



Book Reviews

John Rawls: Towards a just world order

Patrick Hayden

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John Rawls was incontestably the most influential Anglo-American political philosopher of the last half-century. His major work, *A Theory of Justice*, (1971) is not simply important because it is the most impressive treatise on the subject since, perhaps, the work of J.S. Mill, it is also important because it re-established the idea that political philosophy is a discourse that can be engaged in by the writing of big books on big topics. Because it is such an impressive work, and, as important, because it is in many ways a flawed masterpiece, *A Theory of Justice* has inspired a truly enormous secondary literature, summarizing, criticizing, elaborating and/or refining its central propositions, a literature to which Rawls himself has added in a number of subsequent, self-critical studies. Patrick Hayden adds to this book mountain a very useful survey of Rawls's work, its unique selling point is that it gives due weight to the international dimension of Rawls's theory, in particular to *The Law of Peoples* (Rawls, 1999) which, is his final statement on the subject.

Part I of Hayden's book provides a valuable overview of Rawls's project, paying particular attention to the way in which Rawls sets up his argument, and to the notion of basic rights that he espouses. One possible criticism of Part I might be that Hayden pays too little attention to the implications of the quite radical shift that takes place between *A Theory of Justice* and Rawls's account of justice as 'political not metaphysical' in *Political Liberalism* (Rawls, 1996), but, overall, this is a reliable summary that can safely be given to students to help them come to terms with the original. The same can also be said of Part II, which addresses the international side of Rawls's work — but here the approval must be qualified somewhat. Hayden provides an accurate summary of Rawls's account of the 'law of peoples' and of the various critiques which have been directed at this account by cosmopolitan thinkers such as Thomas Pogge, Charles Beitz, and Allen Buchanan, critiques that Hayden broadly endorses, linking them to the cosmopolitan thought of Martha Nussbaum, although not, interestingly, to the explicitly cosmopolitan thought of Brian Barry or Charles Jones. Barry is a source that Hayden employs in Part I but not in Part II, perhaps because the burden of Barry's work is that the anti-cosmopolitanism of Rawls's later work follows naturally from the shift to justice political not metaphysical, and Hayden does not seem to want to go



down this path. In any event, Hayden's re-iteration of the standard cosmopolitan line may be satisfactory in its own terms, but it fails to engage with Rawls directly, since the latter is quite clear and explicit that he is not attempting to present a cosmopolitan account of global justice but rather an account of international justice which assumes that 'peoples' rather than individual persons are the referent object (Rawls, 1999, 120).

Hayden is, of course, entitled to reject Rawls's reasoning here, but the account he presents of Rawls's position hardly does justice to its complexity or sophistication; in effect he presents Rawls as providing a justification for the status quo, a somewhat strained reading of *The Law of Peoples*. Part of the problem here may arise because Hayden, a political philosopher himself, is predominantly concerned with the way in which other political philosophers of a cosmopolitan persuasion have received the international thought of Rawls, and less concerned with the reception of his thought by international relations theorists who certainly have not seen it as reflecting any status quo with which they are familiar — but then I would think that, because I am one of the IR theorists who has written about Rawls whose work is not referenced, in the good company of, for example, Stanley Hoffmann.

In summary, this is a useful book but it does approach Rawls's work from a particular angle without perhaps sufficiently recognizing that this is what it is doing, and that must be seen to limit its value somewhat.

References

- Rawls, J. (1971) *A Theory of Justice*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Rawls, J. (1996) *Political Liberalism*, New York: Columbia University Press.
Rawls, J. (1999) *The Law of Peoples*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

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