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Individual Values, Public Reasoning and the Promotion of Social Cohesion

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VERY PRELIMINARY VERSION
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Abstract: This study aims to address the topic of the so-called public reasoning focusing, more specifically, on the discussion about the underlying individual political values that characterize a person as being rational and reasonable and the idea of an "overlapping consensus". As Rawls (1997) argue, "a citizen engages in public reason, when he or she deliberates within a framework of what he or she sincerely regards as the most reasonable political conception of justice". Furthermore, the possibility of consensus about political conceptions of justice that guide individuals' behavior and its feasibility given the natural tendencies of human behavior will be examined. As different interpretations of the idea of public reason yield sharply diverse views regarding the duties of citizens and public officials, the importance of moral altruistic values to guide individual behaviors and thinking processes are also not consensual in the literature. Hence, another main venture of this article will be to argue that, in order to have a real thriving public reasoning, the referred conceptualization of justice have to be composed of a more compassionate set values. The authors expect to conceive an articulated perspective on how individual behavior can act in accordance with an ideal of citizenship, thereby signaling a path for possible political initiatives to facilitate the type of behavior and rationale pattern that makes an individual reasonable in a sense of caring about others and going beyond a mere egoistic state of mind. Through a counterpointed synthesized examination of different perspectives, in the light of philosophers such as Rawls, Habermas and Nussbaum, the article will try to foresee alternatives, taken from behavioral economics insights, by which a virtuous public reason can be encouraged, as to enable a society to increase its social cohesion and its human development.

Keywords: Public reasoning; overlapping consensus; behavior economics; policies

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1. Introduction

The legitimization of a political system is not only a matter of practical partial public consensus/support. If we take the approach of social choice theory, in which collective choice is aimed by the adoption of rules for aggregating individual's preferences, we can easily see that the conditions for the existence of a political system that respects basic human rights of freedom and equality have to surpass the mere recognition of individual preferences through vote. Majorities sometimes may have disturbed and problematic understandings about the world that are incompatible with democracy. Take for example, the 2012-2013 Muslim Brotherhood government in Egypt; or the more recent apparent support for Donald Trump's campaign based on fear and violence. These and other events outstand the importance of individual values being in accordance with basic democratic principles.

"The ultimate guarantee for individual liberty may rest not on rules of social choice but on developing individual values that respect each other's personal choices."

(Sen, 1997: 289)

The ideal of a liberal democratic society is based upon a set of conditions that enables a person to express her own ideas as she wants, insofar as respecting others liberties. Moreover, the importance of political freedoms are not only as natural basic capabilities for humans as social creatures that value unrestrained participation in political and social activities. It is valuable also as a potential instrumental mechanism whereby rulers have the incentive to listen to what people want if they have to face their criticism and their support in elections. Furthermore, it may have a constructive aspect: the conceptualization of what a society values and prioritizes is directly related to the practices of open discussion, debate, criticism, and dissent according to what informed and reflected choices emerge (Sen, 1999:152-154).

How these freedoms are exercised is crucial to their effectiveness and furthermore to their alignment to the core idea of democracy; that is to say, political freedoms should be exercised in accordance with values that represent and conjointly certifies the maintenance of democracy.

The article will have four major sections. The first concerns the ideal of public reason and how it connects to that of an "overlapping consensus". The second makes a bridge between the concept of behavior present in the philosophical notions of reasonableness and rationality with a scrutinized reflection about the so-called burdens of judgement and how they difficult the prospects for consensus. The third will then go deeper in how humans actually behave, taking into consideration our ways of thinking and the importance of values and the in which practical reason occur. Finally, in the fourth section, the basis structured in the previous sections will help to identify possible policies for promoting consensus – and therefore social cohesion – by the examination of some interesting policies from the behavioral economics insights already in practice around in some countries.

2. Why Public Reason?

One of the expected outcomes of a democratic political system is the coexistence of a plurality of reasonable irreconcilable comprehensive doctrines [3], religious, philosophical, and moral. As is the normal result of its culture of free institutions, this pluralism can represent an impediment for the public discussion of fundamental political questions since the imposing norms of some of these doctrines cannot be reasonably accepted by others.

In this scenario, the conception of a framework, based in basic moral and political values by which these discussions can occur in a feasible and constructive way, becomes a necessary path to undertake in order to enable a democracy to be legitimized through the active and reasonable relation of its citizens with the government and with one another.

2.1 The conceptualization of Public Reason

The idea of public reason gained considerable prominence in contemporary moral and political philosophy through the work of John Rawls. For him, the idea has a defined structure that can be described in five major aspects. First, the fundamental questions

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[3] The terms doctrine and conception are used with the same meaning as in Ralws (1997:766): "I shall use the term doctrines for comprehensive views of all kinds and the term conception for a political conception and its component parts, such as the conception as the person as citizen."

about political justice to which it applies. Second, the persons to whom it applies (government officials and candidates for public office). Third, the content as defined by a family of political conceptions of justice. Fourth, the application of these conceptions in the discussions of coercive norms to be enacted in the form of legitimate law for a democratic people. And citizens checking that the principles from their conceptions of justice satisfy the criterion of reciprocity.

Additionally, he assert that the reason is public in three ways:

> "as the reason of free and equal citizens, it is the reason of the public; its subject is the public good concerning questions of fundamental political justice, which questions are of the kinds, constitutional essentials and matters of basic justice; and its nature and content are public, being expressed in public reasoning by a family of reasonable political conceptions of justice reasonably thought to satisfy the criterion of reciprocity"

(Rawls, 1997: 766-767).

The concept of public reason would apply then to political discussion of fundamental questions that occurs in what he calls the "public political forum". In there is comprised the discourses of judges in their decisions – especially the judges of a supreme court -, the discourse of government officials – especially chief officials and legislators, and the discourse of candidates for public office and their campaign managers, especially in their public oratory, party platforms, and political statements and other groups who support them. It also applies to official forums – to legislators when they speak in the floor parliament and to the executive in its public acts and pronouncements; to the judiciary and "above all" to a supreme court in a constitutional democracy with judicial view, once the justices have to explain and justify their decisions as based on their understanding on the constitutions and relevant statutes and precedents. In addition, the idea of public reason holds for how citizens are to vote in elections when constitutional essentials and matters of basic justice are at stake - from what is called the "duty of civility". This implies that the manner in which a person goes on voting has to integrate a justificatory processes on fundamental political issues made in consonance with public values and public standards. This duty consists of a moral value that is imposed by the ideal of citizenship, which is a necessary condition for the legitimization of political power exercised over one another (e.g. voting for legislation).

This idea of civic virtue should be extended to the "political relationship between citizens within the basic structure of society" (Rawls, 1993:217-218). Citizens, as

reasonable and rational, should be ready to explain the basis of their actions to one another in terms each could reasonably expect that others might validate as consistent within their freedom and equality. The participation in a democratic system as a citizen implies an understanding of how to behave oneself in accordance with an ideal of public reason (Rawls, 1993).

The broader sphere in which civil society will engages with its many different comprehensive doctrines are where some central aspects of a democracy should manifest. In fact, Rawls calls attention that "sometimes those who appears to reject the idea of public reason actually mean to assert the need for full and open discussion in the background culture" (Rawls, 1997:78). To glimpse the possibility of an open discussion in such a large sphere of public life, a reasonable overlapping consensus of comprehensive doctrines, a notion coined by Rawls' Political Liberalism (1993), needs to take place. All doctrines, both religious and nonreligious, support a political conception of justice guaranteeing a constitutional democratic society whose principles, ideals, and standards satisfy the criterion of reciprocity. Subsequently, a society based on these principles is affirmed through corresponding political institutions. Furthermore, doctrines, which do not support equal basic rights and liberties for all citizens, being, hence, out of this consensus, are not reasonable (Rawls, 1997:801). One question to keep in mind: How might the political conceptions that respect basic liberties and freedoms as well as the criterion of reciprocity – comprised in reasonable comprehensive doctrines - reach such a broad consensus in a society?

When referring to political values, Rawls splits the moral person into the public identity of a citizen and the non-public identity of a private person shaped by her individual conceptions of the good. These two identities constitute the reference point for two domains, one constituted by rights of political participation and of communication, the other protected by basic liberal rights. The constitutional protection of the second of these identities enjoys priority (Habermans, 1992: 129).

The individual approach to political life need therefore to be a reasonable one. For that to happen he needs to have two main characteristics. First, he "should stand ready to offer fair terms of social cooperation between equals, and abide by these terms if others do also, even should it be to his advantage not to". Second, a reasonable individual "recognizes and accepts the consequences of the burdens of judgement, which leads to

the idea of reasonable toleration in a democratic society" (Rawls, 1997:805). There are certain restraints within a democracy; through these, individual's behavior qualifies to engage in the public sphere by expression of active citizenship - whether by voting or any other action that in itself is characterized as "political". This restriction in the social behavior of citizens has a clear association with Scaldon's concept of "contractualism" (1998: 153):

> "An act is wrong if its performance under the circumstances would be disallowed by any set of principles for the general regulation of behavior that no one could reasonably reject as a basis for informed, unforced, general agreement."

The idea of public reason serves as a platform in which a set of deeply specified moral and political values serves to determine a constitutional democratic government's relation to its citizens and their relation one another. In order for this dialogue to flourish, people need to be acquainted with certain traits of engagement necessary for them to use if they want to participate in the public debate. In other words, an individual needs to have the ability to rationalize not only on a mere disregard self-interest manner but - further along in respect for others manifested preferences and visions - also striving to find a way to articulate reasonable ideas not neglecting others reasonable interests as well.

One might notice that, in the modern world, these types of rationales are not seen as often as a "reasonable" person would probably find ideal. Therefore, we must start investigating how they are forged. In parallel with Sen's critic on the "theory of reveled preference"[4], those actions of thinking deliberation are a manifestation not only a particular set of individual preferences but of a series of variables that have to do with circumstances that vary from the weather to the setting; the psychological traits and momentary mood swings. To understand how the idea of public reason might be of good use in the improvement of society, we need, first, to understand how such a pattern of reasonable deliberation happens, given the characteristics of human conduct.

This characterization will support the next section in which a more detailed account of human behavior will be organized.

3. Human Behavior

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[4] Behaviour and the Concept of Preference (Sen, 1973)

Now, we shall try to go deeper into understanding how a person really thinks and acts. After this, it will be possible to get a closer look on what it takes a person to act reasonably and for us to envision how society and circumstances might help to improve the frequency of this desired outcome.

3.1 The Reasonable and the Rational

Let us begin distinguishing rational and reasonable behavior by a very acute quotation from W.M. Sibley (1953: 554-560), used by Rawls in his "Political Liberalism":

> "knowing that people are rational we do not know the ends they will pursue, only that they will pursue them intelligently. Knowing that people are reasonable were others are concerned, we know that they are willing to govern their conduct by a principle they and others can reason in common; and reasonable people take into consideration the consequences of their actions on other's well-being."

In a democracy, to be reasonable is to be willing to propose principles and standards as fair terms of cooperation among equals, and to abide by them willingly, given the assurance that others will likewise do. However, more than a legal proposition, it is a choice of action that present when the opportunity arises. To be reasonable is not to go against rationality; rather is to deny with egoism and is related to the disposition to act morally. Still, certain judgements can be attributed to each. Through rationality, people have to balance their various ends and estimate their appropriate place in their way of life. On the other hand, through reasonableness they must assess the strength of peoples' claims, not only against their own claims, but also against one another, or on their common practices and institutions. Moreover, there is the reasonable as it applies to their beliefs and schemes of thought, or the reasonable as appraising their use of their theoretical (and not our moral and practical) powers (Rawls, 1993:49).

3.2 The Burdens of Judgement

The expectation of truth that commonly is present in political discussions is often also misleading and it makes individuals settle for a pre-conceived and superficial opinion. Furthermore, there are certain subjects in which disagreement will occur, not because of misunderstandings and superficiality but as a consequence of their intrinsic complexity. Hence, the reasonable person has a second basic characteristic that is the "willingness to recognize the burdens of judgment and to accept their consequences for the use of public reason in directing the legitimate exercise of political power in a constitutional regime" (Rawls, 1993:54).

These "burdens", in their more obvious sources, are covered in Rawls (1993: 56 - 57):

"a. The evidence - empirical and scientific - bearing on the case is conflicting and complex, and thus hard to assess and evaluate."

"b. Even where we agree fully about the kinds of considerations that are relevant, we may disagree about their weight, and so arrive at different judgments."

"c. To some extent all our concepts, and not only moral and political concepts, are vague and subject to hard cases; and this indeterminacy means that we must rely on judgment and interpretation (and on judgments about interpretations) within some range (not sharply specifiable) where reasonable persons may differ."

"d. To some extent (how great we cannot teil) the way we assess evidence and weigh moral and political values is shaped by our total experience, our whole course of life up to now; and our total experiences must always differ."

"e. Often there are different kinds of normative considerations both sides of an issue and it is difficult to make an overall assessment"

"f. System of social institutions is limited in the values it can admit so that some selection must be made from the full range of moral and political values that might be realized… Many hard decisions may seem to have no clear answer."

Burdens of judgement are sources of reasonable disagreement that can happen from opposing views, which are in accordance with democratic principles (e.g. reasonable comprehensive doctrines). Let us analyze some of them more in depth.

From (a). The scope of the domain of information needed in order to have a clear and robust understanding of the particularities of some problem is almost always not satisfied. In fact, most decisions are made in a very restricted informational domain. Naturally, people often take stands with a very restricted set of information. In most decisions the circumstances, within which they are confined to, limit their ability to devise robust judgements. In Sen (2002: 463):

"What we can observe depends on our position vis-à-vis the objects of observation".

Sen calls this phenomenon "positional objectivity". From (b) and (c). In scientific realms, a superposition of ideas assembled in a critical and synthesized manner would then be a way of reducing the positional bias from a particular perspective taken from a specific position. Nevertheless, the previously conceived knowledge and the type of reasoning the researcher is able to use, defines this so-called "trans-positional" rationalization. Albeit, the imminent threat of emergence and/or display of competing lines of reasoning, has the potential to supplement a particular hegemonic stablished understanding, characterizing a process that can be self-correcting over time. However – from (e) -, sometimes different normative considerations will considerably reduce the

possibility of a dialectic turn out from divergent perspectives. Even when there is no proper normative issue, the different researches approaches may happen in such a disparate way as to reduce the likelihood of complementation between them or superposition of one over another for a matter of practicality. On the other hand, sometimes the results of studies begin, at a certain point, to conciliate, arriving, ultimately, at the similar conclusions. As consensus becomes increasingly evident, the public discussion that reflect in public action becomes a matter of reasonableness and "accessibility" of information for citizens and government representatives.

From (d). First, consider Intuitionism in ethics. It sustains that it is not possible to assess the plausibility of weights for problems by a moral criteria that establishes their reasonableness. Thus, it advocates for a plurality of first principles (of justice) in regard to which it is possible only to say what it seems to us as the more adequate way to balance these weights. In Ralws' conception of justice as fairness, the role of intuitionism is limited by a certain choice situation – the so-called original position. From this theoretical place, individuals would try to balance the principles of justice. However, in everyday life, individuals' deliberation are subject to their own position – as it was seen above – and it is hard to see this abstraction occurring in everyone's subjective balance of weight for in every ordinary judgment. Why? This process happens in what we will see as the "deliberative system" and our day-to-day ordinary choices and decisions happens in great part in the automatic system. In addition, emotions play a central role in decision weighs, as we will see in the next section.

From (f). Tolerance comes also with the understanding of the frailty of fixed conceptions as accurate descriptions of the "one and only" truth. In fact, it is a central characteristic of conflicts between divergent religious views to deny the existence of doubt, once this would damage their faith. On the other hand, sometimes the diversity of religious faiths can be a strength for stability and peace. Voltaire brought attention to a particular occasion in when he was in Britain - after he had been released from the Bastille from two-weeks of incarceration and nine years before he had spent eleven months in the prison. (TO BE EXPLAINED)

Still, individuals are much prone to have their character shaped by the environment within which they are born and raised in. Of course when said by a major actor of the fight for human rights in a country tinted by the horror of apartheid, the message becomes considerably more compelling:

> "No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite."

> (Mandela, "A Long Walk to Freedom", 1994)

Given the natural complexities of certain issues, especially those in which a society must take a stand by making a decision of action and selecting priorities, the hardship of bringing about overlapping consensus becomes palpable.

4. **How Humans actually behave?**

In order to envision a possible path for bringing overlapping consensus about democratic political values, is necessary to take a close look at how do citizens actually behave.

Behavior Economics tell us that humans thinks in two ways. One is slow, effortful, based on reasoning and considers a broad set of relevant factors (wide frame) reflective – the so-called "deliberative system. The other, is effortless, associative, intuitive and considers what automatically comes to mind (narrow frame) – the automatic system. Furthermore, there is social thinking. As social beings, individuals are influenced by social preferences, social networks, social identities, and social norms influence individuals. Most people care about what those around them are doing and how they fit into their groups, and they imitate the behavior of others almost automatically.

Usually, people have social preferences for fairness and reciprocity and possess a cooperative spirit. These traits can play into both good and bad collective outcomes; societies that are high in trust, as well as those that are high in corruption, require extensive amounts of cooperation.

Through the understanding of the most natural behaviors given particular situation, it is possible to see the relationship between different groups and their relationships.

> "What is natural and intuitive in a given situation is not the same for everyone: different cultural experiences favor different intuitions about the meaning of situations, and new situations become intuitive as new skills are acquired."
>
> (Kahneman, 2003)

One of the central biases, identified by behavioral economic theory - invoked a few paragraphs earlier – is called "accessibility". This alludes to a particular characteristic of human thought to make judgements utilizing disposable information that they can easily

access in their minds. Often there is even a heuristic attribute which server as a way to answer a relative complex question with a simplified intuitive one. This process of selecting an attribute value occurs mostly in the automatic system. In psychological terms:

"The intent to judge a target attribute initiates a search for a reasonable value"

(Kahneman and Friedrich, 2002)

This search can be quickly end when a plausible value is easily identified by memory or a recent event. In cases where the information is not immediately found, the search will bring out other values (memories) and conceptually and associatively related. So vacuums left by questions not answered automatically will be filled by tracking related attributes. This substitution occurs when the search for an answer ends up being assisted by the mapping of various factors linked to the main element, under the conditions that the target in question (answer) is relatively inaccessible, there is a semantically associated attribute highly available and critical System operations reflexive not reject the replacement of the heuristic attribute (Kahneman, Frederick, 2002).

The central characteristic of humans is not that they reason poorly but that they often act intuitively. Agent's behavior "is not guided by what they are able to compute, but by what they happen to see at a given moment" (Kahneman, 2003:1469).

Through their intuitive thinking, individuals act upon a pre-conceived understanding that reflects their devised mind-frame. This intersubjective structure, in fact, has a clear connection with the idea of a comprehensive doctrine. Moreover, the extent to which these doctrines can be characterized as reasonable has a deep connection to what is called by Barbara Herman "moral contingents of upbringing", as she explained in her Tenner Lectures on Human Values (1998):

> "To a large extent, contingencies of upbringing determine what we are like as moral agents. Parents pass on or produce psychic deformations that have morally untoward effects. The specific moral values one grows up into are social values, some of which are decent and wellfounded, while others are derived from unjust or morally limited institutions. Persons thus arrive at maturity with some virtues, but also with faults they inherit, weaknesses they may not be prepared to resist, and values that may not be adequate to the moral tasks they will come to face. The circumstances of moral agency thus open a gap between the facts of character and the requirements of moral competence and responsibility."

4.1 The Importance of Values

Along with the discussions made above about the nature of human behavior, the importance of values as drivers of practical and psychological actions must be brought into closer examination, in parallel with Herman's and Nussbaun's contributions.

The theory of "Basic Human Values" (Schwartz, 2012) identifies ten basic personal values that are recognized across cultures. It identifies ten motivationally distinct types of values and specifies the dynamic relations among them. Some values conflict with one another (e.g., benevolence and power) whereas others are compatible (e.g., conformity and security). The "structure" of values refers to these relations of conflict and congruence among values. (TO BE CONTINUED)

4.2 How does practical reasoning occur?

Open, broad discussions about politics and reason can sometimes seem incompatible. The way by which the political debate commonly appeals to the wide public reveals a problematic overlaying of emotions to reason. These was of the points that worried Plato about the conception of full democracy. He once wrote that:

"Popular acclaim will attend on the man who tells the people what they truly want to hear rather than what truly benefits them"

Some interesting features of rationality and judgement were already exposed in the previous subsections. The positional framing of circumstances, the importance of intuitive judgement for our day-to-day life, the confirmatory bias. They bring to light a much more acute vision of human behavior.

Utilitarian rationality that of the man machine, clearly mismatches with practical reason. Even the idealization of a rational person, cannot neglect the importance of emotions, for example. Nussbaum, in her celebrated "Love's Knowledge" account, invokes Aristotelian rationale of the intrinsic relation between practical rationality and emotion. (TO BE DEVELOPED)

5. A Political Approach of Behavior Change

Now we should see how this could possibly serve as guiding lines for public policy. Recently the approach of behavior change has gained expression, specially, through the recent 2015 World Development Report "Mind, Society and Behavior. The report shows a series of political measures to address issues related specifically to certain patterns of behavior that inhibit the development of society.

(EXAMPLES)

- Pro-social incentives for altruistic behavior.

- What to do when corruption is the norm.

- Entertainment Education

- Mobilizing Communities to Change Social Norms

- Changing mindsets (mental models) through brief interventions

- Constructing a new sense of Collective Citizenship and Civic Engagement.

6. Final Remarks

In this article, we expect to argue that, in order to have a thriving democracy, compassion needs to guide citizens' behavior. Once we understand how humans behave, a clearer path to promote citizenship may present itself naturally. Therefore, the idea of an overlapping consensus can be expanded to the flourishing of a broad sense of moral responsibility with social development. Especially in the developing countries, there needs to be an active participation of civil society and of government that exposes persons with moral ideals and with the major challenges that society face. A pragmatic approach to policies through the lights of the previous sections will show how behavior change for social cohesion is attainable through smart and inexpensive measures inspired in other initiatives from that are already in course in countries from around the world.

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