

# The Debate Around the Idea of Justice

The fact that an economist with the trajectory of Amartya Sen, has published a work such as *The Idea of Justice* (2009), nearly forty years after the famous *Theory of Justice* by John Rawls (1971), reveals the fertility and relevance of the debate on this essential subject for the organization of society. Rawls revolutionized political science by reintroducing a concept that had been expelled from the social sciences in general, and political science in particular. Before Rawls, justice was understood as a concept not sufficiently operational to be applied with tangible results, neither in science nor in socio-economic praxis. To these positivist opinions, joined that of orthodox Marxists who, despite their rhetoric about justice, always rejected the use of ethical concepts to explain processes they attributed to historical forces' determinism. Defying both the indifferent and opposed currents to the presence of ethical thinking in social sciences, Rawls set a bridge –as they had done before him Weber, Arendt, Aron or Adorno– among social sciences, political philosophy and classical ethics' traditions.

Sen's novelty relies in the renewal of the debate opened by Rawls, collecting its main motivations, but trying to enrich and even correct them. In this sense, this double issue of *Cultura Económica*, devoted to the debate on the idea of justice, reopened by Sen's book, starts with the article by Joaquin Migliore, Professor of Political Philosophy of UCA and member of our editorial board, who broadly describes the work done by Sen, and critically examines various aspects of the book. According to Migliore, *The Idea of Justice* contains valuable contributions but is limited by an excessive pragmatism. In his critique of the theories of justice based on a contractual basis, Sen would end up jeopardizing the criteria for making the value judgments required to incorporate the idea of justice to public policies. In addition to presenting a strong counterpoint to Rawls' theory, Migliore offers a reading of Sen in dialogue with other writers of contemporary political philosophy, concluding with a reflection inspired by Christian social thought.

In the second place, we present a contribution of Ricardo Crespo, Professor of Philosophy and Economics from the Universidad Nacional de Cuyo (UNCU), researcher at CONICET and member of our editorial board, focused on the analysis of the existing tensions in Sen's idea of justice. In agreement with some aspects of Migliore's critique, Crespo believes that Sen's critique of the "transcendental" theories of justice runs the risk of undermining any objective basis, slipping down the slope of pragmatism. Moreover, without being inhibited by the current popularity enjoyed by this approach, the author focuses on a detailed analysis of Sen's theory of capabilities –comparing it in a critical tone with the version of the same approach proposed by Martha Nussbaum– and stating the weaknesses that he finds, especially in terms of anthropology and ethics.

Thirdly, we publish an article in English written by Severine Deneulin, Professor of Human Development at the University of Bath, who proposes a reading of the work *Creating Capabilities* by Martha Nussbaum –one of the most recognized interpreters

of Sen— in relation to political liberalism’s contemporary problems and in the light of Aristotelian ethics. In connection with the weaknesses of Sen’s capabilities theory in the ethical field raised by Crespo, Deneulin believes to find the answer in a neo-Aristotelian review of this approach, present in authors such as MacIntyre, that could lift Nussbaum’s proposal to its full potential and through it, to that of Sen himself.

Fourthly, we present an article by Carlos Hoevel, Professor of Philosophy of Economics and Social Philosophy of UCA and director of this publication, focused on the comparison between Sen’s idea of justice and the origins of the Catholic concept of social justice in Antonio Rosmini. According to Hoevel, appealing to Rosmini’s thought —original disseminator of the term “social justice” in the nineteenth century— makes it possible to find similarities between Sen and Christian social thought. In Hoevel’s view, the critique of transcendental theories performed by Sen and also, partly by Rosmini, does not necessarily slide into a pragmatic stand, but opens the possibility of a reasonable and gradual approach to the problem of social justice based not so much in the “change of structures” but in the strengthening of people’s capabilities.

In the fifth place, we publish the work of Alvaro Perpere Viñuales, Professor of History of Political and Economic Ideas at UCA and editorial secretary of our journal, dedicated to the debate on social justice that took place between the Argentine Catholics in the 1940’s. According to Perpere, the exploration of that debate, in which the differences between those who proposed a more idealistic vision and those with a more pragmatic view of social justice are revealed, remains useful to interpret the current discussion about justice in the Argentinean and Latin American sphere.

The sixth article in this double volume, presented by the Professor of Microeconomics at UCA, Luis Zemborain, exhibits some of the most important contemporary theories of justice, such as the ones proposed by Nash, Harsanyi, Rawls, Sen, Dworkin, Roemer and Nozick. In the author’s opinion, all of these theories have valuable elements to consider, although he suggests that Nozick’s theory, with its concept of decentralized and voluntary distribution, would be the one able to lead to an effective implementation of justice.

Last, we present an article by Anton Jamnik, Auxiliary Bishop of Ljubljana (Slovenia) and a specialist in business ethics, which accounts for the importance of professional ethical responsibility, with particular focus on the analysis of the ethical code in the performance of public accountants. We also offer our readers two documents by Pope Benedict XVI: the first is a speech delivered during the Holy Father’s visit to the Bundestag (Berlin), in September of 2011, which deals with the basis of law and the current problematic of defining a criterion of justice, and stresses the importance of having a listening heart to discern between good and evil and hence, establish a true right, serving justice. Second, we present the message for the celebration of the XVI World Day of Peace on January 1st, 2012. On that occasion, His Holiness Benedict XVI called on the entire society to educate young people in justice and in peace in these dark times, so that they will bring light and new hope to the world.

The attempt made by Sen to carry on with the dialogue initiated by Rawls between the social sciences and the great tradition of political and ethical philosophy, reopens, in our view, the possibility of a renewal of the former by the contact with the main currents of the humanist tradition. In the case of our journal, it joins an often forgotten current of the history of thought: Christian social thought. At the same time, Sen’s new impulse also guides the discussion towards the field of economic theory, questioned due to serious theoretical and practical defects, proposing its widening in a scenario of recurring crises of the economy and society.

C.H.