As it stands, John Rawls’s public reason is an inadequate deliberative device. If public reason is intended to correspond to an idealized form of historic specific circumstances, it must then incorporate a vocabulary that speaks to the competing narratives political actors and citizens face. This goal can be achieved by expanding the kinds of epistemic resources that are retrieved to define public reason, which would include religion and race. Such a move is designed to create what Michele Moody-Adams calls a “reflective confrontation.”

As I shall attempt to argue, W.E.B. Du Bois’s double consciousness serves as a heuristic model for imagining the terms under which individual political actors can scrutinize and possibly transform their primary epistemic resources prior to entering public debates that might require the use of public reason. Employing double consciousness into debates on political liberalism and public reason will provide a framework for exploring the role of ethics and religious reasoning in extending notions of public reason and deliberative democracy.

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