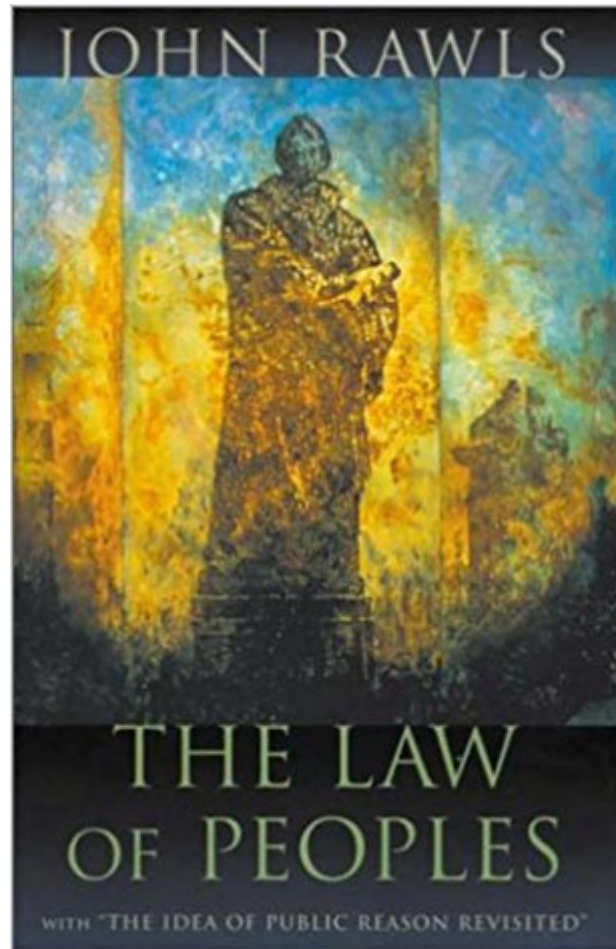




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# The Law Of Peoples: With "The Idea Of Public Reason Revisited"



## Synopsis

This book consists of two parts: the essay "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," first published in 1997, and "The Law of Peoples," a major reworking of a much shorter article by the same name published in 1993. Taken together, they are the culmination of more than fifty years of reflection on liberalism and on some of the most pressing problems of our times by John Rawls. "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited" explains why the constraints of public reason, a concept first discussed in *Political Liberalism* (1993), are ones that holders of both religious and non-religious comprehensive views can reasonably endorse. It is Rawls's most detailed account of how a modern constitutional democracy, based on a liberal political conception, could and would be viewed as legitimate by reasonable citizens who on religious, philosophical, or moral grounds do not themselves accept a liberal comprehensive doctrine--such as that of Kant, or Mill, or Rawls's own "Justice as Fairness," presented in *A Theory of Justice* (1971). *The Law of Peoples* extends the idea of a social contract to the Society of Peoples and lays out the general principles that can and should be accepted by both liberal and non-liberal societies as the standard for regulating their behavior toward one another. In particular, it draws a crucial distinction between basic human rights and the rights of each citizen of a liberal constitutional democracy. It explores the terms under which such a society may appropriately wage war against an "outlaw society," and discusses the moral grounds for rendering assistance to non-liberal societies burdened by unfavorable political and economic conditions.

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## Customer Reviews

About one-quarter of this book is a reprint of Rawls's 1997 essay, "The Idea of Public Reason

Revisited," in which he sets out the principles of a well-ordered constitutional democratic society. The rest of the book is much revised version of his 1993 essay, "The Law of Peoples," which integrates those principles into an account of how decent societies should behave toward one another. The first two-thirds of this part is an ideal theory of peoples' interactions under a liberal conception of justice such as advanced in Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*. The last third concerns nonideal theory, i.e., how to prosecute the ideals, and discusses foreign policy, just war doctrine, disadvantaged societies, guidelines for assisting those societies, pluralism, tolerance, etc. A profound and absorbing book.

Robert Hoffman, York Coll. of CUNY Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

[These essays are] some of [Rawls's] strongest published expressions of feeling...These are the final products of a remarkably pure and concentrated career...The writings of John Rawls, whom it is now safe to describe as the most important political philosopher of the twentieth century...owe their influence to the fact that their depth and their insight repay the close attention that their uncompromising theoretical weight and erudition demand. (Thomas Nagel *New Republic*) Rawls offers us the appealing vision of a social order that every citizen finds legitimate despite large differences in their personal values. In *The Law of Peoples*, he attempts a parallel feat for global society. He tries to spell out a Law of Peoples that both liberal and non-liberal peoples can agree upon to govern their international relations. This involves steering a judicious mid-course between liberalism's imperialist and isolationist tendencies...I should say straight away that this is the most engaging and accessible book Rawls has written. Although some of the daunting conceptual apparatus from *Political Liberalism* appears from time to time, for the most part Rawls lays out his argument in a straightforward way, and refers extensively to historical and contemporary episodes to illustrate it. (David Miller *Times Literary Supplement*) John Rawls is one of the great political philosophers of the 20th century...His ideas have not only sparked a lively debate among philosophers, which continues to this day, but they have also been taken up by economists, sociologists and others. So *The Law of Peoples*, Mr. Rawls's latest work and probably his last significant effort, deserves to be read with interest, and some respect. (The Economist) Now, in an effort to turn realpolitik on its big, bald head, Rawls in *The Law of Peoples* proposes to extend his historicist, pragmatic notions of justice to the larger world of 'peoples'--the term he prefers to 'nations.' He lays out a series of general principles--among them, that peoples are free and independent, should honor human rights, and should observe a duty of nonintervention--that can and should be accepted as a standard for regulating their behavior toward one another. Without the

slightest hint of millenarian fever, he goes so far as to assert that we stand on the brink of a 'realistic utopia'...The Law of Peoples seems likely to reframe the debate about what is possible in the international realm. In contrast to the chastened, inward gaze of most 20th-century thought, Rawls's book is one of those rare works of philosophy that directs its energies outward. It has the potential to send shockingly optimistic reverberations through the world at large, and maybe even jolt those somber-suited realists right out of the realpolitik. (Will Blythe Civilization) Why should we care whether Rawls has modified his difference principle so that it avoids unpopular outcomes? In the course of doing so, he advances some excellent arguments. (The Mises Review)

As all writings of Rawls, this book is full with interesting ideas. Especially important is the acceptance of diversity of regimes, subject to meeting some standards, which is unusual for strong proponents of human rights and liberty. But The Law of People suffers from two weaknesses, one conceptual and the second substantive. The term "peoples" makes no sense. The offered explanation and justification (pp. 23-30) leave the ontological nature of "peoples" vague. Are Austrians a people or a part of the German people? What about the Ummah of Islam and the Jewish People? What is the relation between "nation" and "people"? "nation" and "people" are it all remains vague. My recommendation is to read "states" for "peoples" and then, with some adjustments, all becomes clear. The much more serious substantive weakness is partial obsolescence. When the book was written, say 1997-1998, it was already clear that humanity is moving into a new epoch in which it can change the world radically, and also remake itself as a species including terminating the existence of humankind. This poses fateful issues which must be confronted globally. But the book completely ignores them. To start with climate change, shall limits on greenhouse gases emission be imposed on all countries? Will citizen in liberal democracies rush to support necessary life style changes? Who will accept mass migration caused by rising sea levels? The book ignores such issues and much harder ones: Thanks to progress in synthetic biology an apocalyptic sect may be able to synthesize a mass-killing virus likely to decimate humanity. Preventing such global catastrophic risks requires an intrusive collective security regime, with all people/states being compelled to hunt down such sects, or/and a powerful global security apparatus doing the job on the basis of worldwide intrusive monitoring. Should people/states be free to decide on human cloning and production of "super-intelligent machines" or are global

choices on such issues which are enforced worldwide essential? To cope with such unprecedented future-shaping issues knocking on the door it is not enough to "reformulate the powers of sovereignty in light of a reasonable Law of Peoples and deny to states the traditional rights to war and to unrestricted internal autonomy" (pp. 26-27). The proposed "Law of the Peoples" is clearly inadequate. Much more is needed than "some kind of loose or confederative form" (p. 111) of a Society of well-ordered Peoples, based on Kant's *foedus pacificum*. There is also something to learn from Hobbes.

\*\*\*Moving briefly to the second part of the book *The Idea of Public Reason Revisited*, it suffers from wrong assumptions on human beings and political processes, which make trust in deliberation as basic to public reason largely utopian. Politics is inherently linked to doctrines hardly open to doubt, combined with competition on who gets what. The supposition that citizens deliberate, exchange views and debate their supporting reasons concerning public political questions contradicts nearly all empiric findings and psychological theories. On "hot issues" most citizens do not suppose that their political opinions may be revised by discussion with other citizens (p. 138), nor is "Knowledge and desire on the part of citizens generally to follow public reason" (p. 139) prevailing. Political leaders cannot explain in public all of their reasoning without demolishing the chances of actually acting as statesmen or stateswomen, which often requires doing what the public would not accept. And so on. Such wrong assumptions do not reduce the intrinsic values of democracy, justice and political liberty, their utility as enabling second-order agreement on reaching decisions (however little based on "public reason"), and their importance for providing much scope for pluralism with some civility. Too much of the "truth" may be dangerous for the very functioning of democracy, however "contaminated".

Therefore I would regard Rawls' discourse on public reason as justified, though in part not in the sense intended by him, were it not for the obsolescence shared with *The Law of Peoples*. Let us assume that we can move into an epoch of transhumanism by enhancing human minds, up to procreating *Homo sapiens superior* who is likely to displace present humankind and move into a future we cannot conceive. Should development of the technologies for doing so be permitted, encouraged, or strictly prohibited and prevented? Taking a stand on such issues, and also much easier ones such as climate change, is for most citizens a matter for "doctrine" and/or "gut feelings" of what they regard as their "interests".

Serious deliberation on complex techno-value dilemmas requires good science and technology

literacy combined with advanced philosophical and quasi-theological reasoning. These are far beyond the minds of most humans, even if subjected to compulsory year-long learning. Therefore, contemporary "public reasoning" and other conceptions of deliberative democracy, cannot cope with most of the novel fateful issues facing humanity. Ergo, the theory and practice of democracy have to be redesigned in order to preserve as much as possible of its basic values. This is beyond the horizon of both parts of this book, making it in important ways obsolete.\*\*\*Rawls is an outstanding political philosopher. The fact that he ignored the emerging phase-shift of humankind illustrates the lag of much of political philosophy after reality. If Rawls did not sense and comprehend what was happening before his eyes, what can we expect from lesser minds?

Well, I needed this book for my Theories of Justice college level course, this is the book I need, It was in mint condition, One little crease on the cover page but no matter, the content is and will be amazing, I suggest you read Rawls's original "Theory of Justice" , then "Political Liberalism" before indulging yourself in this book. There are many references to the previous two books that I just mentioned. You will be lost otherwise.~C.Sanchez

My 'phenom' daughter recommended this book to me. She read it as a poli-sci/pre-med undergrad at UC Berkeley, and having noticed my growing cynicism regarding the direction our country has been headed, this was her 'philosophical lifesaver'. What Prof. Rawls offers is nothing less than a roadmap of hope, not only for our country but for the world. And that's a mouthful of praise, coming from a cynical Vietnam-vet.

This is a must-read book. This treatise analyses how peoples of diverse cultures and religions can find a path towards living cooperatively together in peace. If the peoples of the world want to find a "government" that can lead them all and be respected, this book will be of enormous assistance in understanding the way it may be done. The discussion views a variety of disparate forms of societies and describes their pros and cons to underscore his arguments, and as a result Rawls could easily be quoted out of context. This however is the strength of his discourse, as he takes the reader along in his line of thought, while at the same time answering his anticipated critics.

Pretty well written. It doesn't have the impact of Law of Peoples or Political Liberalism though. It was written towards the end of his life, so he may not have been able to flesh out the ideas more

thoroughly. It feels sort of like a skeleton of a book, but it's a good skeleton and leaves a lot to think about.

Great product. Works perfect!! :)

This book is for college purposes only. Very hard to read but was required for a reading material. Plus was way cheaper to buy from than the school book store. =)

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