

Human Rights, Religion, and Decent Hierarchical Societies: A Rawlsian Analysis

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Abstract

Global society is characterized by its philosophical, ethical and religious disagreements. What are the implications of the doctrinal conflict for the understanding of a conception of human rights? In this paper, I briefly explain John Rawls' conception of human rights, which is distinct from and narrower than his conception of justice (i.e., justice as fairness). Rawls conceives human rights as minimal, but necessary requirements of justice – although not sufficient from a liberal point of view –that can be satisfied by various political systems. Rawls argues that human rights are common to all peoples, since they are compatible with all reasonable political morality, including those of both “liberal” and “decent hierarchical” peoples. The central idea of Rawls' account is that, a conception of human rights suitable for a pluralistic world must be independent from controversial philosophical, ethical or religious doctrines. Such a conception must serve as the object of an *overlapping consensus* among different ethical and religious traditions; each may offer the different lines of argument. I briefly examine possibilities within Islamic doctrine to include in an overlapping consensus on a freestanding conception of human rights.

Keywords: John Rawls; Freestanding Conception of Human Rights; Plural World; Overlapping Concensus; Islamic Doctrine; Decent Hierarchical Society.

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