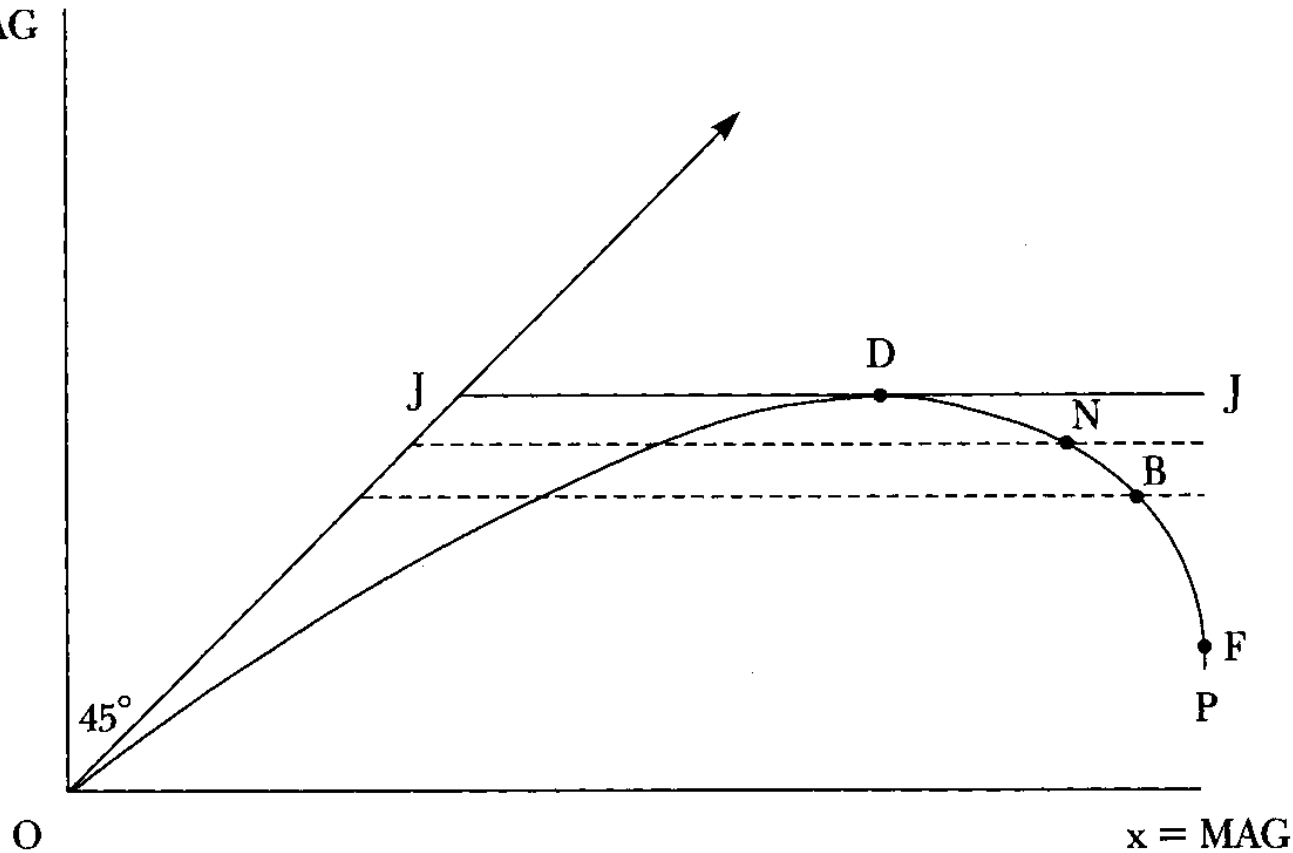


Figure 1

$y = \text{LAG}$



*The
Difference
Principle*

Marcello Di Bello

Lehman College CUNY

PHI 171 - Fall 2014

*Can Economic
Inequalities Be Justified?*



The Good and Justice

*Angono, Philippines
Lester Garcia for
National Geographic*

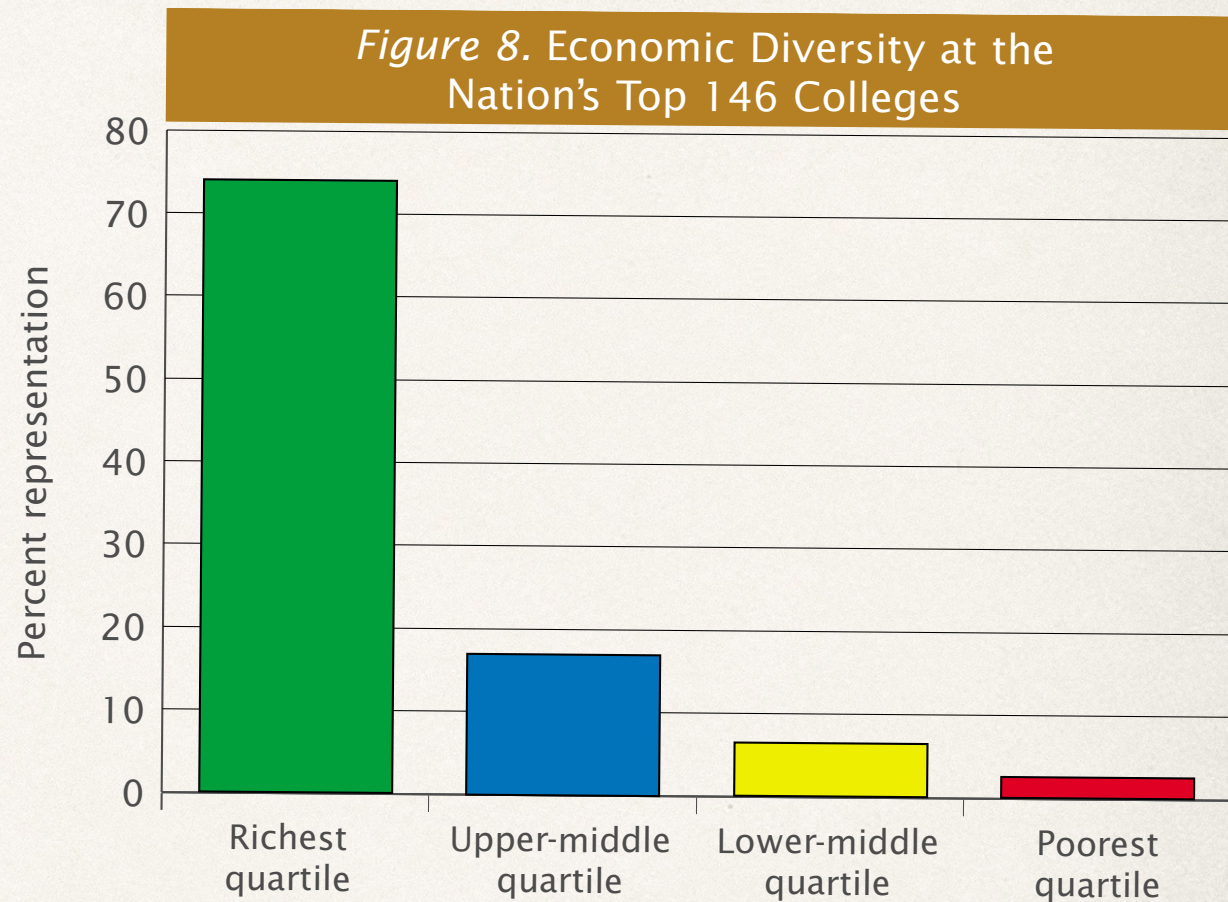
Are we morally
obligated to donate our
money to the poor?

Can economic
inequalities be
justified?

Can Social and Economic Inequalities be Justified?

How Much Does Working Hard
Matter to Achieve What You Want?

One's Family
Economic
Background
Matters a lot to
Get into a
Good
University



Source: Anthony P. Carnevale and Stephen J. Rose, "Socio-economic Status, Race/Ethnicity, and Selective College Admissions," in Richard D. Kahlenberg, ed., *America's Untapped Resource: Low-Income Students in Higher Education* (New York: Century Foundation Press, 2004), Table 3.1, p. 106.

Imagine We Lived in a Society in Which
All Economic Inequalities Depended
on How Hard People Worked

*Would All
Inequalities
Be Just?*

Many Social and Economic Inequalities
Depend on Our Talents — e.g. How
Intelligent or Hard Working We Are

*We Do Not Deserve Our Talents
Because We Have Not Worked for Them*

Some Factors Contributing to Inequalities

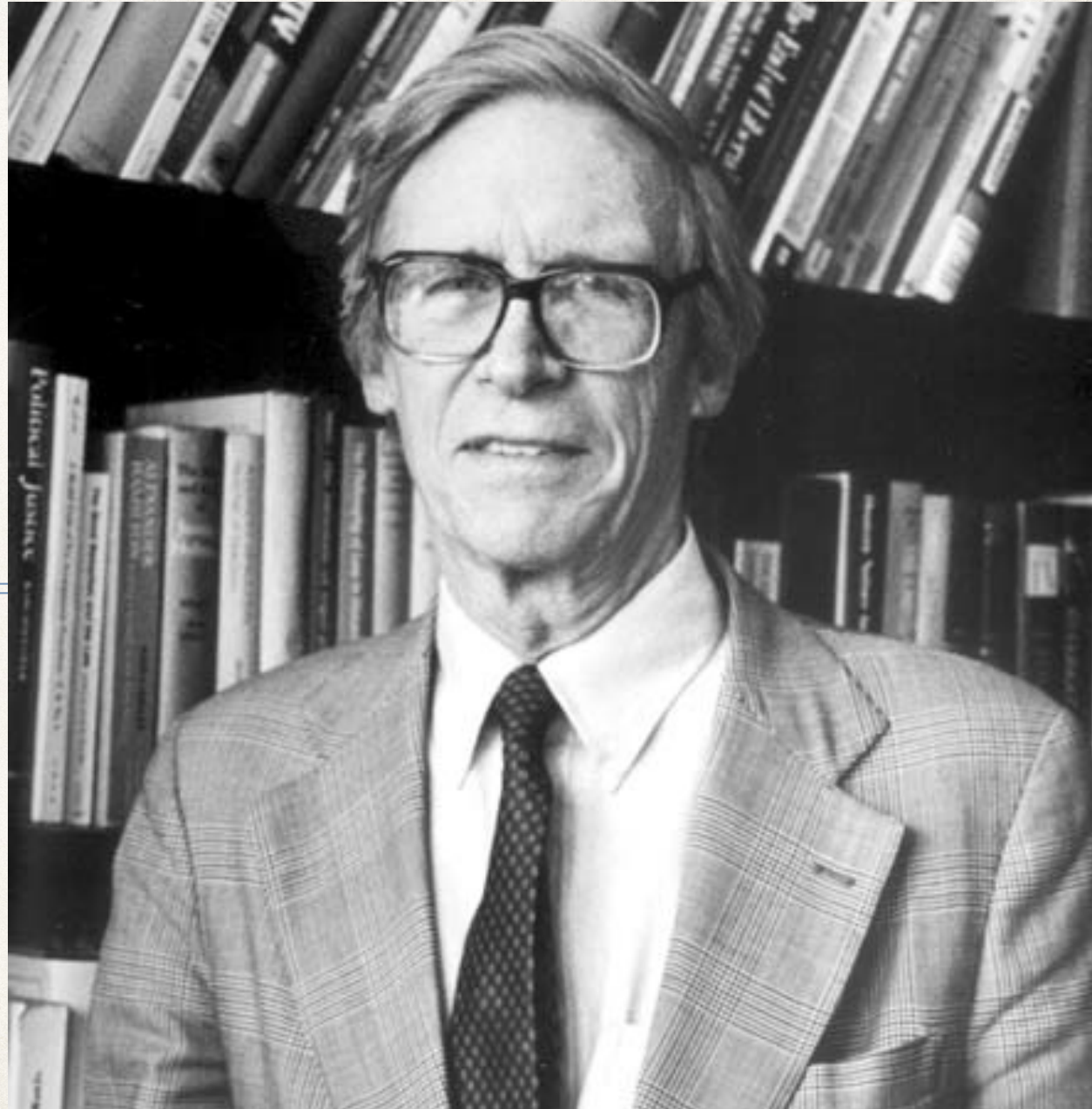
- ❖ Different family cultural and economic background
- ❖ Different levels of education
- ❖ Different opportunities
- ❖ Different natural talents and abilities

Should We Then Eliminate All Inequalities?

Would People Still Have Any Incentive to Work?

John Rawls

(1921-2002)



Rawls' Difference Principle

Social and economic inequalities are justified *provided they benefit those who are the least advantaged in society.*

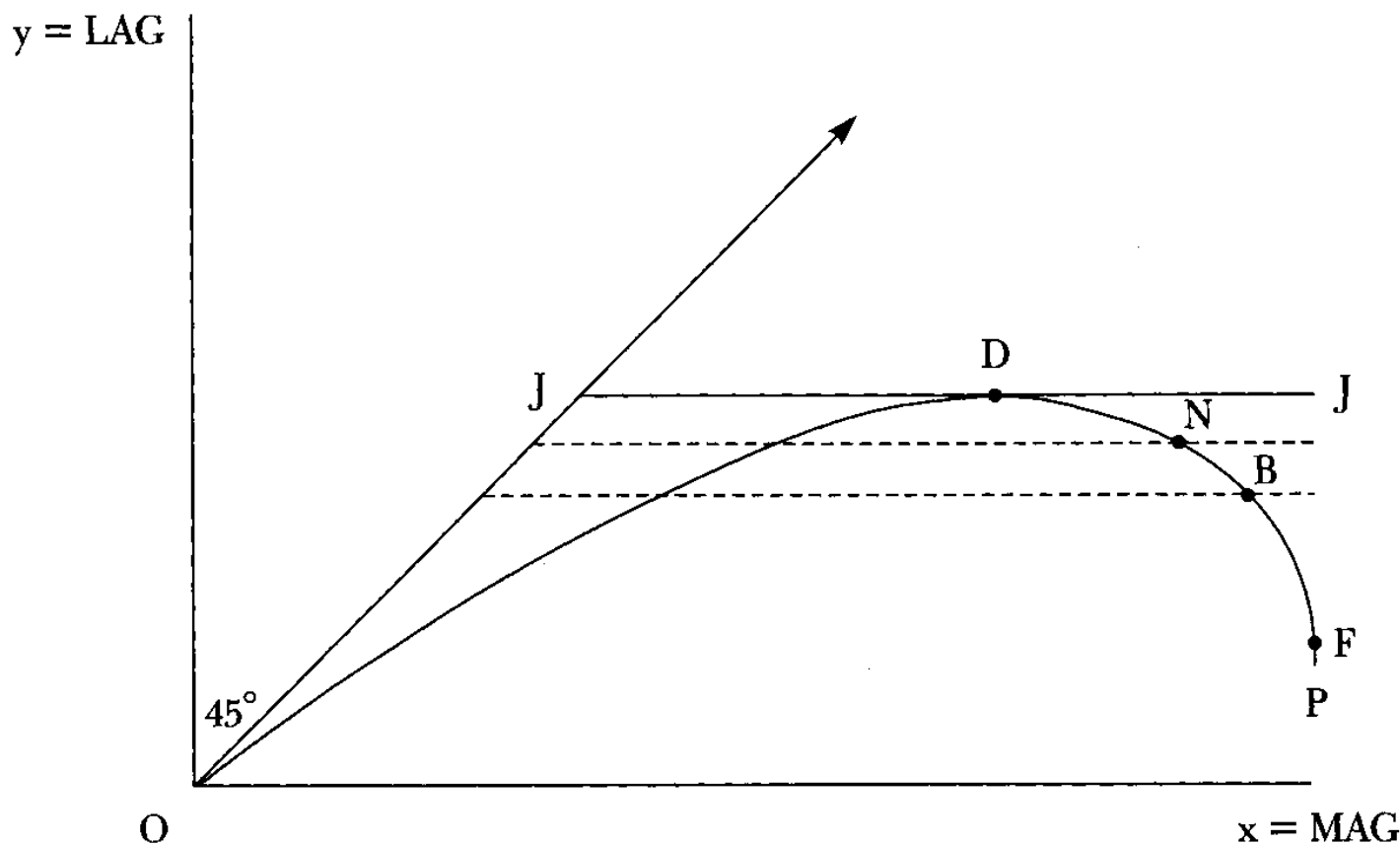
Which Society Better Conforms With Rawls' Difference Principles?

Social and economic inequalities are justified *provided they benefit those who are the least advantaged in society.*

	A	B	C	D
<i>Richest</i>	105	75	65	40
<i>Poorest</i>	50	45	60	40
<i>Total</i>	155	120	125	80

In society C,
inequalities benefit
the least advantaged
the most

Figure 1



Point D is the point that is closest to equality and still on the OP curve

If wealth is distributed according to D, inequalities go to the benefit of the LAD

LAG = Least advantaged
MAG = Most advantaged

The 45 degrees line represents an equal distribution between LAG and MAG

If wealth is distributed according to N, B, or F, inequalities harm the LAD

The OP curve represents all the possible ways to distribute wealth between LAG and MAG given a certain economic system

But Is It Realistic to Put in Place a System
that Allows Inequalities Only for the Benefit
of Those Who Are the Least Advantaged?

How Would that System Work?

Minimum Income

Social and economic inequalities are justified
provided everybody is guaranteed a minimum income

Which Principle Is Best?

- Social and economic inequalities are justified *provided they derive from how the free market distributes wealth and money.*
- Social and economic inequalities are justified *provided they derive from how hard people worked to get what they have.*
- Social and economic inequalities are justified *provided they benefit those who are the least advantaged in society.*
- Social and economic inequalities are justified *provided everybody is guaranteed a minim income.*