



John Rawls: Liberalism and the Challenges of Late Modernity (Modernity and Political Thought)

By J. Donald Moon

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Donald Moon's *John Rawls: Liberalism and the Challenges of Late Modernity* is distinguished not only by the originality of its contribution to the literature on one of the most important political philosophers of the 20th century, but for an argument that will be accessible to students as well as scholars of justice and its complex array of controversial issues at the heart of our hyper-modern globalized world. Rawls's work is often viewed primarily through the lens of liberal theories of social justice focusing on issues of income distribution and economic inequality. Moon allows for a more complete understanding of Rawls' legacy by setting his account of social justice in the context of modern and increasingly pluralistic democracies. Moon's reading of Rawls shows how his work breaks with political theory's traditional aspiration to provide a general theory of politics, including a theory of justice, which can be rationally vindicated. Instead, Rawls views theorizing as itself a practical, political form of engagement, which offers a specifically political conception of justice and political principles more generally that speak to the conditions of modern, democratic citizens.

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Editorial Review

Review

Moon has written a brief overview of John Rawls's political philosophy. He also reviews some major criticisms of Rawls and defends Rawls against those criticisms. This book would be an excellent starting point for readers seeking a serious introduction to Rawls and the secondary literature Rawls's work generated. Moon provides a persuasive synthesis of Rawls's major works as a whole rather than seeing them as distinct works. The emphasis is primarily on tying Rawls's conclusions together rather than on Rawls's method. Moon argues that Rawls's liberalism is a 'radically new approach' in the history of political theory because it rejects a 'comprehensive doctrine' that does not have wide enough appeal in late modernity to serve as a fundamental principle. Moon describes Rawls as a 'chastened liberal,' which stands in contrast to Enlightenment liberalism, rendered untenable by the traumas of the 20th century. Moon presents Rawls's theory as political and practical rather than abstract. Rawls developed a justification of liberalism that satisfies democratic norms. The book raises a number of important points, not just about Rawls's work but also about 20th-century political philosophy and the project of political philosophy in general. Summing Up: Recommended. Upper-division undergraduate and graduate collections. (*CHOICE*)

Donald Moon's *John Rawls: Liberalism and the Challenges of Late Modernity* adds an accessible biography of an indispensable political thinker to the Modernity and Political Thought Series, edited by profs. Kennan Ferguson and Morton Schoolman. By addressing the philosophical justifications and conditions of liberalism, (without a doubt among the most controversial achievements of modernity), Rawls' life and work helped establish the fundamental commitment of classical liberalism: the understanding that the individual has always stood in an ambiguous relationship to the central object of the study of politics: the state.

About the Author

J. Donald Moon is the Ezra and Cecile Zilkha Professor in the College of Social Studies at Wesleyan University.

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