

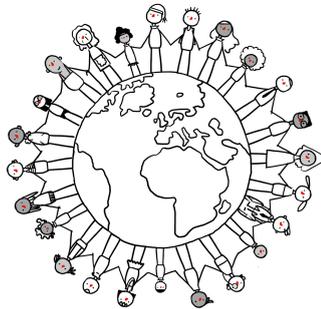
## The veil of ignorance

Imagine you are in charge of cutting up a cake to share between yourself and three strangers. It is up to you how you share the cake. No one will see you cut the cake and no one will know it was you who cut it. How would you cut up the cake?



Now imagine that you don't know which slice of the cake you will receive once you have cut it up. Would that change how you cut up the cake?

If you could create a new world, what would it be like? Think about how everything would be shared out between everyone: money, jobs, healthcare, education, power. How would you share these out between the people of the world: you, your family, your friends, your country, other people?

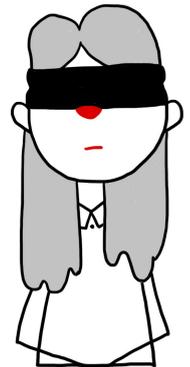


Now imagine you had to create a new world but you did not know what place you would find yourself in it. You did not know in which country you would be born, or whether your parents would be rich or poor, or what their religious or non-religious worldview would be. You did not know if you would be male or female, black or white, straight or gay, healthy or sick, or disabled or not. You didn't even know what your tastes, talents, and interests would be. What kind of world would you want to be born into? What kind of world would you create?

### Questions to think about:

- 1) Would slavery exist?
- 2) Would men be paid more than women for the same work?
- 3) Would ethnic minorities be denied the right to vote?
- 4) Would same-sex couples be forbidden from getting married?
- 5) Would special privileges be given to one particular religion or belief?
- 6) Would poor people be denied access to healthcare?
- 7) Would everybody be given equal opportunities?
- 8) Would everyone be free to follow their interests and talents?

This activity illustrates a thought experiment posed by the philosopher **John Rawls**. Rawls described the idea of not knowing what position you might hold in society as being placed behind a **veil of ignorance**. Rawls believed that this condition would lead us to design a fairer society. By not wishing to disadvantage ourselves, we would need to ensure that no one was disadvantaged. From behind the veil we would therefore choose a much fairer society than we have in reality.



'A just society is a society that if you knew everything about it, you'd be willing to enter it in a random place.'

John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*