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**EGALITARIAN LIBERALISM OF JOHN RAWLS AND BUILDING OF  
JUST AND HUMAN-CENTRIC SOCIETIES IN POST-SOVIET AREA**

**Abstract.** American political philosopher John Rawls could propose and develop a viable alternative to utilitarianism and naturalism peculiar to both the Anglo-Saxon intellectual heritage and Western liberal philosophy. In liberal tradition Rawls could build a bridge between modern liberal thought and modern social democracy. Rawls aimed to reconcile liberal belief in freedoms and pluralism with the need to prevent excessive inequality in society and to develop a model of liberalism which supports some form of distributive justice. Rawls could show that the social welfare state as an economic model and political liberalism are not contradictory concepts and that social welfare state as a model of market economy and liberalism as a political ideal and pluralistic outlook are actually two sides of the same coin. Rawls is famous for arguing that meaningful exercise of civil and political liberties cannot be plausible without the provision of basic social and economic needs. We assert that to present liberalism in Rawlsian ‘egalitarian’ framework is very crucial to help nourish liberal values in post-Soviet context. We believe that Rawlsian political liberalism will shatter deeply-seated stereotypes about liberalism in post soviet countries, specifically among conservative citizens who tend to regard liberalism as inherently egoistic and anti-humanistic.

**Keywords:** liberalism, John Rawls, egalitarian liberalism, post-Soviet area.

**Introduction**

According to our opinion, just and human-centric society is based on (1) the ideological pluralism (acceptance of everyone for who he/she is), (2) the rule of law, and (3) social justice and the priority of human capital development. In this article, we would like to touch briefly on the principles that contribute to the creation of such society, and which are characteristic of the theoretical views of the American political philosopher John Rawls. In this article, we first touch on the topic of perception of liberalism in the post-Soviet space and describe the current understanding of liberalism in the Western political science. Next we will consider the main ideas of the political liberalism of John Rawls.

**Perception of liberalism in the post-Soviet space and the modern understanding of liberalism in the Western political science**

We often face misunderstanding and stereotypes about liberalism in the post-Soviet space. First, liberalism appears as the embodiment of anarchy, lawlessness, and secondly, as the ideology of hedonism, consumerism and immorality, thirdly, liberalism is an ideology of misanthropic capitalism, unregulated market, ideology of the main factor of social cataclysms and the gap between different social groups. The disappointment of liberalism in the post-Soviet countries and the parallel growth of stereotypes occurred due to a systemic crisis caused by the so-called "liberal" reforms that were actually "marketization" or "market" reforms implemented in a legal vacuum [1, 4-5].

If we consider the liberalism from the perspective of Western political science, it should be emphasized that it is a set of concepts and there are many different understandings about it. Besides, liberalism constantly evolved, developed in the course of history and this process continues. Therefore, it seems not an easy task to provide some kind of clear definition of the concept of liberalism. In addition, some of the differences (deviations) in the use of the term "liberalism" are common practice, and in theory there are still some differences in the views of the modern adherents of the liberal theory.

Therefore, secondly, liberalism is not uniform; there are many models of liberalism. We must distinguish between liberalism as a system of political ideas and neoliberalism – the trend in political

economy. Therefore it is necessary to distinguish between liberalism, or rather, "neoliberalism" as a model of unregulated market (which was followed by Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, and the IMF) and the "egalitarian and socially-oriented" liberalism, rooted in the Scandinavian countries. This explains the negative perception of liberalism in the post-Soviet countries due to the fact that liberalism is often wrongly associated with neoliberalism. [14]

As it is known, after the collapse of the USSR, many post-Soviet states have carried out a rapid transition to a market economy, following the tenets of neo-liberal economic theory, which involved minimal state interference in private business, privatization, free trade and the reduction of public spending, which in turn led to the socio-economic disasters in nineties of the last century. But we have to admit that liberal critics have completely seized the opportunity to blame for all troubles not only neoliberal policies of individual governments, but also the very ideology of liberalism. Although the experience of many liberal European countries (notably Sweden and Finland), shows that the liberal-democratic values are not necessarily accompanied by a neo-liberal economic policy, and even conversely, socially oriented state can better ensure the rights and freedoms of its citizens.

Thirdly, it should be taken into account that the concept of "liberalism" is etymologically derived from the word "freedom" (human freedom). Therefore, to some extent, almost all liberal models focused on this aspect. Especially constitutional liberalism, which developed as the protection of human rights to life and property, freedom of religion and freedom of speech. In order to secure these rights, constitutional liberalism attaches particular importance to control of authority/political power of each branch of government, equality before the law and impartiality of the courts and tribunals, and separation of church and state.

In general, the institutional protection of fundamental human rights and freedoms, pluralism of ideas, the rule of law, equality before the law and meritocracy are considered as fundamental liberal principles and values.

On the other hand, the centuries-old evolution of liberalism led to the fact that in the "mainstream" liberalism, "human freedom" is not understood in the absolute sense, but in connection with the "rule of law" (legal state) and is associated with humanistic ethics. Therefore, the "rule of law", along with "human rights and freedom" are an integral part of many developed liberal countries. It surprises the majority of the citizens of post-Soviet countries in because of the level of development in the same society.

In summary, we can say that in Western political science, the liberalism is presented as a political idea, which has the goal of building a society where people strive to "be someone", in other words, the idea of self-realization, self-development, but not anybody's selfish interests, not "ideal of creation of gatherings of people trying to get something (usually illegally)", unfortunately, this is the association of people in most post-Soviet countries on "liberalism".

### **The basic ideas of Rawls political liberalism**

The world-known American thinker and theorist John Rawls, whose main objects of research are the principles of justice in society have fundamentally changed the theoretical views in liberal theory and thus had a significant impact on the development of a philosophy of political thought and theoretical political science, and practice of political life in the West, especially in English-speaking countries. Rawls could overcome utilitarianism and naturalism inherent in the Anglo-Saxon intellectual heritage. The main theme of the works of Rawls was to find reasons to build a just society and the formulation of the problem of morality justification on the basis of the concept of rationality. The fundamental aspect of achieving justice for Rawls is honesty [2, 26-29]. It is believed that Rawls's works made a methodological "turn" in the philosophy of justice and in political philosophy in general.

Overall, Rawls attaches paramount importance on "ideological pluralism", "rights and freedom", "justice" (including the attainment of social justice and welfare) and "fairness" (which are seen as essential qualities of the state institutions, not just citizens). Rawls changed the trajectory of all the liberal ideas of utilitarianism to the direction of building a "pluralistic and fair" society. In his landmark book "Political Liberalism", John Rawls offers a form of liberalism that is not in conflict with other ideologies or religions through the creation of only political superstructure to ensure pluralism in society. In other words, any religion or ideology has a right to exist in a pluralistic society, where there is a consensus on

the basic values and the existing disagreement between the followers of different ideologies and worldviews are resolved through dialogue within the legal field. John Rawls criticizes the "comprehensive liberalism" as an ideology, which not only creates a political superstructure for the ideological and pluralistic society, but aims to establish his philosophical understanding of "the good life", which can go against the tradition of a certain part of society [3]. According to Rawls, the political liberalism does not exclude the coexistence of other understandings of "the good life" (e.g., arising from religion) and the liberal idea does not contradict to the values that exist in religion. [4]

Initially, Rawls accepts pluralism and he writes that the disappearance of many "comprehensive" religious and philosophical doctrines is unlikely in the foreseeable future [5, 775]. He formulates a "reasonable pluralism" as the coexistence of different but reasonable doctrines ("reasonableness" not in the sense of rationalism in epistemology). This means that any comprehensive doctrine, whether it religious or non-religious, will not accept the use of force to make others accept its principles and rules [6]. He hoped that religious, moral and philosophical doctrines will come to adopt tolerance and the foundations of a democratic system.

Citizens, who hold different, but most importantly, intelligent, political, moral and religious doctrines and attitudes, form the basis of a "reasonable" pluralism. For Rawls the reasonable religion is the religion according to reason – is not an epistemological idea [7]. According to Rawls, reasonableness is the property of the political or religious doctrine, which helps to reach agreement and consensus for the sake of society. [8] As Dombrovsky noted, "overlapping consensus, which is an important element of the last works of Rawls, allows citizens to refer to the theological or metaphysical doctrines to maintain the principle of a well-organized society" [9, x]. Properties of overlapping consensus in the principles of political justice can serve as a common basis for the involvement of different doctrines in the formation of political morality [4, 5].

Rawls's political liberalism allows the coexistence of different "concepts of decent life", meaning that there is no need for different groups in society to change their understanding of a decent life, which is contrary to pluralism, but it requires the consent of these groups in order to maintain certain principles of peace and justice. [7] Forcing is possible only in cases of immediate danger to the society. [3] In general, Rawls's political liberalism can be an attractive model for conservative people, so he supports the model of a neutral state, which maintains justice without interfering to the traditions and religions (however, if the society is conservative, it is unlikely that they will like Rawls's liberalism).

Rawls liberalism acknowledges "overlapping consensus" in the principles of justice, despite the great differences in understanding of fairness among citizens, if these understandings lead to a similar political conclusions. In other words, political liberalism can only exist if the majority of the population adheres to a politically reasonable position for the construction of "overlapping consensus".

Rawls showed that the welfare state as an economic model and political liberalism are not concepts contrary to each other and that the welfare state as a correction of a market economy and liberalism as a political ideal and pluralistic worldview are two sides of the same coin. [10]

Rawls concepts, such as "principles of justice", "starting position", "veil of ignorance", "the principle of distinction" are very important for the development of political theory of building a just society.

Rawls's first principle of justice says that every individual, "taking part in the activities of a social practice, or, under its influence, has an equal right to the most extensive liberty compatible with a similar liberty for all." The second principle of Rawls justice admits "inequality, but only on condition that it is beneficial for all and that the position and social status is accessible to all" [2, 30] Under equal freedom "Rawls assumes exactly equal political freedoms (freedom of speech, conscience, etc...), and by the second principle of inequality, he implies inequality of economic, consists in the unequal distribution of wealth among the participants of general practice." The second principle of Rawls justice is usually divided into two components: II a principle – the inequality should be beneficial for all, and II b principle – position and social status, which are associated with inequality, should be publicly available (that is meritocracy). It is argued that the conception of Rawls justice forms the second of these subprinciples [2, 30].

As noted above, the disappointment of liberalism and establishment of stereotypes against liberalism in the post-Soviet countries was due to the failure of the so-called "liberal" reforms, which were actually the transition to the market to the market in a period of "judicial rules."

### **Religious-inclusive liberalism by Rawls**

Rawls's ideas and understanding of religion are still insufficiently studied and understood. Recent studies show that Rawls's approach can be characterized as a religious-inclusive. Rawls's view is different from the "standard view" of "traditional" liberals. Whereas for traditional liberals this kind of suspicion views lead to conclusion that "religion should be restricted by private life." For Rawls religion is an integral part of the liberal-democratic «respublica» (republic). So instead of pushing religion out of the public life to privacy life, Rawls offers to make it beneficial and useful for the society [11, vii]. According to Dombrovsky, "Rawls does not ask believers to abandon their faith." Believers are allowed even to refer to the Bible in political arguments, but as long as they offer a "public" (understood by others) argument in support of their views. By "public argument" Rawls implies the right approach to argumentation, which is clear and can be weighed on its own, without connection to a complex doctrine, whether it is religious or non-religious. The public argument is the opinions, everyone can agree with it, but it is not the fact that all must agree [9, xi-xii].

According to Rawls, the public argument is not a synonym for "secular argument". He writes that "we must distinguish between the public arguments and secular arguments (or secular values). This is not as the same, as the public argument. As for me a secular argument is argumentation in the framework of integrated non-religious doctrine". [5, 775] From this we can conclude that the "isolation" of religion by Rawls is "very limited and competent", as he offers a broader view of religion in political life and the concept of "respect" and "consensus" which are the basis of his "isolation", they are much softer, open and flexible than critics imply". [12: 7]

In Rawls's political liberalism, the religion presents in the public sphere. Policy is not equal to the public sphere, the latter is much wider than the previous one [12, 9]. Political liberalism after Rawls allows active participation of various "understandings of decent life", including religious understanding, in public life and their acceptance as part of the social contract.

### **Conclusion**

A state with developed human potential, the rule of law and pluralistic society will have all the factors for the progressive development, which is typical for many developed liberal countries, except many of the post-Soviet and Muslim countries and societies. There is an urgent need for the development of social principles and values such as "acceptance of everyone for who he/she is", "rule of law and the development of legal consciousness", "equality before the law", the institutional protection of fundamental human rights and freedoms and meritocracy. They belong to the fundamental liberal principles and values, although post-Soviet countries have developed and even entrenched stereotypes about liberalism. Liberalism as a concept that is alien to the traditional opinions of society, and even ideology that perverts the moral order of society, are often incorrectly interpreted.

John Rawls corrected a view of liberalism; it can help to overcome misunderstandings and stereotypes concerning this political model of the former Soviet Union. According to Rawls, liberalism is based on human rights, the maximum ideological pluralism, social justice, implies the idea of self-realization of each individual (Rawls's two theories of justice must be understood in this sense), and suggests inclusion of religions. However, the mixing of different understandings and liberal concepts (which may sometimes have conflicting views about social justice or the role of religion in the public sphere) often leads to a negative attitude to the very concept of liberalism and to the conclusions of the impossibility of acceptance of liberalism by certain societies, or at least, by some segments of society, for example, conservative or religious. In general, Rawls's model of a pluralistic, egalitarian and religious inclusive and political liberalism can be a good ideological and theoretical model of political and social-economic development for the post-Soviet states, Muslim countries and societies to build a just and human-centric society.

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#### ДЖОН РОЛЗДЫҢ ЭГАЛИТАРЛЫҚ ЛИБЕРАЛИЗМ МОДЕЛІ ЖӘНЕ ПОСТ КЕҢЕСТІК АУМАҚТА ӘДІЛ ҚОҒАМ МОДЕЛДЕРІН ДАМУ

**Аннотация.** Заманымыздың әйгілі америкалық саяси ойшылы Джон Ролз өзіндік эгалитарлық саяси либерализм моделін қалыптастыру арқылы, англосаксондық интеллектуалды мирасқа және жалпы батыстың либералдық философиялық ойға тән утилитаризм мен натурализмге күшті балама ойлап шығарды. Осылайша Ролз либералдық теорияның даму бағытына орасан зор ықпал етті, сондай-ақ оның теориялық көзқарастары либералды, әсіресе ағылшын тілдес мемлекеттердің саяси өміріне де елеулі әсер етті. Ролз көпшіліктің әлеуметтік жағдайын қамтамасыз етуді негізге алатын эгалитарлық экономикалық модель мен саяси либерализм арасында қайшылық болмайтынын көрсете алды. Тіпті, Джон Ролз нарықтық қатынастардың әділетсіздіктерін жөндеуді көздейтін эгалитарлық экономикалық модель мен плюралистік қоғамның негізі болып саналатын саяси либерализмнің бір бүтіннің екі жартысы екендігін дәлелдеуге тырысты. Жалпы алғанда, Ролз ұсынған плюралистік және эгалитарлық-әділ деп сипаттауға болатын саяси либерализм моделі, пост кеңестік елдерде азаматтардың игілігін көздейтін саяси моделдерді дамытып жетілдіруге айтарлықтай үлес қоса алады деп айтуға болады.

**Түйін сөздер:** либерализм, Джон Ролз, эгалитарлық либерализм, пост-кеңестік аумақ.

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#### ЭГАЛИТАРНЫЙ ЛИБЕРАЛИЗМ ДЖОНА РОЛЗА И ПОСТРОЕНИЕ СПРАВЕДЛИВОГО И ЧЕЛОВЕКО-ЦЕНТРИЧНОГО ОБЩЕСТВА НА ПОСТ-СОВЕТСКОМ ПРОСТРАНСТВЕ

**Аннотация.** Современный американский ученый Джон Ролз, сформулировав сильную альтернативу утилитаризму и натурализму, присущим англосаксонскому интеллектуальному наследию и западной либеральной мысли, смог изменить теоретические воззрения в либеральной теории и тем самым оказал значительное влияние на развитие как философии политической мысли и теоретической политологии, так и практической политической жизни в либеральных странах, особенно в англоязычных. Ролз показал, что государство всеобщего благосостояния как экономическая модель и политический либерализм не являются противоречащими друг другу понятиями и, что государство всеобщего благосостояния, как коррекция рыночной экономики и либерализм как политический идеал и плюралистическое мировоззрение являются двумя сторонами одной монеты. Такие концепции Ролза, как «принципы справедливости», «исходная позиция», «покров неведения», «принцип различия» являются очень важными методологами для выработки политической теории построения справедливого общества. В целом, модель плюралистического и эгалитарно-справедливого политического либерализма Джона Ролза может стать хорошей идейной и теоретической моделью в политическом, социально-экономическом развитии для постсоветских стран и обществ, где либерализм может восприниматься как предтеча эгоистической, анти-гуманной и аморальной модели.

**Ключевые слова:** либерализм, Джон Ролз, эгалитарный либерализм, пост-советское пространство.

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