

Civic Friendship in Public Reason Liberalism: The Path to a More Respectful Political Community

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Abstract: This paper discusses the discrepancy in the concept of respect within the liberal political community. The dominant approach to public reason liberalism considers respect to be its moral basis: respect frames both the character of the justification of political power and its standards. Yet, despite guaranteeing respect at the essentially political level, still many people remain disrespected. This situation mainly concerns the so-called societal level as another formative level of the liberal political community. Is it sufficient to ensure respect only given essentially political questions? Since respect is by its very nature a universal moral principle, it would be incoherent to guarantee it only with respect to a particular issue. If public reason liberalism is to be in conformity with its moral basis, it must ensure respect within the liberal political community as a whole. It is the aim of this paper to find a way to cover both spheres of the liberal political community. Consequently, the paper turns to the criterion of reciprocity interpreted in terms of civic friendship. The advantage of such an interpretation of the criterion of reciprocity is not only that it is consistent with the idea of public reason, but also that it retrospectively affects the very character of respect. This is because civic friendship inherently shifts the understanding of respect from the third-person imperative to the second-person act of recognition required at the societal level. In this way, civic friendship enables respect both at the essentially political and societal levels of the liberal political community to be achieved.

Keywords: Public reason liberalism, Liberal political community, Respect, Reciprocity, Civic friendship.

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