

# Political Liberalism

## I What's the problem?

### I.1 A Theory of Justice

Is there a “workable and systematic” alternative to utilitarianism?<sup>1</sup>

### I.2 Political Liberalism

“How is it possible that there may exist over time a stable and just society of free and equal citizens profoundly divided by reasonable religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines?”<sup>2</sup>

In particular: “How is it possible for those affirming a religious doctrine that is based on religious authority, for example, the Church or the Bible, also to hold a reasonable political conception that supports a just democratic regime?”<sup>3</sup>

## 2 Vocabulary!

**Justice as Fairness** Rawls's particular version of liberalism, as published in *A Theory of Justice*.

**Stability** A quality of principles of justice. Principles are stable if (a) people governed by them develop strong desires to comply with them and (b) they can be the object of an overlapping consensus among *reasonable comprehensive moral doctrines*.<sup>4</sup>

**Modus vivendi** A balance of power, like Lewis's account of the emergence of tolerance. Contrasted with *stability*, the wholehearted support of a political order.

**Comprehensive Moral Doctrine** A moral doctrine that covers more than politics. It

includes what is valuable in life, for example. Does it also include the epistemological and metaphysical claims on pp. xxvi-ii?

**Political conception** A moral doctrine that is (a) limited to politics, (b) presented as a “freestanding” doctrine, and (c) expressed in terms familiar in the public political culture in order to achieve an overlapping consensus.<sup>5</sup>

**Freestanding** A way of ‘presenting’ a conception of justice that takes no position in opposition to comprehensive moral doctrines, different views of the nature of morality and moral knowledge.

**Overlapping consensus** Consensus on principles of justice based on different comprehensive moral doctrines. Each doctrine gives different reasons for accepting the same principles.

**Reasonable** (a) The willingness to cooperate with others on “terms all can accept”, provided others do the same. (b) The willingness to recognize “the burdens of judgment”; given the difficulty in knowing what sort of life is best, reasonable people can have different comprehensive moral doctrines.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Political Liberalism*, p. xv.

<sup>2</sup>*Political*, p. xxv.

<sup>3</sup>*Political*, p. xxxvii.

<sup>4</sup>*Political*, p. 141; *Theory*, pp. 454, 496-501.

<sup>5</sup>*Political*, pp. 11-15.

<sup>6</sup>*Political*, pp. 48, 54.