

1 <AT>Introduction: Convergence Justifications in Public Reason

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3 <AA>Kevin Vallier

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5 <TXT>With the publication of Political Liberalism, John Rawls inaugurated a new tradition in  
6 political philosophy often called public reason liberalism. Rawls argued that among liberal  
7 democratic cultures, our conception of ourselves as free and equal requires that we justify our  
8 attempts to coerce one another through the use of state power. Thus, a legitimate state is one  
9 whose coercion is publicly justified to all members of a well-ordered society. A publicly justified  
10 political order therefore meets what Rawls called the ideal of public reason. The ideal of public  
11 reason has probably garnered more attention than any other aspect of Rawls's later work.

12       Much of the literature concerning public reason focuses on the requirement that citizens  
13 use public reasons to justify coercion to one another. So what is a public reason? Typically,  
14 public reasons are thought to be those reasons that are shared or shareable with all--or at least  
15 those reasons that all can access or evaluate. This shared reasons interpretation of the ideal of  
16 public reason has become the gold standard in the literature. For many, the ideal of public reason  
17 simply is the ideal of free and equal citizens exchanging shared reasons in line with shared  
18 values. What alternative could there be?

19       This symposium examines an attractive competitor interpretation of the ideal of public  
20 reason, what is called the convergence conception of reasons. The convergence view is  
21 contrasted with the standard shared reasons or consensus conception of reasons by imposing no  
22 shareability or accessibility requirement on justificatory reasons. A coercive law can be publicly  
23 justified so long as all citizens have some reason of their own to endorse it.

1           The five contributions to this volume all assess the ideal of convergence. Two of the  
2 papers defend convergence, and three criticize it despite displaying some sympathy towards it.  
3 Kevin Vallier in “~~A Consensus and~~ **Consensus and Consensus** in Public Reason” argues that  
4 convergence, despite its minority status, is truest to the ideal of public reason. Convergence, in  
5 contrast to consensus, provides greater respect for reasonable pluralism, as it permits the full  
6 diversity of citizens’ reasons to play a justificatory role. Vallier also maintains that convergence  
7 is truer to **the** ideal of self-legislation at the heart of public reason. Selves are constituted by the  
8 totality of their reasons for action; for each person to self-legislate coercion on herself, she must  
9 therefore be able to appeal to her reasons as a whole. By restricting justificatory reasons to a  
10 subset, consensus theorists depart from this ideal. Gerald Gaus in “A Tale of Two Sets: Public  
11 Reason in Equilibrium” argues that the convergence standard is the logical next step in the  
12 evolution of public reason liberalism. Rawls was initially attracted to a consensus standard in A  
13 Theory of Justice and then moved to a two-level hybrid model in Political Liberalism due to his  
14 recognition of reasonable pluralism--the first consensus stage was “freestanding,” and the  
15 convergence stage followed as achieving an “overlapping consensus.” Gaus maintains that the  
16 same recognition of reasonable pluralism should have led Rawls to jettison the initial shared  
17 reasons stage of justification. Instead, he argues that with a “convergence equilibrium” model,  
18 the argument from the original position is appropriately superseded. Gaus also argues that  
19 Rawls’s focus on stability led him to appreciate assurance problems that a pure convergence  
20 model can more effectively accommodate.

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<sup>A</sup> This (edited form) is the way the title reads now for the article that appears in this issue. Would you prefer that the title of that article be changed to “Consensus and Convergence in Public Reason”?

1 All three critical papers find something to admire in the convergence view. This is most  
2 apparent in Christopher Eberle's, "Consensus, Convergence, and Religiously Justified  
3 Coercion." Eberle, a critic of public reason, has long rejected consensus partly on the grounds  
4 that it unjustifiably restricts religious expression and action in the public sphere. He has also  
5 rejected the ideal of public reason entirely, but until now has not addressed convergence. Eberle  
6 argues that persons of faith should find convergence appealing, since it avoids the untoward  
7 implications of consensus; such as **the<sup>B</sup>its** famous implications for restraint on religious  
8 expression. Nonetheless, Eberle maintains that basic principles of well-being and respect for  
9 state membership should lead us to reject convergence, for convergence is too hostile to the  
10 coercion required to secure well-being and to treat citizens appropriately. In short, convergence  
11 blocks the state from performing its proper duties. Andrew Lister is less friendly to convergence  
12 in his "Public Justification of What? Coercion vs. Decision as Competing Frames for the Basic  
13 Principle of Justificatory Liberalism." He begins by arguing that the consensus-convergence  
14 debate is best conceived of as a debate between understanding public reason as constraining  
15 political coercion with a presumption against coercive law on the one hand, and as a constraint  
16 on reasons for political decisions without such a presumption on the other. He then argues that,  
17 while some objections to public reason plague only the consensus view, convergence lacks many  
18 of the benefits its proponents claim for it. In particular, convergence is not as friendly to religious  
19 expression in public life as it may seem because it blocks various coercive proposals that many  
20 citizens of faith endorse. Paul Weithman also believes that the consensus-convergence debate  
21 should be re-interpreted. But in his piece "Convergence and Political Autonomy," Weithman

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<sup>B</sup> Okay as edited? The removal of the comma and not using "it" to refer to both convergence and consensus should clarify this sentence.

1 argues that the debate is really a debate about the nature of political autonomy within public  
2 reason liberalism and the conditions of political freedom. Weithman carefully articulates his  
3 position with an analysis and comparison of the views of Rawls and Gaus. He concludes that the  
4 possibility that citizens will reject a shared vision of justice is not a reason to reject consensus as  
5 a requirement on reasons. Instead, consensus specifies a demanding ideal that just institutions  
6 should encourage because doing so supports genuine political autonomy.

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