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John Rawls

John Bordley Rawls (ˈroʊlz; February 21, 1921 – November 24, 2002) was an American moral and political philosopher. He held the James Bryant Conant University Professorship at Harvard University and the Fulbright Fellowship at the University of Oxford. Rawls received both the Schock Prize for Logic and Philosophy and the National Humanities Medal in 1999, the latter presented by President Bill Clinton, in recognition of how Rawls's work "helped a whole generation of learned Americans revive their faith in democracy itself."

His magnum opus, A Theory of Justice (1971), was said at the time of its publication to be "the most important work in moral philosophy since the end of World War II" and is now regarded as "one of the primary texts in political philosophy". His work in political philosophy, dubbed Rawlsianism, takes as its starting point the argument that "the most reasonable principles of justice are those everyone would accept and agree to from a fair position". Rawls attempts to determine the principles of social justice by employing a number of thought experiments such as the famous original position in which everyone is impartially situated as equals behind a veil of ignorance. He is one of the major thinkers in the tradition of liberal political philosophy. According to English philosopher Jonathan Wolff, John Rawls was the most important political philosopher of the 20th century.

"Veil of Ignorance"

The "veil of ignorance" is a method of determining the morality of political issues proposed in 1971 by American philosopher John Rawls in his "original position" political philosophy. It is based upon the following thought experiment:
people making political decisions imagine that they know nothing about the particular talents, abilities, tastes, social
class, and positions they will have within a social order. When such parties are selecting the principles for distribution of
rights, positions, and resources in the society in which they will live, this "veil of ignorance" prevents them from knowing
who will receive a given distribution of rights, positions, and resources in that society. For example, for a proposed
society in which 50% of the population is kept in slavery, it follows that on entering the new society there is a 50%
likelihood that the participant would be a slave. The idea is that parties subject to the veil of ignorance will make choices
based upon moral considerations, since they will not be able to make choices based on their own self- or class-interest.

As Rawls put it, "no one knows his place in society, his class position or social status; nor does he know his fortune in
the distribution of natural assets and abilities, his intelligence and strength, and the like". The idea of the thought
experiment is to render obsolete those personal considerations that are morally irrelevant to the justice or injustice of
principles meant to allocate the benefits of social cooperation. The veil of ignorance is part of a long tradition of thinking
in terms of a social contract that includes the writings of Immanuel Kant, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean Jacques
Rousseau, and Thomas Jefferson.

Spencer J. Maxcy outlines the concept as follows:

Imagine that you have set for yourself the task of developing a totally new social contract for today's society. How could
you do so fairly? Although you could never actually eliminate all of your personal biases and prejudices, you would need
to take steps at least to minimize them. Rawls suggests that you imagine yourself in an original position behind a veil of
ignorance. Behind this veil, you know nothing of yourself and your natural abilities, or your position in society. You know
nothing of your sex, race, nationality, or individual tastes. Behind such a veil of ignorance all individuals are simply
specified as rational, free, and morally equal beings. You do know that in the "real world", however, there will be a wide
variety in the natural distribution of natural assets and abilities, and that there will be differences of sex, race, and culture
that will distinguish groups of people from each other.

It has been argued that such a concept can have grand effects if it were to be practiced both in the present and in the
past. Referring again to the example of slavery, if the slave-owners were forced through the veil of ignorance to imagine
that they themselves may be slaves, then suddenly slavery may no longer seem justifiable. Perhaps the entire practice
would have been abolished without the need for a war to settle things. A grander example would be if each individual in
society were to base their practices off the fact that they could be the least advantaged member of society. In this
scenario, freedom and equality could possibly coexist in a way that has been the ideal of many philosophers. For
example, in the imaginary society, one might or might not be intelligent, rich, or born into a preferred class. Since one
may occupy any position in the society once the veil is lifted, the device forces the parties to consider society from the
perspective of all members, including the worst-off and best-off members.

Applications

Applications of veil of ignorance include policy formulation and implementation. In administration to reduce corruption
and improve efficiency.

History

The concept of the veil of ignorance has been in use by other names for centuries by philosophers such as John Stuart
Mill and Immanuel Kant whose work discussed the concept of the social contract. John Harsanyi helped to formalize the
concept in economics. The modern usage was developed by John Rawls in his 1971 book *A Theory of Justice*.

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### 3 Crito (Plato)

Plato⁶ (/ˈpleɪtoʊ/; Greek: Πλάτων Plátōn, pronounced [plá.tɔː:n] in Classical Attic; 428/427 or 424/423 – 348/347 BC) was a philosopher in Classical Greece and the founder of the Academy in Athens, the first institution of higher learning in the Western world. He is widely considered the most pivotal figure in the development of philosophy, especially the Western tradition. Unlike nearly all of his philosophical contemporaries, Plato's entire work is believed to have survived intact for over 2,400 years. Others believe that the oldest extant manuscript dates to around AD 895, 1100 years after Plato's death. This makes it difficult to know exactly what Plato wrote.

Along with his teacher, Socrates, and his most famous student, Aristotle, Plato laid the very foundations of Western philosophy and science. Alfred North Whitehead once noted: "the safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato." In addition to being a foundational figure for Western science, philosophy, and mathematics, Plato has also often been cited as one of the founders of Western religion and spirituality. Plato's influence on Christianity is often thought to be mediated by his major influence on Saint Augustine of Hippo, one of the most important philosophers and theologians in the foundation of the Western thought. In the 19th century, the philosopher Nietzsche called Christianity "Platonism for the people". Numenius of Apamea viewed this differently, he called Plato the Hellenic Moses. This would justify the superiority of Christianity over Hellenism because Moses predates Plato—thus the original source of this wisdom is the root of Christianity and not Hellenistic culture.

Plato was the innovator of the written dialogue and dialectic forms in philosophy. Plato appears to have been the founder of Western political philosophy, with his *Republic*, and *Laws* among other dialogues, providing some of the earliest extant treatments of political questions from a philosophical perspective. Plato's own most decisive philosophical influences are usually thought to have been Socrates, Parmenides, Heraclitus and Pythagoras, although few of his predecessors' works remain extant and much of what we know about these figures today derives from Plato himself.

The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* describes Plato as "...one of the most dazzling writers in the Western literary tradition and one of the most penetrating, wide-ranging, and influential authors in the history of philosophy. ... He was not the first thinker or writer to whom the word “philosopher” should be applied. But he was so self-conscious about how philosophy should be conceived, and what its scope and ambitions properly are, and he so transformed the intellectual currents with which he grappled, that the subject of philosophy, as it is often conceived—a rigorous and systematic examination of ethical, political, metaphysical, and epistemological issues, armed with a distinctive method—can be called his invention. Few other authors in the history of Western philosophy approximate him in depth and range: perhaps only Aristotle (who studied with him), Aquinas and Kant would be generally agreed to be of the same rank."

Crito⁷

### INTRODUCTION

The *Crito* seems intended to exhibit the character of Socrates in one light only, not as the philosopher, fulfilling a divine mission and trusting in the will of heaven, but simply as the good citizen, who having been unjustly condemned is willing...
to give up his life in obedience to the laws of the state . . .

The days of Socrates are drawing to a close; the fatal ship has been seen off Sunium, as he is informed by his aged friend and contemporary Crito, who visits him before the dawn has broken; he himself has been warned in a dream that on the third day he must depart. Time is precious, and Crito has come early in order to gain his consent to a plan of escape. This can be easily accomplished by his friends, who will incur no danger in making the attempt to save him, but will be disgraced for ever if they allow him to perish. He should think of his duty to his children, and not play into the hands of his enemies. Money is already provided by Crito as well as by Simmias and others, and he will have no difficulty in finding friends in Thessaly and other places.

Socrates is afraid that Crito is but pressing upon him the opinions of the many; whereas, all his life long he has followed the dictates of reason only and the opinion of the one wise or skilled man. There was a time when Crito himself had allowed the propriety of this. And although someone will say ‘the many can kill us,’ that makes no difference; but a good life, in other words, a just and honourable life, is alone to be valued. All considerations of loss of reputation or injury to his children should be dismissed: the only question is whether he would be right in attempting to escape. Crito, who is a disinterested person not having the fear of death before his eyes, shall answer this for him. Before he was condemned they had often held discussions, in which they agreed that no man should either do evil, or return evil for evil, or betray the right. Are these principles to be altered because the circumstances of Socrates are altered? Crito admits that they remain the same. Then is his escape consistent with the maintenance of them? To this Crito is unable or unwilling to reply.

Socrates proceeds:—Suppose the Laws of Athens to come and remonstrate with him: they will ask, ‘Why does he seek to overturn them?’ and if he replies, ‘They have injured him,’ will not the Laws answer, ‘Yes, but was that the agreement? Has he any objection to make to them which would justify him in overturning them? Was he not brought into the world and educated by their help, and are they not his parents? He might have left Athens and gone where he pleased, but he has lived there for seventy years more constantly than any other citizen.’ Thus he has clearly shown that he acknowledged the agreement, which he cannot now break without dishonour to himself and danger to his friends. Even in the course of the trial he might have proposed exile as the penalty, but then he declared that he preferred death to exile. And whither will he direct his footsteps? In any well-ordered state the Laws will consider him as an enemy. Possibly in a land of misrule like Thessaly he may be welcomed at first, and the unseemly narrative of his escape will be regarded by the inhabitants as an amusing tale. But if he offends them he will have to learn another sort of lesson. Will he continue to give lectures in virtue? That would hardly be decent. And how will his children be the gainers if he takes them into Thessaly, and deprives them of Athenian citizenship? Or if he leaves them behind, does he expect that they will be better taken care of by his friends because he is in Thessaly? Will not true friends care for them equally whether he is alive or dead?

Finally, they exhort him to think of justice first, and of life and children afterwards. He may now depart in peace and innocence, a sufferer and not a doer of evil. But if he breaks agreements, and returns evil for evil, they will be angry with him while he lives; and their brethren the Laws of the world below will receive him as an enemy. Such is the mystic voice which is always murmuring in his ears.

That Socrates was not a good citizen was a charge made against him during his lifetime, which has been often repeated in later ages. The crimes of Alcibiades, Critias, and Charmides, who had been his pupils, were still recent in the memory of the now restored democracy. The fact that he had been neutral in the death-struggle of Athens was not likely to
conciliate popular good-will. Plato, writing probably in the next generation, undertakes the defence of his friend and master in this particular, not to the Athenians of his day, but to posterity and the world at large.

Whether such an incident ever really occurred as the visit of Crito and the proposal of escape is uncertain; Plato could easily have invented far more than that; and in the selection of Crito, the aged friend, as the fittest person to make the proposal to Socrates, we seem to recognize the hand of the artist. Whether anyone who has been subjected by the laws of his country to an unjust judgment is right in attempting to escape, is a thesis about which casuists might disagree. Shelley is of opinion that Socrates ‘did well to die,’ but not for the ‘sophistical’ reasons which Plato has put into his mouth. And there would be no difficulty in arguing that Socrates should have lived and preferred to a glorious death the good which he might still be able to perform. ‘A rhetorician would have had much to say upon that point.’ It may be observed however that Plato never intended to answer the question of casuistry, but only to exhibit the ideal of patient virtue which refuses to do the least evil in order to avoid the greatest, and to show his master maintaining in death the opinions which he had professed in his life. Not ‘the world,’ but the ‘one wise man,’ is still the paradox of Socrates in his last hours. He must be guided by reason, although her conclusions may be fatal to him. The remarkable sentiment that the wicked can do neither good nor evil is true, if taken in the sense, which he means, of moral evil; in his own words, ‘they cannot make a man wise or foolish.’

This little dialogue is a perfect piece of dialectic, in which granting the ‘common principle,’ there is no escaping from the conclusion. It is anticipated at the beginning by the dream of Socrates and the parody of Homer. The personification of the Laws, and of their brethren the Laws in the world below, is one of the noblest and boldest figures of speech which occur in Plato.