

COMPREHENSIVE COMMITMENTS AND THE PUBLIC WORLD: TILlich, RAWLS AND WHITEHEAD ON THE NATURE OF JUSTICE

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation argues that justice has a comprehensive basis, but should also legitimate a plurality of comprehensive views. It examines two modern conceptions of justice, each of which emphasizes one of these aims. Paul Tillich provides an ontological basis for his theory of justice; for him, the principle of morality is rooted in the nature of being itself. John Rawls intends to forgo any dependence on universals in order to maximize the relevance of his theory to societies that legitimate a plurality of comprehensive views. The thesis is that Alfred North Whitehead's metaphysics extends Tillich's ontological basis for a theory of justice, the principles of which thereby legitimate, as does Rawls, a plurality of comprehensive views. In this way, Whitehead's thought helps to articulate a conception of justice that is both ontologically established and relevant to modern situations of pluralism.

With respect to the public order, Tillich's moral imperative of individual-in-community and Whitehead's implied theory of justice based on maximizing creativity drive toward the same end. Hence, the turn from Tillich to Whitehead is largely for the sake of completing Tillich's account of justice by providing an adequate theistic backing. Similarly, the turn from Rawls to Whitehead is for the sake of articulating the role of comprehensive views in considerations of justice, even in modern constitutional democracies.

The dissertation concludes that justice requires freedom, so that the political context in which comprehensive commitments attempt to fulfill themselves is an extension of the ontological reality that enabled them to form. Justice also requires faith—both a faith that affirms the reality and trustworthiness of our experience, as well a faith that articulates our comprehensive commitments and thereby expresses our political purpose. Finally, justice requires that persuasion be the principal means of adjudicating the interplay of incompatible comprehensive commitments in the public world. Religion, in order to fulfill this mandate, must be rational—not in the sense that it can or should explain the ground of its comprehensive commitments on the basis of ordinary knowledge, but in the sense that it can, in publicly accessible terms, justify its political purposes.