

# The Lottery of Life

By Jason Buckley

*5 people A, B, C, D and E are sat on chairs in deep sleep. Enter DOCTOR X and DOCTOR Y.*

**DOCTOR X** Wakey wakey! Rise and shine!

*The people gradually wake up, stretch and yawn, then start looking around, confused.*

**PERSON A** Who am I? I don't think I can remember.

**DOCTOR Y** I'm sorry, we can't tell you that. It would ruin the whole experiment.

**PERSON B** Where are we, then? Have you kidnapped us?

**DOCTOR Y** Certainly not. You're all here of your own free will.

**PERSON C** Well I don't remember anything.

**DOCTOR X** Excellent. That's the idea.

**PERSON D** What idea? Why have you brought us here?

**DOCTOR Y** Let me explain. You're here to take some very important decisions. Decisions that will affect all of us.

**PERSON D** What, am I the Prime Minister?

**DOCTOR X** We don't know yet whether we should have a Prime Minister. That's just the sort of thing we want you to decide. Who should have power? What things should government do, and what things should people do for themselves? How much tax should people pay? How equal should society be?

**PERSON E** How can we decide that? We don't even know who we are.

**DOCTOR Y** That's what makes you perfect to decide. You see, when you ask people what they think is fair, they tend to say what's best for them. So rich people often think they get taxed too much, and poor people often think the rich don't get taxed enough.

**PERSON E** Hmm. I think there should be free care for people who've lost their memories.

**DOCTOR X** See! You've proved our point. But you don't need to worry about that. You've simply been hypnotised to forget all the details of your personal life. We call it 'the veil of ignorance'. When the experiment is over, we'll de-hypnotise you and you'll remember everything. But while you're here, you can decide what you think is a fair way to share out the money and opportunities in society, and nobody will be able to say you've been selfish because you don't know which self is yours.

**PERSON A** So I could be anybody?

**DOCTOR Y** Yes. When the experiment is over, you could find out that you're a premiership footballer and that those high taxes you've decided on are going to cost you a fortune. Or you could discover that you're a penniless refugee from another country, and that you're going to be in one of those detention centres you've set up to put people off coming here.

**PERSON A** So it's a bit of a gamble then?

**DOCTOR X** That's what we don't know. You might gamble on the chance that you're one of the lucky ones, and choose a system where people who are in demand get to keep most of their money. Or you might choose a system where things are shared out perfectly equally. Or anything in between.

**PERSON E** I don't see why we have to do this in pitch darkness.

**DOCTOR Y** All part of the veil of ignorance, I'm afraid. We can't have you knowing what skin colour you have, or whether or not you're good-looking. It's also helpful that you can't even tell whether or not you're blind. It was the only possibility for disability we could include. Of course, you could have a nasty disease that's expensive to cure. But you'll have to decide if health care is a private thing, or if everyone pays for it together through taxes.

**PERSON C** I keep forgetting if I'm a man or a woman.

**DOCTOR X** Yes. That took the hypnotist ages to get right. You'll also notice you can't remember if you fancy men or women or both, or whether you're single or in a relationship. We managed to hypnotise you to forget that.

**PERSON D** I'm pretty sure I'm an adult, but I don't feel old.

**DOCTOR Y** True. But you don't know if you have children or elderly relatives. So you can't tell how you'd want them to be treated.

**PERSON B** Hmm. This feels a bit like waiting to be reincarnated.

**DOCTOR X** Interesting thought. But of course, you can't remember if you really believe in reincarnation, or in God. All the food you eat while you're deciding will be vegan, but for all you know, you might be a carnivore. So you've no idea what rules you would prefer on animal welfare, halal meat or fox hunting, for example. You might have strong convictions one way or the other.

**PERSON B** I hope the food's good. This could take a while. Do we have a deadline?

**DOCTOR Y** No. We couldn't tell you a date we need your decision, because we don't want you to know when you are in history either. So you can't tell who's come before you or who might come after you.

**PERSON E** Can't we just say everything should be equal?

**PERSON B** If everything's equal, why should anyone bother working? We'll all be equally poor then.

**PERSON D** How about if we start off equal? Everyone gets the same...

**DOCTOR X** We'll leave you to it. Lunch or dinner is in a couple of hours.

*Exit DOCTOR X and DOCTOR Y*