In John Rawls’ “A Theory of Justice (excerpts),” Rawls argues that when the Original Position is achieved, the Difference Principle will follow. The Original Position is Rawls’ view of an “appropriate initial status quo,” (Pg. 4 of “A Theory of Justice” by John Rawls) wearing a “veil of ignorance,” (Pg. 2, Rawls) meaning that people do not “know what place they will have in society.” (Lecture 10-26, 2020) Furthermore, it is assumed that people have “mutual disinterestedness” (Lecture 10-26) in the Original Position, meaning they promote “only their own interests and concerns.” (Lecture 10-26). The Difference Principle is the principle that “social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone’s advantage, and (b) attached to positions and offices open to all….” (Pg. 7, Rawls) Rawls later emphasizes the “maximin” (Lecture 10-28, 2020) strategy of inequalities needing to benefit the least well off, and that inequalities should only be allowed if it does not infringe “basic liberties.” (Pg. 8, Rawls) In summary, Rawls believes that in the Original Position, people will agree to the principle of allowing inequalities as long as it benefits every individual and as long as it does not infringe basic liberties. To this claim, it may be objected that the Difference Principle’s maximin strategy to distribute inequality would not be chosen, but rather an alternative strategy, thereby refuting Rawls’ argument. However, a deeper dive into the alternative strategy, thought experiment, and Rawls’ conception of the veil of ignorance, will rebut the objection and defend Rawls’ argument that the Difference Principle follows from the Original Position.

There is one major alternative strategy to the maximin strategy, that at forehand seems more rational. This strategy is heavily based on Utilitarian concepts; it is the combination of “the ex-ante pareto principle” (“The Ex Ante Pareto Principle,” by Anna Mahtani, *Journal of Philosophy*, 2017) and the “expected utility theory” (“Normative Theories of Rational Choice: Expected Utility,” by R. A. Briggs, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2019, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/rationality-normative-utility/>). Ex-ante means the “expected outcomes for the agents, as calculated before the action is carried out,” (Pg. 6, Mahtani) and the ex-ante pareto principle is the principle that if a choice has an expected outcome greater than another choice, than the choice with the higher expected outcome is considered “superior.” (Pg. 6, Mahtani) Similarly, the expected utility theory is maximizing the “weighted average of the *utilities* of each of its possible outcomes,” (Paragraph 3, Briggs) and those utilities are weighted “according to the probability that the act will lead to the outcome.” (Paragraph 3, Briggs) Combining the expected utility theory and the ex-ante pareto principle, the resulting strategy is to choose the scenario with a higher expected utility, or for simplicity well-being, calculated according to the probability of achieving that outcome. With this alternative strategy in mind, consider this thought experiment: let scenario 1 have a total population of 10 people, and let there be group A with a wellbeing of 100, and group B with a wellbeing of 10. Assume that everyone knows their chance of ending up in each group; in this case, let it be 80% for group A and 20% for group B. Knowing this percentage, the total expected well-being can be calculated by multiplying 0.8 by 100 for group A and adding 0.2 multiplied by 10 for group B for a total of 82. Now, consider scenario 2, where the total population size remains equal and the same assumption remains, but group A’s wellbeing decreases to 90 while group B’s wellbeing increases to 20, and there is a 50% chance for people to end up in group A or B. Using the same calculation methods as before, the total expected well-being is 55. If we were to follow the alternative strategy that combines the expected utility theory and the ex-ante pareto principle, then scenario 1 would be chosen over scenario 2. If we were to follow the maximin strategy, scenario 2 would be chosen over scenario 1.

Taking this clear understanding of the alternative strategy, let us reuse the thought experiment but fix the assumption that the exact percentages of each group being known to the assumption that people do not know those exact percentages but know that group A is a group of employed people, while group B is unemployed. Traditionally, employers use the “[i]nstitutionalized desert claims” (Pg. 1 of “VIII. The Concept of Desert,” by John Kleinig, *American Philosophical Quarterly,* 1971) when hiring employees, meaning that if the employee has a certain virtue, most likely the virtue of being competent for the job, then the employee “deserves” (Pg. 1, Kleinig) the job. Based on this notion, if you know that you are highly competent for job opportunities, then you deserve to be hired, ultimately signifying that you have a higher chance of being in the group of employed people, group A. The exact opposite is also true; if you knew that you did not deserve a job, then you would know that you have a higher chance of being in group B. With this information, you would still be able to calculate, if not at least estimate, your expected well-being since you knew your chances of being in a group based on how capable or not you were, allowing the alternative strategy to stand. However, notice that in the first thought experiment, the alternative strategy heavily relied on the assumption that everyone knew their exact chances of ending up in each group while in the second thought experiment, it relied on the assumption that everyone would know their estimated chances based on their knowledge of their own capabilities. The first assumption is not appropriate as there is no such standard percentage of ending up in a group; no person can just set a fixed percentage for each group as the percentage of ending up in a group in the Original Position involves too many complicated factors, including employment rates, the economy, social factors, and etcetera. Moreover, the second assumption fails to take the veil of ignorance into consideration. Rawls explicitly states that the veil of ignorance takes away the knowledge of “natural assets and abilities” (Pg. 2, Rawls) as well as that of “place in society.” (Pg. 2, Rawls) In other words, it is impossible to know if you have a high or low chance of landing a job. If you do not know your chances, there is no way to calculate your total expected well-being. Hence, the alternative strategy of choosing the scenario with the higher expected well-being is not compatible with Rawls’ description of the Original Position and the veil of ignorance.

In these ways, the objection of an alternative strategy combining the ex-ante pareto principle and the expected utility theory being more appropriate than the maximin strategy does not stand and does not invalidate Rawls’ argument that the Difference Principle follows from the Original Position. The veil of ignorance makes it impossible to determine one’s chances of being in any of the available groups, and if one does not know their chances, then it is impossible to calculate the total expected well-being, refuting the use of the alternative strategy in the Original Position.