# Practical political liberalism

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This paper introduces a new version of political liberalism, or at least a new, very close cousin of political liberalism. The new version differs from traditional kinds of political liberalism in its focus on *practical* rather than *doxastic* commitments. I might be committed to paying my taxes, and I might also believe that paying my taxes is morally required. The former is a practical commitment: a commitment to act. The latter is a doxastic state: belief in a proposition. This paper focuses exclusively on the practical states necessary for cooperating together in the right way. So I call the new version *practical political liberalism*.

I'll introduce practical liberalism as particularly accommodating to religious citizens. For instance, it can seem like more traditional kinds of political liberalism require religious citizens to be *skeptics* about religious questions. Practical liberalism will explain why skepticism isn't required. And the explanation illustrates more generally how practical liberalism doesn't require religious citizens to accept additional commitments that they'd find objectionable. I then argue that all political liberals should be practical liberals.

## 1 Motivations and problems

### 1.1 Motivations

Political liberalism aims to avoid the philosophical mistakes that contributed to the wars of religion in the sixteenth century. The warring parties thought that those who died without sharing their religious convictions would be tormented forever. So they thought that it made sense to do everything possible to convert them. If God will torture unbelievers eternally, even forcible conversions are a great kindness; in fact, they're plausibly a greater kindness than saving a drowning stranger. Since saving the drowning stranger is morally required, forced conversions are too.

Rawls puts great stress on "the Reformation and the long controversy about toleration as the origin of liberalism" (Rawls 2005, xxviii). We reject the reasoning that animated the warring parties in the sixteenth century. We think it neglects the importance of *tolerating* those with different beliefs. It's important to diagnose the nature of the mistake that the warring parties

made, in part because related questions still arise. Maybe religious monuments on public lands are intolerant in a related way, or maybe requiring a family business to subsidize their employee's birth control is. Identifying the mistake that animated the wars of religion promises to illuminate those further questions, too.

One motivation for political liberalism is thus to put our convictions about tolerance in reflective equilibrium. The principles that put them in reflective equilibrium should have, as Scanlon suggests:

> the appropriate degree of independence from our current first-order beliefs, since [they] leave open the possibility that some of these beliefs are mistaken and that the authority that we now attach to those beliefs in fact belongs to others instead. (Scanlon 1998, 4)

Political liberalism puts our convictions about tolerance in reflective equilibrium by requiring that political choices be justified to all *reasonable citizens*, including citizens of different religions. It's thus well-positioned to capture the central cases. Forcible conversion to Methodism isn't justifiable to Catholics; forcible conversion to Catholicism isn't justifiable to Methodists. Since Catholics and Methodists can both be reasonable, forcible conversions to any particular religion won't be acceptable to all reasonable citizens. Now since political liberals are looking for a proposal with sufficient independence from our current first-order beliefs, they shouldn't *stipulate* that Methodists and Catholics can both be reasonable. They should instead appeal to a general characterization of reasonableness that allows for Catholics and Methodists to both be reasonable.

Political liberals characterize reasonableness by specifying a range of central liberal commitments and holding that anyone who accepts those liberal commitments is reasonable. The collection of liberal commitments is a liberal "*political conception of justice*." Liberal political conceptions of justice include some moral commitments. For example, they include a commitment to treating citizens as free and equal. But liberal political conceptions are importantly indeterminate: they don't encode answers to all political questions. If they did, they wouldn't have an appropriate degree of independence from our current first-order beliefs.

Though liberal political conceptions of justice shouldn't *stipulate* answers to further questions, they should still *illuminate* those further questions. They characteristically illuminate those further questions by giving a central place to claims about *reasonable disagreement*. Rawls, for example, takes a liberal political conception to include what he calls the "fact of reasonable pluralism":

> the diversity of reasonable comprehensive religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines found in modern democratic societies is not a mere historical condition that may soon pass away; it is a permanent feature of the public culture of democracy. Under the political and social conditions secured by the basic rights and liberties of free institutions, a diversity of conflicting and irreconcilable – and what's more, reasonable – comprehensive doctrines will come about and persist if such diversity does not already obtain. (Rawls 2005, 36)

Reasonable citizens are then those who accept the fact of reasonable pluralism and the other parts of the liberal political conception of justice. That is, *everyone* who accepts all that is reasonable. Since Catholics and Methodists can both accept all that, Catholics and Methodists can both be reasonable.

The fact of reasonable pluralism plays a key role in political liberalism. It cleanly captures the central cases. Coercion of religious belief is unacceptable because the fact of reasonable pluralism guarantees that some reasonable citizen, Catholic or Methodist, will reject any such coercion. But it is also surprisingly fruitful in illuminating further cases without *stipulating* conclusions about them. For example, it figures importantly in Rawls' discussion of abortion (Rawls 2005, 243n32). It thus provides the appropriate degree of independence from our current first-order beliefs.

## 1.2 Problems

But political liberalism then seems to require an implausible kind of *skepticism*. Why would you accept the fact of reasonable pluralism unless you think that none of us can know particular religious claims? If I do know some such claims, shouldn't I be able to rely on them in reasoning about political questions?

David Enoch (2017) has recently articulated this kind of problem particularly sharply.[1] Take a Catholic who is robustly committed to her own religion. Given the fact of reasonable pluralism, the free exercise of human reason will produce some citizens who reject Catholicism; for example, Methodists. Political liberalism holds that Catholics should then refrain

[1] Others who have made related objections include Brian Barry (1995), David McCabe (2000), Steven Wall (1998), and Leif Wenar (1995). These points are connected with broader concerns about the foundations of political liberalism, as developed by Jurgen Habermas (1995), Jean Hampton (1989), and Joseph Raz (1990).

from relying on their comprehensive doctrine in justifying political action to those Methodists because of the Methodist's epistemic situation.

Enoch denies that there's any way for committed Catholics to think of the Methodist's epistemic situation that justifies this restraint. One option is for the Catholic to take the Methodist to be in the same epistemic position as Catholics. This option might well justify the Catholic in ignoring her comprehensive doctrine: there wouldn't be any reason to rely on the Catholic's comprehensive doctrine rather than the Methodist's. But it's not an option that a committed Catholic could accept. According to Catholic doctrine, Catholics *can* be justified in their distinctive religious beliefs. Enoch runs through the other main ways that a Catholic might think of the Catholic's epistemic situation, and argues that none of them explain how the Catholic can intelligibly acknowledge the fact of reasonable pluralism.

This problem is serious, because political liberals want to allow that citizens can believe in a range of different *comprehensive doctrines* while still accepting a liberal political conception. Religions like Catholicism are paradigmatic examples of comprehensive doctrines. Comprehensive doctrines centrally involve convictions about right and wrong, and how to structure your life. The liberal's ambition is to find a political conception that encodes important liberal commitments, but are also acceptable to citizens who believe different comprehensive doctrines: Catholics as much as Kantians. If Enoch is right, the ambitions of political liberalism will be frustrated. The fact of reasonable pluralism won't be acceptable to Catholics – and liberals won't have found a conception of justice that's acceptable to a wide enough range of comprehensive doctrines.

More generally, political liberals seem to be importing resources from another subfield of philosophy without sufficient attention to debates within that subfield. They seem to be talking about notions from epistemology, like justification or reasonableness. They then endorse claims about justification or reasonableness that proper epistemologists find very bizarre. Even more puzzling, political liberals are often serenely indifferent to defending their claims against the epistemologists' concerns.[2]

## 2 Solution: practical political liberalism

I believe that political liberals are *right* to be serenely indifferent to defending their claims against the epistemologists' concerns. But I still believe that they are using notions from epistemology. This section introduces my new version of political liberalism – practical political liberalism – which I

[2]This paragraph is somewhat stylized; Gaus (1996) complicates it.

intend in part to harmonize those two beliefs. I'll spend the next five pages introducing practical political liberalism, then return to Enoch's complaint.

## 2.1 Introducing practical liberalism

Liberal political conceptions of justice are standardly characterized as sets of propositions. They might include what I'll call the Pluralist Proposition.

> (*Pluralist Proposition*) we must reject policies if they're not acceptable to everyone who freely exercises human reason and accepts the doctrines of the political conception of justice

I take this proposition to express a normative requirement, about what we must or should do.[3] I won't fuss about the scope of the Pluralist Proposition: whether it just applies to *policies*, as I have it here, or just some kinds of policies, or to *reasons* offered in support of policies, or something else.[4] Our question cross-cuts these issues.

The core innovation of practical political liberalism is to reconceptualize liberal political conceptions of justice, characterizing them as sets of actions rather than of propositions.

> (*Pluralist Action*) reject policies that aren't acceptable to everyone who freely exercises human reason and accepts the doctrines of the political conception of justice

The Pluralist Proposition is like a map: it purports to describe a part of normative reality. The Pluralist *Action*, in contrast, doesn't describe anything; it's not a map. It's more like an instruction: it's what someone might tell you to do. If liberal political conceptions of justice are actions, then reasonable citizens only need to agree on the same instructions: they don't need to agree to the same map of normative reality.

Reasonable citizens accept this part of the political conception of justice if they're committed to the actions in the right way. This suggestion resembles a non-cognitivist theory of moral judgments, where moral judgments are non-cognitive states like approval or disapproval, or planning

[3] I think standard versions of political liberalism do focus on propositions about normative requirements, as I discuss in more detail below; James Boettcher (2012), Joshua Cohen (2009), David Estlund (1998), and Jonathan Quong (2011) all explicitly claim they do.

[4] For Rawls, the analogue of the Pluralist Doctrine holds only for constitutional essentials and matters of basic justice (Rawls 2005, 140); Jonathan Quong takes it to apply in the first place to laws (Quong 2011, 233ff); for Andrew Lister, it applies in the first place to our reasons for policies (Lister 2013, 13ff).

states. Judging that killing is morally wrong might then be disapproving of killing, or planning to not kill. Moral judgments are factored into actions (killing), plus an attitude (disapproval). Practical liberalism also factors accepting doctrines of liberal political conceptions into actions (like the Pluralist Action) and an attitude (robust commitment). I call this proposal *practical* political liberalism because of its focus on actions rather than propositions.[5]

Non-cognitivism about *morality* is highly controversial. Plenty of reasonable citizens reject it. So practical liberalism couldn't get off the ground if it required accepting non-cognitivism about morality. Fortunately, though, it doesn't. Practical liberalism only gives an account of a notion *internal to political philosophy*: the notion of a reasonable citizen. It's the claim that certain sets of non-cognitive states are jointly sufficient for being reasonable. This claim could be true even if non-cognitivism about morality is false. The deepest problems for non-cognitivism about morality are problems in providing a constructive explanation of the infinite possibilities for using moral language, as Schroeder (2008) explains. Practical liberalism, by contrast, is only a characterization of something *finite*: the doctrines of the liberal political conception. It won't face the same problems.

I've just suggested that standard formulations of political liberalism require reasonable citizens to accept a range of propositions about normative requirements to act in particular ways. Practical political liberalism instead requires reasonable citizens to be robustly committed to those actions. Here's a general recipe for translating standard versions of political liberalism into their practical variant:

> **General Recipe**: Take a traditional version $V_i$ of political liberalism, where reasonableness requires accepting a range of propositions of the form: 'citizens must $\phi$'
>
> > The practical political version of $V_i$ is that reasonableness requires being robustly committed to all

[5]Practical liberalism is an example of what Joshua Cohen calls a *No Truth Bearers* view of political liberalism. The objects of agreement are actions, not propositions, and actions aren't uncontroversially truth-apt in the way that propositions are. Cohen complains that this kind of proposal cannot explain why public reason "is an exercise of practical reason, of reflection and judgment" (Cohen 2009, 16). This complaint is baffling. We can reason about actions and intentions, about what we're committed to once we're committed to performing certain actions or having certain intentions. Cohen may really be worried about whether this sort of view can capture the objectivity of the political conception; I discuss that below. Leif Wenar (1995) and Martha Nussbaum (2011) discuss related theses that are less revisionary than practical liberalism.

> the actions $\phi$-ing that the traditional version of $V_i$ includes as normative required.

Consider, for example, constitutionally entrenched basic rights. Given practical liberalism, acknowledging x's Hohfeldian liberty right to $\phi$ involves robustly committing to not interfering with x's $\phi$-ing; acknowledging a Hohfeldian claim right that everyone $\phi$-s involves at least robustly committing to $\phi$-ing, and committing to getting others to $\phi$ as well. Full specification of these rights would be more detailed. For example, it would specify the contexts where reasonable citizens are committed to not interfering. Though there are interesting technical questions about the details here, I save those questions for another occasion. My goal is to convince you that those technical questions are worth discussing, by convincing you that practical liberalism should be taken seriously.[6]

What is it to be "robustly committed" to an action? *Every* political liberal already needs an answer to that question. Our normative beliefs don't always motivate us – for example, they don't motivate us when we're depressed.[7] It's thus possible for a citizen to believe the Pluralist Proposition while this belief leaves her cold. Such a citizen would be open to voting for policies that she knows aren't acceptable to other reasonable citizens, even though she believes that she's violating a normative requirement in so doing. She's unreasonable.

So all traditional political liberals need a two-part characterization of reasonableness. Reasonable citizens (a) accept the Pluralist Proposition, and (b) are ROBUSTLY COMMITTED to complying with its demands. The (b)-component excludes agents who aren't motivated by their normative judgments. When I talk about 'robust commitment', I intend the (b)-component that *all* political liberals should require. We should thus see traditional political liberals as *extending* practical political liberalism. They

[6]Some have suggested to me that Rawls or Gaus implicitly accepted something like practical liberalism. Maybe so – but the fact that they didn't discuss these technical questions makes me think that it wasn't something they *explicitly* worked out. And it's worth explicitly working it out, as the rest of the paper aims to establish.

[7]There is an enormous literature on this point. Especially important discussions include Michael Smith (1994) and Sigrun Svavarsdottir (1999). Some philosophers insist on a connection between normative judgment and motivation. But even those philosophers concede that the connection is plausible only if the individual is *practically rational*. (See, in addition to Smith, the discussion in Allan Gibbard (2003) and Simon Blackburn (1998).) So the point in the main text still holds. Ordinary finite agents like you and me aren't perfectly practically rational – so a conception of political liberalism that conceives of its citizens as perfectly practically rational is a conception for angels, not for us.

agree with practical liberalism about one of the requirements on being reasonable, the (b)-requirement. Their cognitive (a)-requirement is an *extension* to practical liberalism, not an alternative.

Practical liberalism includes its own characterization of *objectivity*. Reasonable citizens desire to cooperate on fair terms. Cooperation extends over time. So desiring to cooperate on fair terms constitutively involves desiring your future self to also desire to cooperate on fair terms. Practical liberalism thus holds that

- reasonable citizens desire to be robustly committed the actions that constitute the liberal political conception of justice whenever the circumstances of justice obtain.

A citizen could have this higher-order desire if she wants her future self to undergo therapy to restore her present commitment to a liberal society should she lose that commitment.

Political liberals in general insist that reasonable citizens accept the liberal political conception as *objective*. Practical liberals take the objectivity of the political conception to consist in the higher-order desire just mentioned.

> (Practical Objectivity) Accepting a political conception as objective is wanting yourself to accept that political conception whenever the circumstances of justice obtain.

Different kinds of practical liberalism can adopt different practical conceptions of objectivity. I've described a moderate one, focused on the circumstances of justice. A more demanding one would require a desire to accept those doctrines in any circumstance whatsoever; others are possible too. In thinking through the rest of the paper, substitute in whatever version of practical objectivity you find most plausible.[8]

[8] It's not odd for the political liberal to offer her own conception of objectivity. Rawls himself does (Rawls 2005, 117ff). In fact, the practical conception of objectivity is quite similar to the conception of objectivity that expressivists offer. Compare Simon Blackburn: "there is the objectivity mentioned above, of recognizing that it is not our own opinions that ground the rightness and wrongness of things. Cruelty is not bad because I think it is bad, but because it exhibits the intention to cause pain. Objectivity in all these senses is a moral virtue, and one to be striven for and respected" (Blackburn 1998, 308). This conception of objectivity is controversial. (For some doubts, see David Faraci (2017).) Importantly, though, doubts about the expressivist's conception of objectivity are not also doubts about the practical liberal's conception of objectivity. The two conceptions are about different domains: one is about what it is to take a normative judgment to be objective, and another is about what it is to accept the political

Since reasonable citizens must accept a liberal political conception as practically objective, they cannot be committed to it as a *modus vivendi* – as a way of getting along with your present limitations, until you can be free of them.[9] Commitment to the liberal political conception as a mere *modus vivendi* does not include the desire to accept the political conception whenever the circumstances of justice obtain, since your group could accumulated enough political power where the circumstances of justice obtain.

Practical liberalism is thus:

- (Act-Centered) The political conception consists in actions, not propositions.
- (Practical) Accepting the doctrines of the political conception is a practical state: it's being robustly committed to those actions.
- (Practically Objective) Regarding the doctrines of the political conception as objective is wanting yourself to accept those doctrines in any situation you can imagine where the circumstances of justice obtain.

Practical political liberalism doesn't privilege any ground for these practical states; it only claims that they're sufficient for reasonableness.

## 2.2 Skepticism not required

Practical liberalism cleanly explains why reasonable citizens needn't be skeptics about religious knowledge. The explanation does incorporate purely epistemic notions, like the notion of a belief-forming mechanism that's 93% reliable, the notion of a belief-forming mechanism that's 83% reliable, one that's 73% reliable, ... But it then uses those epistemic notions in ways that epistemologists wouldn't.

Practical liberalism uses epistemic notions to put our convictions about tolerance into reflective equilibrium. Here's a crass example.

> Crass Standard: x is *politically reasonable* in believing p iff
>
> - when p is about a scientific question, x's belief that p results from a belief-forming mechanism that's 93% reliable

conception in the right way, as not a mere *modus vivendi*. And all political liberals will agree that the practical liberal's higher-order intentions are necessary for seeing the political conception as objective. They will disagree about whether it's sufficient. But that disagreement is just disagreement about whether practical liberalism is correct – and that's our question in this paper.

[9] For discussion, see pp. xxxixf in Rawls (2005).

- when p is about a religious question, x's belief that p results from a belief-forming mechanism that's 63% reliable

Practical liberalism could incorporate the Crass Standard, requiring policies to be justifiable to every reasonable citizen who meets the Crass Standard. The Crass Standard does incorporate notions from epistemology: notions of belief-forming mechanisms with different degrees of reliability. Because it incorporates those notions, it has the right kind of independence from our first-order convictions – it's not baking in answers about who to tolerate. Then the Crass Standard can matter as the best way of putting our convictions about tolerance in reflective equilibrium.

In contrast, skeptical conclusions involve *all-things-considered* epistemic evaluation – final evaluation from the epistemic point of view. Catholic citizens could insist that only Catholic beliefs could be genuinely justified. In so insisting, they're insisting on a point about all-things-considered epistemic evaluation. And they could intelligibly *reject* the Crass Standard as an account of all-things-considered epistemic evaluation. They might insist, for instance, that all-things considered epistemic evaluation involves holding scientific and religious questions to the same standard – for instance, requiring them all to result from a belief-forming mechanism that's 93% reliable. And they could hold that Catholic beliefs are the only ones that meet that standard. For instance, Methodist belief-forming mechanisms are less reliable, since they ignore the pope. Even if the Crass Standard governs their political actions, it doesn't govern their all-things-considered epistemic evaluations – which is why they're not committed to skepticism about religious belief.

And, crucially, religious citizens can adopt the Crass Standard as Practically Objective without taking the Crass Standard to govern all-things-considered epistemic evaluation. Maybe those citizens refuse to compel any kind of religious belief because they think that only God can legitimately compel someone's religious beliefs. Actions appropriate for God are inappropriate for us, because God has assigned those actions as God's exclusive prerogative. These citizens could then be robustly committed to the Crass Pluralist Action:

> (*Crass Pluralist Action*) rejecting policies that aren't acceptable to everyone whose beliefs are reasonable given the Crass Standard and who accepts the doctrines of the political conception of justice

These citizens could adopt the Crass Standard to put their convictions about tolerance in reflective equilibrium. Their commitment to the Crass Pluralist Action would still be Practically Objective. They want to be

committed the Crass Pluralist Action in every situation they can imagine. They're horrified at the thought of compelling religious belief themselves; they think that they'd be arrogating to themselves something that's God's exclusive prerogative. But they don't think that the Crass Standard is *epistemically* interesting – that's not why they rely on it in political contexts. So they can insist that someone can meet the Crass Standard without having justified religious beliefs.

The previous paragraph highlighted a practical goal: the practical goal of not arrogating God's exclusive prerogatives. That practical goal explains why someone could rely on the Crass Standard. They use the Crass Standard as a guide to not arrogating God's exclusive prerogatives. I find it helpful to compare practical liberalism with a very different kind of claim from Pekka Väyrynen (2014): that courage might be "shapeless" from non-evaluative perspectives – there might be no "independently intelligible non-evaluative relations of real similarity" (Väyrynen 2014, 576) that unify all instances of courage. Practical liberalism allows that the Crass Standard might be shapeless from *non-political* perspectives. Epistemologists could easily see it as a gruesome conjunction of unrelated elements, insisting that there are no "independently intelligible" *properly epistemic* "relations of real similarity" that unify the disparate elements of the Crass Standard. Practical political liberals could nonetheless use it, to the extent that reasonable citizens' practical goals explain its use.

The Crass Standard is of course crass; it's unlikely that any political liberal would use it. But it illustrates how reasonable citizens could be practically committed to a standard that they find epistemically uninteresting, and that epistemologists would find intolerably jury-rigged. It thus illustrates why practical liberalism doesn't require skepticism about religious knowledge. Skepticism involves *all-things-considered* epistemic evaluation. And *practical* goals of tolerating others explains why citizens could use something like the Crass Standard to govern reasoning about tolerance without taking it to govern all-things-considered epistemic evaluation.

David Enoch does anticipate something like practical liberalism (§2.2.3): he admits that it would solve the problem that he's describing, but thinks it's indefensible for three other reasons (Enoch 2017, 144ff). His first point is that religious citizens take their moral commitments to involve beliefs, and not just practical states. Practical liberalism agrees, of course: the point is just that reasonable citizens need to have certain practical commitments *in addition to whatever beliefs they might have*. His second objection is that the serious problems for non-cognitivism in ethics would also be a problem for a view like practical political liberalism. As noted earlier, though, this sort of objection fails: the problems for the non-cognitivist arise because they're trying to explain our ability to make an *infinite* number of moral

judgments (Schroeder 2010, 128ff). And practical liberalism only needs to capture the *finite* number of commitments that make up the political conception of justice. Enoch's final complaint is that non-cognitivism is controversial among reasonable citizens. And indeed it is – which is why practical political liberalism is an account only of notions internal to political philosophy, not of morality in general.

## 3 The fundamental argument for practical liberalism

Practical political liberalism cleanly solves an important problem for political liberals. It explains why religious citizens can acknowledge the fact of reasonable pluralism without being skeptics. I think this solution works well. But I don't want to try to show that it's the only adequate solution to the problem. Instead, my ambitions will shift from this point on. I'll now start arguing that political liberals should all adopt practical liberalism anyway. If so, every political liberal gets this solution for free.

The paper opened by assuming that one of the central motivations for political liberalism is to put our convictions about toleration in reflective equilibrium. But other motivations for political liberalism often loom larger in the recent literature. One more standard option is to motivate political liberalism as a way of justifying coercive government action by showing how some kinds of coercive action are acceptable to reasonable citizens. Another standard option is introducing it as a way of providing fair terms of cooperation, by requiring the terms of cooperation be justifiable to all reasonable citizens. Yet another option is to explain how the social order could be stable for the right reasons.

But I will focus only on putting our convictions about tolerance in reflective equilibrium, and bracket the other motivations. My argument will be that practical liberalism is the best way to put the convictions in reflective equilibrium. This argument is interesting even if practical liberalism is a poor fit for other motivations for political liberalism. If it's a poor fit, my argument would establish that there are important tensions between the different motivations for political liberalism – an interesting result in itself. But if practical liberalism is also a good fit for other motivations for political liberalism, then we've plausibly found the best version of political liberalism. I myself am hopeful that practical liberalism is a good fit for the other motivations. That hope is why I call practical liberalism a kind of political liberalism. If you don't share the hope, you might doubt that it really is a kind of political liberalism. You might think that it's a closely related view that's nonetheless a competitor.

Practical political liberalism differs from other approaches which aim to put our convictions about tolerance in reflective equilibrium. G. A.

Gaus (2011) and Kevin Vallier (2014) have recently developed a sort of variant of political liberalism that avoids forcing religious citizens to accept commitments they find objectionable. They focus on convergence on laws:

> **Public Justification Principle**: L is a justified coercive law only if each and every member of the public P has conclusive reason(s) R to accept L as a requirement (Gaus and Vallier 2009, 53)

This Principle is very different from the Rawlsian approach. For Rawls, *a liberal political conception of justice* is part of what determines whether someone is reasonable. You have to accept that political conception to be reasonable. But Gaus and Vallier don't appeal to a political conception of justice; Rawlsian orthodoxy about reasonableness has an additional layer.

Practical political liberalism retains the additional layer, and so can agree with the orthodox Rawlsians. The additional layer – the political conception of justice – plays a central role in Rawlsian political liberalism. For one thing, it's key to explaining why libertarians are *un*reasonable, as Samuel Freeman (2001) insists; they don't accept a liberal political conception of justice. Gaus and Vallier, by contrast, allow that libertarians can be reasonable.

I'm mentioning libertarians primarily to illustrate how practical liberalism *retains* the additional layer of Rawlsian orthodoxy about reasonableness. You might not think that retaining that additional layer matters. This subsection isn't addressed to you – it's just addressed to those who think it does matter. Now the Gaus/ Vallier view can also be reformulated in a practical way. The crucial point here is that practical liberalism can retain the distinctive claims of Rawlsian orthodoxy, too. Practical liberals do part ways from traditional political liberalism in their conception of the *structure* of liberal political conceptions – they think of them as collections of actions, rather than propositions. But libertarians do not accept the actions constitutive of liberal political conceptions any more than they do the propositions that might make them up. I find practical liberalism attractive as a halfway house between the Gaus/ Vallier view and hostility to religious believers: it promises to accommodate a wider range of religious citizens, without requiring that political choices *also* be justifiable to libertarians.

### 3.1 The primacy of the practical

Practical political liberalism holds that agents' practical states are what determine whether they're reasonable. It is, to repeat:

- (Act-Centered) The political conception consists in actions, not propositions.
- (Practical) Accepting the doctrines of the political conception is a practical state: it's being committed to those actions.
- (Practically Objective) Regarding the doctrines of the political conception as objective is wanting yourself to accept those doctrines in any situation you can imagine where the circumstances of justice obtain.

My basic motivation for practical liberalism is that tolerance demands cooperating with as wide a class of citizens as possible without compromising your own liberal commitments. Citizens' practical states are what determine whether it's possible to cooperate with them. So those practical states are the only things that matter for reasonableness. What's in someone's heart matters only if it affects what they do.

A key complication will be that the practical liberal's practical states may depend on background beliefs. I might be committed to playing a game of baseball. But I won't see that commitment as practically objective; I'll abandon it in many circumstances. It may only be intelligible to see something as practically objective if you also *believe* that it's valuable. If so, beliefs may be central for the practical states that matter for the practical liberal. Practical liberalism still holds that the only expectations that reasonable citizens should have of each other are expectations about practical states. It insists that the only thing that ties all the beliefs that matter together is their connection to the crucial practical states.

The rest of the paper aims at fleshing out the previous two paragraphs. It contrasts practical political liberalism with standard versions of political liberalism. On those standard versions, accepting the fact of reasonable pluralism requires attitudes to *propositions* like the Pluralist Proposition:

> (*Pluralist Proposition*) we must reject policies if they're not acceptable to everyone who freely exercises human reason and accepts the doctrines of the political conception of justice

This 'must' is the 'must' of moral/normative requirement: the Pluralist Proposition is the proposition that our moral/normative reasons decisively favor acting in this way.

Contemporary political liberals who focus on acceptance have mostly come to agree that accepting p only requires you to have the same attitude to p that you have to your other moral commitments. If your moral commitments involve *believing* propositions in the same way you believe quotidian worldly propositions, then accepting the Pluralist Proposition

requires believing it in that way. And if your moral commitments involve a pretense, then acceptance requires the same pretense about the Pluralist Proposition. I'll call this answer the MINIMALIST conception of acceptance, since it does not give a substantive account of acceptance. James Boettcher (2012), Joshua Cohen (2009), David Estlund (1998), and Jonathan Quong (2011) have proposed minimalist pictures. Others, including Rawls, are less determinate about the attitude of acceptance.

Political liberals emphasize acceptance rather than belief to remain neutral on controversial philosophical disputes about moral justification and moral truth. Rawls himself emphasizes the importance of such neutrality, insisting that "holding a political conception as true, and for that reason alone the one suitable basis of public reason, is exclusive, even sectarian, and so likely to foster political division" (Rawls 2005, 129). Minimalists about acceptance are similarly invested in avoiding sectarian philosophical claims, though they tend to focus less on truth.[10]

Error theorists help illustrate the concern about sectarianism. They take some kind of systematic mistake to infect our moral judgments, and perhaps all our normative judgments. But some error theorists can continue to be committed to a broadly liberal set of moral norms for themselves.[11] They can continue to be committed to those norms because their reasons for accepting error theory aren't reasons for rejecting liberal norms in particular. For instance, they might think that the property *being-[morally/normatively]-required* is too "spooky" – too unlike other properties that we acknowledge to exist.[12] Now some error theorists do argue

[10] minimalists tend to reject Rawls' claim that "within itself, the political conception does without the concept of truth" (Rawls 2005, 94). They favor *minimal* accounts of truth, and require reasonable citizens to accept the political conception as true in a minimal sense. David Estlund, for example, says that "a statement P is true in the minimal sense iff P" (Estlund 1998, 263). And he thinks that reasonable citizens need to accept the Pluralist Doctrine as true in the minimal sense.

[11] This error theorist might take her cue from Hume's recommendation in 'The Skeptic': "where one is thoroughly convinced that the virtuous course of life is preferable; if he have but resolution enough, for some time, to impose a violence on himself; his reformation needs not be despaired of" (Hume 1777, 171).

[12] Jonas Olson (2014) has recently laid this line of argument out with particular care. Another argument for an error theory could appeal to a Humean conception of our normative reasons. For a Humean, our normative reasons are always explained by some feature of our individual psychology, like our desires. I have a reason to care for my mother because I like her – that is, because of my own individual psychology. Someone who doesn't like their mother doesn't have reason to care for her. This argument then continues by claiming that moral judgments are *objectively prescriptive*: the moral judgment that $\phi$ is morally obligatory re-

from the error theory to *moral abolitionism*: the view that we should purge our talk and thought of moral claims and moral commitments.[13] I'll assume that their abolitionism makes them unreasonable, because they're not committed to the liberal political conception of justice.

But there are also ways of accepting the error theory while remaining reasonable.[14] Moral judgments have important practical upshots, and error theorists might care about those practical upshots even if they also think that moral judgments involve some systematic mistake. For example, J. L. Mackie suggests that "we need morality to regulate interpersonal relations, to control some of the ways in which people behave towards one another, often in opposition to contrary inclinations" (Mackie 1977, 43). It's intelligible for error theorists to care about this point, because they tend to accept that we can have *instrumental* reasons for promoting the ends that we care about, even if we don't also have moral reasons for promoting those ends. Inasmuch as we care about interpersonal relations, say, we have instrumental reasons for continuing to care about our moral commitments. The error theorist might explain this point by drawing on the distinction that R. M. Hare (1981) draws between two levels of moral thinking. Hare recommends relying on non-utilitarian reasoning in everyday moral thought, and reasoning in a utilitarian way only in reflective contexts. Jonas Olson (2014) recommends the same for the error theorist: that she continue to think ordinarily about her moral obligations, and accept the error theory only in special contexts. He calls this recommendation moral *conservatism*.[15]

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quires everyone to have normative reasons for $\phi$-ing. But because of the variation in human psychology, there's no action that everyone has normative reasons to perform. So nothing is morally obligatory. (This argument is one way of thinking about the "queerness" argument from J. L. Mackie (1977), and is endorsed by Richard Joyce (2001).)

[13]Examples include Ian Hinckfuss (1987) and Richard Garner (2007).

[14]Ronald Dworkin (1996) argues that the error theory must be the first-order claim that everything is permissible. In joint work with Mark Schroeder (2019), we've shown how to formulate the error theory in a way that carries no first-order commitments.

[15]Another way for an error theorist to continue to care about her moral commitments is to be a fictionalist. The fictionalist disbelieves moral propositions, but pretends to believe them, and pretends to assert them, and so on. This pretense might be seamlessly integrated into her practical thought and action. (We all talk as if the sun rises over the horizon, even though we don't actually believe that the sun literally rises.) Fictionalists emphasize how fictions can stimulate and guide our emotions, even as we're aware that they're a fiction. Richard Joyce emphasizes this point in *The Myth of Morality* – see especially his chapter 8. I'm focusing on only one kind of fictionalism, where we pretend to believe moral propositions. But you can also develop a fictionalist approach without appealing

So imagine that *Erika* the error theorist grew up a fully committed political liberal, believing all the doctrines of the political conception, including the Pluralist Proposition. She later became a convinced error theorist but *not* an abolitionist: she retains all her liberal commitments in everyday moral thinking. Every political liberal should take Erika to be reasonable. The free exercise of human reason will produce some citizens like Erika. And Erika will understand herself as committed to the same liberal claims as she was before. Since she understood herself as reasonable before she accepted the error theory, she will also understand herself as reasonable afterwards. The political liberal who classifies her as *un*reasonable is rejecting her self-conception, and making the substantive philosophical claim that error theorists' moral conservatism cannot succeed. This sort of ambitious philosophical claim is *exactly* the sort of claim that political liberals should neither affirm nor deny – it's the sort of sectarian claim that Rawls emphatically rejects. Political liberals are in the business of articulating the states that suffice for reasonableness. They're not in the business of telling citizens which states are psychologically possible.[16]

Minimalism cleanly explains why Erika is reasonable. For a minimalist, you accept the Pluralist Proposition if you have the same attitude towards it as towards your other moral commitments, just as Erika does. Practical liberalism also explains how an error theorist can be reasonable. She's

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to pretense. You can take the propositions in the relevant domain to describe a fiction: according to the fiction, you're morally required to keep this promise. David Lewis (1978) influentially discussed this kind of fictionalism in another context. Caroline West (2010) and Daniel Nolan, Greg Restall, and Caroline West (2005) discuss moral fictionalism in further detail. Mark Kalderon (2005) also has an extensive discussion of moral fictionalism, but he presents his fictionalism as a description of our actual practices, rather than a revision of our ordinary practices, as the error-theoretic fictionalist does.

[16]There is another reason to allow that Erika can be reasonable. It's hard to draw a principled line once you start excluding citizens for their recharchè metaethical views. A Humean constructivist like Sharon Street (2008) thinks we construct normative truths from within our own practical point of view. She's a *Humean* constructivist because she denies that all agents will converge on the same judgments.[17] The error theorists can see their moral commitments in the way that Street sees her own, as articulating their own practical standpoint. The error theorist differs from Street in her semantic or conceptual claims. The error theorist thinks that ordinary moral thought and discourse commits us to a profound mistake, and adopt their commitments as a *revision* of ordinary thought. It's hard to see why that sort of semantic disagreement should make Street reasonable and them unreasonable. But it's also hard to see Street as *unreasonable* only because of her metaethical commitments. She might have the same first-order commitments as a Kantian constructivist, but explain them differently.

reasonable when she has the right sorts of practical commitments: when she is robustly committed to performing the actions that constitute the political conception. It doesn't matter why she has those practical commitments, as long as she's committed to them in the contexts she can envision.

### 3.2 The second citizen: Cathy the Constantinian Pluralist

Though practical liberals and minimalists agree about Erika, they might disagree about other citizens. This section describes a citizen that illustrates the disagreement. I expect it to be highly controversial if this citizen is reasonable. The next section (§4) will argue that only practical liberals have a principled way of adjudicating this controversy.

I'll call my second citizen *Cathy the Constantinian Pluralist*. She's a 'Constantinian', because she thinks that some perfectly just states coerce religious belief. She's a 'pluralist', because she thinks that there are also perfectly just states that don't coerce religious belief. She focuses on two possible arrangements of the basic structure:

> (The Liberal Arrangement): Rawls' two principles of justice govern the major social institutions. Each person has "an equal claim to a fully adequate scheme of equal basic rights and liberties, which scheme is compatible with the same scheme for all" (Rawls 1971, 42) – including a right to free choice about religion.
>
> (The Constantinian Arrangement): the state exercises some coercive control over religious belief. (For example: it might exile a person when the established religious authority judges that tolerating that person would change the religious beliefs of the community.) It's otherwise like the Liberal Arrangement.

Cathy believes that overall well-being is as high in each arrangement; each realizes different proportions of the goods that constitute human well-being. The Liberal Arrangement realizes more of the familiar goods that religious toleration delivers. Individual choice in religious matters seems to be partly constitutive of human well-being; as J. S. Mill claims, "it is the privilege and proper condition of a human being, arrived at the maturity of his faculties, to use and interpret experience in his own way" (Mill 1859, 70). A society that coerces religious belief eliminates some of this good, by inducing conformity among its citizens.

But Cathy takes the Constantinian Arrangement to realize more of the goods that her religious tradition delivers. Augustine illustrates this kind of

thought. He focuses on deliverance from the damnation he expects for those who reject his religion. He writes several letters arguing for state coercion of Christians with different theological views, insisting that the relevant harms are significant enough to justify state coercion of religious belief. For Augustine, that coercion does realize significant goods: deliverance from damnation.[18] Given the different kinds of values that can be realized, it's reasonable to expect equally valuable arrangements of society to realize different proportions of these goods. Crucially, though, Cathy believes that both arrangements are as just as is possible. There are at least two ways she might have this belief. First: she might be a consequentialist, and think that two societies are equally just just in case overall well-being is equally high in both. Second: she might lack a systematic theory of justice, while her piecemeal convictions about justice include the conviction that both societies are perfectly just.

Cathy is unreasonable if that's all she thinks. But I want to explore if additional practical states can make her reasonable. I'll focus on a stipulation about her practical states:

> (Stipulation: Cathy's Practical States): Cathy has all the practical states that reasonable citizens do; she wants to live only in a liberal society, hopes that the liberal society will continue, and so on.

I'll argue that practical liberalism is correct if this stipulation is intelligible – if we can imagine Cathy with all these practical states. I'll then argue that practical liberalism is also correct if this stipulation is *un*intelligible – if we cannot imagine Cathy with these practical states.

The stipulation should look facially intelligible. We can have different practical attitudes towards things that we impartially recognize to be equally valuable. Robert Adams suggests: "if [Romeo] gives Juliet's wit and bravery as reasons for valuing her, he is committed to agreeing that wit and bravery in other people would also be a reason for thinking that they are wonderful, or that it is good that they exist. But there is much more to love than such beliefs, and I think Romeo's reasons do not commit

[18] You might worry that anyone who agrees with Augustine would believe that the good of such coercive action always swamps the Millian goods. But Augustine doesn't endorse this objector's assumption. He only endorses coercion of schismatic break-offs of his own religion. This point is explicit in his 'Correction of the Donatists' – see Augustine (417/ 1983), p. 645ff.C This limitation would be unintelligible if Augustine thought that the goods internal to his religious tradition are so great that they always outweigh those other goods. Since a historical comprehensive doctrine rejects this objection, I take it to be irrelevant for assessing the coherence of Constantinian Pluralism.

him to loving, in the same way that he loves Juliet, other people who have those admirable qualities" (Adams 1999, 166). Even if Romeo encounters someone with all of Juliet's features, his practical states can remain oriented towards Juliet alone. Similarly, Cathy's beliefs about the value and justice of the two arrangements of society needn't determine her practical states. She can desire to live in a Liberal society, and have no desire to live in a Constantinian society.

Importantly, then, part of my stipulation is that Cathy's practical commitment to the Liberal Arrangement is *normatively-saturated*. Her commitment to the Liberal Arrangement isn't a mere fancy that she's taken; it springs from her deepest values. She's committed to the Liberal Arrangement because of the range of experiences that it has afforded her. Suppose, for example, that interaction with others with quite different views has shaped Cathy's religious commitments, for familiar Millian reasons. She may recognize other kinds of religious commitment to be just as rational as her own commitments, but nonetheless be glad that her commitments have the shape they do. Inasmuch as she recognizes and endorses the influence that the Liberal Arrangement had, her historical connection to the Liberal Arrangement explains her practical orientation towards it.

Given Cathy's history, she will vigorously resist any attempts to change her Liberal society into a Constantinian society. Her religious commitments are among the fundamental projects that structure her life, and those commitments require the cooperation of others. Cathy would judge the Constantinian policy to threaten this fundamental project. That policy aims at undermining the religious diversity that has shaped her life. If the policy succeeds, Cathy's religious community won't be shaped by the same forces that determined the shape of her own religious life. And she can intelligibly do everything in her power to resist this threat, and sustain her form of life. Her resistance doesn't spring from her beliefs – she thinks that a Constantinian arrangement is perfectly just – but rather from her practical commitment to her form of life.

In what follows, it's important that Cathy can regard the political conception of justice as Practically Objective.

> (Practically Objective) Regarding the doctrines of the political conception as objective is wanting yourself to accept those doctrines in any situation you can imagine.

Suppose that Cathy's consequentialism is conceptually downstream from her commitment to the Liberal Arrangement; she's a consequentialist only because she think it best explains the justice of the Liberal Arrangement given her other background beliefs. Because it's conceptually downstream

from her commitment to the Liberal Arrangement, she'd give up her consequentialism before giving up that commitment. Such a citizen will see her commitment to a liberal political conception as Practically Objective.

## 4 The fundamental argument for practical liberalism

The fundamental argument for practical liberalism is that only practical liberalism has a principled account of whether Cathy is reasonable. Note first that a minimalist conception of acceptance guarantees that Cathy is *not* reasonable. For minimalists, acceptance must involve the same attitude as you have towards your other moral commitments. But Cathy does not have the same attitude to the Pluralist Proposition as she does to her other moral commitments, since she doesn't *believe* it.

> (*Pluralist Proposition*) we must reject policies if they're not acceptable to everyone who freely exercises human reason and accepts the doctrines of the political conception of justice

She'd have inconsistent beliefs if she did believe it, since she thinks the Constantinian Arrangement is perfectly just. Minimalists just can't classify her as reasonable.

By contrast, it's an open question given practical liberalism if Cathy is reasonable. Cathy's beliefs are irrelevant: what matters is her being committed to the actions that constitute the political conception of justice. Given practical liberalism, everything hangs on the plausibility of the stipulation that she has all the practical states that paradigmatically reasonable people do. That stipulation gives her the states that suffice for reasonableness given practical liberalism.

Either my stipulation that Cathy can have all the liberals' practical states can be sustained or it can't. If it can, minimalists draw arbitrary distinctions among the class of reasonable citizens. Only the practical liberal has a defensible classification of who's reasonable and who's not (§4.1). On the other hand, if Cathy's beliefs prevent her from having all the liberals' practical states, then the practical liberal and minimalists will agree extensionally: they both classify Cathy as unreasonable. But then minimalists have the wrong explanation of Cathy's unreasonableness (§4.2). In both cases, then, we have decisive evidence for practical liberalism.

### 4.1 What if Cathy can have all the liberals' practical states?

We've already seen that minimalists allow that Erika the error theorist can be reasonable, while denying that Cathy can be. This section argues

that there is no politically significant difference between Cathy and Erika if Cathy has the same practical states as other reasonable citizens.

There definitely are differences between Cathy and other reasonable citizens; for one thing, Cathy doesn't *believe* the Pluralist Propositions.

> (*Pluralist Proposition*) we must reject policies if they're not acceptable to everyone who freely exercises human reason and accepts the doctrines of the political conception of justice

But I claim that the differences between Cathy and other citizens lack political significance. After all, it's always possible to articulate *some* differences among the class of possible citizens: those born after 1975, those who have green eyes, those who are the focus of this paper... My complaint is that having the same attitude towards the Pluralist Proposition as towards your other moral commitments is like having green eyes. It cuts a real distinction among possible citizens, but the distinction lacks political significance.

This charge depends on what considerations *do* have political significance for political liberals. I'm assuming that political liberals are putting our modern self-understanding in reflective equilibrium, including the practice of toleration that developed in the wake of the wars of religion. The key considered judgment is that persons are due respect – respect arising from the realization that disagreement about the good arises inevitably from the free exercise of human reason. The political liberal puts the practice of toleration in reflective equilibrium in two stages. First: she specifies a political conception of justice, and then she figures out what sort of society could be justified to everyone who accepts that ideal.

This conception of political liberalism is incompatible with attempting to exclude Cathy as unreasonable. In unpacking our modern self-understanding, what matters is cooperating with others on appropriate terms. That's the reason why we should include some error theorists as reasonable. We *can* cooperate with certain kinds of error theorists without compromising our fundamental liberal commitments. So we should. We're here supposing that Cathy's practical commitment to the Liberal Arrangement is as robust as the error theorist's. Our reasons for cooperating with Cathy and treating her as reasonable are as strong as our reasons for cooperating with Erika. We should see both of them as reasonable. After all, Cathy differs dramatically from unreasonable Ursula, who endorses state coercion of religious belief. Doctrines that Ursula rejects can still figure in proper political justification, because Ursula isn't interested in cooperating on fair terms with other reasonable citizens. In order to have a principled conception of reasonableness, we'd need a similarly general explanation of why we're entitled to ignore Cathy. It's hard to find such an explanation. For one thing, we need to justify our treatment of Cathy by appealing to

beliefs that don't affect her practical deliberation.

Moreover, the general explanation of Cathy's unreasonableness needs to be a part of the public political conception of justice. The political conception should articulate the self-understanding of reasonable citizens – and the political conception should not include any arbitrary elements. It should also appeal to what's "implicit in the public political culture of a democratic society" (Rawls 2005, 50). Like Rawls suggests, the centrality of fair terms of cooperation does seem implicit in the public political culture. But it's very hard to see a suitably restrictive conception of reasonableness that excludes Cathy while conforming to this constraint.

Another way of putting the argument in this subsection is that we should prefer a maximalist conception of reasonableness, free of arbitrary distinctions, that includes the largest possible class of citizens possible without betraying the political liberal's guiding ideals. We should thus take a citizen to be unreasonable only when our own commitment to the liberal ideal prevents us from fully cooperating with that citizen. Assuming that Cathy has the right practical states, our commitment to the liberal ideal allows for full cooperation with Cathy. I infer that minimalists reject this maximalist conception of reasonableness, which makes their proposal unjustifiably arbitrary. It's not enough to articulate a conception of reasonableness that excludes Cathy. You have to *justify* that conception of reasonableness, from basic features of the liberal approach.

### 4.2 What if Cathy can't have all the liberals' practical states?

I just stipulated that Cathy can have all the liberals' practical states – that is, that her beliefs don't prevent her from being practically committed to the liberal conception of justice. This section makes the opposite stipulation: that Cathy can't have all those practical states. It shows that there is still decisive evidence against minimalism.

I'll illustrate the opposite stipulation by imaging that Cathy lives in some Liberal Arrangement. A party of Constantinians gains power, and begins to implement some of their characteristic policies. Maybe they start exiling prominent members of disfavored religions. A reasonable citizen will resent and be indignant at implementation of the Constantinian policy, and may engage in civil disobedience against it. Let's suppose that doing those things requires thinking of the Constantinian policy as *unjust* and so that Cathy won't do any of those things because she thinks it's perfectly just. Now this supposition is resting on a very subtle point. Cathy can be vigorously opposed to the Constantinians, and do everything in her power to resist them. The only things she can't do are things that require her

thinking the Constantinian Arrangement is unjust. So if reasonable citizens engage in civil disobedience only when they think that the state is acting unjustly, Cathy can't be reasonable and engage in civil disobedience.[19] And reasonable citizens need to be ready to engage in civil disobedience against the Constantinian Arrangement.

I'll grant in this subsection that Cathy can't have this practical commitment. Then practical liberals and minimalists agree extensionally. They both classify Erika as reasonable and Cathy as unreasonable. Then the practical liberal has to surrender the charge from the last section. She can't claim that the minimalist draws arbitrary distinctions among the class of possible citizens.

In this case, though, the practical liberal has another objection to the minimalist. The objection is that the minimalist offers the wrong explanation of Cathy's unreasonableness. After all, there is no need for the minimalist to appeal to Cathy's missing practical commitments. The minimalist immediately classifies Cathy as unreasonable because Cathy doesn't have the same attitude to the Pluralist Doctrine as she does to her other normative commitments. *The assumption that was crucial to classify Cathy as unreasonable plays no role in the minimalist explanation of Cathy's unreasonableness.* And that's decisive evidence against Minimalism. The correct account of reasonableness must capture the features that actually determine whether someone is reasonable.

Another way to make this point is that it's a substantive question whether Cathy is reasonable; it depends on what the political conception of justice includes besides the fact of reasonable pluralism. Contrast three political conceptions of justice:

- Thinnest: includes only the Pluralist Doctrine and a commitment to engaging in civil disobedience only when you think the state undercuts your deepest projects.
- Thinner: includes the Pluralist Doctrine and a commitment to engaging in civil disobedience only when you think the state violates core parts of the liberal political conception of justice
- Thick: includes the Pluralist Doctrine and a commitment to engaging in civil disobedience only when you think the state acts unjustly

Political conceptions of justice determine the class of reasonable citizens; a citizen can be reasonable given one political conception of justice but not reasonable given another. Cathy is reasonable given the Thinnest and

[19] This suggestion incorporates a connection between civil disobedience and beliefs about justice that Rawls discusses (Rawls 1971, 365ff).

Thinner political conceptions. We're supposing that she can't have the liberal's practical states because she thinks that the Constantinian state is just, which we supposed prevented her from engaging in civil disobedience. But the THINNEST and the THINNER conceptions still allow that civil disobedience would be possible for Cathy. The minimalist will wrongly predict that she's *un*reasonable given all three political conceptions, since she doesn't believe the Pluralist Proposition.

I take this point to be decisive evidence against minimalism. We should reject philosophical theories that misclassify the explanatory grounds of important notions. And that's exactly what the minimalist does. Political liberals have special reason for classifying the explanatory grounds correctly. Criteria for reasonableness need to be part of the public culture of a well-ordered democratic society. And it's important to get those criteria right. For one thing, it's important that deeply religious citizens can internalize the public culture, without feeling that their co-religionists are excluded for arbitrary reasons. Minimalists can't do that; they'll exclude Cathy for arbitrary reasons. Maybe Cathy should be excluded. The point is just that minimalism forces the wrong explanation of why.

## 5 Wrapping up

This paper ended up contrasting two different conceptions of what it is to accept doctrines of the political conception, and consequently of what it is to be reasonable. Minimalists hold that someone accepts that p iff she has the same attitude towards p that she does do her other moral commitments. Practical liberals, by contrast, hold that someone accepts that p iff she is committed to the right range of actions. Minimalism is what's orthodox, and practical liberalism is new.

§§3–4 argued for practical liberalism. Either Cathy can have all the practical commitments that ordinary liberals do, or she can't. If she can, the practical liberal is the only theorist with an extensionally adequate conception of reasonableness. And in the other case, where Cathy can't have all the same practical commitments, the minimalist offers the wrong explanation of her unreasonableness, and the practical liberal offers the right one. Political liberals should all be *practical* political liberals. Beliefs may still be important for citizens to see liberal political conceptions of justice as practically objective. But we shouldn't expect any interesting uniformity among those beliefs, other than their connection to the important practical states: those practical states determine who's reasonable.

Rejecting minimalism for practical liberalism has important philosophical consequences. Political liberals are offering a powerful way to put our convictions about tolerance into reflective equilibrium, which allows us to

reason about more controversial questions about tolerance. Their approach makes crucial appeal to what's acceptable to citizens who freely exercise human reason, and who accept a liberal conception of justice.

I introduced practical liberalism as an explanation of why political liberalism does *not* require any kind of skepticism. For the practical liberal, reasonable citizens don't need to see the free exercise of human reason as having any significance outside of politics. Citizens are free to regard some ways of exercising of human reason as more legitimate than others, as delivering knowledge. For the practical liberal, the free exercise of human reason is like getting three outs in baseball. It's significant within the practice. But it's silly to refuse to participate because you see some of features of the practice as lacking significance outside of the practice. (It's silly to object to a game of baseball because you see getting three outs as lacking significance outside of the practice.) Since all political liberals should be practical liberals, all political liberals should all give this answer.

Practical liberalism thus allows the virtues of political liberalism to shine through more clearly. Rawls puts great stress on "the Reformation and the long controversy about toleration as the origin of liberalism" (Rawls 2005, xxviii). He's interested in giving a philosophical account of the mistake made by the partisans in the wars of religion, in a way that those partisans could themselves accept. It's striking, though, how few contemporary political liberals follow his lead. They make little effort to explain how their work articulates the values shared with deeply religious citizens.

And contemporary religious thinkers have grown increasingly skeptical of the liberal project. Stanley Hauerwas, for one, sees a deep tension between traditional religious belief (in his case, Christian belief) and the kinds of liberal ideals that Rawls is articulating. He declares: "that if the gospel is true, the politics of liberalism must be false" (Hauerwas 2000, 124). Nor is he alone – Jeffrey Stout (2004) helpfully details the range of religious thinkers who share something like Hauerwas' skepticism. Stout rightly emphasizes that "theological resentment of the secular deserves attention from theorists of democracy not only because it gives voice to an animus felt by many religiously oriented citizens, but also because it reinforces that animus and encourages its spread" (Stout 2004, 92).

These religious critics often see political liberalism as a Trojan horse for commitments that they find objectionable. Maybe it's a Trojan horse for skepticism, or for an atomistic view of the individual, or for a Kantian commitment to the centrality of autonomy, or something else.[20] Even worse,

[20]For worries about the skeptical upshots of political liberalism, see Brian Barry (1995), David Enoch (2017), David McCabe (2000), Steven Wall (1998), and Leif Wenar (1995). For worries about an atomistic view of the individual

some political liberals agree! Charles Larmore, for example, thinks that political liberalism requires a normative commitment to the centrality of autonomy. Political liberals, he thinks, "need to make clear why it is that the validity of coercive principles should depend upon reasonable agreement. I believe that the source of this conviction is a principle of respect for persons" (Larmore 1999, 607). I earlier imagined a religious citizen who believes that only God can compel religious belief. Larmore would classify that citizen as unreasonable, even though she herself would never compel religious belief.

Some political liberals, like Rawls, disagree with Larmore. They deny that political liberalism is a Trojan horse for anything else. They formulate this denial in several different ways: (i) that the political conception of justice is freestanding (Rawls 2005, 10, 12, 40, 140), (ii) that individual citizens need not see the doctrines of the political conception as true (Rawls 2005, xxii, 94, 116, 126ff, 153ff), (iii) that political liberalism is conception-based, rather than respect-based (Weithman 2010, 353-7), and so on.

The central contribution of this paper is to offer a concrete theory (practical liberalism) that makes good on all these formulations, and to trace that concrete theory back to core liberal commitments. Practical liberalism is a powerful and general tool for undercutting attempts to use political liberalism as a Trojan horse for anything else. That's why the paper opened with the concern that political liberalism required skepticism about religion – that concern is one of several ways that political liberalism might seem to be a Trojan horse for something objectionable. The §§3–4 argument aims at assuring religious citizens that political liberalism can't be a Trojan horse for anything objectionable. Reasonableness only requires a practical commitment, and you don't need to see the features of that practice as having significance outside of it. For instance, the practical liberal takes Larmore to be betraying political liberalism, rather than developing it, since he requires reasonable citizens to believe the Pluralist Proposition.

I've alluded to some religious critics of the liberal project. Political liberals should see these religious critics as co-participants in a shared project: making good on our commitment to tolerating each other.[21] Practical liberalism makes it perfectly clear that religious citizens can be co-participants in this shared project. The practical liberal tries her very best to include even Cathy – and she's even more radical than contemporary religious crit-

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and commitments to the centrality of autonomy, see Alasdair MacIntyre (1984), Michael Sandel (1998), Charles Taylor (1985), especially as taken up in Hauerwas (1991, 2000). For worries about the foundations of Rawlsian liberalism, see Jurgen Habermas (1995), Jean Hampton (1989), and Joseph Raz (1990).

[21] The religious critics do share that commitment. Despite their complaints, they don't want to go back to the wars of religion.

ics. Something has gone wrong if your instinct on encountering Cathy was to try to exclude her as unreasonable. That instinct suggests disinterest in cooperating with all the religious citizens you can. And that's exactly what the religious critics of political liberalism are claiming! You're playing right into their hands! Practical liberalism shows a better way.

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