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The Epistemic Dimension of Reasonableness

1.   Justificatory Dilemma

Political liberalism faces an intrinsic tension within its theoretical framework. The attempt to provide a strictly political account of the justificatory framework for liberal theories of justice gives rise to a dilemma between two aspects of the justificatory procedure. On the one hand, the philosophical side demands that the procedure of justification provides a sound argument granting the normativity of the whole structure; on the other hand, practical constraints involving a major focus on the actual circumstances of justice and on the fact of pluralism calls for a less idealized account of public justificatory procedures. In order to develop a procedure of justification consistent with both commitments, Rawls (1993: 10-12) claims that the philosophical argument for justifying principles of justice should be **freestanding**; i.e. completely detached from any specific comprehensive doctrine. Yet the arguments that inform the public – and freestanding – justification should be consistent with different theories of the good life, so that the resulting political principles might obtain support from different moral perspectives. It follows from this tension that any attempt, by a strictly political account of liberalism, to provide freestanding arguments for justifying the political system will end up facing a <u>dilemma between stability for the right reasons and pluralism</u>[1]. The more the theory respects the fact of pluralism, employing strictly freestanding arguments, the more the theory loses philosophical depth and consequently does not grant the stability for the right reasons. Thus, it might look like political liberalism has reached a dead end. Either political liberalism accepts to face the actual circumstances of justice here and now and therefore becomes inclined to focus its attention more on the issue of the actual consent than on the quest for a philosophical normative argument, or it decides to overlook the fact of pluralism by re-affirming the validity of liberalism as a true – and philosophically justified – theory of justice.

Many authors (Eberle 2002; Talisse 2009; Maffettone 2010; Quong 2011; Gaus 2011) have recognized this dilemmatic outcome of the justificatory paradigm of political liberalism and have worked on normative solutions that might avert it. Most commonly, such authors have focused on the public reason debate; in this paper my goal is instead to address this justificatory dilemma from the perspective of moral epistemology. In order to do so, let's reframe the justificatory dilemma in a way well suited for an

epistemic analysis. Examining the dualistic aspects of liberal theories of justification means, at the epistemic level, wondering how a justification of political principles that is freestanding, might anyway achieve the necessary robustness (see D'Agostino 1996 and Gaus 1996). **Robustness** is an epistemic notion according to which a "theory T1 is robust vis-a-vis T2 to the extent that changes in T2 — including the total rejection of T2 in favor of some competing theory T2' — do not weaken the justification of T1. Robustness is to be contrasted with sensitivity; to the extent that the justification of T1 is affected by changes in T2 T1 is sensitive to T2" (Gaus, 1996: 6). The regulative ideal that political liberalism tries to respect is that of providing a public justification of political principles that demonstrates how these principles can achieve robustness in relation to extremely different comprehensive doctrines. If a public justification fulfills the task of making liberal tenets robust vis-à-vis a wide variety of comprehensive views, these theories say, then political liberalism will be justified through a procedure that: a. it is philosophically adequate; b. it respects the fact of pluralism and the variety of comprehensive doctrines held by citizens. However, the attempt to grant political theories the adequate robustness implies different drawbacks that, again, calls for the dilemmatic outcomes of political liberalism. One the one hand, if the procedure of justification has to be freestanding vis-à-vis a wide menu of comprehensive views, then the array of philosophical arguments that can be employed into the justification is extremely reduced. An actually freestanding justification of political theories of justice would result to be almost "empty", given the necessity to avert the reference to comprehensive ideals and values (Drowkin 2000; Galston 2002; Habermas 1995). On the other hand, a freestanding justification of political theories lives room for questions concerning the necessary motivational force that this justification should guarantee in order to face the unconstrained set of comprehensive beliefs held by citizens. In fact, if the public justification of political principles cannot refer to the beliefs that citizens hold more strongly, since such beliefs are connected with different comprehensive doctrines (such as T2 and T2'), then it seems that the motivational force attached to the resulting political principles is substantially reduced. In this regard, political liberalism seems to be counter-intuitive, as it requires citizen to avert any appeal to most of the beliefs they hold more strongly, when they are engaged in a public deliberation over political matters.

2.   Epistemic Circumstances of Justice

The concept of robustness, when imposed as a regulative constraint to the procedure for publicly justifying a political theory or principle, stresses the fact that reasonable pluralism should be accepted as a stable outcome of our contemporary democracies. Indeed, in a justificatory domain in which the fact of pluralism is taken for granted, the requirement for political theory to be robust vis-a-vis different comprehensive doctrines is justified through the epistemic idea that disagreement cannot be solved and, therefore, it is necessary to distinguish between public reasons that are employed within the freestanding justification of the political domain and private reasons by which citizens might support the very same

political module. Different private beliefs, even when inconsistent or even irreconcilable, might overlap in the justification of the same political module for extremely different comprehensive reasons. Consequently, we can define **reasonable pluralism** as a sensible outcome of a justificatory framework in which it might be the case that two individuals are both justified in holding beliefs that are simultaneously justified - by private reasons - and yet incompatible with each other. This epistemic circumstance stresses the fact that it is fundamental to distinguish between: a. private and public justification; b. the doxastic and non-doxastic aspects of the justificatory processes.

a.   Public justification - and the epistemic and normative constraints that apply to this category - is suitable only for a specific range of matters and beliefs. In order to claim that a belief (or principle) is publicly justified, such belief must result robust enough to be justified regardless of the other comprehensive beliefs that different persons hold in their sets of beliefs. This means that a political principle is publicly justified when the arguments employed for such justification are compatible with many different private justifications of the same principle. This definition is consistent with a common interpretation of **overlapping consensus** as an intermediate justificatory stage that is antecedent to that of public justification. According to this approach, overlapping consensus is that justificatory stage in which each citizen, thanks to the appeal to her own private reasons, justifies the political module that has been already justified by freestanding arguments (Rawls 1995; Quong 2011). This means that in a stable overlapping consensus, a political principle p, might result to be justified for Julia thanks to reason a, while the same principle p would be justified to Mark thanks to the reason β. Julia and Mark agree on the validity of principle p, but they disagree on the private reasons that justify such principle p. The role played by overlapping consensus within the justificatory picture outlined by Rawls is exactly that of establishing whether the freestanding arguments in favor of a political principle might be consistent with the different comprehensive system of beliefs held by citizens. In this regard, the overlapping consensus plays a fundamental motivational role, as it is the stage in which each citizen looks for a possible consistency between her comprehensive set of beliefs and the political module she is required to support. It does not matter that Julia and Mark do not agree on the very same private reason in favor of p (i.e. a or β), rather it is important that they overlap, thanks to their different private reasons, on the validity of p.

b.   Once the fact of pluralism has been acknowledged as a given fact of our political life, and consequently the distinction between private and public justification has been cashed out, then it should be clear that the justificatory procedure cannot overlook the epistemic role played by citizens within the deliberation. In order to understand the epistemic relevance of the **personal standpoint**, we can recall a quite common epistemic distinction (Scanlon, 2003: 140):

i. To justify a principle or judgment is "to say that it is supported by good and sufficient reasons";

ii. but there is also the issue of "a person's being justified in holding a certain view".

According to this distinction, the epistemic role of justification is not exhausted by the introduction of a set of reasons R that provides a propositional justification for *p*. Rather, if the epistemic value of a justification hinges in part on the deliberative role played by moral agents, then any comprehensive justification should involve a doxastic analysis that refers to the actual possibility that an agent S might believe, for sound reasons, that *p*. Consequently, the provision of a set of good reasons R is not a sufficient condition for the agent S to believe correctly that *p*. Agent S might believe that *p* for different, and unjustified, reasons or, even, do not accept the set of reasons R as acceptable within her doxastic system. A **doxastic justification** is usually defined as a justification in which a non-doxastic justification is coupled with a basing requirement, namely the fact that agent S bases her belief on the reasons that propositionally justify it[2]. The doxastic presupposition claims that, for a correct epistemic analysis of internal deliberation, it is not sufficient to assess the set of reasons R that are available to an agent S, as we should as well evaluate the epistemic performance carried out by agent S[3].

This epistemic fact has already been discussed by Gettier in his well-known article (1963) against the classical definition of **knowledge as a justified true belief**. Indeed, the classical definition of knowledge merges together the two aspects of justification that I introduced, namely the idea that a belief could be defined as genuine knowledge if and only if a) an agent is justified in holding this belief (doxastic justification) and b) such belief is also warranted as a true belief (propositional justification). Gettier's argument[4], coupling the issue of the relation between internal and external criteria for granting justification with the issue of determining what knowledge is, has shown that epistemic scepticism is relevant to the extent that it tells us, not that our beliefs are false, but that they might be false. Taking the sceptical challenge seriously implies that a deliberating agent should always be aware that even an idealized justification might not correspond with truth, as arguments of irreducible scepticism can always be raised[5]. Under a sceptical scenario it could be the case that one agent is justified in holding a certain belief, since her belief is supported by a sound deliberative route of reasoning; even though this belief happens to be false[6].

I maintain that for a political theory of justice, in order to respect and deal with the fact of pluralism and the doxastic aspects of our moral knowledge, it is important to adhere to a moderate epistemology and to sustain a **fallibilist account of knowledge**. According to <u>fallibilism</u>, knowledge, when viewed as strictly connected with our doxastic evidence for it, is compatible with the possibility of error. In this regard, it should be distinguished between two meanings of "knowing":

i. If S knows *p*, then S is not mistaken about *p*.

ii. If S knows *p*, then S could not be mistaken about *p*.

Fallibilism accepts (i) and rejects (ii). Indeed, (ii) requires a too high standard, namely the "impossibility of error" argument, according to which "to know something requires that it be that sort of thing that you could not be mistaken about" (Feldman, 2002: 125). According to Feldman, a fallibilist view rejects

the <u>Introspective Indistinguishable Argument</u> that maintains that "there cannot be cases of knowledge that are introspectively indistinguishable from cases of non knowledge" (Feldman, 2002: 125). By contrast, fallibilism maintains that "for some P, it is possible for one to know that P even if one could have exactly the same justification for believing P when P is false" and yet that "for some P, it is possible for one to know that P even if one's evidence for P does not necessitate or entail the truth of P" (Leite, 2010: 370). This conclusion follows from the fact that for fallibilism the reasons that an agent can hold in her doxastic system are merely extremely good, but never warranted as true. Consequently, fallibilism involves a definition of knowledge that does not necessarily require certainty and that therefore rules out the impossibility of error.

The first goal of this paper has been to show that, once the doxastic aspects of political deliberation are recognized as a true epistemic fact of our deliberative life together, then the most adequate epistemic framework for dealing with political justification is a moderate one. I define this framework as moderate, since it implies an epistemic modesty according to which we have to look for a justificatory framework that, although aiming at objectivity in moral and political deliberation, acknowledges the impossibility, for political agents, to bridge the epistemic gap between justification and warrant. Once it is demonstrated that this epistemic gap can never be filled, then the justificatory framework should face the fact that, even though the doxastic justification is still a justification for believing true a certain proposition *p*, the whole epistemic procedure of justification cannot be defined as able to guarantee truth in an uncontroversial way[7]. A political theory could be objective to the extent that its justified principles are at least fallibly (and less than infallibly) justified. Since there are no valid moral and political deliberations in which a sound justificatory argument (propositional perspective) can be introduced as completely detached from the fact that a moral agent is actually justified in holding this specific political view (doxastic perspective), then a moderate epistemic framework acknowledges the fact that we have to carefully deal with the epistemic difference between robustness and uncontroversiality. Therefore, a **moderate epistemic account of justification** replies to the sceptical challenges defending the possibility that a moral principle could be defined as robust, since it has been publicly justified – through sound reasons –, and yet this very same moral principle cannot be defined – and justified – as infallibly true, because the agents involved in the justificatory procedure lack the epistemic ability to uncontroversially filling the gap between the doxastic and non-doxastic aspects of knowledge.

3.   Epistemic Peer-hood

In the previous two sections of this paper I introduced the issue of the dilemmatic outcomes of the justificatory framework underpinned by a strictly political liberalism and discussed some epistemic categories that can help in figuring out what does not work correctly within such justificatory processes.

My line of argument has been focused on the fact that some of the dilemmatic outcomes might be avoided – or at least re-interpreted in a less problematic way – once an epistemic analysis of such justificatory procedure is correctly outlined. In this regard, I agree with Gaus (1996: 4) when he claims that: "If public justification is the core of liberalism (as I believe it is), and because there is no such thing as an uncontentious theory of justification, an adequately articulated liberalism must clarify and defend its conception of justified belief—its epistemology".

I have already defended a moderate epistemology that upholds a fallibilist perspective and that highlights the fundamental epistemic role played by agents' doxastic states. Now, I want to connect this epistemic paradigm with two political matters: the political practice of deliberation and the concept of reasonableness. In fact, fallibilism – when coupled with a doxastic presupposition – provides us with good epistemic reasons for claiming that disagreement must be acknowledged as an intrinsic feature of contemporary democracies and that it does not necessarily depend upon the fact that one of the two disagreeing parties has been irrational or that her cognitive processes have been defective. If reasonable disagreement among fellow citizens is an actual epistemic possibility, then this fact affects both the political account of public deliberation practices and the definition of the fundamental concept of reasonableness. From this, I argue, it follows that the very same notion of legitimacy must be modified, once the fact of disagreement is acknowledged as an intrinsic feature of contemporary democracies. If a political principle is legitimated if and only if it can be justified in the light of the different citizens' perspectives to whom this principle is addressed, then the fact that citizens hold different, often contradictory, doxastic sets of beliefs is a fundamental matter. On the one hand, such an outcome modifies the way in which political deliberation must be framed and carried out. On the other hand, a reasonable citizen should be prompted to recognize that she has not the political or epistemic authority to impose the comprehensive beliefs that are justified within her doxastic set as ultimate truths to other citizens. Naturally, this reasonable attitude by one citizen calls for a symmetric attitude by any other citizen. In this regard, I believe that the political reasons that can be provided in order to prompt citizens to **be mutually reasonable** with regard to both meeting the constraints of public reason and respecting other citizens comprehensive views are not strong enough from the motivational perspective if they are not supported as well by some epistemic reasons. We need a fallibilist account in order to explain why, from an epistemic perspective, it is possible for an agent S to be justified both in believing that p and in believing that Z is justified in believing that $\sim p$[8]. How is it so? In order to grasp the political meaning of such an epistemic claim I need to introduce a new concept, namely that of epistemic peers.

An **epistemic peer** is someone who you take to be equally likely to make a mistake (Elga 2007; Peter 2013b). There are other definitions of epistemic peerhood that refer to the degree of equality with regard to epistemic virtues such as intelligence, coherence, attentiveness, intellectual honesty, etc.[9]. Since I have already provided sound reasons in favor of fallibilism as the most adequate epistemic paradigm in

the field of moral and political reasoning, then I believe that it makes sense to accept the former definition of epistemic peers as suitable for our discussion. Two agents that disagree, but that mutually recognize each other as an epistemic peer, are able to acknowledge that, for some issues, it is extremely difficult to establish who has the epistemic authority to make claims which give others sufficient reasons for believing[10]. This is especially true in a deliberative domain as the political one. Indeed, when dealing with the interpretation of factual beliefs and in many circumstances of our daily life it is very often possible to find an agreement about who are the epistemic authorities on determinate matters (e.g. a doctor for establishing how to treat a patient; an engineer for building a non-collapsing bridge; a lawyer in a courtroom). On the contrary, when dealing with disagreements about ethics, politics, religion, and so on, it is extremely difficult to solve our disagreement by referring to the opinion of an expert. These are fields in which the disagreement is pervasive and in which the ability to publicly interchange reasons becomes salient, as the epistemic authority does not stem from a major expertise or specific ability, rather it is established through the public confrontation among disagreeing agents. This conclusion is compatible with the doxastic presupposition I discussed previously. Indeed, when a disagreement cannot be solved thanks to the appeal to an expert whom opinion counts as a third-personal epistemic authority, then the deliberation is tied down to the reference to second-personal perspectives and to the assessment of the epistemic performances provided by deliberating agents.

Does the concept of epistemic peerhood help us in clarifying the epistemic and deliberative possibility that agent S might be justified in believing both that *p* and that agent Z, who had access to the same piece of evidence, is justified in believing that ~*p*? This epistemic circumstance pictures a situation in which two epistemic peers, S and Z, after having acknowledged their disagreement, decide to *stick with their own guns* (i.e. S keeps believing that *p* and Z keeps believing that ~*p*) and yet, they mutually recognize the other as a valid source of justification given her personal doxastic attitude. This is not the standard description of the doxastic response to disagreement by epistemic peers that is provided in literature, but following Fabienne Peter (2013a and 2013b) I hold that this is the most fitting one for addressing political disagreement.

The two traditional positions with regard to peer disagreement are the Conciliatory View and the Steadfast View. According to the **Conciliatory View** (Christensen 2009, Elga 2007), the fact that an epistemic peer disagrees with me with regard to the evaluation of the same piece of evidence is a good reason to "*bite the bullet*" and revise my belief in the attempt to find a middle ground between our opposite beliefs. By contrast, the **Steadfast View** (Kelly 2010) claims that, given the fact that there is not a way to appeal to a third-personal epistemic authority for solving the disagreement, it is a better doxastic response to "*stick to my own guns*" and demote other party epistemic position given the fact that we have good epistemic reason to trust our beliefs as long as they are ours[11]. At the end of the day, both these two approaches do not acknowledge a genuine epistemic role for reasonable disagreement. In fact, the

conciliatory view makes disagreement a "solvable" problem, since it describes peers as willing to "splitting the difference" (Gelfert, 2011: 508) and looking for a middle ground; whereas the steadfast view describes the belief formation process as an unilateral process in which the fact that I disagree with someone I take to be an epistemic peer has no impact whatsoever on my doxastic justification. The conciliatory view stresses the social aspects of the belief formation processes, but puts the cart before the horse requiring that any epistemic peer will be willing to meet the other peer at the middle ground. By contrast, the steadfast view is more consistent with moral phenomenology, recognizing the extreme difficulty in solving the actual disagreement arising among agents deliberating between each other. Still, the steadfast view completely overlooks the social aspects of the deliberation, since it does not attach any relevant epistemic significance to the fact that someone I take as a peer disagree with me. To conclude, both the views, for different reasons, refuse the possibility of genuine disagreement and provide two different accounts of how epistemic peers may react to the fact that they hold different interpretation of same piece of evidence.

According to Peter (2013a and forthcoming) what it is wrong with the conciliatory and steadfast view is that they look at the ways in which reasonable disagreement can be addressed starting from epistemic circumstances in which both the peers have a perfect – and equal – access to the full evidence. This critiques developed by Peter is perfectly consistent with the fallibilist account that I defended in the previous section. Indeed, claiming that justification and warrant might contingently coincide, but not necessarily so, implies describing our doxastic access to the evidence as always mediated and partly "**opaque**"[12]. Therefore, I claim, at least in the political domain, we have to discuss the fact of reasonable disagreement starting from a realistic depiction of the epistemic circumstances of justice. Non-idealized circumstances of justice provide us with an epistemic context in which it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, that moral agents can reach a full disclosure of the evidence at stake. This means that moral agents have epistemic good reasons to deliberate together in order to reach a better disclosure of the evidence. Moreover, since our epistemic abilities are limited and our access to the available evidence is opaque, then looking at agents we disagree with as epistemic peers does not sound as irrational or unjustified. According to this view, reasonable disagreement might be a genuine outcome even in a case in which both the agents have been reasoning correctly and in a rational way while addressing the very same piece of evidence. The idea is that there is the possibility both for the disagreement to be solved (scenario a) and to be reasserted (scenario b). In the scenario a, it could be the case that a more specific examination of the evidence or a "purification" from incoherence or irrationality thanks to a good deliberative procedure will grant a better disclosure of the body of evidence, providing therefore some good reasons for determining which of the two peers has the right to claim epistemic authority on such specific case and to require an agreement on her doxastic perspective (that is now supported by a more adequate propositional set of reasons)[13]. In the scenario b, instead, the disclosure of evidence remains

uncertain even after the deliberation – this outcome might be either related to a specific difficult in accessing a single piece of evidence and evaluating it or stemming from the fact that it is impossible to find an agreement between the two different interpretations that the peers hold in the light of the same piece of evidence that they share (again, I do believe this is especially true in context such as the political domain, in which the appeal to a third-personal epistemic authority is very often unjustified). In the scenario b, two peers keep disagreeing even after deliberating and, given the opacity thesis, there is no possibility to appeal to an external epistemic authority – conjointly acknowledged by both the parties[14] - to solve the disagreement. Consequently, the two parties that disagree can still be justified in "*sticking to their own guns*" and yet the deliberation – that plays an epistemic and normative role – provides both the parties with good epistemic reasons for, at least, diminishing their confidence in their own belief and for not dismissing the other party's belief as totally unjustified.

Once the genuine epistemic possibility for reasonable disagreement has been granted, we can wonder which is the deliberative framework that better fit with the opacity view regarding our access to evidence. The discussion over the most adequate deliberative account brings us back to the epistemic circumstance that has prompted this section of the paper, namely if it is possible that, after public deliberation on political matter, an agent S might be justified in both acknowledging agent Z as an epistemic peers and believing that while she is doxastically justified in believing that p, Z is justified in believing that $\sim p$ according to her set of beliefs[15]. I claim that this epistemic circumstance is the perfect expression of what would mean to be *reasonable* among epistemic peers. In the last section of this paper, therefore, I shall connect the aspects of the epistemology of disagreement that I have outlined, with my personal account of the epistemic features of the political concept of reasonableness.

4.   Epistemic Reasonableness

I began this paper addressing the issue of public justification within the framework of political liberalism. Then, in order to analyze from the epistemic perspective the dilemmatic outcomes of the public justification enterprise, I introduced and defended a specific epistemic view regarding the doxastic perspective of moral agents and their deliberative relation as epistemic peers. Now, I want to re-connect this technical analysis with the strictly political one through to the analysis of the Rawlsian concept of **reasonableness**. When distinguishing between rational and reasonable, Rawls (1993: 48-58) claims that rational agents are able to pursue a conception of the good thanks to a self-centered perspective that very often (but not necessary always) employs a means-ends way of reasoning. By contrast, a reasonable person is aware of the normative constraint of reciprocity[16] and, moreover, she acknowledges among the epistemic circumstances of justice the burdens of judgment. Recognizing the value of fairness within a cooperative context means that reasonable agents have a sense of justice, whereas being aware of the burdens of judgment implies that we are ready to accept the public reason constraints.

The fundamental line of distinction between rational and reasonableness is that an agent might be rational even in case she is the only person alive on the earth, whereas for being reasonable, she needs at least a second person to be in cooperation with[17]. The "reciprocity-constraints" is defined by Rawls as depending upon the moral appraisal of the sense of justice. In my opinion this is not incorrect, but in order to solve the dilemma of public justification, I claim that the principle of moral reciprocity is not enough, as alone it does not have the motivational force for prompting citizens in accepting freestanding argument as normatively binding against their own personal comprehensive beliefs. Therefore, I argue, the reciprocity-constraints can be enhanced through reference, in a context of deep political disagreement, to the normative value of **epistemic reciprocity**. The willingness to recognize the burdens of judgments can be re-framed in a more technical way, namely claiming that those who recognize the burdens of judgments are ready to acknowledge the validity of fallibilism and of the doxastic presupposition. This means that reasonable citizens share an epistemic attitude that grants a justificatory framework that can explain the arising of reasonable disagreement, instead that simply taking it as a given fact of our political societies. Furthermore, this framework provides sound epistemic reasons in favor of the appeal to the use of public reason in certain deliberative contexts. We can claim that reasonable agents abide by the constraints of public reason because their sense of justice compels them to do so. Aiming to something more ambitious, I believe that it is also possible to provide strong epistemic reasons for showing to agents that, in order to be reasonable, when it comes to fundamental political questions on which the appeal to an established epistemic authority is unavailable, then they should tolerate the perspective of their fellow citizens and the beliefs that happen to be justified in their specific doxastic set of beliefs[18].

According to an epistemic account of reasonableness, the recognition of pervasive disagreement as a stable feature of our political life together has implications both at the epistemic and normative level. I have investigated the epistemic side of this issue in the previous section. Now, it is time to address the normative upshots of such an account. As I said before, the recognition of disagreement as a genuine possibility, even in a case in which both the parties have reasoned is a flawless way, imposes on us as epistemic agents a "modest" view regarding our possibility to fully access evidence. At least, this modest account requires that we accept fallibilism as a reasonable account of our epistemic capacities and therefore, when challenged by the disagreement with an epistemic peer, we are asked – for epistemic reasons - to diminish the confidence in our own beliefs and to be tolerant of the view of the others.

In my interpretation, the reciprocity constrain attached to the recognition of the burdens of judgment inherits its normativity from the fact that fallibilism gives us good reasons for recognizing other fellow citizens as epistemic peers; even if this recognition imposes a peerhood in a very minimal sense – and naturally after that a minimal epistemic acceptability threshold has been drawn[19]. Taking each other as peers implies that we should respect a symmetric credibility constraint and that therefore, in a

deliberative process, we must attribute some epistemic credibility to other parties' perspective and recognize the fact that we owe them some sort of response[20]. The opaque view stresses the fact that people, given the nature of the evidence and the epistemic circumstances of belief formation processes, very often (almost every time) find themselves in an epistemic situation where there is no way to be certain about which is the correct point of view from which disagreement could be resolved. This means that the only correct way – not just in a normative sense, but also from a strict epistemic perspective – for dealing with such disagreement is to accept the deliberative side of the epistemic processes for assessing the evidence at stake. The moderate epistemic account, therefore, stresses the fact that the **epistemic authority should be shared** in every circumstances in which no one can claim direct access to a third personal point of view (therefore propositionally justified) to the evidence at stake. The willingness of sharing the epistemic authority expresses the fact that reasonable agents have recognized their fallibility as epistemic agents. Moreover, accepting to share the epistemic authority implies that agents are keen to engage themselves in a public deliberation over political matters that are undecided and on which disagreement is wide.

Historically, the normative constraint for the practice of exchanging reasons within a deliberative political context have been justified referring to moral concepts, such as fairness (Rawls 1993), equal respect (Larmore 2008), acceptability constraint (Habermas 1996; Scanlon 1998), right to justification (Forst 2012; Gaus 2011), etc. One of the goal of this paper is to show that we can appeal to the epistemology of disagreement in order to provide sound epistemic reasons for favoring deliberation as the most adequate political processes within a context of deep and very often unsolvable disagreement among peers. If the analysis about the dynamics of mutual accountability among epistemic peers is correct, then we can provide agents with epistemic reasons for understanding why each side of the disagreement deserves some weight for its claim. Moreover, in cases in which the deliberation does not solve the disagreement – as there is no way to establish who had the right to claim epistemic authority in dealing with a specific piece of evidence – the epistemology of disagreement shows us that the adequate doxastic response is to recognize that I do not have an ultimate justification for my belief that can be recognized in any doxastic set of beliefs and that therefore can be claimed to be public and acceptable by everybody. I might be justified in keeping my own belief, but not in dismissing other parties' beliefs as nonsensical. Consequently, **tolerance** might be defined as a fundamental normative upshot of the epistemology of disagreement[21]. From this point it follows that reasonable disagreement might be a legitimate outcome of a deliberation among epistemic peers. Within the political domain, this implies that reasonable citizens (i.e. agents that accepts both the epistemic and moral constraints of reasonableness), when publicly discussing over political matters, will abstain themselves from appealing to p and $\sim p$ in cases in which there is a reasonable disagreement between p and $\sim p$.

One of the aims of this paper is to show that the epistemic dimension of reasonableness might be extremely useful in our attempt to grant validity to the liberal justificatory structure and that, in some sense, it might be easier to account for the normative bonds stemming from the mutual recognition among epistemic peers, rather than appealing to moral reasons for granting this mutual recognition. Naturally, the two accounts (the epistemic and the moral) are consistent and it is sensible to hope that a liberal citizen would be aware of both of them, namely showing to have a sense of justice and a willingness to accept the deliberative reciprocity imposed by the epistemology of disagreement. From the epistemic perspective, we ask agents to recognize fallibilism as the most adequate account of our epistemic capacities and to acknowledge that our access to evidence is always mediated, therefore producing beliefs that are justified in a doxastical sense, as they stem from a second-personal perspective. Acknowledging these two facts provides agents with good epistemic reasons for assuming a reasonable attitude toward their peers. In this sense, I believe that from the motivational perspective it is less demanding to argue in favor of epistemic deliberative constraints, instead that requiring that any citizens positively engage herself with universal liberal notions, such as equal respect and fair cooperation[22]. Rather than grounding the reciprocity constraints solely on moral reasons, I believe that it could be theoretically fruitful to show that the deliberative ideal can be fulfilled thanks to the reference to the normative request of acknowledging the **status of epistemic peer** to any fellow citizen that is able to meet some minimal epistemic criteria. This means that reasonable agents would be able to abide by a sort of **democratic epistemic ethos** that requires them to regard someone as a political peer even in the circumstances in which there are deep epistemic inequalities and consequently epistemic performances are different. Once that an epistemic threshold of acceptability has been drawn in order to establish which beliefs should be publicly casted out as unjustifiable, notwithstanding the fact that they might be embedded in some citizens' sets of beliefs, then any belief that is above such epistemic threshold cannot be ruled out as totally unjustifiable by any citizens. The advantage of a fallibilist characterization of peerhood is to recognize that the equal status is not given by a potentially contestable standard of assessment of those virtues, but rather by the conditions of deliberation themselves. Two agents that disagree in a context of deliberation, will at least admit that they are on a par as disagreers. Assuming good will in seeking a solution to potential conflict, those subjects would both acknowledge that is extremely difficult to establish who has the epistemic authority to make claims that count as conclusive reasons. This consideration has a fundamental impact on democracy, because it provides agents with good epistemic reasons to recognize other participants as potential epistemic authorities. This specific account of democracy requires citizens to address each other with reasons in the attempt to achieve an agreement about the decision to make. The interpersonal exchange among participants has an epistemic value, regardless the fact of making or not correct decisions, and it is yet procedural, not outcome oriented. As epistemic peers, once disagreement is reckoned not to be solvable once for and for all, we are justified in

holding our beliefs, but not entitled to dismiss other participants' positions as epistemically inferior. From this it follows that in an intersubjective scheme of public decision-making, epistemic peers owe each other some sort of response, because they cannot dismiss other participants' position as utterly wrong. In fact, two agents that disagree would at least have good epistemic – and normative – reasons for mutually acknowledging the other party as a source of valid epistemic claims.

This approach grants political inclusiveness partly referring to criteria of epistemic fairness and argues in favor of an epistemic account of deliberation. In this regard, being reasonable means at least being equally aware of the limitations of our doxastic processes for establishing knowledge and therefore being ready to recognize your peers as potential epistemic authorities. This account of reasonableness is perfectly consistent with the public reason constraints as outlined by the public justification debate (Cohen 2008; D'Agostino 1996; Forst 2012; Gaus 2011; Habermas 1995; Quong 2011; Rawls 1993). Indeed, the **practice of public reason** requires that citizens, when discussing publicly, respect the bounds shaped by reasonableness, namely accepting the requirement of not addressing other citizens with reasons that they do not believe, sincerely, that the others can accept or reconcile with their doxastic systems of beliefs (i.e. not address a fellow citizen with the reasons p, when we are aware that she holds $\sim p$ as true in her doxastic set of beliefs, see Gaus, 1996: 140). According to the democratic deliberation interpretation of public reason, the major task accomplished by public reason is to guarantee that political decisions in a democratic arena are reached following a normative framework of discussion. In this regard, the legitimation of political decisions relies in part on the normative relevance attached to the public reason's constraints.

Conclusion

The main goal of this paper was to investigate the epistemic dimension of reasonableness and to show that the epistemology of disagreement provides us with an adequate theoretical framework for arguing in favour of the democratic practice of public reasoning. In order to establish public reason as the standard of deliberative procedures, I claimed that it is important to provide an epistemic framework that grants a normative democratic ethos through the analysis of the epistemology of disagreement. Public reason requires that citizens, when discussing publicly, respect the bounds of the normative framework of deliberation and therefore do not address other citizens with reasons that they cannot translate in "public reasons arguments" that can be understood even from a completely different doxastic perspective. This follows from the fallibilist account I have been defending, since accepting reasonable disagreement means that every citizen is required, for being actually reasonable, to recognize that some other citizens may hold undefeated beliefs in their doxastic systems that are instead defeated in her doxastic set of beliefs. From this account, it follows that it is correct to claim that political deliberation is a public practice that begins with disagreement, instead of agreement. To conclude, the inquiry

concerning the epistemic circumstances of justice has allowed me to highlight the relevance, for political accounts of liberal theories, of the mutual recognition as epistemic peers by citizens that deliberate together on political matters. Moreover, appealing to the epistemic constraints of deliberation allow us to make sense of the epistemic difficulties derived from the public reason requirement. Hence, the epistemology of disagreement provides us with solid arguments for claiming that the normative request of democracy to grant equal respect to any participant in the decision-making process compels agents to address each other as epistemic peers. From this it follows that any decision-making procedure that denies the shared status of epistemic peer to some members of the constituency frustrates fairness and therefore is intrinsically anti-democratic.

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[1] "Rawls actually does not think in terms of a coherent integration between a normative-philosophical justification and a factual legitimation. Rather he continues to work within the horizon of a philosophical theory of justice. Nevertheless, in order to settle the central dilemma between stability and pluralism, he must concede that a pure philosophical justification of liberal democracy is itself insufficient to guarantee the equilibrium between these opposing claims", Maffettone 2010: 22.

[2] "S's belief that p at time t is [doxastically] justified (well-founded) iff (i) believing p is justified for S at t; (ii) S believes p on the basis of evidence that supports p", Feldman 2002: 46.

[3] "The way in which the subject performs, the manner in which she makes use of her reasons fundamentally determines whether her belief is doxastically justified. Poor utilization of even the best reasons for believing p will prevent you from justifiedly believing or knowing that p", Turri 2010: 318.

[4] Gettier, in "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" (Gettier 1963), starts his analysis with the standard definition of knowledge according to which: Sonia knows that *p* if and only if:
 i. *p* is true;
 ii. Sonia believes that *p*;
 iii. Sonia is justified in believing that *p*.
Gettier then provides several counter-examples to show that such conditions are necessary, but not jointly sufficient for granting genuine knowledge. Gettier's counter-examples concern situations where a person's belief is assumed to satisfy all these conditions, but given that her belief has been determined by accident, then the epistemic conditions for defining such belief as knowledge are not met. Consequently, Gettier (1963: 121) shows us that "it is possible for a person to be justified in believing a proposition that is in fact false".

[5] The irreducible sceptical argument can be always raised against theories of justification or knowledge. Two famous arguments in this regard are those of evil demon presented by Descartes (1642) and the thought experiment of human beings being no more than just brains in a vat developed by Hilary Putnam (1981).

[6] As Scanlon (2003: 140) points out: "a person can be justified, in this sense, in accepting a principle (for certain reasons) even though the principle itself is not justified because, say, there are other factors (which he could not be expected to be aware of) that undermine the justificatory force of the considerations he takes to be reasons for it".

[7] For a deep analysis of the theoretical possibility of objectivity to moral reasoning and a general fallibilist framework of reasoning, see Dorsey 2006; Railton 1995; Wright 1995.

[8] "A political decision can be publicly justified whenever each and every member of the relevant constituency is justified in endorsing the decision, even if each person believes the decision is justified for different, and even incompatible, reasons. This approach thus permits citizens to converge on a political decision for different non-public reasons without appeal to any shared or common reasons" (Quong 2011: 258).

[9] For more standard definitions of epistemic peerhood, see Gutting 1982 and Kelly 2010.

[10] According to Gelfert (2011) the mutual recognition of peerhoood very often partly depends upon "social markers of similarity". Along these lines, it then possible to establish which are the features that are employed in assessing the level of proximity of peers between each other. According to Wald (2009), a close peer is somebody that assesses the body of evidence E in similar manner than me and, moreover, we share a comparable good track record of forming true belief. A distant peer is somebody that meets just one of the two criteria, whereas a remote peer is somebody that fails to meet both.

[11] For a very good analysis of this issue, see Christensen, 2009.

[12] Fabienne Peter (2013a) defines the opacity view starting from the contribution on the discussion about disagreement by Ernest Sosa and Alvin Goldman. Sosa claims that the full-disclosure-assumption with regard to first-order evidence is a too strong assumption given the fact that very often the evidence is "too complex" to be fully grasped by a single agent. Moreover, Sosa highlights the diachronic a social aspects of our belief formation processes. On the other hand, Goldman

stresses the fact that disagreement arises from the fact that people use different systems of epistemic norms and there is no way to grant that any agent will be justified – in her doxastic set of beliefs – in supporting the right system of epistemic norms.

[13] Naturally, given that I maintain that fallibilism is the most adequate account of our epistemic circumstances, a legitimated and publicly recognized claim of epistemic authority is valid but less than infallibly justified.

[14] If the doxastic presupposition were a true fact of our epistemic life as deliberative agents, then, even in the case in which from the supposed God's eye perspective would be true that Julia is right while Mark is wrong, this would not matter for our deliberation, since Julia and Mark have no access to the disclosure of evidence available to God.

[15] It might seem that such epistemic account will necessarily lead to relativism. I do not believe that this is true, but this is too a wide topic to address here. However, referring to Peter (2013a) is again very helpful, since she shows that the opacity view is compatible with a theory about the nature of evidence, according to which if the disclosure of evidence is full, then such evidence must favor one single doxastic state (Uniqueness thesis). The Uniqueness thesis contrasts a second view, the Permissiveness Thesis that claims that the overall body of evidence may justify more than one belief, therefore allowing a sort of epistemic relativism.

[16] "People are unreasonable in the same basic aspect when they plan to engage in cooperative schemes but are unwilling to honor, or even to propose, except as a necessary public pretense, any general principles or standards for specifying fair terms of cooperation. They are ready to violate such terms as suits their interests when circumstances allow" (Rawls, 1993: 50).

[17] "A basic difference between the reasonable and the rational is that the reasonable is public in a way the rational is not" (Rawls, 1993: 53).

[18] Naturally, this line of argument would still rule out as unjustified all those beliefs that are held by agents for irrational reasons or that depends upon defective reasoning.

[19] Let's say for example that the threshold must filter away inconsistent beliefs within the same doxastic set of beliefs or defective (in a strong epistemic sense) reasoning.

[20] This would be, from the epistemic perspective, the corresponding of fairness at the moral level.

[21] I do believe that the philosophical analysis of the epistemology of disagreement, when applied to political issues and deliberative models, can contribute in a fruitful way to the definition of the limits and value of toleration. Regarding this fundamental topic, see Forst (2004) and Galeotti (2002).

[22] In order to solve the justificatory dilemma, from the papers of the 80ies on (see especially 1980; 1985; 1987), Rawls refers to the contextual analysis and to the normativity attached to the ongoing practice of democracy. In this regard, he assumes that a "reasonable citizen" is somebody who, having grasped the normative value attached to liberal institutions among which she happens to live, embeds the liberal ethos within her doxastic set of beliefs and consequently is able to justify political principles through an overlapping consensus. In my opinion, this strategic move is not wrongly posed; however, I do believe that referring to the epistemology of disagreement is less demanding from the theoretical perspective as well as from the citizens' doxastic point of view.

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