Play based on the concept of Rawlsian Original Position and Veil of Ignorance

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Narrator: It is the very beginning of time. A sense of existence has barely pervaded through the consciousness of living beings. Adam and Eve have just been expelled from the Garden of Eden, their carefree lives of limitless consumerism over. Survival was now a primary concern, survival in a world where no one else lived. Man had been cast out with only the knowledge of good and evil. Yet, he knew not himself, knew not if he was good or evil, or that he even had a choice. Overwhelmed, he called upon the very Creator who had left him to fend for himself.

Adam: God? Do you call this fair? Eve and I were alone for eternity with nothing to want for and now you leave us with 3 more mouths to feed in a world we do not understand. At least help us know which way to take in these forked roads?

(Enter Devil)

Devil: He has forsaken you, Adam. His sympathies lie with the obedient, the banal, the slave to whims and wishes. I, I sympathize with poverty, with misery, with starvation. Call upon me and you shall not want.

Adam (visibly confused): I...uh...the gift of immortality has been taken away from me, O Lucifer. I have 3 sons and they shall live longer, live long after I am dust. Yet, I know not what to teach them. I now have the knowledge of good and evil, but I know not which path to choose.

Eve: Everyday, we realize there are many ways to live our lives. We realize with each choice is impinged a different consequence. Yet, there seems to be no certainty of answers. Each choice seems to have its own merit, good and evil themselves remain too broad as definitions. We need a teacher, someone to tell us not only which is right, but which is best.

Devil: The answer appears to be fairly obvious. Do the deed...

God (interrupting): Since when do you solicit advice, Devil?

(Everyone bows)

God: Adam, you need not believe I have forsaken you. I may not provide you with bountiful surplus, but I am here to help you decide your correct path. Your choices, Adam, should be based on the welfare of
your sons. That is the ultimate truth and the ultimate choice. Even if it harms your own benefits, it is imperative that you think of the greater good.

Devil: Hah!

God: You disagree?

Devil: Perchance you see the inherent irony of this statement? If everyone is selfless enough to forgo his welfare for others, ultimately no one shall be happy. It shall be a world of self-sacrificing do-gooders who will consider their chance of going to heaven someday as barter for current satisfaction. It will be a dull world, Eve, do not you see? Would your sons be happy, if they continue the same sacrifices for their sons?

Eve: He is right, my Lord. Wherein lays the satisfaction of doing all I could for my sons if they do not live to reap the rewards of our pain? Lord, no one shall be able to know a day of happiness in such a place, where mutual sacrifice defines the way we live our lives. God, this is merely a way of qualifying ourselves for heaven, not to exist on earth. We shall neither have liberty of spirits nor equality of benefits.

Adam: Quiet, Eve. We have already crossed God’s path once. Do not arouse his wrath again. He speaks correctly. He asks us to build a just society, a society based on mutual reciprocity. If we all think of others, no one can be unhappy. It is but a reasonable request.

Eve: But what about the individual conception of good? We cannot all be altruists, working for the betterment of all, while forgetting our own selves?

God: I never ask you to forget your individual good. I just wish you would take decisions which help everyone, especially the most vulnerable. And remember, whatsoever you would wish others to do to you, do the same unto them.

Devil: Are these philosophical outpourings your guide to them to lead their lives?

God: And why not? I speak of justice and fairness.

Devil: It is not fairness. You ask them to give up their present happiness for a vague promise of satisfaction in the future. You do not give them immortality. Why take away the few years they have to live on earth on altruistic pains?

God: Rather than as greedy egoists? It is exactly the sort of thing you would suggest. With your own selfish perspective of human life, and your biased designs on them, this argument is expected of you.

Devil: You much malign my reputation on earth. However, you will find I shall win by sheer weight of public support, even if public opinion is against me.
Eve: Enough of this. I have made my decision. I refuse to follow the dictums of a whimsical God who knows no forgiveness and casts us out of our Eden. I shall do what is best for my existence. Adam can follow his own dictates of heart.

Adam: God, I shall obey you. Yet, it will not be easy. And what shall we teach our children. They are the foundation of a future society and they will learn diverse ideas. What if they base their lives on an easier mode of living, rather than the correct way of living?

God: There are many ways to base a society upon, Adam. Today you learn that. There will come a day when you might learn to reconcile these ways. There are many lessons to be learned on this road yet.

Devil: You do realize I won this round, do not you?

God: It is not about us anymore, Devil.

<End of Act 1>

Act 2

Narrator: It is several years since then. Adam and Eve have many children, the oldest being Cain, Abel and Seth. It is not a world which is easy to define. While they espouse the teachings of God, there is a strain of the advice the Devil taught their mother years ago. The mask is slipping off slowly and there are undercurrents of tension amidst the façade of peacefulness.

<Enter Cain, Abel>

Abel: Cain, you must learn to be more tolerant of Seth. He is younger and has not seen much of life yet. Can you not try to be more patient of his ignorant mistakes and naïveté?

Cain: Do not ask of me what I cannot give, Abel. It is easy for you to impart advice. You have succeeded where I have not. In the eyes of men and gods, I remain a failure as a man. I have neither accumulated the wealth of lands, nor the respect of men. I remain a lowly farmer, barely yielding enough to support my own household, while you rule on the wealth of your vocation.

Abel: It is not true, brother. In the eyes of God, we remain equal, judged not by our material gains, but by our spiritual motives.

Cain: Pray do not vex me with these platitudes. Do I not see the disgust in the eyes of my own brothers, the hint of pity and amusement in their greetings? Or the regret in the eyes of our parents?

Abel: I despise my wealth if it breeds such discontent within you. I would want no more than mutual cordiality and brotherhood. Do not judge me by such success if it rifts us apart. If you wish, we will share my wealth equally. Our father wished us to live for the happiness of others and not the pleasure of self. How can I go against that?
Cain: You mock me, sir. You cast against me my poverty and helplessness, and disguise it in the garb of sacrifice. I have yet not reached such misery to live under your charitable care. You shall never speak of this again.

Abel: I am surprised to see you offended. You wish for wealth and then spurn the offer within moments? What I present you is not charity. It is the dictates of God, who wished us to work for the happiness of others.

Cain: What is wealth when I gain no respect? You infuriate me with these words.

Abel: I do not see any merit in your argument. Consider your wife and children. Imagine their happiness. Can you not think of the greater good?

Cain: Let us speak of it no more. Come, I see a wood ahead of us. Let us go explore it.

<Exit Cain, Abel>

<Enter Seth, bowed head, walks around forlornly>

God: Why do you look so mournful, youngest of Adam’s sons?

Seth: Cain has killed Abel in a fit of rage. It is an unspeakable deed.

God: It is indeed unheard of. We are born equals and no man has the right to slay another. I am appalled.

<Enter Devil>

Devil: Are you discussing the first human death on Earth?

Seth: Do not speak, Devil. It is your fault. Cain lived for his own pleasure and now a man is dead. Cain knows neither empathy nor pity. Abel, my noble brother, now lies dead. He knew nothing but sacrifice and brotherhood and that has led to his death.

Devil: Yet you blame me? It appears to me his self sacrificial stance did not benefit anyone, least of all him.

<Enter Adam and Eve>

Eve: Whom do I blame for my son’s date then? Do I blame my eldest son, who was goaded by Abel’s sacrifice when he could not reciprocate or my youngest son, who worked only for the happiness of others?

God: This is not an easy question to answer, Eve. A society shapes an individual in curious ways. What a man learns from his environment is manifested in various ways.

Adam: Then have we taught them incorrectly? Have we been providing the wrong environment? We gave them all we learned from you and from life and we gave them choices.
Seth: But is not that where we go wrong? Even if we claim that neither choice is wrong or right, we still define two diverse groups of people who do not have common views. Do you not see, this is what plants the seeds of discord amongst people? Can a society survive on such disparity?

Adam: Is there no middle road? A common path where we can accept each other’s differences and yet live with a certain amount of cordial tolerance?

Devil: Do you believe it is possible for man to disregard individual deep metaphysical beliefs and open himself to such liberalism of thought? Is it easy to find such a unifying concept of justice and freedom to base a society upon?

Eve: If it brings universal peace, any man would make enough compromises to achieve this end. We would all work for individual happiness but adhere to a code of conduct. There should be some mutually acceptable principles which can shape our behavior.

Seth: But individual aspirations and needs differ. One must accept a fair amount of animosity if one person’s ambitions thwart someone else’s. How do we work for the greater good if our own needs forbid us?

God: Nothing forbids you from working for the greater good, Seth. When you make choices, do not make choices for yourself. Forget your own self, forget all selves. Remember what is fair, what is just and work towards it. You will never fail to make the correct decision. Never succumb to your own biases and no man will ever sin again.

Devil: It is an ideal concept, I will not deny it. But you created man, and you did not create him to be ideal. He is a mixture of flaws and evils. It is a rare man who would be able to put the world’s interest above his own.

Eve: We will teach the future men. We will teach them why it is wrong to sin. We will teach to punish sinners. We will have a code of conduct and we will teach them to adhere to them. We will delineate right and wrong and how a man should know his limits as he pursues his individual good.

Seth: Will it be easy, God? Can we ever teach men to be selfless? Even if we give them freedom enough to pursue their own pleasures, how do we ascertain they will not wish for even more?

God: You ask the question for ages to come, Adam. Man will always have choices, and he will not always be right in his choices. Yet, you have made a new beginning today. You have now settled on a foundation for a more just society, a more reasonable society. Humans will co-operate more freely if they know they have enough freedom to pursue personal goals. Today, you have sown the roots of a basic society. What develops will not be perfect, no man will ever be able to be completely true to such a society, but it is a beginning.

Seth: We begin afresh today, then. My brother’s death shall not be in vain. We will move towards a just society. Let us look forward to a new beginning.