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DO POLITICAL LIBERALS NEED THE TRUTH?

by

PIERCE RANDALL

Under the Direction of Christie Hartley

ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I defend John Rawls's assertion that political liberalism does not use the concept of truth. I respond to objections from Joshua Cohen and David Estlund. I argue that Cohen fails to show that public reason needs a minimalist conception of truth, since individuals with a range of conceptions of moral truth can meet the requirements of public reason. I dispute Estlund's argument that the liberal principle of legitimacy is merely insular. Estlund assumes that the claim that the liberal principle of legitimacy is reasonable is no different than the claim that the principle is acceptable to reasonable persons. I argue that this assumption is incorrect, and that therefore the liberal principle of legitimacy is justifiable on the grounds that it is reasonable. I argue that political liberals need not worry that doing without the concept of truth will undermine the semantic coherence or objectivity of political liberalism.

INDEX WORDS: John Rawls, Political liberalism, Truth, David Estlund, Joshua Cohen, Public reason

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PIERCE RANDALL

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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1. INTRODUCTION

In *Political Liberalism*, John Rawls argues that a political conception of justice "does without the concept of truth."[1] Rawls thinks that the concept of truth is "sectarian" and "likely to foster political division,"[2] and he concludes that a conception of justice meant to guide a stable democratic society marked by reasonable disagreement about moral, philosophical, and religious issues ought to avoid the commitment that its principles or ideas constitute the truth about justice. Rawls's exclusion of truth from the political conception of justice has attracted criticism from many commentators, including both those sympathetic to the broader aims of political liberalism as well as those who are not. In this thesis, I defend Rawls's position on truth against criticism from two prominent political liberals: David Estlund and Joshua Cohen.[3] In doing so, I hope to ease the misgivings those who otherwise favor political liberalism might have about distancing political philosophy from the truth.

I would like to emphasize two ways in which the scope of this thesis is limited. First, my arguments are aimed at those who accept the basic conclusions of political liberalism. Political liberalism is the view that reasonable disagreement about morality, metaphysics, and religion is an ineliminable feature of modern democratic societies in which free people live under legitimate institutions, and that therefore the public justification given for the core set of principles that structure those institutions must be aimed at a political conception of justice that is acceptable in principle to all reasonable persons.[4] This thesis addresses the question of whether or not it is plausible to exclude the concept of truth from the core set of principles that constitute the public

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[1] John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, expanded ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 94.
[2] Ibid., 129.
[3] See David Estlund, "The Insularity of the Reasonable: Why Political Liberalism Must Admit the Truth," *Ethics* 108 (1998): 252-75; Joshua Cohen, "Truth and Public Reason," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 37, no. 1 (2009): 2-42.
[4] Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 44. Cf. Charles Larmore, *The Morals of Modernity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 144-45. Importantly, as Larmore emphasizes, the core principles of a political conception of justice must also be acceptable to reasonable persons with non-individualist conceptions of the good. This fact distinguishes political liberalism from the perfectionist liberalism advocated by Joseph Raz and others.

political morality of liberal democracies. Rawls thinks that it is, and I defend his position against criticisms raised by two other political liberals, Cohen and Estlund.

Other philosophers not motivated to find a common set of principles acceptable to all reasonable persons as the basis of political justification have also criticized Rawls's statements about the relationship between truth and political morality. For instance, Joseph Raz claims that "a theory of justice can deserve that name simply because it deals with … matters that a true theory of justice deals with."[5] Raz thinks that the goal of arriving at reasonable agreement is a practical consideration when determining how best to implement the correct principles of justice, not a matter of political legitimacy as Rawls understands it. Raz also thinks that the correct principles of political justice are inextricably tied to a pluralistic comprehensive conception of the good.[6] Jean Hampton, meanwhile, argues that Rawls fails to differentiate the methodology of political liberalism from "Enlightenment liberalism," a position characterized by the attempt to secure agreement on a single secular moral doctrine knowable through the use of reason. Additionally, Hampton argues that the public role of political philosophy is to engage in Socratic criticism of the comprehensive views (metaphysical, religious, or otherwise) of true believers who seek to insulate their views from public criticism.[7] Both Hampton and Raz reject a central tenet of political liberalism: that political philosophy ought to aim at least in part at settling on a moral justification for political institutions acceptable to all reasonable persons. While it would be a worthwhile project to address Raz's and Hampton's arguments, doing so would involve

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[5] Joseph Raz, "Facing Diversity: The Case of Epistemic Abstinence," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 19, no. 1 (1990): 15.
[6] Ibid., 31 & 20-24.
[7] For Hampton's comments on Rawls's political liberalism and "Enlightenment liberalism," see Jean Hampton, "The Common Faith of Liberalism," in *The Intrinsic Worth of Persons: Contractarianism in Moral and Political Philosophy*, ed. Daniel Farnham (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 151-53 & passim. For her views about the Socratic role of political philosophy, see Hampton, "Should Political Philosophy be Done without Metaphysics?" *Ethics* 99, no. 4 (1989): 807-14.

giving a defense of political liberalism generally, a broader topic that should be addressed elsewhere.

Second, the scope of this thesis is chiefly negative: to *refute* arguments *against* Rawls's position on truth in *Political Liberalism*. I do not attempt to provide significant positive arguments in favor of excluding the concept of truth from a political conception of justice. I understand Rawls as making a prima facie plausible argument in favor of avoiding the concept of truth when doing political philosophy: How to properly conceive of truth is a divisive issue, as is the question of whether or not the principles of a political conception of justice appropriate for a society marked by reasonable pluralism constitute all or part of the truth about justice. Neither issue is likely to be one about which all reasonable people can in principle agree. Therefore, both the concept of truth and the claim that the principles that constitute the political conception of justice are true should not be part of the political conception of justice. What Rawls does not do, as I aim to here, is to respond to some objections that his claims about truth attract. Therefore, the question this thesis attempts to answer is not, *Should political liberals avoid the truth?* Rawls gives an argument for thinking that the answer to that question is *yes*. Instead, I ask, *Do political liberals need the truth?* I argue that the answer to this question is *no*. Political liberals at least need not take arguments of the sort Cohen and Estlund have provided to have established the case that arriving at a political conception of justice cannot be done without the truth after all.[8]

In the second section of this thesis, I outline Rawls's position on truth in political liberalism by drawing from comments he makes about political constructivism and public reason. Some of Rawls's claims seem less controversial than others. For instance, the claim that public justification should not try to embody the whole truth about morality or a complete

[8] Of course, the case I attempt to make is inductive. I cannot anticipate or respond to every possible objection to Rawls's claims about truth. Instead, by refuting prominent criticisms of Rawls's position, I hope to show that there is good reason to think that political liberals do not need to have misgivings about accepting Rawls's position.

philosophical treatment of its subject matter is logically weaker and therefore easier to accept than the claim that a political conception of justice can do without the concept of truth altogether. Clarifying Rawls's statements about truth is helpful in order to avoid conflating different distinct claims he makes. This is particularly important since Rawls is not always clear when he is employing stronger or weaker versions of his general thesis that political liberalism should avoid claims about the truth.

A clear statement of the problem that I wish to address involves noting the types of concerns political liberals might have against Rawls's claims about the truth. In addition to the broader worries Hampton and Raz raise about the aims of political liberalism, the idea that a political conception of justice can do without the concept of truth might seem problematic in two ways. First, Rawls's position on truth might seem problematic for semantic reasons. An entailment relationship seems to exist between certain propositional attitudes such as assertion or belief and the concept of truth. For instance, the fact that Sam believes x seems to entail that Sam believes that x is true. Since Rawls does not want to deny that the concepts of assertion or belief may be part of the political conception of justice (since a political conception of truth includes an idea of public reason, a normative ideal of political justification and deliberation in liberal democracies), it might seem that political liberalism cannot do without the concept of truth after all. Cohen makes this argument in "Truth and Public Reason," and I respond in the third section of this thesis.

Second, Rawls's claims about truth may raise concerns about the objectivity of the political conception of justice. One might wonder why it matters whether or not reasonable people accept the principles that make up the political conception of justice unless reasonable people are likely to agree to true principles of justice. Otherwise, why care about acceptability to

reasonable persons and not, for instance, about acceptability to Branch Davidians or to House Republicans? Estlund objects along these lines to Rawls's position on truth in "The Insularity of the Reasonable." In the fourth section of this thesis, I respond to Estlund's argument.

2. RAWLS'S CLAIMS ABOUT TRUTH IN *POLITICAL LIBERALISM*

In this section, I discuss the political conception of justice Rawls outlines in *Political Liberalism* in order to clarify Rawls's view that the political conception of justice can do without truth. In the first part of this section, I will briefly sketch Rawls's idea of a political conception of justice, focusing on public reason and political constructivism.

I understand Rawls as making four central claims about how a political conception of justice can avoid truth:

1. *The No Concept claim*: A political conception of justice does not use the concept of truth.
2. *The No Assertion of Truth claim*: The principles specified by a political conception of justice are not asserted as true.
3. *The No Whole Truth claim*: A political conception of justice does not seek to give a complete philosophical and moral account of the truth about justice.
4. *The Outside of the Political Conception claim*: The claim that a particular political principle is true or false is not part of the political conception of justice.

In the second part of this section, I will explain the central features of political liberalism and why Rawls makes these claims about truth and political conceptions of justice.

2.1. The Conception of Justice in Political Liberalism

In *Political Liberalism*, Rawls is concerned with addressing what he calls "the problem of stability": "How is it possible," he asks, "that there may exist over time a stable and just society of free and equal citizens profoundly divided by reasonable though incompatible religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines?"[9] Modern democracies are marked by permanent disagreement about the fundamental ideas that shape citizens' diverse conceptions of justice and

[9] Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, xviii.

views of the good. Rawls calls this state of affairs "the fact of reasonable pluralism."[10] He states that reasonable disagreement is "the inevitable long-run result of the powers of human reason at work within the background of enduring free institutions."[11] Since reasonable disagreement is the *inevitable* result of free institutions, Rawls is motivated to find a conception of justice robust enough to guide stable free institutions, but appropriately limited so that any reasonable person could reasonably agree to it.

For Rawls, "stability" always means "stability for the right reasons."[12] Rawls is concerned with the stability of politically *legitimate* institutions, i.e., institutions that meet the necessary normative conditions for the appropriate application of coercive legal power. In order to be legitimate, Rawls thinks that institutions must be structured according to the *criterion of reciprocity*. This criterion holds that "our exercise of political power is proper only when we sincerely believe that the reasons we offer for our political actions may reasonably be accepted by other citizens as a justification of those actions."[13] In order for just institutions to meet the criterion of reciprocity, they must accommodate reasonable disagreement, and may only be structured according to reasons to which reasonable persons could agree.

2.1.1. The Idea of Public Reason

Rawls calls this limitation on what reasons may be given to support just institutions "the idea of public reason."[14] The idea of public reason limits the reasons that may legitimately be offered by government officials, candidates, and judges, concerning questions of society's

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[10] Ibid., 36.
[11] Ibid., 4.
[12] Ibid., xl.
[13] Ibid., xliv.
[14] See "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," in *Political Liberalism*, 440-90.

constitutional essentials and matters of basic justice.[15] Public reason includes only those reasons that can conform to the *idea of legitimacy*, which includes the criterion of reciprocity as well as the requirement that we believe that our reasons are sufficient to justify our political actions.[16] The criterion of reciprocity requires that participants in public reason reasonably believe that the reasons they give might be reasonably accepted by other reasonable citizens. A citizen is *reasonable* if she is willing to offer fair terms of cooperation to others as free and equal members of society, and to abide by those terms of cooperation.[17] Reasonable citizens can hold a variety of positions regarding which moral claims are true as well as on the nature of moral truth itself. So we cannot expect that every reasonable citizen will accept reasons offered on the basis of our comprehensive moral, political, or religious doctrines.[18] Thus, public reason includes only ideas and principles of political justice that may be agreed to in principle by reasonable persons, and not to reasons grounded in citizens' divergent ideas of what constitutes the "whole truth" of morality. "Political liberalism," Rawls emphasizes, "views [the] insistence on the whole truth in politics as incompatible with democratic citizenship and the idea of legitimate laws."[19]

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[15] Ibid., 442.

[16] Ibid., 446-47. Rawls refers to the *idea* of legitimacy in "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited." In *Political Liberalism*, Rawls calls this idea the liberal *principle* of legitimacy. Cf. Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 137. Nothing important seems to hinge on this change in terminology. In the fourth section of this thesis, when I discuss David Estlund's insularity objection, I find it more effective to refer to the liberal principle of legitimacy, because this most closely conforms to Estlund's terminology.

[17] Rawls, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," 446.

[18] In *Political Liberalism*, a *comprehensive doctrine* is one which is concerned with matters of morality, philosophy, or religion which go beyond questions of political agreement. See ibid., 13-15.

[19] Ibid., 447. It is important to emphasize here that the liberal principle of legitimacy is only applicable to what Rawls calls "constitutional essentials and matters of basic justice"; see ibid., 442. Constitutional essentials are principles and ideas that belong in a liberal constitution, while matters of basic justice concern how the basic structure of a society ought to be ordered separate from a society's written constitution. Rawls does not, as he might have, insist that all debates about law and public policy conform to the liberal principle of legitimacy. Presumably, it is only the case that the outcome of public policy discussion must be consistent with a legitimate constitution and arrangement of the basic structure. Therefore, it does not seem to be Rawls's intention to exclude questions of truth from matters of public policy altogether. For instance, the debate between teaching creationism and evolution in public schools might hinge in part on whether or not each doctrine is true. But the question of whether or not schools should respect religious liberty or how education in society ought to be provided are matters of basic justice that public reason does cover. Debates about these latter questions should not make reference to the concept of truth.

In order to avoid matters concerning the whole truth of morality, the content of public reason contains what Rawls calls "a family of political conceptions of justice."[20] A political conception of justice is grounded in the ideas of equality and fair terms of cooperation. All reasonable political conceptions of justice include a list of basic rights, liberties, and opportunities; rules that secure the priority of these features over other values (e.g., the general good); and some way to ensure that everyone in society has the material and social means to exercise their basic rights and liberties.[21] Justice as fairness, the position developed in *Political Liberalism* and *A Theory of Justice*, is the political conception of justice Rawls thinks is most reasonable. However, public reason is not limited to justice as fairness; Rawls insists that any reasonable political conception of justice is consistent with public reason in a democratic society.[22] Consistent with reasonable pluralism, public reason thus contains a variety of different political conceptions of justice.

2.1.2. Political Constructivism

The content of a political conception of justice is determined by a procedure of practical reasoning: *political constructivism*. Political constructivism is a representation of how the principles and ideas contained in the political conception can be derived from a procedure modeling the basic ideas implicit in conceiving of society as a system of fair cooperation between free and equal members over time.[23] In order to satisfy the criterion of reciprocity, a political conception of justice must be publicly accessible: it must be something that reasonable

[20] Ibid., 450.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 89-90.

citizens holding diverse comprehensive doctrines can, in principle, understand and agree to.[24] By providing a representation of the correct principles of justice as an outcome of a procedure of reasoning, political constructivism ensures that reasonable individuals have access to the principles and ideas of a political conception of justice through the use of practical reason.

Justice as fairness is the outcome of what Rawls takes to be the correct procedure of political constructivism, which is modeled by the *original position*.[25] In the original position, idealized representatives choose principles of justice to govern society from behind the "veil of ignorance," where representatives are unaware of the morally arbitrary features of those whom they represent.[26] The original position is a "device of representation" that models the ability of free and equal individuals to make choices reflecting their rational autonomy while constrained by reasonable epistemic limits reflecting the nature of society as a system of fair cooperation.[27] In the original position, ideal representatives would be particularly concerned with protecting basic rights and liberties. They would also be concerned with the condition of the least advantaged group in society, because representatives would not know the likelihood that the individuals they represent would be among the least advantaged. Therefore, Rawls thinks that our efforts to engage in practical reasoning about the principles of justice, as modeled by the original position, show that the correct political conception of justice includes the two basic principles of justice as fairness: one that secures basic rights and liberties, and another that ensures that all inequalities are both consistent with fair equality of opportunity and designed to be to the advantage of the least well-off group in society.[28]

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[24] Ibid., 66-71.
[25] Ibid., 90.
[26] Ibid., 305.
[27] Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, ed. Erin Kelly (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005): 80-82.
[28] Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 5-6.

Crucially, political constructivism represents the principles of political justice as the outcome of a procedure of practical reasoning, and not part of an independent order of moral truth. Political constructivism involves *producing* correct principles instead of merely *reporting* (independently) true principles. According to Rawls:

> [Political constructivism] does not … use (or deny) the concept of truth; nor does it question that concept, nor could it say that the concept of truth and its ideas of the reasonable are the same. Rather, within itself the political conception *does without the concept of truth*.[29]

However, it does not follow from the fact that political constructivism avoids claims about an independent order of moral truth that it therefore has no standard of moral correctness. Rather, political constructivism maintains that its principles and judgments are subject to the objective criteria that determine reasonableness.[30]

Why does Rawls think that it is so important for political constructivism to avoid claims about truth? Extensive reasonable disagreement exists regarding which moral principles are true, the nature of moral truth, and how persons come to know correct moral principles. Some reasonable individuals affirm comprehensive doctrines that say that the true moral principles are part of a natural law laid down by God. Others believe that the correct moral principles are not "true" at all, but are rather the expressions of a proper emotional disposition towards certain propositions, which can neither be true nor false. Given the liberal principle of legitimacy, however, a political conception of justice should be one that can be reasonably accepted whether one is a natural law theorist, an expressivist, or if one holds any other view about the true nature of morality that is consistent with the judgments and principles of the political conception of

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[29] Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 94.

[30] It is sometimes difficult to determine how reasonableness might provide objectivity to Rawls's theory, given that he is notoriously nonspecific in *Political Liberalism* about what the idea of reasonableness is supposed to entail. For criticism that Rawls's use of the term "reasonable" is circular, see Leif Wenar, "*Political Liberalism*: An Internal Critique," *Ethics* 106 (1995): 34-41. In discuss this issue in greater detail in sections 4.2.2 and 4.3.

justice. According to Rawls, "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."[31]

2.2. Avoiding Claims about the Truth

I now turn to the four claims about truth listed at the beginning of this chapter in order to characterize the position Rawls takes on truth in *Political Liberalism*. First, consider Rawls's No Concept claim: the political conception of justice "does without the concept of truth."[32] This is the logically strongest claim Rawls makes about truth: it denies not only that a political conception of justice entails claims about moral truth, but that it even involves having a concept of truth at all. Given reasonable disagreement about the nature of morality, its autonomy from religion and science, and its claims to objectivity, Rawls thinks that the political conception of justice cannot be grounded in a contestable conception of moral truth. Since a political conception of justice appropriate for public reason contains only what any other citizen might reasonably agree to, a political conception of justice does not use the concept of truth.

Second, since the political conception of justice does not contain the concept of truth, it follows that its principles and judgments are not asserted *as* true. This is the No Assertion of Truth claim. A procedure of political constructivism may produce the principle p as part of the political conception of justice; however, it would not follow that the procedure produces the principle "p is true." "Is true," after all, is a predicate associated with a concept, *truth*, which political constructivism does not even have.

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[31] Ibid., 129.
[32] Ibid, 94.

Third, Rawls makes the No Whole Truth claim. Public reason avoids claims about the whole truth of morality, and political constructivism seeks only to model what is relevant about morality to ground a conception of political reasonableness. It is not intended to express the whole truth of morality. According to Rawls, "we may not think when we see things as individuals, or as members of religious or other associations, that [political constructivism] gives the full story about the truth of its principles and judgments."[33] We may think, for instance, that the idea of autonomy required to conceive of citizens as free and equal is not an adequate philosophical account of autonomy, which might also include a conception of moral responsibility and free will. Note that the No Whole Truth claim is logically weaker than the No Assertion of Truth claim: it follows from the claim that the political conception of justice does not involve *any* assertion of truth that it does not assert that such principles comprise the *whole* truth of morality, but not conversely. The No Whole Truth claim is worth mentioning separately, however. One might think that the plausibility of the No Whole Truth claim is what is at stake in the political conception of justice—i.e., that the political conception must only avoid claims about the whole truth of morality. This thesis aims to defend Rawls's idea that a political conception of justice must avoid truth in a more substantial way than required by the No Whole Truth claim.

Finally, Rawls makes the Outside of the Political Conception claim. Consistent with denying that a political conception of justice asserts its ideas and principles as true, Rawls does think that the principles that make up the political conception of justice may nonetheless *be* true. The same principles of justice that a reasonable procedure of political constructivism arrives at might also turn out to be part of an independent order of true moral principles.[34] However, this

[33] Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 127.
[34] See Rawls's discussion of the relationship between rational intuitionism and political constructivism at ibid., 95.

claim is not part of the political conception of justice. Additionally, Rawls does not think that asserting that a political conception of justice is true necessarily violates the criterion of reciprocity in public reason. Rawls thinks that one *may* give arguments when engaged in public reason that are grounded in one's comprehensive doctrine, including claims about the status of moral truth in relation to the political conception of justice. However, public reason is only consistent with providing comprehensive reasons "provided that in due course proper political reasons … are presented that are sufficient to support whatever the comprehensive doctrines produced are said to support."[35] For instance, when using public reason, one might assert that a principle upholding the right to freedom of conscience is true independently of political constructivism—e.g., that certain rights are handed down by God. However, Rawls claims that this sort of assertion is *outside* of the political conception of justice. It is consistent with public reason only if other reasons are forthcoming that one might reasonably expect any reasonable person to agree to.

[35] Rawls, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," 462. Rawls calls this condition "the proviso."

3. COHEN'S MINIMALIST CONCEPTION OF TRUTH

Joshua Cohen argues that political liberalism needs a conception of truth because truth is an important norm for concepts such as assertion, belief, and judgment, which are essential to public reason. He proposes a *political* conception of truth for public reason: one that contains only what is necessary to make sense of public reason as a form of public deliberation, but which does not include metaphysical commitments that come with a full philosophical treatment of truth. In this section, I defend Rawls's No Concept claim against the objections Cohen raises about the semantic dependency of propositional attitudes on the concept of truth. In the first part of this section, I respond to Cohen's argument that public reason needs a concept of the truth. I argue that although truth is conceptually connected to certain propositional attitudes, public reason does not depend on this connection, and can accommodate reasonable disagreement about the normative status of truth. In the second part of this section, I address Cohen's proposed political conception of truth. I argue that his attempt to include truth in public reason is unnecessarily sectarian, since it excludes reasonable noncognitivist positions about the status of moral utterances.

3.1. Truth as a Norm of Public Deliberation

According to Cohen, the concept of truth is necessary to make sense of various other concepts that are essential to public reason:

> The idea of locating a common ground of political reflection and argument that does without the concept of truth … is hard to grasp. Truth is so closely connected with intuitive notions of thinking, asserting, believing, judging, and reasoning that it is difficult to understand what leaving it behind amounts to.[36]

[36] Cohen, 15.

In this way, Cohen thinks that the concept of truth is distinguished from such contested concepts as the soul, salvation, or honor: agreement about these concepts is not the aim of public reason, and it is not difficult to understand public reason without them. As a form of democratic deliberation among individuals involved in public discourse, persons engaged in public reason must use the concepts associated with propositional attitudes such as assertion, belief, and judgment. Truth is a fundamental norm governing these propositional attitudes. For instance, as Cohen points out, "coming to believe that p is not true is typically 'fatal' to the belief that p."[37] Similarly, if I assert p, then you disagree with me if you maintain that p is *not true;* however, we would have no such disagreement if I did not, by asserting p, mean that p is true. Since truth plays an essential role in propositional attitudes, which are in turn essential to public reason, Cohen concludes that public reason must include a conception of truth.

It is difficult to discern the argumentative force behind Cohen's claim that it is "difficult to understand" what public reason would be like if it "leaves behind" the concept of truth. He might mean that public reason needs a conception of truth in order to make clear what is meant by its use of concepts such as assertion, belief, and judgment. But it is far from clear that adherents of a political conception of justice need to be committed to some definite idea about concepts that might be necessary in order to explain the other concepts used in public reason. For instance, a person engaged in public reason may use the concept of belief. The concept of belief is difficult to understand without a conception of the mind. But just as adherents of a political conception of justice do not need to be committed to having a conception of the soul, they also do not need a distinct conception of the mind. Furthermore, it is difficult to understand the concept of mind without a conception of how the mind interacts with the body, and it is difficult to understand the concept of belief without a conception of how beliefs are connected to

[37] Ibid, 13.

intentions and actions. But these are matters that go far beyond political conceptions of justice and into contested conceptual territory. A conception of the mind, like a conception of the truth, is part of a person's comprehensive doctrine, if that person even has views about such matters at all. Participants in public reason may have different understandings of what they are doing when they make assertions or hold beliefs, given the diverse conceptions of truth or mind which might be part of the reasonable comprehensive doctrines they hold. Preserving the possibility of philosophical pluralism about such matters is part of the motivation behind what Rawls calls the "method of avoidance" regarding philosophical controversy, thereby applying "the principle of toleration to philosophy itself."[38] In order to make the point that public reason needs a conception of truth to understand the other concepts it uses, Cohen would need to show how a political conception of justice needs to hold a particular philosophical position about any concept in order to understand the other concepts used in public reason. It is not clear how Cohen could make this point without giving up the idea that public reason should avoid sectarian claims with respect to matters about which persons may reasonably disagree.

However, Cohen's argument seems to go beyond the claim that public reason is difficult to understand without a conception of truth. He seems to be arguing that by relying on the concepts of belief, assertion, and judgment, public reason relies on the concept of truth, since the concepts of belief, assertion, and judgment rely on the concept of truth. When he discusses how his conception of truth is supposed to address the relationship between truth and propositional attitudes, Cohen makes what seems to be an identity claim: "believing (asserting, judging) *is* believing (asserting, judging) true." He elaborates, claiming that "this slogan is understood to

[38] Rawls, "Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical," in *Collected Papers*, ed. Samuel Freeman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 395.

mean that truth is *the norm governing* beliefs, assertions, and judgments."[39] This remark seems to mean that, e.g., one's asserting that p is *correct* if and only if p is true, since asserting that p simply *is* asserting that p is true. Since the concept of assertion is governed by the norm of truth, assertion relies on the concept of truth. Therefore, since public reason uses the concept of assertion, public reason relies on a concept of truth.

However, failing to follow the norm associated with truth does not interfere with one's ability to use the concepts of assertion, belief, or judgment. Cohen claims that asserting that p *is* asserting that p is true. According to Cohen, from this statement we can derive the norm that asserting that p is correct if and only if p is true. However, this norm does not rely on the concept of assertion at all. Instead, it relies on the alleged identity of p and "p is true," not on the fact that these propositions are being asserted. I can use and understand the concept of assertion perfectly well without knowing all of the propositions that are identical to one another. For instance, I can make assertions without knowing that to assert that *la neige est blanche* simply is to assert that snow is white. When I assert that snow is white, I may not know that my assertion is correct if and only if *la neige est blanche*, even though all someone would need to do to see whether or not my assertion "snow is white" is correct is to go outside and look to see whether or not *la neige est blanche*. Cohen may show that truth is the norm governing the correctness of one's assertion, but it does not follow that one must understand that norm in order to make assertions.

Another argument that assertion does not require a conception of truth can be illustrated by G. E. Moore's paradox about belief. Consider the sentence, "p, but I do not believe that p is

[39] Cohen, 27; emphasis added. These remarks about the relationship between truth and propositional attitudes are part of the conception of truth that Cohen proposes for public reason, which I will take up in the next section. They are relevant here, however, because they seem to clarify Cohen's critique of the claim that public reason can do without using the concept of truth.

true."[40] While I may certainly be guilty of deep confusion when I utter this sentence, Moore shows that what I say is not strictly illogical. Someone might, for instance, utter the innocuous sentence "p, but Pierce Randall does not believe that p is true." This sentence is not illogical, since it does not contradict itself, and it does not become a contradiction simply because I utter it. There is nothing about the concept of belief that requires that I believe every proposition that I assert is true. Lying, though exceptional, is common enough. Similarly, I may utter the sentence, "p, but I do not assert that p is true." This sentence might be contradictory, supposing that asserting p is identical to asserting that p is true. But the problem with this sentence would not lie in how I used the concept of assertion. Sometimes a person will assert a proposition, and then deny that he asserted it. It is not enough to show that I do not understand that p amounts to the same thing as the proposition "p is true." Cohen wants to show that I misunderstand how to use the concept of *assertion*, not truth. He claims that by using the concept of assertion, I thereby use the concept of truth; and that in order to properly use the concept of assertion, I must have a conception of a minimal set of rules governing the use of the concept of truth. But I can break the rules when it comes to truth without that interfering with my ability to use the concept of assertion. This same argument could be made regarding other concepts associated with propositional attitudes, such as judgment and belief.

One might object that even though the concept of truth is not, strictly speaking, *required* in order to properly use the concepts of belief, judgment, and assertion, it is nonetheless hard to see how someone who lacks competence with the concept of truth to the point of denying that "p" is the same as "p is true" could make very many meaningful assertions or judgments. As Cohen points out, paraphrasing Donald Davidson, "we often figure out what someone's

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[40] See G. E. Moore, "A Reply to My Critics," in *The Philosophy of G. E. Moore*, 2nd ed., ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1952), 541-43. Moore's original paradox was "p, but I do not believe that p."

utterances mean by assuming that they are saying something true."[41] If someone does not mean, by asserting p, that p is true, then it is hard to understand how they could mean anything at all by asserting p.

There are two responses to this objection. First, competently making intelligible assertions is not an all-or-nothing matter. It is possible to have an alternative to truth in mind as the correct norm governing assertion. For instance, I might think that assertions are governed by the norm that propositions are correct if they correspond with the way things really are. You, on the other hand, might think that assertions are governed by the norm of truth. Normally, this amounts to the same thing, and we understand each other perfectly well. If a correspondence theory of truth is correct, then our norms *always* amount to the same thing. If these norms ever come into conflict, however, we will have difficulty understanding each other in that instance, but not in all instances. Normally, we will have no trouble determining when each others' assertions are correct.

Second, someone can have a conception of truth when making assertions in public reason without truth being part of their political conception of justice. This is Rawls's Outside of the Political Conception claim. Rawls allows that adherents of reasonable comprehensive doctrines might hold the political conception of justice to be the truth about justice: "When we speak of the moral truth of a political conception of justice," Rawls claims, "we assess it from the point of view of our comprehensive doctrine."[42] Thus, one may have a conception of truth, but, according to Rawls, that conception is located outside of public reason, in one's comprehensive doctrine.

What is the point of locating the conception of truth outside of public reason? If public reason must appeal to a conception of truth held by reasonable comprehensive doctrines, why not

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[41] Cohen, 14.
[42] Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 126.

simply include that conception of justice in public reason? Different comprehensive doctrines may have different conceptions about truth. One might hold that truth corresponds to the way the world really is. Others might maintain that the truth consists in God's will. In some sense, adherents of comprehensive doctrines that contain incompatible ideas about the truth mean, or take themselves to mean, different things when using the concept of truth. It is difficult to see what would be gained by including a conception of truth into the political conception of justice thin enough to accommodate substantial disagreement between reasonable comprehensive doctrines regarding the nature of truth. Nevertheless, adherents of these diverse doctrines will often be able to communicate shared meaning with one another. Therefore, it is not necessary that adherents of diverse but reasonable comprehensive doctrines share a common conception of truth in order to engage in public reason.

3.2. Cohen's Political Conception of Truth

Cohen proposes to include a political conception of truth in public reason. Cohen's conception of truth includes a *T-schema*: "the proposition that p is true if and only if p." The political conception also includes several "commonplaces" about truth: First, truth is the standard of correctness that governs propositional attitudes such as assertion, judgment, and belief. Second, to state that a proposition is true is to state that it corresponds to the way things are, although not necessarily to some state of affairs independent of the mind or cognition. Third, truth is distinct from warrant or justification, i.e., giving a reason for p's being true is conceptually distinct from p's being true. Finally, fourth, Cohen thinks that the value of truth

must be understood as distinct from the value of warrant or justification—for instance, one may want true beliefs whether or not one desires to have good reasons to believe those beliefs.[43]

Cohen is careful to call his view a minimalist conception of truth, not a deflationary one. A deflationary account of truth holds that there is nothing more to the truth than the T-schema, i.e., that there is nothing metaphysically significant about the truth that cannot be expressed by the T-schema. However, adherents of some reasonable comprehensive doctrines hold that the truth is metaphysically significant—for instance, Catholic natural law doctrine holds that the truth "expresses the essential bond between God's wisdom and will."[44] Cohen does not intend for his political conception of the truth to be sectarian, thereby excluding reasonable comprehensive conceptions of the truth. Rather, he wishes to express, in the political conception of truth, what may be affirmed by all reasonable conceptions of the truth.

However, the conception of truth Cohen offers cannot be accepted by all reasonable comprehensive doctrines. The T-schema *is* a deflationary account of truth, because it implies that asserting that a proposition is true adds nothing to the assertion of a proposition itself. To say that the proposition p is true if and only if p *is* to say that there is nothing more to a proposition's being true than that it is the case.[45] This deflationary account is inconsistent with an example of a reasonable comprehensive view about truth that Cohen gives and is thus a bad candidate for a political conception of truth. Consider the Catholic natural law doctrine, which holds that the

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[43] Cohen, 27.

[44] Cohen here quotes the *Veritatis Splendor*, which states one comprehensive conception of truth rooted in Catholic theology. Ibid., 18. For Cohen's insistence that his political conception is not deflationary, see ibid., 25.

[45] Cohen borrows the term "T-schema" from Alfred Tarski's classic analysis of truth. See Alfred Tarski, "The Semantic Conception of Truth and the Foundations of Semantics," *Philosophy & Phenomenological Research* 4, no. 3 (1944): 341-76. Tarski is not usually interpreted as a deflationist about truth, so my comment that the T-schema is deflationary warrants explanation. First, unlike the deflationary schema used by Cohen, Tarski's T-schema introduces the substantive concept of a metalanguage of semantic predicates into the equivalence: p is a true sentence in the object language if and only if p can be asserted in the metalanguage. Second, Tarski intends his analysis of truth to be a semantic conception for a formal language. See ibid., 345-47. Therefore, Tarski does not, therefore, argue that there is nothing more to a proposition's being true than that it is the case, a position that I have characterized as deflationary. Rather, he argues that, in a formal language, there is nothing more to asserting that p is a true sentence of the object language than saying that "p is true" can be correctly asserted in the metalanguage.

truth "expresses the essential bond between God's wisdom and will." It is not inconceivable that p might be the case without expressing God's wisdom and will. For instance, some propositions are misleadingly or trivially true, and may seem contrary to God's will despite the fact that they are the case. (E.g., "If p, then q," where p is false and q is some blasphemous proposition.) A reasonable adherent of the Catholic natural law doctrine may, therefore, deny that a misleading proposition is true, even if she admits that it is the case.

Nevertheless, it is open to Cohen to deny that there are reasonable conceptions of truth that are non-deflationary in the sense of rejecting his T-schema. To press my case, I will show why applying the T-schema to moral claims conflicts with some reasonable comprehensive doctrines. In order to find a comprehensive doctrine that denies the application of Cohen's T-schema to moral claims, we need to find a comprehensive doctrine either that denies p but affirms that p is true, or else affirms p but denies that p is true. The latter condition is fulfilled by some noncognitivist theories about the meanings of moral claims.

As a theory of the meaning of ethical claims, noncognitivism holds that sentences expressing ethical claims do not express propositions at all, but rather prescribe commands or express the speaker's emotions with respect to the content of the ethical judgment. For instance, expressivists are noncognitivists who hold that moral utterances are correctly analyzed as attitudes directed towards certain ideas or states of affairs. An expressivist might hold that the moral claim "society ought to allow only those inequalities that are to the benefit of the least well-off" is correctly understood as a negative attitude towards the idea of inequalities that are not to the benefit of the least well-off.[46] An expressivist who claims that society ought to allow only those inequalities that are to the benefit of the least well-off would nevertheless *not* hold

[46] For some classic noncognitivist views, see R. M. Hare, *The Language of Morals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964); A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, 2nd ed. (New York: Dover Publications, 1952), 102-20.

that this principle is true, since it is a moral claim, and expressivists hold that moral claims are neither true nor false. Therefore, expressivists, and noncognitivists generally, are committed to resisting the application of the T-schema to moral claims. For any p, if p is a moral claim, then a noncognitivist who affirms p is committed to denying that p is true (or false).

Cohen is careful to distinguish moral noncognitivism, which he calls the No Truth Bearers position, from Rawls's No Concept view. Rawls proposes to leave the truth out of public reason, but not to deny that the propositions in public reason are true or false. Furthermore, Cohen seems to think that versions of moral noncognitivism cannot be reasonable according to the idea of public reason. According to Cohen, the claims made in public reason "*must* be truth-apt … if there is to be a common ground of argument under conditions of doctrinal disagreement."[47]

Cohen is correct, of course, that Rawls's position cannot be the same as the noncognitivist position, because to deny that the claims expressed in public reason are truth-apt would be to contradict ideas about the relationship between truth and morality that are deeply rooted in many other reasonable comprehensive doctrines. However, simply because Rawls cannot assert the No Truth Bearers view, it does not follow that his No Concept view is incompatible with noncognitivism. Cohen is wrong to insist that all reasonable comprehensive doctrines must be able to affirm the truth of a political conception of truth. Certainly, some noncognitivist positions are compatible with some reasonable comprehensive doctrines. There is no reason why one cannot hold a particular view about the nature of moral propositions such as noncognitivism without also affirming all of the normative claims required by Rawls's idea of reasonableness.

[47] Cohen, 17-18. Emphasis added.

Nevertheless, it may be difficult to see how noncognitivism is compatible with the ability to make moral inferences that are essential to public reason as a form of deliberation. Deductive arguments require logically compound propositions, i.e., propositions that are linked by logical connectives such "and," "or," and "if and only if." However, the meaning of logical connectives consists in what propositions formed by the connectives say about the truth or falsity of the propositions they connect. For instance, "if p then q" asserts that either p is false or else q is true. But if p and q are moral propositions, then according to noncognitivism they cannot be true or false. So it is not clear how noncognitivists could use logically compound sentences about moral terms, which seem to be necessary in order to make moral inferences which are necessary to public reason.[48]

Many proponents of noncognitivism, however, believe that their positions can avoid this and similar objections. For instance, Simon Blackburn has argued that conditional ethical claims express disapproval at affirming the antecedent while denying the consequent. Blackburn would analyze moral propositions such as "if drinking is wrong, then drinking and driving is wrong" as expressing disapproval towards the idea that one might disapprove of drinking while not disapproving of drinking and driving.[49] This kind of noncognitive analysis allows for inferential moral reasoning based on the norm of holding consistent moral attitudes. Blackburn's version of noncognitivism, which he calls quasi-realism, would not apply the T-schema to the moral claims that make up a political conception of justice. However, it is a credible account of moral reasoning without truth.

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[48] This argument, when applied to moral noncognitivism generally, is known as the Frege-Geach problem. See P. T. Geach, "Ascriptivism," *Philosophical Review* 69, no. 2 (1960): 221-25.
[49] Simon Blackburn, *Spreading the Word: Groundings in the Philosophy of Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 181-96.

It is not clear whether quasi-realism is a successful theory, nor is that important here. Quasi-realism does not need to be correct or philosophically unproblematic for it to be reasonable in the sense necessary to warrant toleration according to the idea of legitimacy. Quasi-realism does do at least the following: it has an account of moral reasoning that can explain how quasi-realists might make inferences when engaged in public reason, and it rejects Cohen's T-schema for moral claims. Setting aside its rejection of Cohen's political conception of truth, quasi-realism as part of a comprehensive moral or philosophical doctrine is compatible with any aspect of a political conception of justice. To give reasons that rely on the truth of the principles and ideas of justice contained in the political conception of justice, as Cohen's political conception of truth requires, is to give reasons that the quasi-realist cannot accept. Sophisticated variants on noncognitivism such as quasi-realism show that public reason, if it is to remain tolerant with respect to reasonable doctrinal disagreement, cannot include even the minimal conception of truth expressed by Cohen's T-schema.[50]

[50] For another noncognitivist account of moral reasoning, see Allan Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 83-102.

4. IS POLITICAL LIBERALISM OBJECTIONABLY INSULAR?

One way to object to Rawls's claim that a political conception of justice can do without the truth is to argue that some of the concepts that make up political liberalism—for instance, the idea of public reason—use or rely on the concept of truth. In the last section, I responded to an example of this sort of criticism from Joshua Cohen. A second type of objection concerns the objectivity of the content of political liberalism. Critics claim that at least some of the core doctrines of political liberalism must be true in order for the theory to be morally justifiable. According to these critics, political liberalism is unsuccessful as a political theory if political liberals cannot assert the truth of certain claims central to the theory.

David Estlund offers a version of the second type of objection. According to Estlund, central to political liberalism is its doctrine of political justification. Rawls thinks that a doctrine must be acceptable to all reasonable persons if it is to be given as part of a public justification for constitutional essentials or basic principles of justice. Doctrines that are not, in principle, acceptable to all reasonable persons are inadmissible as part of public reason even if they are true, and (perhaps more contentiously) false doctrines may be admitted as part of political justification if they are acceptable to all reasonable persons. Estlund argues that Rawls's claim about the admissibility of doctrines for the purpose of political justification must itself be true, not merely acceptable to all reasonable persons, if political liberalism is to be a successful theory of political justification. Estlund's argument raises a difficult question about the justifiability of political liberalism's doctrine of political justification: Why care about acceptability to reasonable people, instead of acceptability to any other group, unless it is *true* that the coercive power of the state is illegitimate if it is not justifiable to reasonable people (i.e., unless the liberal principle of legitimacy is true)? Were Estlund correct, then Rawls's claims that public reason

does not need or use the concept of truth would be mistaken, as political liberals would then be committed to claiming that the justificatory doctrine on which political liberalism rests is true.[51]

In this section, I will respond to Estlund by arguing that the appropriateness of the liberal principle of legitimacy does not rest on its being true. Since I will focus only on Estlund's objection, my argument will not demonstrate that no sound argument may be given for the claim political liberalism needs some of its central claims to be true. However, I will argue that truth is in no better shape than reasonableness as a criterion for determining whose acceptance is necessary when advancing a doctrine for the purpose of political justification. In the first part of this section, I will outline Estlund's objection, which I will call the insularity objection. In the second part of this section, I highlight Estlund's assumption that the reasonableness of a doctrine is synonymous with that doctrine's being acceptable to reasonable persons. I argue that on this assumption, the truth fares no better than reasonableness according to the insularity objection. Finally, in the third part of this section, I defend the idea that reasonableness can be an independent source of justification for the liberal principle of legitimacy.

4.1. Estlund's Insularity Objection

According to Estlund, an essential feature of political liberalism is a principle he calls Reasonable Acceptance Necessary (RAN):

> RAN (Reasonable Acceptance Necessary): No doctrine is admissible as a premise in any stage of political justification unless it is acceptable to all reasonable citizens, and it need not be acceptable to anyone else.[52]

Rawls's idea of legitimacy entails RAN. As I noted in the second section of this thesis, the idea of legitimacy includes both the criterion of reciprocity and the idea that the reasons given

[51] For another version of this type of criticism, see Larmore, 144-51. Larmore argues that the moral foundation of political liberalism, which he understands to be the principle of respect for persons, must be true.
[52] Estlund, 254.

according to that criterion are considered sufficient to justify the political act in question. According to Rawls, the idea of legitimacy holds that "our exercise of political power is proper only when we sincerely believe that the reasons we would offer for our political actions—were we government officials—are sufficient, and we also reasonably think that other citizens might reasonably accept those reasons."[53] Therefore, any moral justification for a legitimate exercise of political power according to the idea of legitimacy must be acceptable to all reasonable people.[54] The acceptability of a moral justification to non-reasonable people is irrelevant to the idea of legitimacy, since that idea specifies sufficient conditions for the legitimacy of political justification that reference no group other than reasonable people.

Estlund understands RAN as an instance of a more general schema, AN:

> AN (Acceptance Necessary): No doctrine is admissible as a premise in any stage of political justification unless it is acceptable to a certain range of (real or hypothetical) citizens, C, and no one else's acceptance is required.[55]

RAN is a particular instance of the general schema AN. RAN specifies group C as "all reasonable citizens." However, other instances of AN might involve other specifications of group C. C might be specified as "House Republicans," yielding the doctrine that the exercise of political power is legitimate only if it is supported by doctrines acceptable to all House Republicans. There are instances of AN that are inconsistent with political liberalism, and all recognizable variations of political liberalism must include a doctrine of political justification similar to RAN.

According to Estlund, any instance of AN is itself a doctrine of political justification. Therefore, any instance of AN applies to itself, and is thus admissible only if it is acceptable to

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[53] Rawls, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," 446-47.
[54] It is worth noting that according to Rawls's proviso in "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," principles from one's comprehensive moral doctrine, which will not be acceptable to all reasonable persons, may be *admissible* as moral justifications for claims. However, such principles are not sufficient for justifying political claims, and reasons for the claims that, in principle, can be supported by all reasonable people must be given.
[55] Estlund, 257.

the group that it specifies for C. In order for an instance of AN to be admissible as a doctrine in political justification, it must not violate itself, which means any admissible instance of AN must be accepted by the group it specifies for C. This is the *insularity requirement*. For instance, RAN must be acceptable to all reasonable persons in order to be admissible for political justification, since otherwise it would violate itself and would therefore be inadmissible by its own standard. Similarly, in order for the doctrine that the acceptance of House Republicans is necessary for a doctrine's admissibility in political justification to be consistent, House Republicans must accept this doctrine. Some doctrines of legitimacy will fail to meet the insularity requirement: for instance, Estlund claims that all red-haired people would not think that doctrines are admissible for political justification only if they are acceptable to all red-haired people.[56] Nevertheless, at least some specifications of C other than "all reasonable persons" may meet the insularity requirement.

Suppose that, in addition to RAN, contingent circumstances were such that HRAN (House Republican Acceptance Necessary) also meets the insularity requirement: all House Republicans really do agree that any doctrine admissible for political justification must be acceptable to all House Republicans, but need not be acceptable to anyone else. Since the class of House Republicans is not coextensive with the class of reasonable persons, HRAN is inconsistent with RAN. HRAN holds that the acceptance of reasonable non-House Republicans is not necessary for a doctrine's admissibility, and that the acceptance of non-reasonable House Republicans is necessary. Both claims are inconsistent with RAN. Since inconsistent doctrines may be insular, the insularity requirement alone cannot be the sole criterion for choosing between incompatible doctrines of political justification.

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[56] Ibid., 258.

The crux of Estlund's objection is this: If the truth of RAN is not necessary for its admissibility in political justification, then political liberals have no ground on which to argue that RAN is superior to other instances of AN that meet the insularity requirement, such as HRAN. It would beg the question, Estlund thinks, to point out that RAN is reasonable and that HRAN is unreasonable, since Rawls thinks that all reasonable doctrines may be affirmed in principle by reasonable people, and RAN *is* the doctrine that acceptability to reasonable persons is a necessary feature of any doctrine that is acceptable for political justification. As Estlund points out, "to the question why [one specification of] C is the admissible version rather than alternative insular versions, its self-acceptability is no answer at all. That is something possessed by every insular version of C."[57] Estlund understands this objection to be a "logical issue" for accepting political liberalism, given Rawls's claims that it can do without the truth.[58] According to Estlund, political liberals who wish to show that RAN is a more appropriate doctrine of political justification than HRAN must maintain that RAN is correct, and that HRAN is therefore incorrect. Furthermore, this defense must be given without appealing to the acceptability of RAN to reasonable persons, since that would only show that RAN is, like HRAN, an insular doctrine. Therefore, Estlund thinks that political liberalism needs RAN to be *true*, not merely acceptable to reasonable persons, if it is to be an acceptable doctrine of political justification.

4.2 Is the Insularity Objection Sound?

4.2.1 Worries about scope

Before proceeding to my response to Estlund's argument, it is worth considering that Estlund's argument might target an overly-broad reading of the scope of Rawls's project in

[57] Ibid., 261.
[58] Ibid., 259.

Political Liberalism. Rawls insists that "the aim of political liberalism is to uncover the conditions of the possibility of a reasonable public basis of justification on fundamental political questions," but only given the fact of reasonable pluralism, which holds that modern democracies are marked by a permanent and inevitable pluralism of reasonable but irreconcilable comprehensive philosophical, moral, and religious doctrines.[59] In other words, Rawls assumes that in modern democratic societies there exists a plurality of reasonable but conflicting comprehensive doctrines, and that the aim of political liberalism should be to find a way to justify the structure of political institutions and the use of the coercive power of the state to reasonable persons. Estlund asks a different question: How can Rawls's assumption that justification to reasonable persons is necessary be grounded in such a way that the substantial conclusions of *Political Liberalism* are justified without merely assuming that the liberal principle of legitimacy is correct? A political liberal might respond to the insularity objection by arguing that RAN does not lie within its own scope, since it is an assumption upon which the idea of political liberalism is based, and therefore not itself subject to justification. Estlund calls this RAN on this reading a "metajustificatory" principle: it maintains that the principle of legitimacy only applies to a proper subset of political justification that does not include itself.[60]

Estlund resists the claim that RAN is a metajustificatory principle by denying that any basis exists for treating RAN as outside of its own scope. Estlund thinks that the idea of a metajustificatory principle merely gestures at an answer to the insularity objection without making the case that RAN lies outside of its own scope. However, the fact that the aims of political liberalism are more modest than Estlund's characterization suggests would seem to be an adequate basis for treating RAN differently than other doctrines of political justification. All

[59] Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, xix & 3-4.
[60] Estlund, 255.

inquiry must, at some point, come to an end, and all successful arguments start from some commonly accepted premises. For political liberalism, its conclusions about a political conception of justice rest upon the assumption that it is reasonable people to whom justification is owed and that such justification requires respecting the fact of reasonable pluralism.

While this response might explain why Rawls is not moved to anticipate or respond to something like the insularity objection,[61] I do not think that the insularity objection can be set aside without a second thought by those who already accept the basic assumptions behind political liberalism. While Rawls's project in *Political Liberalism* was to develop a theory of justice from substantial commitments regarding the correct principles of political legitimacy, other political liberals might see the assumptions Rawls makes as controversial and might seek a justification for them. Do political liberals really have nothing else to say about HRAN, for instance, other than that it is inconsistent with the principle of political justification political liberals assume to be correct? One natural response to the challenge of competing insular doctrines would be to say that the liberal principle of legitimacy is the true principle of political justification and that competing insular principles are false. Since I argue that political liberals ought not to be worried about objections to Rawls's claim that political liberalism does not need the concept of truth, I need to show that Estlund's insularity objection is unsound.

[61] As I will note below, in section 4.3, I believe that this response helps explain why Rawls does not give a robust analysis of reasonableness in *Political Liberalism*. Rawls is not concerned with explaining why we should want to be reasonable, or why reasonable persons are the proper aim of political justification. Therefore, he does not elaborate in great detail the appealing or normative features of reasonableness, as he might have were he concerned with showing that agreement among reasonable persons, as opposed to alternative insular groups, is the proper aim of public political deliberation.

4.2.2 The Independence of Reasonableness and the Insularity of True Believers

Estlund's objection rests on the assumption that RAN is acceptable to reasonable persons would beg the question as a justification for selecting RAN over competing insular doctrines, since RAN *is* the doctrine that acceptability to reasonable persons is necessary for a doctrine's admissibility in political justification. The strategy I pursue here is that the *reasonableness* of RAN, and not merely its acceptability to reasonable persons, justifies its status as the correct doctrine of political justification. I will show how Estlund's argument insularity objection is unsound. I argue that the claim that RAN is reasonable is not the same justification as the claim that RAN is acceptable to reasonable persons. Even if Estlund gives a good reason to think that RAN's acceptability to reasonable persons only establishes the fact that RAN is insular, it would not follow that no additional justification can come from the claim that RAN is reasonable.

Estlund recognizes a distinction between reasonable people and people-when-reasonable, and with this he seems to address the distinction between acceptability to reasonable persons and reasonableness. He allows that the standard of acceptability to reasonable persons does not imply that there exists some category of reasonable person "whose objections are decisive regardless of the grounds or other merits of their objection," such that they have permanent "rejection rights" over any doctrine.[62] However, Estlund seems to understand this distinction to be motivated by the recognition that "no one is unfailingly reasonable."[63] Since no one is unfailingly reasonable, Estlund thinks, no one's rejection of a doctrine for political justification is decisive; instead, a person's objection is only decisive insofar as that person is reasonable. Estlund's response, however, is to interpret the class of "reasonable persons" in RAN "as reference either to people-

[62] Estlund, 259.
[63] Ibid.

when-reasonable or to hypothetical people who are always reasonable"[64] Since hypothetical people who are always reasonable *are* unfailingly reasonable, Estlund thinks that they should be understood according to RAN as having rejection rights against any doctrine for the purpose of political justification. If "reasonableness" just means "acceptability to hypothetical persons who are always reasonable," then it would beg the question to claim that RAN is the correct doctrine of political justification because RAN is reasonable.

However, reasonableness does *not* mean the same thing as acceptability to hypothetical persons who are always reasonable, and the claim that RAN is reasonable is distinct from the claim that RAN is acceptable to perfectly reasonable persons. It is true that persons, insofar as they are reasonable, will accept reasonable doctrines for political justification. It is therefore true that hypothetical persons who are always reasonable will accept any and all reasonable doctrines. The standards "x is acceptable to reasonable persons" (where "reasonable person" is appropriately construed to include only hypothetical persons who are always reasonable) and "x is reasonable" are *coextensive*, at least when applied to doctrines that may be used for political justification. In other words, any doctrine that satisfies one standard will satisfy the other. But coextension is not synonymy; Estlund has not established that "x is reasonable" means the same thing as "x is acceptable to reasonable persons." Suppose that "x is a renate" and "x is a chordate" are coextensive when applied to biological taxa; it would nevertheless not follow that they are synonymous.[65] Simply because one proposition is true in exactly the same instances as another, it does not follow that these propositions mean the same thing. Therefore, the claim that

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[64] Ibid.

[65] W. V. O. Quine uses the chordate/renate example to show how two coextensive terms do not mean the same thing. See W. V. O. Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," in *From a Logical Point of View*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 30-32.

RAN is reasonable is distinct from the claim that RAN is acceptable to hypothetical perfectly reasonable persons.

Estlund assumes that since reasonableness is coextensive with acceptability to hypothetical perfectly reasonable persons, the fact that RAN is reasonable may be ruled out as a justification for RAN on the grounds that it would be question-begging to justify RAN by claiming that it is acceptable to ideally reasonable persons. However, this assumption is unwarranted. It matters for the purpose of justifying RAN that "RAN is reasonable" and "RAN is acceptable to reasonable persons" are not the same claim. Giving a reason, i.e., making an assertion of the form "p because of q," where q is a reason for p, is an intensional context. In other words, one cannot freely substitute one reason for another while preserving the truth of a sentence that contains words such as "because" or "since" when they are understood as indicating that a reason for a prior claim follows.[66] For instance, it may be the case, as Aristotle thought, that the most pleasant life is a life of virtue, such that "x is a virtuous life" and "x is the most pleasant life" are coextensive.[67] But Aristotle was no hedonist: it does not follow from the fact that he believed that we should cultivate certain habits because they constitute a virtuous life that therefore he thought that we should cultivate those habits because they constitute the most pleasant life. Generally speaking, it does not follow from the claim that q is a reason for p and "q if and only if r" that r is a reason for p as well. Therefore, the fact that RAN is reasonable is not necessarily the same reason for accepting RAN as the fact that RAN is acceptable to perfectly-reasonable hypothetical persons. The fact that RAN is reasonable can be a reason why RAN is the correct doctrine for political justification, even though the fact that RAN is acceptable to

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[66] Quine highlights the problem of replacing coextensional terms in intensional contexts in another article, although his conclusions are different than mine. See Quine, "Quantifiers and Propositional Attitudes," *Journal of Philosophy* 53, no. 5 (1956): 177-87.

[67] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Robert Bartlett and Susan Collins (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 16 [1099a25-30].

reasonable persons would not provide such a justification. In section 4.3, I will argue that the fact that RAN is reasonable can provide non-question-begging grounds for accepting RAN as the correct standard of legitimacy.

Reasonableness is at least not any worse off than truth as a standard for selecting among competing insular doctrines, since the fact that a doctrine is true would be an insular standard for accepting it were it not the case that its truth is a reason for accepting it over and above its acceptability to persons with true beliefs. Suppose that there is some hypothetical group of persons who accept all and only the true doctrines of political justification. Call these persons *true believers*. Suppose that true believers believe that a doctrine is admissible for the purposes of political justification only if it is acceptable to true believers. How would we justify *that* doctrine? It would beg the question to point out that the doctrine that true believers' acceptance is necessary (TBAN) is acceptable to true believers. It seems more natural to say that TBAN is the correct doctrine of legitimacy because it is *true*. (The doctrine must be true since, as stipulated, it is acceptable to hypothetical persons who accept all and only the true doctrines of political justification.) But notice that "x is true" and "x is acceptable to persons who believe in all and only the true doctrines of political justification" are coextensive with respect to any doctrine of political justification. Any doctrine that satisfies one standard would satisfy the other. If coextensive features have the same status as reasons for why we should accept one doctrine over another, then the claim that TBAN is true would be no more reason to accept it than the claim that TBAN is acceptable to true believers. And since the claim that TBAN is acceptable to true believers only establishes that TBAN is insular, it could not explain why TBAN is correct given the plurality of insular groups.

One might object here that while it is clear that the fact that a doctrine is true might be a reason to accept it over and above the fact that it is acceptable to true believers, it is not as easy to see that there is anything to the idea of reasonableness other than acceptability to reasonable persons. Substantial philosophical disagreements aside, most can agree that the truth of a proposition implies some kind of correspondence with reality or other kind of objectivity that is distinct from its acceptability by some person or group.[68] The matter is not so clear in the case of reasonableness. It is not clear whether or not there is anything to a doctrine's being reasonable other than the fact that reasonable persons are disposed to accept it. Perhaps this difference can be explained by the fact that truth is foremost a predicate applied to propositions. A true doctrine is simply a doctrine that can be expressed in true propositions; a true believer (as I have defined him) is simply one who has all true beliefs, which are beliefs the content of which can be expressed in true propositions. However, Rawls might be understood as using "reasonableness" in a sense that applies foremost to persons. One might take the line that propositions are only reasonable because they are the sorts of things that reasonable persons believe, and reasonable procedures are reasonable only because they are acceptable to reasonable persons. According to this objection, while it might be the case that the truth of a doctrine is a reason to accept it over and above that doctrine's acceptability by true believers, it may not follow that the reasonableness of RAN is a reason to accept it distinct from the acceptability of RAN to reasonable persons. There may be nothing to RAN's being reasonable other than the fact that it is acceptable to reasonable persons.[69]

Rawls introduces the ideas of a reasonable person and a reasonable comprehensive doctrine in *Political Liberalism*, and it is clear that these concepts play a significant role in

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[68] Recall that one of Cohen's commonplace observations about truth was that truth is distinct from warrant.
[69] This objection was suggested to me by Andrew Altman.

Political Liberalism.[70] It is less clear how these concepts are related to each other. Sometimes, Rawls suggests that reasonable comprehensive doctrines are just those doctrines that reasonable persons accept. This is essentially the objection now being considered: all it is to be reasonable doctrine is to be acceptable to reasonable persons. However, as Samuel Freeman points out:

> The problem with this understanding of reasonable doctrines … is that it seems to render trivial the problem of stability that Rawls confronts in *Political Liberalism*. For if the problem … is simply whether the reasonable and hence tolerant doctrines that reasonable and hence tolerant people affirm will also all affirm a tolerant and liberal political conception of justice, then the answer is obvious: "Of course they will, for reasonable doctrines are virtually defined as affirming liberal values from the outset."[71]

Rawls devotes an entire chapter in *Political Liberalism* to the idea of an overlapping consensus, so Rawls probably does not intend his point that reasonable persons affirm reasonable doctrines to be understood as a trivial claim. Therefore, it seems likely that when Rawls discusses the reasonableness of a doctrine, he does not merely mean that it is affirmed by reasonable persons. There must be something substantial about the idea of reasonableness as it applies to doctrines over and above the idea of reasonableness as it applies to persons. For the strategy I have taken of defending RAN to work, whatever substance there is to the concept of reasonableness must do the work of explaining why the fact that RAN is reasonable justifies accepting it.

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[70] Estlund's reference to the liberal principle of legitimacy, which he takes to be equivalent to RAN, as a *doctrine* of political justification deviates somewhat from Rawls's use of the term "doctrine." Rawls discusses *comprehensive* doctrines, but not doctrines *simpliciter*. Rawls also avoids calling his political conception of justice, which includes the liberal principle of legitimacy, a doctrine. However, Rawls does call the political conception of justice "a module, an essential constituent part that fits into … various reasonable comprehensive doctrines"; Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 12. I read Rawls as saying here that the political conception of justice is part of some (or all) reasonable comprehensive doctrines. Since the liberal principle of legitimacy, or RAN, is part of the political conception of justice, and the political conception is part of a reasonable comprehensive doctrine, it follows that RAN is part of a reasonable comprehensive doctrine. A comprehensive doctrine would not be reasonable if one of its constituent doctrines is not reasonable; indeed, as we will see, Rawls thinks that coherence is characteristic of reasonable comprehensive doctrines. Therefore, what we can say about reasonableness at it applies to comprehensive doctrines must also be a reason why the reasonableness of RAN is fit to be included within a reasonable comprehensive doctrine.

[71] Samuel Freeman, *Rawls* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 349-50.

4.3. Reasonableness as a Normative Concept

While I agree with Freeman that Rawls intends the idea of reasonableness to be independent from the idea of acceptability to reasonable persons, I do not rely on Freeman's epistemic reading of Rawls's concept of reasonable comprehensive doctrines. According to Freeman, the primary sense in which Rawls uses the term "reasonableness" is moral, especially when he discusses reasonable persons. A reasonable person is someone who accepts the criterion of reciprocity (the idea that one is willing to live on terms with others that they might reasonably accept); accepts the burdens of judgment, i.e., the idea that disagreement about moral, philosophical, and metaphysical is not always a matter of one side of the disagreement being unreasonable or irrational; wishes to be seen by others as reasonable; and has a reasonable moral psychology that includes a sense of justice.[72] However, Freeman argues that Rawls uses the idea of reasonableness when referring to reasonable comprehensive doctrines in an epistemological sense. According to Freeman, Rawls thinks that a comprehensive doctrine is reasonable insofar as it is a more or less coherent view of the world, guides adherents in assigning values to certain conceptions of the good and in weighing those values, and is capable of evolving in response to evidence.[73] On this last point, Freeman quotes Rawls as stating that "a comprehensive doctrine is not necessarily fixed and unchanging … it tends to evolve slowly in light of what, from its point of view, it sees as good and sufficient reasons."[74] Although Rawls does say that reasonable comprehensive doctrines are doctrines reasonable persons believe,[75] Freeman argues that this is a substantial claim about the connection between reasonable persons and reasonable doctrines, not a definition of reasonable comprehensive doctrines. Freeman concludes that Rawls's claim that

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[72] Freeman, 346-50. Cf. Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 48-50 and 54-58.
[73] Freeman, 350.
[74] Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 59.
[75] Ibid., 36.

reasonable persons believe reasonable comprehensive doctrines is "not a trivial conclusion," that is, one that is true by the definition of "reasonable comprehensive doctrine" Rawls gives, "but an empirical hypothesis that Rawls contends is supported by what we know about human nature and social cooperation."[76] In other words, Freeman thinks that Rawls's position is that persons with certain *moral* features we call "reasonable" will, as a contingent matter of fact, affirm doctrines that have certain epistemic features such as coherence and responsiveness to evidence that we also call "reasonable."

I have reservations that the features Freeman identifies for reasonable doctrines is sufficient to show that a reasonable doctrine is in an epistemically better position than an unreasonable doctrine. Thus, it does not seem like these features will be promising for showing how the reasonableness of RAN justifies accepting it over competing, non-reasonable doctrines. The textual evidence Freeman marshals for his interpretation of the "reasonable" in "reasonable comprehensive doctrine" does not make a case for a strong epistemic reading of the concept. The first and third of the three criteria Freeman cites are the only two with specific epistemological importance: reasonable comprehensive doctrines are supposed to be coherent and responsive to evidence. The second criterion that Freeman lists, that reasonable doctrines provide adherents with standards for assigning value and weighing those values, is a claim about the function comprehensive doctrines play in an individual's forming a conception of what is of value. Regarding the first criterion Freeman notes, consistency, Rawls states that a reasonable comprehensive doctrine must address only certain areas—"major religious, philosophical, and moral," not, e.g., scientific, historical, or sociological, "aspects of human life"—in a "more or less," i.e., not necessarily entirely, "consistent and coherent manner."[77] This highly qualified

[76] Freeman, 351.
[77] Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 59.

sense of coherence does little to distinguish reasonable comprehensive doctrines from views that are patently inconsistent regarding, for instance, the biological aspects of human nature or the age of the Earth. The third criterion, that reasonable comprehensive doctrines are responsive to evidence, also lacks sufficient textual support. Rawls says that a reasonable comprehensive doctrine need respond only to evidence that it sees as reasons "*from its own point of view*."[78] Freeman thinks that this means that Rawls considers, for example, "fundamentalist Christians who insist upon the literalness of the Bible and the historical accuracy of the account of creation set forth in Genesis" to be unreasonable.[79] But surely the fundamentalist Christian does respond to evidence that she takes to be reasons from her own point of view. The biblical literalist may have a point of view that discounts any evidence other than the Bible as a reason to adjust her views about evolution or the age of the Earth. She is willing to respond to *that* kind of evidence—if you show her a passage in the Bible that she is unaware of, then she will adjust her views in light of it—but she thinks that this is the only kind of evidence that counts.[80] The criteria Freeman cites would exclude few comprehensive doctrines on epistemological grounds alone, and they do not suffice to show that reasonableness in the sense that comprehensive doctrines may be reasonable is an epistemic virtue.

I wish to give an alternative interpretation according to which Rawls's idea of reasonableness contains and important epistemological aspects. Freeman must be correct that Rawls intends reasonableness to contain epistemological elements, because Rawls says as much: he claims that being reasonable has "epistemological elements" even if it is not entirely an

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[78] Ibid. Emphasis added.
[79] Freeman, 350.
[80] Rawls *does* think that certain fundamentalists are unreasonable. However, he considers them to be unreasonable because they believe that religious authority trumps political authority, and are thus unwilling to accept that others might reasonably disagree with their faith. Such individuals are unreasonable in the moral sense that they fail to respect the criterion of reciprocity and the burdens of judgment. See Rawls, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," 482 and 488.

epistemological idea.[81] However, as I discuss earlier, Rawls is not entirely concerned with giving reasons for aiming political justification at reasonable persons or reasonable comprehensive doctrines. That aim lies outside of the scope of *Political Liberalism*. I do not believe that Rawls uses "reasonableness" as an entirely technical term in his theory. Rather, Rawls is appealing to an intuitive sense of reasonableness that most people have, and he only takes care to clarify what he means by the term when doing so is relevant to explaining (but not necessarily justifying) key assumptions behind *Political Liberalism*. In this sense, what Rawls says about reasonableness is consistent with a range of interpretations of its epistemic or normative significance. Rawls thinks that some version of every major religion is reasonable; however, this may be consistent with denying on epistemic grounds that it is reasonable to believe that the Earth is 6,000 years old, or that citizens are subject to frequent alien abductions.[82]

Our intuitive conception of reasonableness is normative for us. We want to have reasonable beliefs and to affirm reasonable doctrines when we justify our views to others. That I take to be generally accepted. Estlund's insularity objection is not a demand that a justification be given for why anyone should care about being reasonable; surely *that* justification would lie outside of the scope of political liberalism. Rather, Estlund wants a reason for why we should care about the acceptability of our political doctrines to reasonable people. It is worth recalling that Estlund considers the insularity objection to be a "logical issue" regarding Rawls's view that political liberalism can do without asserting or denying the truth of its claims. Estlund thinks that non-question-begging grounds for selecting RAN over competing insular doctrines are not

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[81] Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 62.

[82] It would not be incorrect, on this reading, to suppose that some reasonable persons have unreasonable comprehensive doctrines or views of the world. For instance, the person who believes in alien abductions might still be reasonable in the sense that he is willing to act according to the criterion of reciprocity and accepts the burdens of judgment. In this sense, I accept Martha Nussbaum's conclusion that, epistemic considerations about reasonable doctrines aside, Rawls's idea of legitimacy is aimed at his moral conception of reasonable persons. See Martha Nussbaum, "Political Liberalism and Perfectionist Liberalism," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 39, no. 1 (2011): 23-32.

available if Rawls wants to do without the truth. However, I have tried to show that no such logical problem exists. I have said that we should care about acceptability to reasonable people because it is reasonable to hold such a standard, and I have tried to show that the idea of reasonableness is distinct as a justification from the idea of acceptability to reasonable people.

It is difficult to characterize reasonableness in such a way as to show *why* it is important to hold reasonable beliefs, just as it would be difficult to characterize truth in such a way as to show why it is important that we hold true beliefs. I will not attempt to give such a characterization here. However, it is worthwhile to note that the realm of the reasonable is broader than the realm of truth. The possibility of reasonable disagreement that Rawls assumes implies that there may be multiple inconsistent but reasonable views about political justification, or any other matter about which there can be reasonable disagreement. One might object, therefore, that even if RAN is reasonable, it might also be the case that some other insular doctrine of political justification is also reasonable yet inconsistent with RAN. It is not clear that the reasonableness of RAN justifies it over any other reasonable doctrine of political justification.

Such an objection is correct in a sense, in that it highlights the practical impossibility of showing that RAN is the only reasonable doctrine of political justification one might hold. However, it also does not carry the force Estlund intends for the insularity objection. The significance of Estlund's objection is that it might show that it is impossible to justify accepting RAN over other radical versions of AN, such as doctrines that claim that acceptability to Branch Davidians or to House Republicans is necessary for a doctrine's admissibility into political justification. Political liberalism would be in trouble if its defenders could not give a reason why RAN is preferable to *those* views. But they can. Those doctrines of political justification are

plainly unreasonable. It is not obvious that a reasonable competing insular doctrine of political justification might be given. Given that this is not obvious, the burden of proof is on the insularity critic to formulate a plausible reasonable alternative to RAN.

5. CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have responded to two types of worries about Rawls's claim that political liberalism can do without the concept of truth. One sort of worry was semantic: on this view, political liberalism appeals to certain concepts that entail the concept of truth, or else require the concept of truth in order to be intelligible. This sort of worry, of which Joshua Cohen's argument is one example, should not trouble political liberals too much. Many concepts make reference to other concepts outside of political liberalism, but it does not follow that these referenda are also part of political liberalism. As Cohen points out, political liberalism is not a skeptical view. As such, it does not deny that the truth is central to many concepts that it uses. But the issue of how, and to what extent, any of the concepts used in the political conception of justice rely on the concept of truth is a subject for philosophy in its role as part of the background culture of society. They are matters about that reasonable persons may disagree without affecting the possibility of reasonable consensus about constitutional essentials and matters of basic justice.

The second sort of worry that I have responded to concerns the objectivity of political liberalism. According to David Estlund, the liberal principle of legitimacy must be true, and not merely acceptable to reasonable persons, since the latter claim would beg the question as a justification for accepting the liberal principle over competing insular principles of political justification. Political liberals should accept the liberal principle of legitimacy because it is reasonable, not merely because it is acceptable to reasonable persons. This argument has the effect of demonstrating the importance of reasonableness *Political Liberalism* as it applies to doctrines such as the liberal principle of legitimacy.

Obviously, these are not the only sorts of worries Rawls's distancing of political liberalism from the truth might raise. I cannot canvas every possible worthwhile objection to

Rawls's views, and some worthwhile views, such as those of Jean Hampton, Joseph Raz, and Charles Larmore, have also been omitted in the interest of making this project manageable. I am confident that the worries of these philosophers can also be answered, but I have not address them here.

By limiting the scope of this thesis to a discussion of two prominent political liberals, I hope to show that there is not much for someone who is already motivated to accept the basic assumptions of political liberalism to worry about in doing political philosophy without using the concept of truth. Potentially, this has significant methodological significance to the practice of doing political philosophy generally. If nothing else, it forces political philosophers to ignore the falsity of some reasonable views when justifying their own positions.

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