Conclusion

To summarize, I have taken seriously the charge of cultural imperialism addressed to Rawls in order to discover where the major difficulties in his argument lie and why, consequently, his book has been so badly received. The answer suggested here is that the two major flaws that are responsible are the clash between a psychological conception of peace and stability and an institutional or holistic conception of justice, on the one hand, and his hesitations on the scope of the Law of Peoples, on the other hand. If these clarifications are borne in mind, some of the confusions that have obscured the debate could be lifted and a truly “critical” theory of justice, in the Kantian sense, avoiding both dogmatism and scepticism, could emerge. The exploration of the middle ground between political realism and moral idealism is indeed the right direction.

Rawls’s valuable contribution to the debate is thus the following. Rejecting both cultural relativism and cosmopolitanism, he is trying to define a conception of international justice from the point of view of peace and stability, not from that of the creation of a just world order. Philosophers cannot determine what universal justice may be without violating the fact of reasonable pluralism, but they can examine what the conditions for peace and stability are, justice being one of them. Rawls quite rightly emphasises that a people is a political entity with a corporate moral status of its own. Thus, the demands of peace are paramount and a lesser ambition in terms of domestic justice and full human rights may be justified in the name of respect for peoples’ self-determination.

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Rawls, Historian:
Remarks on Political Liberalism’s ‘Historicism’

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I’m concerned about the survival, historically, of constitutional democracy.

John Rawls

John Rawls was not a historian; this much is obvious. What is less obvious is whether or not his political theory does at crucial points rely on essentially historical arguments. Such a question would once have seemed far-fetched. After all, the standard story of twentieth-century political thought not only holds that Rawls single-handedly revived the discipline of political philosophy with his 1971 Theory of Justice; it also claims that Rawls proved that analytical (and essentially ahistorical) philosophy could address real social and political problems. Unlike with Rawls’s twentieth-century predecessors – thinkers such as Hannah Arendt, Leo Strauss or Eric Voegelin, once ridiculed as ‘gurus’ by Brian Barry – his theory did not in any way depend on dubious philosophies of history, or on grand and essentially unfalsifiable (or even undebatable) claims about ‘modernity’. Instead, A Theory of Justice was famously conceived sub specie aeternitatis – it regarded, as Rawls put it, ‘the human situation not only from all social but also from all temporal points of view’. Not least, this meant that the ‘veil of ignorance’ would deprive those behind it of any knowledge which generation they belonged to, and which ‘stage of civilization’ their society had reached; it finally would also hide from them any historical memories.

In contrast, the 1993 Political Liberalism was for many critics characterized by an ‘uneasy historicism’, as Rawls now relied on ideas already present in

1. For comments and help with historical questions especially, thanks to Michael Freeden, Peter Glibash, Mark Lilla, Thomas Pogge and Erika A. Kiss.
the public political culture of Western societies (or even just the United States, as some European critics of Rawls kept pointing out). A common reading suggested that ‘a local historical context’ or even ‘tradition’, as opposed to what is clear and evident to human beings as such, seems to be the source of Rawlsian liberalism. Even those who do not confuse the later Rawls with Richard Rorty would argue that, while he is not a complete ‘contextualist’, Rawls had conceded far too much to questions of political and social stability – and thereby to historical contingency.

Still more recently – essentially only after Rawls’s death in 2002 – there has been a debate about the deepest motivations of Rawls’s theorizing – and in particular his concerns with questions of human evil, of a reconciliation to the human condition, and even of redemption. Rawls’s project, so not least a number of his former students tell us, was aimed all along at reconciling us to the ‘real world’ by demonstrating that a just society – and a just system of international relations – is theoretically and historically feasible. But the many critics’ concern turned out to be once again whether what Rawls called a ‘realistic utopia’ would not contain too little utopia and too much realism. In short, over time Rawls’s work seemed to become less and less ‘analytical’ in a traditional sense, and, for those who equate ahistorical with universalist, also less and less universalist.

This concern is different from (but related to) that of critics who have long dismissed justice as fairness tout court as itself deeply context-dependent. From this perspective, it might be seen as a last theoretical statement of a ‘high modernist’ conception of the welfare state, whose conditions of possibility began to be eroded more or less at the same time as the publication of A Theory of Justice. One might say that, paradoxically, since Theory of Justice could never catch up with the historical background conditions of its own production, the Rawlsian project necessarily had to move further and further towards questions of ‘historically reality’. Certain owl-related clichés could easily come to mind.

My purpose in this brief essay is not to ‘contextualize Rawls’, let alone to condemn the supposed ‘historical turn’ of political liberalism. Rather, I seek to identify a number of essentially historical arguments that appear in non-trivial contexts in Rawls’s work. At least in this essay, I do so in a rather unsystematic fashion, simply identifying such arguments and explaining their role, rather than already assuming that these arguments might actually make up what could by any stretch of the imagination be called a more comprehensive philosophy of history. However, in a second step, I also ask whether such use of historical argument weakens or in fact strengthens political liberalism. The question of course immediately arises: by what criteria? The answer is: by Rawls’s own criteria, but with the assumption that, if understood properly, political liberalism and the ideal of a ‘realistic utopia’ are in fact much more demanding conceptions than is often assumed. I conclude – contrary to most critics of Rawls – that historical argument has in certain respects strengthened political liberalism – but that, as a ‘realistic utopia’ it might still be less easily acceptable to ‘reasonable people’ than probably Rawls and his followers wished it to be.

I want to stress that historical argument is indispensable if one extends the task of political theory from ‘ideal liberal theory’ to the question of liberalization: how can societies move from various forms of illiberalism to a more or less liberal, stable and self-sustaining form of political life? The question has spawned a more or – for the most part – less fruitful social science literature in ‘transitology’. Yet it has been sadly neglected by political theorists. While Rawls was hardly a ‘transitologist’, he at least gave some hints by which the political, philosophical and, not least, psychological mechanisms of such processes might be understood and furthered.

Three Historical Claims in Political Liberalism

1. Modern Success Stories: Given its central question, political liberalism necessarily carries a temporal index. After all, according to Rawls, that central question asks how it is ‘possible that there may exist over time a stable and just society of free and equal citizens profoundly divided by reasonable though incompatible religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines?’

6. Ibid., 105.

problem of stability is, if we are to believe Rawls, ‘fundamental to political philosophy’. And political stability – to point out the obvious – is something that can only be measured over time. Less trivially, we might say that predictions about stability necessarily – if they are to have any plausibility – rely on empirical, historical (or sociological) argument.

The crucial historical argument here is centred on the ‘fact of pluralism’. According to Rawls, the free exercise of human reason under free institutions necessarily produces a persistent plurality of comprehensive conceptions of the good. This fact is not to be lamented, as long as these conceptions remain ‘reasonable’. As Rawls puts it, ‘the fact of reasonable pluralism is not an unfortunate condition of human life, as we might say of pluralism as such, allowing for doctrines that are not only irrational but mad and aggressive’.10

Rawls of course wants stability to be grounded in an overlapping consensus – as opposed to a mere modus vivendi. Such a consensus is to be supported for the ‘right reasons’ and from within the various comprehensive doctrines, which include comprehensive or ethical forms of liberalism. The claim that such a picture of stability grounded in public reason is not entirely impossible is again not least supported by historical argument. According to Rawls,

…the history of religion and philosophy shows that there are many reasonable ways in which the wider realm of values can be understood so as to be either congruent with, or supportive of, or else not in conflict with, the values appropriate to the special domain of the political as specified by a political conception of justice. History tells us of a plurality of not unreasonable comprehensive doctrines.14

In short, the fact of reasonable pluralism is a historical fact, and it is equally a historical fact that religious (or other forms of) division need not be a ‘disaster for a civil polity’. As Rawls puts it, ‘it took the experience of actual history to show this view [of division as disaster] to be false’.15

It is, from Rawls’s perspective, quite simply irrelevant that there are many other historical facts than this supposedly post-Reformation, supposedly quintessentially modern fact. Rawls’s constructivism mandates that we ‘construe’ (or perhaps: recover) the facts which are relevant to a political conception of justice.16 To put it differently: we view the past (but not just the past) through the filter of an already existing construction of justice. Rawls defends this procedure by saying that ‘the idea of constructing facts seems incoherent. In contrast, the idea of a constructivist procedure yielding principles and precepts to identify which facts are to count as reasons is quite clear’. And further: ‘Apart from a reasonable moral and political conception, facts are simply facts’.

One might say then that Rawls offers essentially a genealogy. It is a highly stylized history which picks and chooses the ‘facts’ according to a present-day normative argument. Rawls’s genealogy takes the Reformation and the emergence of ‘religious pluralism’ as a central feature of modernity, and of giving rise to the central problem of political liberalism in the first place.17 The facts here are selected because they will convince us of the possibility and reasonableness of Rawls’s political conception of justice.

Yet, in a sense, all Rawls has really shown is that modernity, according to his genealogy, is characterized by deep creedal discord and persistent disagreement based on appeals to reason. It might well be that the modern problem or ‘fact’ is ‘the clash between salvationist, creedal, and expansionist religious’, as Rawls puts it.18 This ‘reading’ or perhaps ‘backward reading’ of modernity has become very common, maybe even a commonplace. But what has not been shown is that anything that would have been recognizable to contemporaries as ‘liberalism’ solved the supposedly central modern problem.

In fact, this liberal genealogy clashes with many previous self-understandings of liberalism, and continues a long-standing tradition of making liberal analytical constructs into ‘historical images’. ‘Locke as the first liberal’ was a distinctively twentieth-century invention, as was the whole idea of a distinctly American ‘liberal tradition’ centred on Lockean ideas, promoted most successfully by Louis Hartz.19 To put it very schematically: for nineteenth-

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12. Ibid., xvii.
13. Ibid., 144.
14. Ibid., 140.
15. John Rawls, The Law of Peoples (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 124. There is an important question – which is beyond the scope of this essay, however – whether reasonable pluralism is really a uniquely modern experience, as Rawls and many others argue.
16. Ibid., 122.
18. Rawls, Political Liberalism, xxi.
century European liberals the decline of diversity and pluralism was a problem; for mid-twentieth-century American liberals pluralism (and ‘Americanism’), whereas for late-twentieth-century liberals pluralism was the problem (for which of course political liberalism provided the answer). 22

2. Liberalization Stories: Apart from historical accuracy, there is another question here. An even more relevant ‘fact’ in Rawls’s scheme than the clash of more or less reasonable worldviews would be the precise mechanism or process of how this clash came to an end, or was in some manner transcended. Rawls does not claim that a political conception serves as a panacea in the circumstances of clashing worldviews, or is available in all historical contexts. In fact, Rawls concedes that ‘an overlapping consensus of reasonable doctrines may not be possible under many historical conditions, as the efforts to achieve it may be overwhelmed by unreasonable and even irrational (and sometimes mad) comprehensive doctrines’. 23 Perhaps we moderns just got lucky.

It is not surprising then that the solution proposed in Political Liberalism, in the eyes of many critics, seems so unconvincing, because Rawls’s overlapping appears to presume itself. 24 Without a more general ‘liberal tradition’ as well as what Rawls refers to as a ‘tradition of democratic thought’, and ideas familiar and intelligible to ‘educated common sense’, political liberalism seems to have little chance of success. 25 Here Rawls comes closest to a Rortyish claim that liberal societies are simply those that happen to have inherited liberal political cultures. And, one might extrapolate, those which have not inherited the right traditions, or whose right traditions are simply too weak, will have at least to try to invent such traditions (or genealogies). But there’s certainly no guarantee of success.

On the other hand, those entirely without traditions (or successful inventors of tradition) are not automatically without liberal hope. In fact, Rawls explicitly argues – with reference to historical experience – that what starts out as a modus vivendi can be transformed into a proper moral conception. As he puts it,

recessive toleration has historically first appeared as a modus vivendi between hostile faiths, later becoming a moral principle shared by civilized peoples and recognized by their leading religions. The same is true of the abolition of slavery and serfdom, the rule of law, the right to war only in self-defense, and the guarantee of human rights. 26

In other words, political arrangements motivated by self-interest and resulting from bargaining based purely on political (or even just military) strengths, might over time turn into practices sustained by genuine moral beliefs. Rawls is not very clear about the precise moral psychology underpinning this process. The argument seems to be that we will not suddenly turn on those with whom we have successfully engaged in social cooperation, even when the balance of power changes in our favour. Rawls is clearer, however, about the argument that successful practices of cooperation will in turn further and ground genuine moral belief. As Rawls puts it, practices worked up into principles can become examples or even ‘proofs’ for those contemplating the right political conception of justice. In the same manner, peoples who subscribe to the Law of Peoples develop affinities through practices of sustained cooperation, and over time develop mutual trust and confidence – even if their initial forms of cooperation were purely self-interested and motivated by prudence. 27 Practices thus develop their own moral dynamics – and serve as moral exemplars to others.

What also remains unclear in Rawls’s account, however, is whether the morally not so attractive beginnings of these practices have to be forgotten – or in fact consciously remembered to reinforce processes of what Rawls calls ‘moral learning’. Or, to put it differently, is it preferable to engage in a form of Nietzschean debunking or are we to tell – Rorty-style – edifying stories about ourselves? From the little Rawls says, it might be extrapolated that the task of both giving human beings hope and the prospects for reconciliation with their social world mandates precisely not a forgetting of origins, but rather a progress story from self-interest to moral principle. 28

22. Note also the useful distinction between pluralist and rationalist traditions of liberalism proposed by Jacob T. Levy, with toleration and autonomy as their respective foundational values: Jacob T. Levy, ‘Liberalism’s Divide, after Socialism and before’, in: Social Philosophy and Policy, Vol. 20 (2003), 278-97. On my reading, Rawls could be said to have tried to reconcile the pluralist and rationalist traditions.
23. Rawls, Political Liberalism, 126.
28. These implications are drawn out by Larmore in The Morals of Modernity, 143-4.
This ‘practices into principles’ story is not the only liberalization story Rawls has to tell. There is also what one might call the conscious liberalization through socialization story within already liberal societies. Rawls insists that men and women in a just society develop a sense of justice as they grow up and are socialized into supporting an overlapping consensus. He again relies on the notion of moral learning which essentially ensures that liberal societies (and an international system fashioned after the Law of Peoples) would be self-sustaining and self-stabilizing. Following Raymond Aron, he also claims that liberal societies can be characterized as ‘satisfied’. This claim can be taken not only to mean that liberal democracies do not go to war with each other – it also could suggest that, internally, sources of deep political division no longer exist.

In an important sense what Rawls calls ‘moral learning’ is also historical learning. It is about following what might be termed models of liberalization and about being encouraged by what above I called moral exemplars. It involves understanding – and I am paraphrasing Rawls paraphrasing other thinkers – that historically societies can be changed for the better, that historically affinity and care might grow among peoples cooperating over time, but also that fully liberal democratic societies will not go to war with each other. All these ‘historical lessons’ presumably would be part of a non-comprehensive liberal education which in turn is part of the role of a political conception. ‘Historical facts’ and ‘traditions of thought’ are then also important elements of the ‘public political culture’.

At times Rawls seems to be saying that stability is already possible when the doctrines making up the consensus are affirmed by society’s politically active citizens and the requirements of justice are not too much in conflict with citizens’ essential interests as formed and encouraged by their social arrangements. But what has led critics to charge him with essentially envisioning a homogeneous citizenry and even a civic cult is the fact that a common public political culture – in a Rawlsian scheme – is in fact much more extensive. It will include common traditions of thought and histories, which will influence the political conception of justice, and which will in turn be reshaped according to the political conception of justice. Thus what Jürgen Habermas once called the ‘public uses of history’ actually also has an important place in Rawls’s conception of political liberalism.

3. Realistic Utopia: Historical argument, finally, is essential for the construction of what Rawls calls ‘realistic utopias’. According to Rawls, ‘political philosophy is realistically utopian when it extends what are ordinarily thought to be the limits of practicable political philosophy and, in so doing, reconciles us to our political and social condition’. Ultimately, a ‘realistic utopia’ suggests that a just world is a distinct historical possibility. This insight is supported by historical evidence and in turn is supposed to have an impact on history.

It is rather telling how the topic of the Holocaust enters Rawls’s discussion at this point. The Holocaust is of course often evoked against the very possibility of a final Hegelian reconciliation; Auschwitz signifies the ultimate dystopia which automatically casts doubt on utopian thinking. Rawls claims that he ‘wouldn’t deny either the historical uniqueness of the Holocaust, or that it could somewhere be repeated’. But he goes on to relativize this claim immediately by saying: ‘Yet nowhere, other than German-occupied Europe between 1941 and 1945, has a charismatic dictator controlled the machinery of a powerful state so focused on carrying out the final and complete extermination of a particular people, hitherto regarded as members of society’. Presumably, the point of this particular juxtaposition is to say, in a rather oblique manner, that, after all, Holocausts are rare occurrences.

Rawls then further stresses that Hitler’s worldview – and especially his antisemitism – had a religious dimension. What explains this observation at this particular point in Rawls’s argument? Presumably he hints that Nazism – while clearly both ‘mad’ and ‘aggressive’ (to use terms Rawls often employs to describe unreasonable comprehensive doctrines) – is still within a human horizon that can be understood from a Rawlsian perspective. Religious fervour, Rawls suggests, is behind much evil in human history. But there is also evidence (the ‘facts’ highlighted by a Rawlsian conception of

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29. Ibid., 47.
30. Rawls sometimes seems to imply that these points have to be understood by the ‘statesman’ in particular. But his theory will be all the more likely to succeed if they are understood by all citizens.
32. Rawls, Political Liberalism, 134.
34. This also implies that distinctions between moral and cultural pluralism cannot as easily be drawn as suggested for instance by Joshua Cohen in his otherwise excellent ‘Moral pluralism and political consensus’, in: David Copp, Jean Hampton and John E. Roemer (eds.), The idea of democracy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 279-81; here 274.
justice) that religious conflict can be transcended and that even religions which at one point exhibited aggressive tendencies – such as Catholicism – could be liberalized. The suggestion here, it seems, is that not even the ultimate evil of Nazism could destroy Rawls’s liberal, godless theodicy of reconciliation with our world.

In short, then, not only are the historical arguments which I discussed further above supportive of, or even essential for, Rawls’s political conception of justice. Rawls also explicitly addresses a number of historical experiences which might be said to put into question the whole idea of a realistic utopia, a reconciliation with our social world. At the same time, Rawls seeks to strip reconciliation of the quietest implications it is often said to have. A realistic utopia, according to Rawls, is a spur to action, as it banishes the ‘dangers of resignation and cynicism’. In other words, genealogy ultimately also serves as a kind of inspiration, since the ‘objective facts’ which show utopia to be possible, also inspire us to bring about its actual realization.

Citizens as Legislators, Judges – and Historians

In his work Rawls often asks us to conceive of citizens as legislators or as judges. Yet, as I have tried to show, in an important sense, they also have to be (at least amateur) historians and carriers of liberal memory. They need to understand various essentially historical facts (with, in Rawls’s diction, a capital F): the Fact of Reasonable Pluralism, the Fact of Democratic Unity in Diversity, the Fact of Public Reason and the Fact of Liberal Democratic Peace. These facts (or stories) are highlighted, or even ‘objective’, from the perspective of a political conception of justice, and they must form part of a common knowledge stored in a public political culture. They are not facts that could be construed by moral philosophy as such, understood as ‘the exercise of free, disciplined reason alone’; yet they are also clearly not simply accounts of wie es eigentlich gewesen.

Does this reliance on historical fact and argument imply a weakening of political liberalism, a necessary historicization in the sense of relativization, as some critics have claimed? Has Political Liberalism become ‘historical in the wrong way’, so to speak? And, one might further ask, is there not something paradoxical about the kind of society Rawls is seeking, one which has its normative sources in tradition, and yet at the same time is completely transparent to itself? Moreover, is there not a danger that – for all of Rawls’s discussion of the Holocaust and other evils – the liberal story becomes a profoundly provincial story of unilinear progress again, with some societies necessarily left behind? And, most worrying for some, has Rawls not simply conceded too much to historical contingency? Has professional philosophy given itself hostage to amateur history?

As Thomas Pogge has pointed out, it is certainly the case that – methodologically – ‘realistic utopianism’ means that historical pragmatism goes all the way down: we need to keep adjusting conceptions of justice until one is found that could be realized. But it also needs to be understood that Rawls’s Facts are not Brute Facts (or ‘the facts of life’, as Joshua Cohen has put it). They are essentially stylized arguments about historical change and continuity – arguments which feed into a reflective equilibrium of history and theory.

Of course Rawls’s Facts and arguments are not ‘neutral’ – other genealogies of other liberalisms (let alone other political ideologies) would select different facts and tell different stories. But the Facts are subject to historical contestation (and public reason), and they provide at least some hints as to what liberalization – as opposed to a fully achieved liberal society – might involve. They are not just an inspiring story that we might tell about ourselves (and to others) – even if they might actually serve as such.

More importantly – and Rawls has only discussed this in a rather oblique fashion – historical argument often takes the place of what in other systems of political thought would appear as discussions of ‘human nature’. Not that Rawls can avoid this entirely; and, as has been pointed out many times, Rawls’s account of moral personality can hardly be said to be ‘neutral’. The substitute of stylized historical argument for ‘normalizing’ accounts of human nature (Rawls’s word, not mine, or Foucault’s for that matter) does of course not mean that such argument is necessarily less contestable than accounts of human nature. And yet, while the success of practices are not quite ‘objective proofs’, as Rawls sometimes comes close to saying, these arguments are more open to reasoned argument than essentially unverifiable accounts of human nature or ‘general philosophies of man’, to use Larmore’s phrase.

36. Ibid., 128.
37. Rawls, Political Liberalism, xxi.
38. I can only allude here to the thought of Claude Lefort.
39. Pogge, John Rawls, 139.
Finally – and most importantly – Rawls’s historical claims are also arguments about the workings of practical reason in history – and therefore, in a certain sense, about ‘human nature’ or moral personality, after all. This point is most obvious in the case of the Fact of Reasonable Pluralism. Reasonable pluralism, as Rawls has stressed time and again, is not some unfortunate historical accident – it is the effect of the workings of practical reason under free institutions itself. Political Liberalism is then not simply some conservative concession to ‘realism’, but appears rather as a profoundly Hegelian reconciliation between the real and the ideal. As Joshua Cohen has put it: ‘we need to accommodate the ideal to the real because the real manifests the ideal’.  

Conclusion: History and Hope

What can we then conclude about Rawls’s historicism (or lack thereof)?

At the very least, Rawls believed in Cicero’s idea of *historia magistra vitae*. The history of liberalism (and liberalizations) is a storehouse of models, mechanisms and moral exemplars. But I have suggested that Rawls did in fact go a step further by suggesting that the Facts cannot simply be constructed as a neo-Kantian ‘as-if’ story which might inspire moral progress. Rawls sought (and thought that human beings in general sought) a world in which rational and reasonable men and women could recognize their world as itself rational and reasonable – and reconcile themselves to it (and their own history). However – and this is a maximalist version of the argument for which there is some, but not conclusive evidence – Rawls also at times came close to saying that the rational and the reasonable – in the form of his most basic values, especially the idea of reciprocity – really are already contained in history. Or, put differently, when Rawls looked at history rationally, History looked back rationally at him. At this quasi-Hegelian moments, Rawls certainly seemed like a historicist, that is: a believer in an overall scheme or meaning in history. Of course, it is easy to play with labels here. Is an individualist, *Geist-less* Hegelian a Hegelian at all? Or is he not rather what Eric Weil once called a post-Hegelian Kantian? I would advocate the latter designation, but clearly there is space for reasonable disagreement here...

Does all this mean that Rawls’s theory was in the end historical for the wrong reasons? The maximalist Hegelian perspective certainly does undercut the claim to offer a ‘thin’ or ‘minimum’ political morality, as many will find such Hegelianism controversial or downright unacceptable. But one does not have to accept the maximalist Hegelian argument to link history and liberal hope. The Rawlsian story of liberal practices and moral learning can already do as much. If extending our sense of historical possibility from the perspective of a political ideal is a condition of the possibility of progressive political action, then *historia magistra vitae* – without any controversial claims about meaning in history – could already accomplish the task. And in that purely political, non-metaphysical sense, historicization has strengthened, rather than weakened Rawls’s account of liberalism, making it, one might say, more plausible and appealing to illiberal, altruist or liberalizing societies. Thus Rawls’s liberalism was, above all, a liberalism of hope, which absorbed and extended the liberalism of fear. But even such a liberalism of hope will probably not convince those non-Hegelian and non-Kantians who think that modern men and women simply got lucky.

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43. This goes not only for the domestic context. A constitutional democracy’s conduct in international affairs also has a pedagogic dimension. See in particular John Rawls, ‘Fifty Years after Hiroshima’, in *Collected Papers*, ed. Samuel Freeman (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2000), 565-72.
45. There is of course another sense of ‘historicism’, which might be summed up as context-dependency. Rawls is what one might call a politically (and morally) limited historicist in that other sense, as he admits that political conceptions of justice and forms of public reason can change over time, depending for instance on the rise of new groups with new interests.