
A THEORY OF JUSTICE

Revised Edition

JOHN RAWLS

THE BELKNAP PRESS OF
HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

For Mard

Filozofická fakulta
Univerzity Komenského
Ústřední knihovna
Bratislava
93/2002
F 25 443 DF

D21
1000. -

Filozofická fakulta UKOFIUK



380501050023245

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Printed in the United States of America

This book is a revised edition of *A Theory of Justice*,
published in 1971 by Harvard University Press.

Second printing, 2000

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Rawls, John, 1921--

A theory of justice / John Rawls. — Rev. ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-674-00077-3 (cloth : alk. paper). —

ISBN 0-674-00078-1 (paper : alk. paper)

1. Justice. I. Title.

JC578.R38 1999

320'.01'1—dc21 99-29110

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PREFACE FOR THE REVISED EDITION

It gives me great pleasure to provide this preface to the revised edition of *A Theory of Justice*. Despite many criticisms of the original work, I still accept its main outlines and defend its central doctrines. Of course, I wish, as one might expect, that I had done certain things differently, and I would now make a number of important revisions. But if I were writing *A Theory of Justice* over again, I would not write, as authors sometimes say, a completely different book.

In February and March of 1975 the original English text was considerably revised for the German edition of that year. To the best of my knowledge these revisions have been included in all subsequent translations and no further ones have been added since that time. All translations have, therefore, been made from the same revised text. Since this revised text includes what I believe are significant improvements, the translated editions (provided accuracy is preserved) until now have been superior to the original. This revised edition incorporates these improvements.

Before commenting on the more important revisions and why they were made, I will comment on the conception of justice presented in *A Theory of Justice*, a conception I call "justice as fairness." The central ideas and aims of this conception I see as those of a philosophical conception for a constitutional democracy. My hope is that justice as fairness will seem reasonable and useful, even if not fully convincing, to a wide range of thoughtful political opinions and thereby express an essential part of the common core of the democratic tradition.

The central aims and ideas of that conception I refer to in the preface to the first edition. As I explain in the second and third paragraphs of that preface, I wanted to work out a conception of justice that provides a reasonably systematic alternative to utilitarianism, which in one form or another has long dominated the Anglo-Saxon tradition of political thought. The primary reason for wanting to find such an alternative is the weakness, so I think, of utilitarian doctrine as a basis for the institutions