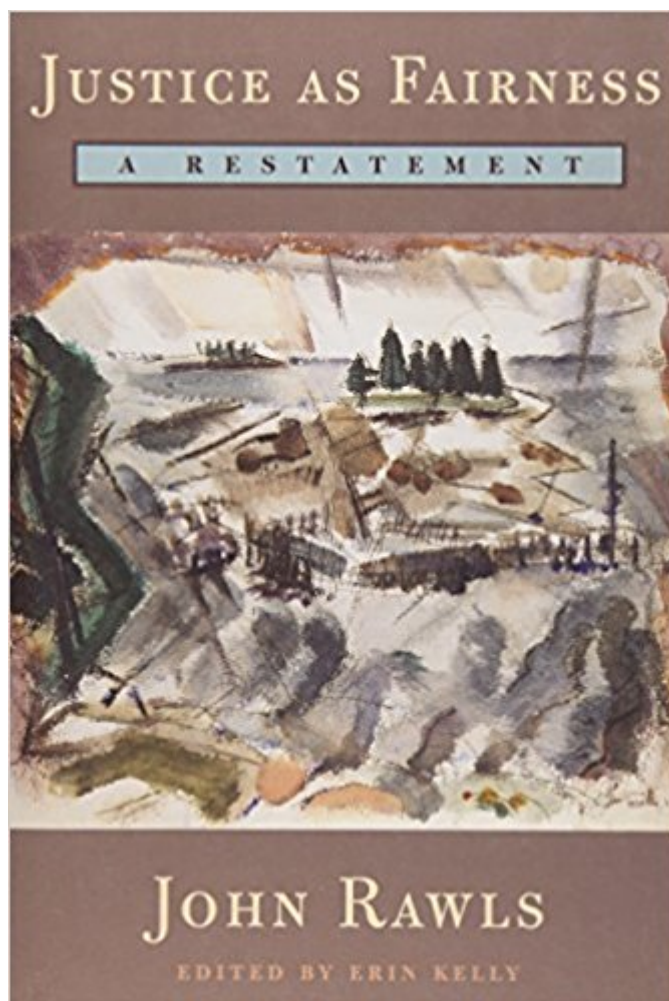


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# Justice As Fairness: A Restatement



## Synopsis

This book originated as lectures for a course on political philosophy that Rawls taught regularly at Harvard in the 1980s. In time the lectures became a restatement of his theory of justice as fairness, revised in light of his more recent papers and his treatise *Political Liberalism* (1993). As Rawls writes in the preface, the restatement presents "in one place an account of justice as fairness as I now see it, drawing on all [my previous] works." He offers a broad overview of his main lines of thought and also explores specific issues never before addressed in any of his writings. Rawls is well aware that since the publication of *A Theory of Justice* in 1971, American society has moved farther away from the idea of justice as fairness. Yet his ideas retain their power and relevance to debates in a pluralistic society about the meaning and theoretical viability of liberalism. This book demonstrates that moral clarity can be achieved even when a collective commitment to justice is uncertain.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Few philosophers have made as much of a splash with a single book as John Rawls did with the 1971 publication of *A Theory of Justice*. Thirty years later, *Justice as Fairness* rearticulates the main themes of his earlier work and defends it against the swarm of criticisms it has attracted.

Throughout the book, Rawls continues to defend his well-known thought experiment in which an "original position"--a sort of prenatal perspective ignorant of our race, class, and gender--provides the basis for formulating ethical principles that result in a harmonious liberal state. In addition, he supplies carefully worked-out responses and, in some cases, reformulations of his theory. Those

coming to Rawls for the first time will find a lucid portrayal of his position; those embroiled in the ongoing debate will encounter a closely argued and subtle rejoinder to his adversaries. Readers will be pleased that the daunting volumes of Rawls's previous work have been distilled to a digestible 214 pages. --Eric de Place

Rawls set out his contractualist conception of justice in *A Theory of Justice* and revised it in a later edition. From 1974 to 1989, he published articles whose theses varied somewhat from the detailed account of that work. In this self-contained attempt to reconcile the differences, he reorganizes his "original position" argument; revises his liberty principle to emphasize that there is not a single "liberty" that governments should aim at, but a set of liberties that ground citizens' powers to form and act from conceptions of justice and of a fully worthwhile life; and reanalyzes justice as fairness, so as to emphasize its political aspects. This book is the capstone to a half-century's deep thinking about its subject and will reward careful study. Recommended for most libraries. Robert Hoffman, York Coll., CUNY Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Thank you

This is the last statement of Rawls' political philosophy and is required reading for economists and political scientists.

Timely, good quality product. Thanks!

Reading this book is like walking through mud, but the effort is worth it. If you are going to be reading and writing about justice, this is one of the books that you need to know. However, be warned that this is difficult reading. Rawls' ideas are good, but his ability to write clear and understandable sentences leaves a lot to be desired. I had to read several of his sentences or paragraphs 3 or 4 times before I could figure out what he was trying to say. Nonetheless, the book is worth struggling with, because so many other authors refer to Rawls' ideas.

Whether one agrees or disagrees with Rawls' theory of justice, almost all contemporary moral and political philosophy takes place in its shadow. If not for *A Theory of Justice*, generations of grad students would still indulge in tired debates over the meaning of Kant's categorical imperative and whether analytic philosophy merely defines the words we use to talk about philosophy. Luckily, this

was not the case and we now have this book that expresses the most refined exposition of Rawls' views on justice to date. Attempting to address the criticisms leveled by Sandel, Walzer, Habermas, and others at his initial theory, *Justice as Fairness* integrates the concepts of "reasonable pluralism" and "stability for the right reasons" (the core concerns of *Political Liberalism*, although not in those words) articulated in articles scattered throughout journals over a span of three decades with the comprehensive philosophical doctrine in *A Theory of Justice*. Whether he succeeds in fully rebutting their objections is certainly up for debate, but *Justice as Fairness* should be essential reading for anybody interested in the philosophical underpinnings of a liberal, property-owning democracy. That said, I would agree with the previous reviewer that a reader should at least be conversant in Rawls' ethical theory as described in *A Theory of Justice* to get the most out of this book. However, to those uninterested in the evolution of his thought and how its shortcomings have been repaired, *Justice as Fairness* is still a momentous work and will probably be used in introduction to ethics or political philosophy classes everywhere. An obligatory note, since another reviewer is certain to mention Nozick: Nozick eventually became convinced that the Lockean proviso of justice in acquisitional holdings did not possess the requisite stability that would ensure that liberties owed to free and equal persons would be preserved and recanted some of the conclusions in *Anarchy, Utopia, and State*. As for Hayek's brilliant works, nobody seriously disagrees with his thesis that central economic planning leads inevitably to abuses as state oversteps individual liberties and that the mechanism of prices in a free market is the best aggregator and distributor of preferences. I just don't see what this has to do with libertarianism. Hayek is too fine a thinker to be shoehorned into such a confining box.

I found the book enjoyable to read, it provided interesting aspects on Justice, specifically how it can become a universal, elaborates the importance of protecting human rights and creating inequality that best benefit the poor. What I like about the book is that it provides a key account on how to create a utopian society my only critic is that the family model tends to make Women subjected to men hence has a gender inequality issue. Over all I would recommend others to read.

In "*Justice as Fairness*," John Rawls summarizes, restates, defends, and, in places, corrects the argument of his epochal "*A Theory of Justice*." Rawls' basic aim is to articulate a conception of justice appropriate for a pluralistic democratic society. He is largely successful: many parts of "*Justice as Fairness*" are profound and gem-like. However, other parts are sketchy, digressions abound, and, weirdly, Rawls' argument flows backward, with the conclusions identified and

unpacked before the premises (the "original position") are set forth. It's no surprise that "Justice as Fairness" began life as lecture notes. Bottomline: the book is a must read for anyone who enjoyed "A Theory of Justice." However, other readers might get lost or wonder what the fuss is about.

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