Against Public Reason Liberalism's Accessibility Requirement*

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Abstract
Public reason liberals typically defend an accessibility requirement for reasons offered in public political dialog. The accessibility requirement holds that public reasons must be amenable to criticism, evaluable by reasonable persons, and the like. Public reason liberals are therefore hostile to the public use of reasons that appear inaccessible, especially religious reasons. This hostility has provoked strong reactions from public reason liberalism's religion-friendly critics.

But public reason liberals and their religion-friendly critics need not be at odds because the accessibility requirement is implausible. In fact, the accessibility requirement is ambiguous between two interpretations, one of which is too stringent and the other too loose. Depending upon the interpretation, accessibility either restricts the use of too many secular reasons or permits appeal to a wide range of religious reasons. The accessibility requirement should therefore be rejected.

Keywords
public reason liberalism, public reason, religious reasons, secular reasons, public justification

Public reason liberalism combines the traditional liberal commitment to individual liberty with a requirement that coercive laws or proposals be justified to those affected in terms they can reasonably be expected to accept.[1]

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[1] Public reason liberalism comes in many distinct conceptions. I draw from their areas of overlap. For a characterization of a common principle of public justification, see Gerald Gaus

Public reason liberalism earns its name from its insistence that only *public* reasons can justify coercion. Thus, to justify coercion, according to public reason liberalism, one should engage in *public justification.* Public reason liberalism is perhaps the dominant brand of liberal political theory today, claiming among its adherents John Rawls, Jürgen Habermas, Charles Larmore, Thomas Scanlon, Gerald Gaus, Stephen Macedo, and many others.

If public justification must occur by means of public reasons, we must determine what it means for a reason to be public. Typically public reason liberals argue that what makes a reason public is that it possesses some crucial epistemic property, such as being shareable, accessible or intelligible. The most common property that determines whether a reason is public is what I shall call *accessibility*. Accessibility has been given a number of characterizations, but the essence of the concept can be distilled into a single definition. In short, I argue that a reason is accessible to John if and only if members of the public can see that the reason is justified according to common evaluative standards.[2]

Accessibility separates reasons into accessible and inaccessible reasons. The most common example of an inaccessible reason is a religious reason, one based on religious commitment and appeals to the supernatural. Religious reasons are said to be inaccessible because they generated by epistemic practices that many reasonable people reject. Secular reasons, in contrast, are supposedly generated by epistemic practices that all reasonable persons regard as legitimate, such as the scientific method, common sense or ordinary testimony. Thus, nearly all public reason liberals hold that one cannot justify coercing others based on religious reasons, as religious reasons fail to be public reasons.[3] This is not due to an explicit secularist commitment of public reason liberals, but only because religious reasons are thought to lack the crucial epistemic property of accessibility.

Accessibility requirements are controversial for this reason. They are arguably responsible for the well-known rift between public reason liberals and their faith-friendly critics. Faith-friendly philosophers often find public reason liberalism objectionable because it treats religious reasons as second-class or

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and Kevin Vallier, "The Roles of Religious Conviction in a Publicly Justified Polity," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 35 (2009), pp. 53-55.

[2] I should stress that accessibility is distinct from the criterion of acceptability defended in David Estlund, *Democracy Authority: A Philosophical Framework,* pp. 40-64.

[3] It is important to qualify this. Robert Audi (a fellow traveler with public reason liberals) and John Rawls (the public reason liberal *par excellance*) argue that religious reasons are permissible *so long as they are accompanied by a suitably public reason*. For these two theorists, it is reliance on religious reasons *alone* that is impermissible. See Robert Audi, *Religious Commitment and Secular Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 86-100 and John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp. 247-254.

somehow inferior to accessible reasons.[4] This treatment is said to require that citizens of faith violate their integrity. It is also said to be unfair. I claim that public reason liberalism's critics reject public reason liberalism unnecessarily. Public reason liberalism can allow the use of religious reasons in the public square. It is the accessibility requirement that bars the use of religious reasons, not public reason liberalism itself. In this essay, I argue against the accessibility requirement. I believe that without it, public reason liberals can answer their faith-friendly critics. Consequently, this paper should be of interest both to those interested in the deep structure of public reason liberal political theory along with those interested in the conflicts between public reason liberalism and religious voices in the public sphere.

My argument, briefly, is that *either the accessibility requirement is so loose that it is trivial or so restrictive that it is implausible*. I defend the thesis by showing that plausible versions of the accessibility requirement allow appeal to practically any reason, including many controversial religious reasons. I specifically argue that the most plausible interpretations of the accessibility requirement count reasons deriving from natural theology and religious testimony as accessible. I then argue that reformulating the accessibility requirement to exclude these reasons makes the requirement implausibly restrictive. If the accessibility requirement cannot exclude the *paradigmatic* private reasons – religious reasons – then it becomes unmotivated. It should therefore be rejected.

My argument resembles an argument of Christopher Eberle's in *Religious Conviction in Liberal Politics* that generates a similar dilemma against accessibility requirements.[5] Eberle claims that *mystical experiences* can provide reasons that meet the accessibility requirement, however construed. So why repeat the argument? Eberle's criticism of public reason liberalism relies on Reformed epistemology.[6] Reformed epistemologists believe that mystical experiences provide reasons to believe in supernatural beings, their presence, and even their testimony. Public reason liberals will tend to resist the use of such a standard to determine which reasons are public. Eberle's argument is thereby weakened because it presupposes that mystical experiences provide reasons for belief in the supernatural that can be used to justify coercion. To avoid this

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[4] Many have advanced this criticism but I am only concerned with *liberal* critics. These liberals are typically concerned that public reason liberals place restraints on citizens of faith that unduly burden citizens of faith.

[5] Eberle prefers to reject public reason liberalism rather than accessibility. See Christopher Eberle, *Religious Conviction in Liberal Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[6] Two canonical works in the Reformed Epistemological tradition are William Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religion Experience* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993) and Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2000).

problem, I discuss forms of religious reasoning whose soundness relies on fewer substantive epistemic commitments.

I proceed in six parts. I articulate and analyze the accessibility require ment in Section I. I lay out the relevant philosophical background for my main arguments in Section II. I show, in Section III, that reasons deriving from natural theology can meet the requirement, and in Section IV, I show that reasons deriving from religious testimony can also. I suggest in Section V that reformulations of the accessibility requirement can exclude religious rea sons, but that these reformulations make the accessibility requirement implau sible for other reasons. Section VI concludes.

I. Analyzing the Accessibility Requirement

Let us begin this section by giving a formal characterization of the Accessibility Requirement:

> The Accessibility Requirement: A's reason X can justify coercing members of the public only if X is accessible to them.

To fully grasp the meaning of the accessibility requirement, we must give a definition of accessibility. Typically, the idea of accessibility is understood as accessibility to the *public,* or to all citizens. We can define accessibility as follows:

> Accessibility: A's reason X is accessible to the public if and only if members of the public (at the right level of idealization) can see that X is justified according to common evaluative standards.

A standard example of this view is given by Thomas Nagel, who argues that to engage in the process of public justification you must "present to others the basis of your own beliefs, so that once you have done so, *they have what you have*, and can arrive at a judgment on the same basis."[7] The literature is rarely clear on the definition of the accessibility requirement; it contains at least eight conceptions of accessibility.[8] But the definition I have given captures the

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[7] Thomas Nagel, "Moral Conflict and Political Legitimacy," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 16 (1987), pp. 215-240, p. 232.
[8] For a detailed outline of eight variations, see Eberle, *Religious Conviction in Liberal Politics*, pp. 252-286.

essence of the idea.[9] Before moving forward, however, three terms in the definition of accessibility require further explanation.

First, I use the term "justified," an epistemic term that is often taken to be straightforward, but is rife with complexities. For our purposes, let us define justification as follows: a belief is justified when it is permissibly affirmed. Someone who justifiably believes P makes no normative error by believing P. Theories of justification abound, so I will leave the definition of accessibility open to various theories of epistemic justification. It is important to emphasize that accessibility requires public reasoners to assign the reasoning of others some positive epistemic status. Often definitions of accessibility only require that public reasoners be able to *understand* the reasoning that another is using, no matter how faulty.[10] But this standard is remarkably low, since even the most absurd arguments can be understood. The definition of the accessibility requirement, therefore, must involve the assignment of some small degree of epistemic justification to the public reasoning of citizens.

I next use the phrase "common evaluative standards." An evaluative standard is a combination of normative standards that specify what should be believed and what should be desired. Thus, take "evaluative standard" to be whatever normative standard can be used to evaluate the contents of one's *subjective motivational set* and all the rationales and reasons within.[11] I also refer to "common" evaluative standards; by "common," I mean that the evaluative standards are broadly shared and enjoy wide intersubjective recognition.

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[9] For some versions of accessibility, see Michael Perry, "Religious Morality and Political Choice: Further Thoughts—And Second Thoughts—On Love and Power," *San Diego Law Review* 30 (1993), pp. 703-727, Kenneth Greenawalt, *Religious Convictions and Political Choice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 12, and Kenneth Greenawalt, *Private Consciences and Public Reasons* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 151-164.

[10] Abner Greene provides one example, analyzing religious reasons on a "secret box model": "Imagine, for a moment, a group of citizens that has access to a box that contains evidence supporting a certain argument for a particular law. Suppose that group relies in the political process on the contents of that box but denies other citizens access to that box and its contents. We should exclude such shenanigans from politics because some citizens have access to the source of authority backing the law, while others are excluded from that source of authority … Express reference to religious doctrine … is the secret box model …" Abner Greene, "Uncommon Ground: A Review of Political Liberalism by John Rawls and Life's Dominion by Ronald Dworkin," *George Washington Law Review* 62, p. 659.

[11] My use of the term "subjective motivational set" follows Bernard Williams. See Bernard Williams, *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 102. A subjective motivational set contains the psychological elements that motivate action, including beliefs, desires, and "dispositions of evaluation, patterns of emotional reaction, personal loyalties, and various projects …." Ibid, p. 105.
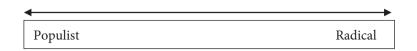
Finally, the definition of accessibility mentions "idealization." Idealization in public reason liberalism involves modifying the components of some citizen's subjective motivational set.[12] Some forms of idealization upgrade a citizen's level of accurate information, while others upgrade her rational capacities. Still others attempt to render her subjective motivational set more coherent, and nearly all attempt each of the three upgrades.[13] Since public reason liberals dispute the right degree and the right dimensions of idealization, I leave it unspecified in the definition of accessibility.

Idealization determines which reasons are accessible. When Citizen A offers a rationale, we must see whether Citizen B is able to access the reason given a certain idealization value. While rarely stated explicitly, conceptions of idealization within public reason liberalism often possess four dimensions: reasonableness, rationality, coherence, and information. I do not have the occasion to analyze the concept of the reasonable here, which is perhaps the most vexed concept within public reason liberalism.[14] For now, I focus on the other three dimensions. First, idealization requires a specification of an agent's rational capacities. One might require that an agent be fully rational, where she has maximal rational capacities. Or she might require that an agent have only the capacity for rationality that humans ordinarily exercise. She might even require something in between. The information metric specifies how much and what kind of information we give an agent that she does not have in her actual state. The coherence dimension specifies the degree to which we wipe out contradictions within a citizen's subjective motivational set. For now, however, we must collapse these three dimensions into a single dimension. This dimension of idealization ranges from *populist* idealization values to *radical* idealization values. Populist idealization values are ones where idealization metrics are left at their actual values, whereas radical idealization values push the metrics to their maxima. The range of valid idealization values runs therefore as follows:

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[12] Connecting a conception of an individual's reasons to her subjective motivational set is usually associated with reasons internalism in metaethics, but a commitment to public reason liberalism implies no such commitment.

[13] For some theories of idealization, see Michael Smith, *The Moral Problem* (Oxford: Blackwell Press, 1994), pp. 151-177 and Richard Joyce, *The Myth of Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 106. Also see Williams's view in Williams, *Moral Luck*, *pp*. 101-113.

[14] For some recent analyses of reasonableness, see Thomas Scanlon, *What We Owe To Each Other* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 32 and Gerald Gaus, "Reasonable Utility Functions and Playing the Cooperative Way," *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 11 (2008), pp. 215-234.

Populist	Radical

If this representation of idealization is accurate, the distinction between populist and radical idealization is non-discrete; accordingly, there will be innumerable specifications of accessibility. In the next section, I will argue that accessing reasons deriving from natural theology and religious testimony requires relatively little cognitive equipment, such that these reasons will count as accessible across a large range of idealization values.

It may initially appear that increasing the degree of idealization would only *add* to the number of reasons that are accessible, but further idealized agents may not be able to access all the reasons that their less idealized counterparts can. In other words, they may not be able to see some reasons as justified at their level of idealization. Increasing the degree of idealization does not *mutatis mutandis* increase the set of accessible reasons as a result. Nonetheless, a general case for the accessibility of religious reasons could show that such reasons will be accessible on enough reasonable specifications of idealization values to successfully defend my thesis.[15]

A final feature of the accessibility requirement must be stressed. The accessibility requirement is only a *necessary* condition that restricts which reasons count as public. Showing that a reason is accessible is not sufficient to show that it can publicly justify coercion. Let me clarify this point with an important distinction. Within public reason liberal political theory, a public justification takes place in two stages. First, reasons enter into the "justificatory pool,"[16] that is, they come under public consideration after being advanced by a member of the public. However, reasons in the justificatory pool must be reviewed by the public before they can be become legitimate bases of policy and law. Let us define a "principle of exclusion" as a principle that prevents reasons from leaving the justificatory pool and a "principle of restraint" as a principle that prevents reasons from entering it. The accessibility requirement is typically understood as a principle of restraint: it bars inaccessible reasons from entering the justificatory pool. Since accessibility is a principle of restraint

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[15] I thank Gerald Gaus for this point.

[16] The idea of a "justificatory pool" is based on Marilyn Friedman's idea of a "legitimation pool," or the "pool of persons whose endorsement would confirm the legitimacy of Rawls's political liberalism …." See Marilyn Friedman, "John Rawls and the Political Coercion of Unreasonable People" in Victoria Davon and Clark Wolf, eds., *The Idea of a Political Liberalism: Essays on Rawls,* 16.

it does not specify a sufficient condition for coercion; thus, even if we show that religious reasons are accessible, we will not thereby show that they are legitimate bases of law and policy.[17]

II. Some Background

In order to proceed, I must specify what a religious commitment is and why public reason liberals often see religious reasons as private reasons.[18] I will also motivate the accessibility requirement and briefly overview why many philosophers object to it.

I define a religious commitment as any affirmation of a proposition concerning the *supernatural* or the activities, wishes, intentions, commands, etc. of some agent or agents beyond the domain of scientific discourse.[19] I exclude reference to abstract objects or external reasons. Specifically, religious commitments are those that appeal to supernatural agents and supernatural events, and testimony about those agents and events or experience of either. Examples of religious commitments include belief in God, or many gods, or a belief that God has revealed, say, that polygamy or racism is wrong. Further, religious reasons are those that are generated by religious commitments.

Public reason liberals see religious reasons as private reasons because they do not believe that religious reasons are accessible.[20] The central argument for this claim is that since reasonable people disagree about which religion is correct (if any), then reasons specific to one religious tradition will be inaccessible to those outside of the tradition. Citizens will not be able to see the reason as justified by common evaluative standards, even if they can see the reason as justified given the evaluative standards of the faith tradition of the citizen who offers religious reasons in public. As Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson put it, appeals to Biblical authority cannot count as moral reasons because "they close off any possibility of publicly assessing or interpreting the content of the claims put forward by the authority."[21]

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[17] I thank an anonymous referee for pointing this out to me.

[18] Audi develops a classification of religious reasons in Audi, *Religious Commitment and Secular Reason*, pp. 69-75.

[19] Of course, this example has counterexamples. For now, I'm merely stipulating a definition of the notion of a religious commitment that is narrow enough for our purposes.

[20] Some complain that religious reasons are ones that cannot be "shared." I discuss shareability in Section V.

[21] Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, *Democracy and Disagreement* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1996), p. 70.

The reason that accessibility matters is that public reason liberals consider it *disrespectful* to offer citizens reasons in public political dialog that they cannot access. If the point of reasoning publicly is to come to a common decision amongst reasonable people about political issues, then offering private, non-accessible reasons cannot advance this cause. Instead, such reasons will only be offered to advance one's private, sectarian interests. Arguments based on private reasons therefore seem to boil down to demands that some comply with the private reasons of others. Giving others accessible reasons expresses respect for the reasoning of others because it is thought to represent an attempt to reason from their standpoint. If we care about respecting others, we will offer them reasons that they can comprehend, that can appeal to them, or that they can at least assess and endorse or reject. When someone offers religious reasons on behalf of her favored policies, she appears to be uninterested in respecting those who do not share her reasons. Christopher Eberle finds that most arguments for accessibility involve the claim that we are supposed to restrain ourselves from using religious reasons out of a sense of reciprocity.[22] As Nagel claims, we are supposed to offer arguments where others can come to a conclusion about them on the *same basis* as we have.[23] But we do not share our religious views, so we cannot do this with religious reasons.

Again, faith-friendly critics of public reason liberalism reject the accessibility requirement's restriction on religious reasons. Michael Perry, Kent Greenawalt, Christopher Eberle, and many others have expressed skepticism about restrictions on the reliance upon religious reasons.[24] Philip Quinn argues that the principles of restraint proposed by public reason liberals exclude religious persons from public debate.[25] Nicholas Wolterstorff maintains that public reason liberalism forces citizens who desire a religiously integrated existence to live a kind of double life, and thereby discriminates against the religious person.[26] Kent Greenawalt contends that public reason liberalism

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[22] Eberle, *Religious Conviction in Liberal Politics,* pp. 109-151.

[23] See Eberle, *Religious Conviction in Liberal Politics,* pp. 115-142 for a detailed discussion of these arguments.

[24] Kent Greenawalt's *Private Consciences and Public Reasons*, Michael Perry's *Love and Power*, and Christopher Eberle's *Religious Conviction in Liberal Politics* can both be seen as book length arguments to this effect.

[25] Philip L. Quinn, "Political Liberalisms and Their Exclusions of the Religious," in Paul J. Weithman (ed.), *Religion and Contemporary Liberalism* (New York: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), pp. 138-61.

[26] Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Why We Should Reject What Liberalism Tells Us About Speaking and Acting in Public For Religious Reasons," in Paul J. Weithman (ed.), *Religion and Contemporary Liberalism* (New York: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), pp. 162-81.

expresses a basic inequity of reasons because it privileges secular over religious reasoning.[27] The faith-friendly critics are frequently liberals, but they believe that public reason liberalism places unfair and excessive burdens on persons of faith. By excluding religious reasons from the process of public justification, these critics argue, public reason liberals do not treat persons of faith as equals and require them to split their identities.

The critics have a point. Public reason liberalism seems biased against religious reasoning. But public reason liberalism is not committed to this bias *per se*; instead, the bias is motivated by the accessibility requirement. By jettisoning accessibility, the complaints of these liberals can be satisfied. Public reason liberalism *sans* accessibility, therefore, will avoid the criticisms made against standard versions of public reason liberalism. With the background laid, let us proceed to the challenge of natural theology.

III. The Challenge of Natural Theology

Natural theology is the attempt to discern evidence for the existence or activity of the supernatural through natural reason.[28] Branches of natural theology pursue a priori argumentation for the existence of God or defenses of theological claims concerning the nature of God or God's will. Some strands of natural theology argue about whether one can have good reason to believe that God has revealed anything to her or what relation God bears to the human soul.[29]

In short, natural theologians claim that facts about the supernatural can be demonstrated through an appeal to natural reason. As a result, arguments from natural theology may pose a challenge to public reason liberalism's exclusion of religious reasons, since natural theologians claim to be able to compete in the realm of pure reason. Robert Audi's recent work on natural reason suggests that the reasoning of natural theologians is evidentially on a par with

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[27] Greenawalt, *Private Consciences and Public Reasons,* p. 120.

[28] George Howard Joyce, S.J. describes natural theology as follows: "Natural Theology is that branch of philosophy which investigates what human reason unaided by revelation can tell us concerning God." George H. Joyce, *Principles of Natural Theology* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1922), p. 1.

[29] See Richard Swinburne, *The Evolution of the Soul* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) and Richard Swinburne, *Revelation: From Metaphor to Analogy,* 2nd edn (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

secular reasoning in some cases.[30] Natural theologians like Thomas Aquinas make some theological arguments that can be evaluated, accepted, or rejected on rational grounds alone, i.e. with no appeal to revelation.[31] Given that natural theology is usually devoted to demonstrating the existence of God as conceived by traditional Judeo-Christian theism, it may have important political ramifications. Audi worries if natural reason is taken to be capable of establishing theism, "then the way is open to hold that governmental establishment of at least a generic theism is justifiable independently of any particular religion."[32] If one has good reason to believe God exists, then she may think that she can discern God's will and conform her behavior – *and potentially the behavior of others* – to that will.[33]

Consider a traditional Catholic argument against abortion: Catholic theologians regularly claim that there is reason to suppose that God provides a fetus with a soul at conception. Presence of the soul creates personhood in the fetus. Hence, the fetus is a person and must not to be killed. Suppose, then, that a traditional Catholic wishes to defend her vote against permitting abortions. Her argument might go as follows:

1) The existence of God can be rationally demonstrated.[34]
2) There is reason to suppose that God gives each human body a soul that can survive death and provides a human life with intrinsic worth.[35]
3) The least arbitrary candidate for the union of soul and body is the first presence of a unique biological potentiality, i.e. conception.

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[30] Audi stresses that natural reason is not essentially religious but can establish religious conclusions, such as the claim that God exists. He also stresses that his notion of natural reason does not depend on the metaphysical proposition that we could comprehend or discover natural reasons without God's help. See Robert Audi, "Natural Reason, Natural Rights, and Governmental Neutrality Toward Religion," *Religion and Human Rights* 4 (2009), pp. 157-175, p. 165.

[31] I do not mean to imply that faith is irrational; I merely mean that natural theology does not rely on supernatural testimony, i.e. revelation. Audi expresses a similar position, arguing that restricting natural reason to theology is not meant to "imply any disrespect for theology." Ibid, p. 167.

[32] Ibid, p. 166.

[33] We shall see below that Audi qualifies this position. Ibid, p. 168.

[34] The Catholic Church has maintained for centuries that the existence of God can be demonstrated by an appeal to natural reason. See Pope Boniface VIII, "Unam Sanctum," in Frederic A. Ogg (ed.), *A Source Book of Medieval History* (New York: American Book Company, 1908), pp. 385-388.

[35] Several theistic philosophers have maintained that the ensoulment hypothesis is one of the best ways to explain the "fact" that we have souls. See Swinburne, *The Evolution of the Soul,* pp. 174-199.

4) Thus, persons exist at conception and have their intrinsic moral worth at conception.

5) Therefore, all persons, fetuses included, must not be destroyed.

This argument is based on inferences that purport to require no appeal to revelation. Let us consider whether such an argument can satisfy the accessibility requirement.

The above argument is not valid. Instead, it represents the reasoning of an ordinary, but reasonably well-informed citizen. Consequently, we can assess the argument's epistemic credentials. To begin, consider whether a reasonable person could justifiably believe the above argument based on common evaluative standards, despite the fact that the argument may be mistaken. If the defenses of the premises are straightforward and based on good reasoning, then properly idealized members of liberal societies will be able to access the argument. Thus, religious reasons will satisfy the accessibility requirement at most levels of idealization.[36]

Consider the first premise: the existence of God can be rationally demonstrated. Most reasonable persons acknowledge that there are arguments for theism that cannot be immediately dismissed, even if they ultimately fail. Many of these arguments have widespread currency among members of the public. For instance, simple versions of the cosmological and teleological arguments are well-known even to ordinary citizens. And yet, both arguments are routinely analyzed and evaluated by people with distinct views (some of whom are excellent analytic philosophers). If those involved in public discussion acknowledge that reasonable people can accept arguments for theism, then they should regard as justified the beliefs of at least some of those who accept the arguments.

Consider the second premise: God provides human bodies with souls that give them intrinsic moral worth. Billions of humans believe in God and many more believe in at least one god; furthermore, some psychological evidence suggests that theistic belief comes naturally to us.[37] The vast majority of humans also believe in some kind of soul.[38] Scores of reasonable humans will then believe that God exists, creates souls, and somehow attaches them to

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[36] Bear in mind that these reasons will not necessarily publicly justify coercion.

[37] See Justin L. Barrett, *Why Would Anyone Believe in God?* (New York: Alta Mira Press, 2004) for an attempt to show that theistic belief is cognitively natural for humans.

[38] See Paul Bloom, *Descartes' Baby: How the Science of Child Development Explains What Makes Us Human* (New York: Basic Books, 2005) for an argument that belief in the soul comes naturally to humans.

human bodies. These views may be *false*, and they may not be well-supported by the most expansive and clear-headed understanding of the evidence, but neither truth nor exhaustive reasoning are the appropriate standard. Instead, public reason liberals seek a degree of epistemic justification appropriate to ordinary political argument. Consequently, such views need not fail to have some positive epistemic status.

The third premise holds that God probably attaches souls to bodies at conception. Many pro-life theorists have defended conception as the least arbitrary point for God to attach souls to bodies. It is not hard to see that this is one reasonable view, even if there are others. At the moment of conception a unity is created and has a certain biological potentiality. The ensoulment point may occur elsewhere in development, but conception is not an unreasonable starting point. The fourth premise only relies on the view that persons have dignity and are inviolable, a common position. Many believe that possessing a soul is essential to personhood, and so the presence of a soul entails the presence of a person. If fetuses are persons, then it is easy to see why they should not be killed.[39]

Most *unidealized* non-religious citizens can access this argument. Again, they might reject it, but they certainly can evaluate the argument and come to see it as justified for others. Granted, the rationale is bound to be controversial. But a rationale is not disqualified merely because it is contentious. What matters is that each premise in the argument can be evaluated and assigned positive epistemic status. So: is the argument we have discussed accessible at the right idealization value to reasonable persons? The answer seems to be yes. The defenses of the premises appear indistinguishable from secular arguments in terms of their epistemic status. Consequently, the natural theological argument against abortion meets the accessibility requirement on many reasonable interpretations. Increasing the idealization value will not render the argument inaccessible, as the argument is too simple. I conclude therefore that the argument above satisfies the accessibility requirement, despite its religious content.

To this point, I have only shown that one natural theological argument satisfies the relevant interpretations of the accessibility requirement. In response, I now expand the point to other natural theological arguments.

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[39] Of course, philosophers like Judith Jarvis Thomson have argued that even if fetuses are persons, that abortion should still be permitted. But I assume that many reasonable persons will reject Thomson's argument. See her famous, "A Defense of Abortion," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1:1, pp. 47-66.

Many argue against the moral permissibility of suicide on natural theological grounds.[40] A typical argument may see God as the sole moral authority over life and death, and conclude that suicide is impermissible. This argument is no less controversial than the argument against abortion, but its premises can presumably achieve the same level of epistemic status. Both arguments may be inconclusive. But most arguments advanced in the public square are inconclusive.[41] We cannot rule out candidates for public justification on such grounds.[42]

Notably, Audi raises an important objection to using natural reason or natural theology to establish substantive moral and political conclusions. He argues that "the best theistic arguments from natural theology conclude with the proposition that God exists, not with any specific moral or political directives."[43] Audi entertains the idea that natural reason can reveal unique normative truths by indicating the "divine will for us."[44] One method of using natural reason in this way is to employ natural law theory. But Audi maintains that natural law theory is no different from "other cognitive sources of moral knowledge, such as those appealed to by Kantians and Aristotelians" and maintains that "any reliable route to moral truth is in effect a possible route to knowledge of God's wishes for us …."[45] Still, Audi's arguments are rooted in his controversial notion of "theo-ethical equilibrium" which holds that a good God would give persons secular routes to moral knowledge.[46] This view has come under powerful criticism in recent years and as such cannot be so easily deployed to establish the substantial conclusion that natural theology cannot establish any robust and distinctive moral and political conclusions.[47]

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[40] John Locke makes one such argument, that an individual "has not liberty to destroy himself" because God has not authorized him to take such an action. John Locke, *The Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. Ian Shapiro (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 102.

[41] Gerald Gaus argues this point persuasively. See Gerald Gaus, *Justificatory Liberalism: An Essay on Epistemology and Political Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 152-3.

[42] The arguments might also be *defeated* within the belief systems of those advancing the argument. If all religious rationales were so defeated, then they would not be admissible in public reason. I presume that not all of them will be, given the public reason liberal commitment to reasonable pluralism.

[43] Robert Audi, "Natural Reason, Natural Rights, and Governmental Neutrality toward Religion," p. 167.

[44] Ibid, p. 168.

[45] Ibid, p. 169.

[46] For Audi's account of this idea, see his *Religious Commitment and Secular Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 130-9.

[47] For one criticism, see Christopher Eberle, *Religious Conviction and Liberal Politics,* pp. 325-9.

From the argument above, it seems that natural theological arguments not only satisfy the accessibility requirement but can also be used to establish substantive moral and political principles if we only require of citizens a standard of rationality and information appropriate for public discourse. Reviewing other natural theological arguments is unnecessary. From the foregoing we can soundly infer that some natural theological reasons satisfy the accessibility requirement. Let us move to the challenge of religious testimony.

IV. The Challenge of Religious Testimony

I define religious testimony as any statement or utterance concerning the action of or communication with supernatural agents. Sacred texts that record testimonies count as religious testimony, along with testimony by authorities who purport to have contact with divine beings. Examples of religious testimony include, among others, the ex cathedra infallible pronouncements of the Papacy and Muhammad's link with the archangel Gabriel. The Torah and the Bible count too.

Consider Teresa. Teresa is a Christian who deems homosexual practices morally impermissible. Suppose that the basis of this belief is her reading of Romans, Chapter 1. In the passage, the Apostle Paul testifies that the reason God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah was due in part to the homosexual behavior practiced and tolerated there.[48] As a result Teresa argues like so:

 (i)   The Bible is the central communication of God to humanity.
 (ii) The Bible is therefore infallible.
 (iii) The Bible teaches that homosexual practices are morally impermissible.
 (iv) Therefore, homosexual practices are morally impermissible.

Due to this argument, Teresa decides to support a ban on homosexual marriage and votes against the repeal of sodomy laws in her state. Does Teresa thereby rely on a religious rationale that fails to meet the accessibility requirement?

Teresa does not appear to be in the same epistemic situation as a citizen employing reasons of natural theology. The first premise does not have as long a history of philosophical argument on its behalf. Accordingly, many will view

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[48] This is a matter of some controversy among Biblical scholars. See John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (New York: University of Chicago Press, 1981) and A.J. Robert Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* (New York: Abingdon Press, 2004).

premise (i) as a paradigm violation of the accessibility requirement. All non-Christian citizens will reject the proposition and many might regard it as unreasonable. While some philosophers and theologians have advanced arguments that the Bible is epistemically reliable, it appears that the standard reasons for believing premise (i) are ones that are not accessible to those who reasonably disagree. Sometimes people believe the proposition for no reason at all, or merely through testimony.

Nevertheless, premise (i) can satisfy the accessibility requirement at the proper idealization value in two ways. First, it can be attached to reasons of natural theology. Teresa's fellow citizens might find her rationale for premise (i) accessible because she could situate it within an argument for God's existence and a further argument that the Bible is reliable testimony of God's will. Many reasonable persons have defended arguments for God's existence.[49] Further, philosophers of religion often defend the view that God's existence entails His goodness.[50] Several theologians and philosophers across history have argued that a good God would communicate with and aid His creatures.[51] These arguments are often accompanied by arguments that the best candidate for revelation is the Bible.[52] All of these arguments proceed by deductive and inductive inferences, and the chains of reasoning contained in these works are not clearly unjustified. Since premise (iii) is a claim about the Bible, although a disputed one, it appears accessible as well.[53] Evidence for this includes the fact that many non-Christians have engaged in the dispute.[54] Therefore, even many non-Christians can evaluate the reasons offered in favor of one position or another and assign the argument positive epistemic status. Premise (iv) flows naturally from premises (ii) and (iii). If God exists, is good, has revealed His will to us in the Bible and the Bible says that homosexual

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[49] Many philosophers do to this day. See J.P. Moreland, *Consciousness and the Existence of God: A Theistic Argument* (London: Routledge Press, 2009), Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds: A Study of the Rational Justification of Belief in God* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990) and Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) for some recent attempts.

[50] One classic argument can be found in St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles, Book I: God*, trans. Anton C. Pegis (New York: University of Notre Dame Press, [1268] 1975), pp. 139-141. For a sympathetic analysis of the argument, see Norman Kretzmann, *The Metaphysics of Theism: Aquinas' Natural Theology in Summa Contra Gentiles I* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

[51] Swinburne, *Revelation: From Metaphor to Analogy,* pp. 79-106.

[52] Ibid, pp. 239-288.

[53] See. ft. 36.

[54] For a study of the argument, see Sandra Y. Mize, "The Common Sense Argument for Papal Infallibility," *Theological Studies* 57 (1996), pp. 252-263.

conduct is wrong, then homosexuality is wrong. A real, good, honest God who tells us that homosexuality is wrong would presumably know whether it was wrong and tell us the truth about it. The argument is not deductive as it stands, but it meets the standard required to enter into the process of public justification.

Reasons derived from religious testimony, like those in premise (i), are also accessible because they are analogous with reasons derived from moral testimony, which are clearly accessible.[55] Public reason liberals have usually raised fewer objections to relying on moral convictions than on religious convictions.[56] But I shall argue that moral testimony and religious testimony are epistemically symmetrical. To see this, bear in mind that moral reasoning relies often on testimony from others – from families, communities, teachers, parents, respected authorities, and books. Our moral judgments seldom arise from pure reason; instead we form many moral beliefs based on the norms those around us already accept. Consider that most citizens cannot defend the moral claims they regularly rely upon, including those they rely upon in their political activities. We simply accept the moral judgments of others, especially authorities like parents, priests, friends, etc.[57]

Consider how our moral beliefs based on moral testimony acquire epistemic justification. One way to achieve justification is by believing the claims of those we have reason to believe are *reliable*. Reliability can be understood in several ways—that testifiers are perceptive, rational, knowledgeable, cool-headed, truth-tracking, etc. Generally we say that testifiers are reliable when they testify based on *good reasons*, that is, their testimony is epistemically justified. Testifiers testify based on good reasons when their testimony can be traced back to a justified judgment not dependent on testimony even if the judgment may be made by someone further "upstream" a testimonial chain. It seems clear that Sarah can justifiably affirm a moral proposition if she believes the moral testimony of John, a man she justifiably believes is reliable. She may

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[55] Christopher Eberle makes such an argument, drawing an analogy between justifications derived from morality and those derived from religious experience. He claims that neither moral nor religious rationales are subject to independent confirmation and that there is no non-circular argument on behalf of the reliability of religious experiences or moral rationales. Christopher Eberle, *Religious Conviction in Liberal Politics*, p. 245.

[56] Recall Nagel's words: "conflicts of religious faith fail this test [of common critical rationality], and more empirical and many moral disagreements do not." Nagel, "Moral Conflict and Political Legitimacy," p. 270.

[57] For more on trusting the testimony of our communities, see Thomas Reid, "Essay on the Intellectual Powers," in Ronald E. Beanblossum and Keith Lehrer (eds.), *Inquiry and Essays* (Boston: Hackett Company Incorporated, 1983), pp. 281-2.

believe he is reliable because his judgment is either not justified by testimony or can be traced back to such a belief in another.

Let us accept that some moral beliefs derived from testimony are justified according to some common evaluative standards. Presumably there are widely shared criteria on which the reliability of a moral testifier can be judged. If John the Testifier is honest, well-informed, level-headed and (at least) tacitly employs a reasonable standard of evidence, Sarah probably justifiably believes that John is reliable. Consequently, the moral beliefs Sarah forms from accepting John's testimony will be justified. Others may well make similar judgments. Thus, while a moral reason like "The moral authorities in my life think X is morally wrong, so X must be wrong" may seem inaccessible, it appears justifiable via common evaluative standards. Therefore, such reasons are accessible when the relevant testifiers are honest, well-informed, level-headed, etc. We can tentatively conclude, then, that many moral judgments derived from testimony will be accessible at the right level of idealization.

A critic might argue that testimonial beliefs are redundant at the right level of idealization because agents will already have direct access to all the information they would learn from testimony. This is implausible. Evaluating the information communicated to an agent via testimony would be an epic undertaking. A plausible account of idealization does not employ ideal agents with god-like capacities, but ones that utilize cognitive processes similar to unidealized agents. Thus agents with limited cognitive faculties may be unable to process all the relevant information. Relying on testimony economizes on the costs of collecting information and processing it. A plausible idealization-value will therefore include testimonial beliefs, some of which may concern morality.

Another problem needs addressing. Often we consider testimonial beliefs accessible because we can check the reliability of the testifier's source. One might think checking reliability is difficult for moral testimony. However, the public reason tradition already supposes that moral reasoning is reliable in that it either tracks the moral truth or follows the correct procedures for good reasoning. Thus, if someone testifies about morality, checking the reliability of the testifier's source requires checking the reasoning for flaws or for an appropriate degree of epistemic justification.

Reasons derived from religious testimony are accessible on analogy. Moral testimony is justifiably accepted if the relevant testifier is reliable. Suppose that the testifier has solid epistemic credentials because her testimony can be traced to a long and well-developed tradition of moral reasoning. Even this high standard of reliability will count many religious testifiers as reliable. For instance, the natural theological arguments discussed above can provide justified

grounds on which to believe supernatural moral claims. Those who testify based on the reasoning of these natural theologians seem reliable as a result. To illustrate, the moral beliefs of many Catholics derive from their local priests. In seminary, these priests probably studied serious Catholic philosophers, including St. Augustine, St. Anselm, and St. Thomas Aquinas. As a result, these priests may have reasonable arguments for their positions, or know someone who does, even if those arguments are flawed. In this case, the religious testimony of Catholics traces back to a reliable source, a source arguably more reliable than many sources of moral testimony.

Many will remain skeptical of the analogy, but it is unclear where it fails. Moral testifiers are frequently embedded in communities and traditions of moral reasoning, and are often reliable in the sense described. Arguably then, some reasonable people can justifiably trust their testimony. This trust will produce accessible testimonial beliefs about morality. Those who accept religious testimony are in a symmetrical epistemic position. Religious testifiers are often embedded within intelligent communities and rich traditions of theological and moral reasoning; further, at least some of them are reliable in the sense described. Those who believe religious testimony can develop justified beliefs based on that testimony. As a result, they will have accessible testimonial beliefs.

Consider an illustration. An economically underprivileged black man attends Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama in 1955. Call him Claude. He hears that on December 1st, Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a Montgomery Bus thereby violating Alabama's Jim Crow laws. Claude's pastor, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., informs his church that they are going to boycott the Montgomery bus system until the buses are desegregated. He tells his congregation, full of men like Claude, that segregation is an affront to their humanity because God created men with equal dignity. Therefore, blacks are equal to whites. As a result, segregation laws degrade black people and must be resisted, even if doing so requires going to jail. Claude accepts King's testimony, despite not entirely understanding King's reasoning. But he trusts Rev. King and justifiably so. Claude next engages in a political activity—he tries to change the Jim Crow laws. He believes, based on the testimony of Martin Luther King, Jr., that the law should be changed and he therefore continually engages in political activity to force the city of Montgomery to desegregate its buses.

Suppose that Bobby approaches Claude and asks him why he is trying to change the law, and suppose that Claude responds, "Well, my pastor, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., told me that the Bible says God created all men equal and that they shouldn't be treated unequally. So that's why I'm boycotting,

because I believe him and I trust him." Imagine that Bobby is a traditional public reason liberal who then replies: "Claude, I'm sorry, but you have just given me an inaccessible reason. I'm not a Christian and I don't much trust pastors when it comes to morality. By offering such a reason, you're disrespecting me by asserting your authority to change the law without giving me a reason that I can access." I submit that not only is Claude not disrespecting Bobby, but that his reason is perfectly accessible to Bobby. Bobby's reaction to Claude seems obtuse and even bizarre. Bobby has probably heard of Dr. King and if he is fair-minded, he will regard Dr. King's testimony as reliable from Claude's perspective. He will find that Claude has a justified belief and will therefore have to conclude that Claude's reasoning meets the accessibility requirement.

After reviewing several strategies that show religious testimony can satisfy the accessibility requirement, we can conclude that some reasons derived from religious testimony can satisfy the accessibility requirement. Consequently, public reason liberals cannot use the accessibility requirement to block reasons derived from religious testimony from entering into public justification. Since reasons derived from religious testimony are, again, the paradigmatic private reasons, the fact that accessibility cannot exclude them seems to deprive accessibility of its bite. It therefore seems to be trivial, which establishes the first horn of our dilemma for the accessibility requirement.

V. Modifying the Level of Idealization

If reasons derived from natural theology or religious testimony can meet reasonable interpretations of the accessibility requirement, then the accessibility requirement is not very useful. After all, the accessibility requirement was practically crafted with religious reasons in mind. Public reason liberals cannot exclude religious reasons simply because they are religious without being unjustifiably discriminatory. Instead, they might be forced to locate another property that will, in Christopher Eberle's terms, "separate the public wheat from the private chaff."[58]

The public reason liberal can save accessibility with two strategies: she can modify accessibility or she can modify the relevant level of idealization. Her goal will be to select an understanding of accessibility or conception of idealization that blocks reasons she regards as suspect, without blocking them

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[58] Eberle, *Religious Conviction in Liberal Politics*, p. 14.

merely because she suspects them. The search for a new understanding of accessibility seems like a dead end. While standards abound in the literature, their similarity renders them vulnerable to the same criticism. They all require that public reasons are justified according to common evaluative standards at the right level of idealization. It is hard to imagine a conception of accessibility that is (a) sufficiently similar to the known conceptions of accessibility to *count* as a conception of accessibility and (b) sufficiently distinct to do the job the known conceptions of accessibility cannot.

The defender of accessibility must therefore develop a new conception of idealization, either more or less demanding. From the preceding argument, it appears that conceptions of idealization closer to full rationality and full information will not change much. The religious reasons in question do not require significant rational capacity or enormous amounts of information to access, evaluate, or independently confirm. They only require a basic familiarity with the arguments that support them. If the argument in Section IV is successful, any plausible conception of idealization will contain some testimonial truths, and if the argument in Section III is successful, only a small amount of rationality is needed to render natural theological arguments accessible. A modest degree of rationality complemented by testimonial truths is sufficient to judge many religious reasons accessible. As a result, it is not clear how additional information and rational capacity could render religious arguments inaccessible. A critic might reply that more information and rational capacity will render some arguments inaccessible. For instance, philosophers sometimes (infamously) refuse to accord claims justification that any non-philosopher would. In some of these cases, philosophers are being difficult, but in others, they reach a level of understanding that shows that the claim in fact is unjustified. Consequently, a higher level of idealization might render some claims inaccessible that were not otherwise. Yet while in principle possible, we have no reason to think that great idealization will render inaccessible arguments from natural theology and religious testimony generally. Thus, it is still hard to see why arguments from natural theology and religious testimony will be seen as inaccessible at high levels of idealization.

In response, public reason liberals might opt for a less demanding conception of idealization or a "populist" conception.[59] Populism requires no idealization, but it is widely regarded as problematic. If public reason liberals adopt populist idealization-values, public justification will be captive to bad

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[59] Gerald Gaus, *Justificatory Liberalism,* pp. 130-136.

information and poor reasoning.[60] Public reason liberals might then adopt a "near-populist" idealization value, a conception of idealization that idealizes only a modest amount. But the arguments we have discussed are accessible on fully populist specifications of idealization. Consider that even unidealized secular persons can see some theistic arguments as justified according to common evaluative standards. A defender of accessibility could reply that at a near-populist level of idealization many citizens would not understand natural theological arguments and therefore could not see them as justified according to common evaluative standards. But this reply may prove too much. Certainly the details of climatology involved in forming global warming policy are much more complicated than the details of arguments rooted in religious testimony. I take it that public reason liberals will want enough idealization to employ climatology (or reliable testimony about climatology). If so, they will have trouble excluding arguments rooted in religious testimony.

Public reason liberals might abandon accessibility for a related standard, *shareability*. A rationale is shareable when the person accessing the rationale can integrate it into her own subjective motivational set. In short, a necessary condition on a reason being public is that it can be integrated into the subjective motivational sets of all reasonable persons. The problem is that moving from accessibility to shareability forces too many non-religious reasons off the table. Imagine Reba is a Kantian and John is a consequentialist. If John offers Reba a rationale influenced by his consequentialism and Reba cannot share the reason given her deontological commitments, then the reason fails to be public. In this case, it appears that any reason Reba cannot see as part of her subjective motivational set fails to be public since the only public reasons are shared reasons. As a result, legitimate state coercion will be rare, far more so than most public reason liberals would accept.[61] If public reason liberals adopt shareability, and they want to avoid a particularly extreme libertarian version of public reason, then they must argue that the number of shared reasons among members of liberal societies is quite large. But this is tantamount to denying reasonable pluralism, something that all public reason liberals must accept. Public reason liberalism is motivated by the idea that reasonable people will inevitably disagree about many of the most important questions in life; accordingly, public reason liberals cannot adopt a requirement on public

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[60] Ibid, pp. 130-131.
[61] An anonymous reviewer pointed out that classical liberal public reason liberals like Gerald Gaus may not mind this. For a more recent statement of his position, see Gerald Gaus, "Coercion, Ownership, and the Redistributive State: Justificatory Liberalisms's Classical Tilt, "Social *Philosophy and Policy* 27 (2010), pp. 233-275.

reasons that ignores this fact. For this reason, public reason liberals should reject shareability requirements as well.

VI. Conclusion

I argued in Sections III and IV that if the public reason liberal adopts a plausible conception of idealization, then she has to permit appeal to religious reasons. I argued in Section V that if the public reason liberal tightens her conception of idealization to exclude religious reasons, then she excludes too many reasons to achieve her other theoretical goals. To put it another way: the accessibility requirement either permits the use of religious reasons of many varieties or rules out too many secular reasons to remain plausible. Thus, either the accessibility requirement is so loose that it is trivial or so restrictive that it is implausible. I suggest, therefore, that public reason liberals reject accessibility.

In my view, the accessibility requirement is probably motivated by an intelligibility requirement.[62] It is hard to see how we can reason from the standpoint of others if we cannot see their reasons *as reasons*. But there is a crucial ambiguity in "seeing their reasons as reasons." Reasons *for who*? The accessibility requirement is the result of interpreting "seeing their reasons as reasons" as "seeing their reasons as reasons based on common evaluative standards." But the intelligibility requirement only requires that we see the reasons of others as reasons for them according to *their own* evaluative standards. I define the intelligibility requirement as follows:

> The Intelligibility Requirement: A's reason X can justify coercing members of the public only if it is intelligible to them.

Intelligibility can be understood as follows:

> Intelligibility: A's reason X is intelligible to the public if and only if members of the public (at the right level of idealization) can see that X is justified for A according to A's evaluative standards.

Intelligibility only requires that the public be able to see that A's reason X is justified for A according to *A's own evaluative standards* rather than common evaluative standards. The accessibility requirement only appears plausible

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[62] Gerald Gaus and Kevin Vallier, "The Roles of Religious Conviction in a Publicly Justified Polity," pp. 56-58.

because it relies on these ambiguities. We can reason publicly with others by recognizing the reasons they have, even if we find ourselves unable to access them. The reasons must be intelligible *as reasons for the other*. Note that if accessibility cannot block religious reasons, then intelligibility will not either given that it is a looser standard.

Public reason liberals should drop accessibility in favor of intelligibility. Since most public reason liberals endorse some version of accessibility, abandoning accessibility presents public reason liberalism with new paths of development. Without accessibility, public reason will lean towards "convergence" conceptions of public reason, where the task of implementing justice in the world is *not* primarily a matter of reasoning in common terms but of converging on a political order from distinct but reasonable points of view. Because public justification will require very few of citizens' reasons to share common properties, more reasons will enter into public justification. Some of these reasons will defeat proposals that would have been endorsed under a more restrictive conception of public reasons. Accordingly, without accessibility, the opportunities for consensus decrease, while the opportunities for convergence increase. Abandoning the accessibility requirement will impel public reason liberals to concern themselves with the shape of institutions and convergence on common *proposals* rather than regulating the structure of our common political dialog. It will lead to a liberal political theory less concerned with what we *say* and more with what we *do.* Thus something important hangs on whether the accessibility requirement is tenable: the nature of the public reason project itself.