

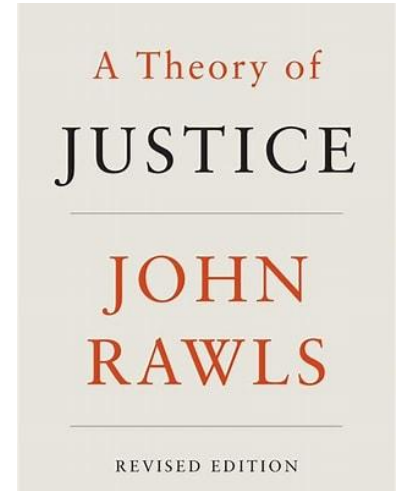
Ch.2: Contractualism

2.4 & 2.6

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John Rawls (1921-2002)

- Inspired by the works of Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill
- Began his teaching career at Princeton, Cornell, Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard University
- Received both the Schock Prize for Logic and Philosophy and the National Humanities Medal (1999)
- Revived interest in moral and political philosophy in the 20th century



- Published in 1971
- Revitalized the social contract tradition
- Introduced the concept of “veil of ignorance”

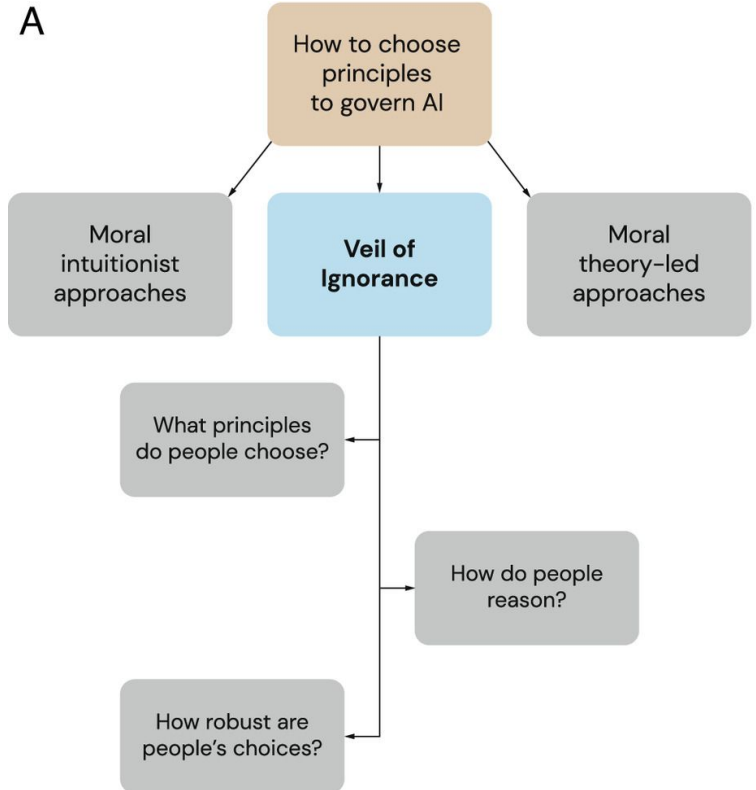
Veil of Ignorance

Oxford Reference Definition: A hypothetical state, advanced by the US political philosopher John Rawls, in which decisions about social justice and the allocation of resources would be made fairly, as if by a person who must decide on society's rules and economic structures without knowing what position he or she will occupy in that society. By removing knowledge of status, abilities, and interests, Rawls argued, one could eliminate the usual effects of egotism and personal circumstances on such decisions.

Collective Definition: A way for individuals to design a society and choose principles of justice without knowledge of their own gender, race, socioeconomic status, or other personal advantages within that system. By removing self-interest, the veil tends to lead to the construction of a fairer society for all.

Veil of Ignorance in AI

- Study conducted using Vol to select principles for AI (ex. value alignment)
- Found participants behind Vol more likely to choose principle that prioritizes worst-off and mention fairness as factor
- Participants behind Vol more likely to stand behind original choice once veil is lifted (they know their own position)



Common Societal Concepts Under the Veil of Ignorance

2 main principles:

- Individuals should have as much freedom as is appropriate for an equal amount of freedom for all
- Individual wealth should be distributed according to the “difference principle”
 - Difference principle: Social/Economic inequalities should only exist if both sides are benefited (some individuals can be paid more than others if the paid less side benefits from it in other ways)

Sides of the Spectrum



Holistic Side:

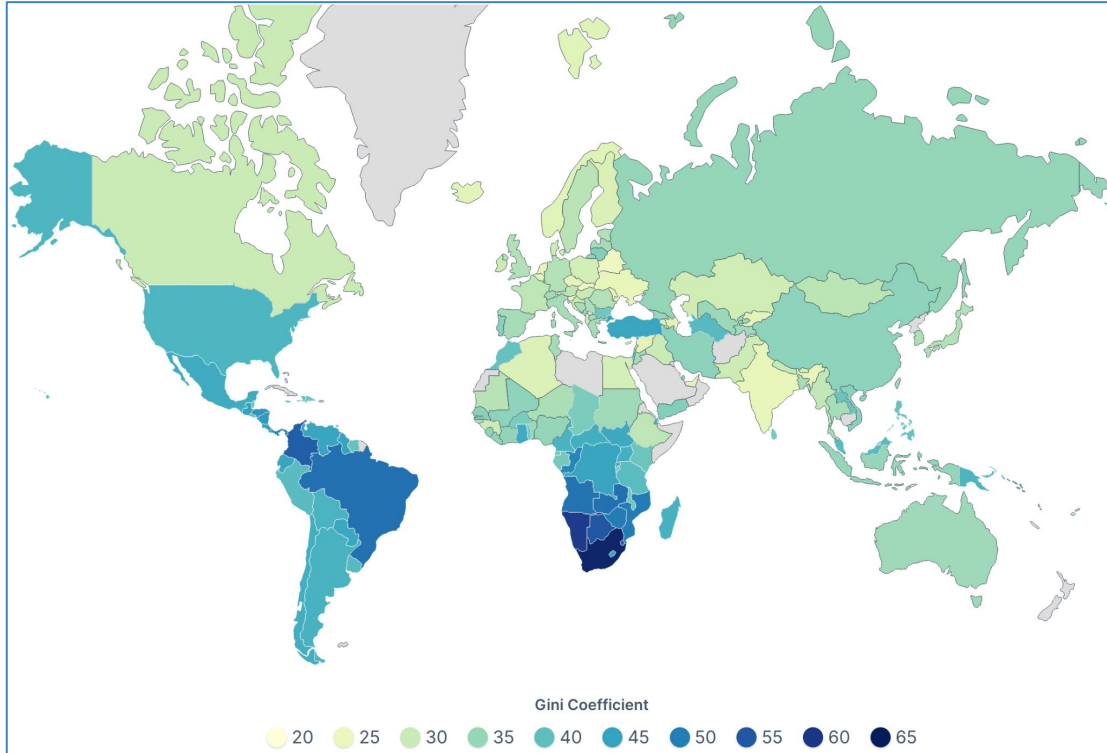
- Focus on equal rights
 - No slavery
 - Equal opportunities/resources
 - Protection
- Strong safety nets:
 - Healthcare, disability, education
- Benefit of all
- Close the gap between rich and poor

Risk-taking Side:

- Will take the gamble of being in a more privileged side of society
- Support wealth disparity
- Rejection of the previous 2 principles

Connection to Real World/Specific Countries

Wealth Inequality by Country 2026



Gini coefficient : a measure of inequality (usually income/wealth)

- 0: complete equality, 100 complete inequality

Connection to Real World/Specific Countries

Lowest:



- Slovenia: 24.3
- Slovakia: 24.1
- Progressive Taxation: higher earners are taxed more, funding public services that benefit lower-income groups (difference principle)
- Social Security: welfare systems that create a strong safety net (unemployment benefits, pensions, parental leave, etc.)
- Accessible healthcare and education: more equal opportunities
- Limit the accumulation of extreme wealth
- Government: Parliamentary Republic

Highest:



- South Africa: 63.0
- Namibia: 59.1
- Apartheid: discrimination leads to unequal access to opportunities, public goods, resources, education, land ownership, and wealth distribution
- Massive gap between global economy and low wages and limited formal jobs
- High unemployment and low wages
- Inefficient public services
- Little to no safety net
- Government: Constitutional Democracy/Democratic Republic

2.6 Bernard Mandeville & Fabel of the Bees 🐝

- “Private vices public benefits”- Private greed can produce public benefits
- Greedy Selfish bees, want more than they need -> so the bees work and invent things -> wealthy & powerful hive
- One day bees decide no more greed -> innovation stops, trade slows -> hive shrinks and becomes weak



For Greedy Bees theory

Greed motivate actions - individuals pursue personal vices which drive them to produce and work



Greed for better technology promotes innovation, creates jobs, and progression.

Greed fuels a demand for services which sustain business



Against Greedy Bees Theory

- In the US (captivist focused = greedy hive)
- Incentive for profit does not prioritize peoples experiences
- People still do public service without greed as an incentive



TECHNOLOGY

The Instant Pot Failed Because It Was a Good Product

A one-hit wonder is never enough.

By Amanda Mull



Egoism (Are Humans Ever Truly Selfless?)

- “all human actions are ultimately motivated by self-interest” - Thomas Hobbes
- Even sacrifice is driven by a desire for personal satisfaction or peace of mind.
- If everything is labeled selfish, the theory becomes unfalsifiable
- Mentioned how: Physicians can't want everyone healthy, Lawyers can't want everyone to follow the law, Priests can't want everyone to not sin (no one to save)
- Psychological Egoism = Unfalsifiable
- Egoism \neq Altruism

Modern Ex:

- Influencers using glass cups/jars
- 'Forgetful' college counselors at CC

