

## THE SOCIAL CONTRACTS FROM THE LENS OF JOHN RAWLS VEIL OF IGNORANCE: A PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS

**Orji, Chidi Paul, Ph.D.**

Department of Philosophy,  
University of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences,  
Umuagwo, Imo State  
hipaulco@gmail.com, paul.orji@uaes.edu.ng

### **Abstract**

*John Rawls is one of the most prominent American political and ethical philosophers of the 20th century. His major work, "Theory of Justice (1971)," laid the foundations of his most discussed conception of justice as fairness. Rawls projects a society consisting of free citizens who hold equal basic rights and cooperate within the framework of an egalitarian economic system. The citizens are under "the veil of ignorance" in their 'original position' when they access the hypothetical social contract and when the principles of justice are created. The method used in this paper is critical analysis, which is used to analyze Rawls Original position through his veil of ignorance. Rawls's construction of the original position considers that the hypothetical people of the social contract are placed behind a 'veil of ignorance', which makes them unaware of their particular circumstances. These hypothetical people are constructed in a way that frees them from all prejudice and special interests. Thus, decisions made by them may be considered philosophically pure. Since the people in Rawls's original position are hypothetical, we must decide what they would believe. If the people in the original position are well defined, we can, so to speak, think through them in order to derive morally acceptable principles. Rawls ideas were considered highly ambitious and progressive. This paper aims at examining social contract theory and also exploring Rawls notion of social contract and his veil of ignorance in relation to the idea of social agreement.*

**Keywords:** Social Contract, Veil of Ignorance, Justice, Fairness, Original Position.

### **Introduction**

John Rawls offers a theory of justice in A Theory of Justice that calls for justice to be viewed in terms of fairness. The work's first section is based on Rawls' ideas about formal justice. Due to the limitations Rawls lays on those in their original position, all hypothetical individuals will be about equal in formal justice. Using the concept of a social compact, Rawls developed his theory of justice as fairness. A social contract, in Rawls'

opinion, lends itself to the formulation of just principles, making it valuable for debating justice.

There will be diverse views of what justice is in every culture. By defining social justice in terms of broad principles, Rawls offers a solution to this issue. Unlike particular definitions of justice, principles of justice will have a far larger scope. People who have clear concepts of justice will be considerably more likely to agree on principles. According to Rawls, "these principles are to regulate all further agreement; they specify the kinds of social cooperation that can be entered into and the forms of government that can be established" (Rawls, 1971:9).

Principle-based justice will fulfill two purposes. The first benefit is that it will offer a framework that all societal members can more or less agree upon. A principle's second purpose is to provide a framework for moral behavior that is independent of specific rules. In his "original position," Rawls contends that in a fictitious social compact, moral standards will be agreed upon. Thus, according to Rawls, we must assume that those who participate in social cooperation pick the principles that will assign fundamental rights and obligations and establish how social benefits will be distributed in a single, coordinated act.

Men must decide in advance how to govern their disputes with one another and what their society's guiding principles will be. A group of people must decide once and for all what is to count among them as just and unjust, just as each person must decide by rational contemplation what comprises his good, that is, the system of objectives which it is logical for him to pursue (Rawls, 1971:11-12).

The original argument assumes that everyone will agree on basic fairness ideas. Rawls contends that two conditions must be met in order for those in the original position to choose the standards of justice and fairness. The first of these is that each individual must be able to rationally decide what constitutes what is right and wrong. The second is that these logical individuals will be able to predetermine how society will be organized.

A theory of justice as fairness must be built on principles that will be accepted by sensible people if it is to be successful, which is why Rawls provides these two conditions. Justice must be agreed upon by society as a whole if it is to be understood in terms of principles.

People in the first situation don't have precise knowledge about either themselves or other people. They will adhere to moral standards based on a definition of fairness that is rooted in a clear, all-encompassing notion of equality. For Rawls, some of the issues that arise when first-person interests serve as the foundation for decision-making processes are eliminated when all distinctive traits of the people in the original position are eliminated. This society will view justice in terms of equality and fairness if, as in the case of the original stance, all persons are independent, rational, and devoid of any individuating features.

According to Rawls, evaluating the agreements reached by people in the initial position is where the phrase "justice as fairness" originates. The essential agreements achieved in it are fair, according to Rawls, who claims that "the original position is, one might say, the appropriate status quo" (Rawls, 1971:12). Agreements reached in the initial position serve as the foundation for justice principles. The initial position's structure ensures that choices will be made in a way that promotes a fair social structure. According to Rawls, those in the initial position won't always opt for a particular justice principle, like the principle of public utility. Instead, those involved in the initial scenario will opt for two different justice ideas.

The first requires equality in the distribution of fundamental rights and obligations, while the second maintains that social and economic disparities, such as disparities in wealth and power, are just if they produce compensating benefits for everyone, especially the most disadvantaged members of society. People in the initial position will be able to argue that a just society is one where individual rights and liberties are safeguarded in spite of social and economic inequities by selecting two distinct principles. Rawls state that, the creation of the two concepts of justice and fairness will enable a just society to maintain its fairness in the face of inherent social inequities (Rawls, 1971:14-15).

### **John Rawls' Notion of the Veil of Ignorance: An Overview**

As suggested by Rawls, we need to find a way to counteract the consequences of certain circumstances that pit men against one another and entice them to take advantage of social and environmental conditions for their personal gain. Now, in order to achieve this, I'm going to pretend that all parties are in the dark. They are compelled to assess principles primarily in light of general concerns since they are unsure of how the many possibilities would affect their own unique situation (Rawls, 1971:137). In

Rawls' worldview, those in the starting position always lapse into ignorance. The original position holders are unaware of the specifics of their own and others' social circumstances. What Rawls refers to as "the veil of ignorance" is the ignorance of particular individual circumstances. The restrictions Rawls lays on the knowledge of those in the original position include the veil of ignorance as an essential component.

The fact that Rawls wants persons in the initial position to agree upon principles of justice rather than a specific definition of justice that may be either broad or too limited to create a contractual society that is fair is one reason for his proposal of the veil of ignorance. It's possible that if any unusual circumstances are permitted in the decision-making process, the society will be built around particular wants and interests rather than on the ideals of fairness. The sole specific fact that the parties are aware of, according to Rawls, is that their society is subject to the conditions of justice and everything that this entails. However, it is assumed that they are aware of broad social truths (Rawls, 1971:137). The persons at the starting position are familiar with all broad knowledge about human society, including political theory, economic theory, psychology, and sociology.

The initial stance and the ignorance veil have a significant impact, as described by Rawls. No one is in a position to adjust principles to his advantage because no one knows his standing in society or his natural resources, based on Rawls (1971:140). In the initial position, there isn't the usual type of haggling. In a typical bargaining game, individuals with various interests negotiate with others to obtain both their goals and those of the other participants. These interests are dependent on the unique circumstances of each person.

In a typical negotiation game, participants bargain according to the particulars of their circumstances. But there are no specifications in the first position. People in the initial situation are compelled to negotiate and come to agreements based on accepted ideas and ideals. For these reasons, the limitations of the ignorance veil and the original stance demonstrate how Rawls is able to base his conceptions of justice on principles.

The limitations on specific information in the original position, outlined by Rawls, are therefore of utmost significance. Without them, we won't be able to develop any concrete theories of justice. We won't be able to say much, if anything, about the specifics of the agreement itself and will instead have to

be satisfied with a nebulous formula that says that justice is what will be agreed to (Rawls, 1971:140).

Justice as fairness is one of Rawls' theories, and it is a notion about people coming to consensus on fundamental ideas. According to Rawls, a just society is defined by these values. Individuals who are not operating in some form of social vacuum will not concur on the two notions of justice and fairness. A whole new concept of justice will result from knowing the specifics. The negotiating concept that Rawls uses to support his theory of justice as fairness is built on generalizations and rules. In order to provide a definition of justice that as many people as possible can use, the theory of justice as fairness aims to be as inclusive as feasible. As stated by Rawls, "the causes of the veil of ignorance now transcend beyond simple simplicity. In order to get the intended outcome, we need to identify the starting point. If knowledge of specifics is permitted, then arbitrary contingencies will skew the result (Rawls, 1971:140).

For Rawls, a theory of justice will be centered on individual interests rather than the two principles of justice if specific situations are let into the decision-making process. The finest theory of justice, in Rawls' opinion, is the idea of justice as fairness because it is not reliant on individual interests.

### **What Is The Social Contract? Conceptual Clarification**

A form of hypothetical or real agreement between society and its state is what the social contract theory is all about. The foundation of our moral judgments and positions has allegedly been traced back to this agreement. To put it another way, we just follow the laws and rules of the government in the hopes that others will do the same, which will ultimately lead to a safer and more comfortable living. To investigate whether it is accurate that our moral obligations may be described by a social contract, this theory draws on a number of philosophers, including Hobbes, Locke, Hume, Rousseau, Kant, and Rawls.

Paz-Fuchs (2007:3) states that:

early conceptions of the social contract, such those put out by Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, place a strong emphasis on examining concepts of social cooperation and, to a greater extent, political obligation. Arguments from the social compact were initially employed to support the requirement to follow the law or, more broadly, the acceptance of

government decisions as final. On the other hand, contemporary models of the social compact assume that the modern state already exists.

In order to establish appropriate social institutions and policies that represent justice as the fundamental value in society, the modern social contract is used as a mechanism. What features do these theories have that make them deserving of the moniker "social contract theories" in light of these distinctions? The primary characteristic of social contract theories appears to be their significant legitimizing role. Paz-Fuchs (2007:4) further states that:

For some early contractarians, if it can be demonstrated that a historical contract to that effect genuinely occurred or if it is conceivable to uncover an implicit contract that dictates such schemes, it is possible to explain social cooperation and political obligation through a contractual process. These ideas started with a certain "state of nature" and proposed that the people of the time had contracted- or ought to be interpreted as having contracted- a legal obligation to which they could and ought to be held.

Hobbes, for instance, describes the "state of nature," or how life would be without a social contract, in vivid and depressing detail, demonstrating how important the social contract is to how we behave morally. In contrast, Locke is much more upbeat and presents a more appealing picture of the state of nature, arguing that even in the absence of imposed laws and restrictions, our moral obligations would still be valid. Both of these philosophers are judged by Hume, who believes that there is no need for a social contract to define our moral obligations because respect for one another would be necessary to establish a stable society. Rousseau viewed social interaction as an agreement between people who had a common interest. The social compact is seen from a different angle by Rousseau, who argues that while there are so many benefits to working together as a society, doing so does not necessarily require giving up our freedom to a government in exchange for security.

Rousseau (2004:21) puts it thus:

The social contract was a classic work by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose main goal was to clarify the origins and bounds of legal authority. According

to Rousseau, adherence to the state can actually provide us more freedom than we would otherwise have. For him following to a rule one sets for oneself is freedom, whereas acquiring the civil society and moral freedom alone makes a person a master of themselves.

We can start to consider the nature of our morality as well as our relationship with power by looking at each of these thinkers' perspectives on the social contract hypothesis. According to Hobbes, the social compact is a simultaneous decision made by everyone, with the exception of the newly established sovereign, to forego the use of all of their existing power in order to allow the new sovereign to use all of his existing authority free from interference from his subjects. The sovereign is actually a benefit of the Hobbesian social compact rather than a participant in it. Not only were individual citizens' free behaviors responsible for starting this dictatorship, Nbete (2012:270) states that:

In the Hobbesian State of Nature, 'conflict' is caused by four factors: (i) equality of demands; (ii) scarcity; (iii) inherent equality of human strength; and (iv) limited altruism. The amusing irony, though, is that unexpected events might lead to the weak conquering the powerful. This made things quite precarious. Even worse, the state of nature lacked the social collaboration required for endeavors like industry, housing, technology, and similar ones.

Reason forced men to agree among themselves to cede their individual rights (apart from the right to self-preservation) to an absolute sovereign for the preservation of life in the community. This agreement was driven by the fear of death, especially violent death, and the desire to foster social cooperation. According to Hobbes, men enter civil society through a compact between or among themselves, not between the people and their government. The contract theory of the state was initially articulated in its contemporary form by Thomas Hobbes. He created the concept of a brutish, short, isolated, and lonely condition of nature and proposed the social psychology theory of a man's innate desire for self-preservation. In the State of Nature, all men were on an equal footing; by this, we mean that everyone is capable of harming his neighbor and taking what he feels he needs for his own security. Similar to the right of all to all, the right of all to

all simply refers to a person's freedom to do as they like and in opposition to anybody they see fit, as well as to own, use, and enjoy all they might possibly obtain.

For Kant, the state is the result of a social contract, and without it, legitimate possession could not be ensured since people lack the capacity to create and uphold laws that will ensure that everyone will respect the property rights of others.

Nbete (2012:272) further states that:

The original contract is Immanuel Kant's term for the social contract. Two unique discussions of the social contract are provided by him. First, he talks about property, which he defines as something "with which I am so connected that its use without my consent would wrong me." In addition, he makes a distinction between two types of possessional rights, namely (i) physical or "sensible" possession and (ii) "intelligible" possession. The former is a physical right, whose rejection would result in "bodily" pain, similar to what one would feel, for instance, if their own apple was removed from them without their knowledge or agreement.

Kant, however, contends that mere physical ownership is insufficient to constitute legal possession of a thing. Intelligible possession constitutes rightful possession. This is the possession of a thing without physically holding it, allowing somebody to use it without my permission and harming me even though I am not physically harmed or using it at the time.

The use of human choice is central to Kant's argument that there must be some sort of intelligent possession that differs from purely physical possession. A person's object of choice is one that they would find valuable for their objectives. The ability to use such a thing would constitute its rightful possession. If no one is legally entitled to acquire a specific object, it is beyond the scope of its potential uses; in other words, even though the object is useable, it hasn't been put to use. According to Kant, such a condition is compatible with everyone's freedom under the rules of universal law; hence it does not conflict with the concept of right. Tibor and Machan (1883:141-42) rightly argue that:



Kant's concept of the social compact is the only one that helps us understand the legitimacy of the state. He stated that the social contract would be a "mere idea of understanding, which has, nonetheless, its doubtless (practical) reality in that it "obligates every lawgiver to advance his statutes so that they could have resulted from the united will of the entire people, and to consider every subject, as regards his desire for citizenship, as though he had been party to accepting that will. Every public enactment is justified on the basis of this.

In Kant's case, the "united will of a whole people" appears to be necessary simply because he is certain that doing so will ensure the presence of consistency.

In contrast to the real contract, consistency appears to be a requirement of the origin of moral norms. For Kant, everyone's act of will is one, and the unanimity of all of them is another essential component of the social compact.

The social contract, for Kant, is not a historically actual act, and even the idea of permission that is inherent in the contract is not historical consent. Instead, it is built on a series of decisions that individuals might accept under reasonable circumstances. It is predicated on potential reasonable consensus, in other words. This consent is not predicated on any particular set of aspirations shared by all individuals; rather, it is a hypothetical assent based on an idealized notion of just allocation of rights and responsibilities. To illustrate the idea of a contract that is rooted in fairness and created through a deliberate process, Rawls used the idea of the initial position. The term "original position" refers to what some other contract theorists refer to as the natural state and is both fictitious and hypothetical. Those who are interested in creating a just society are together to discuss it in the original position. The original position offers the setting for reaching a deal that would create a well-ordered society. In the Original Position, defining the prerequisites for fruitful and fair discussions is Rawls' main responsibility.

The original viewpoint, which defines justice as fairness, is crucial to Rawls' conception of justice. In the initial scenario, free people freely decide whether or not to take part in civic society. Intriguingly, based on Rawls, no

one knows their place in society, their class, or their social standing in nature. They also don't know their fortune in terms of the distribution of natural assets and liabilities, or their intelligence, strength, or other characteristics. No one has access to confidential information or a more valuable background than the other parties; everyone participating in the negotiation is on an equal footing.

Regarding the people in his original position, Rawls holds a number of fundamental presumptions. These presumptions offer insight into the identities of these people as well as their initial goals. They also draw attention to the circumstances that surrounded the people in their starting positions. One supposition is that the parties are persons seeking contracts. Their main goal is to come to an understanding through discussion about the laws that will govern their society and political life. The norms they select will have an impact on how social organizations distribute societal obligations and fundamental rights. The guidelines would also govern how the benefits of social collaboration would be distributed. Nbeta (2012:273) claim that:

Like many other modern social contract theorists, John Rawls emphasizes agreement as the foundation of political duty without entirely rejecting the notion of consent. They make an effort to differentiate between the core concern of the consent tradition, the origin of political obligation, and the issues of what social or constitutional regimes are long-lastingly advantageous to both parties. For Rawls, a person's obligation to follow the law or other social norms depends on their personal morality.

Although the framework of a "original agreement" still exists in Rawls' theory, duties are seen as being based on normative public morality principles rather than consent. Public morality is at stake in the debate over the creation and justification of political and social institutions. In other words, public morality serves as the foundation for these organizations' rationale. This explains James Buchanan's assertion that a key aspect of modern contractual thought has been the redefinition of political philosophy to emphasize social morality rather than personal responsibility.

The intent of the social contract is to create better contractors – parties who are better able to think about, debunk, and create a social structure based on justice. The social contract tries to explain how societies and governments come into being. The social contract theory primarily focuses on the people's voluntary agreement to the establishment of government, despite significant differences on several aspects. The social contract serves as a yardstick for determining if moral values may be justified. We can also assert that we unwittingly take part in such a social compact.

### **Rawls Idea of the Original position**

To the ideas of Rawls, the social contract ought to be created from scratch, with everyone deciding the laws of society but concealing their knowledge. The veil of ignorance is primarily a means of obscuring one's own social standing. Only from behind this curtain can a really just society be created. For instance, one must not know if one is going to be a slave or a slave-owner when deciding whether or not slavery is acceptable. According to Rawls, two basic principles of justice follow from this initial stance.

The first is the "liberty principle," which holds that everyone should have access to their fundamental liberties, including the freedoms of expression, participation in politics, ownership of property, and freedom from unjustified detention, so long as those liberties are compatible with the rights of others. According to the second principle, known as the difference principle, inequalities in social and economic distribution must be set up so that those who are least advantaged benefit the most from them. To put it another way, if things are being distributed in a society, those who need them the most should get them first.

Oyeshile (2008) points out that:

Since it is the circumstance of choice from which the principles of justice arise or derive, Rawls refers to his account of the hypothetical option situation as the "original position" in his argument. In the contractarian theory of the emergence of civil society, the initial position is comparable to the condition of nature. There were several components in the original place. First, it is assumed that the contract's participants are rationally motivated to pursue their life goals. He considers himself to be an independent agent with a desirable life goal that he desires to pursue, thus he wants as many primary goods as he

can and is uninterested in others. Second, Rawls refers to the "veil of ignorance" as a set of informational limitations that apply to the parties in the initial position.

The objective is to deny the parties access to some self-identifying information. To prevent a skewed choice of principles, the parties are primarily kept in the dark about this information. The application of the principles is broad, universal, public, adjudicative, and conclusive. Through their selection of principles, those in the initial position attempt to advance their interests as much as they can. They select the rules that will govern the society they intend to live in based on their expectations of how well they will fare in that society. With Rawls, the parties in the initial situation make logical decisions to further their interests. It is crucial to remember that the hypothetical agreement resulting from the first viewpoint.

The principles to be derived are hypothetical in the sense that they are not what the parties have agreed to, but rather what they may agree to under specific justifiable circumstances. In other words, Rawls tries to convince us through argument that the moral force of the principles of justice he derives comes from the fact that they are what we would agree on if we were in the hypothetical situation of the original position.

### **Application of Rawls Social Contract Theory and the Veil of Ignorance**

John Rawls attempts to provide a social contract-based understanding of justice in "A Theory of Justice" (Rawls, 1971). As a result, we are to imagine that those who participate in social cooperation choose together, in one joint act, the principles that are to assign fundamental rights and duties and to determine the division of social benefits (Rawls, 1971:11). This is Rawls' main point.

For Rawls, a social contract is a hypothetical agreement rather than a recorded agreement. As a result, Rawls does not assert that individuals truly concur on a particular set of justifications for morality. Rawls contends that under some specific circumstances, people would agree to such ideas. Rawls makes it clear in A Theory of Justice that the most important prerequisite for this hypothetical contract is a veil of ignorance, which prevents people from knowing the most specific details about

themselves and their community. The principles of justice that people would accept in their initial circumstances, which are fundamentally characterized by this veil of ignorance, are those that Rawls claims are morally sufficient.

As initially conceived, Rawls' concept of the veil of ignorance (as embodied in the concept of original position) is his description of the moral point of view with relation to issues of justice. The original position, according to Richardson and Weithman (1999), is a hypothetical viewpoint that we can take in our moral deliberations over the most fundamental notions of social and political justice. When compared to its predecessors (in Hume, Kant, and Rousseau), Rawls' impartial perspective is largely distinguished by the fact that, rather than embodying the judgment of a single individual, it is regarded socially as a general agreement by (representatives of all adult) members of a continuous society.

The idea of justice is therefore shown as a broad societal "contract" or understanding. To put it another way, Rawls presents a global rather than a micro theory of moral reasoning. In light of the fact that Rawls' argument touches on society as a whole's moral thinking, it is important. As a mental tool to help people develop a standard of justice while staying unaware of their precise position in or specific role in their community, Rawls introduces the concept of a veil of ignorance. According to Rawls' social compact, rational people would concur if they were each shielded from knowledge.

Their access to "the general facts of human society, such as political affairs and economic theory principles, and whatever general facts affect the choice of the principles of justice" is made possible by the veil. Nobody knows their place in society, their class position or social status, their fortune in the distribution of natural assets and abilities, their intelligence and strength, their conception of the good, their aversion to risk or vulnerability to optimism or pessimism (Rawls, 1971:137). It prevents them from knowing any specific facts about themselves.

In order to prevent persons in the initial position from favoring unjust ideas, Rawls introduces this veil of ignorance to obscure some specific facts from consideration. Because of this, individuals in their initial circumstances are unaware of their place in society, their innate or learned

characteristics or skills, their ideals and objectives. They are also unable to identify the specific political, economic, or cultural traits of their own society or the age to which they belong.

They are aware that they are living in the same time as one another, that they are in a situation where collaboration between people is both conceivable and desired, and that they are all capable of having a sense of justice. Additionally, there is no restriction on how much general knowledge they possess, including that which is found in political, social, economic, and psychological ideas. While the ignorance of those in the starting position considerably limits their understanding. It nonetheless gives people enough knowledge, in Rawls' opinion, to come to just conclusions about how to handle any ensuing criticism and change of the fundamental framework of a society. This results from the fact that when examining a society's fundamental components, only main social goods- i.e., goods that are typically required for fulfilling whatever objectives one may have- are in question.

As a result, even individuals who are obscured by ignorance would understand the value of collecting items of this kind since these are the kinds of items that one would want regardless of other desires. Additionally, Rawls makes the assumption that those in the initial situation would often want more fundamental social goods as opposed to fewer. Persons in this situation would aim to increase their index of primary social goods while disregarding how others fared, assuming an acceptable minimum. This implies that those in the initial situation would not be impacted by love, envy, or resentment. According to Rawls, anyone who started out in that situation would select the following particular notion of justice:

Every person is entitled to the broadest overall system of fundamental liberties that is consistent with a similar system of liberty for all. Social and economic disparities must be set up to help the least advantaged the most and be connected to jobs and offices that are available to everyone with fair equality of opportunity. When the liberties provided by the first principle could be effectively exercised by persons in all social positions, according to Rawls, the first principle would be taken to take precedence over the second. As a result, when this requirement is met, liberties are not to be given up in order to achieve larger shares of other social goods (Rawls, 1971).

Raymond (2006:7) observed that:

In Theory of Justice, his most famous work, Rawls explains his desire to elevate the social compact to a more abstract level of thought. To achieve this, we should not consider the original contract as one in which we enter a particular society or set up a certain type of governance, but rather as one in which the purpose is the principles of justice for the fundamental structure of society. It refers to the principles that any free and sensible person would accept to follow in order to further his interests, assuming that the parties are in a position of supposed initial equality while determining the core conditions of their relationship.

These principles would lay the foundation for and govern all subsequent agreements, defining the kinds of social collaboration and the permissible structures of government. Justice as fairness is the approach to justice that Rawls describes. Because the original position is a circumstance in which the maximum rule for choosing under uncertainty is applicable, according to Rawls, these two principles would be chosen.

The principles that people in the original position would choose are thought to be the same as those rational people would choose for the design of a society in which their enemy would assign them their position, which, of course, would be the least advantageous position. This is because the maximum rule assumes that the best one can do is maximize the payoff to the least advantageous position.

This is not to argue that those in the original position believe that their place in society is so predetermined; if that were the case, their reasoning would be flawed, and Rawls finds that unacceptable. However, Rawls argues that since both circumstances satisfy the requirements of the maximal rule for choice under uncertainty, people would choose the same principles in both cases.

### **Conclusion**

In his political philosophy, Rawls references the social contract tradition. This tradition views societal norms as standards on which one should anticipate agreement among all parties. At least among those whose main

objective is to act in line with such rules, this tradition emphasizes the consent of all. No matter which party to the contract you happen to be, a satisfactory or adequate set of rules is one that everyone involved can expect to agree to. Rawls made this social contract-inspired decision. He suggested that in order for there to be a just society, the distribution standards that parties on an equal footing would have chosen would have to be met.

Even when we are forced to give up our social structures, we can still relate to one another as free and equals if the standards are such that there is little to no opposition to them – when they can therefore be called to be fair. That we should define justice as fairness is Rawls' suggestion, and it is based on this notion. Unlike some prior social contract theorists, Rawls' emphasis is social institutions as a whole rather than a collection of individual social institutions. And for Rawls, a person's benefit or disadvantage cannot be determined by comparison to a natural state.

Despite the fact that social institutions are artificial, it is not advisable to try to judge how we "really" exist apart from the standards, links, and positions we are born into. Instead, Rawls looks to contrast competing theories for evaluating social foundational structures. To help us better understand how to defend and assess such ideas for justice principles, Rawls suggests a method. We envision an initial negotiating "Original Position" where all parties must concur on standards for determining whether social institutions are fair. This is consistent with a social-contract theory of equality and freedom as widespread consent. Furthermore, Rawls expects us to believe that neither party is aware of any information that would influence them to make unjust or incorrect arguments.

In their selection of justice principles, the parties fight in this way while concealing their ignorance. The parties in this initial position are aware, as previously mentioned, that social institutions have a significant impact on their lives. Everyone wants to spread their own personal philosophy of life, but many are unaware of the specific beliefs they hold. Therefore, no one will support a specific benefit distribution only because it supports a particular viewpoint. Furthermore, since no one is certain whether they possess qualities like courage, entrepreneurship, or learning ability, no one would argue that social institutions should definitely benefit them.



They may still agree that institutions can reward some of these qualities, but only in limited circumstances, such as to raise the overall amount of wealth that everyone will eventually enjoy. To Rawls, while selecting justice principles, the social position with the greatest disadvantage would be given the most weight. The notion that parties would consider the worst case scenario for them illustrates this. They will make sure that the least fortunate are as well off as they can be, while not knowing where they will all wind up on the social scale. Since the utilitarian principle of utility maximization permits some to be sacrificed for the benefit of others, Rawls' principles would be preferred.

In order for people to develop a standard of justice while being unaware of their exact position in or specific function in their society. Rawls proposes the concept of a veil of ignorance, which can be thought of as a mental tool. With regard to Rawls' *The Social Contract*, rational people would accept the following if they were each hidden behind a curtain of ignorance.

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