

# THE PUBLIC RATIONAL ENTITLEMENT OF FAITH AN INFERENTIALIST PROPOSAL FOR RELIGIOUS REASONS IN PRACTICES OF PUBLIC JUSTIFICATION

A LEGITIMIDADE RACIONAL E PÚBLICA DA FÉ  
UMA PROPOSTA INFERENCIALISTA PARA AS RAZÕES  
RELIGIOSAS NAS PRÁTICAS DE JUSTIFICAÇÃO PÚBLICA

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**Abstract:** This article proposes an Inferentialist Model of Epistemological Approach (IMEA) to address the normative conditions under which religious reasons may be legitimately used in public justification practices. Drawing on Robert Brandom's inferentialist pragmatics, the article advances a model of rationality grounded in the social practice of giving and asking for reasons, emphasizing concepts such as epistemic entitlement, scorekeeping, and logical expressivism. In this view, the legitimacy of a reason does not rest on its neutrality or universal acceptability but on its intelligibility—understood from an inferentialist perspective—that is, whether it can be rationally understood and assessed by others within a shared discursive space. Religious reasons, therefore, are not excluded *a priori* but must meet the inferential demands of public reasoning. The IMEA framework challenges traditional foundationalist or evidentialist standards in public reason theories and offers a robust account of rational pluralism. Ultimately, the article argues that IMEA enables a more consistent and inclusive treatment of religious reasoning within public justification, without undermining the rationale of public reason.

**Keywords:** Public Justification. Inferentialism. Religious Reasons.

**Resumo:** Este artigo propõe um Modelo Inferencialista de Abordagem Epistemológica (MIAE) para tratar das condições normativas sob as quais razões religiosas podem ser legitimamente utilizadas em práticas de justificação pública. Com base na pragmática inferencialista de Robert Brandom, o artigo propõe um modelo de rationalidade fundamentado na prática social de dar e pedir razões, enfatizando conceitos como autorização epistêmica, monitoramento de posições inferenciais (scorekeeping) e expressivismo lógico. Nessa perspectiva, a legitimidade de uma razão não depende de sua neutralidade ou aceitabilidade universal, mas de sua inteligibilidade – entendida a partir de uma perspectiva inferencialista –, ou seja, se ela pode ser racionalmente compreendida e avaliada por outros dentro de um espaço discursivo compartilhado. Razões religiosas, portanto, não são excluídas *a priori*, mas devem atender às exigências inferenciais da razão pública. O modelo MIAE desafia os padrões fundacionalistas ou evidencialistas tradicionais nas teorias da razão pública e oferece uma explicação robusta do pluralismo racional. Em última instância, o artigo argumenta que o MIAE permite um tratamento mais consistente e inclusivo do raciocínio religioso na justificação pública, sem minar a lógica da razão pública.

**Palavras-chave:** Justificação pública. Inferencialismo. Razões religiosas.

## INTRODUCTION

The role of religious voices in the public sphere remains a deeply contested issue. This tension is partly rooted in political experience: despite the secular imperative of modernity, religion continues to shape the worldview and daily life of individuals and communities, and retains the capacity to mobilize strong social responses and influence behavior. Beyond this practical dimension, however – and still closely related to it–are theoretical concerns within political thought, particularly those tied to liberal democracy, that prompt reflection on how religious reasoning should be positioned within public debate. On one hand, liberal democratic values such as liberty, equal respect, impartiality, and the independence of political authority inform this discussion. On the other hand, there are epistemological assumptions about the reality of pluralism and persistent disagreement in modern societies. Added to this is a core liberal imperative: that coercive political power must be legitimated by justifications that all citizens can, in some way, endorse. This is the soil in which theories of public reason and the Public Justification Principle (PJP) have taken root<sup>1</sup>.

This paper seeks to examine and offer a framework for considering the presence and the inputs of religious reasoning in the public sphere, particularly as it relates to the justificatory ideal at the heart of public reason discourse. Which turns the question into the problem of how to establish the conditions for the use of religious reasons within public justification practices, considering the full range of premises and desiderata that underlie the *raison d'être* of this procedure. Our goal is to offer a contribution toward resolving this problem, particularly through an epistemological approach grounded in Brandom's inferentialism, addressing themes such as rationality, interpersonal justification, and epistemic normativity within the context of social reasoning.

### 1 - PUBLIC REASON AND PUBLIC JUSTIFICATION

In general terms, *public reason*, especially following John Rawls, refers to a type of reasoning shared by individuals in the public or political context and directed toward public or political goals. Thus, public reason should lay the foundation for shaping laws and guiding the conduct of authorities, with the aim of safeguarding justice, rights, and freedom for every citizen, while striving for a pluralistic and well-ordered society. Accordingly, this concept or ideal finds resonance within the framework of liberal democracy, where – at least in the history of political thought – its rationale has become more discernible. In Rawls's words: "The idea of public reason specifies at the deepest level the basic moral and political values

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1 Gaus, 2003; Vallier, 2022; Rawls, 2005.

that are to determine a constitutional democratic government's relation to its citizens and their relation to one another" (Rawls, 1997, p. 766).

In turn, under a minimalist conception, public justification refers to the process and criteria by which public measures and/or social norms are justified, such that all reasonable (or rational) members of the public have sufficient reason to endorse them. Like public reason, the idea of public justification has its roots in the social contract tradition but became a more clearly defined concept only within contemporary liberal theories. Both concepts are closely intertwined, historically and theoretically. For this reason, analyzing proposals of public justification leads to the consideration of different theories of public reason. For Rawls, who holds a prominent position in this debate, thinking about public reason necessarily involves engaging with the concept of public justification:

Public reasoning aims for public justification. We appeal to political conceptions of justice, and to ascertainable evidence and facts open to public view, in order to reach conclusions about what we think are the most reasonable political institutions and policies. **Public justification** is not simply valid reasoning, but argument addressed to others: it proceeds correctly from premises we accept and think others could reasonably accept to conclusions we think they could also reasonably accept. This meets the duty of civility, since in due course the proviso is satisfied (RAWLS, 1997, p. 786).

The practice of public justification, according to Rawls, includes the consideration of a freestanding conception of justice – that is, a conception independent of any comprehensive doctrine and solely political. This makes it possible to establish a consensual standard agreed upon by all reasonable persons in the process of justification. Essentially, public justification, for Rawls, requires common reasons grounded solely in political values that all reasonable individuals can accept. Regarding the principle of overlapping consensus, a nonpublic reason may still be presented in public argumentation, but it must be accompanied by a purely public (or political) reason. This condition is what Rawls calls the "proviso" (1997, p. 784).

However, there are other relevant theoretical proposals on this subject. For example, Habermas (1990, p. 65–68; 1995) proposes a *discursive* approach to public justification, viewing political values as products of a continuous process of public reasoning and dialogue, rather than as a pre-established foundation. What is especially important in Habermas's approach is the emphasis on procedural norms rather than substantive norms derived from a freestanding conception of justice. This is reflected in his proposal of discourse ethics. In this way, he envisions public justification in a broader scope than Rawls, drawing from his understanding of the *public sphere*. Not only constitutional matters are subject to

public justification, but also any issues that are relevant from a public, political, or social perspective.

Furthermore, in the reception of Rawls, topics such as the possibility of consensus, epistemological constraints, epistemic neutrality of political values, and others are widely discussed, articulating alternative conceptions of public justification and public reason. While some theorists uphold the consensual aspect of Rawls's view – in different ways – such as Stephen Macedo (2010) and Jonathan Quong (2011), Gerald Gaus (1996; 2011, p. 276–292), on the other hand, defends a theory of public justification that maintains, among other things, that if it is impossible to isolate a universal system of reasons by which a given measure can be justified in the public realm – and in light of the fact of reasonable pluralism and other liberal values – then the most important aspect is not epistemic consensus, but rather the convergence of conclusions that are rationally justified, even if individuals arrive at those conclusions for different reasons. Justificatory reasons are still necessary, but they need not be identical for everyone – nor must their evaluative standards be.

Another relevant and more recent perspective is that of Kevin Vallier (2014; 2015), who advocates a more pluralistic and convergent form of public reason, challenging the viability – or even the possibility – of unified, shared public reasons. Particularly relevant to the present article is his proposal concerning the status of justificatory reasons: they should not be based on a notion of “universal” reasonableness, but rather on intelligible reasonableness. Vallier refers to this requirement as the “Intelligible Reasons Requirement” (IRR). This means that what matters is not whether a reason is agreed upon by all, but whether it is intelligible to all on its own terms and grounds. Accordingly, this approach embraces the notion that different – even contradictory – beliefs may equally be entitled to participate in public argumentation or be submitted to the public justification process.

These perspectives of Gaus, Vallier, and others like them emphasize “openness” more than those aligned with the Rawlsian perspective, which is often described as a more inclusivist approach to the use of diverse reasons in public argumentation, without a proviso or epistemological constraint. In this view, *convergence* justifies certain political measures rather than *consensus*; that is, acceptance of a public decision must be based on agreement regarding its final form, not necessarily on a shared reason. Although the categorization of consensus versus convergence to label public reason theories, introduced by Fred D'Agostino, is not the most comprehensive framework for capturing the distinct features of varied public reason theories – as noted by Billingham and Taylor (2020) (see their article for a more sophisticated framework) – this distinction remains useful, particularly when considering the role of religious reasons in public justification practice.

## 2 - PUBLIC JUSTIFICATION AND RELIGIOUS REASONS AS A PROBLEM

Andrew March (2013; 2018) identifies two positions regarding the use of religious reasons in public argumentation among political and legal theorists: the exclusivists and the inclu-

sivists. Among defenders of public reason, these positions typically correspond to consensus and convergence views, respectively. Exclusivists, who tend to adopt a more Rawlsian stance—insisting that the proviso must be applied to all private reasons—are generally more restrictive toward religious reasons, possibly due to their specific epistemic status or the potential dangers religion might pose to the public sphere<sup>2</sup>. On the other hand, inclusivists (typically advocates of a convergence model of public justification) argue that exclusivist theories have epistemological flaws regarding the possibilities of consensus, particularly in terms of which reasons are privileged or considered legitimate within the ideal of neutral reasoning. As often occurs with this view, religion tends to lose its space and voice in the public square, at least theoretically, which places this approach in tension with liberal democratic principles such as pluralism and equal respect for diverse worldviews (GAUS; VALLIER, 2009; MARCH, STEINMETZ, 2018, pp. 3–15).

Nonetheless, inclusivists must contend with the necessity of a criterion that can ensure order in a public process of reasoning; there must be limits to maintain the space for dialogue. One common critique of inclusivists is the absence of a sufficiently robust restraint principle to sustain the basic structure of public reason. To address this, defenders of the convergence view propose certain principles as criteria for introducing different reasons. These principles aim to avoid the “authoritarianism” or potential sectarianism of consensus-based restraints by establishing procedural limits, such as the necessity for justification to be open to analysis and critique by others (Gaus) or for reasons to be intelligible (Vallier). In turn, consensus theorists argue that such requirements are insufficient to address key aspects and principles of public justification, such as the *duty of civility*, and that additional requirements, such as shareability and/or accessibility, are necessary<sup>3</sup>. Of course, some inclusivists (as well as exclusivists) reject any form of public reason, but here we delimit the debate to proposals of public reason<sup>4</sup>.

As Billingham and Taylor (2020) point out, conflicts among public reason theorists extend beyond consensus and convergence to the very basic conception of liberalism’s desideratum, the rationale of public justification, the persons who can participate in the process of public reasoning, and the goals of public justification. These conflicts shape perspectives on the desirable requirements that characterize public justification. Thus, the introduction of religious reasons into the public sphere is connected to these differing assumptions, which are not only epistemological but also political and moral. For example, if one considers that public justification requires the acceptability of reasons to all participants, can a religious reason be accepted? What does ‘acceptability’ mean? Why acceptability? Providing answers to these questions implies a commitment to more fundamental ideas about public reason and justification. Nonetheless, the aim of this article is not to defend any current view but, through an inferentialist epistemological analysis, to offer a perspective on the

2 To a revision of these arguments, see: VALLIER, 2014; BARDON, 2016; SMITH, 1997.

3 See: QUONG, 2011, p. 264-273; MACEDO, 2010, p. 19-21; LISTER, 2018, 70-73.

4 WALL, 2016; ENOCH, 2015; BRENNAM, 2021; WOLTERSTOFF, 2012, p. 76-102.

use of religious reasons in public justification practices. This perspective will emphasize the concept of rationality, how to understand reasonable pluralism, the epistemic entitlement of religious reasons, and related issues. By aiming to establish compatibility with aspects of one view or another, it ultimately contributes to developing a particular and refreshing conception of public reason and justification.

Finally, the dilemma of public justification and religious reasons can be summarized as follows: *How can the conditions for the participation of religious reasons in the public justification process be established?*

### 3 - INFERENTIALIST MODEL OF EPISTEMOLOGICAL APPROACH

A relevant standpoint from which to approach the entire debate about public reason and the inclusion of religious reasoning in the process of public justification is the epistemological perspective. Topics such as reason, rationality, and justification demand this kind of approach, which has already been developed (for example, GAUS, 1996). In this paper, we present an Inferentialist Model of Epistemological Approach (IMEA)<sup>5</sup>, based on the distinctive pragmatics theory of Robert Brandom. Although Brandom's theory is primarily about semantics, it both originates from and entails epistemological issues. Brandom adheres to some fundamental epistemological principles proposed and defended by Wilfrid Sellars – whose work forms a theoretical foundation for Brandom's inferentialism, establishing the preeminence of inference in understanding the rationality of mental and discursive acts – especially those found in Sellars's critique of traditional epistemological schools, and more specifically his critique of what he calls the "Myth of the Given" in its various forms<sup>6</sup>. This critique challenges the doctrine of the Given as applied to epistemology, which can be summarized as follows: the idea that knowledge of the world has non-inferential epistemic foundations, given immediately by sense data, without the need for any inferential concepts to establish and justify the content of what is known.

For Sellars, all knowledge – or what we can say [rationally] about things – depends on a network of inferences. For example, when someone says they know the color of a fruit, this can represent genuine knowledge not because it is merely or solely grounded in a particular empirical experience, but because it involves the use of non-empirical conceptual resources through which they can offer reasons and justifications for their claim (SELLARS, 2008, pp. 94–98; 99–108)<sup>7</sup>. Knowledge is not about making assertions based solely on intuition about self-evident features, but rather about using good inferences that entitle someone to make assertions about anything in a given context; that is, knowing is not

5 For a more fundamental conceptual framework of the kind of application of inferentialism developed here, see: GABRIEL, 2005. It is also worth noting that the exchange of papers between Habermas (2000) and Brandom (2000a) – a review by the former and a reply by the latter–already pointed to the possibility of applying inferentialism to the thematic universe we are addressing here.

6 See: SELLARS, 1997; 2008, p. 94-98; DEVRIES; TRIPLETT, 2000, p. 1-15.

7 See also: SELLARS; AMARAL, 1989.

about guaranteeing universal, neutral, and self-evident truths given directly by perception or foundational epistemic states, but about being able to offer reasons within a *logical space of reasons* (SELLARS, 1997, p. 76). Regarding this, in inferentialist theory, being rational means acting as a player in a game of asking for and offering reasons, which is essentially social and interpersonal.

Two fundamental and related concepts from inferentialism are crucial to understanding this dynamic: *logical expressivism* and the *scorekeeping practice*. The former concerns the role of logic (and its language), which not only serves to attribute an apodictic status to propositions but also, and especially, acts as a tool to make explicit inferences underlying non-logical terms in claims or assertions. It reveals the inferential commitments and entitlements implied in a given proposition within discursive practices, helping to capture and establish the semantic aspects of a word or sentence, and making explicit the rational commitments behind a given statement: “The expressive role distinctive of logical vocabulary is its use in making explicit the fundamental semantic and pragmatic structures of discursive practice, and hence of explicitness and expression” (BRANDOM, 2001, p. 650). It is worth noting that this view of logic provides a different perspective on what qualifies as a good reason:

Logicism about reasons understands “good reason” to mean “logically good reason.” Reasons for commitments are governed by logically valid implications, and reasons against commitments are governed by logical inconsistencies. Where it is not obvious on the surface that this is so for some nonlogical reasons, if reasons are to be understood to be involved in the use of that nonlogical vocabulary, a logical deep structure must be discerned as underlying its use. By contrast, expressivist about logic treats the material goodness of prelogical reason relations of implication and incompatibility as prior in the order of explanation to reason relations of specifically logical consequence and inconsistency. The defining task of logical vocabulary is an expressive one: to make explicit, in sentential, claimable form, the reason relations of material consequence and incompatibility that normatively govern the use of sentences expressing claimables in nonlogical base vocabularies. (BRANDOM, 2025, p. 94)

The latter concept, scorekeeping, is a metaphor used to describe how rational normativity operates within discursive practices: individuals participating in this “game” track the commitments and entitlements associated with given statements as scores that change throughout the social practice of discourse, as players ask for and offer reasons. For example, if I assert that “if X, then Y,” I am entitled to assert that “if X, then A,” provided there are no inferential incompatibilities between Y and A – the incompatibility being a contradiction between commitments. However, this possible attribution largely depends on the context

and, consequently, on the materiality of the inferences. In any case, the explicit identification of inferential commitments and entitlements, as well as the ascription of their compatibilities or incompatibilities, is what alters the score in this social “game” – we will examine how this works in greater detail later in the text.

The epistemology underlying this approach emphasizes *know-how* rather than *know-that*. It is not *knowledge* (or knowledge alone) but *understanding* that is central. This means that rational justification does not depend on universal, self-justified truths as the foundational epistemic value of a claim, but rather on the ability to effectively manage the inferences implicit in claims within a pragmatic social context. A belief is considered justified by the compatibility of its commitments, not by its apodictic or self-evident status. This epistemology is also radically social and contextual, since knowledge (or understanding) arises under the normative constraints that govern the procedures of discursive practices. Justification does not rest on foundational beliefs or premises but on the “rules” implicit in the exercise of reason, which is itself social and historically situated<sup>8</sup>. For all these reasons, the epistemological dimension implicit in Brandom’s view is closely connected to his perspective on rationality. The structure of human epistemology is fundamentally rational; this is what distinguishes us as *sapient* beings, not *merely* sentient ones<sup>9</sup>.

As stated, this paper does not aim to offer a comprehensive theory of public reason or public justification, but rather to analyze some relevant epistemological elements involved in the discussion of these conceptions—particularly the relationship between religious reasons and these issues—from an IMEA standpoint. We will do this by addressing two key subjects currently discussed within the thematic universe of public reason: (i) the fact of *reasonable pluralism* and (ii) the *requirements for justificatory reasons*. Beyond serving as examples for our endeavor to apply inferentialism, these are also two crucial themes whose articulation yields valuable insights for other topics surrounding the central issue addressed here:

### 3.1 - REASONABLE PLURALISM

The fact that different and even irreconcilable comprehensive doctrines can be reasonable is affirmed by most contemporary public reason theorists<sup>10</sup>. This does not imply complete relativism, or what Gaus calls “radical pluralism” (2003, p. 13–14), which, in its extreme form, would result in the impossibility of rational dialogue or agreement. Rather, it means that reasonableness is not an exclusive feature of a single set of values or of one discourse about reality, nor is it a condition acquired solely through a kind of “pure” rational inquiry.

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8 BRANDOM, 2009, p. 52-108; 2001, p. 496-613; 2000b, p. 157-183.

9 It is worth noting that two other theorists are crucial to the epistemological basis of Brandom’s inferentialism: Kant, for his understanding of the inherently normative aspect of judgment, and Hegel, for his view of the social and historical development of rationality. Brandom, 2001; 2000b, 2009, 2019.

10 GAUS, 2003.

There are many topics on which reasonable people can reasonably disagree. Even though reasonableness is not the same as rationality – especially for Rawls (2005, p. 48-54)<sup>11</sup> –, these concepts are closely related. In a certain sense, to say that something is reasonable is also to say that it enjoys a form of rational status. In this light, an inferentialist conception of rationality can serve as a useful tool for epistemologically modeling reasonable pluralism – first, by recognizing that rationality is not necessarily an exercise that leads to universal and undeniable truths, even if it is an exercise aimed at seeking them. Second, rationality is not grounded in self-evident or universally shared premises or standards; the goodness of a reason does not derive from the “objective” truth or apodictic value of its isolated premises and conclusions, but from the way these are embedded within coherent inferential relations inside a discursive practice. – Notice that this is not about formal logical validity; the content of non-logical terms, in relation to the social context, is important for sustaining the material inferential relations they enter into –. Through these practices, by making expressive use of logical vocabulary, participants in the game of giving and asking for reasons attribute commitments and entitlements to one another. To be rational, consequently, does not consist in possessing indisputable (or unmediated) knowledge of how things are – or, especially, *must* be – but in the explanatory capacity to justify our claims to others by offering good reasons they can recognize as such, and by being accountable for the commitments thereby incurred.

### 3.2 - REQUIREMENTS OF JUSTIFICATORY REASONS

Among theories of public justification, at least three criteria have been proposed for a reason to be considered suitable for use in the public justification process: accessibility, shareability, and intelligibility (Vallier, 2014; 2022)<sup>12</sup>. The point of this discussion concerns the status that renders a reason justificatory within practices of public reason. To be sure, defending one or another of the criteria listed above raises further questions – beyond purely epistemological ones – related to the broader debate about how best to conceive the ideal of public reason, but these are not the focus here. However, from the perspective of IMEA – and given its understanding of rationality and the interpersonal attribution of rational justification – accessibility and shareability appear not only impractical in light of the goals they are intended to achieve, but also unnecessary given the current reasons for upholding them. The basic difference between the two is that the accessibility requirement does not demand identical reasons but only shared evaluative standards. Shareability, on the other hand, requires that individuals endorse the same reasons (VALLIER, 2014; 2022). The common point of both is the necessity of shareable standards. From an IMEA perspective, this can be problematic.

11 Perhaps the distinction that Rawls established between these concepts may disappear in light of the inferentialist account of rationality.

12 *Sincerity* also appears as an implied requirement in these three (see QUONG, 2011; BILLINGHAM, 2016), but we will not deal with it directly in this paper.

It is true that the idea of shareable standards (or premises) is not foreign to inferentialist rationality – indeed, it is strongly affirmed –, but the way it is developed within traditional conceptions of public justification may give rise to inconsistencies with the IMEA framework: if the necessity of public justification stems from the fact of reasonable pluralism, the emphasis on shareable standards to delimit public reasoning addresses not only premises that are collectively undertaken, but also a kind of standard that is free-standing–pure, independent of any comprehensive doctrine, and necessarily shareable by all reasonable citizens–in order to resolve the problem of disagreement in a pluralistic society.

Even though the goal of Rawls and other contemporary liberal thinkers is not to return to an idea of “universal reason”<sup>13</sup>, the claim that common and freestanding shareable standards are necessary for offering reasons in the public sphere for public purposes does not entirely depart from this Enlightenment conception of reason. Beyond that, it flirts with a foundationalist conception of knowledge; something incompatible with IMEA. This understanding can lead to a conception of public reason as a form of reasoning with a higher epistemic status, grounded exclusively in consensual standards of knowledge that are (or are supposed to be), in some way, self-evident, incontestable, or something of the sort.

The intelligibility requirement–beyond appearing more coherent with the political-moral rationale of the Public Justification Principle (PJP)–is also more compatible with an IMEA framework, particularly regarding reasonable pluralism and the interpersonal attribution of epistemic status to a belief. Vallier, who defends both the exclusiveness and sufficiency of this requirement, describes it as follows:

A's reason RA is intelligible for member of the public P if and only if P regards A as epistemically entitled to affirm RA according to A's evaluative standards. The IRR, then, holds that A's reason RA can figure in a justification for (or rejection of) a coercive law L only if it is intelligible to all members of the public. To qualify as justificatory, intelligible reasons need only be those that members of the public can see as reasons for those who advance or rely upon them, as opposed to mere utterances and expressions of irrational bias. To put it more provocatively, A's intelligible reasons can figure into a public justification for a law even if others regard such reasons as unacceptable for them given their own evaluative standards. (VALLIER, 2015, p. 2)

Being publicly acknowledged as intelligible is what makes a reason suitable to function as a justificatory reason for a law (or whatever may be the content of public justification<sup>14</sup>). It is particularly relevant to point out that what Vallier means by intelligible closely resembles Brandom's concept of the inferential entitlement of a given assertion. Vallier

13 See Rawls, 2005, p. xxiii; 48-54; Gaus, 2003, p. 1-22.

14 In a recent work, Vallier expands the scope of objects that can be subject to public justification. See: Vallier, 2019, p 91.

employs the notion of *epistemic entitlement*, which means that a person enjoys an intelligible reason when they have permission to believe according to their own set of standards. Nonetheless, it is important to note that, in order to function as a justificatory reason within public justification, its intelligibility must be recognized by all members of the public. As a consequence, this criterion requires – if not shared evaluative standards – a basic comprehension of what counts as intelligibility. Vallier seeks to avoid treating externalist approaches to epistemic entitlement as a meta-criterion, such as the reliabilist perspective, which grounds the attribution of epistemic entitlement in a set of skills or external circumstances (2015, p. 11). Epistemic entitlement is an “internal” condition, in the sense that it’s grounded in the relation between a reason and the personal standards of the person offering that reason. Even though, the author doesn’t make more rage technical articulation on epistemic entitlement, three elements seem to be crucial in his comprehension: (i) attributing intelligibility to a reason is an exercise that involves considering its doxastic congruence with agent-relative premises; (ii) epistemic entitlement is not about enjoying external reliable conditions for accessing truth, but rather about having adequate reasons according to one’s own set of beliefs; (iii) to play as justificatory reason to public justification, the intelligibility must be attributed by other members of public<sup>15</sup>. We want to analyze these features from IMEA perspective.

Brandom’s theory of rationality also makes use of the term “entitlement” to articulate the justificatory status of certain reasons. However, beyond this shared terminology, we believe there are deeper conceptual connections that can be drawn between the two approaches. Thus, Vallier’s requirement proposal provides a good starting point for establishing an IMEA framework for addressing topics already present in the public justification debate and, subsequently, for contributing to the development of a distinctly inferentialist model of public justification. That said, it is important to note that Vallier already employs a theoretical proposal to explain epistemic entitlement—if we understand correctly—drawing on Nicholas Wolterstorff (2010, pp. 86–117)<sup>16</sup>. Therefore, we will take the opportunity to bring also his theoretical proposal into dialogue.

Wolterstorff defines epistemic entitlement (entitlement to believe) in light of what he calls “practices of inquiry,” which, in turn, are related to what he refers to as “ways of finding something out”: “A way of finding something out is an abstract sequence of actions that may function as the content of a social practice of inquiry; a practice of inquiry is socially entrenched and thought to embody a way of finding something out” (2010, pp. 92–93). He argues that whether a person’s belief is entitled or not depends on the practices of inquiry available to them and required by the context. For Wolterstorff, it is more ef-

15 The term intelligibility is used here rhetorically to align with the way Vallier employs it—that is, as equivalent to “entitlement to believe”.

16 Vallier (2015, p. 2; 2019, p. 93) makes it clear in two footnotes where he addresses Wolterstorff’s seminal essay as an overview of the concept of epistemic entitlement.

fective to understand entitlement by examining the conditions under which a belief would not be entitled:

It's now not difficult to see how the demerit of non-entitlement gets attached to our believings and non-believings. And the merit of entitlement is attached just in case the demerit of non-entitlement is not. What makes a person not entitled to some feature of his belief - or knowledge - system is that either (i) there is some practice of inquiry that he failed to employ but ought to have employed with a seriousness and competence such that, had he done so, the presence of that feature would have been forestalled or eliminated; or (ii) there is some practice of inquiry that he employed with a certain seriousness and competence but ought not to have (thus) employed, and which is such that, had he not employed it thus, the presence of that feature would have been forestalled or eliminated (2010, p. 105).

Note the crucial role that practices of inquiry play in evaluating the entitlement of a belief. But what are these practices, after all? Who defines them? As previously mentioned, they are socially established practices—they are not uniform across all contexts, nor are they perennial. In other words, these “ways of finding something out” are historically conditioned (2010, p. 94). This social aspect is what grants them their normative status, and, because of that, the believer is accountable for making proper use of the practices of inquiry required in a given context. As Wolterstorff states, these practices exist only within the space of moral obligation, and recognizing the entitlement of a belief also depends on where the person is situated within that space. To be entitled to believe, then, is not a matter of the truth or falsity of the belief in question, but of using appropriate methods of inquiry in relation to the believer's personal and social context. In this sense, a person can assert something that is in fact “true” and still not be entitled to that belief if they have not employed the right practices of inquiry. Conversely, a belief may be considered “false,” yet the person may still be entitled to hold it, insofar as they have made proper use of the practices of inquiry available and required for them, given their position within the space of moral obligations. Wolterstorff refers to this as “entitlement to ignorance”. Therefore, entitlement is not, in the first place, about undergoing truth-conducive processes, but about, as he puts it, “getting one's doxastic house in order” (2010, p. 107).

Even though Vallier does not make extensive or explicit use of Wolterstorff's theory, it seems that he draws on several of its key aspects to help model epistemic entitlement, which he then applies to characterize what makes a reason intelligible. These aspects include: the contingency of the ways of finding something out; the capacity to justify a belief within one's own set of beliefs; the possibility of attributing entitlement to a belief even when the attributor does not recognize or agree with its truth-status; and the idea that entitlement

to believe is a right to hold a belief, not a duty to do so – i.e.: I can acknowledge someone's epistemic entitlement to believe proposition *A* even if I think they should believe *B*.

Hence, there are two main features of IMEA that can contribute to the conceptual apparatus underlying these aspects:

**a. Logical expressivism:** The inferentialist account of rationality may fall under what Wolterstorff refers to as the “realm of doxastic norms”—that is, a proposal for norms that regulate all types of belief, regardless of the context in which they are formed. Wolterstorff, however, rejects this idea. For him, there is no universal set of special doxastic norms underlying different ways of finding something out; rather, such norms—if they exist—are entirely relative to distinct practices of inquiry (2010, p. 110) In sum, we wish to make just two points on this matter: (i) We find it difficult to see how Wolterstorff's own definition of what it means to be entitled to believe, and its dependence on practices of inquiry, does not itself imply a kind of special doxastic norm, albeit in a more minimalist sense – namely: *P* is entitled to believe *A*, given that *P* is applying the appropriate ways of finding something out that are required and accessible to *P*, considering their position in the space of moral obligation. (ii) The thesis of logical expressivism may offer a more suitable framework for conceiving a minimalist approach to objective doxastic norms. As we have seen, this approach to logic does not assess the quality of a reason based on formal validity or apodictic certainty; rather, it functions by making explicit the inferential relations embedded in assertions or beliefs, through the articulation of the commitments and entitlements implicit in them—while preserving the material (i.e., content-sensitive) aspect of inference. Thus, the rational structure underlying discursive practices is not imposed by logic but rather disclosed by it. The relations of entitlement, commitment, compatibility, and incompatibility do not prescribe any particular “way of finding something out” (to use Wolterstorff's terms), nor do they determine how moral issues must be addressed or what kinds of evidence are most legitimate for justifying a belief. Instead, they illuminate the inherent features of any judgment (or any utterance with propositional content). This inferentialist framework does not compete with practices of inquiry or with epistemological theories (strictly speaking); rather, it clarifies how different “ways of knowing”—or proposals thereof—appear as premises (i.e., evaluative standards) embedded within the social practice of attributing deontic statuses to beliefs or claims<sup>17</sup>. The *space of moral obligation* is always a *logical space of reasons*. Inferentialism does not offer solutions for discovering better ways to attain the truth (in a strong sense); instead, it articulates the very basic rational structure inherent in whatever has a propositional claim.

**b. Entitlement and deontic scorekeeping:** What is crucial in inferentialism is that it situates rationality within a social perspective. The commitments and entitlements present

17 It is notable in Brandom's treatment of reliabilism within the framework of inferentialism: Brandom, 2001, p. 97-122.

in an assertion (or in anything with propositional content) are features that arise from – and only make sense within – social discursive practices. This is because the conditions of commitment and entitlement exist within interpersonal relations. A belief acquires its entitlement through the attribution made by another person. Here, it is important to distinguish between two different roles in the practice of scorekeeping: *attributing* and *undertaking*. Within the game of giving and asking for reasons, attributing entitlement to a reason is not the same as endorsing that reason. From the standpoint of the JTB (Justified True Belief) model, we can attribute justification (i.e., entitlement) to a proposition even if we do not agree with it — it may not be true for us. For a belief to qualify not only as justified but also as justified and true, we must undertake that belief as true — that is, we must assume the same commitment entailed by the proposition. It should be noted that the normative functions of attributing and undertaking are distinct:

Undertaking a commitment is adopting a certain normative stance with respect to a claim; it is not attributing a property to it. The classical metaphysics of truth properties misconstrues what one is doing in endorsing the claim as describing in a special way. It confuses attributing and undertaking or acknowledging commitments, the two fundamental social flavors of deontic practical attitudes that institute normative statuses (BRANDOM 2000, p. 168).

What we do when attributing entitlement to a belief is not the same as what we do when acknowledging its truth status. Therefore, consensus—or even shared evaluative standards—is not necessary to recognize that someone is entitled to a belief and has good reasons for it; such consensus is only necessary if we are to agree with the belief ourselves, that is, if the belief is to be [pragmatically] true for us as well. Since the requirement to reason in light of PJP is not about appealing only to reasons with undebatable truth statuses, but to reasons that are publicly recognized as good ones, and since we, together with Vallier, defend the view that the intelligibility requirement (that is, that a reason may be attributed as entitled even if other members of the public do not agree with it) is sufficient to meet this *desideratum*, the distinction Brandom draws between the acts of attributing and undertaking, as embedded in discursive practices, can be very useful.

If the concept of [doxastic] entitlement from IMEA can be used to model – or, preferably, to replace – the notion of epistemic entitlement in Vallier’s proposal for defining intelligibility, we believe this requirement gains significant conceptual robustness. This is especially true because it addresses agent-relative standards and the socially mediated dimensions of what it means to be entitled to believe, in a coherent and consistent way. It is important to note that, within the game of giving and asking for reasons, no type of reason – whether scientific, moral, aesthetic, or religious – has, *per se*, a content more naturally suited to enjoy justificatory status than another. At the same time, each participant is accountable for managing their reasons responsibly, considering the normative force embed-

ded in the use of concepts (and sentences) within a given social context. This responsibility is driven by the inherently interpersonal nature of rational entitlement. The next section will illustrate this more concretely.

To summarize: our project thus far has been to demonstrate how an IMEA can be applied to existing issues related to the inclusion of religious reasons in public reasoning, and, through this, to explore possibilities for articulating an inferentialist account of public justification and public reason – that is, how its epistemological presuppositions and its view of rationality and interpersonal justification offer a distinctive treatment of these themes and concepts. Two elements appear fundamental to an IMEA approach to public justification: (i) the endorsement and qualification of the fact of reasonable pluralism; and (ii) a contribution to the debate on justificatory requirements, engaging with Vallier's proposal while offering refinements—namely, a distinctive perspective on what it means to be entitled to believe. Building on what has already been outlined here, other topics from the public justification debate can also be approached through an IMEA framework, such as: the *scope* of public justification (what kind of objects require public justification – only legislative matters?); its *formulation* (what is needed for public justification to occur effectively?); and its *idealization* (what capacities or dispositions must individuals have to offer and assess reasons in public reasoning?). Some of these themes will appear indirectly in the next section, where we provide examples of how religious reasons may function as justificatory reasons in public justification processes, with attention to their intelligibility status – that is, to their entitlement. A more thorough treatment of these additional issues will be reserved for another occasion.

#### IV THE ENTITLEMENT OF RELIGIOUS REASONS ON PUBLIC SPACE OF REASONING

Suppose that a member of the public rejects a political measure aimed at guaranteeing equal pay for men and women. His reason is a religious one. He says:

– I don't accept it because *it is not the will of God*.

More exclusivist theories would reject this reason regardless of its content, solely because it is religious—thus considered inaccessible or non-acceptable. That is not the case in our framework. All types of reasons can be candidates for inclusion among the justificatory reasons involved in public justification, provided they pass the filter of the intelligibility requirement. But drawing from IMEA and its account of epistemic entitlement, how can the intelligibility of this reason be evaluated? As members of the public and scorekeepers, we need to score the commitments and entitlements embedded in such an assertion. Based on this, we can ask for further reasons through which we may identify compatibilities and incompatibilities in the argumentation –always bearing in mind that this is only possible due to the normative constraints imposed by the concepts operating within a specific socio-historical context. Given the vagueness of this reason, we can (and arguably should)

ask the speaker further questions about the commitments and entitlements that remain unspecified. His initial claim entails a commitment to knowing the will of God. Thus, we may ask: How do you know the will of God? He responds: Because it is written in the sacred book X. We may then reply: So, should all of God's will in this book be politically imposed? Regardless of his answer, he now bears the responsibility to offer further reasons to avoid inferential incompatibilities and to maintain entitlement to his claims. It is important to observe that the content of his justifications will affect his score –that is, his inferential commitments and entitlements. He might respond: "Yes, all of God's will in this book must be politically imposed", or "No, only certain parts of His will should be imposed". Each of these responses generates a distinct set of inferential commitments and entitlements. Another relevant point to notice is how the concepts articulated in his answer function normatively within the rational structure of his claim: 'Will,' 'God,' 'Imposition,' 'Politics,' etc. All these terms, against the background of a given context of discursive practices, make the speaker accountable for the inferential roles they occupy.

One could argue that the reason "because it is not the will of God" cannot be accepted – not because it is religious, but because it is incompatible with the laicity of the state, as expected in a liberal democracy for example. Suppose this claim is correct – that is, we agree with it. In that case, the possible incompatibility at hand is not related to the kind of reason (i.e., its being religious), but rather to the inferential role that the principle of laicity imposes on such a reason. Therefore, it constitutes a potential inferential incompatibility. The speaker who puts forward this reason carries the responsibility to explain either how it is not incompatible with the principle of laicity or, if it is, why this principle can be overridden. Their challenge is to present reasons whose inferential commitments are not mutually incompatible. Nonetheless, it is equally important to recognize that the scorekeeper is also a participant in the scorekeeping process: they do not only ask for reasons but must also offer them. This means that the evaluation of the intelligibility of a reason must itself be intelligible – that is, accountable within the same discursive space of reasons.

To conclude, suppose now that we, as members of the public, come to regard such a reason as unintelligible. We do so by considering a specific *context of application*. What does this mean? It means that if this reason is offered to oppose the approval of a law, we consider it unintelligible not merely because of its content, but also because the purpose and context in which it is invoked are relevant to its inferential evaluation. In this case, the believer failed to manage their reasons in a way that avoids inferential incompatibility. However, if the same reason is offered in a different context or for a different (even if related) purpose, the evaluation of its intelligibility may change.

–I don't accept it because *it is not the will of God*. So, I believe that the obligation to equalize gender salaries should not prevail over members of my religion, since it interferes with our religious freedom.

Even if the reason applied to reject a political measure is the same as in the first case, the specification alters the context of application, thereby introducing new commitments

and entitlements – some maintained, others added or left behind. We may still regard this reason as unintelligible, but for different reasons. Note also that, in our example, the reason is offered to reject a political measure; however, if it were instead used to affirm the same measure, the inferential monitoring of commitments and entitlements would shift accordingly. In this way, the expressive use of logic within scorekeeping practices illuminates questions concerning the *scope* and *formulation* of public justification. The object of what is publicly justified is not the primary concern of IMEA, but it does indicate that whatever is selected – whether a constitution, legislation, political measure, or social moral norm – will shape an inferential role in evaluating the intelligibility of proposed reasons. This is because each object defines a distinct public context of application, and these contexts come with their own norms, principles, rules, and procedures. These are neither freestanding nor permanently fixed; nevertheless, they must be accounted for within scorekeeping practices and may be revised, provided that good reasons are offered.

It is important to note that, for that reason, an IMEA on public justification is not directly committed to either convergence or consensus theories – even if more aligned with the convergence model due to some of its epistemological presupposition and theoretical coherence –, these models address political theories that are concerned with defining the specific *scope* and *formulation* of public justification, something that is not immediately relevant to the inferentialist approach, at least not in the sense of endorsing narrow definitions on these matters.

This reflection also highlights that shared evaluative standards are not necessary, either for excluding dangerous voices or for fulfilling the duty of civility – even in constitutional matters –, because the goodness of a reason is also assessed by considering the inferential force of contextual factors. For example, if a father claims that he has the right to sacrifice his children because an angel told him to, the problem with this belief is not merely that it lacks shared evaluative standards or is epistemically inaccessible, but that it is unintelligible: he is not entitled to believe it. With one or two questions, we can make the incompatibilities in his reasoning explicit. Note that the mere use of a concept like “right” commits him to a network of inferences that make this belief very difficult to sustain.

Taking this example, someone might argue that a person like him is irrational, mentally unstable, insufficiently educated, or lacking the necessary intellectual repertoire, and should therefore be excluded from the space of public reasoning from the outset. However, such a form of idealization is excessively strong and impractical, especially when considered alongside the epistemological presuppositions assumed thus far. Many people regard religious believers as irrational; a common line of thought is: “If someone believes that the Earth is only six thousand years old, they cannot be taken seriously as a contributor to public discourse.” Admittedly, this kind of reasoning is neither unfamiliar nor surprising. Yet, it reinforces a reductionist view of rationality and is therefore inconsistent with the fact of reasonable pluralism – and even with other political values often cited as part of the rationale behind the Public Justification Principle (PJP). By contrast, an Inferentialist Model

of Epistemological Approach (IMEA) focuses on the quality of reasons within the implicit normative structure of propositional claims, rather than on selecting individuals based on specific cognitive abilities or belief systems. While someone may view certain intellectual competencies or educational credentials as more reliable for evaluating the strength of an argument, such criteria cannot be taken as independent of the *logical space of reasons*: even this view must itself be justified through reasons that explain why those abilities or credentials are relevant in attributing entitlement to a belief.

Finally, one can wonder what IMEA can specifically contribute to the understanding of the ingress of religious reasons, since everything proposed thus far could apply to any kind of reason. However, beyond the fact that the debate, since social contract theorists, usually focuses on the problem of the presence and the role of religious reasons in the public sphere for public purposes, it is also important to note that other theoretical approaches with relative similarities to ours also tend to exclude religious reasons and beliefs. Habermas, who from the outset defends a strictly procedural use of reason in public matters, has shown resistance to the inclusion of religious reasons without some filters in rational argumentation for justifying important state measures—particularly within the realm of the formal public sphere. Even though he rejects Rawls's proviso, he maintains that religious discourse carries certain burdens regarding its language when it is used to justify institutional or political decisions. These burdens involve the need for translation into a publicly accessible form of reasoning that aligns with the norms of democratic deliberation<sup>18</sup>.

Another example: notice that Thomas Nagel, who says:

Public justification in a context of actual disagreement requires, first, preparedness to submit one's reasons to the criticism of others, and to find that the exercise of a common critical rationality and consideration of evidence that can be shared will reveal that one is mistaken. This means that it must be possible to present to others the basis of your own beliefs, so that once you have done so, they have what you have and can arrive at a judgment on the same basis" (1987, p. 232).

is the same who says:

That is not possible if part of the source of your conviction is personal faith or revelation because to report your faith or revelation to someone else is not to give him what you have, as you do when you show him your evidence or give him your arguments (1987, p. 232).

The first sentence, at first glance, appears to be very compatible with what we propose here. However, the second reveals an assumption that also – partially – underlies

18 See Habermas (2006). For a critical review of Habermas's view on religious reasons in the public justification process, see Junker-Kenny (2014, pp. 103–182). For a discussion of the inconsistencies in his version of the translation requirement, see Vallier (2014, pp. 68–70).

Habermas's translation requirement: the idea that religious reasons are either not accessible or lack publicly (or neutral) sharable evidence.

Although a more detailed analysis of this bias in both authors would be necessary – who have crucial differences between them, we know –, we can say from now that, from the perspective of IMEA, accessibility, as it is usually conceived, don't should be a 'valid' criterion for recognizing whether a reason is legitimate for public justification, as we have already said. First, the requirement of translation is not necessary (and fair): the religious believer already knows that they must be understood, because this is inherent to any discursive practice. The very fact that they are expected to offer reasons to be entitled by others already holds them accountable for managing the concepts in light of the context they are addressing. Second, the claim that religious reasons must be excluded because they lack shareable evidence is itself controversial, especially considering Sellars's critique of the Myth of the Given. IMEA presupposes that anything with propositional content depends on premises that are not grounded in self-evident or purely observational data. This applies equally to religious, scientific, and political beliefs. So, why are only religious reasons regarded as inaccessible? Beyond that, if we were to map the inferential commitments underlying allegedly neutral political values – which are products of a social and historical process – we would likely discover that many of their foundational premises turn out to be religious after all.

## CONCLUSION

In this article, we present a theoretical proposal for addressing some of the normative aspects surrounding the concepts of public reason and public justification, particularly from an epistemological perspective grounded in Brandom's inferentialism. Our focus is on the introduction and justification of religious reasons into public argumentation. While it is often claimed that religious reasons are widely employed in practice to legitimize political measures, our aim is not to assess whether this is the case, nor to offer a descriptive evaluation of how such reasoning functions. Rather, we seek to develop a prescriptive framework for analyzing the legitimacy and status of religious reasons in relation it uses to public justification, considering the values and assumptions that underlie the aspiration for a public space of rational dialogue. From the perspective of the liberal democratic desideratum, and in view of epistemological considerations regarding what it means to be rational and to offer good reasons – i.e. what it means for a person to be entitled to a belief and to use it to justify their preferences and endorsements – we argue that an Inferentialist Model of Epistemological Approach (IMEA) may provide a consistent way of engaging with these ideals and assumptions.

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