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RAWLS'S INCLUSIVISM AND THE CASE  
OF "RELIGIOUS MILITANTS FOR  
PEACE":

A REPLY TO WEITHMAN'S RESTRICTIVE  
INCLUSIVISM

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# Rawls's Inclusivism and the Case of "Religious Militants for Peace": A Reply to Weithman's Restrictive Inclusivism<sup>1</sup>

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**A**cross almost a decade, Desmond Tutu, Anglican cleric and chairman of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), supported a model of civil resistance against the apartheid regime based solely on religious argument. "Any person of faith has no real option," he wrote. "In the face of injustice and oppression it is to disobey God not to stand up in opposition to that injustice and oppression. Any violation of the rights of God's stand-in cries out to be condemned and to be redressed, and all people of good will must [...] be engaged in [...] preserving those rights as a religious duty." (Tutu 1996, xi; also quoted in Appleby 2000, 13).

Tutu's struggle against apartheid in South Africa received wide popular support, as the high rate of civilian involvement in the work of the TRC confirmed. He played a key role in South Africa's

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transition to liberal democracy. Despite endorsing a “comprehensive” account of justice deeply rooted in his theological conviction, his role was never perceived as disrespectful or as an obstacle to the flourishing of South Africa’s new democratic regime. Yet, as Gutman and Thompson (2000, 32–3) have warned, by appealing to religious doctrine, Tutu sought to overcome the moral conflict by imposing his own worldview while silencing other perspectives.

Desmond Tutu is one of what Appleby (2000, 121ff) calls the “religious militants for peace.” Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. are other examples of “militants” of this sort: people of faith who use religious arguments to buttress resistance against unjust regimes and to support vital political change with regard to rights and justice. Their forms of militancy are supported by what Appleby calls “nonviolent tolerance” (121). Yet the employment of religious arguments to justify political action seems to contradict the liberal democratic requirements of public reason, particularly the duty of liberal citizens to provide reasons that others could reasonably endorse. If “religious militants” violate their duty of civility by appealing to their comprehensive doctrines, should liberal democracy exclude this form of religiously founded dissent as being unreasonable? Or, rather, should liberal democracy embrace and support the efforts of “religious militants” to enhance and/or restore political justice?

Ideas such as public reason and the duty of civility play a central role in Rawls’s *Political Liberalism* in outlining the appropriate constraints to public deliberation in matters of constitutional and basic justice. Rawls, however, famously adopts a more inclusive interpretation of public reason, embracing both antebellum abolitionist dissent and Martin Luther King’s forms of resistance. In these cases, Rawls emphasizes how, when deep divisions over citizens’ shared conception of justice emerge, religious and other

moral reasons arising from the background culture may support a shared conception of political justice instead of undermining it (Rawls 1996, 251).

Rawls's treatment of religious dissent, especially that of King, is central to Weithman's discussion regarding the application of the requirements of public reason to ordinary citizens in actual democracies (Weithman 2016, 120ff). For Weithman, citizens of liberal democracies have a "role-specific interest" (135) in receiving a justification that shows their commitment to citizens' political and social equality and, therefore, their allegiance to the liberal democratic conception of justice. Thus, the exclusion of "comprehensive" – non-public – reasons from the political realm should be primarily understood as an attempt to preserve the stability of this construction. The violation of the "role-specific" duty of citizenship (140) might in fact threaten the forms of mutual trust and respect that apply to the liberal democratic cooperative enterprise. Yet, Weithman argues, an appeal to comprehensive doctrines does not always entail a threat to such forms of mutual trust and respect. Martin Luther King provides an example: although employing religious language, his struggle for civil rights was not perceived as a threat to the forms of mutual trust and respect that characterize a pluralistic liberal democracy, and this was so "because of the moral authority he had in American public life" (144).

Building on Weithman's intuition, one might argue that these forms of mutual trust and respect depend upon several factors, including the recognition by citizens of some shared cultural and historical conditions and, sometimes, of one's moral authority. Thus, in certain circumstances, the appeal to comprehensive doctrines does not necessarily undermine the forms that the requirements of public reason are meant to protect, as it was in the case of King.

Several questions arise from Weithman's account of inclusivism and his treatment of King's case, however. How does liberal theory help to identify these particular circumstances? Do these circumstances depend on contextual – historical or cultural – conditions or on personal moral attributions? Both Rawls and Weithman are likely to recognize that these circumstances were present in the antebellum US or at the time of King. But they seem to disagree on what made these cases so special. Why, for example, were other black civil rights activists operating in the same context as King not afforded the same “moral authority” that he was? One could argue that there was something intrinsically “just” not only in King's arguments but also in his articulation of them; this is perhaps what Rawls has in mind when he maintains that King's arguments supported the conclusion of public reason (1996, 250n.39). Weithman and Rawls disagree on whether there was a violation of the requirements of public reason in King's case: Rawls holds that there was no violation, whereas for Weithman there was, but it did not undermine the sense of trust and respect that must pertain for liberal citizens to recognize one another. These contrasting views, to my mind, follow from two different views of inclusive public reason.

In what follows, I consider the case of “religious militants,” and especially the example of Martin Luther King Jr, in the light of Rawls's inclusive doctrine of public reason. I critically examine Weithman's reading of Rawls's “restrictive inclusivism” and explore some issues with this interpretation. Thereby I suggest an alternative interpretation of inclusivism and Rawls's proviso in societies that are not well-ordered. Section 1 provides a summary of Weithman's reconstruction of Rawls's political turn and, especially, the principle of liberal legitimacy. Section 2 focuses on Weithman's interpretation of stability for the right reasons and the problem of assurance related to it. For Weithman, an interpretation of “restrictive inclusivism” best captures Rawls's requirements of

public reason in existing societies. Section 3 presents an alternative reading of Rawls's inclusionism which takes seriously the case of "religious militants." Section 4 discusses how such an inclusive view of public justification applies to forms of religiously based political dissent. I find that, in very non-ideal circumstances, there is no violation of the requirements of public reason if the form of religiously rooted dissent is buttressed by two factors: the first empirical and highly contextual, namely wide acceptance; and the second normative and morally constructed, namely the reasonableness of its premises.

## I

### **Weithman on Rawls's liberal legitimacy and the role of citizens of faith**

Rawls's *Political Liberalism* provides perhaps the most sophisticated contemporary theory of liberal citizenship. Rawls recognizes that citizens inevitably hold a plurality of religious and secular views. But, he argues, it is possible for these citizens to achieve a consensus on a shared conception of political authority that is independent of these comprehensive doctrines. When this happens, the political conception is supported by an "overlapping consensus" that is stable for the "right reasons" (Rawls 1996, xxxix). He also argues that this shared conception should guide citizens' public deliberation. The requirements of public reason ask citizens and legislators, when deliberating about constitutional essentials and matters of basic justice, to articulate their reasoning by appealing to "a conception that expresses political values that others as free and equal also might reasonably be expected reasonably to endorse" (xlvi). Rawls insists that citizens must honour the "duty of civility," which is a moral duty to provide reasons that others can reasonably endorse (217). Non-public

reasons, those that belong to the realm of the moral and religious doctrines that Rawls calls “comprehensive views,” can be introduced in public deliberation processes as long as supporting reasons that reflect citizens’ shared conception of political authority are provided “in due course” (1).

This account of liberal citizenship has often been considered as incompatible with or even antagonistic to religion. Rawls’s view, and especially the central ideas of overlapping consensus and public reason, have been read as an attempt to keep religious doctrines separate from the public political sphere. This theory has been said to displace the disagreement from the realm of justice, the *right*, to that of comprehensive doctrines, the *good*. Yet reasonable citizens disagree about principles of justice just as much as they do about conceptions of the good life.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the appeal to moral values coming from citizens’ comprehensive views might be crucial for enhancing the political conception of justice.<sup>3</sup> For many critics, political liberalism is an unfeasible theory since it asks citizens to set aside their private moralities in public decision-making processes – sometimes an impossible ask: for instance, with regard to difficult decisions about the moral permissibility of abortion, “the case for seeking a political solution that brackets the contending moral and religious issues – that is neutral with respect to them – would seem especially strong” (Sandel 1995, 1778). Yet, for the critics, such a separation is also normatively problematic: it cannot adequately respond to the need for reform emerging in contemporary societies. When societies are characterized by deep injustices, the requirement of public reason might blind people to those injustices (on this see also Griffin 1997, 118). Some critics

<sup>2</sup> Quong (2005) has labelled this kind of criticism as the “asymmetry objection.” On this objection see Brower 1994, Caney 1995, Gaus 1999, Chan 2000.

<sup>3</sup> On this objection see Waldron 1993. This criticism has been discussed by Solum (1996) who calls it the “novelty objection.”



claimed that it was religious insight that guided the abolitionists and the civil rights movement in the US, for instance, so Rawls's requirement of the silencing religious doctrines in public reason cannot adequately take these cases into consideration.

Weithman's *Rawls, Political Liberalism and Reasonable Faith* provides a fresh and illuminating contribution to a deeper understanding of Rawls's sophisticated framework. Weithman reveals the rich and often neglected aspects of *Political Liberalism* that speak to how religions and citizens of faith may be accommodated in the political realm. Weithman's interpretative project focuses on the centrality of the liberal principle of legitimacy and the related idea of stability for the "right reasons." In contrast with the standard reading that rests upon a discontinuity between the idea of justice and that of legitimacy (Weithman 2016, 85ff), Weithman argues that Rawls's new principle of liberal legitimacy is the most appropriate way to realize political justice under conditions of reasonable pluralism emerging in contemporary democracies. Thus, while refusing the standard criticism that Rawls would subscribe to an idea of intrinsic incivility of religions, Weithman shows that Rawls's qualified exclusion of religions, what he calls "restrictive inclusionism" (151ff), is in fact motivated by Rawls's concerns regarding the possibility that the appeal to non-public – religious – reasons could undermine the privileged form of stability required for liberal legitimacy.

The reason behind Rawls's political turn, Weithman argues (2016, 98ff), is his recognition that the idea of stability presented in *A Theory of Justice* was unrealistic (Rawls 1971, 395ff). That book laid out how a liberal society would encourage members' views of the good to converge – that there would be a "congruence" between the right and the good (Rawls 1971, 513–14) – which would guarantee the achievement of an "inherent stability" of the scheme of social cooperation envisaged by justice as fairness

(Weithman 2016, 156ff; on this see also Weithman 2011, 327–35). But Rawls came to realize not only that this conclusion was improbable but also that it conflicted with the fact that liberal institutions encourage pluralism about the good. Now, the principle of liberal legitimacy, which is expressed in the idea of public reason, is a guarantee of a new idea of stability. Weithman believes that the conclusion of the new form of stability is supported by what he calls the “Ideal of Democratic Governance” (Weithman 2016, 100), which is the “ideal of citizens governing themselves in ways that each thinks the others might reasonably be expected to accept” (Rawls 1996, 218). The appeal to a shared framework of reasons is not aimed at silencing moral disagreement; rather, it encourages reasonable pluralism by showing a certain degree of compatibility between a private and public morality. The compatibility between the *good* and the *right*, however, suggests that state laws or decisions should not necessarily have to be regarded as *good* from the perspective of one citizen’s comprehensive doctrine to be seen as *legitimate* from the point of view of political justice.

Weithman confronts his reading of Rawls’s new stability with some difficult cases and shows how the compatibility problem is solved in this framework. He considers the case of Jan, a citizen of faith who objects to abortion (2016, 102ff). This case, he argues, poses a serious problem for stability as Jan might believe that by allowing abortion, a well-ordered society be enacting a serious injustice and would fail to realize certain important goods in political life. Very roughly, the argument is that Rawls’s liberal legitimacy helps to distinguish an idea of justice of intended “political outcomes” from a more procedural understanding of political justice which reflects the *ideal of Democratic Governance* (103–4). But if citizens of faith recognize that the law they oppose, say the law on abortion, is based on reasons of the right kind – that is, it reflects such an ideal – they might still see compatibility between

what they regard as *true* according to their moralities (that abortion is unjust) and the legitimacy of the exercise of power that has enacted that law (109). Thus, Weithman argues, the inclusion of citizens of faith within the broader liberal framework is possible if they recognize the burdens of judgement, develop a sense of legitimacy, distinguish a legitimate from a just exercise of political power, distinguish accepting the constitution from "accepting as legitimate (when not just) particular statutes or decisions," and give enough weight to the Ideal of Democratic Governance (112).

## II

### **Assurance, stability and the case of "militants for peace"**

With this scheme in mind, Weithman analyses Rawls's public reason and the ideal of citizenship related to it (2016, part III, esp. chapters 6 and 7). Weithman introduces significant elements aimed at reconstructing Rawls's inclusionism – including much that is insightful in considering the case of militants for peace and their role in actual liberal democratic societies.

Rawls's distinctive idea of stability, Weithman (155) reminds us, is not an institutional one; rather, it is primarily aimed at preserving a fair scheme of social cooperation that characterizes a well-ordered liberal democratic society. Thus, the stability for the "right reasons" presented in *Political Liberalism* is constructed in order to solve a fundamental problem of assurance – a generalised prisoner's dilemma, when citizens come to doubt other citizens' allegiance to the political conception of justice – which puts at risk citizens' effective compliance with the political conception. For Weithman, Rawls's "inclusive view" and "wide view" are meant to preserve the stability of the fair terms of cooperation in an ideally just society (158). Rawls's appeal to sincerity in public justification as well as the requirement of the "proviso," which asks citizens to

justify “their conclusions in due course by public reasons” (Rawls 1996, 1), are both directed to solve such an assurance problem (Weithman 2016, 161). Weithman terms this “restrictive inclusivism,” meaning that it introduces “the weakest and least restrictive guidelines of public reason sufficient to solve the assurance problem” (163).

Thus, while asserting that the standard criticism of Rawls’s exclusion of religions fails adequately to grasp Rawls’s overall project, Weithman also maintains that Rawls’s doctrine of public reason is only weakly inclusive, as long as this privileged form of stability is preserved. Rawls argues that the requirements of public reason “vary depending on historical and political conditions” (Rawls 1996, 251). Thus, one problem is to understand how his doctrine works in cases of actual existing societies and, especially, in those that are not well-ordered in a Rawlsian sense. Rawls famously presents three different cases that range from an ideally just to a non-ideal society (248ff). The differences between them seem to be reflected in these societies’ degree of inclusivism of religious and non-public reasons. Whereas in an ideally just society citizens should adopt an exclusive doctrine of public reason (248), a different situation emerges in nearly well-ordered societies and not well-ordered societies. In the case of nearly well-ordered societies, the requirements of public reason ask citizens whose arguments raise reservations about their allegiance to the constitutional order to show how their views are consistent with a reasonable interpretation of the constitutional essentials (248–9). This case is well expressed by Weithman’s example of the US today, which he takes as a constitutional consensus: here, the importance of ensuring that the constitution is not undermined gives support to this interpretation of Rawls’s proviso (Weithman 2016, 164). In the case of not well-ordered societies, where profound divisions emerge about the constitutional essentials (Rawls 1996, 249), however, Rawls seems to favour a more

inclusive doctrine of public reason. This is where my interpretation of Rawls's inclusionism differs from Weithman's.

Sometimes, and particularly under unfavourable conditions, the employment of arguments that reflect citizens' comprehensive views might be consistent with the conclusion of public reason and reinforce citizens' allegiance to the constitutional order (Rawls 1996, 250). Martin Luther King Jr provides an example of this, though Weithman deviates from Rawls in his understanding of the case. For Weithman, Rawls's argument for King's reasonableness is founded on the belief that King would have defended his political views by appealing to a conception of justice independent of comprehensive doctrines (Weithman 2016, 142). In other words, to explain why citizens had no doubt about King's allegiance to the constitutional essentials, Rawls seeks to show that King's political dissent met the proviso. In fact, Weithman argues, not only did King not appeal to public reasons, he was in fact strongly motivated by his religious convictions. Thus, for Weithman, Rawls's "restrictive inclusionism" is unpersuasive precisely because it fails to acknowledge why King was so successful in convincing people that his cause was just even though he used religious arguments (143).

Weithman provides a different explanation for King's case. He believes that the requirements of public reason should be understood in terms of "role-specific duties of citizenship" rather than as a moral obligation (122). The problem, then, is to understand how these duties are specified by the liberal conception of citizenship. Whereas Rawls insists on an ideal of citizenship that imposes "a moral, not a legal, duty of civility" (Rawls 1996, 217) to provide public justification, for Weithman this account fails in generating appropriate requirements of public reason for ordinary citizens. These requirements are in fact determined by the role of citizenship. Thus, Weithman opposes a morality of roles to the

morality of ideals that Rawls seems to endorse in some sections of his work (Weithman 2016, 132-3). Ordinary citizens of actual liberal democracies have a “role-specific interest” (135) in receiving a justification that shows their commitment to citizens’ political and social equality and this, in turns, generates an appropriate role-specific duty of civility. Thus, the liberal qualified exclusion of “comprehensive” – non-public – reasons should be primarily understood as a violation of such a “role-specific” duty (140). This violation is understood as threatening the forms of mutual trust and respect that apply to actual pluralistic liberal democracies.

Yet, Weithman argues, the appeal to comprehensive views does not always endanger such forms of mutual trust and respect. This was for instance what happened in the case of King. For Weithman, citizens do not always look to one another’s religious political discourse for the basis of their agreement, but they sometimes do, and the justification cannot be found in their way of reasoning (143-4). In the case of King, citizens clearly recognized his moral authority and endorsed his religious political struggle. For Weithman, King’s moral authority doesn’t depend on what he said in public forums. Rather, it was related to the special circumstances of his life and political struggle. King’s authority depended upon contingent features, and particularly his membership of a “racial group that suffered great oppression and injustice” (144).

### III

#### **Rawls’s inclusive doctrine: a restatement**

Weithman’s treatment of King is certainly sophisticated and helps us to understand the political and historical relevance of his struggle. However, if what counts is King’s life and that he was perceived as a member of a group that suffered great oppression,

it is not clear why other activists for black civil rights, such as Malcom X, did not garner the same popular support. To provide an adequate answer to this question, it is necessary to reconsider the requirements of public reason and Rawls's doctrine of inclusivism in the case of not-well-ordered societies. In my view, Rawls here brings to a higher level the context-dependency of the doctrine of public reason. As mentioned above, Rawls argues that "the appropriate limits of public reason vary depending on historical and social conditions" (1996, 251). Thus, it is reasonable to think that in the case of King or the abolitionists Rawls's proviso should lead to another interpretation of these requirements. King's struggle did not in fact violate the ideal of public reason because he never signalled that his comprehensive doctrine was the only source for justifying his political struggle. Referring to both the abolitionists and King, Rawls argues that, "given those historical conditions, it was not unreasonable of them to act as they did for the sake of the ideal of public reason itself" (251).

Rawls seems to suggest that there was something intrinsic to the way King or the abolitionists articulated their struggle which is absent in other cases. They were people of faith who not only pursued a peaceful form of dissent – a form of "non-violent tolerance," in Appleby's words (2000, 121) – but also articulated their religious political arguments consistently with a political ideal of citizens understood as free and equal. Thus, the difference between King's civil dissent and that of other activists is that King's appeal to religious argument did not undermine his tolerant disposition towards other ways of justifying those political values. For Rawls, King's religious doctrines "fully support constitutional values and accord with public reason" (1996, 250n.39).

Such an interpretation of the inclusive doctrine of public reason is also compatible with Richards's distinction between the negative and affirmative role of public reason (Richards 1994, 834ff). In his

work on public reason and abolitionism, Richards argues that, in the negative sense, the requirements of public reason are meant to reject the public authority of essentially sectarian arguments that are rooted in an entrenched political epistemology, which often threatens fundamental rights. Conversely, in the affirmative sense, these limits “make available normatively empowering” the political struggles of traditionally silenced people (Richards 1994, 834). These struggles might and, in general, do both reasonably resist unjust regimes (for example, the South African apartheid regime) and political practices that have silenced peoples (for example, slavery), and make positive claims, sometimes based on comprehensive views, both to respect those peoples’ rights and to take concern for their interests in the definition of the political conception of justice. For Richards, the affirmative role of public reason is particularly important to understand the case of King. His elaboration of anti-racist principles was not only made against a political and secular racist orthodoxy, but more generally was aimed at countering a dominant, even religious, racist doctrine (838). Especially in the “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” King’s arguments were primarily directed at the dominant religious elite that failed to take seriously the evil of segregation and the role of public non-violent resistance to it. Even when articulating his civil dissent in his own words, King therefore never expressed his views in ways that could have undermined his commitment to an ideal of citizens understood as free and equal.

Let us now return to Weithman’s interpretative project. If I understand it correctly, it seems that although his view of “restrictive inclusivism” fits well the cases of well-ordered and nearly well-ordered societies, adapting this framework to non-ideal circumstances – such those of the antebellum abolitionists and King’s struggle for civil rights – is more difficult. As Weithman himself recognizes, citizens’ allegiance to the political conception of justice in these circumstances is not secured by an overlapping



consensus nor by a constitutional consensus, and the conception of justice is not sufficient to protect citizens' political autonomy. In these contexts, then, the best interpretation of the proviso is significantly less restrictive than that suggested by Weithman in the case of nearly well-ordered societies. In societies where the compatibility between the *good* within the comprehensive doctrines and the *right* of the political conception is highly contested, the proviso seems to work as an affirmative feature. Thus, the appeal to the inclusive doctrine of public reason might help to forge agreement on what is *right* within the comprehensive doctrines.

In concluding his account of the limits of public reason Rawls clarifies that "appropriate limits of public reason vary depending on historical and social conditions [...] the main point is that citizens are to be moved to honour the ideal itself, in the present when circumstances permit, but often we may be forced to take a longer view. Under different conditions with different current doctrines and practices, the ideal may be best achieved in different ways [...] in less good times by what may appear to be the inclusive view" (1996, 251). Considering the special circumstances in which Martin Luther King Jr expressed his dissent, it is difficult to deny that he did it by honouring this ideal.

#### IV

##### **A weak interpretation of public justification and the problem of sincerity**

In not well-ordered societies, the inclusive doctrine of public reason is concerned with the definition of a conception of political justice of intended outcomes, such as the abolishment of slavery, rather than with strong procedural requirements. Yet it is still possible to frame forms of civil dissent within certain procedural constraints. Rawls argues that the abolitionists and King alike were

reasonable because “they did not provided they thought, or on reflection they would have thought (as they certainly could have thought), that the comprehensive reasons they appealed to were required to give sufficient strength to the political conception to be subsequently realized” (1996, 251). Thus, the inclusive doctrine introduces what we might call a weaker version of the requirements of public reason, which better reflects the non-ideal circumstances emerging in not well-ordered societies.

Boettcher has distinguished a strong public justification, which introduces a very high justificatory standard, from what he calls a “weak public justification.” Whereas the former represents “an aspirational ideal” (2015, 198), the latter is more appropriate to less idealised situations. In the weak interpretation of public justification: “a decision D about the law L is weakly justified in P if and only if D is generated by reasonably acceptable and widely accepted decision-making procedures, and D’s success is not essentially dependent on the votes or other activity of unreasonable members of P, and each reasonable member of P honours requirements of public reason – or would be prepared to honour these requirements if called upon to vote or decide – in making his or her deliberative contribution to D” (198). Here Boettcher makes an interesting distinction between reasonable acceptance and wide acceptance. A “reasonably acceptable procedure,” he argues, “is one that is fully consistent with a reasonable political conception of justice and facilitates ongoing democratic deliberation about matters of law and policy. Reasonable acceptability is thus primarily a normative notion. By contrast, wide acceptance is in principle empirically verifiable and sustained by ongoing successful practices and historical experience” (199).

Returning to the case discussed in this paper, such an account suggests a different explanation for King’s successful struggle. His

success depended on the fact that he did not violate the requirements of public reason, at least not those generated by the inclusive doctrine. These forms of political dissent in fact met two conditions of the weak interpretation of public justification: the first eminently empirical, that is the wide acceptance of the values expressed in that view; and the second explicitly normative, that is the independence of that form of dissent from clearly unreasonable premises. Wide acceptance does not directly imply shareability. King did not necessarily need to articulate his arguments in public terms, as in fact he did not. However, the actual and wide acceptance of the values expressed in his view made those values available to all citizens.

To this interpretation of inclusivism Weithman could raise an important objection regarding the sincerity of public reason. Rawls recognizes that sincerity plays an important role in ensuring to one another our allegiance to the political conception of justice (1996, 248). This concern undoubtedly plays an important role in interpreting the proviso in the case of nearly well-ordered societies. Weithman could therefore argue that, even accepting that King did honour an ideal of public reason, the ideal itself was not in fact what motivated his political struggle. It is true that King's religious motivation was important in shaping the political values he defended in the public forum. Thus, by violating public sincerity, was King in fact violating the requirements of public reason? Schwartzman has interestingly suggested that it would be misleading to believe that public reason has to be self-motivating (2011, 390). He recognizes that, under certain non-ideal conditions, citizens and public officials may have reasons to violate a principle of public sincerity, but that this should not be seen as a violation of the requirements of public reason (2011, 393n.52). According to this interpretation, what counts is that citizens are able to provide public reasons that they sincerely believe are sufficient but which are not necessarily their final or ultimate

source of motivation. Thus, returning to the case of King, as far as his arguments were widely accepted and its premises were not clearly unreasonable, it is unimportant to unpick how he related his political values to his comprehensive doctrine.

### **Concluding remarks**

In response to Weithman's notion of "restrictive inclusivism" this paper suggests an alternative reading of the requirements of public reason. This is based on a weak interpretation of public justification which rests on two features: wide acceptance and independence from unreasonable premises. Such an account helps not only to understand several cases of "militants for peace" but also to distinguish between these and other, unreasonable, forms of dissent. Furthermore, it suggests a more general objection to Weithman's interpretation of the requirements of public reason: in the special case of not well-ordered societies, the distinction between procedural justice and justice of outcomes becomes highly contestable. In these contexts, a strong interpretation of the proviso is inadequate and should be weakened in favour of a different interpretation of inclusivism. In non-ideal circumstances, the inclusive doctrine of public reason should be better understood in its affirmative role. It relies on the conjunction of two aims: attaining a better view of political justice while recognizing a procedure that is widely accepted and does not depend on clearly unreasonable premises. Religious doctrines undoubtedly grounded King's struggle for civil rights but this does not undermine the reasonableness of his form of dissent, as far as the values expressed in his view supported constitutional principles and were consistent with the ideal of public reason (Rawls 1996, 250n.39).

This paper suggests a different explanation for King's political and moral authority. In contrast to Weithman, I believe that it

derives from what he said in public forums. First, his arguments, albeit religious in nature, were not seen to rely on clearly unreasonable premises. Second, the general values expressed in his view were in effect widely accepted by reasonable citizens; this is so because reasonable citizens could see the compatibility of King's arguments with a view of political justice expressed in the constitutional essentials. For these reasons, King was never perceived as undermining the political ideal of citizens as free and equal. This is obviously not the case with regard to other leaders, such as Malcolm X. He was a religious activist who employed his comprehensive views to support his form of political dissent. Yet his radical crusade against white supremacy was unreasonable: it was based on unreasonable premises, including the use of violence as an acceptable means of protest, and the general values he expressed did not meet the requirement of wide acceptance. By supporting an alleged superiority of black people, he was in effect endorsing a form of political dissent that was in clear contrast to constitutional principles and, therefore, the ideal of public reason.

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