

ILLUSIONS OF DIFFERENCE? LARMORE'S POLITICAL LIBERALISM**Shaun P. Young****Abstract**

With the 1985 publication of "Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical" (*JAF*), John Rawls ushered in a new era in political philosophy. In *JAF* Rawls provided the first (somewhat) detailed articulation of his conception of "political liberalism"—a concept and a term that would soon thereafter become familiar features of contemporary political theory. In the wake of this development, theorists did more than simply analyse Rawls' provocative, new propositions; a few also began to develop and articulate their own conceptions of political liberalism. One such individual was Charles Larmore. Of those theorists who have joined Rawls in his effort to develop and promote the concept of political liberalism, none has been more dedicated to the endeavour than Larmore.

Beginning most notably with his *Patterns of Moral Complexity* and continuing through to his 1999 article entitled "The Moral Basis of Political Liberalism," Larmore has sought to articulate a feasible conception of political liberalism and in the course of so doing explain the benefits and necessity of its adoption. Not surprisingly, there has been a substantial degree of convergence between Larmore's and Rawls' arguments. While both Larmore and Rawls readily acknowledge the similarities between their conceptions, Larmore also, understandably, believes that there are important differences between the two. In turn, Larmore argues that these differences enable him to better demonstrate the appropriateness and necessity of political liberalism, and thereby more effectively than Rawls justify the claim that the concept of political liberalism offers the "best" foundation for a conception of justice for modern liberal democracies. The purpose of this essay is to review the principal features of Larmore's conception of political liberalism and note some important similarities and purported differences between it and Rawls' conception. Completing this exercise will not only reveal the extent to which the two conceptions mimic each other, but also show that, when examined closely, the differences cited by Larmore are in fact cosmetic in character and insignificant in their effect.

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With the 1985 publication of "Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical" (*JAF*), John Rawls ushered in a new era in political philosophy. In *JAF* Rawls provided the first (somewhat) detailed articulation of his conception of "political liberalism"¹—a concept and a term that would soon thereafter become familiar features of contemporary political theory.² Rawls presented his conception as a solution to the problem of political stability in modern constitutional democracies. Not surprisingly, Rawls' philosophical progeny provoked both favourable and critical responses. Numerous theorists analysed Rawls' "new"³ paradigm, suggesting what was both "right" and "wrong" with it. Subsequent to the publication of *JAF*, Rawls produced a number of essays in which he further developed and refined his conception of political

liberalism. Rawls' efforts to clarify and perfect his theory were eventually synthesised to produce *Political Liberalism (PL)*. With *PL* Rawls believed that he had finally presented a (relatively) complete articulation of his theory.⁴ As had been the case with *A Theory of Justice (TJ)*, theorists eagerly consumed and responded to *PL*; and like *TJ*, *PL* has provided the focus for a voluminous catalogue of scholarly investigations and—once again—brought Rawls' work to the forefront of political philosophy.⁵

Yet, a revitalised interest in Rawls' work, and the subsequent generation of a multitude of critical analyses of his "new" paradigm, were not the only offspring of Rawls' toils. In the wake of Rawls' post-*TJ* publications, theorists did more than simply "rediscover" Rawls and analyse his provocative, new propositions; a few also began to develop and articulate their own conceptions of political liberalism.⁶ One such individual was Charles Larmore. Of those theorists who have joined Rawls in his effort to develop and promote the concept of political liberalism, none has been more dedicated to the endeavour than Larmore. Next to Rawls, Larmore has been the principal champion of the concept of political liberalism, producing a noteworthy quantity of analysis directly devoted to developing a viable conception of political liberalism.

Beginning most notably with his *Patterns of Moral Complexity (PMC)* and continuing through to his 1999 article entitled "The Moral Basis of Political Liberalism," Larmore has sought to articulate a feasible conception of political liberalism and in the course of so doing explain the benefits and necessity of its adoption. Not surprisingly, there has been a substantial degree of convergence between Larmore's and Rawls' arguments. Both Larmore and Rawls readily acknowledge the similarities between their conceptions⁷ (e.g., Larmore 1990: 354; and Rawls

1995: 133n.1); however, Larmore also, understandably, believes that there are important differences between the two. In turn, Larmore argues that these differences enable him to better demonstrate the appropriateness and necessity of political liberalism, and thereby more effectively than Rawls justify the claim that the concept of political liberalism offers the "best" foundation for a conception of justice for modern liberal democracies.

Developing An Effective Liberal Conception Of Justice

According to Larmore, the proper approach to the task of developing an effective liberal conception of justice is not to try to determine beforehand the essential values of an "appropriately" liberal conception and then develop a paradigm that provides for and embodies these values, as is commonly done, but rather to identify "the basic *problems* that have motivated liberal thought" (Larmore 1990: 339) and design a conception of justice that responds to these difficulties. This approach enables one to more easily identify those versions of liberalism that, more so than others, are likely to secure the conditions needed to establish and sustain a just and stable democratic regime. Larmore contends that only those conceptions of justice that "take the[se] problems seriously and construct liberal thought around them" (Larmore 1990: 339) possess the potential to produce the desired results. Similarly, Rawls maintains that the goal of political philosophy (and, by extension, his conception of political liberalism) is, or at least should be, to solve the principal problem confronting contemporary liberal theory—namely, the problem of political stability—and thereby provide for the establishment and maintenance of a just and stable liberal democracy.

Larmore argues that "[s]ince the sixteenth century, there have been two basic problems to which liberal thought has sought a solution" (Larmore 1990: 339). The first has been the problem of determining the appropriate "moral limits to the powers of government" (Larmore 1990: 339). As Larmore notes, the point here is not merely that governments must behave in a certain way "if they wish to remain in power" (Larmore 1990: 340). More importantly, if individuals are to be accorded the respect and liberty due to them as free and equal agents and thereby be provided with the conditions that will enable self-realisation and self-fulfilment, then it is necessary to limit governments' power to restrict individual freedom. The difficulty has been in identifying limits that can be supported by individuals who affirm a plurality of often conflicting and irreconcilable views. The second problem has been that of identifying the particular beliefs and values—a conception of the common good—which a government can legitimately protect and/or promote. "[This] problem has stemmed from an increasing awareness that reasonable people tend to differ and disagree about the nature of the good life" (Larmore 1990: 340). Larmore refers to this dilemma as the problem of *reasonable disagreement*. Originally manifesting itself in the form of disputes over the validity of different religious beliefs, in the course of the last four centuries this problem has expanded to become a dispute about the nature of the good life in general.

In essence, the character of Rawls' conception is informed by the same fundamental problems, though they are not always presented in an identical manner. This is particularly true in relation to Rawls' understanding of the difficulties posed by disagreement concerning questions of the good. Like Larmore, Rawls believes that such disagreement is an ineliminable feature of modern constitutional democracies, and thus any conception of justice that hopes to provide the basis for

a just and stable liberal democracy must be able to accommodate this fact. Rawls even employs similar terminology to refer to this problem, which he labels the fact of *reasonable pluralism*. However, Larmore contends that there is an important difference between his understanding of this problem and that of Rawls: specifically, Larmore argues that his presentation of this problem corrects a critical mistake present in the arguments of Rawls and many other contemporary theorists.

The Problem of Reasonable Disagreement

As opposed to their ancient and medieval predecessors who tended to believe that Reason would naturally lead to consensus about the nature of the good life, contemporary liberals have assumed that *reasonable disagreement* about the nature of the good life is not just a mere possibility, but to be expected. Indeed, the ineliminable presence of a plurality of competing and conflicting conceptions of the good makes such disagreement unavoidable. Hence unanimity concerning the character of the good life is, in effect, possible only through the use of an unacceptable degree of coercion. Larmore contends that if we are to develop a conception of justice that can adequately accommodate the ineradicable conflict of values that characterises modern liberal societies, we must make this fact of reasonable disagreement the fundamental consideration of our deliberations. Only by fully understanding and addressing the fact of reasonable disagreement can we hope to design a conception of justice that can secure the type of widespread, voluntary support and corresponding stability needed to establish and sustain a just and stable liberal democracy.

The trouble, according to Larmore, is that many (if not *most*) theorists—including Rawls—continue to confuse the fact of reasonable disagreement with the notion of *pluralism* (Larmore 1996: 153-154), and in so doing they incorrectly make the focus of their analysis the dilemmas associated with pluralism. Larmore defines *pluralism* as "the conviction that in the end the human good is not one, but many, its different forms irreducible to any single basis such as pleasure, freedom, or knowledge" (Larmore 1996: 12). Pluralism differs from the fact of reasonable disagreement in that "pluralism has to do not with disagreement about ideals, but with agreement about the independent and equal value of different ideals" (Larmore 1987: xii-xiii). For Larmore, "The expectation of reasonable disagreement is, in fact, a more unsettling view than pluralism, one that runs contrary to some of the deepest preconceptions in the Western tradition. It is the recognition that, on matters of supreme importance, reason is not likely to bring us together, but tends rather to drive us apart" (Larmore 1996: 12).

A conception of liberalism that takes the notion of pluralism—as understood by Larmore—as its fundamental concern is itself "a very controversial doctrine" (Larmore 1996: 154) and "one of the things about which reasonable people [will] disagree" (Larmore 1996: 12). Consequently, any conception of justice that rests "essentially on the acceptance of pluralism" (Larmore 1996: 154) will itself become "just another part of the problem" that it is supposed to resolve (Larmore 1996: 151). Conceptions of justice animated by the notion of pluralism can only further compound the problem of reasonable disagreement. By confusing the fact of reasonable disagreement with the notion of pluralism, theorists fail to address the reality of modern moral conflict effectively and in so doing they preclude the possibility of developing a conception of justice that accords the appropriate and required degree of respect to all individuals. In the

absence of the necessary degree of respect, it is impossible to secure the conditions required to establish and sustain a just and stable liberal democracy. Hence it is imperative that anyone hoping to develop a viable conception of political liberalism clearly understands the difference between the fact of reasonable disagreement and the notion of pluralism and ensures that his or her conception takes as its focal point the former and not the latter. Only by doing so can one hope to generate the kind of uncontroversial paradigm needed to achieve the type of public consensus necessary to secure the stability required to establish and maintain a just and stable democratic regime.

Having noted this problem, and despite his initial argument (seemingly) to the contrary, Larmore concludes that Rawls' characterisation and use of the term *reasonable pluralism* is in fact quite compatible with his (e.g., Larmore's) own understanding of *reasonable disagreement* (Larmore 1996: esp. 154, 170). In the final analysis, then, though Larmore and Rawls employ slightly different terminology and Larmore initially suggests that this difference has important consequences, the effect of their arguments is, according to Larmore, identical. Both theorists conclude that resolving the problem of political stability requires the development of a conception of justice that effectively accommodates the problem of doctrinal disagreement among reasonable people. They also agree that such an accommodation is possible only if the conception of justice presents an "uncontroversial" framework.

Larmore argues that a conception of justice is uncontroversial if it is "neutral" with respect to contentious ideas of the good (Larmore 1996: 125). Rawls has expressed significant reservations about using the term "neutrality" in relation to his conception of political liberalism (Rawls 1993:

191), and prefers to refer instead to the "priority of right" to represent the "freestanding" character of his conception. Larmore's use of the term "neutral" to identify the "essential character" of his ideal conception of justice, however, is generally consistent with Rawls notion of the priority of right. Like Rawls, Larmore recognises the possible problems or misunderstandings that may arise as a consequence of using the term "neutrality," and notes that it "can be variously understood" (Larmore 1996: 125). Importantly, he also argues that by referring to his conception of justice as "neutral" he does not mean that it is "'neutral with respect to morality.'" Rather, he means that, like Rawls' conception, it aims to be neutral with regard to questions of the good (Larmore 1996: 125): it seeks to (and need only) achieve a "neutrality of aim," and abandons as unobtainable a "neutrality of effect"—to use Rawlsian terminology (Larmore 1996: 125n. 6). This is not, Larmore argues, akin to adopting an amoral stance.

Indeed, Larmore contends that his conception of justice is simultaneously a political and a moral conception (Larmore 1996: 145): specifically, it "rests upon fundamental moral duties we have to one another" (Larmore 1996: 124), and expresses a "moral commitment to finding terms of political association that can be the object of reasonable disagreement" (Larmore 1996: 125). Thus it is not premised upon an amoral character. Nor does it demand skepticism. Skepticism would necessitate that we abandon our commitment to the truth of our beliefs when they are confronted with reasonable disagreement. According to Larmore, the reason that it is necessary to maintain a neutral character—that is, to refrain from publicly passing judgement as to the truth or falsity of moral views—is not because "we cannot rightfully believe that our own views are better supported by experience and reflection than those of other people" (Larmore 1996: 126; see also 171-72). Rather, we must remain neutral because regardless of the apparent soundness

and reasonableness of our beliefs and supporting arguments, it would be foolish not to *expect* them to encounter reasonable disagreement. Such disagreement is inevitable "because different conceptions of the good life usually involve (to an extent we may not realize at first) rather articulate but different structures of purposes, significances, and activities" (Larmore 1996: 127); and this diversity of "structures of purposes, significances, and activities" makes it impossible to develop a universally acceptable method for determining the "correctness" or primacy of a given belief—in other words, it ensures reasonable disagreement about the nature of the good life. Using skepticism as a justification for liberal neutrality would, Larmore argues, doom any associated conception of justice to failure, for skepticism "about our ability to know the nature of the human good" (Larmore 1996: 126) is itself an item of reasonable disagreement.

Rawls makes identical claims regarding the simultaneously political and moral character of his conception, and uses similar reasoning to justify his conclusions (Rawls 1996: 62-63). According to Rawls, political liberalism is a "moral conception worked out for a specific subject, namely, the basic structure of a constitutional democratic regime" (Rawls 1996: 175); it "does not argue that we should be hesitant and uncertain, much less skeptical, about our own beliefs" (Rawls 1996: 63). Indeed, "skepticism must be avoided if an overlapping consensus of reasonable doctrines is to be possible" (Rawls 1996: 62; see also 150). And as with Larmore, Rawls' disavowal of skepticism is a consequence of his belief that a conception of justice premised upon skepticism could never provide the basis for a *stable* public agreement because it would place the conception of justice "in opposition to numerous comprehensive doctrines" (Rawls 1996: 150), and thus would itself be a source of reasonable disagreement.

Larmore's understanding of neutrality further mirrors that of Rawls in another important respect: Larmore, too, argues that "[the] requirement of neutrality applies primarily to the fundamental, that is, constitutional, principles of political association, which fix the basic rights and duties of citizens" (Larmore 1996: 126). As it is for Rawls, this restriction is based upon the belief that it is not only possible but indeed necessary for individuals to distinguish between, and at times separate, *political* and *nonpolitical* values. Although Larmore does not use the term '*nonpolitical* values,' it is evident, I believe, that he is, in effect, arguing for a Rawlsian-style distinction between those values that can (e.g., *political* values) and those values that cannot (e.g., *nonpolitical* values) "reasonably" be expected to serve as the basis for a public conception of justice that can secure the voluntary support of the adherents of a plurality of conflicting and often irreconcilable views (see Larmore 1999: 606-07; Larmore 1996: 126, 136). Larmore differs from Rawls only in how he presents this claim. Whereas Rawls focuses upon the ability of political values to be voluntarily affirmed by all reasonable people, Larmore emphasises the coercive character of political values: political values are "values with which we believe people can be legitimately forced to comply" (Larmore 1996: 136). This difference is, however, inconsequential.

The distinction between political and nonpolitical values is possible, according to Larmore, only if we forsake the "cult of wholeness" (Larmore 1996: 141); this requires that we "embrace a certain differentiation between our role as citizens, free of status and ascription, and our other roles where we may be engaged with others in the pursuit of substantial ideals of the good life" (Larmore 1996: 141). Larmore certainly seems to believe that such a differentiation is not only possible but is indeed a recognizable part of modern Western culture (Larmore 1999; see also

Larmore 1996: 145-46). In effect, this argument echoes Rawls' claim concerning the dualistic character of individuals' "overall view," and the possibility of separating the political from the nonpolitical (e.g., Rawls 1993: 38, 140). For both Rawls and Larmore, then, the seemingly schizophrenic character of one's "overall view" enables individuals to be selective in their application of the principle of neutrality, which, in turn, allows for and facilitates the development and acceptance of a purely "political" conception of justice. Moreover, Rawls and Larmore both conclude that the idea of distinguishing between the political and nonpolitical is a recognizable feature of the public culture of modern Western liberal democracies.

The Norms of Rational Dialogue and Equal Respect

Larmore argues that a conception of justice based upon the norms of *rational dialogue* and *equal respect* can provide the type of neutral framework that is necessary to secure the conditions needed to establish and sustain a just and stable liberal society. According to Larmore, a framework is "neutral" if it respects "the reasonable disagreement people have about the nature of the good life" (Larmore 1996: 124), which it does if it is supported by political principles that "express" a conception of justice that all "reasonable" citizens can affirm, "despite their inevitable differences about the worth of specific ways of life" (Larmore 1996: 123). The realization of such a framework therefore demands that the "[governing] terms of political association ... be less comprehensive than the views of the good life about which reasonable people disagree" (Larmore 1996: 123). In other words, the public conception of justice must be "minimal" in terms of its moral character and demands if it is to be acceptable to all "reasonable" people. Larmore emphasises that this does not, however, mean that "those who embrace it will live up to it without effort and without exception" (Larmore 1996: 123). Affirming such a

conception will entail accepting "whatever burdens of controversy weigh upon the reasons for affirming it" (Larmore 1996: 131). A "minimal" moral conception is merely a framework whose demands are general enough to enable the adherents of a plurality of conflicting and irreconcilable comprehensive doctrines to support it voluntarily (Larmore 1996: 123). Rawls, too, argues that the conception of justice must be "thin" (e.g., "minimal") if it is to secure the free and willing support of all reasonable people, and those who support the conception of justice must recognise and willingly adhere to certain "burdens of judgment" (Rawls 1996: 54-58).

Larmore contends that a conception of justice based upon the norms of *rational dialogue* and *equal respect* satisfies the requirement for a minimal moral conception. According to Larmore, the norms of rational dialogue and equal respect represent a "core, minimal morality" (Larmore 1996: 152) that has been and continues to be present and pervasive in modern liberal societies.

The norm of rational dialogue requires that citizens be willing to "respond to points of disagreement by retreating to neutral ground, to the beliefs they still share, in order to either (a) resolve the disagreement and vindicate one of the disputed positions by means of arguments that proceed from this common ground, or (b) bypass the disagreement and seek a solution of the problem on the basis simply of this common ground" (Larmore 1996: 135).

However, on its own, the norm of rational dialogue offers only procedural guidelines: it does not explain *why* individuals who disagree with one another would or should continue to dialogue. Subsequently, adherence to the norm of rational dialogue alone "does not rule out resorting to force, instead of discussion, to achieve a political settlement. What demands that we go on

talking, what in other words requires political principles to be the object of reasonable agreement, is the additional norm of *equal respect* for persons" (Larmore 1996: 136). The norm of equal respect insists that all individuals be treated as "beings capable of thinking and acting on the basis of reasons" (Larmore 1996: 137) ⁸—that is, "as beings capable of affirming a vision of the good life" (Larmore 1996: 136). Exercising the norm of equal respect requires that we recognise and accept the fact of reasonable disagreement, and in so doing refrain from "resting compliance only on force" (Larmore 1996: 137). Combined, the norms of rational dialogue and equal respect "work together to yield the liberal ideal of political neutrality" (Larmore 1996: 141), the very foundation of an "uncontroversial" framework.

According to Larmore, "the important point" is that the norms of rational dialogue and equal respect "are views at which reasonable people can arrive" (Larmore 1996: 131). He maintains that people will voluntarily support a conception of justice based upon the norms of rational dialogue and equal respect because these norms treat all individuals as beings capable of thinking and acting on the basis of reasons, and thereby afford equal respect to all views. By offering a framework that remains neutral in relation to questions of the good, a conception of justice based upon these norms can be endorsed by all (reasonable) people without anyone having to compromise, transgress or forsake his or her particular *fundamental* beliefs (e.g., non-negotiable moral convictions). Furthermore, because the norms of rational dialogue and equal respect are familiar to the public cultures of modern liberal societies and generally accepted by the citizens of these societies, their use will not necessitate a radical violation or transformation of the existing public culture. For these reasons, a conception of political liberalism based upon the norms of rational dialogue and equal respect can effectively accommodate the fact of reasonable

disagreement and thus obtain the free and willing support of a majority of citizens, thereby securing the conditions needed to establish and sustain a just and stable liberal democracy; ⁹ its ability to do so makes it the "[most] fitting response to the basic political problems that liberalism has sought to solve" (Larmore 1996: 134).

As the above review (hopefully) reveals, Larmore's conception of political liberalism is in many respects quite similar—indeed, identical—to that of Rawls; however, despite the numerous similarities, there are also, according to Larmore, notable differences between the two. One such difference is that between Larmore's and Rawls' views concerning the ability of reason to serve as a moderating and unifying force. Whereas Rawls clearly believes that reason can and will effectively guide and moderate individuals' behavior to the extent that makes it possible for the adherents of a wide diversity of competing, conflicting, and often irreconcilable and incommensurable comprehensive views to all agree on a single conception of justice to regulate society's basic structure, Larmore explicitly argues that in an atmosphere of doctrinal diversity such as that which is present in many contemporary societies, reason alone cannot provide, at least not to the extent that Rawls suggests, the basis for such an "overlapping consensus." A second difference manifests itself in the form of Larmore's claim that his conception captures an important feature of the concept of political liberalism that is, at the very least, inadequately reflected in Rawls' conception: namely, the "underlying moral foundations" of the concept of political liberalism (Larmore 1999: 599). According to Larmore, "Rawls has [not] brought out as distinctly as he might this moral foundation and the precise position it occupies in political liberalism" (Larmore 1999: 606). This failure prevents Rawls from making as strong a case for the adoption of political liberalism as is possible.

By incorporating these distinctions into his conception and explaining their significance, Larmore believes that he can better demonstrate the appropriateness, acceptability and necessity of political liberalism. The remainder of this essay is devoted to examining Larmore's arguments with regards to these matters and assessing their validity.

Reasonably Different?

How does Larmore's use of reason compare to that of Rawls? At first glance, it appears that there are a few conspicuous differences between the two. For purposes of brevity, I will note only two of the more significant divergences: 1) unlike Rawls, Larmore does not argue that what is "reasonable" will necessarily be able to provide the basis for an overlapping consensus; and 2) with respect to the use of reasonableness as a standard of judgment, Larmore is much more reserved than Rawls. More specifically, though Larmore certainly suggests that in many cases reason can and will serve as the *minimum* standard needed to justify certain behaviors and actions, he does not, as does Rawls, *explicitly* argue that it should be the "supreme" standard against which the acceptability of all public decisions must be judged. Indeed, Larmore maintains that reason cannot effectively serve as the "final court of appeal" in relation to public matters. These are two of the more obvious differences between Rawls' and Larmore's use of reason. But are these differences substantive or superficial? In order to answer this question, it will be necessary to explore further the arguments of Larmore and Rawls.

Whereas Larmore recommends the norms of rational dialogue and equal respect on the basis that they are norms that all "reasonable" people can be expected to endorse voluntarily, he is quick to

add that "[t]his does not mean ... that the norms of rational dialogue and equal respect are implicitly contained in the bare notion of reasonableness" (Larmore 1996: 134): "The point is not to show that reasonable people, no matter what else they believe, must affirm them" (Larmore 1996: 134). Thus it should not be presumed that the norms of rational dialogue and equal respect "will recommend themselves to all humanity by the idea of reason alone" (Larmore 1996: 134). Indeed, "reasonableness alone ... is too thin a basis for choosing between rival [norms]" (Larmore 1996: 127).

Hence, reasonableness—"that is, thinking and conversing in good faith and applying, as best one can, the general capacities of reason that belong to every domain of inquiry"—is no guarantee of consensus (Larmore 1996: 122). This is especially true with respect to securing widespread public agreement on a definition of the "good" life. Indeed, Larmore argues that "the nature of the good life in a great many of its aspects has come to seem a topic on which disagreement among reasonable people is not accidental, but to be expected" (Larmore 1996: 122). Moreover, "On matters of supreme importance, the more we talk with one another, the more we disagree" (Larmore 1996: 122).

This position would seem to differ notably from that of Rawls, who explicitly argues and continually emphasises that the political values that comprise his conception of justice are values "that all citizens can reasonably be expected to endorse *in light of their common human reason*" (Rawls 1993: 140; emphasis added). He concludes that all "reasonable" people will voluntarily affirm the political values embodied in his public conception of justice. Though Rawls concedes that even "reasonable" people will at times disagree with one another over matters of the "first

significance," he believes that such disagreement will be so infrequent that it need not be a significant concern. Recognizing that "the values that conflict with the political conception of justice and its sustaining [values] ... conflict with the very conditions that make fair social cooperation possible on a footing of mutual respect" (Rawls 1993: 157), Rawls believes it unlikely that "reasonable" people will affirm any such "conflicting" values. Moreover, Rawls seems to hold out hope that even in those rare instances of conflict over matters of the first significance, somehow the power of reason will persuade individuals to act in a reasonable manner. Understanding the potentially severe consequences—namely, the destabilization of society—of such conflict, reasonable people will be extremely hesitant to believe that any conflict of values "justifies their opposing the political conception as a whole, or on such matters as liberty of conscience, or equal political liberties, or basic civil rights" (Rawls 1993: 155).

For Rawls, reason is arguably the "final authority" (e.g., DePaul 1998; Nielsen 1998; Mandle 1999; and Young 2001): that is, the viability of his conception is inextricably dependent upon the presence and "appropriate" influence of reason. This is a condition that is directly and indirectly reiterated throughout the entirety of *PL*. Larmore, however, appears purposely to assign reason a more secondary, subordinate role. Indeed, he seems to make a concerted effort to emphasise that the viability of his conception is not reliant (or, at least not *as* reliant as is Rawls') upon the moderating and unifying force of reason. Larmore's decision to adopt this approach reflects his belief that an appeal to reason cannot guarantee consensus. Given that consensus and the sociopolitical stability it produces are—for Rawls and Larmore—the ultimate goals of political liberalism,¹⁰ if reason cannot ensure consensus, then, according to Larmore, it cannot be expected to serve as the final authority for a viable conception of political liberalism.

Subsequently, Larmore argues that it is impossible to develop a valid or practicable conception of political liberalism that is dependent, to the extent that Rawls' is, upon the moderating and unifying force of reason—the inevitability of reasonable disagreement makes it impossible to do so.

Reason by Any Other Name

Does Larmore really disavow the moderating and unifying force of reason? On the surface, perhaps. However, once one digs deeper and reveals the fundamental assumptions that underlie Larmore's arguments, it becomes clear that the viability of his conception is equally as reliant as is Rawls' upon the presence and appropriate influence of reason; this claim is supported by the following evidence.

According to Larmore, if a conception of justice is to offer a suitable paradigm for contemporary liberal democracies, then it must effectively address the fact of reasonable disagreement. Only a conception that satisfies this caveat can hope to secure the degree of voluntary support needed to generate the sociopolitical stability necessary to establish and maintain a just and stable liberal polity. Larmore argues that his conception can fulfil this condition without relying upon human reasonableness to do so; however, Larmore's argument contains a number of features that would suggest otherwise.

For example, Larmore's focus on "reasonable" disagreement—the foundation of his conception—is undeniably crucial to the success of his argument. Larmore, knowingly or otherwise, uses the notion of "reasonable" disagreement to moderate the demands that must be

accommodated if his conception is to secure the desired support. By limiting the locus to "reasonable" disagreement, Larmore restricts the type of conflicts and demands that individuals must admit into the public realm, and thereby makes possible a widespread public agreement on a single conception of justice. It would, after all, be unrealistic to expect "reasonable" people to support voluntarily a conception of justice that requires that they accept "unreasonable" public demands. Though Larmore is surprisingly vague in terms of defining the precise difference between "reasonable" and "unreasonable" disagreement, it is clear that only the former must be accommodated in order to achieve the necessary consensus on a public conception of justice. In turn, only by enabling the achievement of such a consensus can one hope to secure the conditions required for the establishment and preservation of a just and stable liberal democracy. In this context, the achievement of the sought after consensus is dependent upon individuals needing to accommodate only "reasonable" disagreement: to demand something more would be to forsake the achievement of the required consensus. In essence, then, using the adjective "reasonable" serves to moderate the demands that the conception of justice must accommodate and that individuals must accept, and in so doing makes possible the required consensus and, subsequently, the realisation of a just and stable liberal democracy.

The term "reasonable" plays a similar role with respect to narrowing to a manageable degree the audience that must be satisfied with any proposed conception of justice in order for it to be correctly considered viable. Larmore emphasises the need for the conception of justice to secure the support of "reasonable" people. Though Larmore's description of the principal characteristics of a "reasonable" person is painfully general in nature—a "reasonable" person is someone who thinks and converses in good faith and applies, as best s/he can, "the general capacities of reason

that belong to every domain of inquiry" (Larmore 1999: 600)—the frequency with which Larmore specifically identifies "reasonable" people as the focus of concern rules out the possibility that such references are unintentional or inconsequential. Obviously, not all people can correctly be considered "reasonable," otherwise there would be no need to specify a particular type of person. Larmore leaves no doubt that it is the support of "reasonable" people that must, first and foremost, be secured. To this end, developing a conception of justice that can serve as the basis for a just and stable liberal democracy *requires* identifying "what reasonable people can still share, despite their differences about the good life" (Larmore 1999: 602). Once again, then, Larmore uses the adjective "reasonable" both to distinguish and limit the criteria that a conception of justice must satisfy in order for it to be considered viable, and to moderate the demands upon the conception of justice in a manner that enables it to secure the public support needed to establish and sustain a just and stable liberal democracy.

Larmore, however, argues that it would be a mistake to interpret the above requirements to mean that a viable conception of justice must embody only "whatever might turn out to be common ground among reasonable people otherwise divided by their convictions" (Larmore 1999: 602). This is because "reasonableness"—as defined by Larmore—does not *necessarily* entail a commitment to *equal respect*, something that is critical to the success of any conception of political liberalism. According to Larmore, a conception of justice can expect to obtain the necessary support only if it is equally respectful of all individuals. Satisfying this condition requires that we refrain from using force alone to obtain compliance to political principles. Like Rawls, Larmore argues that while the use of force is unavoidable, it is legitimate only if it is accompanied by "reasonable agreement about the rules to be enforced" (Larmore 1999: 607). To

try to force compliance to principles that are not the subject of such agreement would be to treat individuals "merely as means, as objects of coercion, and not also as ends" (Larmore 1999: 607). Larmore contends that the only effective way to avoid this problem is to ensure that the conception of justice embodies an equal respect for all persons. It is our commitment to equal respect that drives us to seek reasonable agreement, not vice versa. "In other words, the guiding aim of political liberalism is not to devise political principles by appeal simply to whatever might turn out to be common ground among divergent views. It is instead to base such principles precisely on the moral norms that impel us to seek common ground as far as possible" (Larmore 1996: 145).

What is problematic for Larmore's argument, however, is that enacting Larmorean respect also requires that individuals freely and willingly affirm the belief that views that may irreconcilably conflict with their own, nevertheless deserve to be treated with *equal* respect. Only by freely and willingly embracing such a belief do individuals treat others as beings capable of thinking and acting on the basis of reasons—as both means and ends—thereby "engaging directly their distinctive capacity as persons" (Larmore 1999: 607) and enabling the achievement of the required consensus. But why should or would people voluntarily affirm such a belief?

Larmore maintains that the citizens of modern liberal societies can be expected to affirm such a belief not—as Rawls seems to argue—merely because it is a *common* and generally accepted feature of the public culture of such societies or because a *shared human reason* will direct or convince them to do so. Rather, said citizens will believe that given the fact of reasonable disagreement and the widely accepted understanding of persons as free and equal, a conception

of justice based upon the notion of equal respect represents a *morally legitimate* and *just* paradigm. In essence, such a conception is morally legitimate and just, because it treats all individuals as beings capable of thinking and acting on the basis of reasons, and, in so doing, it allows all individuals to affirm and publicly pursue their own particular vision of the good life. This fact ensures that a conception of justice developed around the notion of equal respect (and complemented by the norm of rational dialogue) can—and will—be voluntarily endorsed by the adherents of a wide diversity of competing, conflicting, and irreconcilable views, and thus obtain the support of the majority of citizens. By making it possible for a majority of the citizenry to endorse a single conception of justice freely and willingly, Larmore's paradigm can secure the required sociopolitical stability. For Larmore, then, it is the moral legitimacy and justness and not the *reasonableness* of his conception that enables it to achieve the sought after results.

However, Larmore is, in effect, merely substituting notions such as *moral legitimacy* and *justness* for that of *reasonableness*. The reason that his conception is morally legitimate and just is because given the fact of reasonable disagreement and the generally accepted conception of persons as free and equal, his conception offers the most reasonable paradigm; it offers the most reasonable paradigm because it allows all reasonable individuals to support it without having to compromise, transgress or forsake any of their fundamental values. In doing so, it enables all reasonable people to pursue and potentially realise their own particular interests and goals, thereby engaging directly their distinctive capacity as persons. Only a conception that holds the promise of fulfilling such a condition can correctly be considered to exhibit the necessary respect for individuals; and only by expressing the necessary respect can a conception reasonably be expected to obtain the free and willing support of a majority of "reasonable" people and thereby

generate the sociopolitical stability needed to establish and maintain a just and stable liberal democracy.

In other words, Larmore's conception is morally legitimate and just, only insofar as it treats all individuals in an equally respectful manner; it satisfies this prerequisite to the degree that it engages persons both as means and ends. Fulfilling such a condition requires that it accommodate the fact of reasonable disagreement, which it does to the extent that it enables *all* "reasonable" people to affirm the public conception of justice voluntarily. It achieves this goal only inasmuch as it is perceived to allow all reasonable people to affirm and publicly pursue their individual conceptions of the good. In order for a person to believe this to be the case, s/he must first believe that all individuals deserve to be treated with equal respect. Though there can be no certainty that all reasonable people—that is, those who think and converse in good faith and apply, as best they can, the general capacities of reason that belong to every domain of inquiry—will voluntarily affirm the norm of equal respect, it is surely true that "reasonable" people are much more likely than others to do so. There is no indication that Larmore would disagree with this conclusion. Indeed, knowingly or otherwise, Larmore is arguing that reasonable people will share a "commitment to organize political life" around those beliefs and values that all reasonable people can reasonably be expected to endorse (Larmore 1999: 602); foremost among these is the belief in equal respect. At the very least, it is certain that the type of voluntary, sincere and *reliable* support required cannot "reasonably" be expected from "unreasonable" people.

In essence, then, Larmore's conception can achieve its stated aims only if its target audience is comprised primarily of "reasonable" people (as identified by Larmore) who believe that his conception adequately responds to the problem of reasonable disagreement. In this respect, Larmore's notion and use of "reasonable" serves a moderating and unifying function: it provides specific parameters which guide one's understanding of the requirements associated with an acceptable and viable public conception of justice. Though such a conception may need to be morally legitimate, just, and common to the public culture, it must, above all else, also be able to secure the support of the majority of the citizenry, and it will be able to do this only if it effectively addresses the problem of reasonable disagreement, which it can do only if it treats people in a "reasonable" manner. Only by satisfying the above criteria can it reasonably be hoped that the conception of justice will be considered acceptable to the majority of the citizenry. The reason that the norms of equal respect and rational dialogue are judged by Larmore to be the only viable foundation for a non-coercive public conception of justice for modern pluralistic societies is because given the fact of reasonable disagreement and the common understanding of persons as free and equal, they are norms that all (or, at least, the majority of) reasonable people can reasonably be expected to affirm freely and willingly. Only by securing such support can one reasonably hope to generate the conditions needed to establish and sustain a just and stable liberal democracy. Thus, in the final analysis, the validity and viability of Larmore's conception are a product of its reasonableness.

Acknowledging the Moral Foundations of Political Liberalism

Larmore's emphasis upon the moral legitimacy of his conception manifests itself in another noteworthy way: namely, in his claim that Rawls fails to acknowledge fully, or state clearly, the

"underlying moral foundations" of the concept of political liberalism (Larmore 1999: 599), and in so doing he diminishes its potential justifiability and appeal. For, according to Larmore, only in virtue of an overriding commitment to "certain moral principles" can the adoption of a purely political conception of liberalism be fully explained and justified (Larmore 1999: 602). The reasons for this conclusion are as follows.

Larmore contends that in arguing that a political conception of liberalism is the appropriate response to the problem of reasonable disagreement, both he and Rawls are doing more than merely suggesting that such an approach is necessary to accommodate the value conflict that is an ineliminable feature of contemporary liberal democracies; they are also affirming—explicitly or otherwise—the correctness of "certain moral convictions, which imply that this is the proper route to take" (Larmore 1999: 605). This understanding is based upon the recognition that the search for a "freestanding" political conception is not the only possible response to the problem of reasonable disagreement. There is nothing that *requires* that liberalism become "political" in a Rawlsian or Larmorean sense. As Larmore notes, "liberal thinkers ... [could] instead dig in their heels and, observing correctly that no political conception can accommodate every point of view, maintain that liberalism stands or falls with a general commitment to individualism" (Larmore 1999: 605).

The reason that liberals refrain from adopting such a stance is because the "abiding moral heart of liberal thought" is the belief that the basic principles of political association "should be acceptable to those whom they are to bind" (Larmore 1999: 605). Importantly, this conviction is not merely the result of a belief that people should be bound only by moral rules that they cannot

reasonably reject; rather, it is a consequence of liberals' belief that the coercive use of state power to enforce obedience to "the fundamental terms of political life" is legitimate only insofar as the principles in question are able to secure the free and willing support of those they are to govern (Larmore 1999: 607). Larmore correctly notes that this belief animates Rawls' *liberal principle of legitimacy* which states: "our exercise of political power is fully proper only when it is exercised in accordance with a constitution the essentials of which all citizens as free and equal may reasonably be expected to endorse in the light of principles and ideals common to their human reason" (Rawls 1993: 137).

According to Larmore, however, such an explanation is incomplete because it does not *fully* explain why liberals assign political authority to the notion that the basic principles of political life should be acceptable to those they are to bind. Larmore maintains that the elementary basis for this belief lies at an even "deeper" moral level (Larmore 1999: 607). Specifically, liberals' conviction that the "fundamental terms of political life should be the object of reasonable agreement" (Larmore 1999: 606) is the product of their commitment to the principle of *equal respect*. A brief review of the legitimate use of coercive state power reveals why this is so.

As does Rawls, Larmore observes that, "the use or threat of force cannot be deemed wrong in itself, for then political association would be impossible" (Larmore 1999: 607). However, attempting to use force alone to secure obedience to political principles is morally unacceptable to liberals because to do so is to treat individuals "merely as means, as the objects of coercion, and not also as ends" (Larmore 1999: 607). By demanding that the principles of political association be the object of reasonable agreement among those they are to govern, the liberal

principle of legitimacy requires that people be treated as beings capable of thinking and acting on the basis of reasons—in other words, both as means and ends—and in so doing necessitates that individuals' distinctive capacity as persons be *respected*. It is, Larmore argues, because liberals believe people to be deserving of equal respect that they think it necessary to require that the terms of political life be the object of reasonable agreement.

Larmore contends that a belief in equal respect does in fact animate Rawls' liberal principle of legitimacy (Larmore 1996: 146); however, Rawls fails to state clearly "the nature of this moral foundation and the precise position it occupies in political liberalism" (Larmore 1999: 605). This failure is problematic inasmuch as it prevents Rawls from fully explaining why political liberalism is the most appropriate and appealing response to the problem of reasonable disagreement. Only by making clear the moral basis of political liberalism is it possible to explain satisfactorily how the concept of political liberalism can effectively justify the principle of state neutrality "without having to take sides in the dispute about individualism and tradition"—the fundamental problem confronting liberal theory (Larmore 1996: 132). Having noted this deficiency, Larmore proceeds to argue that Rawls' failure in this respect is more cosmetic than substantive. The fact that Rawls does not *explicitly* articulate the "moral foundation" of his liberal principle of legitimacy does not mean that no such foundation exists. Indeed, an examination of Rawls' notion of "reasonableness" reveals that it embodies precisely this understanding of the moral basis of political liberalism (Larmore 1999: 611).

Larmore observes that, according to Rawls, people are "reasonable" insofar as they voluntarily maintain a "moral commitment to seek and to abide by fair principles of cooperation" (Larmore

1999: 601). Fair principles of cooperation are those "which all citizens as free and equal may reasonably be expected to endorse in the light of principles and ideals common to their human reason" (Rawls 1993: 137). Hence "reasonableness" for Rawls requires compliance with the liberal principle of legitimacy which, as already noted, demands that individuals be *respected as persons*. In essence, then, liberals' commitment to the liberal principle of legitimacy is premised upon its reasonableness, and its reasonableness is a measure of its respect for persons. In this sense, Rawls' liberal principle of legitimacy "expresses in effect the idea of respect for persons" (Larmore 1999: 610) and, in so doing, constitutes a "moral response" to the problem of reasonable disagreement (Larmore 1999: 602).

Thus, in the final analysis, the liberal principle of legitimacy commands the political authority that it does, not because it is a principle that all reasonable people will necessarily affirm, but rather because it compels us to respect others as free and equal and, subsequently, to seek political principles that can be the object of reasonable agreement (Larmore 1999: 608). Given this fact, Larmore argues that the norm of equal respect cannot correctly be considered legitimate in the same sense as the political principles that individuals share as members of a political community; it must be understood to possess a legitimacy beyond mere political authority. What this means, according to Larmore, is that Rawls' liberal principle of legitimacy, in virtue of it embodying the norm of equal respect, should be understood as possessing a *moral* authority independent of its ability to secure reasonable agreement (Larmore 1999: 609). We should consider it to be a principle "binding on us independent of our will as citizens, enjoying a moral authority that we have not fashioned ourselves. For only so can we make sense of why we are moved to give our political life the consensual shape it has" (Larmore 1999: 609). Subsequently,

political liberalism cannot "coherently claim to be freestanding with respect to morality altogether" (Larmore 1999: 608).

Larmore questions whether Rawls would be willing to accept this conclusion, "to admit that, as citizens reasoning from the standpoint of ... [Rawlsian political liberalism], we must acknowledge a moral authority higher than the political principles that we give ourselves" (Larmore 1999: 609). Rawls seems to regard the liberal principle of legitimacy "as one whose validity, at least from the political point of view, depends on our collective will as citizens" (Larmore 1999: 609). However, Larmore also convincingly argues that the constraints that Rawls imposes upon the parties tasked with choosing the political principles to regulate the basic structure reflect an underlying "moral commitment" to reasonableness; because these constraints are *imposed* and not the subject of an *a priori* agreement, neither they nor our commitment to reasonableness can correctly be imagined to be the "object of choice" (Larmore 1999: 609). This, Larmore claims, would suggest that the political principles associated with Rawls' conception possess "a moral basis that we cannot conceive as rooted like them in our political will" (Larmore 1999: 610). Moreover, because our commitment to the liberal principle of legitimacy is a consequence of our *moral* commitment to reasonableness which is itself independent of our will as citizens, the liberal principle of legitimacy cannot be considered to have "the same status" as the political principles that comprise the public conception of justice. Under such circumstances, the liberal principle of legitimacy must "have a moral authority for citizens that is independent of [and beyond] their political will" (Larmore 1999: 610).

It would thus seem that, though Rawls may fail to state as clearly as he should the underlying moral foundations of political liberalism, the effect of this failure—and, by extension, the force of Larmore's criticism—is negligible.

Illusions of Difference

It seems eminently reasonable for Larmore to argue that there are important differences between his conception of political liberalism and that of Rawls: if this were not the case, then one might reasonably question what purpose is served by Larmore's labours, other than to provide (largely) uncritical, secondary support for Rawls' work—something that could have been furnished with significantly less effort than that which Larmore has invested in his project. Not surprisingly, then, Larmore argues that there are indeed some significant distinctions between his and Rawls' conceptions. For the purposes of this essay, I have focused on the purported divergences related to Larmore's understanding and use of "reasonableness," and his presentation of the moral foundations of political liberalism.

With regards to Larmore's belief that reason cannot be counted on to provide a moderating and unifying force able to secure the basis for a stable public agreement on a single conception of justice; this belief, if present, would indeed represent a crucial distinction between Larmore's and Rawls' conceptions. But are things really as Larmore claims them to be? A close examination of Larmore's arguments suggests that, despite his protestations to the contrary, the viability of his conception is as dependent as is Rawls' upon the ability of reason to act as a moderating and unifying force and secure agreement amongst individuals who hold a plurality of conflicting and irreconcilable views. Larmore is, in effect, arguing that "reasonable" people who accept the fact

of reasonable disagreement will recognise the demands of his conception as morally legitimate and just, because said demands allow the adherents of a wide diversity of competing, conflicting, and irreconcilable views to pursue their own particular visions of the good life, thereby engaging directly their distinctive capacity as persons—e.g., their ability to think and act on the basis of reasons. In treating people this way, his conception responds to them as both means and ends, and in so doing accords them the degree of respect needed to secure their voluntary support, thus enabling the establishment and preservation of a just and stable liberal democracy.

However, given the fact of reasonable disagreement and the common understanding of persons as free and equal, a conception can be considered morally legitimate and just, only if it treats people with the respect due to them as free and equal beings capable of thinking and conversing in good faith, and applying, as best they can, the general capacities of reason that belong to every domain of inquiry—in other words, only if it treats them in a "reasonable" manner. More importantly, regardless of whether a conception of justice based upon the norms of equal respect and rational dialogue is morally legitimate and just, it must also treat people in a "reasonable" manner if it is to obtain the degree of support required to secure the sociopolitical stability needed to establish and sustain a just and stable liberal democracy. In turn, only "reasonable" people are likely to support the notion of reasonable disagreement (and its accompanying demands) willingly and reliably and believe Larmore's conception to be an acceptable model. Hence, the moral legitimacy and justness of Larmore's conception are a reflection of its "reasonableness" when judged in light of the beliefs and values common to "reasonable" citizens living in contemporary liberal democracies.

Even accepting Larmore's distinction between his understanding of "reasonableness" and that of Rawls (Larmore 1999: 601-02), the fact remains that Larmore is, like Rawls, employing "reasonableness" as the standard against which all assessments of political justice are to be measured. Only by satisfying the demands of "reasonable" disagreement and securing the support of "reasonable" people can Larmore's conception achieve its stated aims. Hence the success of Larmore's approach—and, indeed, that of all liberals, "political" and otherwise—is as dependent as is Rawls' upon the *reasonableness* of both the proposed conception of justice and of the individuals involved, even if that reasonableness is not necessarily identical in character to Rawlsian reasonableness.

As for Larmore's claim concerning Rawls' failure to state clearly the "moral basis" of political liberalism, and the negative impact of this failure, it, too, reveals itself to be more chimerical than actual. Though Rawls does not emphasise the moral foundation of political liberalism as explicitly as does Larmore, Rawls' arguments clearly underscore his belief that given the fact of reasonable pluralism and the common understanding of persons as free and equal, political liberalism is not merely the most viable foundation for contemporary liberal democracies, it is also the morally appropriate foundation for such societies. Ironically, Larmore himself acknowledges as much when he claims, among other things, that his conclusions regarding the moral basis of political liberalism could be acceptable to Rawls. Larmore's criticism of Rawls on this point would thus seem to be one of presentation rather than substance.

In the final analysis, then, once one penetrates the surface of Larmore's arguments and exposes their foundations, it becomes clear that his conception of political liberalism is, in effect, little

more than a cosmetically altered version of Rawlsian political liberalism: though it may appear different on the surface, it is the same underneath, and thus suffers from the same problems.

It might be argued that the above conclusion is neither unexpected nor particularly insightful or helpful. After all, Larmore himself acknowledges the significant similarities between his conception and that of Rawls. Thus, for some, the value of the preceding analysis may seem questionable, at best. Yet, regardless of the potential predictability of its conclusions, the above analysis is necessary if one wishes to assess the viability of the *concept* of political liberalism thoroughly. Any examination that hopes to provide the basis for a comprehensive assessment of the viability of the *idea* of a purely political liberalism must necessarily include an analysis of the work of not only Rawls but also that of other prominent political liberals, such as Larmore. Only by considering Rawls' arguments in conjunction and comparison with those of other political liberals is it possible to make a sound determination regarding the viability of the *concept* of political liberalism. Furthermore, by presenting a different understanding of the specific character and content of political liberalism, Larmore and other political liberals often help to reveal previously unrecognised difficulties—however substantial or superficial they might be—confronting not only the conceptions of their counterparts, but, more importantly, the concept itself and in so doing help to identify problems that must be resolved if a viable, effective conception of political liberalism is to be developed.

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Notes

¹ This is not to suggest that previous articles by Rawls had not also introduced various aspects of his conception of political liberalism; however, I believe that it is with *JAF* that Rawls first truly emphasises and significantly defines the purely “political” character of his conception of justice as fairness.

² The term “political liberalism” was actually first introduced by Rawls (1987).

³ I have placed the word “new” in quotation marks in order to emphasise that, though Rawls’ conception of political liberalism certainly differs in important ways from the conception of justice that he proposes in *A Theory of Justice*, it remains a source of debate as to whether the former represents a “new” theory or merely a marginal modification of the latter.

⁴ I include the term *relatively* in order to acknowledge that at certain junctures within the text of *PL* Rawls concedes that while further elaboration on specific points would be desirable, he is (if only due to constraints of space) unable at that time to provide such elaboration. Furthermore, the publication of *PL* did not signal the end of Rawls' writings on the subject. Rawls continued to produce additional material in an attempt to further clarify his arguments.

⁵ This is not to suggest that in the period between the publication of *TJ* and the appearance of *PL* that Rawls' work was no longer the focus of a significant amount of theorising.

⁶ I do not mean to imply that other theorists had not already begun or completed such projects prior to the publication of *PL* (or, for that matter, before the appearance of *JAF*).

⁷ Henceforth, unless specifically noted otherwise, all references to either Larmore's or Rawls' "conception" should be understood as referring to their respective conception of political liberalism.

⁸ For Larmore, this means that "we should never treat other persons solely as means, as mere instruments of our will; on the contrary, people should always be treated also as ends, as persons in their own right" (Larmore 1996: 136).

⁹ The reasons identified in this essay do not represent an exhaustive list: one could certainly identify other reasons for supporting this claim.

¹⁰ Of course, consensus and the resulting stability are sought as the means to secure the conditions necessary to live the life one chooses.

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