§1. Community and the self

Objection 1…

Rawls falsely believes that we are unembedded/unencumbered selves…

But Rawls is just interested in the conception of justice we would choose if we didn’t know which community we were embedded in, or which conception of the good we were encumbered with.

The constitutive conception of community and the self…

T1 ‘…to say that the members of a society are bound by a sense of community is… to say that… they conceive their identity… as defined to some extent by the community of which they are a part.’ (Michael Sandel, Liberalism and the Limits of Justice, p.150)

Objection 2…

Rawls falsely believes that we would still be able to make choices if we didn’t know which community we were embedded in, or which conception of the good we were encumbered with.

T2 ‘…the self is prior to the ends which are affirmed by it…’ (TJ, p.560)

T3 ‘What is at stake… is… whether rights can be identified and justified in a way that does not presuppose any particular conception of the good life… The fundamental question, in other words, is whether the right is prior to the good.’ (Michael Sandel, Liberalism and the Limits of Justice, p.x)

T4 ‘The [OP] seems to presuppose not just a neutral theory of the good, but a liberal, individualistic conception according to which the best that be wished for someone is the unimpeded pursuit of his own path…’ (Thomas Nagel, Rawls on Justice, p.10)

You can’t persuade me to accept a particular conception of justice by asking me to consider which conception of justice I would choose if I had an entirely different conception of the good…
§2. Political liberalism

The fact of reasonable pluralism…

In a free/democratic society, people will adopt different reasonable comprehensive doctrines.

The fact of oppression…

If we don’t want people to adopt different reasonable comprehensive doctrines, we will have to use the power of the state to enforce uniformity.

A well-ordered society…

Our society is well-ordered if and only if…

T5 ‘…everyone accepts, and knows that everyone else accepts, the very same principles of justice… [and the] basic structure… is publicly known, or with good reason believed, to satisfy these principles.’ (PL 35)

Suppose we use a particular reasonable comprehensive doctrine – Kantianism – as the basis of our conception of justice…

P1 Our society is well-ordered only if everyone accepts Kantianism.

P2 Everyone accepts Kantianism only if our society is not free/democratic.

C Our society is well-ordered only if it is not free/democratic.

A political conception of justice…

It only tells us about the basic structure of society…

It isn’t presented as part of any particular reasonable comprehensive doctrine…

It exploits…

T6 ‘certain fundamental ideas seen as implicit in the public political culture of a democratic society.’ (PL 13)

T7 ‘…political liberalism looks for a political conception of justice that we hope can gain the support of an overlapping consensus of reasonable religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines in a society regulated by it.’ (PL 10)

Here’s a simple case… Rowan Williams opposes assisted dying/euthanasia…
…chiefly on the grounds of my religious commitments – the conviction that life is a gift from God that we cannot treat as a possession of our own to keep or throw away as we choose.’ (Interview in Mail on Sunday, 2005)

Our life is a gift from God.

It is morally wrong to throw away something that we don’t own.

If our life is a gift from God, it is something that we don’t own.

It is morally wrong to throw away our life.

Legalizing assisted dying increases the risk of vulnerable people being manipulated into an early death.

Nothing should be done that increases the risk of vulnerable people being manipulated into an early death.

Assisted dying should not be legalized.

There could be an overlapping consensus on P2…

…it is clear, I think, that the text [of TJ] regards justice as fairness and utilitarianism as comprehensive, or partially comprehensive, doctrines.’ (PL xvi).

A new argument…

We should accept a conception of justice if it allows us to achieve a well-ordered society while respecting the fact of reasonable pluralism.

Justice as fairness allows us to achieve a well-ordered society while respecting the fact of reasonable pluralism.

We should accept justice as fairness.

§3 Reasonableness

What is a reasonable comprehensive doctrine…?

…it covers the major religious, philosophical, and moral aspects of human life in a more or less consistent and coherent manner…’

It tells us ‘…which values to count as especially significant and how to balance them when they conflict…’

…it normally belongs to, or draws upon, a tradition of thought and doctrine…’ (PL 59)
P1 White supremacism is a reasonable comprehensive doctrine.

P2 In a well-ordered Rawlsian society, the power of the state is used to suppress white supremacism.

P3 The fact of reasonable pluralism is respected only if the power of the state is not used to suppress reasonable comprehensive doctrines.

C In a well-ordered Rawlsian society, the fact of reasonable pluralism is not respected.

A comprehensive doctrine is *reasonable* when it is one reasonable people could accept.

So when is a *person* reasonable?

T10 ‘…they are ready to propose principles and standards as fair terms of cooperation and to abide by them willingly, given the assurance that others will likewise do so.’ (*PL* 49)

They ‘recognize the burdens of judgment’ (*PL* 54).

A reasonable person accepts that differences in comprehensive doctrines are due to complicated, conflicting evidence, vague concepts, the influence of people’s different life experiences, and not just to ‘ignorance and perversity’.

Do Christians really think that the religious disagreement is due to the burdens of judgment…?

§4. *Concluding remarks*

How is it possible for people to cooperate as members of the same society…?

Rawlsian irenicism…

**References**

FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY LECTURE QUESTIONNAIRE  
MICHAELMAS TERM 2017

Lecturer: ________________________  Part/Paper: __________________________

Course Title: _____________________________________________________________

Faculty (if not a Philosophy student): __________________________________________

This questionnaire gives you the opportunity to express your views about this lecture course. Your responses will be totally anonymous. The results will be used as part of an overall assessment of the effectiveness of this course and for course improvement.

Please answer all questions. For those questions which use numerical scales CIRCLE the number closest to your view.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

COURSE CONTENT

1 Clarity of presentation: Very good 5 4 3 2 1 Very poor

2 Interest in course content: Very good 5 4 3 2 1 Very poor

3 Overall, how would you rate this course? Very good 5 4 3 2 1 Very poor

4 If you have any suggestions or comments about this course, please state them here (e.g. too fast, too slow, coherent progression, excellent course):

5 If you have any comments about aspects of the philosophy courses other than this one, please state them here:

PLEASE EMAIL ANY CONCERNS WHERE IMMEDIATE ACTION IS NEEDED TO THE FACULTY OFFICE: phil-admin@lists.cam.ac.uk