

John Charles Herries? The fifth Earl Spencer? Hastings Lees-Smith? Each receives informed, gentle coverage from Fletcher.

Some of the stopgaps are better known: Arthur Greenwood and Herbert Morrison, for instance. Greenwood gets a generous write up which barely touches on his alcoholism. Morrison's achievements are chronicled fairly (though the entry ends with the humiliation of Morrison, so long the leader-in-waiting, trailing Gaitskell and Bevan in the ballot to succeed Attlee as leader).

Nearly *men*? After ninety-six years of universal suffrage? After one hundred and six years of women in the Commons? Really? The fact is that there have only been three female leaders of the opposition: Margaret Thatcher, Margaret Beckett and Harriet Harman. The latter two were stand ins: Beckett following the death of John Smith and Harman after the resignations of both Gordon Brown and of Ed Miliband. Fletcher is clear. He thinks both had the wherewithal to be the leader and prime minister. He seems to regret that Harman didn't

stand after Brown resigned (likely a regret shared by much of the Labour Party).

Fletcher has produced an enjoyable book. But a word of warning. Treat the book like a box of chocolates. Don't try to scoff the lot in one go. Try one. Try another. Give yourself a break. You'll enjoy it all the more. (That was the advice I was given as a child. I can't follow it with regards to books or chocolates.) ■

Peter Truesdale was a councillor and the Leader of the Council in Lambeth. He has also been chair of the local party.

Rawls and his legacy

Katrina Forrester, *In the Shadow of Justice: Postwar Liberalism and the remaking of political philosophy* (Princeton University Press, 2019)

Review by William Wallace

When John Rawls published *A Theory of Justice* in 1971, it made him the most famous political philosopher in the English-speaking world.' (p.1) The culmination of his many articles, lectures and seminar presentations over two preceding decades, the book provoked active debate among academic philosophers on both sides of the Atlantic, as well as pulling in compliments and criticism from economists and philosophers of law with whom Rawls had also engaged.

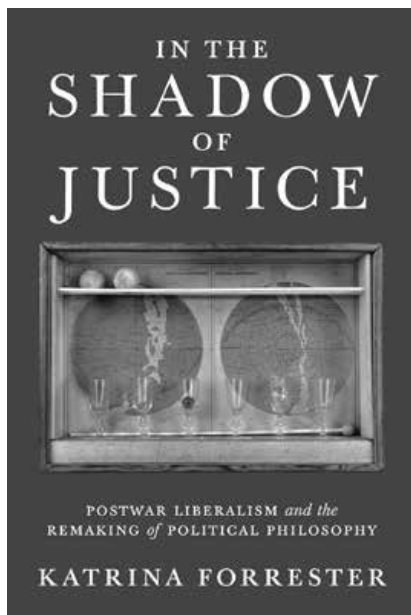
Katrina Forrester, a British academic with a Cambridge PhD who has taught at Harvard since 2017, examines how Rawls's ideas developed, and how they have been received, criticised, interpreted and

misinterpreted since then. This is a densely-written, scholarly volume with over a hundred pages of footnotes, reflecting careful work in Rawls's archives as well as in the papers and publications of many others on both sides of the Atlantic.

Those unfamiliar with what Perry Anderson once called 'Rawls's delphic masterpiece' would benefit from reading Rawls' own volume before grasping the arguments in this work. The focus here is as much on how others responded to Rawls as on the evolution of his own ideas and how he responded to changing political and economic environments. But in the process it effectively provides an intellectual history of liberal political philosophy since 1945, in particular from

the time when Cambridge political theorist Peter Laslett declared political philosophy 'dead' to its effective revival under Rawls and the controversies that he provoked.

Rawls fought in the Pacific in World War Two, studied at Princeton, Cornell and Oxford in the postwar years of the administrative state, of welfare capitalism and the early Cold War, and spent the rest of his career as a professor at Harvard. He interacted at Oxford with Labour-supporting intellectuals – Isaiah Berlin, G.D.H.Cole, Anthony Crosland and others – debating socialism, social democracy and equality – and remained engaged in transatlantic exchanges from then on. Forrester argues that his philosophical



framework was shaped by the early Cold War and the political consensus of American society in those years, even though his classic volume was published two decades later. The ‘assumptions that underpinned *A Theory of Justice* were made possible by the two decades of exceptional, unprecedented economic growth that characterized the postwar years. But at the time Rawls’ book was published and read, this liberal optimism about the direction of the American economy and the capacities of government had been challenged by social unrest and economic downturn.’ (p.180)

Since then ‘the price of admission into political philosophy at many elite universities [has been] a facility with Rawlsianism or its fellow-travelling alternatives.’ (p.270) Forrester takes us through the arguments of his students and others who adapted and extended his concepts of distributive justice, fair play and reciprocity in the face of changing political controversies, social upheavals and economic challenges. She

reminds us of the bitter disputes within and beyond US universities into which *A Theory of Justice* was launched: the Vietnam war and the draft, clashes over civil rights, the Nixon presidency, the slowdown in domestic and global growth and the controversies over the post-colonial international economic order.

Forrester is writing intellectual history in its political context for the younger generation. For this reviewer, halfway between Rawls and Forrester in age, this brings back – and carefully explains – past philosophical debates in all their bitterly contested political environment. I sat in Laslett’s seminars on political thought at Cambridge with Quentin Skinner, who later taught her; I then became a Cornell teaching assistant for courses in ‘Western Civilization’ (‘From Plato to NATO’, as we cynically called it) taught by some of the many European intellectuals who had colonised American universities after escaping authoritarian states in the 1930s. When I returned to Cornell in 1967 after 18 months in Oxford there were demonstrations against the Vietnam draft and clashes over the access programme for black students. In 1968 the university exploded, the professor who had invited me to Cornell committed suicide and the politics and philosophy departments shattered. Political philosophy and political action could not be kept separate. The ‘public affairs’ philosophy of liberal egalitarianism which Rawls’s followers later developed ‘came to occupy a position a few paces to the left of the liberal ideology

known as the “Third Way”’ (p.270), espoused by philosophers and economists supporting the Democrats in the USA and the SDP and Labour in the UK.

Forrester is less surefooted in analysing the challenges to liberal philosophy in the 1980s and after the end of the Cold War – partly because the field became so crowded. Rawls’s followers extended their attention to global and to intergenerational justice. The surge of right-wing rationalists in philosophy and economists, denying the relevance of social justice as such, pushed academic liberals (and welfare economists) to the left, in defence of community and an active role for the state. Continental philosophers – Habermas, Foucault and others – attacked the abstract rationalism that underpinned Rawls’s thought. His assumption of consensual (and patriarchal) society was widely challenged. Those unfamiliar with the distinction between utilitarian and deontological ethics, or ‘the continental-analytical divide’, or the contributions of ‘neo-Polanyians’ and ‘Left-Wittgensteinianism’, may find these chapters hard going. This is not a book for the inexpert general reader.

Forrester’s conclusion is that we should now understand Rawls’s theory ‘as a discrete chapter in the history of political thought – a part of our usable past, and like all political theories a product of its time.’ (p.279) Beyond suggesting that elements such as the concept of liberal egalitarianism can be saved, she does not indicate where (progressive) political philosophy should go from here.

Today's younger generation of political philosophers are left with a broad and contested agenda to address. ■

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on British foreign policy, national identity and European international politics. He is currently Liberal Democrat Cabinet Office spokesman in the Lords.

Inside Asquith's cabinet

Cameron Hazlehurst and Christine Woodland (eds), *A Liberal Chronicle in Peace and War: Journals and Papers of J. A. Pease, 1st Lord Gainford, 1911–1915* (Oxford University Press, 2023)

Review by David Dutton

Until the passage of the Public Records Act (1967), which introduced the so-called Thirty-Year Rule, the most recent British government documents available for public inspection were those relating to the Edwardian era and the opening years of the First World War. This period proved an inevitable magnet for young researchers and graduate students (I joined their ranks in the early 1970s) as they prepared their dissertations and theses. It did not take them long to realise that their quest to understand the decision-making processes at the top of the British government were severely hampered by the absence of minutes of meetings of the cabinet. Such proceedings were regarded as so secret that no written record was taken or permitted, a convention not changed until the start of Lloyd George's premiership in December 1916. The only account available to posterity was the series of letters that the prime minister was constitutionally bound to write to keep the monarch informed of what had been discussed at individual meetings. This correspondence – at least that generated during the

premiership of Herbert Asquith – displays a brevity and lack of detail strongly suggesting that the less the king was told the better for all concerned.

The gap in the available historical record inevitably sent scholars off in new directions, with the private papers of government ministers and, if they were kept, their diaries, offering the most tempting possibilities. But the survival, location and accessibility of such documentation was often uncertain. One historian contributed more than any other to the quest to find out more. As a young doctoral student, the Australian Cameron Hazlehurst, struck by the narrow range of sources cited by those scholars who had thus far published works on Edwardian Britain and the First World War, embarked on a mission to locate the surviving private papers of all those who had sat in Asquith's cabinet. In partnership with the archivist Christine Woodland, this project broadened out and there can be no student of British politics in the first half of the twentieth century who has not benefited from the resulting *A Guide to the Papers of British Cabinet Ministers 1900–1951*, published by

the Royal Historical Society (1974), and the revised second edition of this work, with its scope extended to 1964 (1996).

In the meantime, Hazlehurst's own research project bore fruit with the publication in 1971 of *Politicians at War*. The fact that, half a century on, this book remains the best study we have of high politics in the first months of the First World War is testament to the enduring quality of its research and analysis. One of Hazlehurst's early archival discoveries was a large collection of papers belonging to J. A. Pease, 1st Baron Gainford. The collection included fifteen volumes of diaries, the most important of which offered a continuous narrative of Asquith's government from his accession to the premiership until the formation of a coalition in May 1915. Though Hazlehurst and Woodland began work on Pease's papers in 1968 and hoped to publish an edition of the diaries in the late 1970s, events got in the way and a first volume covering the period 1908–10 did not appear until 1994. While Woodland held several positions in archive management, Hazlehurst divided his career between academia and posts in the Australian