



## Understanding Rawls' Theory of Justice: An Introduction

Rawls' framework hinges on two primary principles. First, he posits each individual has an equal right to basic liberties compatible with similar liberties for others — this can include rights such as freedom of speech or right to own personal property. Second, social and economic inequalities are permissible if they benefit everyone and provide open opportunities for all.

This second principle introduces Rawl's famous difference principle: any socioeconomic inequalities should be arranged so they benefit those who are least advantaged.

In essence, it's a hypothetical social contract where rational individuals decide on rules for their collective existence without knowing their status in society - what Rawls termed 'the original position' under 'veil of ignorance'. This veil ensures impartiality by eliminating personal biases based on knowledge about our specific circumstances.

## The Principles of Justice as Fairness: A Deep Dive

Rawls advocates for equality of opportunity where each person should have a fair chance to acquire positions or offices irrespective of their initial place in society.

What makes this principle unique lies not just in its focus on equal opportunities at all levels (including education and employment) but also its emphasis on rectifying social injustices or disadvantages arising from birth or natural lottery.

Herein lies one key aspect — justice isn't seen merely as maintaining law and order; rather it involves actively creating conditions conducive for achieving genuine equality amidst diversity.

## Critics of Rawls' Justice Theory: Notable Opinions

Some communitarian critics such as Michael Sandel have questioned the feasibility and desirability of Rawls' original position. According to these critics, his theory strips individuals off their personal identities and social attachments which they believe fundamentally shapes human behavior.

This detachment from our personal identities under 'the veil of ignorance' is seen unrealistic and undesirable because it may lead us to endorse principles we would otherwise reject if we considered our real-life circumstances and commitments.

# **The Veil of Ignorance and Its Importance in Rawls' Theory**

In essence, the concept promotes impartiality by compelling individuals to develop societal systems without favoring particular groups or classes - they could belong to any class once the veil is lifted.

This way, the resultant system would aim at providing equal opportunities and maximum benefits for all citizens regardless of their socio-economic standing. Thus, this original position under the 'veil of ignorance' forms the bedrock upon which Rawls builds his egalitarian philosophy ensuring justice as fairness.

## **Comparing Rawls' Theory with Utilitarianism**

The difference principle embedded within Rawls' philosophy categorically rejects any inequality not beneficial to everyone, especially those least advantaged.

Unlike utilitarianism, which could potentially sanction infringement on personal liberties for greater good, Rawls' approach places individual freedoms at its core while advocating redistribution to ensure fair opportunities and benefits even for society's most disadvantaged members.

The fundamental contrast lies in how each theory perceives social cooperation - with utilitarianism maximizing total or average utility, while Rawls emphasizes reciprocal advantages and protection of vulnerable sections.

## **The Relevance of Rawls' Theory of Justice in Today's Society**

Amid growing discussions about systemic racism and other forms of structural oppression in today's society, the second principle proposed by Rawls — that socio-economic inequalities should work to the benefit of those most disadvantaged — provides a compelling framework for reform.

The 'difference principle' encourages us to think deeply about who benefits from existing disparities and pushes towards policies that uplift those at the bottom rungs. Thus, while it may be decades old and subject to critique, Rawls' theory remains thought-provoking material in modern discourse on social justice.