



## UNPACKING RAWLS

### Virtues and Vices of the Rawlsian Paradigm in the XXI Century

International Conference – Turin, 27-28 September 2012  
Centro Einaudi, via Ponza 4/E

*'Justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought. A theory however elegant and economical must be rejected or revised if it is untrue; likewise laws and institutions no matter how efficient and well-arranged must be reformed or abolished if they are unjust. Each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override. For this reason justice denies that a loss of freedom for some is made right by a greater good shared by others.'* JR

#### September 27th, 2012

Afternoon (14.30 – 18.30): *The New Century Challenges to Rawls*

*Welcome Address:* Giuseppina De Santis – Director General, Centro Einaudi

Catherine Audard – London School of Economics

Samuel Freeman – University of Pennsylvania

Ian Carter – Università degli Studi di Pavia

Ingrid Salvatore – Università degli Studi di Salerno

*Chair:* Elisabetta Galeotti – Università degli Studi del Piemonte Orientale

#### September 28th, 2012

Morning (9.30 -12.30): *Unpacking Rawls*

*Welcome Address:* Piero Gastaldo – Secretary General, Compagnia di San Paolo

Enrico Biale - Università degli Studi del Piemonte Orientale

Giulia Bistagnino – Università degli Studi di Milano

Francesca Pasquali - Università degli Studi di Milano

Nicola Riva - Università degli Studi di Milano

*Chair:* Valeria Ottonelli – Università degli Studi di Genova

*Discussion*

Afternoon (14.30 – 18.30): *John Rawls beyond Political Philosophy*

Maurizio Ferrera – Università degli Studi di Milano

Roberto Mordacci – Università Vita-Salute San Raffaele

Francesco Viola – Università degli Studi di Palermo

*Chair:* Alessandra Facchi – Università degli Studi di Milano



## Outline and Purposes

John Rawls is widely recognized as the most influential political philosopher of the twentieth century. His work revived political philosophy as a systematic and wide-ranging discipline in its own right, one that asked fundamental questions about human nature, the justification of social institutions, the best interpretations of welfare, equality, liberty, and rights. As Robert Nozick wrote in 1974, "Political philosophers now must either work within Rawls's theory, or explain why not." Michael Sandel, a colleague and critic of Rawls, has said that "in the 1950s and 1960s Anglo-American political theory was virtually moribund, consigned to irrelevance by linguistic analysis and moral relativism. Rawls revived political theory by showing that it was possible to argue rationally about justice, rights and political obligation."

At the same time, Rawls's theory is one of the most thoroughly misunderstood political theories of its time. To some degree, its scope and subtlety make this inevitable, and the major figures that engage with the Rawlsian tradition today will help us to determine whether Rawls's conception of liberalism needs to be kept alive, to be revised, or finally abandoned.

This Conference is going to be the last event of a series of seminars called *Unpacking Rawls* that we organized throughout the academic year. We started with a seminar on the impact of Rawls's work on political philosophy and the social sciences, and then we had three more seminars on the method and aims of Rawls's moral and political philosophy and the key concepts of his work.

The tentative conclusions we have reached will be tested, in the Conference **first session**, as we discuss the challenges to Rawls presented by Catherine Audard and Samuel Freeman. Does Rawls's theory of justice and political liberalism hold up well against these challenges? If not, how should his political theory be modified to adequately address the challenges of the new century? In light of Rawls's undeniable importance to contemporary debates, this will be an in-depth look at his merits and at some of the more prominent limits.

In the Conference **second session** we will consider and we will critically wrestle with the continued promises and problems that contemporary debates in political philosophy face as inheritors of the Rawlsian legacy.

What makes Rawls's idea of justice so important is that he systematically expresses a vision that had already underpinned a great deal of political philosophy, social policy, legal theory, and even international relations, as the Conference **third session** suggests to investigate.

Our hope is that the Conference will enable us to reason politically and make meaningful interactions between theory, principles, and practices of justice, and Rawlsian analyses of the conditions, present and wished for, under which we pursue the great questions of right living in a pluralistic society.