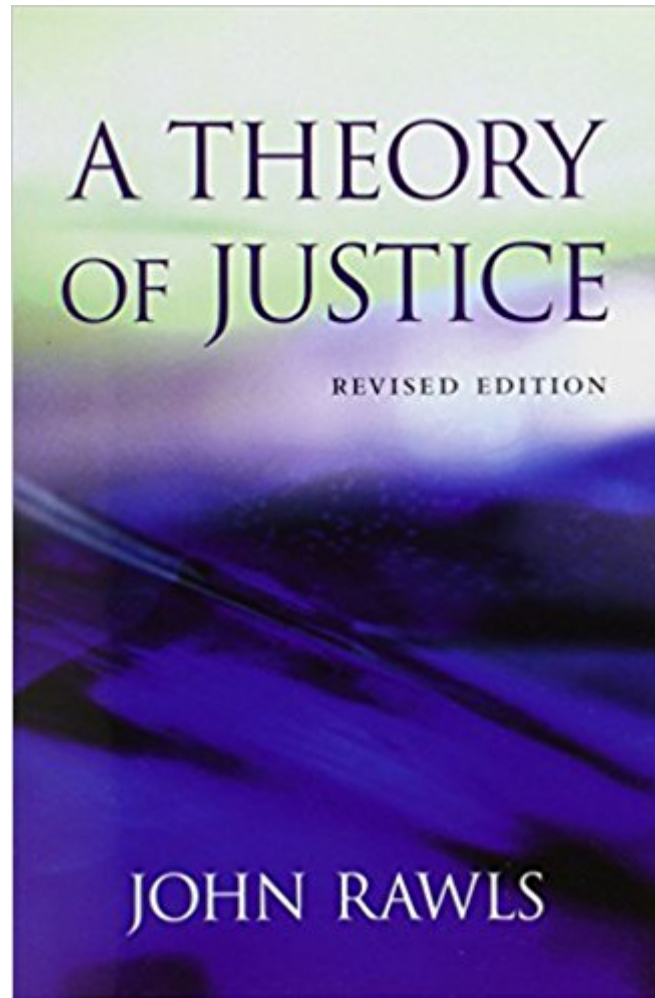




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# A Theory Of Justice



## Synopsis

Since it appeared in 1971, John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* has become a classic. The author has now revised the original edition to clear up a number of difficulties he and others have found in the original book. Rawls aims to express an essential part of the common core of the democratic tradition--justice as fairness--and to provide an alternative to utilitarianism, which had dominated the Anglo-Saxon tradition of political thought since the nineteenth century. Rawls substitutes the ideal of the social contract as a more satisfactory account of the basic rights and liberties of citizens as free and equal persons. "Each person," writes Rawls, "possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override." Advancing the ideas of Rousseau, Kant, Emerson, and Lincoln, Rawls's theory is as powerful today as it was when first published.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I don't know of a more lucid articulation of the intuitions many of us share about what is just. (Scott Turow New York Times Book Review 2013-10-10) In his magisterial new work... John Rawls draws on the most subtle techniques of contemporary analytic philosophy to provide the social contract tradition with what is, from a philosophical point of view at least, the most formidable defense it has yet received...[and] makes available the powerful intellectual resources and the comprehensive approach that have so far eluded antiutilitarians. He also makes clear how wrong it was to claim, as so many were claiming only a few years back, that systematic moral and political philosophy are dead... Whatever else may be true it is surely true that we must develop a sterner and more fastidious sense of justice. In making his peerless contribution to political theory, John

Rawls has made a unique contribution to this urgent task. No higher achievement is open to a scholar. (Marshall Cohen New York Times Book Review) Rawls's Theory of Justice is widely and justly regarded as this century's most important work of political philosophy. Originally published in 1971, it quickly became the subject of extensive commentary and criticism, which led Rawls to revise some of the arguments he had originally put forward in this work... This edition will certainly become the definitive one; all scholars will use it, and it will be an essential text for any academic library. It contains a new preface that helpfully outlines the major revisions, and a 'conversion table' that correlates the pagination of this edition with the original, which will be useful to students and scholars working with this edition and the extensive secondary literature on Rawls's work. Highly recommended. (J. D. Moon Choice) [Rawls] has elucidated a conception of justice which goes beyond anything to be found in Kant or Rousseau. It is a convincing refutation, if one is needed, of any lingering suspicions that the tradition of English-speaking political philosophy might be dead. Indeed, his book might plausibly be claimed to be the most notable contribution to that tradition to have been published since Sidgwick and Mill. (Times Literary Supplement) Enlightenment comes in various forms, sometimes even by means of books. And it is a pleasure to recommend... an indigenous American philosophical masterpiece of the first order... I mean... to press my recommendation of [this book] to non-philosophers, especially those holding positions of responsibility in law and government. For the topic with which it deals is central to this country's purposes, and the misunderstanding of that topic is central to its difficulties... And the central idea is simple, elegant, plausible, and easily applied by anybody at any time as a measure of the justice of his own actions. (Peter Caws New Republic) With the simple carpentry of its arguments, its egalitarian leanings, and its preoccupation with fairness, Rawls's classic 1971 work, A Theory of Justice, is as American a book as, say, Mark Twain's The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. (Will Blythe Civilization)

"Each person" writes John Rawls, "possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override. Therefore in a just society the rights secured by justice are not subject to political bargaining or to the calculus of social interests". In this book Mr. Rawls attempts to account for these propositions, which he believes express our intuitive convictions of the primacy of justice. The principles of justice he sets forth are those that free and rational persons would accept in an initial position of equality. In this hypothetical situation, which corresponds to the state of nature in social contract theory, no one knows his or her place in society; his or her class position or social status; his or her fortune in the distribution of natural assets and

abilities; his or her intelligence, strength, and the like; or even his or her conception of the good. Thus, deliberating behind a veil of ignorance, people determine their rights and duties. The first, theoretical, section of the book addresses objections to the theory and alternative positions, especially utilitarianism. The author then applies his theory to the philosophical basis of the constitutional liberties, the problem of distributive justice, and the definition of the ground and limits of political duty and obligation. He includes here discussion of the issues of civil disobedience and conscientious objection. Finally, he connects the theory of justice with a doctrine of the good and of moral development. This enables him to formulate a conception of society as a social union of social unions and to use the theory of justice to explain the values of community. Since the appearance of the book in 1971, *A Theory of Justice* has been translated into 23 languages. Revisions to the original English text have been included in translations since 1975. This new English edition incorporates all those revisions, which the author considers to be significant improvements, especially to the discussions of liberty and primary goods. The Preface for the Revised Edition discusses the revisions in some detail.

## Great book

John Rawls' "*A Theory of Justice*" is almost universally regarded as the most important work of political philosophy in the 20th century. It's been translated into dozens of languages, is taught at universities around the world, and has generated a huge library of academic and non-academic commentary. Although the book's core conclusions are broadly social democratic, even right-wing scholars like Robert Nozick, Richard Epstein, and Friedrich Hayek have hailed its brilliance. But now Mr. Walt Byars, a libertarian economist and philosopher in Tampa, Florida, has discovered that the book is "blatantly shoddy, contradictory, and confused." Mr. Byars' review can be found immediately below. His criticism is focused on a short section (in a very long book) where Rawls discusses time preference. Briefly put, Rawls contends that people in the "original position" won't choose principles of justice that discriminate between people living at different periods of time. For reasons that aren't given, Mr. Byars claims that this move destroys the argument of "*A Theory of Justice*" since people in the real world -- ah ha! -- do have time preference. This claim is curious: as anyone who has actually read the book knows, Rawls imposes all sorts of "unreal" conditions on persons in the "original position" in order to remove the influence of bias and arbitrariness on the selection of principles of justice. Mr. Byars is a good sport, checks his reviews, and is never shy about offering his opinions, so readers might want to check to see how he responds to my remarks. In the

meantime, they should ignore his negative comments and read "A Theory of Justice." The book is long and often boring, but it offers a wealth of sophisticated philosophical and political arguments that have engaged thinkers around the world. People who read it carefully and think about the arguments -- rather than peruse it to find areas where it contradicts their pet theories -- will find their worldview transformed and deepened, even if they reject many of Rawls' conclusions.

This is one of the most famous books relating to "justice" of all time. I am happy with my buy and this theory has inspired me to do further research based on this theory.

This book is a major contribution to contemporary political philosophy and will shape discussions of justice for decades to come, as it has been doing since it was published. There are critics who sneer at Rawls but their half-baked theories, which reflect their own interests and prejudices, don't come close to his in their scope and persuasiveness. A true thinker for the second half of the 20th century whose ideas remain fresh and pertinent.

I needed this actually for my examen, but it was better than I expected. Though saturated with the American way of thinking, which is not necessarily a bad thing. But why is this book still haunting in my shopping cart, when I buy other books?

Great book. Best value on .

Continues to be the most important work of modern political philosophy. Everything after "Justice", even Rawls' later work, is a response either implicitly or explicitly to "Justice". This is the classic work.

Great Harvard req read

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