

Philosophy 659a

The Political Philosophy of John Rawls

Fall 2001

Mathias

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Monday 7-9

Connecticut Hall 302

Office Hour Wed 2-3

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John Rawls' *Theory of Justice* is arguably the most important book in 20th century political philosophy and has set the agenda for much of the work of at least Anglo-American political philosophers since the early 70s. Rawls' book is distinguished by the sheer range of topics that it covers, many of which have generated their own sub-debates. The impact of the *Theory of Justice* across all disciplines that are in any way concerned with reflection on justice has been enormous. Therefore, a good understanding of Rawls' theory is indispensable for anybody with interests in those disciplines, or, for that matter, for anybody who wants to have a good understanding of contemporary Anglo-American philosophy. This year, Rawls published a *Restatement* of his conception of "Justice as Fairness", as he calls it. In this new book Rawls attempts to remove misunderstandings and responds to at least some of the criticisms that have been published over the decades. Much of the *Theory of Justice* and the *Restatement*, together with additional essays published by Rawls and a fair number of the more interesting critical pieces, will be discussed in this seminar. The authors of those critical pieces include Nozick, G. A. Cohen, Joshua Cohen, Roemer, Pogge, Nagel, Dworkin, Hart, and Arneson. Because of the pivotal position of Rawls' views within contemporary political philosophy, we will encounter a fair range of important questions that have concerned the discipline recently. For this reason, one may regard this seminar both as an intensive discussion of Rawls' work and as an introduction to political philosophy at an advanced level. The seminar is reading-intensive, but the high intellectual quality and the engaging nature of the material is rewarding and very much worth the effort. (But note below that many of the readings are not required, but recommended.)

Requirements

Prior exposure to philosophy is highly recommended. Students are expected to attend the seminar meetings regularly and to give one short presentation on an article or a book chapter. By the end of the terms students are also expected to have written a term paper (20 pages) related to the material discussed in this class. Alternatively, undergraduate students may write two shorter (10 pages) papers. Class participation will count for 15% of the final grade, and the paper(s) for 85%.

Required Readings

The following books are available for purchase at Book Haven:

- John Rawls (1999), *A Theory of Justice*. Revised Edition. Cambridge: Harvard University Press
- John Rawls, (2001), *Justice as Fairness – A Restatement*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press
- John, Rawls (2001), *Collected Papers*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press

In addition, a reader is available for purchase at Tyco.

Schedule

R = *Restatement*; TJ = *Theory of Justice*; all Rawls papers are from *Collected Papers*, all other papers are in the reader, unless they are marked as “TBD” (“to be distributed”)

(a) = required readings

(b) = additional recommended readings (which may, however, be used in class discussion)

Mon, Sep 10: **Introduction: Rawls and Contemporary Political Philosophy**

Mon, Sep 17: **Fundamental Ideas**

- (a) R, sec. 1-11; TJ, sec. 1-11; Scanlon, “Contractualism and Utilitarianism”
- (b) Dworkin, “The Original Position”; Rawls, “Justice as Fairness: Political, not Metaphysical”; Rawls, “The Priority of Right and Ideas of the Good”

Mon, Sep 24: **Reflective Equilibrium**

- (a) R, sec. 10; TJ, sec. 9 and 87, 60-68; Daniels, “Wide Reflective Equilibrium and Theory Acceptance in Ethics”
- (b) Rawls, “Outline of a Decision Procedure in Ethics”; excerpts from Pust, “Intuitions as Evidence”; Singer, “Sidgwick and Reflective Equilibrium”

Mon, Oct 1: **The Two Principles of Justice**

- (a) R, sec. 12-22; TJ, sec. 11-19; J. Cohen, “Democratic Equality”
- (b) Rawls, “The Basic Liberties and their Priority”; Hart, “Rawls on Liberty and Its Priority”

Mon, Oct 8: **The Argument from the Original Position: Setup and First Fundamental Comparison**

(a) R, sec 20-33; TJ, sec. 23-33, 80-84; Rawls, “Reply to Alexander and Musgrave”

(b) Rawls, “The Idea of Public Reason Revisited”; Hurley, excerpts from *Natural Reasons*

Mon, Oct 15: **The Argument from the Original Position: Second Fundamental Comparison**

(a) R, sec. 34-40; TJ sec. 34-40

(b) Waldron, “John Rawls and the Social Minimum”; Biswas, excerpts from *Decision Making Under Uncertainty*

Mon, Oct 22: **Institutions of a Just Basic Structure**

(a) R, sec. 41-49; TJ, sec. 41-50; Rawls, “Fairness to Goodness”

(b) Nagel “Rawls on Justice”, Daniels, “Equal Liberty and Unequal Worth of Liberty”

First Short Paper Due in Class

Mon, Oct 29: **Nozick’s Critique**

(a) Nozick, excerpts from *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*; Pogge, excerpts from *Realizing Rawls*

(b) /

Mon, Nov 5: **Arneson’s Critique**

(a) readings TBD

(b) /

Mon, Nov 12: **Cohen’s Critique**

(a) G. A. Cohen, excerpts from *If You’re an Egalitarian, How Come you You’re So Rich?*

(b) Williams, “Incentives, Inequality, and Publicity”; Pogge, “On the Site of Distributive Justice: Reflections on Cohen and Murphy”

Mon, Nov 26: **Roemer’s Critique**

(a) R, sec. 53; Roemer, excerpts from *Theories of Distributive Justice*

(b) Arneson, “Primary Goods Reconsidered”

Mon, Dec. 3: **Rawls and Luck**

(a) Hurley, "Luck and Equality"; G. A. Cohen, "On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice"

(b) Rasmussen, "Egalitarianism, Option Luck, and Responsibility"; Arneson, "Egalitarianism and Responsibility"; Hurley, "Is Responsibility Essentially Impossible?"

Second Paper Deadline (= Deadline for Long Papers) TBA