

# **Religion and Politics: Two Impolite Topics We Must Discuss**

Religion and Society: Winter 2010

## **I. The Fact of Pluralism**

## **II. The Response of Political Liberalism**

## **III. The Response of Communitarianism**

## **IV. The Response of Political Pragmatism**

# The Fact of Pluralism

Different people have different ***comprehensive doctrines***

Comprehensive doctrine = a moral and metaphysical view of the world

- How the ***world came to be***,
- What it is to be a ***person***,
- What is of ***value*** in life and why,
- What ***standards of conduct*** should govern us, and why
- What ***ideals of character*** should guide us, and why

## Political Consequences

*Differences in views on...*

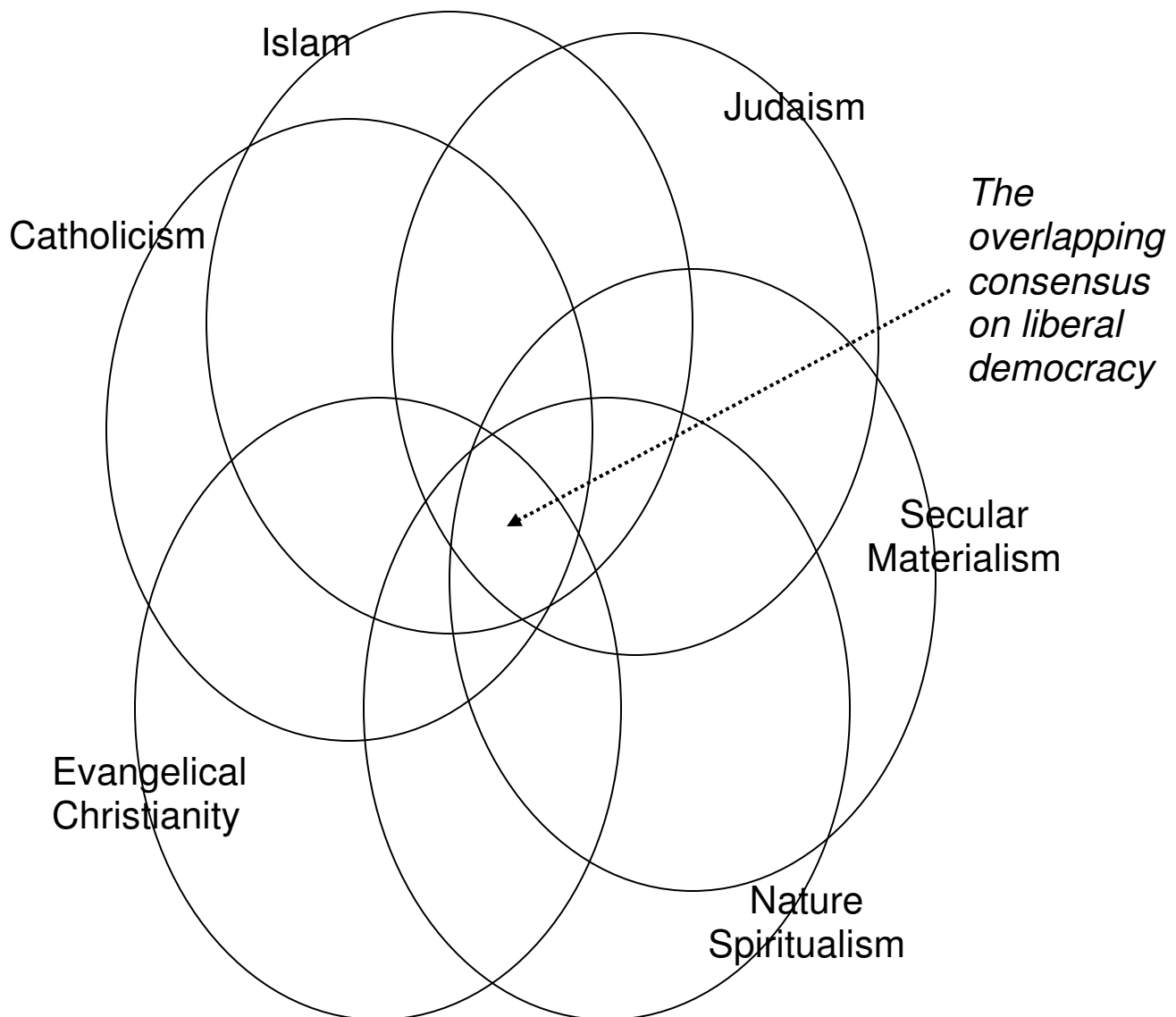
- Abortion
- Medical research (e.g., stem cells)
- Physician-assisted suicide, Euthanasia
- Capital punishment
- Economic inequalities
- War
- Environmental issues

# Political Liberalism

Broader than “Liberalism” as used in partisan politics

John Rawls (1921-2002)  
*Political Liberalism* (1993)

## “Overlapping Consensus”



## Ideal of Public Reason

*“People are reasonable... when... 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. Those norms they view as reasonable for everyone to accept and therefore as justifiable to them” (PL, 49).*

People should “bracket” their reasons that are based on their particular comprehensive doctrine (religion).

## Ideal of Liberal Neutrality

# The Communitarian Response

People cannot reasonably be expected to silence their own religiously grounded principles when speaking in the public square.

In order to have a viable political system, we need to have a united and deep ethical tradition so that we can all understand and accept the same reasons.

## **Result:**

A viable political system must be grounded in a coherent comprehensive doctrine that is shared throughout the society (in effect, a unified *community*)

# Political Pragmatism

- agrees with Communitarianism that people should have full range for expressing their reasons, within the bounds of “reasonableness”
- agrees with Liberalism that the Fact of Pluralism is an enduring condition of our society
- disagrees with an assumption (A) that underlies **both** Communitarianism and Liberalism

(A) Two people can understand and give weight to each other’s political reasons only if they agree on the beliefs rooted in their comprehensive doctrines that ground those reasons.

## **Political Pragmatism, continued**

- Instead, people can engage in productive political dialogue that doesn't assume fundamental metaphysical agreement.
- People can give reasons that appeal to their own comp. doctrines, to the doctrines of those they are addressing, or both.
- People can understand others' reasons as expressing shared values but using different language.