

## FROM METAPHYSICAL TO POLITICAL:

### Does political culture make Rawls's principle of tolerance morally relativistic?

#### Key words

*Moral relativism, political culture, Rawls, political liberalism, metaphysics, concepts*

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#### Field

*Political theory*

#### Summary

*The aim of this paper is to analyze Rawls's conception of political (public) culture, exploring whether his principle of tolerance (Political Liberalism) falls in moral relativism. The analysis consists of three sections. Firstly, the author introduces different critical accounts on Rawls's theory and identifies where they go wrong. Secondly, the author delineates the intellectual tradition of social liberalism from which sprang Rawls's conception, showing that he significantly alters the key ideas of dominant liberal justice of the Western world. In the final section of the paper it is argued that Rawls's idea of political culture is a cornerstone of just society and the spring of tolerance, providing arguments in favor of the idea that Rawls's conception of political liberalism is not morally relativistic but it is, however, in line with liberal pluralism.<sup>1</sup>*

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## INTRODUCTION: IS THERE A UNIVERSAL JUSTICE IN PARTICULAR POLITICAL CULTURES?

In his later writings, John Rawls (1985; 1996) argued that justice, as fairness should be a political and not a metaphysical conception of a stable society.<sup>2</sup> This assertion can be *prima facie* interpreted as an appeal to political philosophy to turn away from conceptions of justice that draw justifications from a universal principle and accept the notion of justice being the matter of what actual people find to be fair in their own society. One of the premises from which Rawls infers his thesis is that political conception of justice is possible only in a society in which there is a certain type of *public political culture*: “Justice as fairness is a political conception in part because it starts from within a certain political tradition” (Rawls, 1985: 225). The premise is contingent and historical, partly because Rawls (1985: 230) calls for the political culture of constitutional democracies, whose roots stretch to the religious wars at the time of the Reformation. The principle of tolerance as the political basis of a free society sprang from religious conflicts, which consisted of incommensurable and irreconcilable metaphysical worldviews.

Rawls’s idea is well known among liberal pluralists. As Berlin (2002: 244) points out: “From sheer differences and disagreements sprang toleration, variety, humanity.” That

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does not mean that this is *a priori* justifiable standpoint in the discourse of political philosophy. In the traditional semantics of political philosophy, the claim that citizenship relies on political, and not metaphysical principles, means that citizens have no obligation to make the ends of their public action good, and that such action is not based on teleological principles. Instead, Rawls’s later works celebrate the diversity that is generated by “the fact that the free development of moral and intellectual abilities leads to incommensurable differences” (Pavicevic, 2011: 210). To claim that the stability of institutions is dependent on political and not metaphysical conceptions implies advocating that the constitution and the laws of a society are to be “value neutral” institutions in guarding the public good. Both citizens and institutions are devoid of normative content, and are reduced to the neutral approach: the primary obligation is to be tolerant in a society that nurtures diverse political ends by default. Rawls famously describes this societal state as *political liberalism*.

Is Rawls’s conception of political liberalism justifiable? If a politician wanted to use his thesis on public culture as the foundation of a stable and just society, he/she could hardly justify such a position. What the politician would in fact suggest to the citizens when they find themselves in a public space, is that they should subject religious, traditional and other values that matter to them, to something that could be termed as political agreement on the peaceful and tolerant cooperation in a community of conflicting values, even if this agreement results in abandoning their metaphysical conceptions of good life. It seems that in Rawls’s conception of political liberalism, laws and institutions acquire their legitimacy through the

process of formalization of a political consensus, which excludes the metaphysical notion of the public good. In other words, the public good is separated from politics and political consensus.

This paper analyzes Rawls's conception of a political (public) culture, aiming to answer the question as to whether his account falls in moral relativism. I analyze this problem in three sections. Firstly, I introduce different critical accounts on Rawls's theory and identify where do they go wrong. Secondly, I delineate the intellectual tradition of social liberalism from which Rawls's conception sprang, showing that he significantly alters the key ideas of dominant liberal justice of the Western world. In the final section of the paper I discuss Rawls's idea of public culture as a cornerstone of a just society, showing that this idea is not doomed for being morally relativistic but instead, is in line with liberal pluralism.

### IS A PRINCIPLE OF TOLERANCE A SAFE WAY TO BE A MORAL RELATIVIST?

What is a conception of "political"? Rawls does not give a clear answer to this question. It is however clear that Rawls designates something as "political" when it is opposite to "metaphysical". Jean Hampton further elaborates this tautology and offers an intriguing interpretation (1989: 794) of Rawls that identifies the usage of both terms in the Hobbesian sense. Hampton believes that Rawls's use of the term "political" is such that it allows overlapping and conflicting values to be included into the discussion. This argument is based on the standard interpretation of a Hobbesian "natural state" situation as a dominion of unlimited desires of different persons contrasted to scarce

actual recourses that "will inevitably come to desire and try to appropriate the same object" (Hampton, 1995: 59). Hampton further argues that the use of the term "political" is as equally Hobbesian as the term "metaphysical": only in the pre-contractual phase (i.e. natural state) does the "political" acknowledge the pluralism of individual ends of people, who are willing to neglect those, not because they believe in the value of civil life, but because it is a part of their personal interest. Hampton (1989: 807) concludes that in a society constituted by the consensus on the basic values, where the role of institutions and laws is to guarantee the principle of neutrality and regulate the conflicting values of moral agents, citizens are neither politically nor morally obliged to consider such order intrinsically valuable. Therefore, Hampton criticizes Rawls's conception of the political as being reducible to egoistic interests of the individuals.

Hampton (1989: 800) arrives at such consequences because she supposes that there is an equivalence between what can best be put into two following assertion:

- (1) "Rawls uses the political as non-metaphysical"
- (2) "Rawls uses metaphysical as non-political"

This equivalence is however, a false one. One cannot apply a Hobbesian strategy of reducing social ends to individual interests to the first assertion since such claim would be absurd. Let us suppose the opposite assertion of (1) being true, i.e. "Rawls uses the political as metaphysical." This is then a contrapositive of assertion (1). If in a Hobbesian strategy one argues that the contrapositive of the assertion (2) is impossible (i.e. it is unconceivable that metaphysical is

political), while the assertion (1) is true, then Hampton found that this contrapositive is possible and made the whole argument absurd. Therefore, there is no equivalence between these two assertions because the first one is not Hobbesian, while the second one is. Rawls argued for the content of the first assertion and Hampton wrongly supposed that he also argued for the content of the second one.

The fear that Rawls's use of the term political will lead to a Hobbesian social situation can be safely discarded. Is there some other way to approach the idea that the term "political" is "non-metaphysical"? According to Boucher and Vincent (2000: 30) Rawls relates the political to values such as tolerance, rationality and reason, while the metaphysical is related to the moral good, the search for truth and the teleological basis of social roles. The important characteristic of the metaphysical, according to Rawls's use of that term (1985: 225), is that it is incommensurable. The political, on the other hand, brakes the category of incommensurability and finds new grounds in *the principle of tolerance*. This means that the theory of political liberalism needs to take into account that there is a permanent value conflict in a society (value pluralism). The quest of a political philosopher is to find a neutral solution when it comes to conflicting metaphysical conceptions. The neutral solution is a value in itself because it solves the problem of conflicting worldviews. Rawls refers to this solution as "political".

This notion of political, conceptualized in *Political liberalism*, hasn't been fully accepted in contemporary political philosophy. There are a host of criticisms of Rawls's formal approach to the role of the political in a conflicting society, but the best summary can be found in the following lines

by Cheshire Calhoun (Vranic, 2016:724): "In ethics, for example, moral knowledge has become equated with the elaboration of highly formalized and stylized decision procedures, with extremely general 'first principles,' and with manipulating the logical implications of hypothetical cases whose occurrence in daily life is either impossible or improbable. The result is the production of a kind of knowledge that has no valence, that does not speak to human needs, fears, and aspirations, and thus cannot attract the assent of the biographical self, but only a kind of purely logical assent. The further result may be, as Annette Baier claims, that the morality endorsed by many moral theorists 'is seriously endorsed only in their studies, not in the moral education they give their children, nor in their reflective attitude to their own past moral education, nor even in their attitude to how they teach their own courses in moral philosophy.'" Put differently, the Rawlsian account of a fair society relies on a principle of political tolerance that no one in real life is likely to use or feel the need to follow. The alternative then is, or at least seems to be, a moral relativism in which the scope of tolerance is determined by cultural roots and norms.

Rawls tries to overcome the problem of cultural determinism by arguing that when the principle of tolerance is applied in a society it will lead to a democratic society, regardless of different cultural traditions in which it is applied to. From Rawls's account, it can be derived that the normative has no moral, but a logical meaning, which makes sense only when behavior with real consequences can be related to it. If the content of law is related to tolerance, respect for human rights, etc., the political consequence of such content is the establishment of a democratic regime.

This conception of normative has value neutrality in its basis. Rawls's works in the late XX century are closely connected to the great dispute that was the axis of almost every social science book and conference after the World War. In the mid-twentieth century, value neutral ideas were severely criticized by traditionally oriented political philosophers. The criticism was not directed toward the fact that most value neutral social philosophers advocated for democracy, but toward the fact that they did not defend it; in other words, their philosophical relativism gave the impression that they were indifferent toward totalitarian ideologies. Leo Strauss, the well-known exponent of this standpoint, strongly attacked the idea of value neutrality in political and legal philosophy. For Strauss (1988: 18), the basic problem of value neutrality (which he also refers to as legal positivism) is that it treats the state, laws and institutions as instruments and not civilizational goals. According to Strauss, law should involve a moral obligation that citizens should act in the way that preserves the order as intrinsic value. When such an obligation is absent, the idea of intrinsic value is erased from the citizens' worldview, and replaced with a set of rules and regulations, which lead to nitpicking and conformism. The positivist *credo* that experience, and not reasons, is sufficient for impartial judgment makes the whole doctrine morally imperfect (Strauss 1988: 19). To put it briefly, in Strauss's view, positivism is a doctrine according to which "anything goes", which causes the imaginary impartial judge to adopt a behavior which leads to value relativism.

The conflict between neutralists and normativists is primarily concerned with the problem of justification of value in social life. While normativists believe that this is

the only goal of political philosophers, neutralists, according to Arnold Brecht (1947), mostly provide argumentation that values are a part of an affective behavior of citizens and there is no rational justification for establishing them as a norm. Consequently, the law should not be concerned with questions citizens believe to be valuable. The law therefore becomes a mere formality, devoid of all metaphysical *qua* value content.

In the revised edition of his influential book *Politics and Vision*, Sheldon Wolin concludes that Rawls's idea of a neutral political approach does not start from "the virtuous citizen, but the rational self-interested bargainer familiar to economic theories" (Wolin, 2004: 531). Wolin's criticism of Rawls is similar to Strauss's more general criticism of value relativism: without the metaphysical idea of public good, there is a threat of double reduction, social and legal. The first one refers to the mutual cooperation of citizens, which is basically interest-driven action, without the duty to respect the fellow citizen. In Wolin's view (2004: 535) the consequence of that reduction is the partial argumentation toward a political culture of capitalism, followed by "the devaluation of political values". The latter reduces laws to conventions on valid behavior, whose justification is at best trivial (because it is derived from other formal norms).

On the other side, new Rawlsian ideas also sparked controversy in the pro-Rawlsian school of thought. Aside from her critique of Rawls's usage of terms "political" and "metaphysics", Jean Hampton (1989: 792) is also doubtful about the success of his idea of political neutrality, despite her "fascination with and partial endorsement of Rawls's proposal". More precisely, her key question is whether Rawls's system would

really make the social consensus intrinsically valuable, i.e. whether it would be more than a *modus vivendi* (Hampton 1989: 800). If Rawls's ideas were reduced to *modus vivendi* liberalism, such order would fail to "affirm the value content which would make citizens interested in the preservation of the order" (Pavicevic, 2011: 238). Jean Hampton (1989: 807) expressed a skepticism that citizens would believe in the value of active politics, if there were no metaphysical criterion they could use to determine the value. Hampton then emphasized the role of political philosophers as citizens who should be more active than others: "Politicians, after all, only want acceptance of ideas they (for whatever reason) are pushing; philosophers are supposed to want the truth" (Hampton, 1989: 807). In other words, if a political philosopher should be neutral, i.e. if she or he cannot determine which of the conflicting metaphysical statements is true and valid, it seems that there is no criterion which would help citizens understand that the consensus is intrinsically valuable, rather than a matter of mere interest. Therefore, according to Hampton, Rawls needs to enable at least some citizens, namely political philosophers, to be obliged to tell the truth and judge what is valuable (Hampton 1989: 811). It follows that the metaphysical conception of justice is possible and necessary, because it is one thing to be tolerant toward somebody who has wrong views, whereas "tolerance of ideas themselves is quite another" (Hampton, 1989: 811). If Hampton aimed to frame Rawls's account in Plato's idea of civic education for the philosopher king, her argument is more than convincing.

### SELF-IMPROVEMENT AND THE POLITICAL: CONTESTED NATURE OF SOCIAL LIBERALISM

The reason why Rawls's use of the political can be brought into question by means of its opposite (the metaphysical), is the fact that political liberalism is essentially contested. It is uncertain whether the state should have a neutral, i.e. procedural role when it comes to solving social conflicts, or whether it should strive to ensure public good and public virtue. In the tradition of contemporary liberal thought, it seems that the latter position is dominant: "Contemporary theory of citizenship and political culture clearly indicates that procedural-institutional mechanisms are not powerful enough to limit the aggression of particular interests [...] Shortly, a certain level of public virtue and 'public wisdom' is necessary in order for a political order to function well" (Podunavac, 2008: 163).

Although Rawls's modifications are significant, one cannot eschew the impression that the basis of his version of political liberalism is related to the tradition of social liberalism. Boucher and Vincent (2000) explored the idea of citizenship in social liberalism, by comparing the conceptions of T. H. Green and John Rawls. The research done by these authors showed that Green's social liberalism sprang from the need of liberals to eliminate the influence of classical utilitarianism and turn toward Mill's conception of liberalism (Boucher and Vincent, 2000). In this sense, it seems that Green and Rawls have the same opponent. The important difference, according to Boucher and Vincent (2000: 29), is that Green's citizens are gathered around the idea of community as space for individual self-perfection. One of the basic duties of citizens is that

in their action toward public good they should demonstrate “active moral reflective engagement” (Boucher and Vincent, 2000: 33). In other words, a good citizen is a “metaphysical” citizen.

What makes the thesis of political liberalism essentially contested is the fact that Green and Rawls start from the same problem (classical utilitarianism) and the same premises when it comes to the examination of political obligation as the basis of stable order. However, they arrive at divergent conclusions. In his book *Lectures on Principles of Political Obligation* Green aims “to consider the moral function or object served by law, or by the system of rights and obligations which the state enforces, and in so doing to discover the true ground of justification for obedience to law” (Green, 1999: 5). Green, therefore, aims to justify reasons for a political obligation of citizens. In his view, citizens will understand the obligation as a connection of interest and duty when they realize that a political obligation helps them in their self-perfection. In order to accomplish this end, the citizen has two capacities: the will to improve on the one hand, and reason on the other (Green, 1999: 7). The process of analysis is performed by means of the idea of what a society in which some individual lives should look like. What would then be the role of the state in the emancipation of those capacities of citizens? For Green (1999: 8), the function of law is to comprise citizens’ various conceptions of society and transform them into universal morality: “The value then of the institutions of civil life lies in their operation as giving reality to these capacities, as enabling them to be really exercised”.

The function of the state and laws is not a purely moral one. Due to the diversity of conceptions of societal order that

citizens have, the state sometimes needs to resort to repression. Therefore, political duty can at best be moral convention, but not genuine morality. The society needs yet to arrive at genuine morality by self-perfection through building laws and recognizing rights. By relating laws and rights to the political, Green finds a justification for repression. According to him, the reason for repression does not lie only in the pluralism of interests and conceptions, but in the need for the state to create the real equivalent of public good, i.e. “a system of rights and obligations [...] which may properly be called ‘natural,’ not in a sense in which the term ‘neutral’ would imply that such a system ever did exist or could exist independently of force exercised by society over individuals, but ‘neutral’ because necessary to the end which it is the vocation of human society to realize” (Green, 1999: 9). Therefore, the political is closely connected to natural laws because natural rights are justified only to the extent to which the state is able to ensure political obligation (Green 1999: 16). It seems that Green’s theory of political obligation is based upon what Podunavac (2008: 172) terms “the organic ideal of a community” in whose basis is “the idea that the state is the main depositor of human freedom, rights and property”. Consequently, the principle of tolerance has limitation to its application and it can be revoked if it blocks further development of social life. In other words, for Green, liberalism itself has its limitations, so it becomes legitimate for the institutions of civil life to exercise illiberal measures in order to remove the barriers that stand in the way of citizens’ self-perfection.

Green is at a constant risk that his theory might be identified with dogmatism, where the conception of state is based on

Hobbesian absolutism, and where the state is the unconditional sovereign. In order to avoid this situation, Green had to transfer the justification of the role of institutions of public life from a political sphere to a metaphysical one. He did this by introducing the general will of citizens into the discussion, through a qualitative definition of law: "It is more true to say that law, as a system of rules by which rights are maintained, is the expression of a general will than the general will is the sovereign (Green, 1999: 70)." It is clear from this that a general will is not a political, but a metaphysical category. Since the sovereignty of citizens and institutions of civil life is constituted through general will, it follows that laws, as an expression of a general will, are not political but metaphysical creations. The laws of civil society are legitimate only when they express a general will for self-perfection of the society and citizens.

If Green's argumentation is understood as a part of the history of liberal mainstream discourse, it is clear why Jean Hampton's view is skeptical toward Rawls's account that is in opposition to metaphysical conceptions. In addition, the metaphysical approach to liberalism is the basis of criticism coming from ethical liberals (Pavicevic 2011: 234), according to whom Rawls's conception of public liberalism is morally imperfect, because it fails to admit that there are always certain values that liberalism should not tolerate in its scope. Ethical liberals reject the part of Green's conception that justifies coercion, while at the same time giving additional arguments that liberalism possesses a morally superior conception of good. Once citizens accept the liberal conception of good, they have no problem with justification why other

political conceptions should be abandoned (Pavicevic, 2011: 241).

Finally, if Rawls's conception is complemented by a more or less superior conception of good, which would make liberalism more acceptable as a doctrine, it could still be criticized for its moral relativism. The problem lies at the foundation of theory, i.e. its value pluralism. As Strauss notably pointed out, pluralism is another name for relativism: for a liberal pluralist "every resolute liberal hack or thug would be a civilized man, while Plato and Kant would be barbarians" (Strauss, 1961: 140). In Rawls's work, this issue is not reflected in a purely historical character of his theory, i.e. the processes of state, laws and society formation after the Reformation. Therefore, this is an issue of political culture. As Wolin (2004: 548) concludes, Rawls's idea of common political culture aims to create "a citizen cult" of liberalism, by making other traditions of political thought and action relative. The critics accused Rawls of relating societal stability to societies who are already liberal, i.e. where "citizens with liberal views constitute a stabile majority" (Pavicevic, 2011: 247). The question that can be drawn from this discussion is: can political culture be conceptualized without involving metaphysics?

#### **LIBERALISM: CULTURAL, NOT METAPHYSICAL**

In order to make the postulates of political liberalism theory plausible, Rawls (1996: 15) presupposes the existence of public, or political culture of constitutional democracies: "This public culture comprises the political institutions of a constitutional regime and the public traditions of their interpretation (including those of the judiciary), as well as historic texts and documents



that are of common knowledge.” The foundation of that constitutional culture is pluralism which creates a political society “of diverse political communities and does not belong to any of them *a priori*” (Podunavac, 2008: 155). The transcendental principle of a pluralistic society is the principle of tolerance. In other words, over the last half millennium the transcendental psychology of a pluralistic society has been such that citizens’ behavior is guided by the idea that their fellow citizens sometimes have different, often disputable conceptions of the public good.

Let me briefly summarize the critiques on Rawls’s account. By identifying the contested nature of the public good in *Political Liberalism*, it is not difficult for one to infer that Rawls’s transcendental principle leads to value relativism. If each citizen is guided by the principle of tolerance, while there is no public criterion for its application, then we are not dealing with tolerance but rather a Hobbesian conflict of incommensurable ideals. There is no guarantee that the existence of a general cultural knowledge acquired through historical documents and court verdicts will make citizens believe that the preservation of order is of value in itself. Instead, it seems that an idealistic principle is necessary: in order to be tolerant toward different conceptions of societal order, the precondition is the minimal consensus on what represents the right, moral or good conception of a society. The justification of that conception must go beyond the frame of legal norms and historical documents, i.e. it must be of metaphysical value itself.

I argue that this conclusion can be refuted by analyzing the concept of political (public) culture that Rawls uses in his later writings, i.e. after *A Theory of Justice*.

The introduction of political culture by Rawls is to reevaluate his concept of justice as one that should no longer “be developed *sub specie aeternitatis*, but as a theory which is derived and which addresses the public political culture of democratic societies” (Podunavac, 1998: 102). In *Political Liberalism*, political culture is defined as a set of basic ideas and principles (Rawls, 1996). This definition is a summary of his idea from the paper “Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical”, in which one can find a very helpful definition of political (public) culture, whose function lies in “specifying a point of view from which these principles can be seen” (Rawls 1985: 226). Public culture enables citizens to understand why they should direct their interest toward the preservation of order.

Rawls terms this kind of justification *reasonableness* and it presents a moral criterion, or “the only normative criterion for determining the legitimacy of individual requests and beliefs” (Pavicevic, 2011: 249). Using a visual metaphor, “reasonableness” can be seen as the “smart glasses” of citizen rationality that enable the citizen to be guided by public principles when making decisions by providing them insightful information regarding their fellow citizen. It is well known that reasonableness is not the same as rationality in Rawls’s conceptual apparatus. Rationality represents a cognitive dimension in the psychology of citizens, while reasonableness is related to the affective dimension, i.e. the citizen’s feelings about societal principles. For Rawls, primary affective loyalty of citizens within constitutional political culture is related to the principle of tolerance.

By relating political (public) culture to the feelings of citizens, Rawls opted for the interpretation of a culture that is normal for

Western political science. It is important to stress that for Rawls (1996: 46) public culture is the way in which citizens see daily life and it represent the bridge between the abstract principles of political philosophy and real political conflicts in a society. This standpoint is not unusual in political culture studies. In similar terms, Verba (1965: 515) defines political culture as the concept, which signifies citizens' daily life sphere, meaning the way it functions in reality. In other words, the basis of political culture consists of "mentally conditioned habits and representations that comprise the predominantly non-reflective part of everyday life" (Podunavac, 1998: 233). An important consequence of such definition of political culture is that it rests in the idea that political practices of citizens are equally general and based on empirical foundations. The political culture of citizens means that there are multiple conceptions of good life, but that only some of them can constitute the basis of a just society. Which conceptions deserve to be included is not decided upon by philosophical reflection, but results from the political agreement among citizens, which finds its basis in common experience: "We can regard these convictions as provisional fixed points which any conception of justice must account for it to be reasonable by us." (Rawls 1985: 228). This lies at the heart of the seminal idea of *overlapping consensus*. Nevertheless, if overlapping consensus is used consistently with the term political culture in psychological terms, then this concept can be reduced to *dispositional behavior*.<sup>3</sup> The reduction is legitimate, which can be seen from Rawls's thesis on citizen

psychology: citizens are endowed with the ability to act rationally and reasonably; reasonableness and rationality are mutually irreducible and also inseparable. This means that it is impossible to turn rationality into reasonableness (vice versa), and it is also impossible to practically separate these two principles. This is precisely the purpose of disposition. These are primitive concepts that cannot be reduced to something else. In spite of their irreducibility, one can identify certain elements within them (e.g. cognitive, affective, and conative), but they are all descriptive in their nature.

At this point it is useful to recall Rawls's application of the idea of *descriptive theories*, as a part of the semantics of *A Theory of Justice* (1971). Rawls relates the idea of good to rationality in *A Theory of Justice*, and in later works he reinforces this thesis by stating that there are numerous and incommensurable conceptions of good. Their meaning is descriptive, which means that they are such conventionally, and that they do not need an additional meaning to be understood. However, the descriptive character of good as rationality cannot have primacy over the other two elements of behavior (affective and volitive), due to the nature of dispositional acting. This means that each normal<sup>4</sup> citizen, when in the position to make political decisions, strives to act in a balanced manner, which is the basic function of reasonableness. In other words, when it comes to making political decisions, citizens' affective loyalty to the stability of political order leads to a balanced position among various (conflicting) cognitive conceptions of good. Finally, the

<sup>3</sup> Verba (1965: 516) believes that political culture is always related to dispositions as permanent forms of behavior, because the aim is to find out how citizens actually relate to political life, political goals and emotional loyalty to the political system.

<sup>4</sup> Under the term "normal citizen" I mean those citizens who are not partisan representatives of various ideological, religious and other social options, which can influence the formation of political institutions and laws.

volitive element of the disposition, which is no more than a principle of motivation,<sup>5</sup> supports the wish of the citizens to keep the stable order, which is one of the most complex civil activities.

Rawls's conception of good has no metaphysical, but a prescriptive understanding. This affects rationality in a twofold way: firstly, rationality does not allow for the claim that a certain way of life is more true or valuable than another<sup>6</sup>; secondly, rationality is the capacity to praise parts of the conceptions of others, which we consider valuable. Finally, being a result of dispositional acting, the overlapping consensus ultimately depends on subjective factors, and not the objective ones, such as the ability to praise parts of others' conceptions, the willingness to compromise in order to reach a consensus, and the motivation for such action, etc.

All these are elements of the principle of tolerance, but do they lead to value relativism? On the basis of the analysis provided so far, I claim the answer is negative for three reasons. Firstly, the nature of dispositional acting is such that even if its analysis were possible, it would not be possible to arrive at the metaphysical basis of action without regressing *ad infinitum*. Secondly, citizens' action is most often such that it strives to preserve the stability of order, if such order is conventionally understood as the expression of justice as fairness. Conventionalism is not the same as value relativism. The conventional nature of justice as fairness, which

<sup>5</sup> In *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls (1971) advocated the "Aristotelian theory of motivation" according to which people always strive to perfect those activities they do, *ceteris paribus*.

<sup>6</sup> This is a consequence of Rawls's claim on the incommensurability of values. When someone claims that a certain value has primacy over other values, they do not express philosophical truth, but perform doctrinal repression.

is a product of political culture, is political value in itself, but not moral value.<sup>7</sup>By referring to political culture, Rawls does not discard the value of metaphysical justification of social order, but opts for another kind of value, equally legitimate in its form and normative in its content: justice as fairness is a political conception of justice, which is valuable in itself *due to the convenient empirical circumstances* that the action of citizens after the Reformation is regulated by the principle of tolerance. Thirdly, conventionalism does not exclude moral justification due to the fact that it depends on citizens' dispositional action. In order for behavior to be dispositional, it needs to be public, and reasonably acceptable as such. This is evident from Rawls's requirement that all political action needs to pass a public test in order to be legitimate. As Pavicevic (2011: 222) points out, the public test is "not expressed only through philosophical argumentation, but also through citizens' general consensus".

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS ON VALUE PLURALISM AND POLITICAL CULTURE

Since the Reformation, citizens of constitutional democracies have lived in convenient empirical circumstances which have at least three characteristics: firstly, the everyday psychology of citizens is regulated by the transcendental principle of tolerance; secondly, the stability of order is a part of the political consensus based on a conception of justice; thirdly, justification for such political consensus is a part of public morality, which is reflected in the willingness of citizens to behave reasonably when

<sup>7</sup> It is not moral, due to the nature of its aim, which is to build stable political institutions on just foundations.

pursuing their interests. The conception of citizenship psychology enables Rawls to bypass the metaphysical nature of law. To claim that laws are political categories means to claim that they are an institutional expression of citizens' political culture, which is, if nothing else, a more elegant theory based on humanistic principles, such as value pluralism.

This conclusion is important for the history of liberalism, because it comes from one of the most prominent exponents of liberal political philosophy at the time when liberalism was regarded as a dominant metatheory and ideology. By introducing political (public) culture into his account, Rawls judiciously argued for value pluralism as a theoretical capacity to expand the notion of the liberal concept of tolerance. Therefore, the citizens of constitutional cultures, in Rawls's conception, have the capacity to judge whether statements and actions are right or wrong, but the validity of those judgments is not based on metaphysical, but rather empirical, cultural validity. However, one cannot escape the feeling that Rawls's conception of political culture is applicable only in a very specific spatial and historical context, namely to the European tradition of political philosophy and constitutional theory. This throws a shadow on Rawls's attempts to reshape the tradition of European social liberalism, because it still has remnants of the old European notion of superiority of constitutional cultures over the rest of the political cultures.

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**OD METAFIZIČKOG DO POLITIČKOG:****Da li političkom kulturom Rolsov princip tolerancije zapada u moralni relativizam?****Ključne riječi**

*Moralni relativizam, politička kultura, Rols, politički liberalizam, metafizika, koncepti*

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**Sažetak**

*Cilj ovog rada je da analizira Rolsovu koncepciju političke (javne) kulture, ispitujući da li njegovo načelo tolerancije (Politički liberalizam) zapada u moralni relativizam. Analiza se sastoji iz tri dela. Prvo, autor analizira različite kritičke pristupe Rolsovoj teoriji i pokazuje gde leži njihova greška. Drugo, autor razlučuje intelektualnu tradiciju socijalnog liberalizma iz koje je proizilazi Rolsova koncepcija, pokazujući da je on značajno primenio ključne ideje dominantne liberalne pravde Zapadnog sveta. U poslednjem delu rada nude se argumenti u prilog tezi da je Rolsova ideja političke kulture kamen temeljac pravednog društva i izvor tolerancije, čime se dodatno osnažuje ideja da Rolsova koncepcija političkog liberalizma ne zapada u moralni relativizam već je deo tradicije liberalnog pluralizma.*

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