



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?

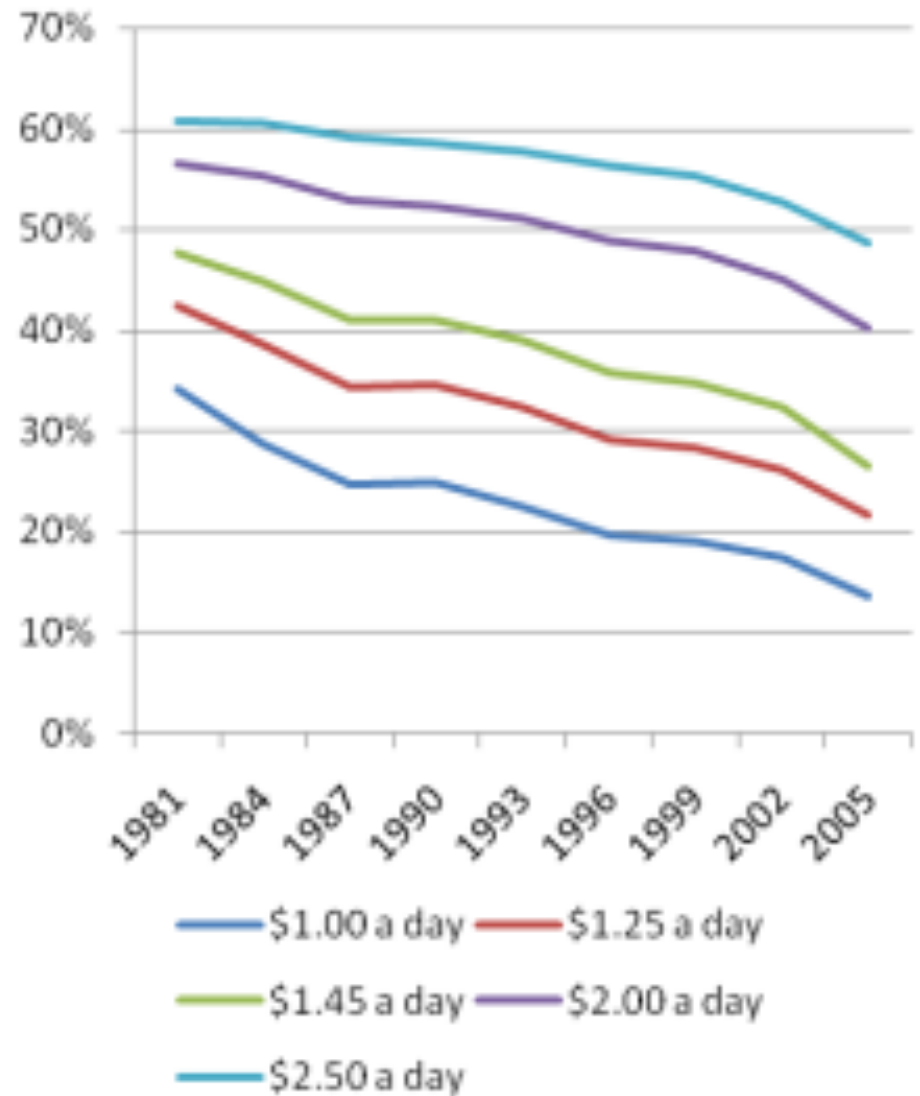
Relative v. Absolute Poverty

- ❖ Absolute (or extreme) poverty = *not having enough income to meet the most basic human needs for adequate food, water, shelter, clothing, sanitation, health care or education*. The World Bank has established an absolute “poverty line” of an income of \$1.25 per day per person, below which the total number of people has varied from 1.8 billion in 1981 to 1.3 billion in 2005. As of 2008, 950 million people in the world were malnourished. The annual death toll from poverty-related causes is 18 million, or one third of all human deaths.
- ❖ Relative poverty = *poor by comparison to others in one’s own society*. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that in 2010 the nation’s official poverty rate was 15.1 percent, up from 14.3 percent in 2009. There were 46.2 million people in poverty in 2010, up from 43.6 million in 2009.

Is Absolute Poverty Decreasing?

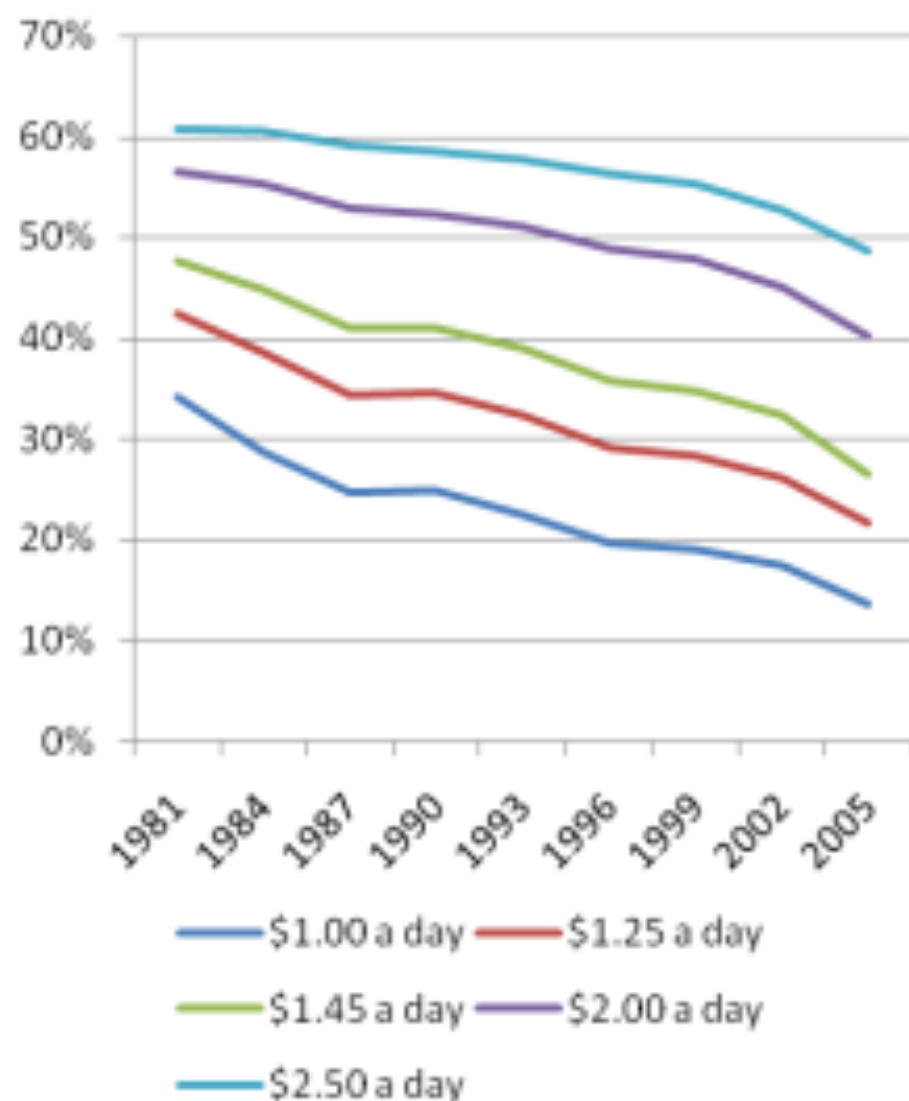
Looks Like Poverty Is Decreasing

**Poverty levels over time
world population (%)**

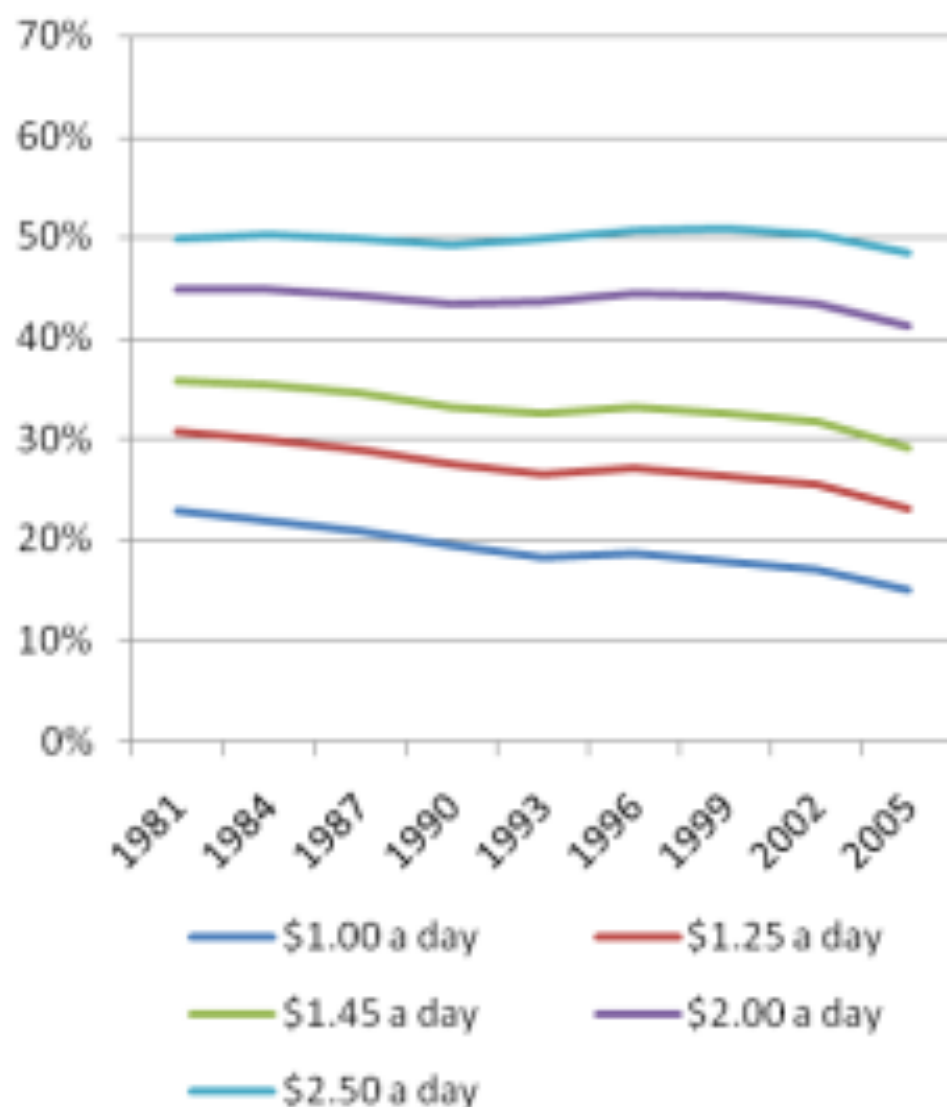


But Let's Look Closer...

Poverty levels over time world population (%)



Poverty levels over time excluding China



Source: World Bank Development Indicators 2008

Are we Morally Obligated to Donate Our Money to the Poor?

Here “*money*” means “*money we could live without*”. Indeed, we cannot be morally obligated to donate money that are necessary for us in order to buy basic items such as food and shelter.

Think About Something You Bought But You Didn't Need

Examples:

Clothes; chocolates and snacks; tickets for a show; a bottle of wine; french fries; etc.

Peter
Singer
(1946-)



A Drowning Child

“On my way to give a lecture, I pass a shallow ornamental pond and notice that a small child has fallen in and is in danger of drowning. I look around to see where the parents, or babysitter, are, but to my surprise, I see that there is no one else around. It seems that it is up to me to make sure that the child doesn’t drown. Would anyone deny that I ought to wade in and pull the child out?

This will mean getting my clothes muddy, ruining my shoes and either cancelling my lecture or delaying it until I can find something dry to change into; but compared with the avoidable death of a child none of these things are significant”

Peter Singer, “Famine, Affluence and Morality”

What Is the (*Morally Significant*)
Difference Between a **Drowning Child**
and a **Starving Child Living Far Away?**

Why don't we give money to the starving child?

Singer's Principle

If we can prevent something bad without sacrificing anything of comparable significance, we are morally obligated to do it.

We are morally obligated to save the drowning child (even though this would require messing up our new shoes) because our shoes are less important than the child's life

We are morally obligated to give money to the children in need (even though this would require giving up some of our extra money) because the pleasure we derive from keeping our extra money is less important than the child's life

Singer's Argument

- (1) If we can prevent something bad without sacrificing anything of comparable moral significance, we are morally obligated to do it.
 - (2) Extreme poverty is bad.
 - (3) There is some extreme poverty we can prevent without sacrificing anything of comparable moral significance.
 - (4) Therefore, we are morally obligated to prevent extreme poverty.
- This means we should give up some of our money and wealth — money and wealth we could live without — to help the poor.

Are you convinced by Singer's argument?

Objection: Aid Leads to Dependency

It Is Better to Teach People “*How to Fish*” as Opposed to “*Give Them a Fish*”

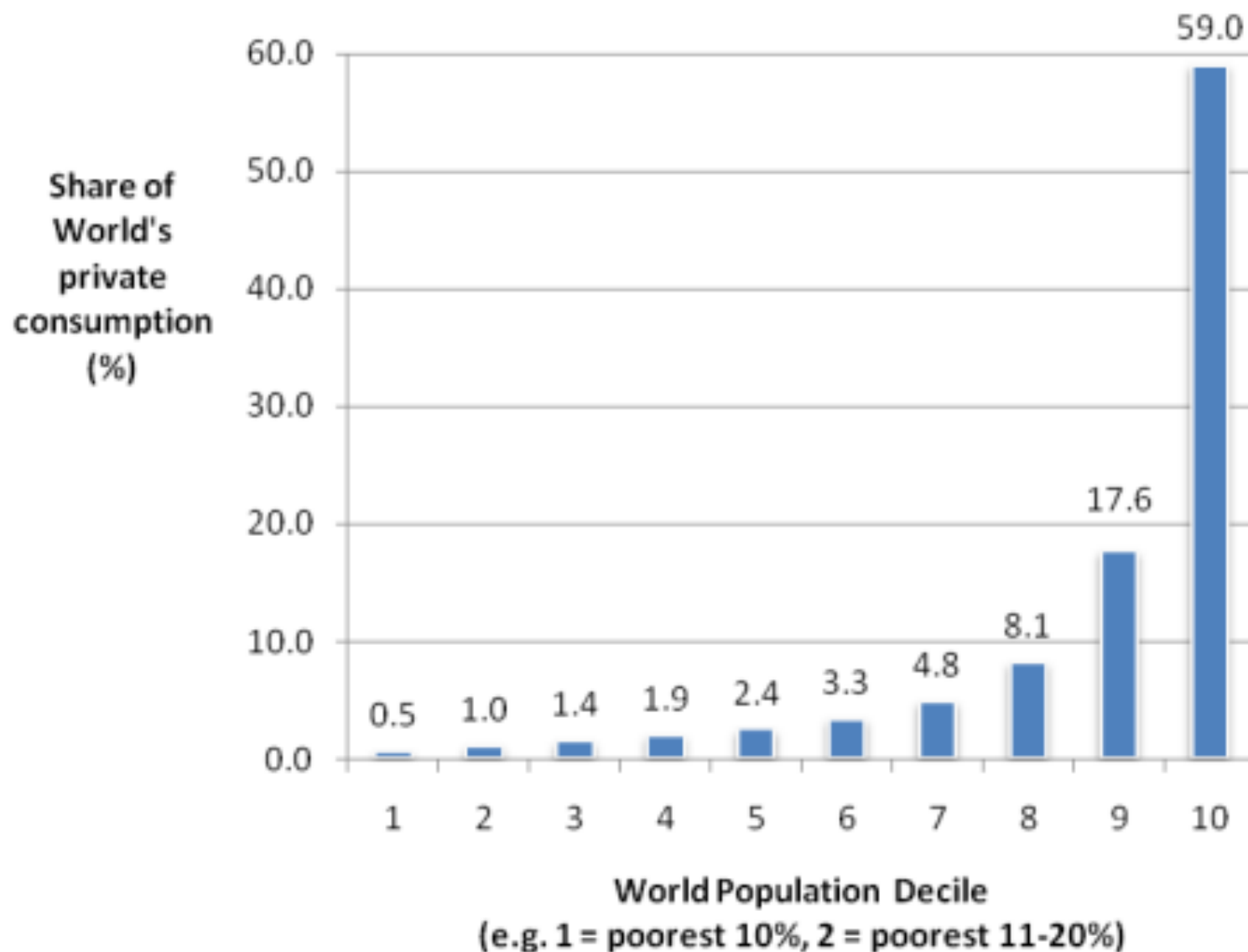
You can donate money that can be used to teach people how to fish. The money you donate need not be used to buy fish only, but also to teach and empower people. The money can be used to teach the poor how to read, write, do business, be independent, etc. That's how many charities use the money donated to them.

Check out

www.givewell.org

Can Social and Economic Inequalities be Justified?

Inequality of Consumption, 2005



Source: World Bank Development Indicators 2008

Against Economic Inequalities

A challenge to Margaret Thatcher in the British Parliament in 1990

“...during her 11 years as Prime Minister, the gap between the richest 10 per cent and the poorest 10 per cent in this country has widened substantially. At the end of her chapter of British politics, how can she say that she can justify the fact that many people ... are relatively much poorer, much less well housed and much less well provided for than they were in 1979? ... that is not a record that she or any Prime Minister can be proud of.”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rv5t6rC6yvg>

What is Thatcher's Response to the Challenge that Inequalities Widened While She Was Prime Minister?



Economic inequalities are needed to create incentives in a free market economy

A Justification of Economic Inequalities Based on the Free Market

Social and economic inequalities are justified *provided they derive from how the free market distributes wealth and money.*

But Is There Anything Bad With the Economic Inequalities Created by the Free Market?

Does the free market reward merit?

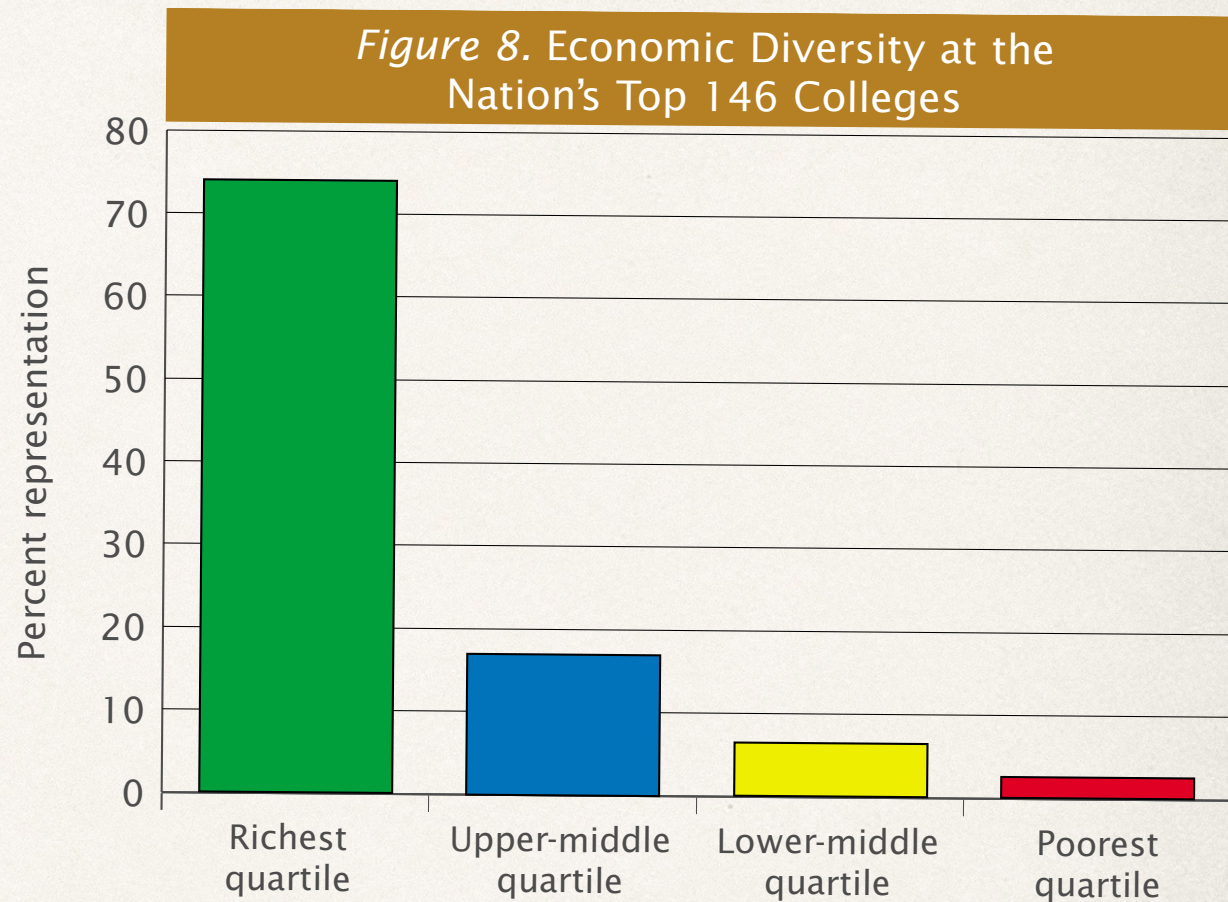
<http://thecolbertreport.cc.com/videos/2p2ijk/michael-sandel>

A Justification of Economic Inequalities Based on Merit or Desert

Social and economic inequalities are justified *provided they derive from how hard people worked to get what they have.*

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*

Factors Contributing to Inequalities

- ❖ Different family cultural and economic background
- ❖ Different levels of education
- ❖ Different opportunities due to social connections, family background, education etc.
- ❖ Different natural talents and abilities

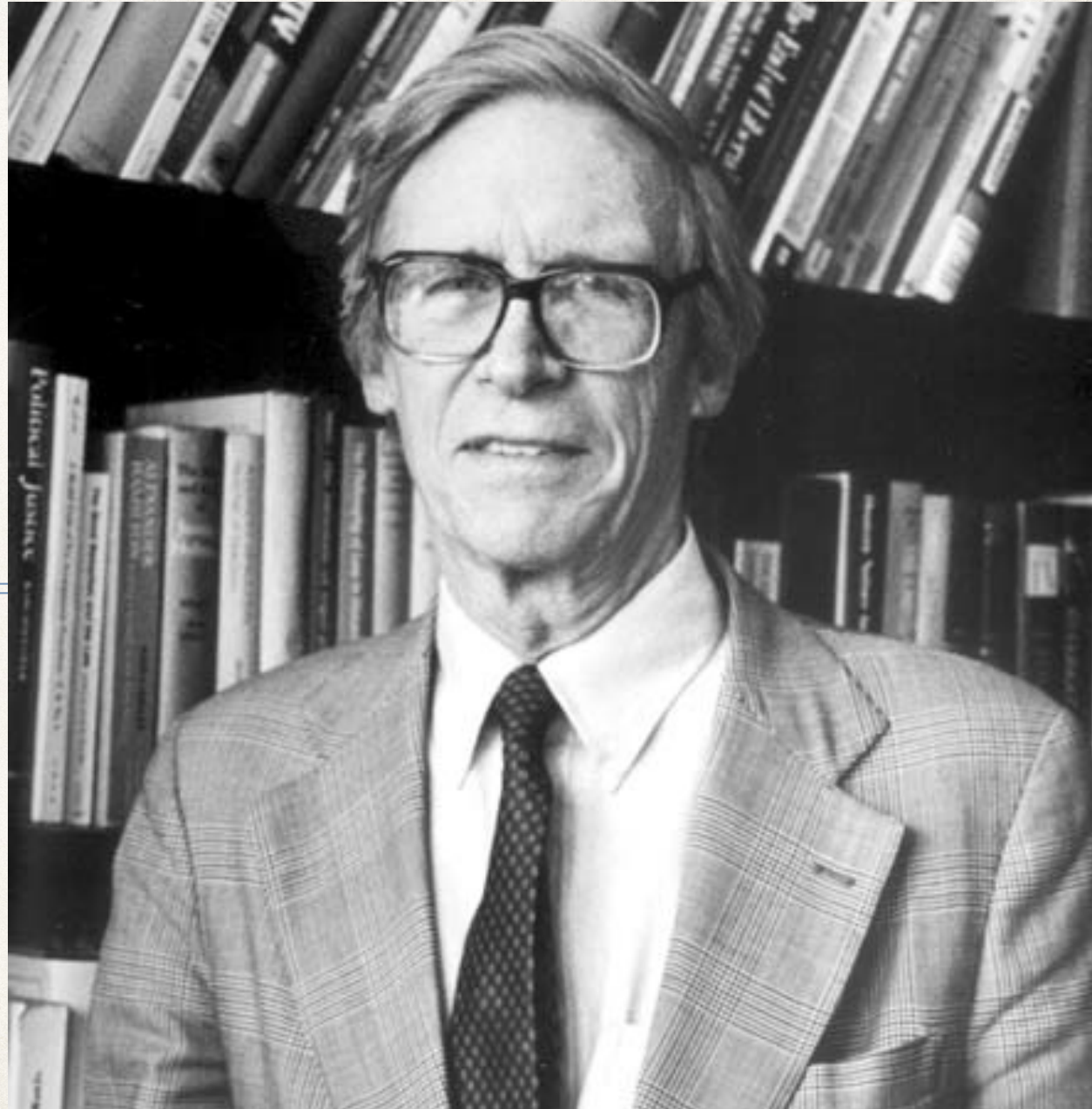
NB: The factors above are not under our complete control

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.*

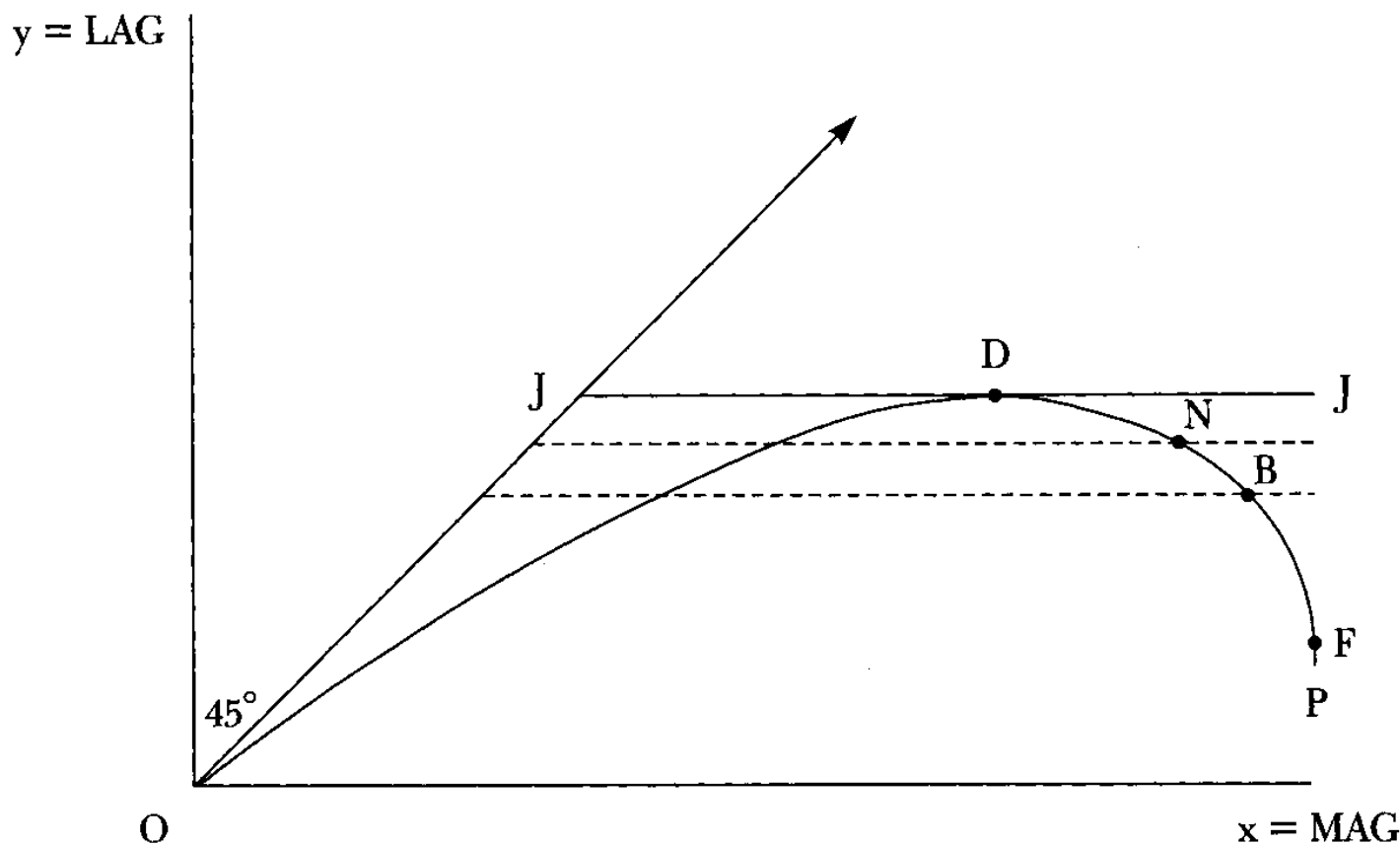
Which Society Better Conforms With Rawls' Difference Principles?

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.*