

Epistemological Externalism for Liberal Anti-Perfectionists

Several public reason theorists have argued that liberal anti-perfectionists should reject epistemological readings of their notions of public reasons, public justifications, and the reasonableness of agents. Klosko (2000) argues that they make it harder for agents to count as reasonable without any empirical evidence that epistemological requirements ensure more reasonable behavior. Kelly & McPherson (2001) similarly argue that they pre-emptively restrict the constituency of the reasonable too narrowly and intolerantly. And Nussbaum (2011) argues that they promote specific, controversial understandings of what is epistemically valuable, without proper justification, thereby falling into a kind of perfectionism. Nevertheless, many public reason theorists have assumed or defended some epistemic dimension of reasonableness, public reasons, or public justification.

Anti-perfectionists overwhelmingly assume or defend epistemological internalism about these notions. However, I survey the externalist implications of some public reason liberal theorists' claims. In particular, I look at Wall (2010, 2014), who, unperturbed by the objections of Klosko, *et. Al.*, embraces liberal perfectionism and defends epistemological externalism about reasonableness and public justifications, prioritizing the need to justify political decisions on the basis of good epistemic reasons over other concerns. I argue that prominent anti-perfectionist objections against epistemological externalism are not decisive. However, I contend that there is good reason to worry that strong externalism collapses the standard of public reason into a truth standard, leaving no room for public reason to do independent work. Therefore, taking the advice of Rawls, I look to the public political culture for any implicit standards on which we might base the standards of public reason. Following Rini (2020), I argue that the ordinary standards of good faith debate of disagreements do not entail truth and leave much room for good faith disagreement. Being implicit to the public political culture, its acceptance presupposes no excessively controversial views.

Therefore, taking inspiration from Klosko, Kelly & McPherson, and Nussbaum, I develop a "Cooperation First" account of reasonableness, on which reasonableness is first and foremost a matter of being a reliably fair cooperative participant in all matters of civic life. On this view, successfully cooperative *behavior* determines who is reasonable. But I argue that in order to successfully cooperate with other members of one's society, reasonable agents must be sensitive to facts about how the burdens and benefits of cooperation are distributed in one's society, including social, historical, political, or economic facts about their society. So, reasonableness is an epistemologically externalist virtue, but I argue this does not collapse the standard of public reason into a truth standard, because in matters of public inquiry, where reasonableness is manifested alongside the virtue of civility, the virtuous practice of public reasoning is governed by the standards of good faith debate, which require neither truth nor resolution in complete agreement. Thus, I develop a Cooperation First account of reasonableness that is epistemologically rigorous. Finally, I put my view to the test in a series of thought experiments, demonstrating that, whereas externalist excellences can ensure successful cooperation in public reasoning, internalist excellences are too weak. (497 words)