

B.R. Ambedkar on "Castes in India: *Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development* "

In "Castes in India: *Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development*," B.R. Ambedkar not only gave a pathbreaking account of the origin and evolution of caste, he also gave a number of moral arguments against the caste system. This relatively unknown scholarly essay served as the theoretical basis for what would later be his most famous popular work, *Annihilation of Caste*. I begin my discussion by explaining what caste is and why it originated, on Ambedkar's view. Next, I discuss one of his principal arguments against the caste system: it led to the most egregious forms of oppression of women in India. In focusing on the oppression of women, Ambedkar departed from other important philosophical works on social inequality, including Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* and Rousseau's *Discourses*, which all but ignore the oppression of women as an important form of social inequality. I close by arguing that, because of the insights it offers, Ambedkar's "Castes in India" should be considered an important part of the canon in political philosophy.