

The Original Position

Basic structure of society the “major social institutions” that “distribute fundamental rights and duties and determine the division of advantages from social cooperation. Examples: “the political constitution and the principal economic and social arrangements”, legal protection of free thought, competitive markets, private property in the means of production, and the monogamous family. (§2)

List of alternatives the parties are asked to choose among some of the rules in §22, p. 124.

Circumstances of justice the parties know that they live in moderate scarcity. Material resources are neither drastically scarce nor abundant and people are neither completely benevolent nor malevolent. Social cooperation is possible and desirable: it produces benefits compared with general egoism. But they disagree about how to distribute the benefits of social cooperation. (§22)

Generational concern the parties care about the next two generations of their families, even though they are not in the circumstances of justice with respect to one another. (§22, pp. 128-9)

Unlimited information the parties know basic generalizations from the social sciences. But they don't know anything specific about their own society, aside from the fact that it's in the circumstances of justice. (§24, pp. 137-8)

Formal conditions the parties can only choose principles that meet the conditions of: generality and universality (principles apply to everyone), publicity (the principles will be public knowledge), ordering (the principles resolve all claims), and finality (there is no appeal to higher principles). (§23)

The veil of ignorance the parties don't know who they are. (§24)

Equality the parties are all equal. Indeed, they're indistinguishable, such that there might as well be just one.

Rationality the parties take efficient means to their ends. (§25)

Mutual disinterest the parties are motivated only by their own interests. They have no special interest in helping or harming any other party. (§25)

Sense of justice the parties know that they will all abide by the principles they choose. They know that they can abide by principles of justice and that others will abide by those principles. (§25)

Strains of commitment there are limits to what rules people can abide by. The parties cannot choose rules that they could not keep. (§29)

The thin theory of the good the parties know that their good consists in pursuing a 'rational plan of life'. (§60)

Primary social goods the parties know that there are some things that are useful for *any* rational plan of life: liberty, opportunities, wealth, sense of self-worth. (§11, p. 62; §15)