**Liberal Arts and the Failures of Liberalism**

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Abstract (220):

Public reason liberalism is the political theory which holds that coercive laws and policies are justified when and only when they are grounded in reasons of the public. The standard interpretation of public reason liberalism, consensus accounts, claim that the reasons persons share or that persons can derive from shared values determine which policies can be justified. In this paper, I argue that consensus approaches cannot justify fair educational policies and preserving cultural goods. Consensus approaches can resolve some controversies about teaching values in the educational system, such as curriculum choice. But they cannot determine which culture goods, e.g., architecture, artwork, or language ought to be preserved in the education system. Consensus approaches cannot fairly resolve competing claims about these kinds of disputes.

I propose that convergence accounts of public reason, which allow individuals to draw on their own comprehensive doctrines in limited ways, can remedy these weaknesses in the mainline public reason tradition. The convergence approach can justify a pluralist state that can advance valuable community goods. John Henry Newman’s advocacy of liberal arts education finds resonance in other cultures, notably among Confucians, illustrating that there can be a shared moral vision and inquiry into the good life across deep substantive disagreements about educational values and policies, once we expand our notion of justification to be more inclusive.

Keywords: education, culture, public reason, justification, convergence, Confucian, Newman

Public reason liberalism is the political theory which holds that coercive laws and policies are justified when and only when they are grounded in reasons of the public. The standard interpretation of public reason liberalism, consensus accounts, claim that the reasons persons share (or that persons can derive from shared values) determine which policies can be justified. Conversely, the account insists that, because of the limited character of the reasons people share in this way, coercive laws and policies cannot be justified by appeal to reasons that are not publicly accessible, such as reasons whose soundness depends on the truth of religious or ‘comprehensive’ philosophical views (including various forms of liberalism itself). Instead, the demands of public justification require us to appeal only to those reasons appropriately sharable with all other citizens. This is sometimes put as a demand that use of coercive power be *neutral* among competing comprehensive doctrines which would allow us to identify and promote, for example, good or valuable ways of life.[[1]](#footnote-1)

John Rawls (a representative public reason liberal) accepted the implication that liberal government cannot be a *community* united in the same values: “the hope of political community must indeed be abandoned, if by such a community we mean a political society united in affirming a general and comprehensive doctrine…”[[2]](#footnote-2) For a perfectionist, in sharp contrast, a shared conception of what is truly valuable is part of the good we share by living together in a community, without which human communities fail to flourish. Perfectionists therefore conclude that living in a state governed by principles of justice that abstract from general and comprehensive doctrines about the good life is fundamentally and seriously bad for human beings. Many contemporary criticisms of public reason liberalism appeal to perfectionist intuitions and argue that liberal institutions do more than fail to promote the full good. Liberal institutions *undermine* the good of political life. Specifically, critics such as Deneen and MacIntyre think liberalism undermines the possibility of maintaining the consensusin shared reasons that is necessary for liberal governments to continue in existence. And they argue therefore that liberalism is particularly corrosive with regard to educational arrangements and the maintenance of shared culture.

What I will do in this paper is argue that, on the one hand, liberal restrictions on public justification are too narrow. Competing claims of value in regard to important societal goods such as education and culture cannot be resolved if we are restricted only to appealing to reasons that can be shared by all members of the public, as required by some kinds of public reason liberalism. Fairness only goes so far in adjudicating disputes over, for example, school choice. We need *publicly* to determine which cultural goods are to be preserved or what values ought to be promoted in educational policy, which inevitably requires appeal to values going beyond those which all members of the public share. On the other hand, there are possibilities that allow us to expand the public reason theory of justification by appealing not only to fully shared reasons, but also to reasons that draw – in limited ways – upon comprehensive doctrines, as long as such reasons are intelligible to all members of the public. Such *convergence* views of public justification provide a basis from which to respond to these communitarian, anti-liberal critiques of liberal arrangements. In conclusion, I will illustrate that the expanded convergence account can resolve those disputes in regard to either cultural promotion or educational policies, appealing to reasons that derive from Confucian and natural law traditions.

1. The Critique

Alasdair MacIntyre’s criticism of modern liberal government is that such governments are premised on “a series of compromises between a range of more-or-less conflicting economic and social interests. ...the outcome is that although most citizens share, although to greatly varying extents, in such public goods as those of a minimally secure order, the distribution of goods by government in no way reflects a common mind arrived at through widespread shared deliberation governed by norms of rational enquiry.”[[3]](#footnote-3) The problem for MacIntyre, and perfectionists generally, is that modern liberal regimes seek shallow agreement. Liberal political deliberation has the wrong object in view because it concerns allocation of merely *public* goods, e.g., concerning transportation, defense, police. A true community, by contrast, is united in deliberating on how to achieve the good, *simpliciter,* including goods such as culture or religion*.* Notice that the problem isolated by MacIntyre is not merelythe lack of a shared vision. The problem is lack of a common vision among citizens produced by means of the *right kind of practical enquiry*. Thus, MacIntyre and others feel that there might be elements of modern states that inherently impede or discourage shared forms of deliberation that are aimed at comprehensive visions of the good life.

Deneen’s *Why Liberalism Failed* argues that many contemporary problems in American culture can be chalked up to liberal political arrangements. The book is, in many ways, a series of footnotes to MacIntyre’s critique, relying on the claim that liberalism *undermines* public reasoning indirectly by undermining the conditions which promote the existence of shared values among citizens. Liberalism, Deneen implies, will lead to the eventual loss of legitimacy in use of political power when there are no shared reasons; “the gap grows between what the ideology claims and the lived experience of human beings under its domain until the regime loses legitimacy.”[[4]](#footnote-4) The liberal country inevitably devolves, presumably, into a mere *modus vivendi* regime. Deneen appears more apocalyptic than MacIntyre in holding that liberalism is sinister in providing a cover for others to promote their own ideological agenda of untrammeled license: “as an ideology, [liberalism] pretends to neutrality, claiming no preference and denying any intention of shaping the souls under its rule. It ingratiates by invitation to the easy liberties, diversions, and attractions of freedom, pleasure, and wealth.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

Deneen’s claims about public reason liberalism aiming at complete and abstract neutrality, or as requiring skepticism about human nature or the morality, ring false at least when it comes to established representatives of these views. If we focus on Rawls’ version of public reason liberalism, for instance, ‘neutrality’ is not a helpful rubric for understanding the view. Rawls’ vision might be better put as a demand for *fairness* in adjudicating disputes over policies that employ coercive power, rather than mere neutrality, as Rawls’ vision of public justification involves, first, *moral* reasons for embracing such limits on power and the corresponding justifications for it,[[6]](#footnote-6) and, second, these demands of fairness apply to the ‘constitutional essentials’ rather than to all aspects of government.[[7]](#footnote-7) Excluding comprehensive doctrines about which lives are more valuable than others means that, while the liberal state is not a *modus vivendi* among warring and competing interests, the moral values that the liberal state can act upon are fundamentally only political values of justice. Even Rawls admits that abiding by our duties of justice to other citizens is good for us,[[8]](#footnote-8) but – we might say – the liberal institutional arrangement only allows us to promote (as it were) the *bare minimum*, as protection of the ‘right’ is the limit of the way in which liberal government can promote the good. For that reason, the cynical and hyperbolic insinuation that liberalism is nothing more than a cover for ideological domination, while rhetorically effective, overshoots into *ad hominem* attacks. Public reason liberalism of Rawls’ kind clearly *does* reject the use of coercive laws and policies in favor of liberalism itself, skepticism about the moral life, or mere license. Any political theory can be appealed to as an excuse by bad actors. Deneen’s objection is only plausible as alleging an *unintended consequence* that an overlapping consensus in a liberal society will inevitably devolve in these directions.

Nevertheless, Deneen illustrates his apocalyptic claims by appeal to phenomenon in American education and culture. First, “liberalism is eliminating liberal education with keen intent and ferocity, finding it impractical both ideologically and economically.… ”[[9]](#footnote-9) Education is important to avoid creating people who are swayed by public reasoning of the right sort, including the very reasons public reason liberals might find appropriate, rather than by mere demagoguery or vain self-interest. Liberal institutions cannot preserve and promote that kind of education necessary for preserving the freedom of society, such as the liberal arts, because to do so would implicitly involve judgments about the *value* of public deliberation in our lives. Second, liberal institutions are overly cosmopolitan and liberate “the individual from embedded cultures, traditions, places, and relationships [so that] liberalism has homogenized the world in its image….”[[10]](#footnote-10) Without a shared public culture, Deneen implies, all citizens have in common are modes of economic and political negotiation among competing interests. Liberal institutions cannot preserve and promote those cultures, traditions, places, and relationships that matter for having sharedreasons of the right sort as to constitute more than a *modus vivendi* regime.

In light of these considerations, we can put Deneen’s charge in a way that is less controversial and more politically serious: public reason liberalism is unstable, because liberal institutions do not permit the promotion of what is necessary for the maintenance of shared reasons among reasonable citizens. Rawls offers that the norms of public reason liberalism do not “inform us how to raise our children,” as they do not apply to the internal life of institutions like families and universities.[[11]](#footnote-11) Rawls also insists on “a fair equality of opportunity” in education, for, “otherwise all parts of society cannot take part in public reason or contribute to social and economic policies.”[[12]](#footnote-12) The reason education should be open to all, in justice, is that civic virtue and education in public deliberation are necessary for the maintenance of a well-ordered society. Further, which cultural goods to promote and preserve involves a choice that affects our school curricula and wider culture in much the same way: what pieces of art, buildings, languages, public places, memorials of historical significance, and other elements of wider culture we choose to preserve or promote. Such cultural goods are considered goods not because they are among the ‘primary goods’ aimed at in political life, but because cultural goods are constitutive of or connected intimately with sets of institutions and practices are taken to have intrinsic value of some kind – call what makes a cultural good valuable is, broadly, its connection to valuable ‘ways of life’ that some citizens believe ought to be preserved. Thus, issues of education and culture are deeply linked because they necessitate taking a stand on whether some modes of deliberation or whether some wider cultural practices are more valuable than others; not taking a stand will involve potentially treating publicly reasonable and publicly unreasonable modes of behavior as morally (or axiologically) equivalent.

Public reason liberals already endorse some normative restraints of justice, as their view usually entails endorsing a particular model of ‘reasonability’ and corresponding norms of ‘toleration’ of other reasonable views; the most prominent defenders of public reason are agreed a moral norm of respect for persons undergirds these claims about public reasonability.[[13]](#footnote-13) The moral norm of respect for persons is often taken (by political liberals) to entail that State policy must be neutral in regard to comprehensive doctrines on which citizens reasonably disagree. Martha Nussbaum exemplifies this liberal position when she notes that “…respect for persons leads to the conclusion that they ought to have liberty to pursue commitments that lie at the core of their identity, provided that they do not violate the rights of others and that no other compelling state interest intervenes.”[[14]](#footnote-14)

Wall points out that there is an ambiguity in the principle of respect for persons which Nussbaum invokes: we do not *necessarily* disrespect a person when we hold that their views are unreasonable, even when they are central to their identity.[[15]](#footnote-15) The State need not respect every doctrine held by citizens, including those that seem constitutive of one’s personal identity, since those doctrines can be publicly unreasonable. Wall offers pedophilia as one such doctrine; the State is under no obligation to respect the value of pedophilia, even if this were an identity-constitutive doctrine of someone.[[16]](#footnote-16) Further, Nussbaum might underrate citizens’ ability to revise their commitments. If persons are such that they are rational agents, with ability to reconsider their positions, then State policies “may respect a person fully even as it seeks to get her to revise her comprehensive commitments in response to the reasons she has for doing so.”[[17]](#footnote-17)

Even within public reason liberalism, liberals need to draw a distinction between education that promote political values in ways that are publicly reasonable (abiding by the standards of fairness) and those that would be indoctrination. And it is naïve to think any educational scheme that promotes political values will not affect and even inform us how to raise our children. Debates about whether public school curricula should insist upon inculcating in students a sense of tolerance for various kinds of sexual orientations and non-traditional marriages are so fraught precisely because these kinds of ‘tolerant attitudes’ indirectly condemn traditional views on which these sexual behaviors are morally blameworthy. “Arguments about schools quickly reveal themselves to be arguments about all of the things that adults in liberal democracies prefer to leave up to the individual conscience—because the answers to those questions touch upon some of our most closely held beliefs about right and wrong, good and evil, truth and lies.”[[18]](#footnote-18) Even if we can publicly justifythe political values insisted upon by public reason liberals are worthwhile in education, there is still the task of determining whether the system is currently structured so as to aim (in practice, if not in theory) at excluding other reasonable views and indoctrinating students into liberalism.[[19]](#footnote-19)

Yet insisting on the norms of fair procedure or equal opportunity can only get us so far in resolving these disputes. Rawlsian public reason might justify policies of school choice, such as to allow variant curricula for those endorsing traditional sexual morality, and public funding so that such curricula are available to those who would not want their children to be inculcated by attitudes they find morally objectionable. But disputes in education often go further than this, centering around what is *required* for reasonable citizens. Is the ‘tolerant’ attitude toward variant sexual orientations or non-traditional marriage a requirement of being a reasonable citizen? Should the government’s funds go toward religious schools when those schools reject the reasonability of homosexual ways of life, of transgender persons, and so forth? Should the government be promoting a *positive* acceptance of these other ways of life in its promotion of civic virtue in public schools, even if it passively tolerates religious schools that reject such acceptance? A consensus approach to these questions seems infeasible, given that it appears as if we have no shared reason to accept what appears to be a partisan, potentially ideological account of public ‘reasonability.’ Some defenders of public reason liberalism have argued that there can be no independent reasons to endorse a liberal account of reasonability. Quong thus argues that liberalism should not be expected to provide an answer to the ‘external’ question, “Why be liberal at all?”[[20]](#footnote-20) I argued above, however, that disputes within education policy largely rests on questions of why to accept one account of reasonability over another. If so, we have further reason to believe that the consensus approach cannot seem in principle to answer the question as to why individuals should accept a program for liberal civic education. The same goes *mutatis mutandis* for promotion of cultural goods, which are justified as partially constituting valuable ways of life.

1. A Convergence rather than a Consensus

Rawls’ approach to public reason exemplifies a requirement that there be a *consensus* among shared public reasons as the only permissible basis for coercive laws and policies. However, I tried to motivate that this consensusview of public justification seems to encounter difficulties in justification of the public promotion of valuable ways of public deliberation, as well as selecting among valuable cultural or civic goods, both of which undergird the possibility of agreement in public reasons. But consensus views are not the only public reason views available. Some deny that public justification requires that every member of the public have shared reasons for endorsing a policy, but only that each has a reason on which that policy is reasonable for them.[[21]](#footnote-21)

If both A and B share a reason R that makes a regime reasonable for them, then the justification of the regime is grounded in their *consensus* with respect to R. If A has a reason Ra that makes the regime reasonable for him, and B has a reason Rb that makes the regime reasonable for her, then the justification of the regime is based on *convergence* on it from separate points of view.[[22]](#footnote-22)

On convergence accounts of public justification, reasons to endorse coercive laws/policies do not even need to be mutually accessible in order to properly ground agreement among citizens. But Vallier argues this renders convergence preferable to consensus, because a requirement only that each citizen has a reason which justifies a policy for themselves respects reasonable pluralism more than the need for shared reasons and places less burdens on individual liberty.[[23]](#footnote-23) The convergence account relies on the common intuition of social contract theories that “government institutions are justified to the extent that they can resolve disputes about rankings.”[[24]](#footnote-24) Consequently, there is no reason to criticize the ‘emergent’ principles of justice selected according to such decision procedures converged upon by all parties, even if those procedures are not endorsed by all members of the public for the same reasons.

What follows is an attempt to apply the convergence account to the issues of public deliberation, in the context of education policy, as well as preservation/promotion of cultural goods, and thereby illustrate the usefulness of convergence accounts of justification to political disputes that might be difficult for consensus accounts to resolve. The convergence account is susceptible of a number of further criticisms, which I will not review extensively here.[[25]](#footnote-25) I will instead argue that convergence accounts can be used to justify decision procedures for contentious cases involving institutions that indirectly promote *shared forms of deliberation*. The application of convergence justification to the issue of institutions which support public deliberation might incidentally address some of these criticisms. While convergence accounts do not require shared reasons among all members of the public as a condition of public deliberation, convergence accounts might ironically provide a justification for promoting those necessary conditions for arriving at greater *consensus* of shared reasons among citizens than consensus accounts of justification can provide. I will hereafter take for granted a convergence account of public reason and aim to operate within its scope.

1. Education and Institutional Support for Public Deliberation

A classical liberal arts education, of which John Henry Newman is a well-known advocate and which he in turn inherits from the Aristotelian tradition, is a sort of educational practice which aims explicitly at imparting more than mere knowledge:

This process of training, by which the intellect, instead of being formed or sacrificed to some particular or accidental purpose, some specific trade or profession, or study or science, is disciplined for its own sake, for the perception of its own proper object, and for its own highest culture, is called Liberal Education… to set forth the right standard, and to train according to it, and to help forward all students towards it according to their various capacities, this I conceive to be the business of a University.[[26]](#footnote-26)

The content of liberal arts education involves a ‘canon’ of classics, fostering students to develop independent attitudes and modes of thinking about such classics in a humanistic mode. Classical liberal education aims to be compatible with education in other subjects, such as medicine or STEM disciplines, by having that humanistic study of classics serve as a propaedeutic or foundation for further studies. My aim is not so much as to attempt to define/characterize a particular model or essential set of characteristics of liberal arts education as to highlight the way in which the educational model itself aims at preparing students to engage in patterns of reasoning and deliberation that are valuable in addition to the content studied.

Such classics-oriented approaches to education are not by any means unique to Newman’s Victorian England or to Aristotle. Indeed, many cultures are familiar with the sort of education Newman is advocating. For example, classical education taking its departure in study of the Chinese classics became a model that spread throughout Asia. An integral part of Mencius’ promotion of the good life, for example, was promoting the study of the Confucian canon in country schools (as was the case in China until recent times). Mencius sees moral benefits in such a program, such as promoting filial piety: “Let careful attention be paid to education in schools, inculcating in it especially the filial and fraternal duties, and grey-haired men will not be seen upon the roads, carrying burdens on their backs or on their heads.”[[27]](#footnote-27) Zhu Xi more broadly claims, “literature carries the [*Dao*] much as a carriage carries things.”[[28]](#footnote-28) For the Confucian, study of classics is primarily intended to pass along the right views about what it is to live a good life.[[29]](#footnote-29) Yet Zhu Xi also notes that study of literature only gives one the tools with which to pursue a good life, and reading alone does not mandate one accept or interpret these texts correctly.[[30]](#footnote-30) The moral valence to such education is not that of teaching someone the moral truth, but learning to engage in appropriate modes of reasoning that will benefit one in practical situations, whether politics or individual moral cultivation – which has led some Confucians to defend classical Confucian education as publicly justified within a democratic and constitutional framework.[[31]](#footnote-31)

Newman explicitly ties the purpose of liberal education to politics: “…training of the intellect, which is best for the individual himself, best enables him to discharge his duties to society.”[[32]](#footnote-32) What we might say, consequently, is that liberal arts education aims to form citizens who can *virtuously* engage in public reasoning. Education does so by providing citizens with skills to render their reasons intelligible to others and to aim to understand the reasons of other citizens. Liberal arts aim, therefore, at enhancing a kind of moral, civic trust among citizens by enabling a citizen to “to accommodate himself to others, how to throw himself into their state of mind, how to bring before them his own, how to influence them, how to come to an understanding with them, how to bear with them.”[[33]](#footnote-33) Even Shun, a nominal critic of ‘liberal education,’ aptly expresses Newman’s own ideal in his claim that classical Confucian education aims at “the forming of life-long aspirations, backed by the development and personal embodiment of a broad world view as well as a deep ethical sense, [which shape] the student to become a person of broad vision and with a sense of mission to serve the public realm….”[[34]](#footnote-34)

Study of classics aims to give students cultural resources that make them competent practical reasoners, without aiming to indoctrinate students into holding any particular views. Policies promoting ritual or classical education do not therefore require mandating acceptance of a certain set of comprehensive doctrines. These policies aim at facilitating a shared set of resources for deliberating about the good life and at promoting valuable kinds of deliberation. Certainly, the promotion of classical education involves holding that some kinds of deliberation are more valuable than others. But the value of classical education can be recognized from within different comprehensive accounts of value, and, given that these reasons are mutually intelligible across such accounts, promotion of classical education can be publicly justified on account of this convergence of support even without strictly shared reasons for doing so. Distinct perspectives, such as those represented by Newman or Confucians, can have mutually intelligible reasons for supporting such education, despite having potentially distinct accounts of the way in which such education supports the right moral culture for a State to flourish as a community.[[35]](#footnote-35) Even if there is no shared canon of those works to count as ‘classics,’ there is nevertheless good reason to believe State promotion of liberal arts education can be justified on a convergence account precisely insofar as Confucians and Aristotelians converge upon State promotion of liberal arts education which aims at promoting *civic virtue* of a kind – liberal arts or classical education promotes valuable modes of public deliberation.[[36]](#footnote-36)

Similarly, the civic virtues associated with liberal arts education can be suitably extended to the other valuable ways of life that are instantiated by cultural goods – if civic virtue involves being able to appreciate the reasons of others, it can equally incorporate the ability to appreciate and preserve valuable ways of life associated with the culture of our nation. The Confucian notion of ‘ritual propriety’, or *li* 礼, is wide, as *li* can refer both to a set of practices (‘rituals’) that form one to engage in virtuous behavior of right relationship to other people *and* to one of the ‘cardinal virtues’ of Confucianism, a virtue of self-restraint by which one acts in accord with those rituals (analogous to temperance). We might understand the role of these rituals as aiming to foster appropriate attitudes or behaviors in regard one’s place in the community. As a set of practices that form one to engage appropriately in the life of the community, Confucians place significant emphasis on *li* in governmental policy[[37]](#footnote-37):

“If you try to guide the common people with coercive regulations… and keep them in line with punishments, the common people will become evasive and will have no sense of shame. If, however, you guide them with Virtue, and keep them in line by means of ritual, the people will have a sense of shame and will rectify themselves.”[[38]](#footnote-38)

Confucian rituals aim quite literally at making people *cultured*. Promoting ritual behavior does not require agreement on religious or political comprehensive doctrines, even if it does embrace a certain normative conception of cultural or civic life. The normative conception of the cultural life aims indirectly as promoting beliefs and emotional response, but the promotion of ritual behavior governs external conduct, not at beliefs*.*[[39]](#footnote-39) Yet, while Confucian rituals do not necessarily aim at changing beliefs,[[40]](#footnote-40) and while many citizens might find the reasons for Confucian rituals intelligible, it is not likely that there would be convergence around the State *enforcement* of such rituals. For example, Catholics might find their faith to conflict with performance of ritual homage to Confucius. Cultural practices usually involve, to some extent, comprehensive doctrine, because human life does so.

Nevertheless, there is conversely a *public* dimension to the preservation of cultural goods associated within those countries where Confucian rituals are culturally significant. In Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea, governments often support Confucian or Shinto ritual under the aspect of cultural goods – e.g., local temple events of long-standing significance, veneration of Confucius during ‘Teacher’s Day,’ or the promotion of Confucian filial piety – and so fall under provisions similar to those embodied in article 9 of the Constitution of the Republic of Korea that “the State shall strive to sustain and develop its cultural heritage.”[[41]](#footnote-41) The preservation of such ritual practices aims to preserve valuable ways of life, which involve comprehensive doctrines, but this does not stop others from finding such practices to have value that can justify their preservation. Catholics might not agree that all aspects of Confucian rituals, as traditionally practiced, are morally acceptable. Nevertheless, Catholics have reason to see that, when shorn of any questionable aspects, Confucian rituals are valuable not only because they constitute a cultural heritage, but *even insofar as those rituals express moral/religious convictions that Catholics share.* Thus, within Asian countries where these rituals are of longstanding cultural heritage, the Catholic Church encourages incorporating these rituals within its own liturgy. Even if we do not share all the same reasons for preserving a given cultural practice or way of life, we can still justify their public preservation insofar as we appreciate them for our own good reasons – we can *converge*.

**Conclusion**

Nevertheless, publicly promotion of education as well as of cultural goods clearly needs to be publicly accountable. A helpful distinction proposed by Vallier can help make sense of this: convergence accounts support a principle of restraint for public institutions and officials, “limiting state power through institutional design and demanding that political officials be sensitive to whether the coercion they propose can be justified to each person,” rather than a principle of restraint on citizens’ reasoning.[[42]](#footnote-42) Natural law thinkers have often advocated that the government’s role in education is subsidiary, precisely on the basis that civic virtue is best inculcated by civil society (e.g., families, churches), and thus have – for example – advocated for school choice schemes.[[43]](#footnote-43) Similarly, families, churches, temples, and other agents in civil society are the primary agents for preservation or promotion of cultural goods, not the national government. The convergence model of justification allows that citizens might have reasons to allow the government to facilitate civil society organizations in these endeavors and that there might be appropriate convergence for endorsing these proposals around, e.g., liberal arts education, even if citizens do not share the same reasons. The convergence model therefore also seems to honor practices of real-world citizens, where State promotion of cultural goods or of liberal education can help sustain the preconditions for good public reasoning.

The value of the convergence approach, then, is global. It might be true that there is a point at which we cannot offer strictly public reasons – that is, reasons which are fully shared by the public – for embracing a particular account of political reasonability. Yet we can reject the need for an account of public reason to require such shared reasons and embrace an account of reasonability which depends on other factors. Specifically, I want to suggest briefly in concluding that the way I have argued for public justification of liberal arts education and promotion of cultural goods on the basis of a convergence model of justification is not incidentally tied to an account of civic virtue. Vallier, for example, focuses on civic trustas both a precondition for and the basis of public justification.[[44]](#footnote-44) Conversely, an account of public reasoning as involving dispositionsto engage in public reasoning on the basis of mutually intelligible reasons is closer to a classical virtue-based account of political prudence than that which requires an overlapping consensus of shared reasons and norms among all citizens – convergence can be conceived to foster the *civic virtues* which sustain public trust, rather than achieving consensus. Convergence gives us a richer potential account of these virtues than those proposed by Rawls.[[45]](#footnote-45) A convergence account of justification might thus allow us to mount a publicly reasonabledefense of *public reason* itself because – as in the realm of ethics – it is often easier to find convergence among our account of the virtues rather than in fully shared norms.

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