

“Pluralist,” “Partially Comprehensive Doctrines” & the Problem of Motivation

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Abstract

Recent scholarship has drawn attention to John Rawls’s concern with stability—a concern that, as Rawls himself notes, motivated Part III of *A Theory of Justice* and many important changes in *Political Liberalism*. For Rawls, the possibility of achieving “stability for the right reasons” depends on citizens possessing sufficient moral motivation. I argue, however, that the moral psychology Rawls develops to show how such motivation would be cultivated and sustained does not cohere with his specific descriptions of the “pluralist,” “partially comprehensive” doctrine. Considering Rawls’s claims that “most” citizens—both in contemporary liberal democracies and in the well-ordered society—possess pluralist doctrines, these incompatibilities may critically undermine his stability arguments. Despite the enormous importance of these citizens and the potential difficulties they pose for Rawls’s broader theoretical project, remarkably little attention has been paid to them. By critically examining these difficulties, this paper attempts to address this oversight.