

Rawls's Original Position

Camping Trip Exercise

Camping Trip. Six friends are going on a camping trip. They need to establish some ground rules about how to distribute goods on the trip, such as fish and apples, as well as time spent doing chores. You have been tasked with representing one of the six in the deliberation process about which of the four rules below to choose. Your job is to do *whatever you can* to maximize their interests—i.e., maximize their goods and leisure time, and minimize the amount of time they would spend doing things they don't like to do.

Harry loves fishing, and Harry is very good at fishing. Consequently, he catches, and provides, more fish than others do. If everyone had one hour of leisure time from tasks like cooking and cleaning, they would together catch 5 fish. With two hours of leisure time from tasks like cooking and cleaning, Harry could catch 5 *more* fish. But Harry *hates* cooking, especially cooking fish. He would prefer not to do any camping chores at all; but if he has to, he'd really prefer it not be cooking.¹

Sylvia is unusually lucky. She often stumbles upon great finds, like trees full of perfect apples. She is also greedy, though; and when stumbles upon some great find, she doesn't like to share it.

Leslie has been endowed from birth with many odd knacks and talents. One of those talents is cracking nuts. She is the only one of the campers who knows how to do this. She is also very good at singing camp songs: everyone gets a lot of pleasure out of hearing her voice. But singing is very tiring for her, and she'd prefer not to do it for very long.

Morgan's father camped at this campsite thirty years ago. She know that he dug a special little pond on the other side of the hill nearby, and stocked it with specially good fish. "Dad knew I might come camping here one day," she says, "and he did all that so that I could eat better when I'm here."

Jayson is an Eagle Scout, and so has received an excellent survival education. He's extremely well-trained in navigating the wilderness; building fires, identifying poisonous plants, etc., and is considerably better at these things than everyone else. As much as he likes doing these things, though, he'd of course prefer to spend most of his camping trip relaxing.

Tyler has a great sense of humor, and is fun to be around. His favorite thing is to relax with his friends by the fire, telling stories and eating s'mores. But his family was not outdoorsy growing up, and he doesn't know anything about fishing, or navigating, or cracking nuts. In fact, he can contribute very little to the supply of camping goods. He is, however, perfectly able to do chores like cooking and cleaning.

¹These character descriptions have been borrowed in part or in full from G.A. Cohen's *Why Not Socialism*, pp. 7-9.

Menu of Principles

Finders, Keepers. Whatever goods that someone finds, makes, or catches, they get to keep those goods; and cannot be forced to share with others. But if anything found, made, or caught requires cooking or other preparation, that person has to do the preparation themselves.

Average Utility. Leisure time and chores will be distributed in the way that *best* maximizes the average happiness of all the campers; namely: Harry does not have to do any chores at all, and gets 12 hours of leisure time each day; Morgan and Sylvia each get 8 hours of leisure time per day; Jayson gets 5 hours of leisure time each day; Leslie gets 3 hours of leisure each day but has to sing most of the time; and Tyler gets no leisure time at all.

Egalitarianism. Everyone gets the exact same amount of leisure time, and must distribute chore time equally according to how difficult each chore is for each person. Whatever goods that someone finds, makes, or catches, they must share them equally with the others.

Win, Win. Some people can have more leisure time than others (and be made to do fewer or less burdensome chores) *only if* everyone would be better off as a result than they would have been, had the leisure and chore time been distributed equally.

Round 1

Which principle would be best for the person you're representing? Which would be *worst*? Why?

Round 2

Which principle would be best for the person you're representing? Which would be *worst*? Why?

How is this scenario *like* the "original position," as Rawls describes it? How is it different?