In contemporary moral and political philosophy, the veil of ignorance is employed, most notably by Harsanyi and Rawls, as an analytic device to model certain commonly held intuitions about justice and to determine corresponding principles of justice. Despite differences in the specifications of their veils, Harsanyi and Rawls agree that one central objective of the veil of ignorance is to model the moral ideal of impartiality, which both philosophers regard as essential to their theories of justice.

Recently, Moreno-Ternero and Roemer (2008) have argued that the veil of ignorance does not model adequately the moral ideal of impartiality. According to them, the veil of ignorance enforces a stronger form of impartiality than Kant’s categorical imperative and, primarily as a consequence, it generally leads to anti-prioritarian conclusions, if the procedures that are necessary to determine the demands of justice are specified fully and are based on sound reasoning. According to Moreno-Ternero and Roemer and their understanding of common sense morality, justice demands that the worse-off members of society are prioritized at least weakly over the better-off group members and, as a result, Moreno-Ternero and Roemer reject the veil of ignorance as a modeling device for demands of justice.

I show that the notion of impartiality that is expressed by Harsanyi’s and Rawls’ veils of ignorance is not essentially different from the notion of impartiality that is expressed by Kant’s categorical imperative, if the procedure that is necessary to determine the demands of the categorical imperative is specified fully and is based on sound reasoning. Further, it is not the fault of the veil of ignorance and the moral ideal of impartiality expressed by it that many theories of justice that rely on veil of ignorance reasoning lead to anti-prioritarian conclusions. Although the veil of ignorance demands solid justification for favoring particular positions of society, and thereby sets high standards for partiality, it does not rule out prioritarianism. Moreover, justice may be demanding, and thus the high standards of the veil of ignorance do not offer per se a good reason to reject the veil of ignorance on moral grounds. The anti-prioritarian conclusions reached by many theories of justice that rely on veil of ignorance reasoning are a result of the complex structures of these theories and the way that they combine and weigh different moral ideals, as well as their informational bases.