

Verbal Agreements and the Pressure of Instability against the Convergence Conception of Political Liberalism

SARANGA SUDARSHAN 

Abstract:

Political liberalism, or public reason liberalism, has taken a decisive turn towards the Convergence Conception of public justification and away from the orthodox Consensus Conception. Convergence theorists argue that public justification should be understood as all reasonable people having some conclusive reason to endorse coercively enforced moral rules that are issue and context specific. They argue for this on the basis that, given the nature of deep moral and political disagreement, only the Convergence Conception can show reasonable people how to achieve a stable political order. I argue however that the Convergence Conception faces the Verbal Agreement Objection which puts pressure on its claims to show people how to maintain a political order. This is because at its core it involves a tension between its account of the nature of the agreements that constitute public justification and the objects of those agreements that make it highly sensitive to context changes.

Keywords: political liberalism; verbal agreement; deep disagreement; reasonable disagreement; convergence.

1. Introduction

As a theory of political legitimacy, political liberalism, or public reason liberalism, is the view that political principles or rules that are coercively enforced are legitimate if they are ‘publicly justified’ to all reasonable people. When coercively enforced political principles or rules are publicly justified to reasonable people it means they have sufficient moral reason to endorse them. This is the normative standard of ‘public justification’ or ‘Public Justification Principle’ formalised by contemporary political liberals like Gerald Gaus and Kevin Vallier (2009).¹

The central goal of such a theory is to show how reasonable people with profound disagreements about the right and the good can live together in a stable political order in a shared social world.² A theory’s ability to show this is understood along two dimensions: the ability to show how reasonable people can create a political order and the ability to show how they can maintain this political order over time. Showing how reasonable people can create a political order amounts to showing how all reasonable people’s balance of reasons can provide them sufficient moral reason to coordinate on political principles or rules that are coercively enforced despite their reasonable disagreements. Showing how reasonable people can maintain a political order amounts to showing how all reasonable people’s balance of reasons can be maintained so they continue to have sufficient moral reason to coordinate on political principles or rules that are coercively enforced despite the endogenous and exogenous forces disturbing their balance of reasons. The forces we are concerned with

are limited to, in the case of the endogenous forces, the sphere of activity the political principles or rules themselves permit or encourage. In the case of the exogenous forces we are concerned with the normal changes in circumstances a political society is likely to face. When a theory has the ability to show both of the above things, it shows which political principles or rules allow reasonable people to live in a stable political order. It shows which political principles or rules it is permissible to coercively enforce, and ought to be obeyed by all reasonable people. For political liberals, that theory is political liberalism with its core normative standard of 'public justification'.

On the orthodox 'Consensus Conception' of political liberalism, public justification is the justification of political principles or rules by 'public reasons'.³ These are particular morally conclusive reasons that all reasonable people share. The core idea being that, what explains reasonable disagreements is that reasonable people weigh deliberative considerations, such as reasons, values and so on, in conflicting ways when making moral and political judgements.⁴ As a result, what justifies coercively enforced political principles or rules is a particular subset of moral reasons – 'political values' – that all reasonable people share even if they do weigh them slightly differently.

But some political liberals (and non-liberals) have argued that the Consensus Conception is unstable because the public reasons it identifies are either not actually shared by all or not actually conclusive and can be overridden by other moral reasons not shared by all reasonable people. As such, they have argued for a turn towards the 'Convergence Conception' of public justification.⁵ The core idea being that public justification should consist of the justification of moral rules by some morally conclusive reasons. This allows for coercive rules to be justified on the basis of a convergence of potentially conflicting reasons that are each conclusive for a reasonable person within their own point of view. This would vindicate political liberalism as a theory of political legitimacy that can show how reasonable people can achieve a stable political order.

This paper argues that, although the Convergence Conception is an improvement over the Consensus Conception, it suffers from some so far unnoticed costs that put pressure on its claim to vindicate political liberalism. I argue that it faces a novel objection as yet unnoticed by political liberals, which I call the 'Verbal Agreement Objection'. The basic idea of the objection is that the Convergence Conception contains an underlying tension between its account of the nature of convergent agreements (they are 'merely verbal agreements') and the nature of the rules which are supposed to be the object of those agreements (they are issue and context specific). This tension results in an account of public justification that is highly sensitive to both endogenous and exogenous changes in the context in which publicly justified rules are supposed to apply. As such, public justification is disposed to easily break down into disagreement. I argue that this puts pressure on the theory's ability to constitute a political order that can plausibly be maintained over time. The problem is that the main ways open to convergence theorists to respond to the objection itself carry costs. As a result, the Convergence Conception, despite being the best version of the political liberal project, suffers serious costs that put pressure on political liberalism as a plausible theory of political legitimacy.

Given all that, the paper runs as follows. In §2 I explain what the Convergence Conception of political liberalism is, how it differs from the Consensus Conception, and what motivates it. In §3 I explain what the Verbal Agreement Objection is and how it applies to the Convergence Conception. In §4 I lay out some potential responses and how they fail to salvage the Convergence Conception.

2. The Convergence Conception

The Convergence Conception of political liberalism is best summarised as:

Convergence Conception: A set of issue and context specific moral rules are legitimate if there is a convergence of mutually intelligible reasons amongst all the reasonable people in a society that conclusively justifies endorsing them.

This is the theory of political legitimacy that theorists like Gerald Gaus, Kevin Vallier and Ryan Muldoon have argued for as an alternative to the orthodox Consensus Conception of political liberalism (Gaus 2016; 2011; Muldoon 2016; Vallier 2019; 2014; 2011).⁶ Although they all differ on the mechanism of convergence (I will return to this point in §3), the core idea is the same. Public justification is a sufficient condition for political legitimacy and thus for reasonable people who disagree profoundly about the right and the good to achieve a stable political order. The coercively enforced issue and context specific moral rules that comprise a political order are publicly justified if all reasonable people converge in their conclusive justifications through potentially conflicting reasons on those rules.

There are two important features that make the Convergence Conception a form of political liberalism and distinguish it from the orthodox Consensus Conception. Firstly, public justification consists of the convergence of mutually intelligible reasons. That means coercively enforced moral rules are publicly justified if all reasonable people can find some conclusive reason to endorse them and the reason is intelligible to other reasonable people as a reason.

The main reason for understanding public justification in this way is that it avoids a serious objection that plagues the Consensus Conception: the Inconclusiveness Objection.⁷ The core idea is that reasonable disagreements come in different varieties, for our purposes here the ones that matter are ‘shallow disagreements’ and ‘deep disagreements’. The central contention of the objection is that whilst the Consensus Conception can show how reasonable people can justify political principles in the face of their shallow disagreements, it is inconclusive in the face of deep disagreements. By way of illustration take the following case of reasonable disagreement:

Abortion: Barry and Nora are discussing the laws concerning abortion that their society ought to enact. Barry, having grown up amongst poor single mothers, judges their society ought to enact laws that permit abortion in the first trimester because he believes respecting women’s bodily autonomy is what justice requires in this case. This is because respecting women’s bodily autonomy outweighs the value of human life in a fetus. Nora, having grown up amongst poor women pressured to get abortions, judges their society ought to outlaw abortion in the first trimester barring exceptional circumstances because she believes preserving the value of human life is what justice requires in this case. This is because the value of human life outweighs women’s bodily autonomy.

Barry and Nora are having a shallow disagreement because they share certain reasons that they weigh slightly differently. They disagree about the content of their first-order judgement about what justice requires, but broadly agree about what determines what justice requires. To put it differently, they agree on the truth conditions of their judgments, but disagree in their judgements about which judgements are true.

This means that following the Consensus Conception Barry and Nora can overcome their disagreement by deferring to the political principles conclusively justified by the reasons they share, namely political autonomy as a subset of bodily ethical autonomy and the political value of human life for the survival of the society and its political culture. What principles they precisely justify to resolve this issue will depend on their particular comprehensive moral views, but something like a liberal principle requiring a fair and impartial political procedure

(which furthers their political autonomy) and a suite of basic negative and positive rights to sustain the political life of their society (which furthers the political value of human life) would work. Although this example of disagreement and the way I have illustrated the Consensus Conception overcoming it is controversial in the literature, the way it illustrates how the conception works still holds.⁸ Barry and Nora are reasonable people who share certain values (although they weigh them slightly differently) that can justify a political principle to resolve their disagreement and order their political lives.

But reasonable disagreements are not all shallow disagreements, some are deep disagreements. These are disagreements that are seemingly not about, or at least not only about, the content of the first-order moral or political judgements that people make. Rather they are about people's 'worldviews', 'fundamental commitments' or 'perspectives'.⁹ On these disagreements, reasonable people disagree about some of the most fundamental aspects of how they see the world and interpret it, like what counts as evidence or a morally relevant reason. For instance, consider the following case:

Nationalisation: Bryan and Elizabeth are discussing the economic structure their society ought to have. Elizabeth judges their society ought to nationalise, at the very least, some key industries because a society's productive capacity being for the mutual benefit of all is what justice requires. Bryan judges their society ought not to nationalise any industries because protecting people's natural moral right to their body and private property is what justice requires. This is because he believes natural moral rights are what matter, benefiting everyone with society's productive capacity is irrelevant and has nothing to do with what justice requires. On the contrary, Elizabeth believes materially benefiting people is what matters, natural rights to private property are irrelevant and have nothing to do with what justice requires.

In *Nationalisation* Bryan and Elizabeth, unlike Barry and Nora in *Abortion*, do not disagree in virtue of the content of their beliefs about what justice requires. After all, Bryan and Elizabeth can acknowledge that relative to what each of them views as the relevant reasons for forming normatively correct beliefs about justice, each of them makes the normatively correct judgement. As such, their disagreement hinges on a conflict in some other mental content, namely their fundamental views about how one ought to think, deliberate and form beliefs about what justice requires.¹⁰ Theorists explain such disagreements in various ways. Some theorists explain it epistemically by citing conflicts over special types of beliefs they hold, including 'hinge beliefs', 'entitlement claims', 'substantive epistemic principles' and 'framework propositions'.¹¹ Other theorists explain it semantically or conceptually by citing conflicts over the content of one's conceptual or evaluative framework that are expressed pragmatically in cases of deep disagreement.¹² Regardless of which explanation one adopts, they all share an underlying structure. They all explain deep disagreements by arguing that they actually involve two conflicts. The first conflict is over the first-order matter, and is a proxy for, an indirect representation of or pragmatic expression of a second, deeper, conflict. The deeper conflict is over what reasonable people believe, categorise or interpret as the morally relevant deliberative considerations for making moral and political judgements. This means people disagree, not because they hold conflicting first-order moral and political beliefs, but because they hold conflicting beliefs, categorisations or interpretations of the morally relevant deliberative considerations for forming those beliefs.¹³ Therefore, *Nationalisation* is explained as Bryan and Elizabeth's conflict over the economic system that justice requires being a proxy for their conflict in views of the morally relevant deliberative considerations for making judgements about what justice requires. It is the second conflict that makes a deep disagreement like *Nationalisation* a genuine disagreement.

The point of all this is that once reasonable people face deep disagreements there is no reason to think that there will be a set of reasons that all reasonable people share. As such, there is no reason to think there will be a shared set of reasons that all reasonable people view as conclusively justifying some political principles. Therefore, political liberalism as construed by the Consensus Conception is inconclusive.

But, as political liberals who endorse the Convergence Conception argue, the Inconclusiveness Objection can be avoided if public justification is construed more modestly. Rather than understanding public justification as justification through a consensus of conclusive reasons, it should be understood as justification through some mutually intelligible conclusive reasons. This means that each reasonable person can conclusively justify coercive rules through reasons they view as conclusive from their point of view. This means deep disagreements are no impediment to political liberalism.

The second distinguishing feature of the Convergence Conception is that the objects of justification are not political principles, but context and issue specific rules which all can recognise as moral rules. They are moral rules because all reasonable people recognise them (for their own reasons) as requirements of justice or morality. For some theorists these rules are social norms and for others they are individual laws. Crucially, they are not general principles for how to construct social institutions or constitutional rules.

By proposing the justification of issue and context specific moral rules, the Convergence Conception publicly justifies a political order from the ground up. It shows how social institutions and political regimes as a whole are legitimate by way of showing how the specific coercively enforced local rules that the regime either enforces through its laws (in the case of social norms), or the individual laws themselves are publicly justified. This is in stark contrast to the Consensus Conception which offers an account of the legitimacy of a political order by way of the public justification of the principles that guide its structure of social institutions.

This narrowing of the focus of public justification on issue and context specific moral rules is for two reasons. The first reason is that convergence on general principles is too unlikely given that reasonable people's powers of reason are limited. On the other hand, local moral rules are the sorts of social practice that can be internalised by most people and so make convergence more likely (Gaus 2011: 496; Vallier 2019: 175).

The second reason for narrowing the focus of public justification is that issue and context specific moral rules are needed for moral rules to do the work of effectively ordering a society so that people who disagree cooperate rather than cheat. As Gaus argues, 'group cooperation requires norms or rules that are specific enough in their requirements that cheater detection is highly reliable within the group' (Gaus 2011: 113). As such, rules that do not clearly state what behaviour they require and the context in which they require them cannot help us detect those who do not cooperate. This would make it difficult for people to actually maintain sufficient reason to endorse moral rules and act according to them.

The point in all of this is that the objects of public justification are moral rules that apply in specific contexts about specific issues like social norms or laws. They are not principles general enough to guide the design of social institutions or meant to be applied to various contexts like Rawlsian or Utilitarian principles. Whether general principles of justice can be abstracted out of the set of issue and context specific moral rules is of course another matter. But, on the Convergence Conception, whatever these general principles are they are not the objects of public justification.

With those two distinguishing features, political liberals argue that the Convergence Conception avoids the Inconclusiveness Objection and shows how reasonable people can

achieve a stable political order.¹⁴ This is because, according to the Convergence Conception, reasonable people can create a political order despite their deep disagreements if they publicly justify issue and context specific moral rules by finding the rules they all have some mutually intelligible conclusive reason to endorse even if they all disagree about what that reason is (Vallier 2019: 89–98; Muldoon 2016: 62–65; Gaus 2011: 391–408). The idea is that when the restriction on people's reasons is weakened from 'shared' to 'mutual intelligibility' far more possible reasons can conclusively justify a coercively enforced moral rule including the ones people disagree about in deep disagreements. For instance, in a case like *Nationalisation* Bryan and Elizabeth can agree to issue and context specific economic rules for completely different, yet mutually intelligible, reasons. Bryan and Elizabeth could perhaps agree that if the government wants to nationalise industries, justice requires that it must operate like any other private agent in the equity markets by buying stock at fair market price. Bryan could agree to this rule because he believes it protects people's moral right to their private property and that is what justice requires. Elizabeth could agree to the rule because it provides a way for the government to materially benefit everyone from the economy and that is what justice requires. This shows how reasonable people can have sufficient moral reason to endorse issue and context specific moral rules despite their deep disagreements.

Political liberals then argue that this political order can be maintained because the convergence is not over any specific set of reasons. This means that when reasonable people's set of moral reasons changes or their weighing of them changes, this will simply change the set of issue and context specific moral rules that are converged upon (Vallier 2019: 116–21; 2014: 164–70; Gaus 2011: 310–21). There is no point at which the publicly justified set of rules are oppressive or justify anarchic rebellion because whenever they become so they will no longer be publicly justified since at least one reasonable person will not have a conclusive reason to endorse them. Since the Convergence Conception holds on to the core idea that only publicly justified moral rules can be coercively coordinated upon, the justified political order is always maintained.

3. Verbal Agreement Objection

Whilst the Convergence Conception does well at avoiding the Inconclusiveness Objection, I believe the Convergence Conception's feature of adapting to changes in people's beliefs and values comes at a cost. Its idea of justification is unstable because it is context sensitive to such a degree that makes the agreements it prescribes disposed to break down.¹⁵ This is not an objection about the inconclusiveness of public justification, or that it would lead to anarchy because it could never publicly justify any rules. Rather, this objection takes a new tack in revealing how the Convergent Conception's idea of public justification has a structural weakness. The structure of the agreements it prescribes will be shown, through a semantic analysis, to be highly sensitive to context changes and so highly disposed to breaking down. The rest of the section involves developing this line of thought into what I call the 'Verbal Agreement Objection'.

The basic idea of the Verbal Agreement Objection is that the nature of convergent agreements and the subject of those agreements are in tension such that it makes the Convergence Conception's account of public justification highly context sensitive. To get a sense of this tension take the case of *Nationalisation* again. Suppose, as we did before, Bryan and Elizabeth follow the Convergence Conception and agree to the following issue and context

sensitive moral rule: 'If the government wants to nationalise industries, justice requires that it must operate like any other private agent in the equity markets by buying stock at a fair market price.' Bryan agrees to this rule because he believes it protects people's moral right to their private property and that is what justice requires. Elizabeth agrees to the rule because it provides a way for the government to materially benefit everyone from the economy and that is what justice requires.

The basic problem with Bryan and Elizabeth's convergent agreement is that there is a tension between the nature of the agreement and the object of the agreement. We can see this tension when we analyse in more detail the two elements that make up Bryan and Elizabeth's agreement.

The first element is the convergent agreement. By following a semantic analysis of agreements and disagreements, we can recognise the convergent agreement, which constitutes public justification on the Convergence Conception, is a 'mere verbal agreement'.¹⁶ This is because Bryan and Elizabeth's agreement involves judgements that are practically compatible wholly in virtue of expressing the particular but different mental contents they express for each person. This means that agreement is wholly grounded in the difference between their views on the relevant deliberative considerations for deciding what justice requires in the context they occupy. For Bryan the rule is 'just' because it protects people's moral rights, and for Elizabeth it is 'just' because it allows the government to materially benefit everyone. They express these particular but different mental contents because of the particular but different reasons Bryan and Elizabeth see as conclusive for their judgements about what justice requires.¹⁷ For Bryan the conclusive reason is about the protection of moral rights, and for Elizabeth it's about the material benefit to everyone. These are different reasons that allow for a practical agreement on a rule as 'just' without any deeper agreement about the meaning of justice. This is what constitutes a mere verbal agreement. It is an agreement based on the pure practical compatibility of using a word as opposed to any deeper agreement about the meaning of the word or its broader pattern of use.

Such an agreement is highly sensitive to the particular beliefs and reasons people hold at any given time. However, on the Convergence Conception this is a benefit. By being sensitive to people's particular moral and political beliefs it can show them how to reach an agreement and endorse a moral rule on their own terms. That the agreements that constitute public justification are sensitive to these particularities is a benefit.

The problem is that Bryan and Elizabeth's mere verbal agreement is combined with a second element that is highly context sensitive: the subject of their agreement. The agreement is about an issue and context specific moral rule. Issue and context specific moral rules are by design context sensitive. They are not supposed to apply outside specific contexts and issues because they provide fixed sets of permissions and obligations for specific contexts. If the context changes, these moral rules are not supposed to apply. A slight change in the facts that constitute the background state of affairs would give Bryan and Elizabeth reason to back out of the agreement. For example, a technological innovation adopted by the government might allow it to predict market forces better than private agents. This could get Bryan to back out as he does not think the government is behaving like any other private agent and so the rule does not further his view of justice any longer. On the other hand, the rule being implemented could trigger businesses to collude to inflate prices by buying back stock and shutting the government out of the market. This could get Elizabeth to back out because there is no way to materially benefit everyone and hence the rule fails to further her view of justice. Without changing their beliefs about justice or their values, slight changes in context cause a convergent agreement to

break down. With this the moral rule is illegitimate, and so coercively enforcing it is impermissible even if it was still an efficient or rational policy.¹⁸ The need to agree to issue and context specific rules places pressure on the agreements that constitute public justification in the Convergence Conception. Of course, the context change may also mean the moral rule is inefficient or irrational given their views of justice. But that is beside the point.

The point here is not that agreements must never break down or change. Rather it is that according to the Convergence Conception the political order of a society is made up of a web of issue and context sensitive rules. The justification of these rules is based purely on the practical compatibility of people having disparate reasons for labelling a rule as 'just'. They do not agree to a rule on some shared understanding of justice that applies across contexts. This means the agreements are highly disposed to become unjustified. This is a problem in two senses. In one sense for individuals within a society, issue and context and specific rules becoming unjustified due to context changes is not a predictable political order that people can view and act under with assurance. It is an unpredictable order where political decisions cannot be made quickly and efficiently.

In another sense, rapidly changing contexts can cause a government to become paralysed in the face of unjustified rules or lead to a state of anarchy. This is because a representative structure of government, as opposed to a direct democracy, operates for an extended period of time with the express purpose of facing new social contexts. Achieving this aim requires justification of a regime as a whole. A regime as a whole is not made up of issue and context specific rules, but of general principles or an entire ideology. The generality of the rules or principles that constitute a regime are what allow it to operate across contexts and meet the expectations of a society. Without this, changing contexts would stop governments from acting which could result in worse outcomes for society than were originally foreseen. This also highlights how the Verbal Agreement Objection is unique to the Convergence Conception of political liberalism. The Consensus Conception involves justifying entire theories of justice which are general principles. These general principles, even if justified on the basis of convergence agreements, expressly apply across contexts. As such the Verbal Agreement Objection does not apply to the Consensus Conception. Of course, as I have already mentioned the Consensus Conception faces its own objection – the Inconclusiveness Objection – which motivated the Convergence Conception to begin with.

Bryan and Elizabeth's case also illustrates how context changes can occur in two different ways: endogenously and exogenously. The first involves context changes caused by facts in the context itself. Human societies, and the world around them, are complex systems. When people try to deliberate in this context, slight changes in the form of technological advancements and scientific discoveries, perhaps even philosophical views, can rapidly change how they evaluate moral rules even if they do not change their moral beliefs and values. The changes can affect the set of token states of affairs a moral rule applies to or what states of affairs fall under a deliberative consideration. This can cause agreements to break down under these new and unforeseen contexts.¹⁹ This is worrying because what complex and diverse societies require are normatively stable social institutions that can decide on new claim disputes and policy problems.

The second variety of context change involves a change caused by the implementation of the rule itself. The enforcement of some rule on a complex system like a society's economy, which is also interconnected with other complex systems, can change the set of background facts that constitute the context.²⁰ This will then change what states of affairs a person counts as evidence for future judgements about that very rule and therefore change the deliberations of

the people that it must be justified to. In this new context, the agreement on the rule will break down purely because of its own enforcement and therefore the rule will no longer be publicly justified. Once again, this seems worrying because it would mean that there is no publicly justified rule about an issue when a rule is sorely required.

The upshot of all this is that, although independently mere verbal agreements and issue and context specific rules are not objectionable, when brought together at least some of the convergent agreements that constitute the public justification of a society's political order are disposed to break down. I say 'at least some' to keep the scope of the objection here in perspective. One might think that mere verbal agreements on issue and context specific rules could track some robust fact about what can be agreed to and coordinated in a particular society with its particular diversity of moral and political views.²¹ Here the thought might be that, like convergent evidence in science, some convergent political agreements will represent robust social facts about the rules that a particular society with its particular moral diversity can coordinate on. It will reflect social learning on what the best social institutions are. This sort of agreement will be largely context insensitive. As a result, the Verbal Agreement Objection only applies to the type of convergent agreements that are made up of mere verbal agreements.

I readily concede that there is a distinction between cases of convergent agreements that reflect genuine social learning and cases of mere verbal agreements. I also concede that the Verbal Agreement Objection only applies to the latter. However, let me make two points. Firstly, how much of a society's political order will involve the former and how much will involve the latter are empirical questions that are beyond the scope of this paper. As such, to rule on the scope of the Verbal Agreement Objection would be premature. One has to take it seriously even if it ultimately is a rare occurrence. Secondly, we must not forget that we are concerned with theories of political legitimacy and therefore the moral rules that are legitimate and not ideally just. As such, we cannot appeal to cases of social institutions that are merely unjust as evidence that sometimes an unstable justification of a political order is good. With that in mind I believe the point still stands that the Convergence Conception is open to be constituted at least some of the time by convergent agreements that are mere verbal agreements. These agreements will be disposed to break down.

4. Possible Responses

One thought at this stage might be that the examples of context changes I have discussed above mitigate the force of the Verbal Agreement Objection.²² This is because the context sensitivity of the Convergence Conception is only problematic if the verbal agreements are sensitive to changes in the context that are insignificant to achieving an ordered social world. However, the examples and types of context changes I have mentioned are significant and as such warrant a rule change. This makes the charge of instability hollow since in these cases agreements should be broken and remade. However, this response to the Verbal Agreement Objection overstates my case. At no point have I said that the ability of Convergence Conception to respond to context changes itself is a problem. Rather it is the way it goes about this. Of course, there are some cases where agreements are rightly broken and rules change. However, the point is that the Convergence Conception does not present any guidelines or limiting principle to this. What counts as 'significant' is not a neutral judgement. Reasonable people will differ, and when they differ the Convergence Conception is predisposed to aid those who see the rules must be

changed and if no agreement can be reached to conclude there is no publicly justified moral rule on the particular issue at hand. This predisposes a society to unstable rules.

One other way convergence theorists may respond is by arguing the instability identified by the Verbal Agreement Objection is actually a feature of the Convergence Conception. A convergent agreement breaking down in the sort of ways I have argued is good because it signals that the moral rules that were publicly justified are no longer justified and ought not be obeyed or coercively enforced. To illustrate this point, convergence theorists typically draw on the distinction between ‘stability’ and ‘robustness’. Stability, as ordinarily understood, is the tendency of a system to return to the same unique equilibrium point, and robustness is the tendency to return to some equilibrium point (Vallier 2019: 193–195; Gaus 2016: 230–237). As such, if the mechanism of convergence is modelled in the right way we can see how a political order can be stable in the ‘robustness’ sense by adapting to short-term changes in context so that it continually returns to a convergent agreement.

There are roughly two ways this response can be made in the contemporary literature: the ‘Multi-Perspectival Bargaining View’ and the ‘Social Equilibrium View’. Each of these involves a particular view of the mechanism of convergence that proponents believe best explains the robustness sense of stability. Both views are novel and rich in detail. Evaluating them in full would be beyond the scope of this paper, but in what follows I offer a brief description of how they work and why I think they fail to salvage the Convergence Conception.

Ryan Muldoon has recently argued that the mechanism of convergence should be seen as the outcome of what he calls ‘Multi-Perspectival Bargaining’. On this view, a convergence on a set of issue and context specific moral rules is the result of reasonable people bargaining about the public rules (which specify rights), that ought to govern their shared social world. Muldoon argues that, despite holding different and conflicting perspectives, reasonable people can bargain over what rules ought to govern their shared social world because the underlying physical states of affairs are the same (Muldoon 2016: 77–84). Although each person has a different perspective of these states of affairs, each recognises the stakes of having their opponent’s rules governing them according to their perspective. This allows for a bargain that results in a ‘joint individual justification’ on rules over the shared social world.

Muldoon argues the bargaining will take place much like bargaining in a marketplace where two parties agree to a mutually advantageous price for an exchange. In the case of issue and context specific moral rules, reasonable people weigh up how much a set of rules conforms to their moral and political beliefs against how much it violates it (83). Muldoon concludes that, just like marketplaces, the bargaining will contain a measure of instability as people constantly reassess their rights (110–111).²³ But, this instability merely reflects people deciding whether they are made better off by a new bargain or staying in the old one. Muldoon’s account of the mechanism of convergence is compelling and does provide a plausible picture of why the Verbal Agreement Objection might not be a serious problem. If a society has reason to value the adaptation to changes in context and perspectives in order to strike new bargains, then the instability of mere verbal agreements does not seem all that worrying.

However, there are two serious problems with the Multi-Perspectival Bargaining view of the mechanism of convergence that undermine its ability to show a political order can be created let alone maintained. Firstly, as Gaus argues, the Multi-Perspectival Bargaining View treats cases where people renegotiate agreements out of self-interest and for moral reasons as equally valid because it makes achieving a stable political order hinge on what is mutually advantageous to the parties when they strike a bargain (Gaus 2016: 170–171). But, as Gaus rightly points out one of the core ideas of political liberalism is that reasonable people try to

agree to rules that bind people despite what social position they might find themselves under (170–171). This is part of the idea of endorsing a rule for moral reasons that is for the good of all no matter their contingent social positions. The Multi-Perspectival Bargaining View would then be a significant departure from political liberalism's view of public justification.

The second problem is that as Gaus argues, the Multi-Perspectival Bargaining View hinges on reasonable people being able to calculate the costs and benefits of living under rules from their perspective and negotiate the rules as required (172–173). However, this likelihood of future renegotiations itself places enormous costs on calculating the complexity of how one's bargain right now would affect the sort of bargains one can strike in the future. It seems almost impossible for someone to calculate the costs and benefits of striking a bargain when they cannot predict how striking a particular bargain may change the context which will itself require a new bargain.

The most well-developed alternative to Muldoon's Multi-Perspectival Bargaining View of the mechanism of convergence is the Social Equilibrium View argued for by Gerald Gaus and also used by Kevin Vallier. The Social Equilibrium View's model of convergence relies on two key ideas. The first is that the issue and context specific rules are social norms with distinct moral content.²⁴ When moral rules that form a coherent scheme are publicly justified, which means all reasonable people have sufficient moral reason to endorse them, they constitute a social-morality which establishes the 'moral order' or 'public moral constitution' of a society. A political order of coercive laws and institutions is legitimate if it enforces this moral order (Vallier 2019: chs. 6–7; Gaus 2016: 206–7; 2011: 449–70).

The second key idea is that the mechanism of convergence on a set of moral rules is an equilibrium that emerges out of the actual path-dependent social interactions of reasonable people (Vallier 2019: 33–36, 110–113, 192–195; Gaus 2016: 223–226; Gaus 2011: 321–322, 389–408, 434–443). Convergence – and hence public justification – is then an emergent phenomenon that arises out of reasonable people's everyday social interactions where social norms are agreed to and reassessed continuously.

The process of convergence is then modelled in two stages. In the first stage, reasonable people, with their conflicting political beliefs and conflicting views of the morally relevant deliberative considerations for forming those beliefs, rank social rules which they judge as strictly better than no authoritative rule at all. The set of social rules that all reasonable people rank in this way constitutes the socially eligible set because no rule in that set is judged as worse than no authoritative rule at all on a particular issue (Gaus 2011: 322). After forming a socially eligible set, the second stage of public justification involves reasonable people finding a rule they all have conclusive reason to endorse in the socially eligible set by interacting with each other based on those rules (Gaus 2016: 223–26; 2011: ch. 19).²⁵ As such, convergence is achieved by reasonable people acting on moral rules according to (1) what moral rules best satisfy their view of the morally relevant deliberative considerations for forming political beliefs and (2) the extent to which acting on the moral rules other reasonable people are coordinating on allows them to reap the benefits of having social interactions where they can 'respect their equality and moral freedom' (Gaus 2011: 398–399). The benefits are that they will be able to make morally authoritative demands on others that are publicly justified.

Reasonable people will then converge because there are two forces that are pushing people into agreement. One force is the satisfaction of their view of the morally relevant deliberative considerations and another force is the benefit of endorsing rules that others also endorse so they can enjoy social interactions that respect others' equality and moral freedom. The point is, reasonable people will be able to weigh these two considerations in such a way that they do not

merely hold out for rules they view as ideal. They will reconcile in favour of rules that satisfy these considerations as far as is possible whilst also allowing them to have social interactions with publicly justified rules.

The result of all of this is that, as Gaus argues, convergence on a set of issue and context specific moral rules is an emergent equilibrium of social norms that can be legitimately explicated, enforced and maintained by coercive political power because they are the moral rules, in virtue of being in equilibrium, that are publicly justified (Gaus 2011: 402–403, 225–226). This political order is then maintained by a feedback loop between the underlying moral order of social norms that fall in and out of convergence and the coercive laws in place.

This solves the Verbal Agreement Objection because it shows how changes in context will be met with changes in people's reciprocal normative obligations and expectations, which will shift the equilibrium of social norms. The practice of moral reform and criticism allows people to move to a new equilibrium of moral rules in the same process that the political order was created (Gaus 2016: 226–230; Gaus 2011: 433–443). On this view, the Verbal Agreement Objection is a red herring because mere verbal agreements are simply shifts in the equilibrium of social norms that constitutes a publicly justified moral constitution which is then enforced by a political order of coercive laws and institutions. The socially eligible set provides a set of rules that reasonable people can constantly reflect on and deliberate about endorsing. As a result, any changes in context are part and parcel of how reasonable people converge on coercive rules.

The problem with this view of the mechanism of convergence is that for some reasonable people it requires that they endorse and act on a moral rule because they face the coercive social pressure of other reasonable people endorsing and acting on the rule and not because it is supported by their moral reasons. A core aspect of the Social Equilibrium View is that reasonable people can endorse a single moral rule within the socially eligible set by evaluating each moral rule, endorsing one and then simply interacting with each other. The majority will either face others who endorse the same rule or the costs of conforming to the rule they view as second best are so slight they join the growing majority that endorse it. However, for a minority, this process will involve facing others holding them accountable in their day-to-day social interactions on a rule they view as the least optimal in the eligible set. This is because the moral rule that is endorsed by others is the one that they rank as the one that least satisfies the deliberative considerations they view as morally relevant for making moral and political judgements about justice. Although they can see the rule as better than no rule at all, it is barely better. The overriding reason these people will have for endorsing the moral rule the majority endorses is the fact that the majority endorse and act on it. This is the 'bandwagon effect' that Gaus believes models the way people's day-to-day social interactions involve a slow formation of a majority of people who see the increasing returns of endorsing a particular moral rule (Gaus 2011: 395–400). But this means that, for those who hold a moral position in the minority, conclusive justification of a rule within the socially eligible set does not depend on a rule being supported by their view of the morally relevant deliberative considerations and the conclusive reasons that view entails. Rather it depends on endorsing and acting on the rule being the only way to avoid the costs of the social pressure the majority places on them for not doing so.

Ultimately this problem is a version of the "Integrity Objection" originally posed against the Consensus Conception of political liberalism.²⁶ The idea being that requiring non-liberals to only justify political principles and decisions according to the reasons they share with other reasonable people requires them to not act according to the reasons they view as conclusive reasons in all domains of life. This requirement of infidelity to their true character, plans and


beliefs violates their integrity. It involves a requirement to not be sincere and faithful to the whole of their comprehensive worldview and its moral ideals. But in this case it applies to the Convergence Conception because of the way the mechanism of convergence of a particular rule within the socially eligible set ends up favouring the coercive pressure of social norms over the deliberative considerations a person views as morally relevant for evaluating those social norms as moral rules.²⁷

In sum, avoiding the Verbal Agreement Objection by understanding the mechanism of social convergence in a particular way faces its own problems. As it stands either these problems or the Verbal Agreement Objection must be answered.

5. Conclusion

In this paper I have argued that the Convergence Conception of political liberalism suffers from an under-discussed source of instability that puts pressure on its claim to vindicate political liberalism as a theory of political legitimacy. I argued it faces the Verbal Agreement Objection, which is that convergent agreements on issue and context specific moral rules between reasonable people who conflict in their views of what the morally relevant deliberative considerations are for making moral and political judgements will be highly sensitive to changes in context. As such, at least some of the political order the Convergence Conception purports to create is disposed to break down in the face of even slight changes in social contexts. I've shown that modelling the mechanism of convergence can avoid the objection but raises its own objections. As it stands the Convergence Conception, although overcoming the Inconclusiveness Objection against the Consensus Conception, faces its own problems that must be answered before it can adequately vindicate political liberalism.

ORCID

Saranga Sudarshan  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0750-0177>

Acknowledgment

I owe the deepest thanks to the late Gerald Gaus who gave me invaluable advice and comments on the chapter in my thesis that this paper comes from. Much of my thinking on the issues in this paper is owed to him, and would not be what it is without the time he gave me during my semester in Tucson in 2019 and as the external examiner for my PhD. His contribution as a political philosopher, in my view the greatest since Rawls, and as a scholar who encouraged even those who deeply disagreed with him will be sorely missed. Thank you also to Benjamin Sachs, Derek Ball, Stefano Lo Re, Clotilde Torregrossa, Colin McLean, Lara Jost, and Philipp Schoenegger and the members of the Theories of Public Reason Panel at MANCEPT 2019 who gave precious comments on early drafts.

Notes

1. See also Rawls (2005: 69–71, 136, 387, 388), Gaus (2016: ch. 4; 2011: ch. 5; 1999), Vallier (2019: 4–5), and Quong (2011: 180–91).
2. As with most things in philosophy, this view of the structure of political liberalism is somewhat controversial. Some theorists dissent from this standard reading and argue that in fact political liberalism solely responds to the social fact

of disagreement about the good that is generated by liberal institutions. See Weithman (2015: 75, 83–88; 2010: 319–321) and Quong (2011: 36–37, 137–38), on this second interpretation. I do not see things this way and so side with those who hold the more standard reading that political liberalism is an ambitious project responding to fundamental disagreements about justice itself. See Vallier and Muldoon (2021: 1–3), Gaus (2017: 27–30; 2014: 243–48), Vallier (2019: 5–7), Vallier and Thrasher (2018: 399–400), Kogelmann (2017), Reidy (2007: 250–251), and Dreben (2003: 320–321) for this interpretation. Arguing for this second interpretation is beyond the scope of this paper, but see Vallier and Muldoon (2021: 11–16) for the best attempt.

3. See Rawls (2005) and, for those who follow him, Quong (2011), Nussbaum (2011), Lister (2013), Hartley and Watson (2009), Larmore (1999; 1990) and Leland and Wietmarschen (2017).
4. See Rawls (2005: 54–58) on the ‘burdens of judgement’, but also Mason (1993: 15, 58, 99–100) and McMahon (2009: 3–4, 55–63, 78, 81) who develop Rawls’s explanation into more comprehensive theories.
5. See Thomas Nagel (1987) and Fred D’Agostino (1996) for the earliest explication of the distinction between consensus and convergence in political liberalism.
6. Strictly speaking, Gaus’s theory concerns social morality and the construction of a moral order, with a political order being a tool for constructing and maintaining the moral order (Gaus 2016: 177–87, 206–7; 2011: 460–70, 545–46). Also, arguably, Amartya Sen advances a sort of Convergence Conception (2010). See Gaus (2016: 155–163) for discussion on this point.
7. See Boettcher (2015: 194–195) for a good discussion of how the Inconclusiveness Objection, being a variety of the broader Incompleteness Objection, is similar, but importantly different to the objection put by others in the literature. See also Reidy (2007: 261; 2000: 63–70) and Williams (2000). See also Gaus (2011, ch. 16) on the ‘Problem of Indeterminacy’ and Vallier (2019: 114–115; 2014: 215) on the ‘Anarchy Objection’. More recently, see Vallier and Muldoon (2021: 7–11) who explain the central objection to the Consensus Conception and the consequent motivation for the Convergence Conception in clear but broad strokes.
8. See the famous footnote 32 in Rawls (2005: 243–244), and Quong’s discussion of abortion (2011: 196–197, 213–214).
9. See Ranalli (2021: 983–986), Hazlett (2014: 12–13), Kappel (2018: 1) and Fogelin (1985) for an overview of deep disagreement in epistemology, and Gaus (2018: 647; 2017; 2016: 145–46; 2011: xv–xvii, 2, 38–42) and Muldoon (2016: 1–4) in political philosophy.
10. Here I follow the idea that a genuine disagreement is one that involves a conflict in mental content (e.g. beliefs, desires, plans, etc.) such that one person holds content P, the other holds Q, and P and Q cannot both be true. See Frances (2014: ch. 1) and Gibbard (2003: ch. 4) for this basic way of thinking about genuine disagreement.
11. See Ranalli (2020), Hazlett (2014), Pritchard (2018), Kappel (2018), Adams (1985) and Fogelin (1985).
12. See Gaus (2018: 648–50; 2016: 43–45, 51–56; 2011: 276–79) and Muldoon (2016: 80–85) who build on the idea of ‘diverse perspectives’ developed by Scott E. Page (2007: 30–31) in complexity theory, and Sudarshan (2023) who uses the idea of metalinguistic negotiations from Plunkett & Sundell (2013).
13. Note this means deep disagreements are not about any slippage in what people believe and what people articulate, and they are not about a difference between people’s beliefs about whether they are disagreeing. Thank you to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out this as a possible confusion.
14. Interestingly, Boettcher demurs and argues some form of inconclusiveness remains a problem because of the controversial notion of coercion assumed by convergence theorists (2015: 201–204). I leave aside Boettcher’s objection and side with Gaus’s response to similar objections as adequate (2014).
15. Hartley and Watson advance a similar objection saying the Consensus Conception lacks a kind of normative stability because it is a matter of luck that a given set of people converge on a particular moral rule since they could easily have converged on a different one with slightly different beliefs (2018: 59–61). The prospect of slight changes in beliefs means that agreements are disposed to break down. I don’t think this is a worry as this is actually a feature of the conception that allows it to deal with a common occurrence in social and political life.
16. It is important to recognise here that my claim is limited to convergent agreements because the Convergence Conception permits public justification through a consensus of reasons if such reasons happen to exist. The issue is that the Convergence Conception permits convergent agreements which are ‘mere verbal agreements’ to also constitute public justification.
17. See Chalmers (2011: 525–526) for this way of construing verbal agreements. See also Ballantyne (2016) on construing verbal agreements through the idea of a single answer satisfying two different questions.

18. Thank you to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out the need to clarify this when dealing with moral rules that would be specific economic policies.
19. If one doubts context changes like this can have such consequences, consider the rapid escalation of the coronavirus pandemic of 2019–2022 and the way many countries without enduring social institutions were not able to form new agreements to combat the health and economic crisis. See <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2020/03/coronavirus-paid-leave-health-care-trump.html>
20. See Gaus (2016: 230–231) for someone who seems to acknowledge this form of instability.
21. Thank you to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out this possible response.
22. Thank you to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out this possible response.
23. See Muldoon (2016: 90–91, 102–107) on the three principles that a bargain will have to satisfy for his specific argument for how reasonable people will reassess old bargains and make new ones because they value diversity and social experimentation.
24. See Bicchieri (2016; 2006) on the general empirical account of social norms, and Gaus (2016: 211–15; 2011: 163–82) and Vallier (2019: 30–36) on its implementation in political liberalism.
25. I leave aside the additional steps of arriving at the optimal socially eligible set which includes only the rules that are not Pareto dominated by any other rules, and narrowing that set to rights that preserve people's status as moral agents and establish private spheres of conduct, as it is irrelevant for the objection I press here. See Gaus (2016: 198–202, 215; 2011: ch. 4) and Vallier (2019: 202–214) for more detail.
26. See Vallier (2014: 57–66), Eberle (2002: 143–151) and Wolterstorff (1997, 105) for a good overview.
27. See Waldron (2015) for the closest version of the objection I press.

Bibliography

- Adams, David (1985) 'Knowing When Disagreements Are Deep', *Informal Logic*, 25: 1, 65–77.
- Ballantyne, Nathan (2016) 'Verbal Disagreements and Philosophical Scepticism', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 94: 4, 752–65.
- Bicchieri, Cristina (2006) *The Grammar of Society: The Nature and Dynamics of Norms*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bicchieri, Cristina (2016) *Norms in the Wild: How to Diagnose, Measure and Change Social Norms*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Boettcher, James W (2015) 'Against the Asymmetric Convergence Model of Public Justification', *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 18: 1, 191–208.
- Chalmers, David (2011) 'Verbal Disputes', *Philosophical Review*, 11: 4, 515–66.
- D'Agostino, Fred (1996) *Free Public Reason: Making It Up As We Go*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dreben, Burton (2003) 'On Rawls and Political Liberalism' in Samuel Freeman ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Rawls*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 316–346.
- Eberle, Christopher (2002) *Religious Conviction in Liberal Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fogelin, Robert (1985) 'The Logic of Deep Disagreements', *Informal Logic*, 7: 1, 1–8.
- Frances, Bryan (2014) *Disagreement*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Gaus, Gerald (1999) 'Reasonable Pluralism and the Domain of the Political: How the Weaknesses of John Rawls's Political Liberalism Can Be Overcome by a Justificatory Liberalism', *Inquiry*, 42: 2, 259–84.
- Gaus, Gerald (2011) *The Order of Public Reason: A Theory of Freedom and Morality in a Diverse and Bounded World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gaus, Gerald (2014) 'The Turn to a Political Liberalism' in Jon Mandle and David A. Reidy eds. *A Companion to Rawls*, Oxford: Wiley Blackwell.
- Gaus, Gerald (2016) *The Tyranny of the Ideal: Justice in a Diverse Society*, Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Gaus, Gerald (2017) 'Is Public Reason a Normalization Project? Deep Diversity and the Open Society', *Social Philosophy Today*, 33: 1, 27–52.
- Gaus, Gerald (2018) 'The Complexity of a Diverse Moral Order', *The Georgetown Journal of Law & Public Policy*, 16: 1, 645–80.

- Gaus, Gerald, and Kevin Vallier (2009) 'The Roles of Religious Conviction in a Publicly Justified Polity: The Implications of Convergence, Asymmetry and Political Institutions', *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 35: 1–2, 51–76.
- Gibbard, Allan (2003) *Thinking How to Live*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
- Hartley, Christie, and Lori Watson (2009) 'Feminism, Religion, And Shared Reasons: A Defense Of Exclusive Public Reason', *Law and Philosophy*, 28: 5, 493–536.
- Hartley, Christie, and Lori Watson (2018) *Equal Citizenship and Public Reason: A Feminist Political Liberalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hazlett, Allan (2014) 'Entitlement and Mutually Recognized Reasonable Disagreement', *Episteme*, 11: 1, 1–25.
- Kappel, Klemens (2018) 'Higher Order Evidence and Deep Disagreement', *Topoi*, 1–12.
- Kogelmann, Brian (2017) 'Justice, Diversity, and the Well-Ordered Society', *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 67: 269, 663–84.
- Larmore, Charles (1990) 'Political Liberalism', *Political Theory*, 18: 3, 339–60.
- Larmore, Charles (1999) 'The Moral Basis of Political Liberalism', *The Journal of Philosophy*, 96: 12, 599–625.
- Leland, R. J., and Han van Wietmarschen (2017) 'Political Liberalism and Political Community', *Journal of Moral Philosophy*, 14: 2, 142–67.
- Lister, Andrew (2013) *Public Reason and Political Community*, London: Bloomsbury.
- Mason, Andrew (1993) *Explaining Political Disagreement*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McMahon, Christopher (2009) *Reasonable Disagreement: A Theory of Political Morality*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Muldoon, Ryan (2016) *Social Contract Theory for a Diverse World: Beyond Tolerance*, London: Routledge.
- Nagel, Thomas (1987) 'Moral Conflict and Political Legitimacy', *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 16: 3, 215–40.
- Nussbaum, Martha C. (2011) 'Perfectionist Liberalism and Political Liberalism', *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 39: 1, 3–45.
- Page, Scott E. (2007) *The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools, and Societies*, Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Plunkett, David, and Timothy Sundell. 2013. 'Disagreement and the Semantics of Normative and Evaluative Terms', *Philosophers' Imprint*, 13 (23): 1–37.
- Pritchard, Duncan (2018) 'Wittgensteinian Hinge Epistemology and Deep Disagreement', *Topoi*, 1–9.
- Quong, Jonathan (2011) *Liberalism Without Perfection*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ranalli, Chris (2021) 'What Is Deep Disagreement?' *Topoi*, 40, 983–998.
- Ranalli, Chris (2020) 'Deep Disagreement and Hinge Epistemology', *Synthese*, 197, 4975–5007.
- Rawls, John (2005) *Political Liberalism: Expanded Edition*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Reidy, David A. (2000) 'Rawls's Wide View of Public Reason: Not Wide Enough', *Res Publica*, 6: 1, 49–72.
- Reidy, David A. (2007) 'Reciprocity and Reasonable Disagreement: From Liberal To Democratic Legitimacy', *Philosophical Studies*, 132: 2, 243–91.
- Sen, Amartya (2010) *The Idea of Justice*, London: Penguin.
- Sudarshan, Saranga (2023) 'Reasonable Disagreement and Metalinguistic Negotiation', *Theoria*, <https://doi.org/10.1111/theo.12454>
- Thrasher, John, and Kevin Vallier (2018) 'Political Stability in the Open Society', *American Journal of Political Science*, 62: 2, 398–409.
- Vallier, Kevin (2011) 'Convergence and Consensus in Public Reason', *Public Affairs Quarterly*, 25: 4, 261–80.
- Vallier, Kevin (2014) *Liberal Politics and Public Faith: Beyond Separation*, London: Routledge.
- Vallier, Kevin (2019) *Must Politics Be War?: Restoring Our Trust in the Open Society*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Vallier, Kevin, and Ryan Muldoon (2021) 'In Public Reason, Diversity Trumps Coherence', *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 29: 2, 211–30.
- Waldron, Jeremy (2015) 'Isolating Public Reasons' in Thom Brooks and Martha C. Nussbaum eds. *Rawls's Political Liberalism*, Columbia University Press, 113–137.

- Weithman, Paul (2010) *Why Political Liberalism?: On John Rawls's Political Turn*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Weithman, Paul (2015) 'Legitimacy and the Project of Political Liberalism' in *Rawls's Political Liberalism*, Columbia University Press, 73–112.
- Williams, Andrew (2000) 'The Alleged Incompleteness of Public Reason', *Res Publica*, 6: 2, 199–211.
- Wolterstorff, Nicholas (1997) 'The Role of Religion in Decision and Discussion of Political Issues' in Robert Audi and Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Religion in the Public Square: The Place of Religious Convictions in Political Debate*, Lanham MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 67–120.