

From Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*

**John Rawls asks us to imagine that we are going to have a meeting to determine society's rules from this point forward. He calls this THE ORIGINAL POSITION.**

*Imagine that those who engage in social cooperation choose together, in one joint act, the principles which are to assign basic rights and duties and to determine the division of social benefits.*

**He further asks us to imagine that we temporarily know nothing at all about ourselves. He calls this THE VEIL OF IGNORANCE.**

*No one knows his place in society, his class position or social status, nor does anyone know his fortune in the distribution of natural assets and abilities, his intelligence, strength and the like.*

**He claims that people in the original position, behind the veil of ignorance, would want to limit their own disadvantages in the new society, and so it would be only rational for them to choose the following TWO PRINCIPLES.**

First, there must be equality in the assignment of basic rights and duties, and second, any social and economic inequalities are just only if they result in compensating benefits for everyone, and in particular for the least advantaged members of society.

**For example, under the first principle, we might choose a rule that says that anyone who wants to eat has to work. But under the second principle, we might make an exception for small children, elderly people, and those with physical or mental disabilities (the "least advantaged").**