Beyond Political Liberalism

Toward a Post-Secular Ethics of Public Life

Troy Dostert

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One of the most pressing dilemmas in contemporary political theory concerns how we should conceive of political life in light of the challenges posed by moral diversity. When citizens with widely divergent ethical or religious convictions clash in public debate, how can we approach such disagreements constructively? How can we work toward a stable and legitimate basis for political life, given that we do not share the same presuppositions about what constitutes the proper end of human activity? And to what extent should space be given to particular groups or communities to pursue their own distinctive practices and way of life, even when these might in some respects be at odds with public purposes as currently understood? Conceptualizing what is at stake in moral disagreements in public life and determining an appropriate response to them are political tasks of the first order, daunting though they may be.

These challenges are especially acute when they concern religious differences. The convictions that animate the lives of religious citizens touch upon the most crucial matters: the nature of good and evil, the path to salvation, the substance of a virtuous life. Citizens of diverse religious faiths, as well as those without religious commitments, disagree profoundly over such questions. And these disagreements cannot be neatly detached from the stuff of politics; indeed, they often reveal themselves most sharply in public debate. To be sure, religious diversity is not the only significant kind of moral diversity in political life. While contentious debates over multicultural education, school prayer, gay marriage, or capital punishment are frequently
fueled by citizens’ disparate moral convictions, these kinds of disagreements do not always have religious differences at their core. Nevertheless, in many respects, the differences that separate citizens as members of religious communities with divergent constitutive understandings and practices do exemplify the challenges of moral diversity, and they are apparent in many of today’s most vexing public disagreements. How any conception of politics responds to the public presence of religious diversity is, therefore, one crucial test of its desirability.

The dominant approach to this question within contemporary liberal theory is that of political liberalism. Developed most fully and notably by John Rawls, political liberalism works within the tradition of theorizing the relationship between religion and politics initiated by John Locke in his work *A Letter Concerning Toleration* ([1689] 1983). Locke’s approach to securing tolerance and church-state separation involved establishing a firm boundary between the civic and private realms. Within the latter realm churches would be free to carry out their distinctive purpose (defined by Locke as seeking “the Salvation of Souls”), while within the former the state would govern authoritatively, in the interests of the commonwealth as a whole (39). Rawls and other political liberals continue this project by theorizing a basis for political cooperation that can allow citizens with widely disparate convictions and ways of life to support a properly configured public sphere. Once liberal societies reach agreement upon an “overlapping consensus” of shared political norms and values, a conception of “public reason” becomes available through which citizens may deliberate together about political essentials. The boundary between the public and nonpublic realms can thus be legitimately established, and citizens are given a clear way to differentiate their obligations *qua* citizens from those, religious or otherwise, that they may recognize in their nonpublic lives. Via the shared political language of public reason, public discourse can be guided straightforwardly by distinctly political values, thereby circumventing the discord that can be occasioned when citizens bring their more comprehensive and contestable convictions forward in public life. The challenges raised by religious diversity are thus conclusively settled, as public reason allows citizens to approach their disagreements in a spirit of commonality, without allowing their conflicting worldviews to complicate the attainment of a just political order.1

My project in this book involves challenging this approach to public life. By examining political liberalism’s conceptualization of religious diversity
and its strategy for responding to it, I question the desirability of managing this diversity through the device of liberal public reason, and I suggest that a politics less devoted to a narrowly circumscribed public realm will be better suited for religiously diverse liberal societies. Indeed, I seek to contest the fundamental logic of political liberalism—that religion as such constitutes a distinctive threat to public order—and instead argue that religious communities themselves have a great deal to offer in approaching the challenges of religious diversity, and moral diversity more generally, in a responsible manner. Stated simply, my argument is that it is through engaging our diversity directly, rather than seeking to control it, that we stand the best chance of negotiating public space successfully. And I offer an alternative to political liberalism with this aim in view.

Political Liberalism’s Appeal

It is not hard to appreciate why political liberalism has gained a substantial following. What it promises is a way to steer a course between two alternative theoretical frameworks, neither of which by itself appears to be fully compelling. The first is what has been called “perfectionist liberalism.” Defended in different forms by thinkers such as Joseph Raz and Ronald Dworkin, this approach emphasizes the distinctive ethical attributes of a liberal way of life, for instance individualism or personal autonomy, and defends liberal political arrangements as a way to encourage those attributes in citizens generally. Dworkin contends that “the most plausible philosophical ethics grounds a liberal faith,” and that “liberal equality does not preclude or threaten or ignore the goodness of the lives people live, but rather flows from and into an attractive conception of what a good life is” (2000, 242). Dworkin’s own conception of liberalism is premised upon his ideal of “ethical individualism,” which informs his particular defense of egalitarian justice, as well as his account of liberal citizens as self-determining beings (4–7). Similarly, Raz builds his defense of liberalism around the notion that personal autonomy is a “constituent element of the good life,” and that liberal states should design public policy with an eye toward helping citizens achieve it (1986, 408).

Perfectionist liberalism traces its lineage not through Locke’s Letter, with its primary emphasis on establishing a secure boundary between the political and the private spheres, but rather through thinkers such as John Stuart Mill
and Immanuel Kant. It draws upon a rich tradition of liberal philosophical thought on the nature of the good life, thereby offering a robust depiction of the value of the liberal ideal. But as political liberals have pointed out, this way of life will not appeal to all citizens equally. Charles Larmore notes that a liberal politics that privileges the value of autonomy is deeply at odds with the Romantic values of “belonging and custom,” and the life lived in obedience to a shared tradition (1990, 343–344). And Rawls stresses that a comprehensive commitment to autonomy or liberal individualism will inevitably prove to be “incompatible with other conceptions of the good, with forms of personal, moral, and religious life consistent with justice and which, therefore, have a proper place in a democratic society” (1985, 245). Would not the state’s acting upon a perfectionist conception of liberalism lead to the kinds of paternalism and coercion that liberals have long resisted, carried out (ironically) in the interests of attaining a more perfect liberal political order? A perfectionist liberalism appears to pave the way toward making liberalism nonliberal.

Political liberalism thus reaffirms the public/private distinction invoked by Locke and limits its emphasis to obtaining political norms with which to regulate the public sphere, as opposed to wider ethical ideals that would inevitably generate disagreement among citizens with diverse worldviews. The virtue of “reasonableness” that undergirds political liberalism’s conception of citizenship is considered a political virtue, connected to a political way of reasoning, and as such it may be very different from the way in which citizens reason personally about morality or ethics (Rawls 1996, 215). Similarly, while citizens must employ a version of political autonomy in their public lives, they are not obligated to view their nonpublic convictions and obligations through the lens of personal autonomy. They are free to regard those commitments as involving obedience to a shared faith or tradition (97–99, xlv–xlvi). At the same time, however, political liberals insist that while this vision of liberalism is strictly political and not perfectionist in nature, it is nevertheless built upon a moral foundation. Rawls, for instance, stresses that citizens must affirm their allegiance to liberal justice on moral grounds (1996, xl), and Larmore also is at pains to emphasize that political liberalism rests upon a “core morality” (1990, 346). Why is this important?

Establishing a liberal regime on a moral foundation allows political liberals to differentiate their approach from the other competing liberal frame-
work: modus vivendi liberalism. For modus vivendi liberals, political justification is pursued prudentially, in the hope of attaining provisional political agreements in societies deeply divided over the good life. What is most important is not that citizens share a commitment to particular political norms, let alone a commitment to a comprehensive way of life. Rather, it is simply to facilitate the negotiated compromises and strategic truces that allow citizens with widely disparate constitutive understandings to live amicably. Patrick Neal calls this “vulgar liberalism,” and defends it as a “chastened and minimal” liberalism best suited for polities in which citizens possess radically incommensurable worldviews (1997, 8). Similarly, John Gray argues that “the aim of modus vivendi cannot be to still the conflict of values. It is to reconcile individuals and ways of life honouring conflicting values to a life in common. We do not need common values in order to live together in peace. We need common institutions in which many forms of life can coexist” (2000, 5–6).

Modus vivendi liberalism clearly evinces a significant attentiveness to the moral diversity likely to be present in contemporary liberal societies, especially when contrasted with perfectionist liberalism. But for political liberals it gives up far too much. It seems to rule out, for instance, the shared societal commitment to distributive justice that characterized Rawls’s project in *A Theory of Justice*, a project that could only be successful if citizens were unified around the priority of social justice as a goal for liberal politics. Citizens whose allegiance to liberal justice involved “simply going along with it in view of the balance of political and social forces” would lack the deep-rooted attachment to social cooperation needed to realize liberal justice to the fullest extent (Rawls 1996, xl). What political liberalism seeks, in short, is “stability for the right reasons,” and modus vivendi liberalism cannot promise this (xliii).

In its commitment both to rejecting the paternalist temptation of perfectionist liberalism and its insistence upon the ideal of a shared moral commitment to justice and political stability, political liberalism promises a way to incorporate citizens with wide-ranging moral and religious commitments within the liberal project. It aims not merely for civic peace but for a realization of the goods of mutual respect and, even, civic friendship (Rawls 1997, 771). As such it is an inspiring vision. But for my purposes in this study, it presents two central difficulties. Both have substantial implications for the status of religious citizens and their role in public life.
Where Is the Politics in Political Liberalism?

A number of recent analyses of political liberalism have focused on whether its emphasis on stability and a shared moral foundation for political life results in an attenuated democratic politics. Roberto Alejandro suggests that Rawlsian politics “is so concerned with the exclusion of divisive issues that might threaten the stability of a well-ordered society and so interested in removing any contingency that might impair the orderly application of the principles of justice that it might engender a passive citizenry, one willing to silence its criticisms rather than risk the instability of the political order” (1998, 134). Stanley Fish contends that the principles embedded in political liberalism’s ostensibly overlapping consensus are just a way of blanching political life. Like all approaches to liberalism that trace their inspiration to Locke, political liberalism claims to establish a common point of view to govern the public realm that can transcend the struggle between incommensurable worldviews. But such a strategy inevitably purges political life of the motivations that give politics its driving force: it requires us to abstract from our histories, our deepest convictions, and the commitments that propel us to conceptualize and strive to bring about our visions of justice and the good. This can only be done “by turning the highest things into the most ephemeral things (higher in the sense of ‘airy’) and by making the operations of the public sphere entirely procedural, with no more content than the content of traffic signals” (Fish 1999, 12).

Political liberalism’s proceduralism is not limited to the workings of the public realm. It also shapes the manner in which political liberals consider the claims of those who may have reservations about its conception of politics. J. Judd Owen discusses the way in which political liberalism resists fully engaging the concerns of its critics, for if it did so “it would not then be on its own ground—the ground of reasonable democratic consensus—but rather on the ground of dogmatic assertion,” which would involve offering the kind of “comprehensive” claims, à la perfectionist liberalism, that political liberalism has declared off-limits to the public sphere (2001, 120). Similarly, John Tomasi wonders why political liberals seem unwilling to address the concerns of religious citizens who may worry about their particular traditions being eroded by the “spillover effects” of a public realm governed by liberal rights and norms. Shouldn’t political liberalism be more attentive to this
concern, given its purpose of accommodating a wide range of citizens with diverse views of the good life, including those who (while otherwise remaining reasonable) may have religious commitments that are in tension with some aspects of liberalism? (2001, 21–22, 33–39).

Tomasi suggests that political liberals’ neglect in this regard is largely a symptom of “the peculiarly narrow view most liberal theorists take concerning the boundaries of political theory.” If we limit our concerns to establishing a legitimate conception of liberal justice, political liberals maintain, we can then sidestep questions concerning nonpublic life and the kinds of personal lives citizens lead, and we need not reflect upon the effects liberal political arrangements might have on the shape of those lives (37). Political liberalism thus adopts a kind of official agnosticism with respect to the substance of citizens’ nonpublic convictions, and this radically restricts the scope of political liberals’ theorizing, and the kinds of political possibilities that are conceivable as a result. There is much to be said for this explanation, although I believe Tomasi is wrong to argue that political liberalism can do otherwise if it is to remain within its core presuppositions. Indeed, I will argue that political liberalism’s general devaluation of politics and its insistence upon securing social stability are both principled stances that work powerfully to inhibit democratic engagement. And as I will seek to show, this stance toward politics has serious implications for our ability to negotiate public space amid the competing claims of radically diverse religious communities.

Singling Out the “Problem” of Religion

Although political liberalism is committed to a hands-off approach when it comes to negotiating the claims of religious communities politically, it is not the case that political liberals are silent on the question of religion. Indeed, religion has become an increasingly prominent preoccupation within political liberal thought. This is especially the case with Rawls and Stephen Macedo, both of whom have focused substantial attention on how political liberalism functions with respect to religion. The paradigmatic question Rawls poses in *Political Liberalism* is indicative: “How is it possible for those affirming a religious doctrine that is based on religious authority, for example, the Church or the Bible, also to hold a reasonable political conception that supports a
just democratic regime?” (1996, xxxix). This emphasis is also reflected in the kinds of historical examples we find in political liberals’ accounts of politics; these frequently concern religious groups and their involvement in public life.5

That political liberals have shown more willingness to confront these matters is a welcome development and, indeed, a crucial task if they are to take seriously their ambition to craft a commodious politics. Yet there is an aspect of much of this theorizing that is highly troubling. Ashley Woodiwiss identifies a constitutive tendency within liberalism to “police” communities of faith, in the interests of preventing them from disrupting social unity (2001, 68–71, 76–81). Such an impulse can be seen as the product of a distinctive narrative, in which liberalism is seen as the guarantor of civic peace in the midst of internecine religious conflict. Locke’s project, on this view, is uniquely representative of liberalism as a political tradition. Political liberals exemplify this perspective, for when they write about religious diversity it is frequently with an eye toward controlling its politically “harmful” features.6

When citizens offer religious arguments in public debate, we must worry that they may be trying to colonize the public sphere with their particular convictions. This is not to say that political liberals seek simply to confine religious expression to the private realm, for they acknowledge occasions in which citizens’ religious arguments might work to support the overlapping consensus—for instance, if citizens can explain how their convictions are consistent with public reason. But such concessions serve only to make it clear that in order for religious citizens’ political activity to be consistent with liberal norms, it is incumbent upon them to ensure that their convictions are properly expressed, governed by the primary logic of public reason—to which their religious or ethical appeals must always be offered in service.

Political liberalism thus relies upon the preeminence of secular political values as a way to suppress the dangers of religion’s public presence. “Secular” here does not presuppose a self-consciously anti-religious worldview or explicit hostility to claims of religious faith. Indeed, in keeping with political liberalism’s commitment to steer clear of contentious religious disputes about the good life, such a position would be clearly out of keeping with political liberalism’s core principles.7 For political liberalism, secular values are merely those that have been purged of religious particularity; they are thus able to serve as political values suitable for public discourse in a morally diverse polity. Unless we as a society can agree upon the public sufficiency of these
values, political liberalism’s project collapses, for there is no longer a way to
guarantee the stability of the public sphere in the face of competing moral
or ethical claims that citizens might use to justify their political positions.
Political liberals thus advance a plausible claim to stay above the fray when
determining the relative truth value of religious ways of life. But given the
way in which religious claims are thus forbidden from contributing toward
the definition of public ideals, faith communities are clearly faced with the
imperative of tempering any assertions that might throw into question the
self-sufficiency of secular political values or that might advance their faith
tradition as offering a distinctive approach toward resolving public policy di-
lemmas. In this way, political liberalism assumes a hegemonic secular stance
toward the political appeals of faith communities, even while refraining from
endorsing a larger, more fully articulated account of “secularism” as a basis
for its approach to politics.

When political liberalism’s insistence upon the secular as a way to regu-
late public discourse is considered alongside its tendency to devalue demo-
cratic engagement, the difficulties this raises for an account of politics that
would truly aspire to be a “home” for diverse communities of faith become
evident. Are liberal justice and social stability fully desirable if, as a means to
those ends, citizens are not welcomed in bringing their deepest convictions
to bear in negotiating public space or defining public purposes? This is not
simply a question of fairness to both religious and nonreligious citizens.
Given the role that religious communities have historically played in the
American context through shaping public space and public ideals, are we
now to look upon this involvement as being inherently suspect, something to
be carefully controlled or monitored? Restricting religion’s role in political
life may not be as beneficial as political liberalism would have us believe.

The Objectives and Structure of This Book

While political liberalism’s liabilities are significant, they are ultimately in-
structive. It is through a careful engagement with political liberalism that we
can envision a route to a more compelling politics. My claim is that we can
develop a politics better able to work through the challenges of moral diver-
sity if we suspend political liberalism’s assumption that managing moral
diversity, and religion in particular, is the proper strategy. In other words, it
is by inverting the logic of political liberalism—by welcoming democratic engagement over the good life, with all of its attendant messiness and uncertainty—that we stand the best chance of responding to our differences appropriately. Modus vivendi liberals are right to contend that in a context of radical moral diversity, the shape of public space must be negotiated rather than determined conclusively. We should proceed not by policing citizens’ convictions but rather by bringing them forward and attempting to forge compromises and tentative agreements with those convictions in full view.

Yet I would not wish to suggest that political liberals’ concerns about social stability are wholly unwarranted or that their desire for a politics characterized by civic friendship and moral commitment is misplaced. An agonistic politics without any guiding norms whatsoever could harmfully exacerbate social divisions, rendering the attainment of worthy political ideals a much more difficult undertaking. It is for this reason that I will offer an ethics of discourse that can allow us to envision a politics involving both significant contestation and a disciplined search for shared norms. As I will make clear, however, such an ethics must be a post-secular ethics: it must involve jettisoning the presuppositions that political liberalism relies upon for circumscribing religion’s presence in the public realm. Once we do that, we are then freed to search out other moral resources for guiding political life—including those of theology.

I draw from theological sources for my constructive project for two main reasons. First, considering the substantial literature on public discourse written from a theological perspective better enables us to move beyond the view that religion is intrinsically problematic for political life, as well as the corollary premise that secular political values should be used to regulate public discourse in a liberal society. Because these understandings have come to play such a prominent role in liberal theorizing in general, they can hinder our ability to consider other ways of conceptualizing the public realm. As John Milbank has forcefully suggested, the way we theorize the political is always conditioned by the narratives we rely upon—it is never as simple as analyzing the social as a thing in itself. We cannot “‘round upon’ society as a finite object, and give an exhaustive inventory, valid for all time, of the essential categorical determinants for human social existence” (1990, 64). If we are governed by the background assumption that religion constitutes a persistent threat to civic order, or that relying upon the primacy of a secular political
language is a self-evident way to solve that problem, our conception of the political will be limited by those (often unquestioned) assumptions.

Second, if we are to take seriously the possibility of democratic moral engagement as a norm for political life, then it becomes crucial that we find ways in which citizens and their communities can sustain the practices needed for such a politics. Ecclesiological theology (theological reflection on the church as a community of faith) represents a sophisticated body of thought concerning how churches’ social practices can themselves generate powerful and compelling political possibilities. By considering the work of Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder as well as the theological insights particular to the black church during the civil rights struggle, I suggest that these resources have much to offer by way of articulating and demonstrating the desirability of a post-secular ethics of moral engagement.

It is important to note that I am addressing these concerns within the context of American society and its longstanding struggles over the definition of public meanings and ideals. This is a significant qualification; the ways in which we understand the shape and limits of public life are crucially informed by the historical experiences of particular polities. As my analysis will show, the development of liberalism in America has been subject to a great deal of ongoing contestation, as communities with different moral convictions have sought to negotiate the challenges of sharing public space. This was as true of the eighteenth-century debates over religious freedom as it was of the twentieth-century struggle over civil rights. This has helped to give American liberalism its distinctive character, as it has always been subject to competing understandings and interpretations. Indeed, I would suggest that it is by remaining attentive to the widest possible range of perspectives, even nonliberal ones, that liberalism possesses what potential it has to serve as a suitable framework for a noncoercive and capacious politics that can steer clear of totalizing and oppressive political possibilities.

Seen in this light, much of the difficulty with political liberalism is its reluctance to concede the contestability and provisionality of liberal norms—to acknowledge that these depend for their vitality on the ongoing process whereby particular moral communities offer their distinctive moral and political visions in attempts to refine, reconceive, and give new meanings to political purposes. By offering a vision of liberalism that is safely immune from this democratic contestation, secure behind the static values of the
overlapping consensus, political liberalism leaves us with a rigidified liberal politics unable to allow itself to be informed by broader ideals that are often indispensable to the viability and dynamism of political life. Rawlsian public reason thus works to foreclose possibilities of transformation within the liberal tradition, precisely by insulating core political values from the “corrupting” influence of religious or other moral languages that might be brought to bear in altering or developing our understanding of liberal political ideals. Certain of the adequacy of their particular conception of liberalism, political liberals deny that democratic engagement is necessary for navigating our way through the thicket of moral diversity. I contend, in contrast, that if we wish to remain both hopeful of approaching our moral disagreements constructively and open to the discovery of new political understandings and ideals, an ethics of engagement is our best option.

The chapters of the book can be divided into two main parts. In chapters 1 through 3, I consider political liberalism’s approach to religious diversity, focusing principally on the thought of Rawls and Macedo. I discuss Rawls most extensively, both because of his prominence as the foremost and most respected proponent of political liberalism and because of the breadth and comprehensiveness of his analysis.

In chapter 1 I analyze political liberalism’s strategy in managing moral diversity and the difficulties it raises for democratic politics. In chapter 2 I develop this criticism further, by looking specifically at Rawls’s understanding of religious liberty. I consider the issues raised by the widely discussed Mozert v. Hawkins court case, a religious free-exercise dispute that involved several Christian fundamentalist families who were denied permission to have their children exempted from a reading curriculum they found to be in conflict with their religious convictions. Here I will turn to Macedo, whose analysis of the case from political liberalism’s perspective reveals the ways in which political liberalism’s resistance to democratic contestation renders it poorly equipped to recognize and respond to the challenges religious communities can sometimes face in negotiating their relationship with the wider liberal polity.

In chapter 3 I consider the implications of political liberalism’s secular conception of public reason and its requirement that religion’s role in public life should be constrained. I contend that, despite Rawls’s and other political liberals’ assertions to the contrary, this ideal of public reason entails very sig-
Significant restrictions on the presence of religious communities in public debate. Moreover, it results in an impoverished public discourse, as communities with ennobling moral visions are precluded from offering those visions fully and compellingly.

Chapters 4 through 6 present the book’s constructive project of formulating a post-secular ethics of moral engagement. For the first step in this process I devote chapter 4 to assessing the resources offered by three theological thinkers: David Tracy, Richard John Neuhaus, and Yoder. Each makes an argument for the positive role religious communities might play in public life. Of the three, however, only Yoder provides an account that is sufficiently able to move beyond the problematic presuppositions that animate political liberalism. Both Tracy and Neuhaus see the function of public discourse as maintaining shared conceptions of rationality, and in that light they make moves that parallel political liberalism’s own restrictive view of public reason. Because Yoder is able to articulate a vision of inter-community discourse that does not rely upon a singular framework for public reasoning, Yoder offers the most valuable resources for my own conception of public life.

In chapter 5, I locate additional resources for developing this political vision, by way of the particular lessons to be drawn from the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 60s. The public witness of Martin Luther King Jr. and his fellow activists on the front lines of the struggle for racial justice reveals the promise and potential of a discourse in which our most fundamental convictions are linked to the pursuit of justice and shared public norms. Because the movement did not seek to offer support for political values that could be articulated in a “reasonable” secular language but instead brought its particular, religiously derived ideals forward to refashion and transform public meanings, it offers a valuable case study for considering how a post-secular ethics of public life might be conceptualized and sustained.

Finally, in chapter 6 I articulate and defend the distinctive practices at the heart of my ethical conception. What is critical to this approach is its emphasis on a genuine engagement among our moral traditions, a practice that allows us to present our political visions fully and sincerely, as opposed to subordinating them to a secular public language. With this approach in view, I reconsider the challenges of the Mozert v. Hawkins case. I argue that, rather than insisting on political liberalism’s unyielding standard of reasonableness, a response of creativity and forbearance toward those like the Mozert families.
who find themselves at odds with public school curricula will better serve to ameliorate such conflicts. It will also help us avoid the divisive and tragic outcomes that can result when moral diversity is managed rather than negotiated.

I then explore two recent debates that suggest ways in which the ideals of religious communities, far from posing a threat to public debate, can provide indispensable resources for coming to terms with pressing public policy concerns. By considering the Jubilee 2000 movement for international debt relief and two recent analyses of the abortion debate, I argue that a politics of moral engagement, provided it is sustained by a disciplined and sincere attempt to discern what our moral communities can offer the search for public purposes, is preferable to one in which their insights are regarded with distrust or suspicion.

A conception of citizenship adequate to the challenges of moral diversity must entail the courage to present our core convictions truthfully, while being animated by a spirit of generosity and solicitude toward the contributions that very different communities might make to our political understandings. Developing such a conception will require great political imagination and should itself be informed by the insights of different traditions and worldviews, as well as the political experience of a wide range of moral communities. In what follows I offer my contribution to this project.