

On Jonathan Quong's Sectarian Political Liberalism

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Abstract Jonathan Quong's book, *Liberalism without Perfection*, provides an innovative new defense of political liberalism based on an "internal conception" of the goal of public justification. Quong argues that public justification need merely be addressed to persons who affirm liberal political values, allowing people to be coerced without a public justification if they reject liberal values or their priority over comprehensive values. But, by extensively restricting members of the justificatory public to a highly idealized constituency of liberals, Quong's political liberalism becomes objectionably sectarian. Coercing citizens without a public justification if they hold *non-liberal* comprehensive views is no different from the sectarian perfectionist view that people can be coerced without a public justification if they hold *false* comprehensive views. Quong argues that some degree of sectarianism is unavoidable in formulating a conception of political liberalism. While this may be, I maintain that the internal conception is nonetheless *excessively* sectarian. To demonstrate this, I develop an attractive competitor conception, the convergence conception, which addresses public justification to a diverse, moderately idealized justificatory public. If convergence is a viable interpretation of political liberalism, I argue, then the internal conception is excessively sectarian.

Keywords Political liberalism · Public reason · Liberalism · Public justification · Liberal perfectionism

John Rawls's political liberalism sharply contrasts with the liberal perfectionist theories offered by Joseph Raz, Steven Wall and others.¹ For political liberals, respect for persons requires that the use of legal coercion be justified from multiple points of view, such that

¹ Raz (1986); Wall (1998).

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states are not permitted to promote one person's conception of the good over others, even if that conception of the good is *true*. Political liberals argue that liberal perfectionism is *sectarian* and *authoritarian* because it permits the state to force reasonable people to comply with "true" moral values they nonetheless reasonably reject. For this reason, political liberals resist liberal perfectionism, but some mainstream versions of political liberalism retain a sectarian and authoritarian element.

In this paper, I shall argue that Jonathan Quong's "internal conception" of political liberalism, in virtue of extensively restricting members of the justificatory public to a highly idealized constituency of liberals, is objectionably sectarian. In his recent book, *Liberalism without Perfection*, Quong argues that public justification need merely be addressed to persons who affirm liberal political values, allowing people to be coerced without a public justification if they reject these values or their priority over comprehensive values.² Insisting that people can be coerced without a public justification in virtue of embracing *non-liberal* comprehensive views is not so different from insisting that people can be coerced without a public justification in virtue of embracing *false* comprehensive views.

Quong's political liberalism gets a lot right. He rejects not only perfectionism, but an unattractive version of political liberalism he dubs the "external conception."³ The external conception makes public justification and liberal political principles depend entirely on the beliefs of actual citizens. To avoid holding public justification *entirely* hostage to the defects of persons' actual beliefs, the political liberal addresses justifications to an *idealized* constituency, and, in my view, rightly so. But Quong's constituency erroneously idealizes all reasonable persons so that reasonable people by definition prioritize liberal values. This strategy dramatically shrinks the justificatory public, rendering the internal conception objectionably sectarian.

In reply to a version of this objection, Quong contends there is no better alternative to sectarian political liberalism.⁴ I defend two claims that jointly undermine his contention. First I argue that *if* (though not *only if*) there is a better alternative, the internal conception is objectionably sectarian. Political liberals should prefer an interpretation of political liberalism that avoids both the trappings of the external conception and sectarianism, if such an interpretation is available. Second, I argue that there *is* a better alternative that I have elsewhere called the "convergence conception," which addresses justification to a diverse, moderately idealized justificatory public.⁵ I contend that the convergence conception avoids both the trappings of the external conception and the high degree of sectarianism of the internal conception. While I do not defend the convergence conception here, I argue that it is both coherent and immune to Quong's main objections to the external conception. I conclude that, since convergence is a viable interpretation of political liberalism, the internal conception is objectionably sectarian because there is a viable, less sectarian alternative to the external conception.

I develop my concerns across eight sections. I first review the basic structure of political liberalism as Quong characterizes it, assuming his own interpretation for the sake of argument (I). I outline Quong's internal conception of political liberalism (II). I then

² Or as Quong would put it, such persons are offered a public justification in terms of shared values, but they reject it for their own reasons or reject its deliberative priority.

³ Though, from what I can tell, no political liberal endorses the external conception.

⁴ Quong (2012, p. 53).

⁵ I defend convergence in detail in Vallier (2014), Chs. 3 and 4. Also see Gaus and Vallier (2009), Vallier (2011).

explain how the internal conception is immune to criticisms of the external conception, which explains how the internal conception differs from Rawls's view, especially with respect to the idea of an overlapping consensus (III). The next section (IV) develops the sectarianism charge and Quong's reply to it. I also argue that avoiding sectarianism is a central value in political liberalism. I then introduce the convergence conception and argue that the values Quong uses to justify the internal conception also support convergence (V). Next I argue that the convergence conception is less sectarian than the internal conception (VI). If so, then the internal conception is objectionably sectarian. This means we should reject the internal conception unless there are countervailing considerations that favor it. So, in the following section I answer Quong's claim that the convergence conception permits citizens to be insincere, and so disrespectful, to one another (VII). I conclude that the internal conception of political liberalism is objectionably sectarian (VIII).

1 Quong on Rawls's Political Liberalism

Quong understands political liberalism "as an attempt to work out how political principles and institutions can be *publicly justified* by reference to *moral ideas* that each person who is bound by them could reasonably endorse."⁶ Specifically, political liberalism holds that the coercion derived from political principles and institutions must be *constrained* in that it is permitted only when each person has sufficient reason to endorse the coercion in question.⁷ Where liberal perfectionists permit coercion to promote authentic moral values that many reasonably reject, political liberals prohibit it. Political liberals claim that to coerce another without public justification is to dominate or oppress her in a sectarian and authoritarian manner.

Quong explains this public justification constraint in terms of five ideas: (i) the fact of reasonable pluralism, (ii) reasonable citizens, (iii) a political conception, (iv) an overlapping consensus, and (v) the idea of public reason. Let's begin with (i). For Quong, as for Rawls, "whenever freedom obtains and individuals are at liberty to think and believe what they wish, this results in deep, permanent, and intractable disagreements about central philosophical, moral, and religious issues."⁸ The free exercise of practical reason leads to reasonable disagreement about matters of ultimate good. What explains this fact of reasonable pluralism? For Quong, again following Rawls, reasonable pluralism arises from the burdens of judgment—which are largely natural cognitive obstacles to consensus on important matters under free conditions.⁹ Reasonable disagreement is not based merely on self-interest or irrationality. Instead, such disagreement is often "*reasonable* in the sense that it exists as a result of the sincere and reasonable efforts of rational people to consider ethical, religious, and philosophical questions."¹⁰ So to make political principles and institutions compatible with a variety of reasonable views, they must be construed as part of a "*political conception of justice*" that itself can become "the subject of an *overlapping*

⁶ Quong (2011, p. 36).

⁷ I assume here that Quong's understanding of what "can be justified" to persons is equivalent to the related idea that each person has sufficient reasons to endorse the same. Also, while the quote does not mention it, Quong commits himself to the idea that a main object of public justification is coercive law. See pp. 273–275.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Rawls (2005, pp. 54–58).

¹⁰ Quong (2011, p. 37).

consensus between reasonable citizens all of whom are committed to the idea of *public reason*.”¹¹

Moving to (ii) reasonable citizens, Quong agrees with Rawls that political liberalism should not require that political principles be acceptable to actual persons; to do so would hold public justification hostage to the “ignorant, immoral, self-obsessed, or otherwise troublesome.”¹² As a result, Rawlsians typically restrict the constituency of those to whom justification is owed to “reasonable” citizens.¹³ Reasonable citizens must hold (a) that a political society should be seen as a mutually beneficial system of social cooperation between free and equal persons and (b) accept the burdens of judgment and the reasonable pluralism that flows from it. Quong stresses that reasonable people have egalitarian beliefs and dispositions—they believe all citizens are natural equals and that political society is a form of social cooperation not meant to benefit some at the expense of others.¹⁴ Since reasonable people both affirm the natural freedom and equality of all and the fact of reasonable pluralism, they will recognize the imperative to publicly justify coercion to all persons, and so adopt Rawls’s liberal principle of legitimacy.¹⁵

The next component of political liberalism is (iii) the idea of a political conception. To be reasonable is to recognize that people naturally disagree about the good and so must attempt justify principles and institutions in ways that do not assume that any particular conception of the good is true. Valid political principles, and principles of justice specifically, must therefore be “robust across permissible conceptions of the good.”¹⁶ A political conception is therefore limited in content to ideas about justice, citizenship and other political concepts, specifically to three foundational political values: freedom, equality and fairness.¹⁷ It is in this way “free-standing” from theories of the good.

The free-standing political conception must be integrated into each reasonable comprehensive doctrine. When a political conception is so integrated, Rawls claims that (iv) an overlapping consensus obtains. Each reasonable person must see the political conception as congruent with, or at least not in conflict with, her comprehensive doctrine. Thus, the overlapping consensus is critical for political justification. Identifying a true political conception is not enough. Rawls and Quong both stress that the integration of comprehensive doctrines with the political conception must be carried out by individual citizens. As Quong puts it, in the second stage of political justification, Rawls “passes the buck” to the citizen from the hands of the political philosopher.¹⁸ The citizen must carry out this second stage of justification, not the theorist.

The fifth piece of political liberalism is (v) the idea of public reason. On Quong’s view (which I think is Rawls’s view), “public reason is the common political language that judges, legislators, and citizens use when they debate and decide issues that Rawls refers to as constitutional essentials and matters of basic justice.”¹⁹ Quong identifies public reason as having two parts, the principles of justice that are part of the political conception and the

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Rawls (2005, pp. 54–61). Quong (2011, p. 38).

¹⁴ Quong (2011, p. 38).

¹⁵ Rawls (2005, p. 137).

¹⁶ Quong (2011, p. 39).

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 39.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 226.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 41.

associated forms of inquiry and inference and political virtues like compliance with the duty of civility. The duty of civility is a moral, not legal, duty to offer arguments for issues concerning constitutional essentials by appealing primarily, if not exclusively, to reasons drawn from the political conception. Quong offers a somewhat stronger interpretation of the duty of civility than mainstream political liberals, though in most respects his interpretation is mainline.²⁰

2 Quong's Internal Conception of Political Liberalism

The five components of political liberalism (the ideas of reasonable pluralism, reasonable citizens, a political conception, the overlapping consensus and public reason) by no means settle all the interpretive questions that political liberals face. Rawls's view is ambiguous between multiple coherent interpretations offered by other political liberals. Quong's "internal conception" is one such interpretation, and Quong contrasts it with another interpretation—the "external conception." The division fundamentally concerns "what kind of question political liberalism is meant to answer, what social facts it should respond to, how the constituency of reasonable people should be defined, and what it means to justify something to reasonable people."²¹ This division tracks different understandings of the fact of reasonable pluralism. If theorists take reasonable pluralism to be a fact "about the world to which liberalism must accommodate itself if it is to be considered a sound position," then they adopt the external conception.²² In contrast, if pluralism is taken to be "a consequence of liberalism itself" or rather "an inescapable feature of any well-ordered liberal society," then the theorist has adopted the internal conception.²³ On the internal conception, the question of political justification is "internal to liberal philosophy."²⁴

To put it another way, the internal and external conceptions offer different interpretations of the construal of members of the public, those to whom justifications are owed. The internal conception holds, above all else, that political principles must only be justified to idealized persons who already affirm liberal values. All the distinctive features of the internal conception are built around this highly idealized justificatory constituency. For instance, as we have seen, reasonable pluralism is not taken as a fact about the world, but as a "fact about liberal theory," namely that reasonable pluralism will arise among an idealized constituency of people who affirm liberal values. The relevant justificatory publics are not those present in liberal democracies but members of Rawls's idea of a well-ordered society, with people who are fully rational and reasonable. Thus, reasonable citizens are not actual citizens but instead exist within the well-ordered society model. And the legitimacy test holds that political principles are publicly justified when these highly idealized citizens could endorse them.²⁵

While Quong stresses all of these different elements, we can understand the internal conception rather simply: political justification obtains when the highly idealized, reasonable citizens of a well-ordered society endorse political principles. As Quong puts it,

²⁰ Weithman (2010, pp. 329–330) provides a brief overview of Rawls's duty of civility and a relatively more inclusive interpretation of it.

²¹ Quong (2011, p. 137).

²² *Ibid.*, p. 138.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

“the internal conception declares that the justification of liberal principles *at no point* depends on the beliefs of real people.”²⁶ Or again,

On the internal view, to say that certain principles of justice could be endorsed by all reasonable people is to say that those principles can be validly constructed from a normative ideal of society as a fair system of social cooperation between free and equal citizens.²⁷

The external conception simply negates the main features of the internal conception. On the external conception, reasonable pluralism is a “fact about the world,” which describes reasonable disagreement about real-world reasonable people. The relevant justificatory publics are members of current liberal democracies. Reasonable citizens are a specific subset of *actual citizens* in a liberal society and the legitimacy test holds that political principles are publicly justified when they are acceptable to this specific subset of actual citizens. In other words, the external conception declares that the justification of political principles always depends on the beliefs of actual citizens. If political conceptions cannot survive the test of actual citizens, then they are not justified and cannot rightly regulate the actions of citizens.

Quong believes the external conception’s attempt to secure the “assent of actual citizens in current liberal democratic societies” ensures that the external conception will be “political in the wrong way.”²⁸ Real citizens lack the normative power to defeat political principles because they are frequently biased by self-interest, poor reasoning and other factors. As a result, depending on how the external conception is fleshed out, it will raise a host of objections. First, to avoid complete reliance on actual beliefs, the advocate of the external conception might restrict the justificatory constituency to reasonable people. Quong thinks this reply is vulnerable to a “spare-wheel objection” because appealing to real citizens is now a “spare-wheel” in the process of public justification.²⁹ Second, the defenders of the external conception could argue that, as a matter of fact, actual citizens endorse liberal values such that their commitments will lead to liberal results. But, Quong maintains, we must now make the justification of liberal principles depend on the contingency of the public’s affirmation of liberal values, raising the “public culture dilemma.”³⁰ On this dilemma, if justification depends on the public’s affirmation of liberal values, the justification of liberal institutions is too contingent, and if justification does not depend on the public in this way, appeals to public culture are themselves a spare-wheel. A third concern is that, due to the burdens of judgment, actual people will not converge on determinate principles of justice, raising the “dissensus about justice objection.”³¹ If the external political liberal claims that dissensus about justice does not bar coercion based on principles of justice, then Quong thinks she is blocked from barring coercion based on conceptions of the good, making political liberalism perfectionist. Quong calls this fourth concern “the asymmetry objection.” A natural reply to the asymmetry objection is to argue that, as a matter of empirical fact, citizens disagree much more about the good than about justice. Quong thinks this “empirical reply” threatens to make political liberalism

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 144. Emphasis added.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 145. Rawls (2005, p. 54).

²⁹ Quong (2011, p. 147).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

³¹ *Ibid.*

historically and culturally “relativistic” since different peoples affirm different ideas at different times.

The case for the internal conception is that it can avoid all the aforementioned problems. Most obviously, since the internal conception in no way depends on the beliefs of actual citizens, it can avoid the spare-wheel objection, the public culture dilemma, the empirical reply and worries about relativism. Quong simply defines the relevant justificatory public so that these concerns are irrelevant. But the internal conception is still vulnerable to two objections. First, it leaves unclear the role of an overlapping consensus in political justification. On the external conception, the role of an overlapping consensus is obvious, as it involves appealing to the beliefs of actual, reasonable people. So Quong must reinterpret the role of an overlapping consensus. Second, Quong must grapple with the asymmetry objection as it applies to an idealized justificatory constituency of members of a well-ordered society, as they too can disagree about justice.³² Quong addresses these two concerns by revising the idea of an overlapping consensus.

3 Eliminating the Overlapping Consensus

Quong argues that Rawls’s interpretation of the overlapping consensus must be understood as the first stage in political justification, rather than the second. The problem with Rawls’s interpretation is that it allows citizens to reject a political conception of justice if it is incongruous with a reasonable comprehensive doctrine.³³ Quong calls this the “common view” of the overlapping consensus. The common view is mistaken on two grounds. First, it makes political liberalism vulnerable to a dilemma: “either the overlapping consensus is superfluous to the justificatory project, doing no real work in the theory, or else the consensus might make political liberalism hostage to the demands of the unjust.”³⁴ Second, the common view threatens the “effective practice of public reason” because it focuses the overlapping consensus on a particular conception of justice, leaving citizens with insufficient resources to “engage in the practice of public reasoning under conditions where reasonable disagreements about justice arise.”³⁵

We can see how these problems develop if we recall why Rawls thinks the overlapping consensus is necessary for political justification. For Rawls, as I understand him, the process of formulating the political conception is based on trying to achieve reflective equilibrium based on our *shared considered judgments*, a process Rawls calls “narrow reflective equilibrium.”³⁶ But achieving narrow reflective equilibrium does not guarantee the achievement of “wide reflective equilibrium” where each person renders her commitment to the political conception consistent with all of her other considered judgments. So there is a live question as to whether reasonable citizens who formulate the political conception have sufficient reason to endorse it given the totality of their considered judgments.

Quong adopts a different view. Reasonable people are “by definition, those people who see political society as a system of cooperation governed by the values of freedom,

³² Quong addresses other objections to the internal conception, such as the concern that political liberalism permits the mistreatment of unreasonable citizens, but I do not believe we need to address them here.

³³ Rawls (2005, p. 392).

³⁴ Quong (2011, p. 162).

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Rawls (2005, p. 384).

equality, and fairness.” If so, then we do not “need to check and see if these reasonable people will endorse the free standing conception of justice worked out in the first stage[.]”³⁷ If someone rejects the freestanding political conception, they *must* be unreasonable. It follows that, if the first stage guarantees political justification, then the second stage is unnecessary. Should the defender of the common view reply by allowing reasonable people to reject the political conception, she allows people to “veto the liberal conception of justice by claiming that it is not congruent with their illiberal comprehensive views.”³⁸ After all, someone could only reject the political conception either because she has illiberal commitments or because she prioritizes her illiberal commitments over her liberal commitments.

The second problem for the common view is that different citizens support the overlapping consensus for different reasons. As a result, they may disagree about the relative weight or interpretation of the principles that comprise the overlapping consensus. If so, then the “effective practice of public reason” is next to impossible because different groups have “insufficient common normative ground” to publicly reason with one another.³⁹

In response to the deficiencies of the common view, Quong advances an alternative where the two stages of political justification are reversed: the political conception now *follows* the overlapping consensus. Political justification begins “by asking what it is that citizens living in a society well-ordered according to any liberal conception of justice would have in common,” which should include the ideas of citizens as free and equal and society as a cooperative venture for mutual gain. If all parties agree to these conceptions up front, then the political conception they formulate in the second stage will be acceptable to reasonable people *by definition* because their reasonable comprehensive doctrines will automatically accept the political conception of justice. Political justification begins by identifying “the deep, or fundamental, values or ideals that can serve as a common framework within which liberal citizens can reasonably conduct disputes about justice.”⁴⁰

I do not think Quong’s alternative view reorders the stages of political justification. Instead, Quong has *eliminated* the overlapping consensus from political liberalism. To see this, consider what Rawls says about the formulation of the political conception. It begins from the perspective of “you and me” where we collect our shared considered judgments, which presumably *already include* our shared conceptions of the person and society.⁴¹ From the perspective of you and me, Rawls constructs the original position as a device that can convert the justificatory questions that you and I ask (which rules can we justly and fairly live under?) into a deliberative problem.⁴² So the perspective of you and me *already performs* the role Quong assigns to the overlapping consensus. Consequently, Quong’s overlapping consensus unnecessarily duplicates the construction of the political conception. For this reason, I interpret Quong as abolishing the overlapping consensus, which I shall argue moves the internal conception in an uncomfortably sectarian direction.

Quong couples his revision of the overlapping consensus with his reply to the asymmetry objection. Recall that the asymmetry objection holds that political liberalism relies

³⁷ Quong (2011, pp. 166–167).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

⁴¹ Rawls (2005, p. 28).

⁴² Rawls (1971, p. 16).

heavily “on an asymmetric view of disagreements about the good and disagreements about justice” that cannot be justified.⁴³ If asymmetry is indefensible, political liberalism is too. Here’s why. Political liberalism is based on recognizing the fact of reasonable pluralism. Due to the burdens of judgment, there will be a diversity of views about matters of ultimate importance among free and equal people. But Rawlsians have tended to focus on reasonable disagreement about *the good*, whereas Rawls later admitted that the burdens of judgment also generate reasonable disagreement about *justice*.⁴⁴ This is problematic because Rawlsians argue that reasonable disagreement about conceptions of the good prohibits the use of state coercion to promote them. It follows that, if citizens will reasonably disagree about justice, then the state cannot use coercion to promote reasonably contestable conceptions of justice. But political liberalism assumes that we can agree on a conception or at least a restricted family of conceptions of justice.

In reply, Quong distinguishes between two kinds of reasonable disagreements among citizens of a well-ordered liberal democracy. *Foundational disagreements* in which “the participants do not share any premises which can serve as a mutually acceptable standard of justice,” are contrasted with *justificatory disagreements*, where “participants do share premises that serve as a mutually acceptable standard of justice, but they nevertheless disagree about certain substantive conclusions.”⁴⁵ Quong claims that reasonable disagreement about the good is foundational, whereas reasonable disagreement about justice is justificatory. A state violates the liberal principle of legitimacy when it coerces by “taking sides” on a foundational disagreement, but not on a justificatory disagreement. The internal conception simply *assumes* that reasonable people endorse the liberal values out of which a conception of liberal justice is constructed, but it does not assume as much common ground on matters concerning ultimate good. Since Quong has already set up the internal conception to assume more common ground for disagreements about justice rather than the good, the distinction helps his case. As Quong says, “reasonable disagreements about justice are ... justificatory by definition” and so do not rest on “any empirical claim about substantive agreement between actual citizens.”⁴⁶

Quong’s revised overlapping consensus and his reply to the asymmetry objection insulate political justification from the troublesome input of insufficiently liberal citizens, including many actual citizens.⁴⁷ By eliminating the overlapping consensus, Quong prevents citizens with illiberal comprehensive doctrines from challenging the justification of liberal justice. Further, by defining disagreement about justice as justificatory, he can insulate citizens from sufficiently deep disagreements about justice to protect political justification from real-world disagreement about justice. It is this general attempt at insulation that makes the internal conception objectionably sectarian, or so I shall argue.

4 An Initial Challenge to the Internal Conception

The internal conception restricts the justificatory constituency to those who already embrace liberal values concerning justice. So while coercing some to promote goods they

⁴³ Quong (2011, p. 192).

⁴⁴ Rawls (2005, p. xxxvi).

⁴⁵ Quong (2011, p. 204). For Quong’s original development of this distinction, see Quong (2005).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

⁴⁷ After all, idealized citizens can be illiberal, and actual citizens can be liberal.

reasonably reject is unjustified, coercing them to promote a conception of justice they reject is permitted. An initial challenge to the internal conception is that, by allowing the state to coerce people based on a conception of justice they reasonably reject, the internal conception is objectionably sectarian. Gerald Gaus argues that what makes a view sectarian within public reason liberalism is not specific to coercion based on conflicting conceptions of the good. Instead coercion based on conflicting, but reasonable, conceptions of justice can be just as sectarian. Gaus provides a generic definition of an illiberal sectarian doctrine:

B is an illiberal sectarian doctrine in population P if (1) B is held only by S, a proper subset of P, (2) the members of S justify moral and political regulations R for the entire P population (3) by appeal to B and (4) only B could justify R.⁴⁸

What makes a doctrine sectarian, in other words, is that some members of the public coerce others on the basis of it when the coerced have insufficient reason to endorse it. *That's* why a doctrine is an unacceptable basis for coercion. This problem clearly extends to disagreement about justice, so Quong's distinction between justificatory and foundational disagreements cannot help us here.⁴⁹ Even if people share common premises, they will still embrace incompatible views about justice as true or valid, and so will still coerce others on the basis of doctrines the coerced lack sufficient reason to endorse.⁵⁰

Quong's reply to Gaus, in my view, only deepens the worry. Quong forthrightly admits that his "account of political liberalism shares this structural similarity with perfectionism."⁵¹ Strikingly, Quong denies "this is anything to be embarrassed about." He argues as follows:

Should we liberals be troubled by the fact that our conceptions of justice are sectarian with regard to these groups (like psychopaths and Nazis)? The answer is clearly no. The mere fact that my view of political liberalism is sectarian in one sense—that it rests on values not endorsed by all members of the political community—is not sufficient to think it is relevantly similar to perfectionist theories. The important difference between political liberalism and perfectionism is that the latter, but not the former, is sectarian with regard to some *reasonable* members of the political community.⁵²

Of course, as Quong quickly admits, people who thoughtfully disagree with liberal values are not necessarily twisted or wicked like psychopaths and Nazis. There are "All Things Considered Reasoners" who accept liberal values but who still think that other values have deliberative priority.⁵³ However, *even these people* are excluded from the constituency of

⁴⁸ Gaus (2012, p. 8).

⁴⁹ In response, Quong has claimed that he simply idealizes the justificatory constituency so that they share enough common ground about justice to prevent disagreements about justice from being foundational, but not enough common ground to prevent disagreements about the good from being foundational. This seems to me *ad hoc*.

⁵⁰ Gaus points out that Quong's view is not dogmatic, in the sense that it excludes appeal to any values other than shared liberal values. Instead, it's just "exclusionary" because the liberal values are all that count towards a public justification. Quong (2012, p. 12).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁵² Quong (2012, p. 53).

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

public reasoners because by including them we cannot “guarantee that the content of the theory will remain suitably liberal.”⁵⁴ It appears, then, that even those who think that liberal values are *sometimes* but not usually outweighed, are similarly excluded.⁵⁵

Quong admits that some will think his reply assumes “what needs to be shown, namely, that particular liberal rights and principles are justifiable and have deliberative priority for the members of our political community.”⁵⁶ But this assumption is problematic only if we think that public justification is a foundational principle in moral and political philosophy. According to Quong, it is not: “we do not begin with a commitment to public justification, and then only accept or endorse subsequent principles once we are satisfied they meet the test of public reason.”⁵⁷ Instead we begin with substantive commitments, such as a commitment to the idea of persons as free and equal, and then see whether other moral rules can be justified in these terms. To have a problem with excluding All Things Considered Reasoners, you must hold that public reason is meant to do too much.

Let me again stress that Quong admits that the internal conception is “sectarian” but that without a sectarian ideal of public reason, we cannot guarantee that public reason is liberal. Thus, “insofar as the public reason project is a distinctively liberal project, a certain amount of sectarianism is both unavoidable and, indeed, desirable.” Quong embraces sectarianism to guarantee that political liberalism *stays liberal* because there is no “coherent and morally attractive alternative.”⁵⁸

But what if there *were* a coherent and morally attractive alternative? In other words, what if a third conception of political liberalism could avoid the problems with the external conception while avoiding the significant sectarianism of the internal conception? If so, political liberals should prefer it to Quong’s internal conception because there is a strong case to be made that political liberalism must avoid being sectarian *insofar as it can*.⁵⁹ The case is relatively simple. Political liberals generally acknowledge that one point of public reason is to avoid the sectarianism of alternative approaches to political legitimacy. Theological conceptions are the subject of reasonable contestation, so imposing them on those who disagree would be sectarian. Similarly, comprehensive liberal conceptions are the subject of reasonable contestation, so imposing them on those who disagree would also be sectarian. The reason many accept political liberalism is because they seek a truly non-sectarian conception of liberalism. So it seems safe to say that if an interpretation A of political liberalism is less sectarian than interpretation B, then all else equal, B is superior to A. In light of this, I will now develop the convergence conception. I will argue that it is less sectarian than the internal conception and that other liberal values fail to favor the internal conception. If the convergence conception is coherent, attractive and less sectarian than the internal conception, then we can vindicate the sectarianism objection against the internal conception.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ I thank Chad Van Schoelandt for this point.

⁵⁶ Quong (2012, p. 56).

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 58.

⁵⁹ Importantly, this is not Quong’s view. In conversation, Quong denies that “if a theory X is less sectarian than Y, then it is necessarily better than theory Y in at least one respect.”

5 The Convergence Conception

The convergence conception of political liberalism joins the internal conception in justifying political principles and laws to an idealized constituency. Thus, in principle, the convergence conception agrees with the internal conception that requiring that political principles be publicly justified to *unidealized* actual people would tie public justification unacceptably close to vice, ignorance and irrationality. Further, on the convergence model, reasonable pluralism is a fact about the free exercise of practical reasoning among the idealized constituency, in the sense that people in the idealized constituency will systematically disagree about matters of ultimate import, including both the good and justice. The convergence conception also assumes that citizens are reasonable, though in a weaker sense than the internal conception. While idealized constituents must affirm the burdens of judgment and recognize that persons should be understood as free and equal in virtue of possessing two moral powers, they are not assumed to automatically affirm the absolute priority of liberal values. They *can* be assumed to give liberal values priority in the sense that convergence citizens will not insist upon laws that violate the freedom and equality of citizens, but they will frequently insist that their diverse reasons be treated on par with shared, political reasons when determining which laws are publicly justified.⁶⁰ It is important to note that illiberal values do not always lead to illiberal policies: citizens may have illiberal reasons to support liberal policies, particularly when the liberal policy is favored because it provides the citizen a space for illiberal lifestyles. For instance, a convergence citizen might affirm the right of free speech so that she can convince people that her illiberal religious views are true. Further, rights can be generated by using diverse reasons to defeat proposed coercion; citizens will tend to have a right against illiberal coercion because they will tend to have defeaters for the use of that coercion. Among convergence citizens, perfectionist policies will often be defeated due to reasonable disagreement about the goods to be promoted, so people will end up with a *de facto* right against perfectionist coercion. So convergence should also come close to guaranteeing liberal rights, though not for the same reasons as the internal conception, because on convergence liberal principles and policies must be justified via substantive arguments.

Beyond this, however, the convergence conception differs from the internal conception in almost every respect. The most foundational difference between the internal and convergence conceptions of political liberalism is the form of idealization used to characterize the justificatory constituency. On the internal conception, citizens are idealized to be rational, informed and reasonable enough to endorse the central liberal values of liberty, equality and fairness as having total deliberative priority over all other values. The internal conception does not in any way base the beliefs of the idealized constituency on the beliefs of actual persons. In contrast, the convergence conception begins idealization by taking persons' actual beliefs and modifying them in accord with widely recognized norms of inference and by adding information that is reasonably accessible to them. I do not work out this standard of "moderate" idealization here.⁶¹ For now, it should suffice to point out that convergence-based idealization *does* depend on what people actually believe, but only

⁶⁰ Paul Billingham has pressed me to specify that convergence citizens treat others as free and equal *as they understand those ideals*, which permits, for instance, perfectionist citizens into the idealized constituency. But, as I explain, just because people can advance illiberal or perfectionist reasons does not mean that perfectionist policies will be publicly justified. In fact, they will be defeated so long as others have sufficient reason to reject those policies.

⁶¹ For much more detail, see Vallier (2014, Ch.5), Gaus (2011, p. 235–250).

in the weak sense that it begins the idealization process by updating each person's actual beliefs. Thus, the convergence theorist's idealized constituency is a constituency of *updated* citizens.

The second critical feature of the convergence conception is its conception of *justificatory reasons*. On Quong's internal conception, the only reasons and rationales that can enter into the process of public justification are *shared* reasons drawn from shared political values.⁶² The convergence view permits reasons to differ dramatically between persons in the idealized constituency. All of the relevant moral considerations that persons consider rational and reasonable can count for or against a political law or principle. While mainstream accounts of idealization homogenize the perspectives of agents, moderate idealization maintains greater diversity.

In virtue of appealing to diverse comprehensive reasons, the convergence conception retains much of the overlapping consensus, in contrast with the internal conception. On convergence, we carry out *pro tanto* justification, which is driven by our shared values, but we must test the principles we adopt from a shared point of view against the rest of our considered judgments. If, for instance, a principle of distributive justice is adopted in the first stage based on shared reasons, but some reasonable members of the public have sufficient comprehensive reasons to reject the principle, then the principle is defeated. Consequently, the second stage is not a spare-wheel because it ensures that the political conception is justified to diverse points of view. However, in contrast with Rawls's second stage, the political conception is not intrinsically justificatory; on convergence, *pro tanto* justification is a mere means to full justification.

Finally, the convergence conception rejects Quong's reply to the asymmetry objection. It accepts that reasonable dissensus about justice can be as "foundational" as dissensus about the good, and that many disagreements about justice are as justificatory (in Quong's sense) as disagreements about the good. The convergence conception acknowledges no basis for asymmetry. This means that the convergence theorist must allow disagreement about justice into public justification, which means that in many cases the best or truest principles of justice will not be publicly justified. While this is a concern for the convergence theorist, it is *no more* of a concern than not being able to coerce others based on the true principles of the good. The result is that we must chasten the ambitions of political liberalism in a different way than Quong does: political liberals must accept that the true principles of justice may not be able to be publicly justified to many idealized constituencies, at least not in their totality. Instead, the most we can hope for is a range or "eligible set" of limitations on the principles of justice on which a liberal society can be based.⁶³

Let us suppose for the sake of argument that the convergence conception of political liberalism is coherent. So far we have no reason to think that it is not.⁶⁴ If so, convergence has at least two philosophically attractive features. First, it avoids most of the problems with the external conception by distancing (though not severing) public justification from the beliefs of actual citizens.⁶⁵ For instance, it avoids some of the worries about relativism,

⁶² Quong (2011, p. 262). I believe this requirement simply follows from the idealization.

⁶³ Gaus (2011, p. 43). As we have seen, Rawls adopts a similar position towards the end of his career. See Rawls (2005, p. xxxvi).

⁶⁴ I cannot address all worries about the plausibility of convergence, but some may worry that convergence citizens may give very little priority to liberal values, which might make convergence citizens less attractive as the subjects of public justification, as opposed to say Quong's citizens. I thank Quong for this point.

⁶⁵ Though the extent to which it does so will depend on how moderate idealization is fleshed out; it should do better than the external conception on almost any construal.

given that it relies on an idealized constituency rather than an actual constituency. Presumably an idealized constituency will converge on at least some moral principles that match our pre-theoretical considered judgments, given the need for *some* cooperative social system that is considered morally acceptable. Second, the convergence conception lessens the unattractive sectarianism of the internal conception. It does not insist on restricting public justification to people who are already political liberals. Instead, it allows a great diversity of views into the constituency of public justification. I suspect Quong's first concern about the convergence view will be that convergence does not guarantee liberal outcomes, such as protections for basic liberties. The internal conception vindicates liberalism by definition, but the convergence view does not. Quong will see this as a damning defect of convergence. But why think political liberalism is *supposed* to vindicate liberalism by definition? Quong's argument is that the only successful case for public justification is that it expresses a commitment to substantive liberal values, such as respect for persons as free and equal, the value of liberty, etc. Furthermore, if political *liberalism* is to be a distinctively *liberal* view, it must justify liberal outcomes.⁶⁶ We can construe Quong's claim as one of grounding: liberal commitments vindicate public reason and not the other way around. If so, then we need not be troubled by the sectarianism of the internal conception. In fact, we should even find some degree of sectarianism "desirable," as a means to guarantee liberal outcomes. The convergence view, as I have presented it, tests liberal political principles via public justification to a potentially illiberal population.

However, even if Quong is right about the point of public reason, this need not invalidate the convergence conception because there are versions of the convergence view that can be based in Quong's own understanding of what public reason is supposed to do. Let's suppose that Quong is right and public justification is constrained by the fact that it is meant to articulate a commitment to substantive liberal views. If so, we are not automatically led to the internal conception. One could still hold to a convergence conception of justificatory reasons and a moderate conception of idealization *on the ground that* they articulate a commitment to substantive liberal views. This reformed convergence view will ensure that citizens will often endorse liberal principles and associated liberal outcomes and policies. That is, we will construe convergence citizens as already somewhat liberal, since their views and choices serve to model our shared liberal ideas. So even if the standard grounds for convergence are not Quong's, we can offer an account of convergence as an articulation of substantive liberal commitments all the same. Thus, convergence need not be illiberal in the way Quong fears.

6 Convergence is Less Sectarian than the Internal Conception

Demonstrating that the internal conception is sectarian is not difficult. After all, Quong claims that the public reason project, as a liberal project, is both unavoidably sectarian and *desirably so*.⁶⁷ Further, Quong seems to accept Gaus's definition of sectarianism and acknowledges that the internal conception fits the definition.⁶⁸ Thus, Quong allows that perfectionism counts as an illiberal sectarian doctrine, and he admits that his version of

⁶⁶ Quong (2012, p. 58).

⁶⁷ Quong (2012, p. 58).

⁶⁸ Gaus (2012, p. 8).

political liberalism shares this “structural similarity with perfectionism” in light of Gaus’s definition.

If we base the convergence conception on Quong’s three moral ideas, then convergence will permit coercing non-liberal citizens in some cases.⁶⁹ So, to some extent, given Quong’s foundations, convergence is sectarian. However, convergence is clearly less sectarian than the internal conception because it prohibits coercing people who have comprehensive reasons to reject the coercion in question. The internal conception often permits coercing All Things Considered Reasoners, those who endorse liberal values but do not necessarily prioritize them.⁷⁰ In contrast, the convergence conception generally prohibits coercing All Things Considered Reasoners, as it will count their diverse reasons as defeaters for coercion. Convergence only recommends imposing laws that can be justified from multiple, moderately idealized and reasonable points of view.

Quong argues that for the sectarianism objection to succeed, “it would have to show that my account of political liberalism is sectarian in this objectionable sense—that it fails to be justifiable to some people whom we should identify as reasonable, and thus people to whom our political principles ought to be justifiable.”⁷¹ I contend that the coherence and attractiveness of the convergence view shows that coercion ratified by the internal conception cannot be justified to some people that we should identify as reasonable—All Things Considered Reasoners. Quong thinks that his exclusion of these individuals from the constituency of public justification will only trouble those who think public justification is a foundational principle, rather than an articulation of substantive liberal values. But we can accept Quong’s foundation for public reason and still endorse the convergence conception of idealization and justificatory reasons. If I am right, then a reformed convergence view can assign justificatory force to the comprehensive reasons of All Things Considered Reasoners.

The obvious reply is that if we understand the convergence conception as an articulation of liberal moral ideas that we cannot count the comprehensive reasons of All Things Considered Reasoners as justificatory because they are not liberal reasons. But a commitment to liberal moral ideas does not require all justificatory reasons be liberal reasons. It merely requires that the general application of the theory should vindicate liberal values. Given that the non-liberal reasons of All Things Considered Reasoners will primarily serve as defeaters for coercion rather than as reasons that can justify coercing others, illiberal coercion will be hard to justify. So in this sense, convergence may be *more* liberal than the internal conception.

However, I admit that it is possible that some All Things Considered Reasoners will have defeaters for *liberal laws* like non-discrimination laws. We might use Quong’s case of Anna, who has a defeater for non-discrimination laws of certain sorts, as an example.⁷² But whether defeating non-discrimination law is a problem will depend on the case. If Anna is the owner of a kosher grocery store and refuses to hire non-Jews to prepare kosher meat, her religious defeaters for non-discrimination laws are ones that a liberal theory should recognize as justificatory. But what about potential defeaters for laws prohibiting racial discrimination? I believe that the reformed convergence view based on Quong’s conception of the point of public reason can rule out the use of these reasons as unreasonable, and

⁶⁹ Again, the convergence conception is not wedded to Quong’s grounding values. They might flow from other foundations, like those offered in Gaus (2011).

⁷⁰ Quong (2012, p. 55). Importantly, though, it forbids violating rights justified for them according to shared liberal ideas.

⁷¹ Quong (2012, p. 54).

⁷² Quong (2012, p. 55).

so not justificatory. Just because convergence counts many comprehensive reasons as justificatory doesn't mean it must count them all as justificatory. Further, in being reasonable, convergence citizens must recognize a principle of reciprocity and the burdens of judgment. If they demand freedom to live in accord with their values, and recognize that others deeply, but reasonably, disagree with them about how to conduct their lives, then they must be prepared to extend that freedom to others. So even in cases where members of the public hold illiberal views themselves, they will recognize that coercion that institutionalizes their illiberal moral views cannot be justified to all because such coercion is not reciprocally exercised. So, insofar as convergence citizens recognize the burdens of judgment and the criterion of reciprocity, they will probably lack sufficient reason to reject liberal institutions.⁷³

Quong might reply by insisting that the internal conception is still more liberal than the convergence conception because convergence cannot show that the justification of illiberal conclusions is *impossible*. After all, a moderately idealized constituency with different cultural and moral values might reject liberal institutions, so the convergence view could count an illiberal regime as justifiable. But we should reject the condition that a liberal political theory is liberal to the extent that it makes justifying illiberal laws impossible. The only way to guarantee illiberal laws are *never* justified is to make the main conclusions of political liberalism true by stipulation. This is the route Quong pursues and it is unsatisfying. We should instead be satisfied if convergence shows that liberal institutions are generally publicly justified under contemporary social conditions. If convergence were to imply that liberal institutions are generally defeated, that would be a mark against it. But we have no reason to think as much, as long as convergence is rooted in liberal moral ideas and requires that citizens be reasonable.⁷⁴

It seems, therefore, that the internal conception is more sectarian than the convergence conception. Since I have already shown that convergence is coherent and attractive and that sectarianism is a desideratum in deciding between conceptions of political liberalism, we can conclude that the internal conception is objectionably sectarian. However, we must now address the concern that there are *other* values that vindicate the internal conception over the convergence conception.

7 Convergence and Sincerity

The best way to show that convergence is inferior to the internal conception would be to show that convergence is less liberal. But we have examined and rejected this charge. Nonetheless, we cannot conclude that Quong's view is objectionably sectarian unless we

⁷³ It would take more work to show that the reciprocity condition on convergence can generate more specific liberal policies, such as anti-discrimination laws. Given the power of illiberal defeaters on convergence, whether convergence can do so is an open question. I cannot demonstrate as much here, but I believe convergence can vindicate at least some anti-discrimination laws. I thank Quong and Van Schoelandt for this point.

⁷⁴ Perhaps Quong can reject convergence based on a weaker claim: while a liberal political theory need not make the justification of illiberal institutions *impossible*, it must show that illiberal results are remote or unlikely. He could claim that convergence is a poorer expression of liberal commitments than the internal conception because it does not make the justification of illiberal institutions remote enough. But I think there is a good *prima facie* case that convergence will vindicate broadly liberal institutions because convergence can be rooted in liberal moral ideas and requires that citizens be reasonable. Admittedly, I lack the space to make that case here. Gaus (2011) is an extended attempt to show that a convergence conception can vindicate liberal institutions.

address his main criticism of convergence. Quong argues that the convergence conception of justificatory reasons fails to realize the value of *sincerity* in public justification. If he is right, this might vindicate the convergence conception over the internal conception.⁷⁵

Quong argues that convergence permits citizens to be insincere with one another because it violates a commonly adopted sincerity requirement on public reasons.⁷⁶ For instance, Rawls holds that, as citizens, we should “believe that the particular view we propose ... expresses a reasonable combination and balance of the political values.”⁷⁷ Sincerity is necessary to ensure that attempts at public reasoning are not merely rhetorical or manipulative. Being sincere also expresses respect for our fellow citizens as free and equal. When we are sincere with others, Quong argues, “we acknowledge that every citizen is to be treated as someone ... who is the source of moral claims ... someone over whom power cannot be exercised without appropriate justification.”⁷⁸ Quong defines his own Principle of Justificatory Sincerity (PJS) as follows:

A may only endorse X if the following are true (and vice versa for B):

- (i) A reasonably believes he is justified in endorsing X,
- (ii) A reasonably believes that B is justified in endorsing X.

Quong takes (iii) to follow from (i) and (ii):

- (iii) A may only (in the political domain) offer arguments in favor of X to B that he reasonably believes B would be justified in accepting.⁷⁹

Convergence permits the violation of PJS by permitting cases like the following: suppose we have two individuals, A and B, who believe the following with respect to their respective reasons, R_a and R_b , with respect to policy X:

A believes $R_a \rightarrow X$.

B believes $R_b \rightarrow X$.

A does not believe $R_b \rightarrow X$.

B does not believe $R_a \rightarrow X$.⁸⁰

In this case, suppose that Art wants to convince Ben to endorse X. Art knows that he endorses X for his reason R_a and that Ben thinks R_a does not justify X. However, Art can persuade Ben with reason R_b , as Ben believes it justifies X. The problem is that Art must offer R_b to Ben *insincerely* because Art does not think that R_b justifies X. By voting for X, then, Art votes to impose a law on Ben that Ben regards as unjustified. By permitting this case, Quong thinks convergence permits insincerity.

Quong addresses several potential replies by convergence theorists, but I shall focus on one. Quong suggests that the convergence theorist can maintain that “A can sincerely believe B is justified in endorsing X even though A does not believe $R_b \rightarrow X$,” as X could be justified “from B’s point of view” since B accepts views that A does not.⁸¹ In short, Art can say, “I don’t think R_b is a good reason, but *you* do, Ben, so endorse X.”

⁷⁵ Though even if convergence permits insincerity, avoiding sectarianism might be more important.

⁷⁶ Micah Schwartzman has perhaps the most developed conception of sincerity within the literature. See Schwartzman (2011).

⁷⁷ Rawls (2005, p. 241).

⁷⁸ Quong (2011, p. 266).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 267.

⁸⁰ Quong uses “ \rightarrow ” to denote whatever justification relationship one prefers.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

To complete Quong's critique, however, he must reject Gaus's view that a moderate form of relativism about rational justification is required to identify our justificatory reasons. Gaus embraces a standard of *open justification* for reasons and beliefs. On open justification, "we treat [one's system of beliefs and reasons] as open to new information and arguments and, from this external perspective, mak[e] judgments about what would then be justified in [one's system of beliefs and reasons]."⁸² This is to say that what counts as a reason or a justified belief for a person will be relative to his cognitive system, inferential norms, beliefs and values. Thus, Gaus can reply to Quong's objection by arguing that Art can recognize Ben as having reasons that he lacks since Art understands that the set of beliefs and values justified to Ben are different than his own. If Gaus is correct, public reason liberals should endorse an agent-relative conception of epistemic justification that permits diverse beliefs, reasons and values to be justified to different agents. Given open justification, to check whether Art's beliefs are justified, we only need to look at the relationship between A's reasons, beliefs and evidence. Following Gaus, we only need a conception of epistemic justification that allows individuals with "systems of belief that contain different norms of inference and belief acceptance [to] be able to recognize each other's systems as *rational*."⁸³

Quong thinks that "Gaus's wider theory of epistemology ... is thus necessary in order for the convergence view to be consistent with PJS" rendering it problematic.⁸⁴ Quong offers two arguments to this effect, but I will only discuss Quong's claim that reasonable citizens will disagree about the relevant standards of epistemic justification needed for public justification. Therefore, adopting a specific view like Gaus's will be inappropriate: "Political liberalism cannot affirm or deny the truth of Gaus's epistemic theory because that theory conflicts with what some reasonable citizens believe about the epistemic status of other people's non-public doctrines."⁸⁵ But this reply confuses what Gaus has called the "perspective of philosophical reflection" and the "perspective of real moral agents."⁸⁶ Gaus's conception of the epistemology appropriate for public reason concerns how to formulate a model of public justification from the perspective of one theorizing about justice. If we employ relativism about reasons *qua political theorists* we do not thereby claim that the agents modeled by the theorist must endorse this relativism of reasons. It is crucial not to mix these perspectives, for if all of the details of public reason are viewed from the perspective of real moral agents, then practically all aspects of a theory of public justification are subject to reasonable disagreement. Consequently, the entire theory of public justification will appear too controversial to be the subject of public reason, making public reason liberalism self-refuting.⁸⁷

⁸² Gaus (1996, p. 31). Gaus has since altered his view on the epistemic ground of justificatory reasons, but the alterations do not undermine my reply to Quong. See Gaus (2011, pp. 244–251).

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁸⁴ Quong (2011, p. 270).

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 271.

⁸⁶ Gaus (2011, pp. 265–267).

⁸⁷ See Wall (2002, 2013). In correspondence, Quong remarks that my response may imply that real citizens can offer each other reasons they believe are not justificatory as long as the reasons actually are justificatory. This may seem tantamount to rejecting a principle of justificatory sincerity. Not so. Citizens do need to think that the reasons they offer each other are justificatory, but they do not need to have any view about the *philosophical explanation* for why those reasons are justificatory. That is, they must recognize that others can have different reasons for action, but they do not need to have a theory of epistemic justification to do so. *That's* why citizens interested in sincerity need not endorse any epistemic theory of justificatory reasons. I thank Quong for raising this concern and Billingham for encouraging me to clarify.

If public justification can assume an agent-relative conception of justification, then citizens may offer each other reasons they regard as unjustified for themselves without being insincere. If so, then the convergence conception of public justification need not violate PJS. To be sure, Quong rightly thinks that citizens will regard the comprehensive doctrines of others as false; and they will assuredly believe that the best reasoning and information vindicates their comprehensive doctrines. But, in recognizing this, citizens need not regard their fellows' views as unjustified despite being based upon ultimately faulty reasoning. John Pollock's distinction between epistemic justification and warrant is useful here:

A *justified* choice is one that a real agent could make given all the reasoning that it has performed *up to the present time* and without violating the constraints of rationality. A *warranted* choice is one that would be justified if the agent could complete all possibly relevant reasoning.⁸⁸

Recognizing reasonable pluralism only requires recognizing that citizens' differing deliberations about their reasons will yield justified beliefs, not necessarily *warranted* ones. Quong is right that reasonable citizens will not only regard their compatriots' views as mistaken but as based on all things considered bad reasoning, but this is not cause to adopt a loose, non-epistemic conception of reasonableness. Pollock's distinction allows citizens to ascribe positive epistemic credentials to each other's deliberations without regarding them as having reasoned in the best way. They can accept that other citizens' views lack warrant while still ascribing those views epistemic justification.⁸⁹ In sum, convergence is compatible with sincerity.

8 Conclusion

Political liberalism and liberal perfectionism differ over the use of coercion to promote conceptions of the good, right and just. Liberal perfectionists think the state is both permitted and often required to use coercion to promote authentic moral values. Political liberals urge restraint: unless the coercion is acceptable to each reasonable point of view, it is not permitted. In brief, publicly unjustified coercion disrespects others, fails to recognize their status as free and equal and treats them in an authoritarian and sectarian manner.

Quong has taken up the cause of defending restraint in the face of perfectionist coercion, but his defense is half-hearted. In response to criticism that his internal conception of political liberalism is too sectarian, he simply accepts the charge, declaring there is no better way forward. I agree that the external conception of political liberalism is flawed, but the internal conception is sectarian. If the convergence conception is coherent, attractive and avoids insincerity, then the internal conception is *objectionably* sectarian. Fortunately, a better alternative to liberal perfectionism lies before us.

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⁸⁸ Pollock (2006, p. 6). Note that both consensus and convergence liberals can make use of Pollock's distinction.

⁸⁹ Quong insists that reasonable people will still often view one another's doctrines as lacking justification even in Pollock's sense. I simply disagree. I am prepared to stipulate that reasonableness requires that a citizen be prepared to ascribe Pollockian justification to many doctrines incompatible with her own.

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