation classes. If you are not able to recall the scholar or concept, then go back to class notes and handouts. UPSC has asked **4 ten-mark questions, 5 fifteen-mark questions, and no twenty-mark questions** from this topic in last 12 years.

### 1. Classical roots of the equality idea

- **Aristotle** ( *Politics* ): separates **natural** from **conventional** inequality.
- **John Locke** ( *Two Treatises* ): natural rights rest on the *inherent equality* of persons.
- **Jean-Jacques Rousseau** ( *Social Contract* ): the **general will** presumes civic equality.
- **Alexis de Tocqueville**: equality deepens as *modernity's master trend*; it is a “modern idea.”

### 2. Liberal → Socialist → Positive-liberal line-up

Conception	Devices	Critique
<b>Classical / Negative Liberalism</b>	<i>Equality before law &amp; equality of opportunity</i>	<b>Marxists</b> call this <i>formal / procedural</i> .
<b>Socialist / Marxist</b>	Socio-economic leveling; class abolition	Dismiss liberal equality as <i>hollow without material parity</i> .
<b>Positive Liberals / Welfare Liberals</b>	<b>Affirmative action</b> , positive discrimination, social rights	Aim to build the <i>level playing field</i> socialists demand.

### 3 Liberal-egalitarian debate inside Rawls–Dworkin–Nozick triangle

Thinker	Key Principle(s)	Equality payoff
<b>John Rawls</b>	<i>Opportunity Principle + Difference Principle</i> – inequalities fine <b>only</b> if they benefit the <b>least advantaged</b>	<i>Welfare-egalitarian</i> , “justice as fairness”
<b>Ronald Dworkin</b>	<i>Resource / luck egalitarianism</i> – auction equal resources; offset <b>brute luck</b> ; leave <b>ambition</b> to individuals	Distinguishes <i>choice</i> vs <i>circumstance</i>
<b>Robert Nozick</b>	<i>Entitlement theory</i> : historical holdings trump patterns; no perpetual compensation for past wrongs	Warns against coercive redistribution
<b>Dworkin's reply</b>	People <i>not</i> responsible for the circumstances shaping their choices; insurance-market thought-experiment offsets brute luck	

### 4. Beyond welfare & resources: Amartya Sen's Capability Approach

- Shifts metric from *means* to *ends* : **capabilities** (range of doings) > mere goods.
- Equality = equalizing **capabilities**; development = freedom expansion, not GDP alone.
- Captures **external** (social) & **internal** (health, emotion) deprivations; poverty = capability deficit.

### 5. Michael Walzer's Complex Equality ( *Spheres of Justice* , 1983)

- **Plural goods, plural rules**: each sphere (money, office, education...) has its own distributive logic.

- **Blocked exchanges** stop dominance spill-overs (wealth → power, status → school seats).
- Guards against tyranny and respects cultural meaning of goods.
- **Critiques:** cumulative hierarchies (e.g., caste), feasibility of blocking, lingering intra-sphere gaps.
- Nonetheless prized by multiculturalists and communitarians for context-sensitive justice.

## 6. Liberty ↔ Equality — four angles

	Libertarian View	Modern-liberal / Social-democratic View
<b>Definition</b>	Liberty = <i>absence of restraint</i> ( <b>Smith, Spencer, Nozick</b> ); equality = literal sameness → seen as <b>opposed</b>	Liberty & equality <i>mutually reinforce</i> ; each needs limits ( <b>J.S. Mill, T.H. Green, Amartya Sen</b> )
<b>Domain</b>	Political liberty prized; socio-economic equality feared	Socio-economic leveling sometimes <b>requires</b> curbs on unfettered market freedom
<b>Purpose</b>	Promote individual choice; laissez-faire capitalism	Promote <i>general welfare</i> ; social democracy blends both (Scandinavian model)
<b>Critiques</b>	<b>Tocqueville, Lord Acton:</b> equality frenzy breeds conformity & stifles freedom	<b>Laski, Macpherson, Tawney:</b> without baseline equality, the weak are <i>unfree</i>

*Bottom line:* reasonable equality is **pre-condition** for meaningful liberty; pure liberty for the privileged can create the “**un-freedom**” of the vulnerable.

## 7. What is Affirmative Action?

- **Targeted, state-backed preference** to dismantle *structural* disadvantage—not every preferential rule qualifies.
- Aims at *equal citizenship participation* by reallocating scarce jobs, seats, credit, skills.

**Contrast:**

	Purpose	Examples
<b>General preferential policy</b>	Political accommodation, ethnic dominance, minority security	Sinhala-only drive (Sri Lanka), <i>Bumiputera</i> policy (Malaysia)
<b>Affirmative action proper</b>	Remedy <i>historic injustice</i> , widen opportunity pools	SC/ST/OBC reservations, US minority recruitment plans

## 8. Weak ↔ Strong Forms of Affirmative Action

- **Soft tools:** outreach, training, skill grants—low political heat.
- **Hard tools:** *quotas / reservations*—guarantee entry; highest controversy but fastest impact.

## 9. Normative Rationale behind Affirmative Action

Principle	Content	Voices
<b>Non-discrimination</b>	End morally arbitrary barriers (race, caste, sex)	<b>14th-Amendment jurists, Article 15(4) framers</b>
<b>Equal opportunity</b>	Build <i>level playing field</i> beyond formal rights	<b>Lyndon B. Johnson:</b> “ <i>You don’t take a person who’s been hobbled... and then say ‘you are free.’</i> ”

<b>Group-disadvantage</b>	Cumulative deprivation demands group remedy (Dalits, STs)	<b>B.R. Ambedkar</b> in CA debates
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### 10. Indian Design – Three Tracks of Affirmative Action

1. **Numerical reservations** – Lok Sabha, assemblies; 15%/7.5% job & education quotas for SC/ST, later OBC (Mandal, 1990).
2. **Targeted benefits** – scholarships, grants, health schemes.
3. **Protective laws** – SC/ST (PoA) Act; anti-atrocity, bonded-labour bans.  
*Compensatory justice* is the moral lodestar; jurisprudence has shifted from “non-discrimination” to **equal outcomes** test (Creamy-layer debate shows calibration).

### 11. Critique Catalogue of Affirmative Action

Objection	Typical Author or Trope
<b>Inter-generational blame</b>	“Why should today’s youth pay?”
<b>Merit dilution / efficiency loss</b>	<b>Milton Friedman</b> , some industry lobbies
<b>Fair-opportunity violated</b>	Libertarian <b>Robert Nozick</b> line
<b>Stigma / paternalism</b>	“Quota hires seen as token”
<b>Victim mentality &amp; dependency</b>	Conservative sociology
<b>Cumulative social fracture</b>	Polarisation, “creamy layer” hogging benefits
<b>Who qualifies?</b>	Endless boundary fights—SC vs OBC, EWS etc.
<b>Outcome vs opportunity</b>	US court preference for the latter; India the former

### Counter-Arguments against the critiques

1. **Present, not past, injustice**—discrimination still active (landlessness, literacy gaps).
2. **Merit is social-coded**—exam scores mirror privilege; efficiency loss unproven.
3. **Rights, not favours**—constitutional promise of inclusion.
4. **Confidence dividend**—mobilisation of Dalits proves empowerment effect outweighs stigma.
5. **Inclusive polity**—blocked opportunities breed unrest; calibrated reservations foster loyalty.
6. **Outcome focus justified in stratified orders**—when exclusion crosses economy, society and politics, *equality of result* is fair yard-stick.

### 13. Reverse Discrimination Debate

- **Critics:** burdens innocents, violates *fair equality*, fuels resentment.
- **Proponents:** necessary “*counter-discrimination*”; without parity, formal liberty is hollow (echo **Rawls & Sen on basic structure & capabilities**).
- **Core tension:** procedural justice vs substantive equity.

### 14. Liberty–Equality Revisited (Tie-in)

- **Tocqueville / Acton:** equality can coerce; liberty guards individuality.
- **Laski, Macpherson, Tawney:** without material floor, liberty is privilege, not right.
- economic equality *conditions* democratic liberty; affirmative action is one instrument.

### Hints for writing the practice questions today

Theme Heading	use these as frameworks when you attempt practice questions
<b>Levelling the Finish Line — Equality of Outcome</b>	<i>Core idea</i> → shift concern from fair starts to where citizens actually land. <b>Rawls's Difference Principle</b> supplies the fullest moral defence: inequalities must raise the floor for the least-advantaged → progressive tax, public services, civic-dignity minimum. <b>Libertarian counter</b> (Nozick, Friedman): end-state levelling invades choice, discourages enterprise. <i>Practical synthesis</i> in modern democracies: mild outcome equalisation + open competition, maintaining a protective floor while leaving scope for talent and risk.
<b>Liberty as the Gateway to Equality</b>	Equality claims presuppose <b>free moral agency</b> (UDHR, Locke). <b>Rawls</b> : basic liberties are equal and lexically first; liberty is <i>already</i> equality-laden. <b>Berlin's warning</b> : curbing domineering freedoms secures others' liberty. Deep material gaps hollow formal freedoms; <b>Amartya Sen</b> links capability expansion to both ideals. <i>Mutuality</i> : liberty enables equality's assertion; equality extends liberty's reach—conflict arises only when each is reduced to caricature (laissez-faire vs forced uniformity).
<b>Economic Floor for Democratic Liberty</b>	<b>Political equality</b> (one person–one vote) and <b>personal liberty</b> operate on terrain shaped by wealth. Large income gaps erode the <i>fair value</i> of liberties ( <b>Rawls</b> ) and shrink real choice ( <b>Sen</b> ). <b>T. H. Marshall</b> : social rights (welfare, education) are the scaffolding for civil & political rights. Indian framers ( <b>Ambedkar</b> ) baked socio-economic democracy into Directive Principles. Conclusion: without a reasonable economic floor, liberty becomes a privilege and citizenship stratifies; moderate economic equality lets both ideals reinforce each other.

#### Scholar Index –

**Adam Smith · Alexis de Tocqueville · Amartya Sen · Aristotle · B.R. Ambedkar · Brian Barry · C.B. Macpherson · David Miller · H.J. Laski · Herbert Spencer · Isaiah Berlin · J.S. Mill · Jean-Jacques Rousseau · John Locke · John Rawls · Karl Marx · Karl Popper · Lord Acton · Lyndon B. Johnson · Michael Walzer · Milton Friedman · R.H. Tawney · Robert Nozick · Ronald Dworkin · T.H. Green · T.H. Marshall**

#### Practice Questions (attempt before 4 p.m.)

1. **Comment on equality of outcome as a political idea.** (UPSC 2021 – 10 marks)
2. **How is liberty a pre-condition for equality? Explicate the relationship between equality and liberty.** (UPSC 2014 – 15 marks)
3. **“The nature of relationship between equality of democratic citizenship and liberty of citizens is influenced by economic equality.” Comment.** (UPSC 2024 – 15 marks)

📌 *Model answers drop this evening on the Telegram channel: <https://t.me/psirbyamitpratap> – set an alert.*

See you tomorrow with Day 4...Keep writing!!

- **Amit Pratap Singh** & team

**Quick logistics**

- **2025 Mains writers: PSIR O-AWFG Cohort 1** launches **11 June**; **PSIR ATS** goes live **15 June**. While you write your tests in **PSIR O-AWFG & ATS** bring your evaluated answer copies in mentorship sessions and ensure that you get the personalised feedback.
- **2026 Mains writers:** keep uploading **PSIR O-AWFG & ATS copies** on the dashboard; This topic is in test 3 of PSIR-AWFG and ATS 1.
- Alternate between mini-tests (**O-AWFG**) and full mocks (**ATS**) is designed to tackle speed, content depth, and structured revision—line-by-line evaluation pinpoints your weaknesses and errors. Follow your **PSIR O-AWFG & ATS** schedule and use the model answers to enrich your content, as rankers recommended based on their own success.