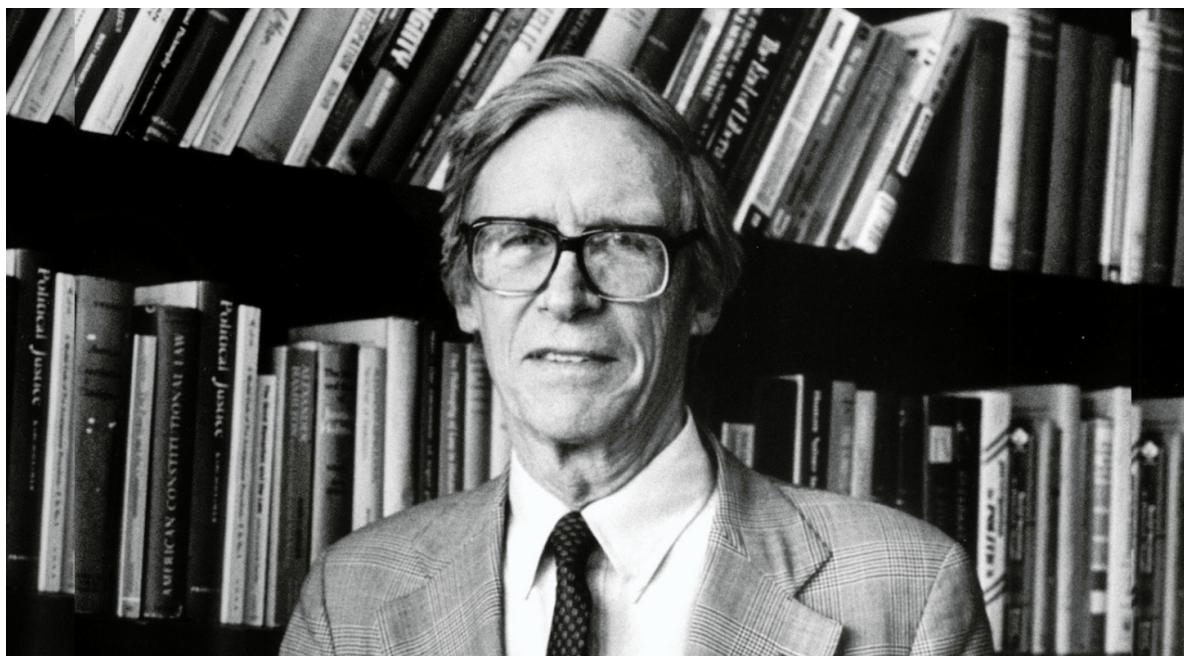


INTRODUCTION

# John Rawls, 100 years later: the legacy of «A Theory of Justice»

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2021 marked the 100th anniversary of the birth of the philosopher John Rawls, as well as the 50th anniversary of the publication of his most important work, «A Theory of Justice».

John Rawls (1921-2002) is one of the most important political philosophers of the contemporary ages. Many can consider that the publication of *A Theory of Justice* —his *opus magnum*— turned him into a classic of modern political thinking. In the mid-1970s, Robert Nozick argued that «today, those who do political philosophy have to work according to Rawls's theory or explain why they don't». At the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, Gerald A. Cohen wrote that «at most two books in the history of Western political philosophy have a claim to be regarded as greater than *A Theory of Justice*: Plato's *Republic* and Hobbes's *Leviathan*». Therefore, the influence of this work on current political thought, especially in the academic field, is an undoubted fact. An influence that became even broader and deeper with the publication of *Political Liberalism* (1993), *The Law of Peoples* (1999) and *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* (2001), the other books that Rawls published in his lifetime. Later, his administrators would still be in charge of publishing the notes that the philosopher had used to teach his classes of History of Moral and Political Philosophy at Harvard University, whilst they also published his first youth texts.

Rawls's work, however, has not been influential only in the academic field. Rawls was never an intellectual *avant la lettre*; he almost never intervened in the public sphere in order to channel an opinion or defended a controversial position. Despite this rather discreet public profile, in the North American legal world his thesis on justice is well known and used repeatedly. It is not surprising, for example, that judges appeal to his texts, when justifying a sentence, in order to substantiate the decision taken. Likewise, as Véronique Munoz-Dardé points out in the article included in this publication, Rawls is the father of the original position's figure, one of the most famous experiments of thought in the history of philosophy that has transcended, as we said, the strictly academic field.

During 2021 two events have been commemorated: first, the 100th anniversary of John Rawls' birth (born on February 21, 1921) and, secondly, the 50th anniversary of the publication of *A Theory of Justice*. On the occasion of this double anniversary, four Catalan universities (Pompeu Fabra University, the Autonomous University of Barcelona, the University of Barcelona and the University of Girona, through the Ferrater Mora Chair) organized an International Symposium on the figure and work of the American philosopher, with the collaboration of the Center for Contemporary Studies.

The figure of John Rawls and the debates that his work provokes around concepts such as equity, justice and rationality are not unconnected to the Center for Contemporary Studies and the IDEES Magazine. In 2003, coinciding with the Second Gulf War, IDEES published Rawls' article «The Doctrine of the Just War.» And in 2006, within the framework of the Temes Contemporanis collection, the Center for Contemporary Studies published the essay Les esquerdes del liberalisme polític. Una crítica filosòfica a John Rawls, by Joan Vergés Gifra, head of the Ferrater Mora Chair.

The double anniversary, therefore, has turned out to be a propitious moment to recover a primordial author for contemporary political thought. In order to give continuity to some of the numerous lectures that the symposium hosted, we publish this IDEES magazine special issue with an *ex professo* selection of articles that evaluate the validity and re-contextualize the work of the American philosopher. To illustrate the contents we have been able to resort to the Archives of Harvard University, which have given to us some of the Rawls' manuscripts that they keep, and which we have been able to graphically adapt in each case.



**Joan Vergés Gifra**

Joan Vergés Gifra is full professor of Moral and Political Philosophy in the Philosophy Department at the University of Girona, and has been a visiting professor in other universities such as Pompeu Fabra University. He has been visiting fellow at the Harvard University in the United States and visiting Scholar at the Oxford University (UK), among others. He is Director of the Ferrater Mora Chair of Contemporary Thought. His main fields of study include contemporary political philosophy, with special emphasis on John Rawls, the theory of nationalism, pluralism and religious diversity. He authored several articles and books such as *La nació necessària* (2014) and *John Rawls: la justícia es la virtud más importante de una Sociedad democrática* (2017).

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Manuel Manonelles i Tarragó is the former director of the Center for Contemporary Studies (CETC). Since 2013, he works as an Associate Professor of International Relations at Blanquerna – Ramon Llull University, and has collaborated with the Human Right Centre at the University of Padova (Italy). He had previously been an advisor to the Presidency of the Catalan Government, Representative of the Government of Catalonia to Switzerland and to International Organizations and General Director of Multilateral and European Affairs. He has a degree in Political Sciences from the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona and holds a European Master's on Human Rights and Democratisation from the European Inter-University Centre for Human Rights and Democratisation. He has senior level experience within the diplomatic and public sector. For two years, he was Special Advisor to the United Nations High Level Group for the Alliance of Civilizations and has participated in several summits, forums and processes within the United Nations and other international organizations such as the Council of Europe. He has also been head of the *Cultura de Pau* Foundation and the UBUNTU Foundation, and has been an OSCE International Electoral Observer and Supervisor.