

The Role of Religious Reasons in the Public Sphere:  
A debate between John Rawls and Nicholas Wolterstorff

A Thesis Submitted to the College of  
Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Masters of Arts  
In the Department of Philosophy  
University of Saskatchewan  
Saskatoon

By

Zahra Shojaei

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis has the goal of finding the proper place of religious reasons in a pluralistic liberal democracy in the debate between two liberal political philosophers, John Rawls and Nicholas Wolterstorff. According to Rawls, who is concerned with the legitimacy of binding laws in a liberal democratic society and the stability of such a society without oppressing citizens, free and equal citizens naturally and inevitably disagree on their moral, philosophical, and religious comprehensive doctrines. Thus, we should look for social unity in a shared political basis, which is independent from all these doctrines. Binding laws are legitimate if they can be supported by public reasons drawn from this political basis. Therefore, citizens have the moral duty to use public reasons, and avoid using religious reasons and other nonpublic reasons, to justify binding laws. Wolterstorff, however, is skeptical of the existence of such a shared political basis and worries that the restraint on using religious reasons puts an unfair and unnecessary burden on religious citizens who may have all their beliefs shaped by their religion. Thus, he argues that liberalism entails that citizens should be free to use whatever reasons they have in support of binding laws. In this work, I will explain Rawls's views (the exclusive, inclusive, and wide views) and Wolterstorff's views (the consocial position and the equal political voice view) as well as examine strengths and weaknesses in their arguments. Then, I will argue that Rawls's wide view, according to which citizens are free to use religious reason in public political deliberations with the proviso of supplementing it with proper public reason in due course, is the best among these views to create a balance between the neutrality of the state, and thus social peace and stability, in a pluralistic democratic society, on the one hand, and freedom to exercise one's religion and freedom of speech, on the other.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I am sincerely thankful to Dr. Susan Dieleman, who supervised my thesis. She has not merely helped me throughout my thesis with her patience and immense knowledge, but also generously supported me financially and academically by offering me the research assistantship position and encouraged me to attend WCPA, CS-IVR, and CPA conferences and guided me through many challenges.

I would also like to thank my committee advisors, Dr. Ria Jenkins and Dr. Emer O'Hagan for their invaluable comments and suggestions, both in my proposal defence and on the draft of my thesis, which have been of significant help for revising and improving my thesis. I am also grateful to my external examiner, Dr. Neil Hibbert, for his time, interest, and valuable and rigorous questions.

I must also express my special gratitude to Dr. O'Hagan for hiring me to assist with Philosophy in Community, which was a valuable and learning experience for me as a graduate philosophy student. I am also thankful to her for suggesting the department to give me some travel fund for the WCPA conference in Regina, and thanks to Dr. Peter Alward, the department chair, for making that happen.

I also wish to thank Heather McWhinney, the instructor of the course GSR 981 for international graduate students, for being a very kind and supporting friend throughout this time.

Finally, I would like to deeply thank my husband, Nima, for being my best friend throughout the past ten years, always encouraging and supporting me to follow my dreams. Without him, it would have been very difficult, if not impossible, to be where I am now.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Should there be any restraints on the reasons citizens use when participating in political decision-making about binding laws or policies in a pluralistic democratic society? This question is the starting point of this thesis. My focus here, however, will be specifically on the place of religious reasons in the public political domain of a pluralistic democracy in the eyes of John Rawls and his critic Nicholas Wolterstorff. This debate is relevant to contemporary pluralistic constitutional democracies, like Canada and the United States. In such societies, it still seems a hard task to find a balance between, on the one hand, not letting religion determine laws and policies, which can result in the violation of the neutrality of the state as well as silencing and excluding nonreligious citizens, and on the other hand, not silencing and excluding religious citizens from political participation. A current example of the former concern can be seen in the United States, where some officials cite the Bible to justify their policy of separating the children of (illegal) immigrants from their parents.<sup>1</sup> By doing this, they label criticisms of this policy as not-worth-listening-to statements that are against what they consider to be the “will of God.” This way, they can stigmatize those criticisms and thus block them from being heard, which is not in accordance with the spirit of a pluralistic liberal democracy. However, Wolterstorff rightly worries that public reason liberalism might portray religion as inherently dangerous or as irrelevant and unworthy. If this happens, liberalism itself will be threatened because the equality condition of liberalism might be violated; religious citizens, who choose to support their political beliefs with religious reasons, might lose their equal status and their equal right to express their

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<sup>1</sup> Adam Edelman, “Sessions cites Bible in defense of breaking up families, blames migrant parents,” *NBC News*, last modified June 16, 2018. <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/immigration/sessions-cites-bible-defense-breaking-families-blames-migrant-parents-n883296>

thoughts while being listened to and respected. This can lead to the alienation of religious citizens and thus their gradual exclusion from public political deliberation, which is again against the spirit of a pluralistic liberal democracy. An example of this concern can be the current situation in the United States, in which Donald Trump is seen as a “dream president” who can bring “religious freedom.”<sup>2</sup> This situation can be understood as a backlash against the perceived exclusion of religious citizens from politics by liberal elites.

In the Rawls-Wolterstorff debate, Rawls argues for some kind of restraint on religious reasons while Wolterstorff disagrees, arguing that there should be no such restraint. Rawls believes that in a pluralistic democratic society where citizens hold conflicting worldviews, they have a moral duty to use generally understandable and acceptable reasons, namely, public reasons, to explain why they are supporting a certain binding law about fundamental political issues. Wolterstorff, however, argues that looking for public reason is not only unrealistic, but if all citizens have an equal voice and treat each other well and justly, they can offer any kind of reason they want, including religious reasons. While I am sympathetic to Wolterstorff’s idea that citizens’ freedom should not be restricted by excluding nonpublic reasons (like religious reasons) from public political discussions, I will argue in favour of Rawls’s latest view regarding his public reason restraint, which he calls the wide view of public political culture. According to this view, it is not sufficient to use only nonpublic reasons, like religious reasons, to justify a binding law in a pluralistic democracy; proper public reasons should be introduced in due course in support of the same law to make it legitimate. I will also argue that Wolterstorff’s arguments in favour of a no-restraint position on religious reasons and against Rawls’s public reason liberalism are flawed and lack precision.

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<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, “Why Evangelicals Support President Trump, Despite His Immorality,” *TIME*, last modified Feb 16, 2018. <http://time.com/5161349/president-trump-white-evangelical-support-slaveholders/>

In 1993, Rawls first developed his theory of public reason in the book *Political Liberalism* as a result of his realization of what he calls the fact of reasonable pluralism. According to this fact, we should never expect free and equal citizens to agree on the same worldview—or as Rawls calls it, a moral, philosophical, or religious comprehensive doctrine—in a free democratic society. In other words, disagreement on reasonable comprehensive doctrines is a reasonable disagreement; the natural and unavoidable result of freedom and equality. As a result of the irreconcilability of reasonable comprehensive doctrines, Rawls argues that we should look for social unity somewhere else, namely, in a shared political basis which is freestanding or independent of all comprehensive doctrines. The subject matter of this shared political basis, or a family of political conceptions of justice, is fundamental political issues, which are “the constitutional essentials and the basic questions of justice.”<sup>3</sup>

The freestanding shared political basis is Rawls’s solution to his main concerns regarding a pluralistic democratic society: public justification of binding laws and the long-term stability of such a society. These two concerns are usually referred to as the legitimacy challenge and the stability challenge.<sup>4</sup> For Rawls, a binding law can be justified if it can be supported by public reasons, which are drawn from political conceptions of justice. Therefore, using only religious reasons, like appealing to the Torah, Bible, or Quran, which are nonpublic, cannot help to justify a law that applies to all citizens with diverse comprehensive views. In his response to the stability challenge, Rawls argues that a pluralistic society would be stable for a long time if its citizens, despite holding different, incompatible comprehensive views, could find an overlapping consensus on a family of political conceptions of justice. Based on the extent to which a society has achieved an overlapping consensus, that is, the extent to which a society is well-ordered,

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<sup>3</sup> John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 156.

<sup>4</sup> Leif Wenar, “John Rawls,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, last modified Jan 9, 2017.

Rawls explains how public justification of binding laws or the ideal of public reason can be achieved. In other words, there seems to be a link between the two challenges for Rawls: the legitimacy challenge is resolved differently in societies with different degrees of stability.

Rawls introduces three kinds of societies: well-ordered, partially well-ordered, and non-well-ordered.<sup>5</sup> In the first kind of society, which is the ideal, there is a strong overlapping consensus between different reasonable comprehensive doctrines on a family of political conceptions of justice. Such a society is just, and basic liberties and rights are respected in it. In this ideal society, Rawls argues that, in order to justify binding laws, citizens have the moral duty to always support those laws by using public reason. This is Rawls's exclusive view. In the case of the second and third kinds of societies, however, Rawls introduces the inclusive view of public reason. According to this view, binding laws can be publicly justified not necessarily by offering public reasons, but by presenting the political values inherent in one's reasonable comprehensive doctrine with the proviso that it leads to strengthening the ideal of public reason and moving the society towards becoming well-ordered. Rawls's examples of strengthening the ideal of public reason in a non-well-ordered society are Martin Luther King and the abolitionists who used religious reasons in a way that led their society to get closer to political justice.

Rawls revised his idea of public reason in 1997, and introduced the wide view of public political culture.<sup>6</sup> This view allows citizens to offer religious reasons, or other kinds of nonpublic reasons, in public political decision-making in support of a binding law, but with the proviso that those reasons be supplemented by proper public reasons *in due course*. The interesting point about this view is that Rawls leaves the time that the proviso should be satisfied and the person

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<sup>5</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 248-252.

<sup>6</sup> John Rawls, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," *University of Chicago Law Review* 64, no. 3 (1997): 783-787.

who should satisfy the proviso unspecified, because he believes that these are practical issues which should be decided at their time.

Wolterstorff objects to all of Rawls's views with the same criticism. He argues that the hope of achieving a freestanding shared political basis is misguided, which makes public reason misguided too. Although, like Rawls, Wolterstorff accepts the reasonable pluralism of comprehensive doctrines, he argues that we cannot hope to reach consensus on political conceptions. He also believes that the idea of public reason, and excluding religious reasons from public political deliberations, is incompatible with citizens' freedom to exercise their religion as they see fit, and as a result it is incompatible with the "Idea of liberal democracy," which for Wolterstorff embodies "equal protection, equal freedom, equal voice, and state neutrality."<sup>7</sup> Moreover, in a famous objection to the Rawlsian idea of public reason, which is usually called the integrity objection,<sup>8</sup> Wolterstorff argues that for many religious citizens, religion is what shapes their values, beliefs, and ethics. As a result, to expect these people to offer public reason rather than religious reasons, which they really believe, is to violate their integrity. In a later version of this objection, Wolterstorff argues that the fact that such religious citizens exist in society shows that the Rawlsian moral duty which encourages citizens to use public reason, or supplement their religious reasons with public ones, is not the ethic of the citizen that we should accept in a liberal democracy.

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<sup>7</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff, "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 Publishers, Inc., 1977), 71. According to Wolterstorff, the core ideas of liberal democracy are "Equal protection under law for all people, equal freedom in law for all citizens, and neutrality on the part of the state with respect to the diversity of religions and comprehensive perspectives." Wolterstorff, "Role of Religion," 70.

<sup>8</sup> Wolterstorff's version of the integrity objection is provided in the book *Religion in the Public Square : The Place of Religious Convictions in Political Debate* is mentioned by Kevin Vallier as a "a classic statement of the integrity objection." "Liberalism, Religion and Integrity," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 90, no.1 (2012): 156. Also see Kevin Vallier, "Public Justification," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, last modified March 1, 2018.

Wolterstorff believes that his own accounts of liberal democracy are the ones that are compatible with what he calls the Idea of liberal democracy. His consocial position, which is explained in his 1997 piece in *Religion in the Public Square*, rejects the restraint of Rawls's account of religious reasons and instead introduces three new kinds of restraints: the manner restraint, according to which citizens should respect each other by listening to each other open-mindedly; the constitution restraint, according to which political discussions should not violate the constitution; and the justice restraint, according to which political discussions should have the goal of achieving political justice rather than gaining self-interest. Wolterstorff's second account of liberal democracy, the equal political voice view, is explained in some articles in his book *Understanding Liberal Democracy: Essays in Political Philosophy* in 2012. In this account of liberal democracy, he seems to repeat the same restraints from the consocial position, but with different language. He argues that citizens can offer any kind of reason they want in public political deliberations in support of a law, with the condition that they do not bully each other. Since he thinks it is not realistic to expect to reach a consensus on a binding law, the political decision is normally made by voting. Citizens should learn to accept the result of the vote, as long as it does not violate the constitution, in which case the result of the vote would be out of order. Therefore, it seems it is the voting procedure that, for Wolterstorff, justifies binding laws.

My main argument in this thesis is that the reasons used to support binding laws are important in justifying those laws. Wolterstorff tries to show otherwise, but he is not successful as he cannot remain consistent in his view against the restraint on religious reasons. For example, in his 2013 article, "Reply to Kevin Carnahan and Erik A. Anderson," Wolterstorff calls a Christian citizen's religious reason that appeals to God *out of order* while accepting another reason in support of the same law. This is contradictory because nowhere in his positive account

has Wolterstorff called a reason out of order; rather, he calls laws (the results of voting) that violate the constitution as out of order. There are also other inconsistencies in Wolterstorff's arguments as well as imprecisions in presenting Rawls's views, which I will explain in detail in the third chapter. Therefore, while Wolterstorff's view might look more liberal than the public reason view, I will show that it is ironically caught in the trap of idealism, which he criticizes Rawls for. This is because Wolterstorff does not deal with important practical details of his view—which makes his view look “simplistic,” as William Curtis puts it<sup>9</sup>—and is not consistent in some of his important arguments against the idea of public reason. I will, therefore, end my thesis by arguing that although Rawls's views are also idealistic in the sense that they give an ideal definition of citizen and society, his wide view of public political culture is the most successful, among all the views discussed here, in creating a balance between the neutrality of state towards the plurality of religious and nonreligious comprehensive views, on the one hand, and the freedom of religion (and also secular doctrines) and freedom of expression, on the other hand, in a reasonable pluralistic democracy.

The second chapter, which is of an exegetical nature, examines Rawls's idea of public reason in his political liberalism philosophy. After describing Rawls's methodology and ideal concepts of persons and society, I will explain the legitimacy and stability challenges as well as the distinction Rawls draws between comprehensive doctrines and political conceptions, due to his realization of the fact of reasonable pluralism. Then I will summarize the idea of public reason, explaining that its content is drawn from political conceptions of justice, its subject matter is fundamental political issues, and its application is in the public political culture (or the public political forum), consisting of judges, government officials, and candidates for public

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<sup>9</sup> William M. Curtis, *Defending Rorty: Pragmatism and Liberal Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 226.

office. The idea of public reason can also apply to citizens when they vote or actively advocate a fundamental political issue. However, in his revised version of the idea of public reason, Rawls points out that public reason applies to citizens less strictly, and their moral duty is to “think of themselves ideally *as if* they were legislators following public reason,”<sup>10</sup> and by doing this hold the officials and legislators accountable. Finally, I will examine the place of religious reasons in the ideal of public reason by explaining the exclusive and inclusive views.

The third chapter starts by introducing Wolterstorff’s accounts of liberal democracy, which are the consocial position and the equal political voice view. Then I will lay out his main criticism of Rawls’s idea of public reason based on the claim that it is impractical due to the infeasibility of having freestanding shared political basis. I will then argue against Wolterstorff’s criticisms of public reason, showing the contradictions and flaws of his arguments by drawing on the work of philosophers like Robert Audi, Erik Anderson, and William Curtis, as well as address Wolterstorff’s article “Reply to Kevin Carnahan and Erik A. Anderson.” I will also examine his integrity objection and respond to it by arguing that complete integrity is impossible and that this objection contradicts another argument of his against public reason, which I call the many reasons argument. In this argument, Wolterstorff defends using as many reasons as possible in support of the same law when deliberating with different people, for the reason that we actually need to use different reasons to convince different people who hold different views in order to support the law in question. I will end the thesis with the fourth chapter by stating the conclusions reached throughout the third chapter regarding the inconsistencies in Wolterstorff’s arguments, and will argue that Rawls’s wide view is the most compatible view with the Idea of liberal democracy among all the views discussed in this work.

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<sup>10</sup> Rawls, “Public Reason Revisited,” 770. (emphasis added)

## Chapter 2: Rawls's Idea of Public Reason

According to Rawls, in a pluralistic society, where people have different, incompatible religious or nonreligious worldviews, the only way to be able to live together in peace as free and equal citizens is to endorse a reasonable constitutional democracy,<sup>11</sup> or political liberalism. In such a society, for political decision making, citizens should have the opportunity to deliberate and discuss public political issues by exchanging their reasons to support their ideas. To justify a binding law that will affect everybody, however, it is a moral duty of citizens not to appeal to nonpublic reasons, which are reasons based on their religious, moral, or philosophical conceptions of the good life, or as Rawls call them, comprehensive doctrines. This is because most reasonable citizens do not share the same comprehensive doctrine. It is incompatible with a pluralistic liberal democratic society—in which all citizens are considered free and equal and the plurality of reasonable comprehensive doctrines is a natural outcome of a free society—to let a group of citizens establish hegemony based on their shared comprehensive doctrine, that is to say, to impose the rules and ideas of their comprehensive doctrine on others. This, for Rawls, “would be inconsistent with the idea of equal basic liberties for all free and equal citizens.”<sup>12</sup>

By accepting the fact of reasonable pluralism, in his version of liberal democracy, Rawls recognizes two challenges: the legitimacy challenge and the stability challenge. The first one is the challenge of justifying our political decisions about laws that are binding for all. In other words, he poses the question of how we can expect citizens with diverse comprehensive doctrines to accept and abide by the same laws without violating their equality and freedom. His solution is that citizens have the duty to base their decisions on the political values that they all

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<sup>11</sup> Rawls understands “a well ordered constitutional democracy ... as a deliberative democracy.” Rawls, “Public Reason Revisited,” 772.

<sup>12</sup> Rawls, “Public Reason Revisited,” 782.

share regardless of their comprehensive doctrines. The stability challenge asks how people with diverse and incompatible comprehensive doctrines can live together justly and stably for a long time. He answers this question by introducing the idea of an overlapping consensus of comprehensive doctrines on a family of political conceptions of justice. Both of these challenges are connected to the idea of public reason that is explored in this chapter. The legitimacy challenge shows the need for public reason to justify binding laws in pluralistic liberal democracies, whereas the stability challenge shows the need for a common political basis between all reasonable comprehensive doctrines that can formulate public reason.

In this chapter my goal is to explore John Rawls's idea of public reason as it is introduced in his second book, *Political Liberalism*, in which he distinguishes political conceptions from religious, moral, and philosophical comprehensive doctrines. In order to clarify what Rawls means by public reason, I will show how important Rawlsian concepts, like comprehensive doctrines, political conceptions of justice, and overlapping consensus, are connected to each other and to the idea of public reason in Rawls's well-ordered society.

In section 2.1 I will explain some of Rawls's basic assumptions that I find necessary for understanding his philosophy of political liberalism, within which he develops the idea of public reason. In section 2.2, I will explore Rawls's intention for introducing the idea of public reason by discussing the fact of reasonable pluralism, the distinction between comprehensive doctrines and political conceptions, the legitimacy challenge, and the concept of reasonableness. The content, scope, and subject of public reason will be examined in section 2.3, as well as the challenge of stability and the idea of an overlapping consensus. Finally, in section 2.4, the implications of Rawls's idea of public reason for religious reasons (as a sort of nonpublic reason) and their role in political decision making in ideal and nonideal societies will be discussed.

## 2.1: Starting assumptions

Before presenting Rawls's attempts to justify the legitimacy of binding laws on citizens in a democratic society by introducing his idea of public reason, it is helpful to briefly clarify some of his assumptions. Rawls formulates his democratic theory based on specific and idealized definitions of society and the person. He defines the idea of society as "a fair system of cooperation over generations."<sup>13</sup> Such a society is closed and self-sufficient, which means that it is where citizens can live fulfilling lives as free and equal, from their birth to their death.<sup>14</sup> Since Rawls's political liberalism deals with the political domain, he defines persons politically as citizens who are free and equal. Being also reasonable and rational, citizens have two moral powers, namely a "capacity for a sense of justice" and a "capacity for a conception of the good."<sup>15</sup> These two capacities make it possible for citizens to be "fully cooperating member[s] of society over a complete life."<sup>16</sup> Rawls also adds to these two fundamental ideas the idea of a well-ordered society, which is introduced "as a society effectively regulated by a political conception of justice."<sup>17</sup> In such an ideal society, all citizens endorse the principles of justice with the knowledge that others would do the same. I will further explain these ideas in more details in the following sections.

Rawls consciously uses such ideal conceptions as these because he thinks that we first need to construct an ideal theory and then use it as a guide for a nonideal theory that can help us deal with real world problems like "existing injustices."<sup>18</sup> Also, an ideal theory can give us some standards based on which we can recognize what needs to be fixed and in what order; thus it

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<sup>13</sup>Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 35.

<sup>14</sup>Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 12.

<sup>15</sup>Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 19.

<sup>16</sup>Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 18.

<sup>17</sup>Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 14.

<sup>18</sup>John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A restatement*, ed. Erin Kelly (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 13.

gives us a vision of how to improve our nonideal world.<sup>19</sup> In other words, according to Rawls, there cannot be a nonideal theory without having an ideal theory first. Rawls not only does not consider such an idealization to be unrealistic, he believes that thinking of it as unrealistic can negatively affect our view of the world and our attitudes towards it, which underlie the way we conduct politics. He asks whether it is “worthwhile for human beings to live on the earth”<sup>20</sup> if they do not see themselves, at least to some extent, as having the two mentioned moral capacities that can lead them to care for justice.

Although Rawls’s methodology of using ideal conceptions and constructing an ideal theory is controversial and can be criticized in different ways,<sup>21</sup> given the limited space that I have here, it is not my intention to focus on this methodology or criticisms against it. However, I need to mention that the ideal nature of Rawls’s political liberalism does not result in him overlooking the nonideal conditions of a pluralistic democratic society (like Canada or the United States) in his theory.<sup>22</sup> To be more specific, when theorizing about the limits of public

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<sup>19</sup> In the book, *Justice as Fairness: A restatement*, Rawls says: “the idea of a well-ordered society should also provide some guidance in thinking about nonideal theory, and so about difficult cases of how to deal with existing injustices. It should also help to clarify the goal of reform and to identify which wrongs are more grievous and hence more urgent to correct.” 13; Also in *Political Liberalism* he says, “we always work at first within ideal theory.” 55; He also says, “ideal theory, which defines a perfectly just basic structure, is a necessary complement to nonideal theory without which the desire for change lacks an aim.” *Id.* at 285.

<sup>20</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, lx. Also see: “The answer we give to the question of whether a just democratic society is possible and can be stable for the right reasons affects our background thoughts and attitudes about the world as a whole. And it affects these thoughts and attitudes before we come to actual politics, and limits or inspires how we take part in it. Debates about general philosophical questions cannot be the daily stuff of politics, but that does not make these questions without significance, since what we think their answers are will shape the underlying attitudes of the public culture and the conduct of politics. If we take for granted as common knowledge that a just and well-ordered democratic society is impossible, then the quality and tone of those attitudes will reflect that knowledge.” *Id.* at lix.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Charles W. Mills, “Ideal Theory’ as Ideology,” *Hypatia* 20, no. 3 (2005): 165-84; and, Colin Farrelly, “Justice in Ideal Theory: A Refutation,” *Political Studies* 55 (2007): 844-64.

<sup>22</sup> In *Political Liberalism*, Rawls discusses some of the present political debates in the U.S. like abortion (p. 246), funding religious schools (p. 248), and school prayer (p. li). Although Rawls tries not to take a final position on such issues, he introduces a theoretical framework (i.e. political liberalism) that citizens can use to deliberate and make decision on them in a constitutional democratic society.

reason, Rawls talks about three kinds of societies among which only the first one is the perfect, well-ordered society in which all citizens completely agree on a political conception of justice. The other two kinds of societies—namely, a well-ordered society in which there is disagreement on a political conception of justice, and a non-well-ordered society in which there are a large number of disputes and disagreements about fundamental political issues—are similar to real societies. Rawls ties the limits of applying public reason to the historical and social conditions of society, asserting that it is only in the first kind of society that citizens (officials and legislators who are exercising powers of public office and candidates for public office, or citizens who vote on a fundamental political issue) have the moral duty to always use public reason in their debates about fundamental political issues. In other words, he recognizes that, in real situations, the ideal of public reason can also be fulfilled by using nonpublic reasons that promote political justice.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, one can argue that his theorizing in *Political Liberalism* is not ideal in the sense of being completely disconnected from the real, nonideal world we are living in.<sup>24</sup>

As I mentioned above, it is not the purpose of this work to focus on Rawls's methodology; however, referring to it briefly seems unavoidable here as it clarifies the underlying ideas of Rawls's principles of justice. These principles provide the ground on which he develops his political liberal conception of justice, namely, justice as fairness.<sup>25</sup> Rawls believes that reasonable and rational persons would agree on his two principles of justice in the "Original Position," where they are being unbiased and fair. Thus, in addition to the ideal conceptions of the citizen and the well-ordered society, Rawls's methodology also relies on the

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<sup>23</sup> Rawls claims that the ideal of public reason can be fulfilled in different ways according to the political and social conditions of society. This will be discussed in details in section 2.4.

<sup>24</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 248-249.

<sup>25</sup> In *Political Liberalism* and his later works, Rawls asserts that justice as fairness is only one reasonable interpretation of "the values of liberty and equality" among a family of reasonable political conceptions of justice, which formulate the idea of public reason.

idea of the Original Position, which is the main feature of his contractarian approach. In *Political Liberalism*, the Original Position is defined as a device of representation that provides a hypothetical impartial viewpoint from which all parties' representatives can agree on the same political principles of justice that are fair to all citizens as free and equal.<sup>26</sup> To make sure that these derived principles of justice are not unfairly benefiting a person or a group more than others based on factors like social position, philosophical or religious beliefs, race, sex, mental or physical capacities, and so forth, they should be chosen fairly by forgetting about such characteristics; Rawls "express[es] these limits on information figuratively by saying the parties are behind a veil of ignorance."<sup>27</sup>

Here I briefly sketch the outcome principles of the Original Position thought experiment because they will help with understanding the idea of public reason in this chapter. The two principles of justice can be generally described as the liberty principle and the opportunity principle.<sup>28</sup> According to the former, all citizens should have basic rights and liberties, which can include the right to vote, the right to freedom of expression, liberty of thought, liberty of conscience, and so on.<sup>29</sup> The latter principle has two parts: the first part states that citizens should have an equal opportunity to gain a position in society regardless of their social and economic class, while the second part—namely, the difference principle—states that inequalities are acceptable only if "they are to be to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged members of society."<sup>30</sup>

Rawls first develops these two principles of justice as building blocks of his conception of justice, namely, justice as fairness, in his first book, *A Theory of Justice* (1971). He later

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<sup>26</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 22-28.

<sup>27</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 25.

<sup>28</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 5, 6.

<sup>29</sup> Leif Wenar, "John Rawls."

<sup>30</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 6.

revises justice as fairness in *Political Liberalism*—which is the focus of this chapter—introducing it as a *political* conception of justice. Moreover, he understands this political conception to be only one among a family of reasonable political conceptions. Although Rawls’s revision of his theory limits the subject matter of justice as fairness only to the political realm, it leaves its content, including the principles of justice, intact.<sup>31</sup> The reason that Rawls redefines justice as fairness is because he realizes that it is not reasonable to ask all citizens to endorse the same conception of justice—which is a requirement of a well-ordered society in *Theory of Justice*—when they already believe in different such conceptions as a result of the different comprehensive doctrines they are following. In other words, Rawls reformulates the idea of a well-ordered society of justice as fairness in *Political Liberalism*, so that it is compatible with the “fact of reasonable pluralism.”<sup>32</sup> According to this fact, in a democratic society where the basic rights and liberties of citizens are guaranteed, reasonable citizens will inevitably come up with different and irreconcilable philosophical (religious or nonreligious) conceptions of the good life. Thus Rawls makes a distinction between political conceptions of justice and irreconcilable religious, moral, and philosophical comprehensive doctrines. This reformulation of the idea of the well-ordered society is associated with redefining justice as fairness as a political conception, and thus limits its application to the “basic structure of society,” which means “society’s main political, constitutional, social, and economic institutions and how they fit together to form a unified scheme of social cooperation over time.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, xlin8: “Not very much of the content of the doctrine of justice as fairness needs to be changed. For example, the meaning and content of the two principles of justice and of the basic structure are much the same except for the framework to which they belong.”

<sup>32</sup> “Theory does not distinguish between comprehensive doctrines and political conceptions.” Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, xli.

<sup>33</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, xlin7.

So, the pluralism of reasonable doctrines is what Rawls claims leads him to introduce the idea of public reason, “the idea of a political conception of justice and so to the idea of political liberalism.”<sup>34</sup> This is the main subject of the following section.

## **2.2: The need for the idea of public reason**

In this section, I will illustrate Rawls’s motivation for introducing the idea of public reason, which stems from his recognizing the fact of reasonable pluralism in constitutional democratic societies. I will explain what Rawls means by comprehensive doctrines and political conceptions of justice, as well as how he distinguishes between them and shows that public reason cannot be given by the former but should be given by the latter. I will also outline what Rawls means by a reasonable person or a reasonable comprehensive doctrine—which sheds light on other notions that Rawls introduces, like the burdens of judgment and the criterion of reciprocity—and how they are related to the idea of public reason.

According to Rawls, holding diverse and incompatible conceptions of the good life is a natural, inevitable, and reasonable outcome in a democratic society consisting of free and equal citizens.<sup>35</sup> It would only be possible to have a society wherein all citizens agree on the same comprehensive worldview that tells them what the good life is like, be it religious or nonreligious, if there was an undemocratic state in power that forced people to do so and thus violated their freedom; this is what Rawls calls “the fact of oppression”.<sup>36</sup> Examples of this kind of oppressive regime can be found now and throughout history. The government of the Islamic

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<sup>34</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, xlv.

<sup>35</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 216-7.

<sup>36</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 37. Also see Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A restatement*, 34: “In the society of the Middle Ages, more or less united in affirming the Catholic faith, the Inquisition was not an accident; its suppression of heresy was needed to preserve the shared religious belief. The same holds, we suppose, for any comprehensive philosophical and moral doctrine, even secular ones. A society united on a form of utilitarianism, or on the moral views of Kant or Mill, would likewise require the oppressive sanctions of state power to remain so.”

republic of Iran, for example, expects all its citizens—one could even claim with good intentions of helping them lead what they think is the best life possible—to abide by the laws that are based on Islam, which is a religious comprehensive doctrine. As a result of this system, other comprehensive doctrines, like other religions or other moral or philosophical doctrines, do not have an equal voice in political deliberations and decision making, if they are not discriminated against or eliminated altogether. Another example of such regimes is the Soviet Union's communism, which can be referred to as a secular comprehensive doctrine, which excluded religious citizens and citizens who believed in a different secular version of the good life from political participation, if not limiting their freedom from other nonpolitical aspects of their lives as well. These oppressive states are the result of trying to impose one comprehensive doctrine on all citizens, thus oppressing them and not treating those who follow a different comprehensive doctrine as free and equal. In other words, such regimes wrongly, Rawls believes, try to bring about social unity by coercing all citizens to endorse the same conception of the good life. They do not see or accept the fact of reasonable pluralism, and thus their governments have to use their state power to suppress any idea or action that is different from or in contradiction to the selected state ideology.

On the contrary, Rawls's liberal philosophy sees human beings as equal and free, no matter which comprehensive doctrine they decide to follow. To live in a democratic and non-oppressive society, we should find a way to be able to live together under the same laws that are legitimate and so justifiable for all reasonable citizens, who themselves see other citizens as free and equal, regardless of their different comprehensive views. But with this irreconcilable, permanent plurality of comprehensive views, one could ask, as Rawls does, "how is it possible for there to exist over time a just and stable society of free and equal citizens, who remain

profoundly divided by reasonable religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines?”<sup>37</sup> In his book *Political Liberalism*, Rawls attempts to answer this question by developing political liberalism as his political philosophy in which he constructs the idea of public reason.

The main goal of political liberalism is to find an answer to both the legitimacy and the stability challenges. I discuss the first challenge here and the second challenge in the next section. By these challenges Rawls means the following questions: how can we legitimately coerce all free and equal citizens, who reasonably follow the plurality of comprehensive doctrines, to abide by the same laws? And how, in such a diverse environment can all citizens *willingly* abide by the same laws in order for the society to be justly stable for a long time? Rawls argues that the answer to these questions can be found in the “shared fundamental ideas implicit in the public political culture”<sup>38</sup> of a democratic society and the “overlapping consensus” of reasonable comprehensive doctrines—which will be discussed in section 2.3—respectively.

For Rawls, the public political culture of a democratic society “comprises the political institutions of a constitutional regime and the public traditions of their interpretation (including those of the judiciary), as well as historic texts and documents that are common knowledge.”<sup>39</sup> As can be seen, the public political culture, as opposed to the background culture, belongs to “the domain of the political.”<sup>40</sup> Rawls believes that implicit in this political culture are fundamental ideas and principles that support “settled convictions [such] as the belief in religious toleration and the rejection of slavery”; these convictions can act as “provisional fixed points that it seems any reasonable conception must account for.”<sup>41</sup> As a result, these fundamental ideas and principles can provide a good source, which is independent from incompatible comprehensive

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<sup>37</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 4.

<sup>38</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 100.

<sup>39</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 13–14.

<sup>40</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 38.

<sup>41</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 8.

doctrines, for formulating a political conception of justice that all reasonable citizens can endorse.<sup>42</sup> It is only with the help of such a generally acceptable political conception that the coercive laws can be justified to all reasonable citizens and thus become legitimate.

In his political liberalism, Rawls introduces justice as fairness as an example of a reasonable political conception of justice, which uses the “fundamental organizing idea ... of society as a fair system of social cooperation between free and equal persons viewed as fully cooperating members of society over a complete life.”<sup>43</sup> He claims that using such an idea of society can systematically connect and relate ideas and principles within the political conception. Justice as fairness, Rawls believes, can likely be freely accepted as a reasonable political conception of justice by all reasonable moral, philosophical, and religious comprehensive doctrines, whether they are liberal or nonliberal.<sup>44</sup> However, he does not expect all citizens to agree with him that this political conception is the most reasonable political conception of justice; he would be unreasonable if he did so because every political conception of justice that is consistent with the public political culture of a democratic society<sup>45</sup> and also satisfies the “criterion of reciprocity” can be considered as a potential reasonable political conception of justice.<sup>46</sup> Every time a basic liberty or right—like the abolishment of slavery or the right to

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<sup>42</sup> In *Political Liberalism*, Rawls says, “we begin from shared fundamental ideas implicit in the public political culture in the hope of developing from them a political conception that can gain free and reasoned agreement in judgment, this agreement being stable in virtue of its gaining the support of an overlapping consensus of reasonable comprehensive doctrines.” 100-101.

<sup>43</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 9.

<sup>44</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, xxxviii. Here Rawls says that he *hopes* that the political conception of justice be acceptable to both religious and nonreligious comprehensive doctrines. Moreover, Rawls thinks that “the most reasonable political conception of justice for a democratic regime will be, broadly speaking, liberal.” *Id.* at 156.

<sup>45</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 8: “a political conception of justice, to be acceptable, must accord with our considered convictions, at all levels of generality, on due reflection, or in what I have called elsewhere “reflective equilibrium.”

<sup>46</sup> According to Rawls, there can exist “a family of reasonable political conceptions” of justice; however, “The limiting feature of these forms is the criterion of reciprocity.” Rawls, “Public Reason Revisited,”

vote—is rejected, the criterion of reciprocity is also violated.<sup>47</sup> The criterion of reciprocity then refers to the idea that “our exercise of political power is proper only when we sincerely believe that the reasons we offer for our political action *may reasonably be accepted by other citizens as a justification of those actions.*”<sup>48</sup> As a result, a political conception which is not potentially acceptable by all reasonable citizens cannot be a candidate for a political conception of justice that legitimates the coercive use of political power.

It is important to note here that a political conception of justice, or a family of such conceptions, which serve as the basis for public reason, is not introduced to replace any comprehensive doctrine, religious or nonreligious. Instead, a political conception of justice should be freestanding, which means that it should be independent from, and impartial towards, the plurality of comprehensive doctrines. In fact, unlike a comprehensive doctrine that is about a conception of the good life, the subject of a political conception is limited to *the basic structure of society*, which refers to “a society’s main political, social, and economic institutions, and how they fit together into one unified system of social cooperation from one generation to the next.”<sup>49</sup> So, not only conceptions of the good life, but also many political issues as well, are not the subject matter of such a political conception (or a family of such conceptions). In fact, the reason to pursue a political conception of justice is only to “reach political agreement on at least *the constitutional essentials and the basic questions of justice.*”<sup>50</sup> Having this shared public political ground makes political deliberation, political decision making, and justification of laws possible in a constitutional democratic society in which reasonable citizens reasonably disagree

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774. Also see: “Any conception that meets the criterion of reciprocity and recognizes the burdens of judgment is a candidate.” Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, xlvii.

<sup>47</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, xlix.

<sup>48</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, xlv (emphasis added).

<sup>49</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 11, xli.

<sup>50</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 156 (emphasis added).

on their comprehensive views. So drawing a distinction between comprehensive doctrines and political conceptions is the first step in Rawls's theory of political liberalism to make it possible for all citizens to willingly abide by the same laws despite the fact of reasonable pluralism<sup>51</sup>—which refers to the irreconcilable, reasonable disagreements about what we believe to be the correct or true way of understanding the world.

Rawls mentions that there are two kinds of disagreements; one is unreasonable and the other reasonable. On the one hand, unreasonable disagreements are usually the result of things like “prejudice and bias, self- and group interest ... ignorance ... perversity ... rivalries for power, status, or economic gain.”<sup>52</sup> One example of such a disagreement could be the case of oil or fossil fuel companies that disagree with most scientists about climate change because of their companies' interest—that is, pursuing their self-interest at the expense of the common good. The sources of reasonable disagreements, on the other hand, which according to Rawls are not reconcilable, are *the burdens of judgment*.<sup>53</sup> Rawls defines these sources as “the many hazards involved in the correct (and conscientious) exercise of our powers of reason and judgment in the ordinary course of political life.”<sup>54</sup> This kind of disagreement happens between free and reasonable people and is inevitable even in the best conditions possible. Rawls lists some of the burdens of judgment, which include complex, vague, and indeterminate evidence and concepts

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<sup>51</sup> Rawls makes a distinction between the fact of pluralism and the fact of reasonable pluralism and says that people usually can understand the former better because we know that there can be a plurality of worldviews, but we usually tend to think that when this is the case only one of these worldviews should be correct and the rest of them should be false. The fact that there can be a plurality of worldviews and that all of them can be reasonable seems less appreciated. In Rawls's words, “That a democracy is marked by the fact of pluralism as such is not surprising, for there are always many unreasonable views. But that there are also many reasonable comprehensive doctrines affirmed by reasonable people may seem surprising, as we like to see reason as leading to the truth and to think of the truth as one.” Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 63-4.

<sup>52</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 58.

<sup>53</sup> According to Rawls, “Conflicts arising from the burdens of judgment always, however, remain and limit the extent of possible agreement” Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, lviii.

<sup>54</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 56.

that need to be assessed and interpreted, and also our different standpoints, which are the result of our different life experiences including gender, race, class, and occupation.<sup>55</sup> One consequence of these reasonable sources of disagreement, according to Rawls, is the fact of reasonable pluralism of comprehensive doctrines.<sup>56</sup>

By learning from the burdens of judgment that not everything is justifiable to others—like our moral and philosophical beliefs on how to lead a good and happy life—and accepting that these burdens apply to everyone equally, a reasonable person can and should develop “a democratic idea of toleration”<sup>57</sup> to “endorse some form of liberty of conscience and freedom of thought.”<sup>58</sup> Thus, accepting and respecting reasonable comprehensive doctrines other than the one a person believes to be correct or true, and not trying to force other people to what one believes, is the first requirement of being considered as a reasonable person. In contrast, people are not reasonable if they use their political power to force others to abandon their comprehensive doctrines in favor of what they approve of. Reasonable people do not look for consensus or social unity based on a shared comprehensive doctrine because they recognize that there can be reasonable disagreement between reasonable and free people over such doctrines. Thus, rather than trying to resolve such a disagreement, they respect other people’s different, reasonable comprehensive doctrines; they look for unity in the shared political values that shape

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<sup>55</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 56-57. Also see Leif Wenar, “John Rawls.”

<sup>56</sup> If the plurality of comprehensive doctrines is the result of the burdens of judgment, it is a little confusing when Rawls in his introduction to the paperback edition mentions them as two separate kinds of conflicts. He says, “There are three main kinds of conflicts: those deriving from citizens’ conflicting comprehensive doctrines; those from their different status, class position, and occupation, or from their ethnicity, gender, and race; and finally, those resulting from the burdens of judgment.” Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, lviii.

<sup>57</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 58. Also see, “our recognizing and being willing to bear the consequences of the burdens of judgment... limits the scope of what reasonable persons think can be justified to others, and ... this leads to a form of toleration and supports the idea of public reason.” Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 59.

<sup>58</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 61.

the idea of public reason. In Rawls's words, a reasonable citizen is willing "to recognize the burdens of judgment and to accept their consequences for the use of public reason in directing the legitimate exercise of political power in a constitutional regime."<sup>59</sup>

The second requirement for being considered a reasonable person for Rawls is to regard all people as free and equal members of society. Reasonable citizens are concerned with the interests of all citizens, rather than merely their own, so they try to offer "fair terms of cooperation" that everyone, including themselves, can reasonably agree with, at the political level.<sup>60</sup> Such fair terms of cooperation are, on the one hand, defined by a family of political conceptions of justice, which are based on the principles of justice implicit in the public political culture, including basic rights and liberties. On the other hand, they are related to the idea of reciprocity according to which all cooperating citizens "are to benefit in an appropriate way."<sup>61</sup> In other words, reasonable citizens are the ones who try to propose and abide by the terms that fulfill the criterion of reciprocity, according to which "citizens offering [fair terms of cooperation] must *reasonably* think that those citizens to whom such terms are offered might also *reasonably* accept them. And they must be able to do this as free and equal."<sup>62</sup> To explain, if a group of citizens want to exercise legitimate political power in a constitutional democratic society, to justify a political decision or a law that is binding to all citizens, they need to explain those decisions and laws to others by offering reasons that can fulfil the criterion of reciprocity. This means that they should give reasons that they can *reasonably* expect all citizens, including

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<sup>59</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 54.

<sup>60</sup> "[T]he willingness to propose fair terms of cooperation and to abide by them provided others do." Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 54.

<sup>61</sup> See "Fair terms of cooperation specify an idea of reciprocity: all who are engaged in cooperation and who do their part as the rules and procedure require, are to benefit in an appropriate way as assessed by a suitable benchmark of comparison." Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 16.

<sup>62</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, xlii (emphasis added).

themselves, to *reasonably* and potentially understand and accept, without any oppressive force in power.

Being reasonable is very important for Rawls because he sees it as something that “addresses the public world of others,” and as “part of a political ideal of democratic citizenship that includes the idea of public reason.”<sup>63</sup> According to this understanding of reasonable, the ideal of democratic citizenship can be achieved when citizens accept the fact that there can be reasonable disagreement over what citizens consider true comprehensive views, while at the same time, they are willing to mutually cooperate with others as free and equal to propose fair terms of cooperation at the political level that all can endorse. These fair terms, which are characterized by political conceptions of justice, can be the basis of the reasons that reasonable citizens use to explain to other reasonable citizens the political decisions that affect everyone in society. Such reasons are Rawlsian public reasons, whose principles, guidelines, and procedures “are seen as selected in the original position and belong to the political conception of justice.”<sup>64</sup> I will discuss the idea of public reason in more detail in section 2.3.

Here, it is worth noting that Rawls considers an acceptable political conception of justice to be reasonable rather than true. This is because its subject is limited to political values that citizens with different comprehensive views can share and thus use to justify the laws that are binding for everyone.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, Rawls argues that although people normally see their own comprehensive doctrines as true, they are not expected to have the same judgment about other comprehensive doctrines—which they normally do not, because comprehensive doctrines are

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<sup>63</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 62.

<sup>64</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 62.

<sup>65</sup> “[P]olitical liberalism, rather than referring to its political conception of justice as true, refers to it as reasonable instead. This is not merely a verbal matter but does two things. First, it indicates the more limited point of view of the political conception as articulating political and not all values, while providing at the same time a public basis of justification.” Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, xx.

incompatible—in order to respect and tolerate them; to achieve this purpose, it is enough to recognize such doctrines as reasonable. A reasonable person, who is aware of the consequences of the burdens of judgement and sees all citizens as free and equal, can also see other comprehensive doctrines, which are followed by reasonable persons, as reasonable. Although Rawls substitutes the notion of truth with reasonable, he knows that it might not be easy to imagine a plurality of *reasonable* comprehensive doctrines, because we usually think that reasonable means true, and there is only one truth. But considering his definition of reasonable, which was discussed above, this is not so.<sup>66</sup> Rawls argues that we cannot decide whether a person's belief, based on her comprehensive view, is true or false because we do not have “a shared public basis” to do that. However, this is not the case for deciding whether it is reasonable or not.<sup>67</sup>

Reasonableness applies to a comprehensive doctrine when it is followed by a reasonable citizen who respects the reasonable disagreement between herself and others, sees all citizens as free and equal, and sees society as a fair system of cooperation.<sup>68</sup> Almost all traditional comprehensive doctrines, which seem to include the major religions like Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism, can be considered to be reasonable, unless they insist on imposing themselves, using political power, on citizens who hold a different doctrine.<sup>69</sup> Another feature of reasonable comprehensive doctrines is that, although they are stable through time, they are still

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<sup>66</sup> “[T]hat there are also many reasonable comprehensive doctrines affirmed by reasonable people may seem surprising, as we like to see reason as leading to the truth and to think of the truth as one.” Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 64.

<sup>67</sup> “[W]hile people can recognize everyone else's comprehensive views as reasonable, they cannot recognize them all as true, and there is no shared public basis to distinguish the true beliefs from the false.” Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 128.

<sup>68</sup> Martha Nussbaum, “Rawls's Political Liberalism. A Reassessment,” in *Ratio Juris* 24, no. 1, (2011): 6.

<sup>69</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 59- 60.

open to some modification based on the reasons that they find acceptable.<sup>70</sup> This tendency to evolve makes it possible for them to become compatible with political conceptions of justice.

Rawls intentionally avoids a more strict definition of reasonable comprehensive doctrines because he is very careful not to call any comprehensive doctrine unreasonable too quickly and thus exclude them arbitrarily.<sup>71</sup> Another reason for this, I believe, can be found in his belief that most religious and philosophical doctrines are only partially comprehensive.<sup>72</sup> This means that they include only some, and not all, “nonpolitical values and virtues” or articulate them all precisely within a system;<sup>73</sup> in other words, most comprehensive doctrines are “neither systematic nor complete.”<sup>74</sup> As a result, it is possible that a slippage happens and followers of a (partially) comprehensive doctrine endorse a political conception of justice, even loosely, for the reason that they might find it valuable for themselves and their society. Rawls even goes further, claiming that it is possible that when comprehensive doctrines are not compatible with the political conception of justice, reasonable citizens choose to “adjust or revise” their doctrines to fit with the political conception.<sup>75</sup> Despite Rawls’s reluctance to call a specific comprehensive doctrine unreasonable, it is not hard to find examples of unreasonable (interpretations of) religious or secular doctrines that encourage their followers to impose their comprehensive view on other citizens with different comprehensive views. These followers of unreasonable comprehensive doctrines—or unreasonable versions of comprehensive doctrines—only care

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<sup>70</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 59.

<sup>71</sup> “We avoid excluding doctrines as unreasonable without strong grounds based on clear aspects of the reasonable itself. Otherwise our account runs the danger of being arbitrary and exclusive. Political liberalism counts many familiar and traditional doctrines—religious, philosophical, and moral—as reasonable even though we could not seriously entertain them for ourselves, as we think they give excessive weight to some values and fail to allow for the significance of others. A tighter criterion is not, however, needed for the purposes of political liberalism.” Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 59-60.

<sup>72</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 160.

<sup>73</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 13.

<sup>74</sup> Rawls, *Justice as fairness: a restatement*, 33.

<sup>75</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 160.

about what they believe to be the *true* conception of the good life rather than accepting what is *reasonable*; they do not recognize and/or accept that there can be a *reasonable* disagreement between people. Different (fundamentalist) religious groups that are looking for political power to suppress other citizens into believing and acting as they do, for example imposing laws to ban homosexuality, or forcing all women (Muslim or non-Muslim) to wear hijab, can be seen as unreasonable.

The first and main difference between political conceptions of justice and comprehensive doctrines is that, according to Rawls, the former constitutes a narrower domain of morality, which is limited to political, social, and economic issues.<sup>76</sup> While people do reasonably disagree on comprehensive doctrines that they hold, one could be hopeful that, despite this irreconcilable, reasonable disagreement, they could still freely endorse the same political conception, or the same family of political conceptions,<sup>77</sup> and make political decisions—which are going to result in binding laws for all citizens—based on them. Making political decisions and explaining them based on such shared grounds can help justify the laws that are passed for all reasonable citizens to abide by, whether they agree with them or not, like, for example, property laws or criminal laws. It thus maintains the democratic nature of the laws and the process of law-making, which is justifiable for all reasonable citizens regardless of the comprehensive doctrine they hold, as opposed to nondemocratic oppressive regimes, which do not care about the justifiability and thus legitimacy of the laws for the citizens they apply to.

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<sup>76</sup> Rawls has mentioned several times that the political conception is a moral conception: “we formulate a freestanding political conception having its own intrinsic (moral) political ideal expressed by the criterion of reciprocity.” Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, xlv. Also, “While [a political conception] is, of course, a moral conception, it is a moral conception worked out for a specific kind of subject, namely, for political, social, and economic institutions.” Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 11.

<sup>77</sup> Since Rawls states that “the content of public reason is given by a family of political conceptions of justice, and not by a single one” (p. 773) I have inferred that he assumes that all citizens could endorse not only a single political conception of justice, but a family of them.

Another difference between political conceptions and comprehensive doctrines is that they apply to different subjects. The (primary) subject of the former is the basic structure of society, while the latter is about “what is of value in human life, and ideals of personal character, as well as ideals of friendship and of familial and associational relationships.”<sup>78</sup> As mentioned above, an example of a political conception of justice that is about the basic structure of society is justice as fairness, while utilitarianism could be an example of a secular comprehensive doctrine that is about how to live a good life.

A further difference between political conceptions of justice and comprehensive doctrines is that the content of the former belongs to “the public political culture of a democratic society,” which includes, for example, the parliament and the judiciary organs, and the debates between political parties, while the latter is linked to “the background culture of civil society,” which has a social character rather than a political one, and includes places like universities, churches, and scientific institutions.<sup>79</sup> It is very important to note that, although the political conception is independent from all comprehensive doctrines, according to Rawls, it does not oppose any reasonable comprehensive doctrine and does not compete with any of them.<sup>80</sup> In fact, if a comprehensive doctrine is reasonable, it should support the political conception of justice.

Rawls argues that one should not think that conflicting comprehensive doctrines will be a barrier to achieving social unity because, as was mentioned earlier, the diversity of such conflicting doctrines is the natural result of having burdens of judgment and living as free and equal citizens, and it is not something that can be eliminated. Therefore, we should look for a basis for social unity and peace somewhere else: in a reasonable political conception of justice, which includes “principles of justice, guidelines of inquiry that specify ways of reasoning and

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<sup>78</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 13.

<sup>79</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 13-14.

<sup>80</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, xl, xlvi, 12.

criteria for the kinds of information relevant for political questions.”<sup>81</sup> Such conceptions are what help us formulate the content of public reason, which is generally understandable and acceptable for all reasonable citizens regardless of what comprehensive doctrine they hold.<sup>82</sup> The content and scope of public reason and how Rawls envisions it will be discussed in the next section.

### **2.3: Elaborating the idea of public reason**

In this section, first I will provide a sketch of public reason, explaining its distinction from nonpublic reasons. Then, I will discuss how the idea of public reason helps justify and thus legitimate coercive laws in a constitutional democratic society. I will also look into how Rawls’s idea of an overlapping consensus can explain the willingness of citizens (either as officials who exercise the powers of public office and candidates for public office, or as ordinary citizens who vote on a fundamental political issue) with a diversity of worldviews to use public reason, and even prioritize it over their cherished nonpublic reasons, and by doing so, bring stability to society for the right reason.

According to Samuel Freeman,<sup>83</sup> Rawls explains the idea of public reason through two different routes. First, by acknowledging the legitimacy challenge, which deals with the question of how to duly exercise our coercive political power over each other as free and equal citizens in a way that can be justified in a democratic society consisting of a plurality of reasonable comprehensive doctrines; and second, by defining the idea of public reason in relation to justice as fairness, which is a political conception of justice that Rawls finds the most reasonable among other such conceptions. Here, however, I want to argue that these two routes can hardly be considered as two separate and independent ways of dealing with the idea of public reason. Thus,

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<sup>81</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 223.

<sup>82</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 223.

<sup>83</sup> Samuel Freeman, “Public reason and political justifications.” *Fordham Law Review* 72 (2004): 2021.

I prefer to call them the macroscopic and the microscopic accounts of public reason respectively. The macroscopic account provides us with an explanation of why we need public reason in a constitutional democratic society, while the microscopic account goes into detail about what public reason really is according to justice as fairness as an example of a political conception of justice. In the following paragraphs, I will discuss these accounts in order.

The legitimacy challenge is formed around the idea of persons as free and equal citizens who have a political relationship among each other within the basic structure of a democratic society in which they are born, live, and die. In such a society, political power is shared between all these citizens as “a collective body.”<sup>84</sup> Since this political power is coercive, and since it is a fact that free and reasonable persons inevitably follow different and irreconcilable views of the good life, exercising such a power could result in oppressing a group or groups of citizens with certain comprehensive views by other groups of citizens with opposing comprehensive views. In order to maintain the democratic system in which everyone respects each other as free and equal in a way that everyone can live their lives as they see fit, Rawls believes that citizens have a moral duty to use public reason as a common ground to justify the political decisions that they make, either through voting or other ways of supporting a policy. Thus, Rawls’s characterization of public reason “in a democratic society ... is the reason of equal citizens who, as a collective body, exercise final political and coercive power over one another in enacting laws and in amending their constitution.”<sup>85</sup> Fulfilling the duty to use such reason, and a willingness to listen to others, which Rawls defines as the (moral) duty of civility,<sup>86</sup> means attaining the ideal of democratic citizenship, and legitimating citizens’ use of political power.

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<sup>84</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 216.

<sup>85</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 214.

<sup>86</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 217. Rawls modifies the duty of civility in “The Idea of Public Reason Revisited,” pointing out that it applies to ordinary citizens less strictly. He says, “citizens fulfill their duty

So, Rawls believes that citizens' political power is used properly when they appeal to public reason as their common ground for political deliberation and decision making; this is his solution to the legitimacy challenge. However, Rawls does not see all political issues as subject matters for public reason. Citizens only have the duty to use public reason when they are dealing with fundamental political issues, that is, the constitutional essentials and matters of basic justice. These include:

fundamental principles that specify the general structure of government and the political process: [such as] the powers of the legislature, executive and the judiciary; the scope of majority rule; [and] equal basic rights and liberties of citizens... such as the right to vote and to participate in politics, liberty of conscience, freedom of thought and of association, as well as the protections of the rule of law.<sup>87</sup>

So, some examples of fundamental political questions are, "who has the right to vote, or what religions are to be tolerated, or who is to be assured fair equality of opportunity or to hold property."<sup>88</sup> Also, current controversial issues like a right to abortion as a women's right and a right to same-sex marriage are among such fundamental issues.

According to Rawls, in a democratic society, the constitutional essentials should be justified to and thus supported by all reasonable citizens regardless of their comprehensive views of life. This can be done by explaining those essentials in terms of public reason, which includes reasons that are potentially understandable and acceptable to all those reasonable citizens. So, the idea of public reason is presented by Rawls through *the liberal principle of legitimacy*, which is as follows: "our exercise of political power is proper and hence justifiable only when it is exercised in accordance with a constitution the essentials of which all citizens may reasonably be

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of civility and support the idea of public reason by doing what they can to hold government officials to it." Rawls, "Public Reason Revisited," 769.

<sup>87</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 227.

<sup>88</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 214.

expected to endorse in the light of principles and ideals acceptable to them as reasonable and rational.”<sup>89</sup> Rawls gives as an example of a non-fundamental political issue the declaration of a “National Fast Day” and “Thanksgiving” by Lincoln. He argues that the ideal of public reason does not seem to be violated by Lincoln because he was not addressing a fundamental political issue.<sup>90</sup> Rawls gives other examples of non-fundamental political issues, including “much tax legislation and many laws regulating property; statutes protecting the environment and controlling pollution; establishing national parks and preserving wilderness areas and animal and plant species; and laying aside funds for museums and the arts.” However, he also contends that “sometimes these do involve fundamental matters.”<sup>91</sup>

Rawls’s second route to the idea of public reason, or as I like to call it, the microscopic view, is connected to the first route and shows how public reason is formulated by justice as fairness in particular, and a family of political conceptions of justice in general. For Rawls, a political conception of justice consists of two parts: “substantive principles of justice for the basic structure” and “guidelines of inquiry that specify ways of reasoning” by which the principles of justice are applied.<sup>92</sup> The principles of justice, which were mentioned in section 2.1, characterize “the values of political justice,” such as “the values of equal political and civil liberty; equality of opportunity; the values of social equality and economic reciprocity,” while

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<sup>89</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 217.

<sup>90</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 254.

<sup>91</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 214. One criticism that I believe Rawls has not, to my knowledge, successfully answered is the unclear distinction between fundamental and non-fundamental political issues. For example, Kent Greenawalt points out that “troublesome borderline cases will be inevitable.” He asks, for example, “if abortion falls within the range of constitutional essentials, what of research on and implantation of fetal tissue and the enforcement of surrogate motherhood contracts?” Kent Greenawalt, “On Public Reason,” *Chicago-Kent Law Review* 69, no.3 (1993): 686. My intuition is that Rawls could use basic rights and liberties as a criterion to draw a distinction between fundamental and non-fundamental political issues. But, to be fair to Rawls, even with this criterion at hand, political issues can get too complicated to be categorized as either fundamental or non-fundamental in advance. So, it might be more feasible to decide that on a case-by-case basis.

<sup>92</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 224.

the guidelines characterize “the values of public reason.”<sup>93</sup> In justice as fairness, Rawls sees both the principles of justice and the guidelines of inquiry specified by the same criterion, that is, the Original Position. In this hypothetical situation that Rawls describes as a device of representation,<sup>94</sup> representatives of different groups of citizens not only agree on the same principles of justice, but they also accept the same guidelines of inquiry that shape the values of public reason to apply those principles. In other words, the representatives come up with guidelines for applying the principles of justice that all citizens are expected to potentially understand and accept regardless of their comprehensive worldviews; thus, the liberal principle of legitimacy is satisfied.

Rawls points out that citizens might reasonably choose different criteria and political conceptions as the best and most reasonable ones, which will result in different forms of political liberalism. What all these forms of political liberalism, and so political conceptions of justice, have in common are liberal principles of justice and some guidelines of public reason.<sup>95</sup> In his later work in 1997, *The Idea of Public Reason Revisited*, Rawls mentions Habermasian discourse theory and “Catholic views of the common good and solidarity when they are expressed in terms of political values,”<sup>96</sup> as two examples of acceptable political conceptions of justice which might be seen by some citizens as the most reasonable conceptions. Rawls argues that disagreement over what is the most reasonable political conception is not something to be worried about; on the contrary, it is anticipated and even unavoidable because the public political culture consists of different fundamental ideas that can be developed into different political conceptions of

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<sup>93</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 224.

<sup>94</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, xxix

<sup>95</sup> “Keep in mind that political liberalism is a kind of view. It has many forms, depending on the substantive principles used and how the guidelines of inquiry are set out. These forms have in common substantive principles of justice that are liberal and an idea of public reason. Content and idea may vary within these limits.” Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 226.

<sup>96</sup> Rawls, “Public Reason Revisited,” 774- 775.

justice. But Rawls is hopeful that citizens might eventually come to agreement on the most reasonable political conception. He says, “[a]n orderly contest between them [appropriate political conceptions of justice] over time is a reliable way to find which one, if any, is most reasonable.”<sup>97</sup>

In all reasonable political conceptions, the idea of public reason provides citizens with a framework to lead their political discussions about fundamental political issues “based on values that the others can reasonably be expected to endorse.”<sup>98</sup> In other words, whether we accept Rawls’s justice as fairness or another political conception as the most reasonable one, the content of public reason, as Rawls clearly asserts in his 1997 article, “is given by the principles and values of the family of liberal political conceptions of justice”<sup>99</sup> and in order to provide public justification for our coercive political power, we need to appeal to such a reason. One can hope that there is always, or most of the time, public reason when dealing with a fundamental political issue because Rawls hopes that the content of public reason, namely political conceptions of justice, should be complete, which means that they should have “a reasonable answer for all or nearly all fundamental questions.”<sup>100</sup>

A third way to define public reason can be through contrasting it with nonpublic reasons, which Rawls emphasizes are different from private reasons.<sup>101</sup> For Rawls, public reason

is public in three ways: as the reason of citizens as such, it is the reason of the public; its subject is the good of the public and matters of fundamental justice; and its nature and content is public, being given by the ideals and principles expressed by society’s conception of political justice, and conducted open to view on that basis.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 227.

<sup>98</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 226.

<sup>99</sup> Rawls, “Public Reason Revisited,” 776.

<sup>100</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 244

<sup>101</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, xix.

<sup>102</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 213.

He claims that “there are many nonpublic reasons and but one public reason.”<sup>103</sup> While public reason is formulated by a family of political conceptions of justice as a common ground between all reasonable citizens, nonpublic reasons are based on people’s religious, moral, and philosophical comprehensive doctrines. Put differently, while public reason is based on the public *political* culture, and as Rawls mentions later, should be more rigorously used in the public political forum consisting of judges, government officials, and candidates for public office,<sup>104</sup> nonpublic reasons belong to the *social* culture of the civil society, which is called by Rawls “the background culture.” So, nonpublic reasons are the reasons of different associations with different purposes within a society, such as churches, universities, scientific associations, and clubs.<sup>105</sup>

Despite the differences between public and nonpublic reasons, they both share some qualities as reasons like including “standards of correctness and criteria of Justification,”<sup>106</sup> which distinguish them from other ways of using the language and mind, such as rhetoric or storytelling. The main difference between public reason and nonpublic reasons is that the former only deals with political issues and is impartial towards different comprehensive doctrines, so consequently it can be expected to be endorsed by all reasonable citizens regardless of their worldviews; whereas the latter deals with “personal and associational decisions”<sup>107</sup> that are based on a doctrine that is accepted by the members of an association, and thus it is not expected to be endorsed by other reasonable citizens. To illustrate, in the case of religious comprehensive doctrines, a certain group of Muslims might believe that women must cover their hair in front of

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<sup>103</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 220.

<sup>104</sup> Rawls, “Public Reason Revisited,” 767.

<sup>105</sup> “Nonpublic reasons comprise the many reasons of civil society and belong to what I have called the “background culture,” in contrast with the public political culture. These reasons are social, and certainly not private.” Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 220.

<sup>106</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 220

<sup>107</sup> Justice as fairness. a restatement, p. 92.

men who are not their close family members. The reason that they give for this rule is based on The Quran, the holy book of Muslims. This reason is a nonpublic reason because it is only acceptable to the members of this Muslim community, thus it cannot be used as a basis of public justification for a Hijab rule as a legitimate coercive law for all the other citizens in society.

According to Rawls, nonpublic reasons “are public with respect to their members, but nonpublic with respect to political society, and so nonpublic with respect to citizens generally.”<sup>108</sup> It is also worth noting that, although it is acceptable for associations to have their own rules and reasons, namely their “nonpublic authority,”<sup>109</sup> in a democratic society, if a person does not want to continue being a member of an association—in the above example if a person no longer wants to be a member of that Muslim community—that association no longer has authority over that person and as a result cannot punish that person for not abiding by their rules; this is because in a democratic society all citizens equally have basic liberties and rights, like freedom of conscience and freedom of thought, and so they are free to convert to whatever comprehensive doctrine they want.

It is important to note that when Rawls defines public reason and nonpublic reason, he mentions secular reasons among the latter group. This is because he sees secular reasons and values as belonging to comprehensive doctrines that cannot be expected to be endorsed by all reasonable citizens. Although it seems that in *Political Liberalism* Rawls only expresses this view implicitly by writing “nonreligious comprehensive doctrines,” in his later works he does not leave any doubt about the difference between public reason and secular reason. In *The Idea of Public Reason Revisited*, Rawls says that “[w]e must distinguish public reason from what is sometimes referred to as secular reason and secular values. These are not the same as public

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<sup>108</sup> Justice as fairness, a restatement, p. 92.

<sup>109</sup> Justice as fairness, a restatement, p. 93.

reason. For I define secular reason as reasoning in terms of comprehensive nonreligious doctrines. Such doctrines and values are much too broad to serve the purposes of public reason.”<sup>110</sup> And, as was mentioned earlier, the main purpose of public reason is providing a basis for public justification of the coercive laws for all reasonable citizens to legitimate such laws in a democratic society.

Rawls claims that his theory of political liberalism is not a comprehensive doctrine, which means it is not a secular, religious, philosophical, or moral doctrine that competes with other comprehensive doctrines. Political liberalism acknowledges the fact of reasonable pluralism, according to which reasonable citizens will naturally endorse different comprehensive doctrines in a free society. Its aim is to be impartial toward all reasonable comprehensive doctrines—whether they are religious, nonreligious, liberal, or nonliberal. Being impartial and independent from comprehensive doctrines thus opens up the possibility for political liberalism, which is limited to the political aspect of people’s lives, to be accepted by all reasonable citizens.<sup>111</sup> To achieve this aim, Rawls’s solution is to formulate reasonable political conceptions of justice based on the fundamental ideas implicit in the public political culture of a democratic society.

But here, although the subject of the political liberalism is limited to the domain of the political, there is still the question of how it is possible that all citizens accept the same political

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<sup>110</sup> Rawls, “Public Reason Revisited,” 775.

<sup>111</sup> “Political liberalism is not a form of Enlightenment liberalism, that is, a comprehensive liberal and often secular doctrine founded on reason and viewed as suitable for the modern age now that the religious authority of Christian ages is said to be no longer dominant. Political liberalism has no such aims. It takes for granted the fact of reasonable pluralism of comprehensive doctrines, where some of those doctrines are taken to be nonliberal and religious. The problem of political liberalism is to work out a political conception of political justice for a constitutional democratic regime that a plurality of reasonable doctrines, both religious and nonreligious, liberal and nonliberal, may freely endorse, and so freely live by and come to understand its virtues. Emphatically it does not aim to replace comprehensive doctrines, religious or nonreligious, but intends to be equally distinct from both and, it hopes, acceptable to both.” Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, xxxviii.

conceptions of justice as reasonable while they are endorsing incompatible comprehensive doctrines. This is a more pressing question when we consider situations where people's comprehensive views, which they think give them the truth about the world and life, and their interests are not exactly in line with the political conception of justice. Rawls expects from reasonable citizens that, when they are dealing with fundamental political issues, rather than being guided by either their preferences and interests or what they see as the whole truth, they act according to their duty of civility and use public reason.<sup>112</sup> So, Rawls notes that there might be a paradox lying here. He asks, “[h]ow can it be either reasonable or rational, when basic matters are at stake, for citizens to appeal only to a public conception of justice and not to the whole truth as they see it?”<sup>113</sup>

Rawls attempts to resolve this paradox partly by addressing the legitimacy challenge, as discussed above, and partly by addressing the stability challenge, which asks: how can a constitutional democratic society that treats all its citizens justly regardless of their comprehensive views remain stable for a long time? Rawls responds that a compromise between comprehensive doctrines or “a mere balance of power (*a modus vivendi*),”<sup>114</sup> or even looking for an average between existing comprehensive doctrines, cannot result in a long-term stability. This is because the stability of *a modus vivendi* can easily be threatened by the shift of power, and the stability of finding an average between existing comprehensive doctrines “is not how justice as fairness proceeds.”<sup>115</sup> To achieve a long-term stability for the right reason, namely one that is not the result of an oppressive power or a compromise, Rawls believes that people should really be willing to abide by the coercive laws. Therefore, the strongest stability can exist if all reasonable

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<sup>112</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 219.

<sup>113</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 143.

<sup>114</sup> Leif Wenar, “John Rawls.”

<sup>115</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 39.

citizens with all their different comprehensive views have *an overlapping consensus* on political conceptions of justice.

Although Rawls does not claim that such a consensus is something that can surely be achieved, he argues that if we can find political conceptions that are freestanding, that is, independent from and thus impartial towards all the reasonable comprehensive doctrines, we can be hopeful of achieving this consensus in a well-ordered constitutional society.<sup>116</sup> In the presence of an overlapping consensus, the political conception of justice is defined by Rawls as a *module* that is included in all reasonable comprehensive doctrines and as a result it is endorsed by those doctrines from inside—that is, by their own nonpublic reasons. In Rawls’s words, “the political conception is a module, an essential constituent part, that in different ways fits into and can be supported by various reasonable comprehensive doctrines that endure in the society regulated by it.”<sup>117</sup> When there is an overlapping consensus, all reasonable citizens support the same principles of justice from within their comprehensive views. For example, reasonable atheists, reasonable Buddhists, reasonable utilitarians, reasonable Christians, reasonable Muslims, and all the other reasonable citizens can support political values such as the abolishment of slavery or the freedom of conscience using reasons that belong particularly to each of their doctrines.

To completely resolve the paradox of using the political values that belong to political conceptions of justice rather than using what one believes to be the whole truth, Rawls adds that such political values “are very great values and not easily overridden and the ideals they express are not to be lightly abandoned.”<sup>118</sup> In other words, these political values and public reason

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<sup>116</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, xlv.

<sup>117</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 144-145.

<sup>118</sup> PL, p. 218. He continues in the same page, “Thus, when the political conception is supported by an overlapping consensus of reasonable comprehensive doctrines, the paradox of public reason disappears. The union of the duty of civility with the great values of the political yields the ideal of citizens governing themselves in ways that each thinks the others might reasonably be expected to accept; and this ideal in

outweigh other values and nonpublic reasons when dealing with constitutional essentials and matters of basic justice. As a result, in a well-ordered society with an overlapping consensus on political conceptions, reasonable citizens are willing to give priority to the values of political conceptions (and thus public reason) over other values given by their different comprehensive doctrines, in case they do not match completely, when they are discussing and making decision about fundamental political issues. But one could ask whether the paradox is also resolved for not completely well-ordered societies, that is, real pluralistic democratic societies like Canada or the United States, where an overlapping consensus between all reasonable comprehensive doctrines on political conceptions of justice is not firm. In such societies, is it reasonable to expect citizens to use public reason rather than nonpublic reasons that are based on their comprehensive views which they believe to be true? Whether the answer is yes or no, how is the role of the idea of public reason similar to or different from its role in a well-ordered democratic regime?

As I mentioned in section 2.1, although Rawls develops his idea of public reason in an idealized system of a well-ordered society, he is not ignorant of the difference between this idealized picture he draws and real societies. The ideal of public reason for him “contains a form of public political deliberation”<sup>119</sup> in which citizens can explain to each other how they are supporting a certain law or policy by referring to political values that they know can also be endorsed by other reasonable citizens. In the following section, I will discuss how the ideal of public reason can be satisfied in ideal and nonideal societies. In short, Rawls believes that in

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turn is supported by the comprehensive doctrines reasonable persons affirm. Citizens affirm the ideal of public reason, not as a result of political compromise, as in a *modus vivendi*, but from within their own reasonable doctrines.”

<sup>119</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, lvii.

some conditions, appealing to nonpublic reasons—including religious reasons—can also help fulfill the ideal of public reason.

#### **2.4: The place of religious reasons in the ideal of public reason**

Rawls does not treat religious reasons differently from other nonpublic reasons, which include secular, philosophical, and moral reasons. In a well-ordered society, citizens have the moral duty of civility to explain to each other why they are advocating a certain policy that deals with the fundamental political issues by using public reason. This is because in a democratic society where citizens are following a plurality of reasonable comprehensive doctrines, they need a common ground, namely political values, that are just and fair to all citizens and so potentially understandable and acceptable by all of them. Using public reason in political deliberation and decision making thus honours this fair and just common ground and so justifies citizens' binding political decisions to each other.

However, Rawls is well aware that it is not always the case for a society to be well-ordered, in the sense that all its citizens know that there is a firm overlapping consensus between their diverse doctrines regarding values of political justice. He argues that a society could be almost well-ordered with a deep disagreement on how to apply a certain principle of justice, or it could be not well-ordered at all with a deep disagreement over the constitutional essentials. Based on the kind of society that we are living in, Rawls looks for the best way that citizens can act to attain or maintain the ideal of public reason and establish political justice. Using public reason for deciding and explaining a binding law is the best way to maintain and honour such an ideal in a well-ordered society. However, in nonideal societies, Rawls believes that referring to one's comprehensive doctrine, for example appealing to one's religious reasons to abolish slavery, can sometimes be a better way of attaining the ideal of public reason and political

justice. In other words, he argues that “the appropriate limits of public reason vary depending on historical and social conditions.”<sup>120</sup>

Rawls makes a distinction between the “exclusive view” and the “inclusive view” of public reason. According to him, the first view only applies to well-ordered societies where there is no deep disagreement between citizens with regards to the political values they endorse; to put it in other words, there is “a firm overlapping consensus of comprehensive doctrines” among their citizens.<sup>121</sup> In such societies, citizens should never give nonpublic reasons in their deliberations about fundamental political questions; citizens can directly appeal to generally accepted political values to fulfill their duty of civility and the ideal of public reason. This is the ideal form of society in which citizens’ “fundamental rights are already guaranteed and there are no basic injustices they feel bound to protest.”<sup>122</sup>

On the other hand, Rawls believes that the more appropriate approach for both well-ordered societies without a firm overlapping consensus among their citizens, and non-well-ordered societies with deep disagreements on the constitutional essentials, is “the inclusive view.” This view allows citizens to give nonpublic reasons in their deliberations about fundamental political questions, provided that the ideal of public reason is fulfilled. Rawls points out that which of these two views we choose depends on which one of them better helps us in the current historical and social condition we are in to achieve a just society and the ideal of public reason. He says, “the ideal [of public reason] may be best achieved in different ways, in good times by following what at first sight may appear to be the exclusive view, in less good times by

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<sup>120</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 251.

<sup>121</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 248.

<sup>122</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 248.

what appears to be the inclusive view.”<sup>123</sup> In other words, in the case of nonideal societies, the inclusive view can be more helpful in achieving the ideal of public reason.

It seems to me that the second scenario—according to which the society is nearly well-ordered but there are disagreements over the interpretation of a political principle of justice—is the closest picture to what Rawls understands of American society of his time. He mentions the controversial issue of whether the government should support church schools or is only responsible for public schools as an example of a dispute over “the principle of fair equality of opportunity as it applies to education for all.”<sup>124</sup> In this case, it is possible that the two sides of this dispute “come to doubt the sincerity of one another’s allegiance to fundamental political values.”<sup>125</sup> To resolve this doubt, Rawls argues that if the leaders of the two parties appeal to their comprehensive doctrines in the public political forum to show each other that their doctrines support those political values, they might be able to recognize their overlapping consensus again and show each other that they are not living in a mere *modus vivendi*. For Rawls, “[t]his knowledge surely strengthens mutual trust and public confidence” and “can be a vital part of the sociological basis encouraging citizens to honor the ideal of public reason.”<sup>126</sup> Therefore, it can be concluded that using religious reasons in the public political forum to discuss fundamental political questions—as long as it reminds the citizens that they are sharing the same political values—not only is not disallowed by Rawls, he finds it even to be a better way of achieving the ideal of public reason in nonideal but well-ordered societies.

In the third scenario, in which the society is not well-ordered, the role of religious reasons (and other nonpublic reasons) in achieving the ideal of public reason and political justice

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<sup>123</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 252.

<sup>124</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 248.

<sup>125</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 248.

<sup>126</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 248.

is more clear. Based on the examples that Rawls uses for this kind of society—the abolitionist movement of slavery and the civil rights movement of Martin Luther King—one could correspond this scenario to the American society of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, when basic rights and liberties of persons were not recognized or respected. In such social and political conditions, appealing to religious reasons to support freedom and equality does not seem to be against the political values of public reason; on the contrary, doing so can strengthen those values. In the cases of the abolitionists and King, Rawls believes that they were not unreasonable in appealing to their religious reasons because “they could have seen their actions as the best way to bring about a well-ordered and just society in which the ideal of public reason could eventually be honored.”<sup>127</sup> He argues that taking the inclusive view in such cases is a better way of honouring the ideal of public reason and a better way to lead the society to political justice. Therefore, to answer the question of “whether we should understand the ideal of public reason in accordance with the exclusive or the inclusive view,” Rawls points out that it depends “on which view best encourages citizens to honor the ideal of public reason and secures its social conditions in the longer run in a well-ordered society.” He concludes that “the inclusive view seems the correct one.”<sup>128</sup> In other words, in the case of nonideal societies, Rawls not only does not discourage offering nonpublic reasons in public political debates, he also argues that doing this could fulfill the ideal of public reason even better than offering public reason.

Although in *Political Liberalism* Rawls clearly mentions that religious reasons can be appealed to in order to develop and maintain the political values of public reason in a nonideal society, some religious philosophers still believe that his idea of public reason not only is unnecessary but also that it discourages religious citizens from participating in political

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<sup>127</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 250.

<sup>128</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 248.

deliberations. Among these philosophers is Nicholas Wolterstorff, whose ideas I will discuss in detail in the next chapter.

### **Chapter 3: Wolterstorff's Arguments against Public Reason and Critical Analysis**

In the previous chapter I explained John Rawls's theory of political liberalism—or as it is also called, public reason liberalism—within which the idea of public reason has a central role. I showed that Rawls introduces two different views, exclusive and inclusive, for honouring the ideal of public reason, only the second of which is relevant to nonideal pluralistic democratic societies like Canada or the United States. In this chapter I will explain Nicholas Wolterstorff's alternative account of liberal democracy, which he claims to be more liberal and fair than Rawls's account. After laying out his criticisms of Rawls's idea of public reason and his restraint on religious reasons, I will analyze his arguments and outline their flaws. I will show that his arguments are not consistent in rejecting Rawls's restraint on religious reasons in public political discussions. Meanwhile, I will introduce and explain Rawls's revised view of public reason, namely, the wide view of public political culture, according to which citizens are free to use any kind of reason in political deliberation with the *proviso* that it is supplemented by suitable public reason *in due course*. I will then compare it to the exclusive and inclusive views as well as Wolterstorff's views and show that it is the most feasible account for bringing social peace in a pluralistic democratic society. Finally, I will argue that Wolterstorff is not successful in rejecting Rawls's idea of public reason because there are contradictions in Wolterstorff's arguments and his criticisms do not address Rawls's wide view. Let me first provide an outline of this chapter.

In section 3.1, I will provide an overview of Wolterstorff's positive accounts of liberal democracy, namely, the consocial position and the equal political voice account. In section 3.2, I will explain Wolterstorff's main criticisms of public reason liberalism according to which Rawls's restraint on religious reasons in public political deliberations is not compatible with the Idea of liberal democracy and that the notion of freestanding shared principles are misguided. In

section 3.3, I will highlight flaws in Wolterstorff's arguments, both in his positive account and his criticisms of Rawls, and respond to them. I will use Wolterstorff's response to an example put forward by Erik A. Anderson to show that he contradicts himself and thus fails to support his no-restraint position on religious reasons. In section 3.4, I will present Wolterstorff's integrity objection according to which citizens' moral duty to use public reason is not defensible because there are two groups of reasonable religious citizens—the religious integralists, the barthian and the eberlian—who believe that, in public political debates, in order to be faithful to their religion they must either *only* use religious reasons (the barthian) or *always give priority* to religious reasons in case they conflict with public reason (the eberlian). I will end this section by arguing against this objection, claiming that complete integrity is not realistic and it is in fact in conflict with Wolterstorff's other arguments. Moreover, such religious citizens in office could threaten the neutrality of the state and, as a result, social peace in a pluralistic liberal democracy.

### **3.1: Wolterstorff's positive account of liberal democracy**

In 1997, in his debate with Robert Audi in *Religion in the Public Square*, Wolterstorff claims that his own version of liberal democracy, namely, the consocial position, is more liberal than Rawls's political liberalism because it “wishes to grant citizens, no matter what their religion or irreligion, as much liberty as possible to live out their lives as they see fit.”<sup>129</sup> He argues that, unlike the Rawlsian position, this version of liberalism really allows religious citizens to exercise their religions freely. The consocial position has two parts: a negative part and a positive part. The negative part concerns a major difference between Wolterstorff's

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<sup>129</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff, “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 Publishers, Inc., 1977), 115. In the same book, Wolterstorff also contends that “the consocial position is fully harmonious with the Idea of liberal democracy.” *Id.* at 81.

position and that of Rawls. The consocial position does not exclude religious reasons from public political discussions. It abandons the idea of looking for freestanding political conceptions of justice or what Wolterstorff calls “an independent source.”<sup>130</sup> In the positive part of his position, Wolterstorff offers three sorts of “restraints”<sup>131</sup> on public political deliberation that “belong to the ethic of the citizen in a liberal democracy.”<sup>132</sup> I call these three restraints the manner restraint, the constitution restraint, and the justice restraint.

First, the manner restraint suggests that there should be some restraints on the manner in which citizens participate in public political discourse. Citizens should respect one another by listening and being open to what others say. In other words, in discussions, citizens should listen to each other “with a willingness to learn and to let one's mind be changed.”<sup>133</sup> The second restraint, the constitution restraint, requires that discussions be restricted by the constitutional laws of the state. However, this restraint does not hold for extreme circumstances.<sup>134</sup> The third restraint states that discussions should not be based on citizens’ self-interests. Instead, they should be restrained in a way that can satisfy the proper goal of liberal democracy, which is

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<sup>130</sup> Wolterstorff, “Role of Religion,” 81. In fact, Wolterstorff suggests that there are two major differences between his consocial position and Rawls’s political liberalism. The second difference is that his own position embraces the *impartiality* interpretation of the neutrality of the state with respect to religions rather than the *separation* interpretation. According to Wolterstorff, Rawls’s religious restraint on reasons is the result of the separation interpretation of state neutrality which implies that “government is to do nothing to advance or hinder any religion.” *Id* at 75–6. This means that “the state must not in any significant way aid any religion—nor any comprehensive non-religious perspective.” *Id* at 115. To explain the impartiality and separation positions, Wolterstorff gives the example of school funding by the government. He argues that adopting the impartiality position results in funding either no school at all or all schools by government whereas adopting the separation position results in only funding schools that do not have a religious character. Since this distinction is not relevant for my project I am not pursuing it further.

<sup>131</sup> Wolterstorff, “Role of Religion,” 112.

<sup>132</sup> Wolterstorff, “Role of Religion,” 113.

<sup>133</sup> Wolterstorff, “Role of Religion,” 113.

<sup>134</sup> Wolterstorff, “Role of Religion,” 113. Wolterstorff does not clarify what he means by these circumstances.

political justice. This goal is what Wolterstorff's version of liberalism shares (as he himself acknowledges) with Rawls's political liberalism.

In his later works, Wolterstorff develops his new positive account of liberal democracy which he calls "the *equal political voice* interpretation of liberal democracy."<sup>135</sup> According to this account, "the governing idea implicit in constitutional liberal democracy is [that] ... all adult citizens have an equal right to full political voice" supported by the constitution, against the state and other citizens infringing on those rights.<sup>136</sup> Wolterstorff argues that within the constitutional framework, this type of liberalism does not introduce any restrictions on the kinds of reasons citizens use in political deliberation, nor on their aims and motivations when using their political voice. However, he introduces some other moral rules: citizens "ought to exercise their political voice as a *moral engagement* and in an *epistemologically responsible* manner."<sup>137</sup> I believe that one can understand these two requirements as capturing the two restraints of manner and justice, introduced in Wolterstorff's earlier account, namely, the consocial position. The constitution restraint is also maintained in Wolterstorff's equal political voice account as it assumes "constitutional liberal democracy."<sup>138</sup> More specifically, citizens' equal right to political voice is

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<sup>135</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Understanding Liberal Democracy: Essays in Political Philosophy*, ed. Terence Cuneo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 114. It is worth noting that although Wolterstorff introduces his consocial position in 1997 in *Religion in the Public Square*, in his 2013 paper he strangely claims that he has not developed a positive account of liberal democracy at that time. He says: "In the writings available to Anderson [which refers to *Religion in the Public Square*], I have argued in detail against the positions of a number of public reason liberals but have given no more than hints as to my own positive position." Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Reply to Kevin Carnahan and Erik A.

Anderson," *Philosophia* 41, no. 2 (2013): 431-432.

<sup>136</sup> Wolterstorff, "Reply to Kevin Carnahan and Erik A. Anderson," 432; Wolterstorff, *Understanding Liberal Democracy*, 128.

<sup>137</sup> Wolterstorff, "Reply to Kevin Carnahan and Erik A. Anderson," 433; Wolterstorff, *Understanding Liberal Democracy*, 128.

<sup>138</sup> Wolterstorff, "Reply to Kevin Carnahan and Erik A. Anderson," 432.

limited by a constitution that protects citizens against the violation of their rights to equal political voice and also against “being wronged”<sup>139</sup> by either government or other citizens.<sup>140</sup>

To explain the two requirements, firstly, citizens exercise their right to political voice as a moral engagement when they advocate or vote for a candidate or a policy in a way that serves the common good and does not result in injustice. This includes adopting a manner free from insulting other citizens and treating them unjustly. This first requirement includes the manner and the justice restraints. Secondly, citizens exercise their right to political voice in an epistemologically responsible manner when they have checked their beliefs and judgments and thus are entitled to them. More specifically, to be entitled to one’s views, one should listen with an open mind to “well-considered objections and well-considered alternatives to one’s own views that are not morally corrupt.”<sup>141</sup> Wolterstorff points out that such listening happens in a context where citizens hold a *plurality* of comprehensive doctrines on which they ground their reasons in support of or in opposition to a policy. This second requirement includes the manner restraint.

To better explain his account of liberalism, Wolterstorff provides the following example. Imagine a professor who wants to let his students determine the rules of their class by ensuring that students have equal voice. The first step is for the students to share their preferred rules and support them with whatever reasons they wish. In Wolterstorff’s words, “everybody has the right to be free to state to their fellow classmates the rules and arrangements they prefer and their

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<sup>139</sup> Wolterstorff, *Understanding Liberal Democracy*, 135.

<sup>140</sup> Wolterstorff, *Understanding Liberal Democracy*, 133.

<sup>141</sup> Wolterstorff, “Reply to Kevin Carnahan and Erik A. Anderson,” 434. Wolterstorff relates his concept of entitlement to Rawls’s concept of reasonableness: “I acknowledge that Rawls’s *reasonableness* is not identical with my *entitlement*. But in the course of his discussion it becomes clear, so I judge, that if ‘reasonable’ ... is interpreted as *entitled*, Rawls would happily affirm that too.” Wolterstorff, “Role of Religion,” 91.

reasons for preferring them, *whatever those reasons be.*<sup>142</sup> This reason-giving should be “without anyone in any way bullying other members of the class, and . . . everybody is also encouraged to listen with open mind to whatever reasons other members of the class offer for or against some proposed rule.”<sup>143</sup> In the second step, since one cannot hope to reach consensus, the proposed rules are put to a vote, with everyone having an equal right to vote. Even if some students do not agree with this method, and rather prefer their professor to set the class rules, they still have the right to engage in the discussion and vote. The professor has to provide the students, in advance, with a short list of unacceptable ways of treating each other—such as bullying, intimidating, demeaning, and so forth. So, he has the right to “declare out of order”<sup>144</sup> or “declare null and void”<sup>145</sup> any rule that is in conflict with that list, or any rule or arrangement that would “seriously wrong members of the class,”<sup>146</sup> but with no intention of policing the process. Moreover, the professor urges students to see the process as a moral engagement, which means that they should choose the rules that are “best for the class as a whole” and “treat everybody justly.”<sup>147</sup> In order to also be epistemically entitled to their views, students should listen with open mind to the “significant objections”<sup>148</sup> raised about them by their fellow classmates.

Wolterstorff is giving the classroom example as an analogy that illustrates the role of citizens, the constitution, and government in his account of liberal democracy. If we put this example in the liberal context, it seems that citizens have the equal right to express whatever reason they have to support their preferred law, but they also have the moral duty to listen to

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<sup>142</sup> Wolterstorff, *Understanding Liberal Democracy*, 89, 126 (emphasis added).

<sup>143</sup> Wolterstorff, *Understanding Liberal Democracy*, 89.

<sup>144</sup> Wolterstorff, *Understanding Liberal Democracy*, 89.

<sup>145</sup> Wolterstorff, *Understanding Liberal Democracy*, 127.

<sup>146</sup> Wolterstorff, *Understanding Liberal Democracy*, 126.

<sup>147</sup> Wolterstorff, *Understanding Liberal Democracy*, 127.

<sup>148</sup> Wolterstorff, *Understanding Liberal Democracy*, 127.

others open-mindedly as well as to avoid unjust laws and mistreating or wronging others. The constitution seems to be a short list that is introduced by the government in advance of citizens' political deliberation and decision making (voting). As a result, the constitution has the power to exclude the laws that are passed by citizens' vote, if those laws wrong some citizens or are unjust toward them. As Wolterstorff states, "the equal right to full political voice ... [should] be exercised within constitutional limits on the powers of government and within legal limits on the infringement by citizens on the right of their fellow citizens to freely exercise their full political voice."<sup>149</sup> In this picture, although the government should not police the process of citizen's political deliberation and voting, it apparently has the duty to call "out of order" those passed laws that wrong some citizens seriously or are not within the limits of the constitution.

According to Wolterstorff, his equal voice account of liberal democracy is superior to Rawlsian public reason liberalism because it offers no restriction on the kinds of reasons citizens would use "other than that nobody is to bully anybody"<sup>150</sup> and thus everybody is *really* respected as free and equal. In other words, he claims that there is no need for the public reason imperative in his account of liberal democracy because "everybody's having the right to equal voice in the determination of the laws is sufficient to satisfy the commitment of liberal democracy to all citizens being respected as free and equal in setting the rules."<sup>151</sup> However, I will argue in this thesis that, in light of Wolterstorff's later arguments in his 2013 paper, "Reply to Kevin Carnahan and Erik A. Anderson," his account of liberal democracy in fact does not support what he claims to be a no-restraint position on religious reasons. But first I should lay out his main criticisms to Rawlsian public reason liberalism, which I will do in the following section. Doing

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<sup>149</sup> Wolterstorff, *Understanding Liberal Democracy*, 125.

<sup>150</sup> Wolterstorff, *Understanding Liberal Democracy*, 89.

<sup>151</sup> Wolterstorff, *Understanding Liberal Democracy*, 91.

this will help show in more detail how Wolterstorff contradicts himself, and show other problems with his arguments.

### 3.2: Wolterstorff's criticisms of Rawls's position

Wolterstorff's main criticisms of Rawls address "the thesis that the role of citizen in a liberal democracy includes a *restraint on the use of reasons*, derived from one's religion, for one's decisions and discussions on political issues, and a requirement that citizens instead use an *independent source*."<sup>152</sup> In this section, I will explain these criticisms in detail.

As a philosopher who supports what he calls the Idea of liberal democracy,<sup>153</sup> Wolterstorff argues that public reason liberalism in all its versions, including Rawls's political liberalism, is not compatible with the Idea of liberal democracy.<sup>154</sup> He claims that assigning the Rawlsian duty of civility to religious citizens, requiring that they use public reason and refrain from using reasons grounded in their comprehensive doctrines in public political discussions, is in conflict with the components of the Idea of liberal democracy, specifically with the ideas of equality and of living one's life as one sees fit. Wolterstorff acknowledges that the duty of civility is a moral (not a legal) duty; however, he believes that it still can have the social power to impose the nonliberal restraint of avoiding religious reasons in political deliberations.<sup>155</sup> Even when briefly considering Rawls's *wide view* of public reason<sup>156</sup>—introduced in Rawls's later work in 1997, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited", to revise his inclusive view—Wolterstorff does not seem to be convinced that it offers a less restrictive account of public reason liberalism. According to the wide view of public political culture, citizens and even legislators are always

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<sup>152</sup> Wolterstorff, *Understanding Liberal Democracy*, 81 (emphasis added).

<sup>153</sup> Wolterstorff, "Role of Religion," 81.

<sup>154</sup> Wolterstorff, "Role of Religion," 77, 94.

<sup>155</sup> Wolterstorff, "Role of Religion," p. 79.

<sup>156</sup> Wolterstorff, *Understanding Liberal Democracy*, 86.

allowed to give religious or other nonpublic reasons based on their reasonable comprehensive doctrines, with the proviso that they substitute these reasons with appropriate public reasons “in due course.”<sup>157</sup> In fact, Wolterstorff believes that there is no need for “the public reason imperative”<sup>158</sup> at all. It is giving citizens an equal voice, like in the classroom example, that results in treating them as free and equal and also setting rules that are fair to everyone.<sup>159</sup> Therefore, for him, the revised duty of civility in the wide view is still not compatible with the Idea of liberal democracy. According to Wolterstorff, aside from the three restraints on public deliberation that he offers in his consocial position (namely, the manner restraint, the constitution restraint, and the justice restraint), citizens should be able to “use whatever reasons they find appropriate” because there is “no reason to suppose that the ethic of the citizen in a liberal democracy includes a restraint on the use of religious reasons in deciding and discussing political issues.”<sup>160</sup> In other words, liberal democracy does not require any restrictions on reasons citizens have in supporting a law or policy.

Rawls’s public reason restraint is based on the idea that all reasonable citizens can agree on a set of freestanding principles of justice leading to a reasonable political conception of justice (like justice as fairness). According to Rawls, these principles can be derived from the ideas implicit in the shared public political culture of a democratic society. However, Wolterstorff believes that “such a basis is not necessary” because there exists liberal constitutional democratic societies thriving without such a shared basis.<sup>161</sup> In such societies, citizens engage in political deliberation to reach an agreement on policies and laws rather than

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<sup>157</sup> Rawls, “Public Reason Revisited,” 783-784.

<sup>158</sup> Wolterstorff, *Understanding Liberal Democracy*, 91.

<sup>159</sup> Wolterstorff, *Understanding Liberal Democracy*, 91.

<sup>160</sup> Wolterstorff, *Understanding Liberal Democracy*, 111-112.

<sup>161</sup> Wolterstorff, *Understanding Liberal Democracy*, 114.

start such deliberation with a pre-established agreement on some set of principles.<sup>162</sup> Accepting Rawls's burdens of judgment,<sup>163</sup> Wolterstorff believes that we should not expect all reasonable citizens to agree on a shared political basis, in the same way that we should not expect them to endorse the same comprehensive doctrine. In his own words, "there is no more hope that reasonable and rational citizens will come to agreement, in the way Rawls recommends, on principles of justice, than that they will come to agreement, in the foreseeable future, on some comprehensive philosophical or religious doctrine."<sup>164</sup> In other words, living in a pluralistic society, we should know that we cannot hope to arrive at a "set of agreed-on principles."<sup>165</sup> Trying to achieve such a shared and independent basis is "hopeless and misguided"; thus Wolterstorff suggests that instead, "we must learn to live with a politics of multiple communities."<sup>166</sup> In other words, when we want to support a law we should be able to use reasons that are grounded in the religious or nonreligious comprehensive views that we believe in.

Wolterstorff argues that Rawls's hope to derive freestanding political principles, which should be according to the Idea of liberal democracy and shared by all citizens, from the shared public political culture, is misguided. Therefore, requiring citizens to use independent principles of justice as the source of their reasons on political matters, rather than allowing them to use their own religious comprehensive doctrines as the source of these reasons, is too idealistic.

Wolterstorff maintains that the shared political culture does not exist in real democratic societies as Rawls suggests, and even if it exists, it is not necessarily the same as "*the Idea of liberal*

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<sup>162</sup> Wolterstorff, *Understanding Liberal Democracy*, 114.

<sup>163</sup> Wolterstorff, *Understanding Liberal Democracy*, 42.

<sup>164</sup> Wolterstorff, *Understanding Liberal Democracy*, 99.

<sup>165</sup> Wolterstorff, *Understanding Liberal Democracy*, 114.

<sup>166</sup> Wolterstorff, *Understanding Liberal Democracy*, 109.

*democracy.*”<sup>167</sup> In fact, many citizens of a liberal democratic society support positions that are in conflict with the Idea of liberal democracy itself.

Here, it is worth noting that Wolterstorff seems to have an inaccurate understanding of what Rawls means by the shared public political culture of a democratic society. As mentioned in the second chapter, according to Rawls, the public political culture “comprises the political institutions of a constitutional regime and the public traditions of their interpretation (including those of the judiciary), as well as historic texts and documents that are common knowledge.”<sup>168</sup> However, Rawls also refers to the public political culture “as the shared fund of implicitly recognized basic ideas and principles” that citizens can use to formulate the freestanding political conceptions of justice.<sup>169</sup> It seems that Wolterstorff’s understanding of the shared political culture is only based on the latter quote. But this incomplete understanding, if not an outright misunderstanding, of Rawls’s technical use of the public political culture, can be the result of the confusing terminology Rawls uses. As Charles Larmore points out, Rawls’s use of the term “public political culture,” with the specific meaning that he has in mind, can be misleading (even for Rawls himself) because it does not completely match with what the term itself suggests.<sup>170</sup> With the disparity between Wolterstorff’s understanding of “public political culture” and that of Rawls, I continue explaining Wolterstorff’s criticism of this concept.

Wolterstorff tries to show that there is no shared political culture compatible with the Idea of liberal democracy in real liberal democratic societies; consequently, there is no shared

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<sup>167</sup> Wolterstorff, “Role of Religion,” 97. On the same page, Wolterstorff says: “Rawls assumes that the *shared political culture* of certain extant societies is what I have been calling *the Idea of liberal democracy*. I see no reason whatsoever to suppose that that assumption is true.”

<sup>168</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 14.

<sup>169</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 8.

<sup>170</sup> Charles Larmore, “Public Reason,” in *Cambridge Companion to Rawls*, ed. Samuel Freeman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 384.

independent source<sup>171</sup>—which seems to be Wolterstorff’s terminology for freestanding principles or political conceptions of justice—compatible with the Idea of liberal democracy. He gives the example of the current disputes in the United States (which is a liberal democratic country) over the issues like “the rights of practicing homosexuals” and “the legitimacy of prayers in public schools.”<sup>172</sup> He points out that despite the conflicts within the political culture of the United States, and despite the fact that many Americans hold nonliberal views, the position implicit in Ideal of liberal democracy on these issues is quite clear: “homosexuals should enjoy equal freedom under law to live their lives as they see fit, and state sponsored schools should not include prayers as an official part of the school program.”<sup>173</sup> Thus, the divergence between the shared political culture, within which many citizens hold nonliberal ideas, and the Idea of liberal democracy, makes it impossible to extract “from that political culture, principles of justice that are both *shared* and *appropriate to a liberal democracy*.”<sup>174</sup> Wolterstorff points out that even Rawls himself sees his idea of public reason as an ideal, which means that in real life we are not able to find an independent source to base our reasons and political decisions on.<sup>175</sup>

Although Wolterstorff is against “the *religious-reason restraint*,”<sup>176</sup> he concedes that in certain kinds of societies, like seventeenth-century England, where people cared a lot about religion and had passion about it, it would be plausible to impose a moral restraint on using religious reasons in political deliberation. He believes this restraint to be valid because, in such societies, social peace “depend[s] on getting citizens to stop invoking God, canonical scriptures,

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<sup>171</sup> Wolterstorff, “Role of Religion,” 100.

<sup>172</sup> Wolterstorff, “Role of Religion,” 97. Wolterstorff claims that, “on many issues a good many Americans are firmly opposed to the Idea of liberal democracy. The Idea of liberal democracy does not capture their ‘considered convictions.’” *Id.* at 98.

<sup>173</sup> Wolterstorff, “Role of Religion,” 97.

<sup>174</sup> Wolterstorff, “Role of Religion,” 97.

<sup>175</sup> Wolterstorff, “Role of Religion,” 101.

<sup>176</sup> Wolterstorff, “Role of Religion,” 75.

and religious authorities when discussing politics in public.”<sup>177</sup> Nevertheless, he does not see it to be the case for our century in Western societies, where religious tolerance is in the First Amendment of the United States constitution for example. Wolterstorff believes that in our current century we should rather be more wary of the secular causes people care deeply about. In fact, he argues that “pretty much anything that human beings care deeply about can be a menace to freedom—including, ironically, caring deeply about freedom.”<sup>178</sup> If we look at recent history, for instance, secular ideas like “nationalisms of many sorts, communism, fascism, patriotisms of various kinds, economic hegemony” are responsible for human suffering.<sup>179</sup> On the other hand, religion has been the cause of many positive social movements, like the abolitionist and the civil rights movements, in establishing liberal democracy.

As mentioned in chapter two, Rawls not only recognizes the positive role of religious reasons in fulfilling the “Idea of liberal democracy,” he explicitly supports the use of such reasons in his inclusive view—according to which citizens should be able to give nonpublic reasons in their deliberations about fundamental political questions provided that political justice or the ideal of public reason is honoured. However, in his exclusive view—which only applies to the ideal well-ordered society with a firm overlapping consensus in which only public reason is accepted in political discussions on fundamental political issues—he excludes both religious and nonreligious philosophical views as comprehensive doctrines in favour of political conceptions of justice as the proper source of reason giving in public political debates. Wolterstorff sees Rawls’s even-handedness in considering both religious and secular comprehensive doctrines as

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<sup>177</sup> Wolterstorff, “Role of Religion,” 79.

<sup>178</sup> Wolterstorff, *Understanding Liberal Democracy*, 46.

<sup>179</sup> Wolterstorff, “Role of Religion,” 80.

greatly meritorious;<sup>180</sup> but he still asks, “What difference does it make what reasons citizens use in making their decisions and conducting their debates, if the positions they advocate do not violate the Idea of liberal democracy?”<sup>181</sup> Wolterstorff understands the religious-reason restraint as an “*epistemological* restraint,”<sup>182</sup> which is in conflict with the “Idea of liberal democracy.” What matters in a liberal democracy, according to him, is not the reasons citizens offer, but the compatibility between the law supported by citizens and the core ideas of liberal democracy.

### **3.3: Responses to Wolterstorff’s positive project and his criticisms of Rawls**

In the previous section, I explained in detail Wolterstorff’s criticisms against the religious-reason restraint and the idea of an independent source. In this section, I will provide four main responses both to these criticisms and Wolterstorff’s positive account of liberal democracy, building on the work of Erik Anderson, Robert Audi, and William M. Curtis.

#### **a) Public reason is independent of both religious and secular reasons**

Although Wolterstorff acknowledges and admires Rawls’s even-handedness toward religious and secular comprehensive doctrines, he suspects that public reason liberalism is the result of “[f]ear of, or dislike for, religious reasons.”<sup>183</sup> He believes that there should not be such a fear because anything that we passionately care about can work against our freedom, and so there is nothing specifically threatening about religion itself. But looking back at history, and even the contemporary context, where religion still oppresses its opponents, especially in theocratic governments, fear of religion seems plausible. Erik Anderson argues that we should not ignore “religion’s dark side,” which means the dogmatism, arrogance, and self-righteousness

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<sup>180</sup> “One of the great merits of Rawls’s discussion is that, under ‘comprehensive doctrines,’ he includes not only religions but comprehensive philosophies.” Wolterstorff, “Role of Religion,” 90.

<sup>181</sup> Wolterstorff, “Role of Religion,” 77.

<sup>182</sup> Wolterstorff, “Role of Religion,” 77.

<sup>183</sup> Wolterstorff, *Understanding Liberal Democracy*, 76.

that usually can be seen in religious people's holding and defending social and political views—which are mostly illiberal—based on what they take to be the absolute truth.<sup>184</sup>

Wolterstorff himself seems to empathize with this dark aspect of religion when he mentions that in seventeenth-century England, for the sake of social peace, citizens had to stop using reasons that appeal to their religions. But he continues to say that, in the current century, secular ideas are more threatening because people have more passion for them.<sup>185</sup> Robert Audi challenges this latter claim. He agrees with Wolterstorff that secular reasons can awaken great passion like religious reasons; however, he argues that the latter can still be more threatening because of its other aspects like assuming an “infallible authority” which many religious citizens are willing to uncritically and non-autonomously obey and follow.<sup>186</sup>

However, Wolterstorff's worry of excluding only religious reasons as nonpublic reasons does not address Rawls's theory. Unlike Audi, for Rawls, both religious and secular reasons and beliefs are on the same footing as belonging to comprehensive doctrines that cannot bring social peace. As Rawls puts it, “secular philosophical doctrines do not provide public reasons” because they “belong to first philosophy and moral doctrine, and fall outside of the domain of the political.”<sup>187</sup> Considering Rawls's even-handedness in excluding both religious and secular comprehensive views from the political domain, if we want to have legitimate binding laws that can be justified to all reasonable citizens in a pluralistic society, why not listen to Rawls and substitute public reason for both religious and secular reasons when making binding political decisions? Wolterstorff answers that it is hopeless and misguided to look for an independent

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<sup>184</sup> Erik A. Anderson, “Religiously Conservative Citizens and the Ideal of Conscientious Engagement: A Comment on Wolterstorff and Eberle,” *Philosophia* 41, no. 2 (2013): 412.

<sup>185</sup> Wolterstorff, “Role of Religion,” 79-80.

<sup>186</sup> Robert Audi, “Wolterstorff on Religion, Politics, and the Liberal State,” in Robert Audi and Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Religion in the public square: The place of religious convictions in political debate*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1977), 126.

<sup>187</sup> Rawls, “Public Reason Revisited,” 780.

source that people can appeal to when giving reasons in support of a policy. In other words, looking for public reasons which are generally understandable and acceptable to all reasonable people is hopeless and misguided. This idea leads to my second response to Wolterstorff, arguing that the shared “independent source” on which political decisions can be made is possible.

**b) Looking for shared freestanding political principles is not hopeless and misguided**

Wolterstorff criticizes Rawls’s political liberalism for expecting citizens with diverse standpoints to be “united on the principles they employ[ ] for deliberating and deciding on” laws and policies while what real liberal democratic societies, like the United States, are concerned with is “*convergence on a particular policy from ideologically diverse standpoints.*”<sup>188</sup> In other words, what citizens—or the majority of them—need is to reach agreement on a policy or a law, rather than on some shared political basis independent of all religions (or an independent source in Wolterstorffian terminology), in advance. Looking for such shared political principles is unrealistic and hopeless because “we cannot leap out of our perspectives. And even if we could, there is nothing firm that we could leap on to: no adequate independent source.”<sup>189</sup>

But Wolterstorff’s special articulation of Rawls’s freestanding shared political basis—namely, political conceptions of justice—as an *independent source* seems to be inaccurate. This articulation can lead to incorrectly assuming that there is no commonality between that shared political basis, on the one hand, and citizens’ religious and philosophical comprehensive doctrines, on the other. But, as noted in the second chapter, Rawls argues that we can expect to have a long-term stable liberal democracy for the right reasons only if our freestanding political

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<sup>188</sup> Wolterstorff, *Understanding Liberal Democracy*, 172. He continues, “the more diverse we become in our religious and philosophical orientations, however, the more difficult it becomes to secure such convergences; that’s what endangers our endurance.” *Id.* at 173. One could understand from this that despite our differences, we need to have some shared values to be able to converge on a policy. If this understanding is correct, Rawls could be right to expect some shared principles in advance of converging on a policy.

<sup>189</sup> Wolterstorff, “Role of Religion,” 113.

conceptions of justice can be supported by an overlapping consensus of all reasonable comprehensive doctrines, where being reasonable means not looking for an opportunity to gain the power to impose itself on citizens. In Rawls's words, "political liberalism looks for a political conception of justice that we hope can gain the support of an overlapping consensus of reasonable religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines in a society regulated by it."<sup>190</sup> If there is such an overlapping consensus, citizens with different reasonable comprehensive views can support the same political conceptions of justice (and thus support public reason which is formulated by such conceptions) with their nonpublic reasons.

Having an overlapping consensus on political principles seems to be unrealistic or unreliable for Wolterstorff. Although it is true that a firm overlapping consensus might never leave its idealistic status, I would like to suggest that citizens of a liberal democracy, like the United States or Canada, in fact share some political basis that is also supported by nonpublic reasons. Religious tolerance, equality of human beings, and rejecting slavery can be some examples of a shared political basis, which can also be supported by Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and other reasonable comprehensive doctrines. As Audi also argues, although there is always disagreement on details, citizens in liberal democracies have consensus on matters like equal rights to freedom of religion and freedom of speech.<sup>191</sup> He also adds that even Wolterstorff himself seems to have a political conception in mind that is independent of any religion: his third condition, namely, the justice restraint according to which *political justice* should be the goal of our political debates. Wolterstorff does not define political justice based on a certain religion; instead, he presents it as if it is understood and accepted by everyone, regardless of their worldviews. If justice can be a shared goal for all citizens, Audi continues, then one can

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<sup>190</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 10.

<sup>191</sup> Audi, "Wolterstorff on Religion," 132.

understand Wolterstorff as “implying that at least our main reasons for sociopolitical decisions (particularly concerning the legal structure of society) should be ... presumably in some sense public.”<sup>192</sup> Therefore, it would not be unrealistic to assume some shared political principles, which are not dependent on religions (or secular comprehensive doctrines), between citizens of a liberal democracy.

Furthermore, Wolterstorff also assumes other shared principles, which are independent of religions, when he introduces the moral engagement requirement in his equal political voice account. He assumes that citizens should, among other things, treat each other justly, consider the common good, listen to each other with an open mind, accept the voting method, and not violate the constitution in their political debates, before casting their votes. Expecting citizens to hold these shared principles runs counter to his criticism of Rawls’s “model of *shared general principles*.”<sup>193</sup> Since Wolterstorff is assuming pre-established agreement on moral premises himself while criticizing Rawls, one can argue that he is contradicting himself and thus his argument is not satisfying. For example, William Curtis defines Wolterstorff’s criticism of public reason liberalism as “simplistic” and “unsatisfying” because he is “implausibly assuming that there is unproblematic agreement on the framework of ‘the rights and liberties’ in which voting takes place.”<sup>194</sup> This assumed “unproblematic agreement” can clearly be seen in Wolterstorff’s classroom example. All students are expected to accept the moral engagement requirement, the short list that the professor provides in advance to voting, and the authority of the professor to be able to declare a rule students have voted for as out of order. These assumed shared principles are apparently independent of religion and other comprehensive doctrines. Therefore, to argue

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<sup>192</sup> Audi, “Wolterstorff on Religion,” 140.

<sup>193</sup> Wolterstorff, *Understanding Liberal Democracy*, 172.

<sup>194</sup> William M. Curtis, *Defending Rorty: Pragmatism and Liberal Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 226.

that Rawls's shared political basis for public reason is hopeless and misguided only by virtue of it being independent of religion (and other comprehensive doctrines) is in conflict with Wolterstorff's own assumptions in his consocial account and equal political voice account.

**c) The duty of civility applies differently to government officials and citizens**

Charles Larmore makes a very useful distinction between what he calls “*open discussion*” and “*decision making*.” He defines these two different forms of political deliberation, respectively, as situations “where people argue with one another in the light of the whole truth as they see it” and “where they deliberate as participants in some organ of government about which option should be made legally binding.”<sup>195</sup> When philosophers fail to draw such a distinction, they usually misunderstand Rawls as placing the public reason restraint (or the duty of civility) on all citizens with the *same rigour*, whenever they participate in public political deliberation. But I think Rawls draws a distinction quite similar to Larmore's distinction when he distinguishes between “the background culture,” on the one hand, and “the public political culture of democratic society” or “the public political forum,” on the other. Rawls has been clear enough on this distinction, at least when, in “The Idea of Public Reason Revisited,” he points out that “the idea of public reason does not apply to all political discussions of fundamental questions, but only to discussions of those questions in what I [Rawls] refer to as *the public political forum*,”<sup>196</sup> and that “[t]he idea of public reason does not apply to *the background culture* with its many forms of nonpublic reason.”<sup>197</sup> For Rawls, the public political forum consists of judges, government officials, and candidates for public office, while the background culture is

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<sup>195</sup> Larmore, “Public Reason,” 382.

<sup>196</sup> Rawls, “Public Reason Revisited,” 767 (emphasis added).

<sup>197</sup> Rawls, “Public Reason Revisited,” 768 (emphasis added). Rawls also explicitly mentions the phrase “open discussion” to point out that the restraint on reasons only applies to public political debates on fundamental political issues. He says, “Sometimes those who appear to reject the idea of public reason actually mean to assert the need for *full and open discussion* in the background culture. With this political liberalism fully agrees.” *Id.* at 768 (emphasis added).

“the culture of civil society... not, of course, guided by any one central idea or principle, whether political or religious.”<sup>198</sup> The duty of civility for the first group is to explain by using public reason to citizens why they are supporting a certain law. However, in the case of the background culture, although the idea of public reason does not apply to it,<sup>199</sup> the ideal duty of civility for citizens who belong to this group is to imagine how they would use public reason to support a law *if* they belonged to the first group—and by doing this, hold the officials and legislators accountable.<sup>200</sup> Thus, the duty of civility only applies to the first group, or in its ideal form, applies to the first group “more strictly.”<sup>201</sup>

Unlike Rawls, Wolterstorff fails to make a distinction, either explicitly or implicitly, between open discussion and decision making in his positive account of liberal democracy. In his classroom example, he apparently tries to draw an analogy between professor/students and government/citizens to show that Rawls’s idea of public reason is unnecessary (if not in conflict with the Idea of liberal democracy). Wolterstorff argues that in a democratic system, students (who seem to represent citizens) should have equal voice and thus be able to offer whatever reason they have in support of a rule. This situation looks similar to Larmore’s open discussion definition. Wolterstorff sees Rawls’s idea of public reason against his equal voice view because, based on his understanding of the idea of public reason, certain reasons, and as a result a number of students, are excluded from participating in deliberation. But, based on Rawls’s view, although citizens (who belong to the background culture) ideally have a moral duty of civility to be able to explain to others why they support a certain rule *as if* they were legislators, they are

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<sup>198</sup> Rawls, “Public Reason Revisited,” 768.

<sup>199</sup> Rawls, “Public Reason Revisited,” 767, 768.

<sup>200</sup> “[I]deally citizens are to think of themselves *as if* they were legislators and ask themselves what statutes, supported by what reasons satisfying the criterion of reciprocity, they would think it most reasonable to enact... citizens fulfill their duty of civility and support the idea of public reason by doing what they can to hold government officials to it.” Rawls, “Public Reason Revisited,” 769.

<sup>201</sup> Rawls, “Public Reason Revisited,” 768.

not disallowed from offering their nonpublic reasons in public political deliberations; in fact, they can argue in support of or against a law “in the light of the whole truth as they see it.”<sup>202</sup> It is the legislators (who belong to the public political forum) who have the more strict duty of using public reason when they are deciding on a binding law. What these people have to do looks similar to Larmore’s definition of decision making. However, in Wolterstorff’s example, the professor and his “short list” cannot be good analogies for the government (the public political forum) and the constitution in a liberal democracy.

The classroom example is a faulty analogy because in democratic societies the government is not led, and the constitution is not established, only by one person (the professor) who is not a representative elected by voting. Moreover, students can in fact represent both the government legislators (who belong to Rawls’s public political forum) and citizens (who belong to Rawls’s background culture). Wolterstorff’s lack of distinction between open discussion and decision making has led him to misunderstand the degree to which the idea of public reason applies to government officials and ordinary citizens. Therefore, his criticisms of Rawls’s public reason and the duty of civility are at best imprecise, if not irrelevant.

**d) Wolterstorff’s “no religious-reason restraint” position restrains religious reasons**

In his classroom example, in which the professor tries to set the rules of his class democratically, Wolterstorff argues against the Rawlsian restraint on religious reasons in political deliberation. However, in his response to an example offered by Erik Anderson, Wolterstorff seems to have a different opinion; he approves of banning at least some religious reasons used by ordinary religious citizens when they want to vote in support of a law or policy.

Anderson’s example is as follows: he asks us to imagine a faithful Christian citizen called Frank, who cares about politics and supports a law to prohibit the ritual of sacrificing animals

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<sup>202</sup> Larmore, “Public Reason,” 382.

practiced by the followers of Santería. Frank's reasoning is based on his most cherished religious belief according to which sacrificing animals is a sin to God. Anderson argues that "[t]his would be a clear case of one citizen proposing a law that would violate the religious freedom of others."<sup>203</sup> Now imagine another citizen who supports a law that prohibits this ritual based on the fact-checked and accepted reason that killing animals threatens public health and wellbeing. Although both reasons can result in the same law of banning the animal-killing ritual, according to Anderson, only the latter reason "would arguably be a legitimate exercise of state power, one that a citizen could reasonably advocate."<sup>204</sup>

With this example, Anderson tries to show two things. The first one is that the legitimacy of a proposed law is not independent from a reason that supports it. The law of banning the ritual would be the result of "a legitimate exercise of state power" if it is supported by the public health reason, but not so if it is supported by Frank's religious reason. Therefore, Anderson's example argues against Wolterstorff's "no restraint on religious reasons' position"<sup>205</sup> according to which citizens should morally be allowed to support a coercive law solely based on their religious reason. Anderson believes that not all kinds of religious reasons can be acceptable as determining reasons for passing a coercive law. So he argues that Wolterstorff's arguments would have been valid had he made a distinction between acceptable and unacceptable religious reasons.<sup>206</sup> The second thing that Anderson tries to show with the Frank example is that passing a coercive law only based on our religious reason (Frank's reason) to limit the religious exercise of

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<sup>203</sup> Erik A. Anderson, "A Comment on Wolterstorff and Eberle," 418.

<sup>204</sup> Erik A. Anderson, "A Comment on Wolterstorff and Eberle," 419.

<sup>205</sup> Erik A. Anderson, "A Comment on Wolterstorff and Eberle," 411.

<sup>206</sup> Anderson himself tries to make such a distinction, but I will not go into details of it as this thesis is focused only on the Rawls-Wolterstorff debate.

another religious group (the followers of Santería), would be a violation of “the religious freedom of all citizens.”<sup>207</sup> This violation is something that Wolterstorff clearly disagrees with.

In response to Anderson, in “Reply to Kevin Carnahan and Erik A. Anderson,” according to his equal voice account of liberal democracy, Wolterstorff argues that he agrees with Anderson and thus he calls Frank’s religious reason *out of order*. This is because it is not within the framework of the constitution; in this case, the United States’ First Amendment which protects citizens’ right to freedom of religion. Wolterstorff also points out, without going further into detail, that reasons like Frank’s reason, which appeal to his religion, are not compatible with having a moral engagement—which includes considering common good rather than self-interest, not bullying others, and listening to objections open-mindedly. He says, “Frank’s support for a law banning ritual animal sacrifice on the ground that it is an abomination to God is *out of order* in a liberal democracy—not just something that would be rejected by anyone who practices his citizenship as a moral engagement, but out of order.”<sup>208</sup> It is not clear whether Wolterstorff wants to argue that all religious reasons similar to Frank’s (namely, reasons that solely appeal to God and holy books) should be rejected and considered as out of order in a liberal democracy. However, it seems to me that his argument for judging Frank’s reason as out of order is reminiscent of Rawls’s fact of reasonable pluralism and the duty of citizens to avoid using nonpublic reasons when they are participating in political decision making that will result in binding laws. This is evident from the following quote by Wolterstorff:

The assumption behind the specification of this right [to freedom of religion in the First Amendment] is that in liberal democracies citizens disagree with each other on matters of religion ... What the free exercise clause in the constitution implies is that citizens of a liberal democracy live with this reality: I affirm your civil right to the free exercise of your religion even though my religion tells me that yours is religiously objectionable. If,

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<sup>207</sup> Erik A. Anderson, “A Comment on Wolterstorff and Eberle,” 418.

<sup>208</sup> Wolterstorff, “Reply to Kevin Carnahan and Erik A. Anderson,” 434 (emphasis added).

on the contrary, I support the proposal to outlaw the practice of your religion on the ground that I find it religiously objectionable, I am asking the state to do what the free exercise clause forbids it to do.<sup>209</sup>

The above quote—which addresses the equal freedom of all citizens as well as the fact of reasonable pluralism—demonstrates the reason why Rawls had introduced the idea of public reason in the first place. So, Wolterstorff seems to say quite the same thing as Rawls. According to Rawls, we are exercising our legitimate political power when we (as legislators or as ordinary citizens who can ideally “think of themselves *as if* they were legislators”<sup>210</sup>) use public reason to explain our support for a coercive law to other citizens who follow different religious or secular doctrines. In other words, a binding law cannot be legitimate if it is not supported by public reasons, which are reasons all reasonable citizens can potentially understand and accept regardless of their religious or secular comprehensive views.

Going back to Anderson’s example, it is true that the public health reason for banning the ritual of animal sacrifice, which can be understood as a public reason, does not violate the constitution of a liberal democracy. Hence, the law that is the result of this reason is a legitimate law. Although Wolterstorff is not optimistic that such a reason can be found,<sup>211</sup> he agrees with Anderson—and I would say with Rawls—that it would be permissible (or “a legitimate exercise of state power” in Anderson’s and Rawls’s terminology) to support the law of banning the ritual animal sacrifice by using the public health reason but not by Frank’s religious reason. In other words, despite the fact that both reasons lead to the same result, that is, banning the followers of Santería from sacrificing animals, only the religious one is *out of order* in a liberal democracy. In

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<sup>209</sup> Wolterstorff, “Reply to Kevin Carnahan and Erik A. Anderson,” 435.

<sup>210</sup> Rawls, “Public Reason Revisited,” 769.

<sup>211</sup> He says, “if it turns out that, *for some strange reason*, the killing of animals endangers public health and I and others propose a law forbidding all killing of animals for that reason?” Wolterstorff, “Reply to Kevin Carnahan and Erik A. Anderson,” 435 (emphasis added).

Wolterstorff's words, "on my understanding of liberal democracy, Frank's proposal to ban the ritual sacrifice of animals because he finds it religiously objectionable is *out of order* on constitutional grounds, whereas the proposal to outlaw all killing of animals on public health grounds is not out of order."<sup>212</sup> Therefore, the only difference between the two reasons seems to be the religious nature of Frank's reason, which appeals to his God. This undermines Wolterstorff's positive account of liberal democracy where he says, "[I]et citizens use whatever reasons they find appropriate—including, then, religious reasons."<sup>213</sup>

There are three problems with Wolterstorff's argument against Frank's reason. The first problem is that in the classroom example (in Wolterstorff's positive account), it is the *rules* proposed that are out of order, never the *reasons* used to support rules. In that example, Wolterstorff argues that the professor can "declare out of order any proposed *rule* that he judges would be a serious affront to the worth or dignity of some member of the class," and that "nothing is said as to the sorts of reasons members of the class should offer each other, other than that nobody is to bully anybody."<sup>214</sup> So, it seems that Wolterstorff is offering two different, incompatible arguments in the classroom example on the one hand and Anderson's example, on the other. In Anderson's example, Wolterstorff does not call the law banning the ritual animal sacrifice out of order. Surprisingly, he calls Frank's religious reason, which supports that law, out of order. Since both Frank's reason and the public health reason support the same law, the question of why only one of them is out of order is raised. As mentioned above, Wolterstorff argues that Frank's reason "is out of order on constitutional grounds" because he regards the animal sacrificing ritual as "religiously objectionable." This quote leads to the second and third problems with Wolterstorff's calling Frank's reason out of order.

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<sup>212</sup> Wolterstorff, "Reply to Kevin Carnahan and Erik A. Anderson," 435 (emphasis added).

<sup>213</sup> Wolterstorff, "Role of Religion," 112

<sup>214</sup> Wolterstorff, *Understanding Liberal Democracy*, 89 (emphasis added).

The second problem is that Wolterstorff is not consistent in using the constitution restraint, according to which “the debates, except for extreme circumstances, are to be conducted and resolved in accord with the rules provided by the laws of the land and the provisions of the Constitution.”<sup>215</sup> It is true that he says “[c]itizens in a liberal democracy are free to exercise their political voice with whatever aims, motivations, and reasons they prefer—provided that those fall within the constitutional and legal framework.”<sup>216</sup> But, in other places, he argues in a way that implies he rejects any kind of restraint, even the constitution restraint, on reasons. For example, in the following quote, he even rejects the need for giving reasons altogether:

the governing idea of liberal democracy says nothing at all about the sorts of reasons citizens are to give each other. Citizens are free to give each other whatever sort of reasons they wish. Not only are they *free* to do so; the governing idea of liberal democracy says nothing at all as to which sorts of reasons they *ought* to give each other, nothing even as to which sorts of reasons are to be *preferred*. The governing idea of liberal democracy doesn’t even tell citizens that they have to give *some reason or other* for deciding and voting as they do.<sup>217</sup>

Based on the above quote, in a liberal democracy, it should not matter why citizens vote for a certain law. So, in Anderson’s example, it too should not matter what reason Frank uses as a citizen. He should be free to use his religious reason in voicing his support of a law. Therefore, by calling his religious reason out of order, Wolterstorff is contradicting his own understanding of the governing idea of liberal democracy.

The third problem with Wolterstorff’s argument against Frank’s reason is also related to the fact that Wolterstorff calls this reason out of order on constitutional grounds for the reason that Frank sees the animal killing ritual objectionable based solely on his religion. On the one hand, in his positive account of liberal democracy, Wolterstorff never associates the constitution

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<sup>215</sup> Wolterstorff, “Role of Religion,” 113.

<sup>216</sup> Wolterstorff, “Reply to Kevin Carnahan and Erik A. Anderson,” 433.

<sup>217</sup> Wolterstorff, *Understanding Liberal Democracy*, 145.

restraint with religious reasons. On the contrary, Wolterstorff has always defended religious reasons against exclusion in public political deliberation. He is against public reason liberalism's "restraint on religious reasons" because it "appears to be in flagrant conflict with the Idea of liberal democracy."<sup>218</sup> In fact, in his integrity objection to public reason liberalism (which will be explained in detail in the next section), Wolterstorff argues that asking religious citizens "not [to] base their decisions and discussions concerning political issues on their religion is to infringe, inequitably, on the free exercise of their religion."<sup>219</sup> On the other hand, Wolterstorff has never stated that a religious reason that appeals to God is unacceptable in liberal democracy—either on constitutional grounds or otherwise. In fact, he has never made a distinction between acceptable and unacceptable religious reasons. He considers "references to God, to Jesus Christ, to the Torah, to the Christian Bible, to the Koran"<sup>220</sup> as examples of religious reasons in general. And in his positive account of liberal democracy he argues against rejecting religious reasons (whether on a legal or a moral basis) from public political debates, as acceptable reasons in support of a law, on the basis that such rejection is against the idea of liberal democracy.

In light of these two issues, it can be inferred that asking Frank not to base his vote in support of banning the animal sacrifice ritual on his religious reason (which appeals to God), would *infringe on the free exercise of his religion*, which is against the constitution. As a result, Wolterstorff cannot call Frank's reason "out of order on the constitutional grounds" without undermining his own account of liberal democracy and his no-restraint position on religious reasons. In short, Wolterstorff is contradicting himself by declaring Frank's religious reason as out of order.

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<sup>218</sup> Wolterstorff, "Role of Religion," 77.

<sup>219</sup> Wolterstorff, "Role of Religion," 105.

<sup>220</sup> Wolterstorff, "Role of Religion," 105.

### 3.4: Wolterstorff's integrity objection and four responses to it

In the previous section I showed the ways in which Wolterstorff's position—including his positive account and criticisms of Rawls's public reason liberalism—is self-contradictory. One final issue I want to address is Wolterstorff's integrity objection (or as he calls it “the integralist objection”<sup>221</sup>), which seems to be seen by him as the final nail in public reason liberalism's (and Rawls's) coffin. This objection has attracted more attention than any other arguments of Wolterstorff against public reason liberalism and has been picked out by a few philosophers like Christopher J. Eberle, Cristina Lafont,<sup>222</sup> and Jeffrey Stout,<sup>223</sup> to argue against Rawls's idea of public reason. Therefore, it is deserving of its own section and requires a response.

The integrity objection mainly addresses what Wolterstorff sees as a violation of religious citizens' integrity and freedom. According to this view, it is not an option for religious citizens to simply put away their fundamental beliefs while participating in political deliberation and use public reason instead. Wolterstorff states, “[m]ost people who reason[ ] from their religion in making up their mind on political issues would *lack the intellectual imagination* required for reasoning to the same position from premises derived from the independent source.”<sup>224</sup> And even if they can use public reason, it would not be realistic to ask them to think in religious reasons but speak in public reasons. Moreover, expecting religious citizens to give priority to public reason over their own religious reasons, especially in cases where they contradict each other, is unrealistic. Thus, according to this view, the idea of public reason limits religious citizens' ability to apply their own cherished beliefs and values to their public lives, which results in

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<sup>221</sup> Wolterstorff, *Understanding Liberal Democracy*, p. 98.

<sup>222</sup> Cristina Lafont, “Religion and the Public Sphere: What Are the Deliberative Obligations of Democratic Citizenship?” *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 35, no. 1-2 (2009): 130.

<sup>223</sup> Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 72.

<sup>224</sup> Wolterstorff, “Role of Religion,” 78 (emphasis added).

dividing their lives into public and private realms. This places a psychological burden on religious citizens, preventing them from living integrated lives and living their lives as they see fit. As Wolterstorff famously puts it:

It belongs to the *religious convictions* of a good many religious people in our society that *they ought to base* their decisions concerning fundamental issues of justice *on* their religious convictions. They do not view it as an option whether or not to do so. It is their conviction that they ought to strive for wholeness, integrity, integration, in their lives: that they ought to allow the Word of God, the teachings of the Torah, the command and example of Jesus, or whatever, to shape their existence as a whole, including, then, their social and political existence. Their religion is not, for them, about *something other* than their social and political existence; it is *also* about their social and political existence.<sup>225</sup>

According to Wolterstorff, prohibiting religious citizens from giving reasons based on what they believe contradicts the very principle of freedom in the Idea of liberal democracy, which claims to give religious citizens the right to exercise their religions. Since it is not in any way natural for religious people to divide their lives into a private, religious part and a public, nonreligious part, the prohibition of religious reasons is tantamount to silencing them in public political deliberations. Christopher J. Eberle, another Christian philosopher, agrees with Wolterstorff and argues that religious people are required by their religions to fulfill certain obligations and duties—for example, they have to obey God—“irrespective of their feelings, desires, or thoughts *about* those obligations”;<sup>226</sup> thus, when there is a conflict between their duties as religious people and their duties as citizens, they have to favor the former over the latter at all times.

Another philosopher that should be mentioned here, who agrees with Wolterstorff’s integrity objection to Rawls’s political liberalism, is Cristina Lafont. Although she disagrees with

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<sup>225</sup> Wolterstorff, “Role of Religion,” 105.

<sup>226</sup> Christopher J. Eberle, *Religious Conviction in Liberal Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 145.

abandoning the idea of public reason, she argues against Rawls's wide view, which allows offering religious reasons with the proviso that in due course they are accompanied by suitable public reasons. She contends that since religious citizens unavoidably give priority to their religious reasons, "the political integration of religious citizens in liberal democracies" is threatened when they are asked to also offer public reason.<sup>227</sup> In other words, Rawlsian liberalism restrains religious citizens' participation—if not completely excluding them from political deliberations—or at least their *sincere* participation, in political deliberations.<sup>228</sup>

In his later works, Wolterstorff recognizes that religion can play different roles in different religious people's lives. For one group, which does not practice their religion regularly, religion is just a set of beliefs while for another group it shapes every aspect of their lives. The majority of religious people are somewhere on a spectrum between these two groups. Wolterstorff makes these distinctions to modify his view and clarify that the integrity objection is only about the second group of religious people; the religious integralists. He says, "a good deal of what I have said about the use of religious reasons in public political discourse makes sense only if I am understood as having in mind especially those for whom their religion is a form of life."<sup>229</sup> He gives the example of two reasonable religious citizens, the barthian and the eberlian—the second of which is obviously borrowed from Eberle—who see their religion as a way of life they are committed to live. Although both of them see "citizens as free and equal" and "society as a fair system of cooperation,"<sup>230</sup> their religious commitments always override all other commitments.

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<sup>227</sup> Lafont, "Religion and the Public Sphere," 131.

<sup>228</sup> In this work, I will not go into more details of Eberle and Lafont's ideas because they have developed their own positive accounts, which is not possible to explore in addition to Wolterstorff's account in this limited space.

<sup>229</sup> Wolterstorff, "Reply to Kevin Carnahan and Erik A. Anderson," 430.

<sup>230</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 15.

Both the barthian and the eberlian are entitled to their convictions because they have the habit of openly listening to objections, but they have not been convinced to change their convictions so far. The difference between them is that the barthian sees himself obligated to use *only* religious reasons when dealing with political issues, whereas the eberlian sees himself as being allowed to *also* use public reason. In other words, for the barthian “a component in his comprehensive religious doctrine is that he use the resources of his comprehensive doctrine *and only those resources* in deliberating, debating, and voting on some political issues,”<sup>231</sup> whereas the eberlian “does not think he is being unfaithful in *also* thinking about political issues using the resources of public reason.”<sup>232</sup> The eberlian’s two resources do not always match; sometimes he cannot find a parallel public reason that can support the same policy. In these cases, he always gives priority to his religious conviction because he has the duty to be faithful to his religion. Wolterstorff’s example of such a conflicting case between resources is when the eberlian “is obligated to God to be a pacifist, to defend the pacifist position, and to vote for the pacifist option whenever the occasion arises.”<sup>233</sup> All public reason—derived from political conceptions of justice—he can find are not in favour of pacifism, but he fulfills his duty to God and keeps defending pacifism.

The barthian and the eberlian, according to Wolterstorff’s interpretation of public reason liberalism, are not to blame for disregarding public reason or favouring religious reason over public reason, respectively. This is because, according to his understanding of public reason liberalism, Wolterstorff claims that “the public reason imperative” is only “a *prima facie* obligation” that can be outweighed by “other *prima facie* obligations” incompatible with it.<sup>234</sup> In

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<sup>231</sup> Wolterstorff, *Understanding Liberal Democracy*, 99.

<sup>232</sup> Wolterstorff, *Understanding Liberal Democracy*, 102.

<sup>233</sup> Wolterstorff, *Understanding Liberal Democracy*, 102.

<sup>234</sup> Wolterstorff, *Understanding Liberal Democracy*, 101.

other words, the religious integralists are always allowed to give priority to their religious obligations over the public reason imperative. Therefore, Wolterstorff tries to show that the existence of the religious integralists—like the barthian and the eberlian—do not allow public reason liberalism to define the ethic of the citizen in a liberal democracy as any of the following: (1) one should not use religious reasons in support of a political position; (2) one can only do so when one *also* agrees to use public reason; (3) one can only do so when one *also* agrees to use public reason *and* can find a proper such public reason.<sup>235</sup>

Having explained the integrity objection, I have four responses to it. I start with analyzing whether the three points above actually address Rawls's idea of public reason.

**a) The existence of religious integralists can only question Rawls's exclusive view**

The three points above might seem similar to Rawls's moral duty of civility. However, here I want to show that they only address the duty of civility in Rawls's ideal view, that is, the exclusive view, but not in his inclusive view or wide view of public political culture.

Wolterstorff's first point, according to which religious reasons are not allowed in political deliberation, can be related to the exclusive view. Based on this view, when society is well-ordered and has a solid overlapping consensus, citizens have the duty to use only public reason. It is worth repeating that Rawls is aware that this is an idealistic view and does not apply to real societies like the United States and Canada. The second point, according to which one can only use religious reason when one *also* agrees to use public reason, can roughly be related to the wide view of public political culture. This view allows religious citizens to give their own religious reasons at any time in political deliberations with the proviso that those reasons be substituted by public reason *in due course*. However, Wolterstorff might have misunderstood the wide view—in case he has had it in mind—because Rawls does not put a limit as to when

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<sup>235</sup> Wolterstorff, *Understanding Liberal Democracy*, 102, 103.

religious reasons should be substituted by public reason and who is obliged to carry out the substitution. For him, these are things that should be developed in practice and so cannot be specified in advance.<sup>236</sup> Therefore, the proviso can be satisfied by someone other than the religious person who uses public reason and the religious person who has offered the religious reason does not have to necessarily agree to also offer a public reason. The third point, according to which one can only use religious reason when one *also* agrees to use public reason *and* can find a proper such public reason, can only be related to the wide view, but it also assumes something that Rawls never says in the wide view: Rawls has not specified that it is the religious person himself who has to find proper public reasons. So it can be the case that someone other than the religious person, who has offered a religious reason, finds the parallel public reason and fulfills the due course proviso.

Therefore, one can see that none of the three mentioned points is capturing, or capturing precisely enough, Rawls's moral duty of civility for real liberal democracies. As a result, the presence of the religious integralists—even if they are reasonable as Wolterstorff claims—cannot discredit Rawls's duty of civility as the ethic of the citizen of a real liberal democracy.

**b) The integrity objection is against the impartiality of the state towards different comprehensive doctrines**

To respond to the integrity objection from another angle, one could start by asking whether it is realistic to expect absolute religious (or secular)<sup>237</sup> integrity in a liberal democracy, which is marked by the fact of reasonable pluralism. If we understand integrity as Wolterstorff suggests, one should always be able to give priority to one's religious obligations over other obligations. However, Wolterstorff agrees that citizens' conceptions of the good life “flagrantly

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<sup>236</sup> Rawls, “Public Reason Revisited,” 784.

<sup>237</sup> Secular in Rawls's sense, that is, as a comprehensive doctrine.

contradict each other”<sup>238</sup> in many respects and thus, in a pluralistic liberal democracy, government neutrality (impartiality) is essential. Now one could ask what could happen if the religious integralists hold or seek office in government and engage in political decision making in the “public political forum,” to use Rawls’s term. As Wolterstorff argues, these sorts of religious citizens could “lack the intellectual imagination”<sup>239</sup> to use public reason, see themselves obligated to *only* use their own religious reasons (the barthian), or always give priority to their religious reasons if they see a conflict between them and public reason (the eberlian). Since these religious integralists are reasonable, they cannot be prevented from working as officials and legislators. But can they secure the neutrality of government? It seems unlikely, because in order to be impartial they should be able to consider reasons other than their own religious reasons as unbiasedly as possible. To decide on a law or a policy that affects all citizens, they need to consider the common good<sup>240</sup> rather than their obligation to be faithful to God.<sup>241</sup> This means that if their obligation to God conflicts with the common good, they should not give priority to

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<sup>238</sup> Wolterstorff, “Role of Religion,” 72.

<sup>239</sup> Wolterstorff, “Role of Religion,” 78.

<sup>240</sup> It should be mentioned here that unlike the conceptions of the good life, which belongs to the realm of comprehensive doctrines, the common good for Rawls belongs to the realm of political conceptions of justice. In *Political Liberalism* he mentions the “values of the common good” alongside “the values of equal political and civil liberty; equality of opportunity; the values of social equality and economic reciprocity,” as “the values of political justice [which] fall under the principles of justice for the basic structure.” 224. According to Waheed Hussain, Rawls sees the common good as referring to the common interests of citizens in a society. In other words, Rawls believes that “members of a political community have a relational obligation to care for the interests attached to the ‘position of equal citizenship’ which all citizens share,” thus, he “uses the term ‘the common good’ to refer to the sum total of social conditions that answer to the interests attached to the position of equal citizenship.” Waheed Hussain, “The Common Good,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, published Feb 26, 2018.

<sup>241</sup> Of course Wolterstorff can argue that the religious integralists have their own understanding of the common good and justice. In fact, it is true that no one can step out of her perspective, but in order to be free from dogmatism one needs to be, to some extent, willing to learn about other views. Imagine a pacifist integralist who believes that people should not fight in any circumstance—even if they are attacked. He thinks that even if a person who is attacked does not fight back and is killed, she will go to heaven. So he supports a binding law that criminalizes physical self-defence because in his mind he is serving “the common good.” But what he is in fact serving is his religious group with their conception of the good life.

the former. In addition, even if their religious reasons do not result in a policy that conflicts with the common good, they should still be open to other nonpublic or public reasons that might result in a policy that serves the common good better. If they keep giving priority to their own religious reasons (the eberlian), or not even consider supporting a policy that is not the result of a religious reason they endorse (the barthian), they are not neutral (impartial) between their religion on the one hand and other religious and secular comprehensive doctrines, on the other.

Even as ordinary citizens—who can vote and hold the officials and legislators accountable—the religious integralists might need to consider other reasons (especially public reasons) in support of political positions. This is because, according to Wolterstorff’s justice restraint and moral engagement requirement, their goal should be political justice and serving the common good rather than simply the interest of the religious group they are affiliated with; to have such a goal one might need a more open perspective than just one’s comprehensive doctrine. In fact, Rawls’s concept of reasonableness is an attempt to reach such an open perspective that honours reciprocity, which makes pluralistic liberal democracy possible. It is not clear though how the religious integralists—whether as legislators or ordinary citizens—understand society as a fair system of cooperation, as Wolterstorff claims.

In Rawls’s political liberalism, reasonable citizens should propose fair terms of cooperation based on a political conception of justice that they find the most reasonable. They “must also think it at least reasonable for others to accept them [namely, the proposed fair terms of cooperation], as free and equal citizens.”<sup>242</sup> But the religious integralists *only* (the barthian) or *firstly* (the eberlian) allow their religion to shape their political views rather than a political conception of justice. They do not also think whether what they offer can be acceptable to others or not. In fact, what they are willing to do is “to offer their reasons for the policies they favor and

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<sup>242</sup> Rawls, “Public Reason Revisited,” 770.

to listen to criticisms of those reasons, just as they are willing to offer criticisms of other people's reasons."<sup>243</sup> Wolterstorff maintains that this means that "they are reasonable."<sup>244</sup> But this is not convincing. To support his claim that these citizens do not "suffer from Rawlsian unreasonableness,"<sup>245</sup> Wolterstorff has the burden to provide more details to clarify how these citizens offer and accept fair terms of cooperation. Without doing this, he fails to confidently call these citizens reasonable in the Rawlsian sense and conclude that their presence in a liberal democracy makes Rawls's moral duty of civility unacceptable as the ethic of the citizen in such a society.

### **c) Complete integrity is not realistic**

Another point that can be made against the integrity objection is that, as much as it is not possible to step out of one's perspective completely, it is not also possible to have complete integrity like the Barthian and the Eberlian. This is why some, like Olivia Newman, believe that Wolterstorff's religious integralist example "exaggerates our ability to achieve integration and underestimates the value of maintaining some differentiation of character and diversity of commitments."<sup>246</sup> In fact, in order to be able to live in a pluralistic liberal democracy, citizens should be able to adopt more than only one perspective,<sup>247</sup> including a more open perspective of the common good, as was mentioned above. For example, such citizens should have the ability to listen with an open mind to others, which seems to require one to allow her mind to change. But

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<sup>243</sup> Wolterstorff, *Understanding Liberal Democracy*, 98.

<sup>244</sup> Wolterstorff, *Understanding Liberal Democracy*, 98.

<sup>245</sup> Wolterstorff, *Understanding Liberal Democracy*, 98.

<sup>246</sup> Olivia Newman, *Liberalism in Practice: The Psychology and Pedagogy of Public Reason* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2015), 82. Also, Mark Jensen argues that "[t]here does not appear to be a class of integralist citizens who have a legitimate complaint against liberal political theory." Mark Jensen, "The Integralist Objection to Political Liberalism" *Social theory and practice* 31, no. 2 (2005): 158.

<sup>247</sup> Martha Nussbaum says, "part of living on respectful terms with others in a pluralistic society is, precisely, learning how to segment one's existence in certain ways; insofar as Wolterstorff objects to this segmentation, he may be objecting to the very idea of a pluralistic liberal society." Martha Nussbaum, "Rawls's Political Liberalism. A Reassessment," *Ratio Juris* 24, no. 1 (2011): 15.

in the case of the religious integralists, their mind is so fixed on their number one obligation, namely, being faithful to their religion or God, that one doubts whether they can ever listen openly. This is another point that Wolterstorff has not clarified when he claims that the barthian and the eberlian are entitled to their convictions because they have listened to criticisms “carefully and with open mind.”<sup>248</sup> He needs to show how being a religious integralist as he characterizes it is compatible with listening open-mindedly. Most importantly, he needs to show that such integralist characters, who are also willing to listen openly to different views, can actually exist. Without doing this, his argument in the integrity objection, which is against the need for the idea of public reason, is invalid.

**d) The integrity objection contradicts another argument Wolterstorff offers**

My next response to the integrity objection is based on what I call Wolterstorff’s “many reasons” argument. In one of his arguments against the idea of public reason, he draws a distinction between our own reason for supporting a policy and the reason we would use in public discussions to support the same policy. Wolterstorff believes, if there is no misleading involved, “there is an eminently honorable reason for [such a] discrepancy between”<sup>249</sup> these two reasons; the reason for such a discrepancy is trying to convince others to support the same policy. Since everyone is usually convinced by a different reason, public reason seems unnecessary. To support this argument against the need for public reason, Wolterstorff offers the following example: if there are two people, Ryan and Wendy, one does not have to support a policy based on a reason that Ryan, Wendy, and others accept. Instead, one can have her own

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<sup>248</sup> Wolterstorff, *Understanding Liberal Democracy*, 100.

<sup>249</sup> Wolterstorff, “Role of Religion,” 106.

reason, offer a reason to Ryan that she knows he might accept, and offer another reason to Wendy that she knows she might accept.<sup>250</sup> Wolterstorff continues:

In a democracy, we discuss and debate, with the aim of reaching agreement. We do not just mount the platform to tell our fellow citizens how we see things. We listen and try to persuade. Typically our attempts at persuasion are on an ad hoc basis: offering to Republicans reasons that we think might appeal to them, if we can find such, to Democrats reasons that we think might appeal to them, if we can find such, to Christians reasons that we think might appeal to them, if we can find such, to America-firsters reasons that we think might appeal to them, if we can find such. And so forth.<sup>251</sup>

Thus, Wolterstorff does not see any problem with using as many different reasons as one can use to convince other citizens to support a policy one advocates. This seems to be the strongest response one can make to the integrity objection: using reasons other than the reason one sincerely and deeply believes (whether they are based on an independent source or not) does not have to threaten one's integrity. Wolterstorff clearly states that reasons offered to others "need not even be reasons that I accept—let alone reasons that for me personally were determinative."<sup>252</sup> It can be inferred from this that religious citizens can have their own religious reasons in support of a policy while also offering different reasons that they know can convince others without risking their own integrity. Thus, by accepting the "fact of honorable discrepancy"<sup>253</sup> as Wolterstorff suggests, between the reasons one has in mind and the reasons one offers in public, religious citizens' sincere participation will not be at risk, as Lafont claims, if they are asked to *also* offer public reason. In other words, offering public reason in addition to their religious reasons does not place a psychological burden on religious citizens; they can exercise their religions freely and live their lives as they see fit.

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<sup>250</sup> Wolterstorff, "Role of Religion," 107.

<sup>251</sup> Wolterstorff, "Role of Religion," 108.

<sup>252</sup> Wolterstorff, "Role of Religion," 107.

<sup>253</sup> Wolterstorff, "Role of Religion," 107.

So Wolterstorff contradicts his integrity objection by offering his “many reasons” argument. Moreover, the integrity objection not only draws an unrealistic picture of reasonable citizens who seek complete integrity to their religion in a pluralistic liberal democracy, it does not address Rawls’s inclusive and wide views. Therefore, it is not successful as an objection against Rawls’s idea of public reason in real liberal democracies.

## Chapter 4: Public Reason or No Public Reason?

As mentioned in the second chapter, Rawls introduces the idea of public reason to make social unity and peace possible in a liberal democratic society consisting of a plurality of reasonable comprehensive doctrines. He believes that government neutrality (the separation of church and state) is necessary to protect religions, secular culture, and the state from each other equally.<sup>254</sup> We need a family of freestanding political conceptions of justice—although they are independent of all comprehensive doctrines, political conceptions of justice act as a module in them when they are reasonable—as a shared political basis that makes such neutrality toward comprehensive doctrines, and thus social unity and peace, possible. Political decisions, including laws and policies that are binding to all citizens, are legitimate only when they are the result of a political deliberation (and voting in cases of stand-offs<sup>255</sup>) in which citizens ground their reasons in political conceptions of justice, rather than their religious or secular comprehensive views, in support of such decisions.

In the third chapter, I explained that, although Wolterstorff also agrees with government neutrality<sup>256</sup> and the fact of pluralism, he criticizes Rawls for assuming a shared political basis independent of comprehensive doctrines and imposing a moral duty on citizens to avoid offering religious reasons in their political deliberation. Wolterstorff indicates that voting is what makes a binding law legitimate in a liberal democracy, not the sort of reason that citizens use. However, he later calls Frank's religious reason—as a reason determining a binding law against the followers of another religion incompatible with Frank's religion—out of order by virtue of it

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<sup>254</sup> Rawls, "Public Reason Revisited," 795.

<sup>255</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, lii – liii.

<sup>256</sup> He agrees with the government neutrality with the impartiality interpretation.

being an appeal to God, while he accepts another reason, which addresses public well-being, in support of the same law. As was mentioned in section 3.3, this position contradicts Wolterstorff's view against Rawls's moral restraint on religious reasons.

To be fair to Wolterstorff's concern with regard to the religious reason restraint position, I would like to argue that if citizens are engaged in political debates that do not have the direct goal of passing or enforcing a law or a policy, Wolterstorff is right to oppose any restraints on religious reasons and to see such restraints as a violation of the freedom of speech. Even in cases of political decision making—implemented through legislation or voting by citizen voters or officials, judges, and legislators—I agree with Wolterstorff that everyone should be able to express their reasons based on their comprehensive doctrines, or it would again be against freedom of speech. Even Rawls is cautious not to overstep this freedom when he emphasizes that the duty of civility “is not a legal duty, for in that case it would be incompatible with freedom of speech.”<sup>257</sup> Characterizing the duty of civility as moral, however, is also not exempt from Wolterstorff's criticism, because he sees “social disapproval”<sup>258</sup> as a power that can enforce such a duty. One could agree that moral duties as well as norms in a society can sometimes have a social power that is comparable with the power of legalization and criminalization. But it does not mean that it is always the case or that we should not introduce any moral duties for ourselves as citizens. Wolterstorff himself, contrary to his criticisms of moral duties, assumes such duties in his account of liberal democracy when he speaks of moral engagement and epistemological entitlement. Thus, there seems to be more similarities in Rawls and Wolterstorff's theories than Wolterstorff might be aware of.

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<sup>257</sup> Rawls, “Public Reason Revisited,” 769.

<sup>258</sup> Wolterstorff, “Role of Religion,” 79.

Both Wolterstorff and Rawls are the proponents of constitutional liberal democracy as well as the neutrality of the state towards all comprehensive doctrines. They emphasize the necessity of political engagement within the limits of a just constitution of a pluralistic liberal democracy, which includes religious toleration and the right to free exercise of religion. From both Rawls's and Wolterstorff's perspectives, for example, Frank's religious reason in support of a binding law against the ritual of Santería religion is not acceptable because it appeals to a certain religion's God, whereas a reason that appeals to public well-being is acceptable. To use Rawls's language, Frank's reason is a nonpublic reason based on his cherished comprehensive doctrine, while the public health reason is a public reason that can be endorsed by all reasonable comprehensive doctrines. A binding law or policy passed or enforced by the first reason is not legitimate because it is not based on a shared political basis. However, a law is legitimate if it is passed or enforced based on the second reason, which is a generally understandable and acceptable reason. For Wolterstorff, Frank's reason is out of order because it violates the First Amendment, and thus interferes with the free exercise of Santería religion. I believe that Wolterstorff's argument against Frank's reason is similar to Rawls's argument because the First Amendment can be understood as a shared and independent political basis. More specifically, the First Amendment can be understood, in the Rawlsian sense, as a constitutional essential "which all citizens as free and equal may reasonably be expected to endorse in the light of principles and ideals acceptable to their common human reason."<sup>259</sup> Based on the Frank example, I would like to suggest that, despite what Wolterstorff claims, he, like Rawls, supports the same idea of restraining religious reasons when it comes to accepting them as the determinant for passing or enforcing a binding law or policy.

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<sup>259</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 137.

Wolterstorff clearly contradicts himself when he rejects any restraints on the sorts of reasons that citizens offer, on the one hand, to advocate religious citizens' right to freedom of speech, and calls Frank's religious reason out of order to protect the First Amendment, on the other. His integrity objection is also toothless as it contradicts with his "many reasons" argument, according to which reasonable citizens may plausibly use as many reasons to convince different people to agree with a law or policy that they support. Surprisingly, here he does not see using different reasons as a violation to citizens' integrity, but believes that Rawls's moral duty of civility, which in the wide view asks citizens to use public reason in addition to their religious reasons, can violate the integrity of citizens like the barthian—who is strangely both reasonable and sees himself committed to *only* use religious reasons in his political deliberations. Furthermore, since Wolterstorff does not make a distinction between Rawls's different views of public reason, he also fails to reject the idea of public reason and citizens' moral duty to use public reason—in Rawls's inclusive and wide views—with his integrity objection.

Among Rawls's views on the role of reasons in political decision making, which are the exclusive and inclusive views introduced in *Political Liberalism* and the wide view of public political culture introduced in "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited", I would like to argue that the latter is the most plausible, both theoretically and practically. The exclusive view, according to which all citizens should offer only public reason in all political debates, belongs to the realm of ideal theory. This view is about a well-ordered society with maximum stability. Rawls explains this view as follows: "on fundamental political matters, reasons given explicitly in terms of comprehensive doctrines are never to be introduced into public reason."<sup>260</sup> Since this view is only about an ideal liberal democracy, I would disregard it as a viable solution for the problem of legitimacy in real pluralistic liberal democracies. Rawls himself is also aware that the exclusive

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<sup>260</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 247.

view does not apply to real societies, but he believes that we need such an ideal to help us navigate our real societies towards the ideal of public reason. As I mentioned in the second chapter, my focus in this work is not on Rawls's and Wolterstorff's methodology. Moreover, Rawls is not only concerned with the ideal society as he also introduces his inclusive view.

In the inclusive view, Rawls mentions the abolitionists' and Martin Luther King's religious reasons against slavery as examples of acceptable reasons that "strengthen the ideal of public reason."<sup>261</sup> Although this view clearly allows for religious reasons to be offered on fundamental political issues, I would like to suggest that it is still restrictive considering the proviso of strengthening the ideal of public reason; it could be the case that citizens do not recognize whether a religious (or secular) reason is strengthening the ideal of public reason or not. In fact, the ideal of public reason does not seem to be an uncontroversial and definite conception that can always specify in advance whether a nonpublic reason is in its favour or not. Since the challenge of assessing nonpublic reasons in the face of the ideal of public reason is not present in Rawls's wide view, I argue that Rawls's wide view is more feasible as a view that is in accordance with liberalism and freedom of speech.

According to the wide view, religious (and secular) reasons are not only allowed to "be introduced in public political discussion *at any time*" with the in due course proviso, there "may be *positive* reasons for introducing" such reasons in the public sphere.<sup>262</sup> To explain the first part, citizens in public political culture who are responsible for making political decisions even on fundamental political issues do not face any restrictions on expressing whatever reason they have, but "proper political reasons"<sup>263</sup> must also be introduced in support of the same law or policy to make it legitimate. This obligation to introduce proper political reasons (or public

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<sup>261</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 247.

<sup>262</sup> Rawls, "Public Reason Revisited," 784 (emphases added).

<sup>263</sup> Rawls, "Public Reason Revisited," 784.

reasons) in due course is what Rawls calls the proviso. According to this proviso, religious (or secular) reasons are not sufficient to support a law or a policy. Rawls illustrates this point (and also the next point) in the following example: “citizens of faith who cite the Gospel parable of the Good Samaritan do not stop there, but go on to give a public justification for this parable's conclusions in terms of political values. In this way citizens who hold different doctrines are reassured, and this strengthens the ties of civic friendship.”<sup>264</sup> To explain the second part of the wide view, it can even be a good thing if citizens introduce their religious (and secular) reasons as long as they accept the proviso. This is because, by embracing the proviso, religious (and secular) citizens’ “commitment to constitutional democracy is publicly manifested” and thus they “are more willing to honor the duty of civility.”<sup>265</sup> When citizens are aware of each other’s such commitments, they can introduce their comprehensive doctrines without violating the ideal of public reason. Rawls mentions the abolitionists’ and Martin Luther King’s religious reasons as examples that strengthened the ideal of public reason because they had manifested their support for constitutional democracy as the result of fulfilling the proviso.<sup>266</sup> Although Rawls does not explain how they have fulfilled the proviso, he points out in a footnote, “I do not know whether the Abolitionists and King thought of themselves as fulfilling the purpose of the proviso. But whether they did or not, they could have. And had they known and accepted the idea of public reason, they would have.”<sup>267</sup>

Rawls’s wide view of public political culture, I argue, is the most plausible view among Rawls’s other two views and Wolterstorff’s view for three reasons. Firstly, the wide view removes the restriction on offering religious (or secular) reasons—whether they are good reasons

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<sup>264</sup> Rawls, “Public Reason Revisited,” 786.

<sup>265</sup> Rawls, “Public Reason Revisited,” 785.

<sup>266</sup> Rawls, “Public Reason Revisited,” 785-786.

<sup>267</sup> Rawls, “Public Reason Revisited,” 785-786n54.

or not—in political debates and thus honours the right to freedom of speech. However, it also recognizes that such reasons are not sufficient to support a law or a policy, and proper public reasons are also required. For example, in Frank’s case, he can offer his religious reason (which appeals to God), but this reason is not by itself sufficient to pass a law that bans the followers of Santería from their animal sacrificing ritual; a proper public reason is required to pass such a law. Secondly, it does not determine who should fulfill the proviso and when it should be done. Rawls rightly notes that these matters cannot satisfyingly be determined in advance, for they “must be worked out in practice” by the public political culture of the time.<sup>268</sup> Thus, as an example, it is not necessarily and only the duty of the eberlian integralist to find a proper public reason to support a law that is the result of his religious conviction; somebody else might want and be able to do that. Thirdly, the wide view makes a clear distinction between the duty of civility of citizens in the public political culture (or the public political forum) and the background culture. In a representative democracy, citizens who belong to the latter culture, according to Rawls, usually do not have to vote to make political decisions on fundamental political issues. They elect the government officials and legislators to decide on such matters instead. Thus, even if citizens ideally want to fulfill the proviso and so hold the officials and legislators accountable, the moral duty does not apply to them.<sup>269</sup> Thus, according to Rawls’s wide view, the idea of public reason does not apply to examples like Frank and the integralists, who belong to the background culture and are only engaged in the open discussion form of public debate.

I conclude this chapter by pointing out that Wolterstorff fails to offer a better—consistent, and more liberal and fair—alternative account of liberal democracy in which there is

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<sup>268</sup> Rawls, “Public Reason Revisited,” 784.

<sup>269</sup> Rawls, “Public Reason Revisited,” 769.

no need for any kind of restraint on religious reasons. His account is not consistent because in his positive accounts—the consocial and equal voice positions—Wolterstorff assumes freestanding shared principles, such as political justice and moral engagement, while criticizing Rawls for introducing political conceptions of justice as freestanding shared principles. He contradicts his no-restraint position on religious reasons when he responds to Anderson’s example of a devout Christian, Frank, who appeals to God in support of a law banning the followers of Santería from their ritual. He calls Frank’s reason out of order, which also challenges his claim to have offered a more liberal and fair account of liberal democracy. Moreover, his integrity objection to public reason liberalism contradicts his many reasons argument, which shows that using different reasons in support of the same law or policy does not undermine the integrity of a person. This objection also fails to address Rawls’s wide view of public political culture, which would not put pressure on ordinary citizens like the integralists to supplement their religious reasons with proper public reasons themselves. In addition to all this, Wolterstorff also misrepresents Rawls’s public reason liberalism by ignoring both his inclusive and wide views on the one hand, and his distinction between the background culture and the public political culture, on the other hand. This misrepresentation makes his own positive account as well as his criticisms of Rawls less credible.

I want to end this thesis by arguing that in the Rawls-Wolterstorff debate on the role of reasons in public political deliberation—in its decision-making sense—Wolterstorff fails to show that without the idea of public reason, there can be a better way to maintain the neutrality of the state, and thus social peace and stability, in a pluralistic democratic society. On the contrary, Rawls’s wide view of public political culture offers a more realistic solution to having a neutral

government capable of passing legitimate binding laws in a pluralistic democratic society, in which reasonable citizens hope to find a common political ground.

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