

# DISAGREEMENT AND PUBLIC REASONS

## GUEST EDITOR'S PREFACE

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The problem of disagreement is without doubt one of the most examined and hotly debated issues in the contemporary philosophical literature, representing a central concern among meta-ethicists, epistemologists, moral theorists, scholars of aesthetics, and so on. Moreover, disagreement constitutes a prominent and fundamental problem also among political theorists. Indeed, much recent political philosophy is preoccupied with political and moral disagreement, and it is a common place to hold that the crux of modern politics is to provide some theoretical framework apt to show that it is possible for some decent political order to be the object of agreement among citizens who disagree about morality and justice. Political philosophers' interest in the topic of disagreement should not come as a surprise. Indeed, in order to understand the relevance of the problem at the political level, it suffices to recall the kind of questions that are a matter of struggle: is abortion morally permissible? Are homosexual relations morally wrong? Is economic equality more valuable than political freedom? Is suicide in the face of terminal and painful illness right? Is it wrong to kill non-human animals for alimentary purposes, clothing, or scientific research? Is death penalty wrong? Are there any intellectual property rights? Should prostitution be legalized?

It is important to understand that the problem of disagreement within the political domain is relevant not only with regards to the reality of current debates in democratic societies: it is not only a relevant matter because of the urge to find tools apt to deal with controversial issues, which may have a dangerous impact on the relations among citizens. On the contrary, disagreement represents one of the most long-standing issues in political philosophy, having its roots in the social contract theories defended by Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau,

and Kant. However, starting with the publication of John Rawls's *Political Liberalism*, this issue has gained new and tremendous interest in contemporary debates of normative political philosophy and it is fair to say that what is usually called *public reason liberalism* has dominated the discussion. The core of this account relies on the idea that, since political authority must in some sense rest on the free consent of those subjected to it, coercion must be justified to all citizens with public reasons. And public reasons are reasons that citizens can reasonably be expected to accept. In this sense, public reasons are reasons that are acceptable from everyone's point of view, despite particular interests or individual convictions; and to justify something publicly means to appeal to reasons apt to reach an agreement because of this acceptability requirement. In the last years, the paradigm of public reason liberalism has started to creak and several political philosophers have attempted to show its theoretical difficulties and conceptual impasses. Such turn has allowed defenders of public reason liberalism to sharpen their arguments and to deeply reflect upon the limits of their theory.

The articles included in this special issue are solidly placed within this debate about the merits and limits of public reason liberalism. Some of them attempt to go beyond it, whereas others attempt to defend its philosophical and practical merits. A perfect example of this dialectic is the discussion offered here between Christopher Eberle and Emanuela Ceva. The former, in his article "Religione, rispetto e guerra: contro la vision canonical della religione in politica", expresses his scepticism towards public reason liberalism. By analysing the case of a state waging war against another, Eberle argues that public reasons are not the only ones apt to justify political decisions, for some non-public reasons, as for example religious reasons, may be suited for the job. In her reply, entitled "Rispetto, disaccordo e giustificazione pubblica: cosa è davvero in gioco?", Ceva rejects Eberle's argument and argues that the example he focuses on is misleading and deceptive with respect to the aims and commitments of public reason liberals. Moreover, by drawing a distinction between practical and epistemic dimensions of disagreement, Ceva defends a procedural interpretation of the Rawlsian argument for public reason.

My article "Rispetto e giustificazione pubblica da una prospettiva oggettivista" attempts to show that the relation between respect and public justification, as public reason liberals conceive it, is not convincing. To support this thesis, I raise a methodological, a practical, and a logical objection. I then compare public reason liberalism and objectivist liberalism in an attempt to delineate their respective and conflicting conceptions of respect and justification. The relation between these two versions of liberalism is crucial also in

Michele Bocchiola's "Rawls e Enoch su disaccordo e ragioni". Here, the goal is to rescue public reason liberalism from the objectivists' critiques. Despite maintaining some important doubts about the idea of public reason, Bocchiola rejects the objection according to which public reason liberals not only do not understand what is the real nature of reasons, but also confuse reasons with preferences.

Finally, Enrico Biale, in his "Ragioni partigiane e agency democratica", aims at investigating the complex relation between partisan reasons and democracy: is appealing to partisan reasons in contrast with the democratic ideal? Biale's answer is that partisanship needs to be positively reconsidered, in particular with respect to its motivational and justificatory functions. However, it is also necessary to understand that partisanship is not compatible with the deliberative model of public justification. In this sense, in order to enjoy the benefits of partisanship, we need to accept a model of political, and not public justification.

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