

Modus vivendi as a liberal practice

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Abstract

Modus vivendi has been traditionally conceived of as the pejorative model of toleration, i.e., toleration as mere acquiescence or forbearance. Interpreted as the ‘darkest side’ of toleration, modus vivendi is pursued for prudential reasons only, surely not for moral reasons like respect for others’ freedom and self-determination. This is the idea of modus vivendi theorized by John Rawls, who conceives it as the unstable way for people to coexist in spite of the ‘unreasonableness’ of some of them. *Pace* Rawls, modus vivendi is not to be understood necessarily as this fragile arrangement. Modus vivendi may be instead a practical accommodation that can be accepted for a variety of reasons by those who are parties to it. In order to defend modus vivendi I first introduce some seminal accounts of it, then, secondly, I try and interpret it as a liberal practice. I choose thus not to engage with a proper theory of modus vivendi. I will be rest content with modus vivendi being an effective practice to deal with differences. I interpret this practice as liberal, that is, open to host any difference, both liberal and non-liberal. Modus vivendi is thus consistent with liberalism and its ideals.

Keywords

Liberalism; Unreasonableness; Toleration; Realism.

Riassunto

Il modus vivendi è stato tradizionalmente inteso come un altro nome per la tolleranza negativa, come cioè forma della non-interferenza quale mera sopportazione. Le ragioni per un modus vivendi sono in questo senso prudenziali, non sono le ragioni morali quali il rispetto dell’autodeterminazione e della libertà altrui. John Rawls considera così il modus

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vivendi, qualificandolo come la modalità instabile in cui persone convivono nonostante l'irragionevolezza di una parte di loro. Nonostante Rawls, il modus vivendi può essere altresì un accomodamento pratico accettabile per molte ragioni, morali e/o prudenziali. Con l'intento di difendere il modus vivendi, questo contributo si sviluppa così: dapprima sono presentate alcune recenti prospettive intorno al modus vivendi; quindi, il modus vivendi viene difeso come pratica liberale. Non è presente intento proporre una teoria del modus vivendi ma soltanto difenderlo come una pratica efficace per gestire le differenze. Si tratta di una pratica liberale poiché non esclude nessuna differenza, liberale o meno che sia.

Parole chiave

Liberalismo; Irragionevolezza; Tolleranza; Realismo.

Introduction

Why modus vivendi? I start by asking this question for a couple of reasons.

First: modus vivendi has been traditionally conceived of as the pejorative model of toleration, i.e., toleration as mere acquiescence or forbearance. So construed, toleration is seen as just absence of intolerance. So, it represents a convenient option, coming naturally as the cheapest way to act. When people fail to make up a safe world, they find how to cohabit by way of toleration as modus vivendi. Second: if modus vivendi is interpreted as the 'darkest side' of toleration, it is pursued for prudential reasons only, surely not for moral reasons like respect for others' freedom and self-determination. When there is no room for toleration as a positive attitude of acceptance based upon equal respect, modus vivendi does its work as a way to cohabit peacefully, with persons with whom one fundamentally disagrees. No moral reasons are needed to join this kind of cohabitation. Simply people choose cohabiting peacefully rather than fighting.

These two traditional understandings of modus vivendi seem obsolete: in liberal democracies people live together and base this living together upon moral values such as freedom, equal respect, and mutual acceptance. So interpreted, modus vivendi seems too an old-fashioned notion to be still attractive.

More recently, a negative representation of *modus vivendi* has been contested by John Rawls. According to Rawls, *modus vivendi* is a precarious equilibrium that depends on “circumstances remaining such as not to upset the fortunate convergence of interests”¹. Rawls is extremely sceptic about *modus vivendi*: *modus vivendi* is in fact the way in which the so-called ‘unreasonable’ people adhere to liberal institutions. Unreasonable people are those who do not take others to be equally deserving of freedom and respect. They are unreasonable in so far as they do not support these basic ideas of liberal democracies. This clarifies why ‘unreasonable’ people adhere to liberal institutions for prudential and not moral reasons, that is, as Rawls would say, for the ‘wrong reasons’. That explains also why these ‘unreasonable’ people are ready to violate institutions as suits their interests when circumstances allow. Understood as a mere balance of forces or, more generally, as a contingent equilibrium between contrasting interests, *modus vivendi* is intrinsically destined to instability. *Pace* Rawls, *modus vivendi* is not to be understood necessarily as a fragile balance of political forces. *Modus vivendi* may be reached also for moral reasons or even prudential reasons may help supporting a stable *modus vivendi*. Quoting Horton, “a *modus vivendi* is a practical accommodation that can be built around any number of factors and be accepted for a variety of reasons by those who are parties to it”². For now, suffice it to say that those reasons may vary from prudential considerations to moral reasons, from measures of self-interest to whatever moral principles and values.

The above misrepresentation of *modus vivendi* has to be revised. In order to defend *modus vivendi* I first introduce some seminal accounts of it, then, secondly, I try and interpret it as a liberal practice. I choose thus not to engage with a proper theory of *modus vivendi*. I will be rest content with *modus vivendi* being an effective practice to deal with differences. I interpret this practice as liberal, that is, open to host any difference, both liberal and non-liberal. *Modus vivendi* is thus consistent with liberalism, specifically with respect for persons as ‘their values’-holders. *Modus vivendi* is here the frame including all differences, albeit under certain conditions.

My argument proceeds as follows: a) I clarify the notion of *modus vivendi* by focusing on the pejorative meanings of ‘*modus vivendi*’ both in the traditional and in the

¹ Rawls 2005: 147.

² Horton 2010.

Rawlsian way; b) then I focus on the relationship between *modus vivendi* and liberalism: my idea is that *modus vivendi* does not represent an alternative to liberalism but it offers a way to cope with disagreements within a liberal framework. In short, I subscribe to a version of liberal *modus vivendi* in which liberal and non-liberal differences may be hosted; c) finally, I draw some conclusions.

1. Modus vivendi: less than an ideal

In contemporary political debate the expression ‘*modus vivendi*’ describes a group’s way of living together in spite of disagreements that would likely cause conflict among its members³. Disagreements concern values, beliefs, culture, identity, religion, and also interests. Furthermore, people who are somehow identical with regard to those features may find themselves involved in conflict, i.e. for scarce resources. Thus, even a homogeneous group may need a *modus vivendi*. However, *modus vivendi* is invoked most frequently as a device of contemporary ‘deeply divided’ societies, where differences are not easily reconcilable. It describes an arrangement a number of parties have negotiated to enable themselves to live together peacefully, given the realities of their particular situation.

This emphasis on reality puts a distance from the Rawlsian ideal of just society: *modus vivendi* is to be distinguished from a society the members of which regard or should regard its arrangements as just. According to Rawls, a just society is the ideal way of cohabitation for people who experience no conflict between their moral, philosophical, or religious positions. People belonging to a just society agree on fundamental political values such as liberty, freedom, equal respect, on the basis of which they may cohabit fairly. This cohabitation is supported by an overlapping consensus on the constitutional essentials of a liberal democracy, embodying those shared political values. Thus, there is no room for compromise, at least with regard to the society’s basic structure and constitutional essentials.

In front of a disagreement on these fundamental values or constitutional essentials, there may be a way of supporting liberal institutions falling out the overlapping consensus: it is the way of a ‘mere’ or Hobbesian *modus vivendi* as a result of a calculus

³ Jones 2017.

of opportunities or of simple fear. This kind of *modus vivendi* is intrinsically unstable, doomed to change as circumstances vary.

So far, I have shortly recalled the Rawlsian idea of fair society and, conversely, of *modus vivendi* as a ‘tolerated’ way to comply with fair institutions for prudential, i.e. wrong, reasons. Many authors label the Rawlsian account of just society as unrealistic. Those who do not share any political values and any commitment to a fair society are too far from being motivated to behave accordingly. Being sceptic about the feasibility of the Rawlsian society does not mean rejecting it or denying its possible ‘utility’ (for example, in orienting people towards ideals as standards or comparison criteria). As an ideal, the Rawlsian society is desirable but utopian, thus politically irrelevant.

This emphasis on reality is crucial for properly understanding *modus vivendi*: against abstract ideals and presumed realisations of abstract ideals, *modus vivendi* is a pragmatic response to the realities in which the parties find themselves, in their given circumstances. As for all those who are parties to it, *modus vivendi* will be *less* than their ideal, *less* than they would ideally like. It represents a ‘second best’, although practically it may be the best that is realizable.

Furthermore, this ‘second best’ is being achieved for a variety of reasons that can be both moral and non-moral. It can be constructed from any motive and it causes the parties to make the best of specific situations. In some circumstances, it is more important that the outcome be seen on all sides as a rough and ready compromise in which all the parties have been given something and each has made concessions. Hence, *modus vivendi* requires less than consent given under conditions of freedom and equality of the sort demanded by the Rawlsian overlapping consensus. The sort of consent reached through a *modus vivendi* is quite distant from the crucial feature of the overlapping consensus, i.e. supporting political institutions in a way which is compatible with free will and personal autonomy⁴.

2. Modus vivendi and liberalism

2.1. Modus vivendi or (moral) liberalism

⁴ Rossi 2010.

After briefly illustrating the negative meaning that *modus vivendi* has been conferred in the Rawlsian account, I recall now the already mentioned crucial criticism to it, the one reproaching the Rawlsian account of being unrealistic. I am referring to the realist trend in political theory the start of which has been marked paradigmatically by Bernard Williams's *In the Beginning was the Deed* (2005)⁵.

Realism is generally presented as an alternative to ideal theory, an attack on the 'moral liberalism' of Rawls and his attempt to prioritizing morality (i.e. justice) over *real* politics (i.e. the ways that political arrangements actually function, the reality of disagreement and conflict, the priority of order and stability on justice and so on)⁶. Realism is for correcting moral liberalism or, in Horton's words, 'liberal moralism'⁷, mostly for its descriptive inaccuracy and for its mischaracterization of politics in various ways, for example for beginning with a Kantian model of free, equal and unencumbered individuals and for disregarding social bounds and relationships of power. According to realism, these facts are not contingent for politics: politics is about having to cope with these kinds of features of human coexistence.

In this perspective, *modus vivendi* may represent an alternative to moral liberalism, figuring as a proper realist approach to politics. *Modus vivendi* may be understood as any political arrangement primarily aimed at granting peace and security to all those who are party to it, whatever reasons they may have to value peace and security as well.

Let me introduce some realist views on *modus vivendi*. I start from the one propounded by Horton, who clarifies what it does represent for political theory⁸. Generally speaking, a *modus vivendi* is about seeking to avoid the kinds of evil that make practically impossible any worthwhile life. This does not entail that *modus vivendi* implies that peace or security are the only concerns; it implies only that they do have a special place as *goods of politics* that everyone is likely to share. How to value these goods of peace and security is something that everyone will individually evaluate.

⁵ Many authors contributed actively to the realistic turn in political theory: for instance, Geuss 2008; Gray 2000; Newey 2001; Horton 2010; Rossi and Sleat 2014.

⁶ Sleat 2013.

⁷ Horton 2010: 431-448.

⁸ Horton authored many relevant essays on *modus vivendi*. Among others: Horton 2007; Horton 2010; Horton 2011.

This account of *modus vivendi* as a way to pursue a peaceful coexistence is compatible with many different reasons to adopt it, be they moral or non-moral, liberal or non-liberal. People may have in common moral commitments or concerns, but they may have ‘their’ own reasons too. Thus, they may consent on shared moral contents or, alternatively, they may act in non-moral ways promoting a *modus vivendi*.

Then, Horton highlights a fundamental feature of *modus vivendi*, that is, its being deemed *acceptable* by those who are party to it. A *modus vivendi* is obtained only if each of the parties to it concedes something and only if each agrees to it. This agreement - not necessarily a moral consensus *à la* Rawls - is what we can expect the parties would regard as legitimate. Speaking of legitimacy may sound like a reintroduction of liberal consent. On the contrary, this agreement is not (or not necessarily) an expression of moral consensus but just an evidence of being party to a *modus vivendi* and accepting it.

In the end, this account of legitimacy as factual acceptance gives Horton’s *modus vivendi* a peculiar normative dimension, much more empirical in character than in any liberal settlement⁹.

I go now to two further ‘political realists’ seeing *modus vivendi* as alternative to moral liberalism. Discussing *modus vivendi*, Enzo Rossi declares previously to be sympathetic with the realist turn in political theory in which *modus vivendi* finds room. Indeed, *modus vivendi* is an alternative to consensus-based accounts of liberalism¹⁰. Rossi too emphasizes that the sort of agreement reached through a *modus vivendi* is incompatible with the most important requirement of the consensus view of liberal legitimacy, i.e. grounding political power in a way which is respectful of autonomy. Nonetheless, Rossi values *modus vivendi* as that settlement achieved between the competing demands of different actors, in which basic rights are protected. For this to be attained, a condition of peaceful coexistence (or absence of violence) is needed, and this sort of peaceful coexistence could also be interpreted as itself a basic right. In this regard, *modus vivendi* is not so alien to liberalism: they both aim at peace. What differs are the reasons for which peace is being sought. Rossi annotates that liberals should drop the language of morals, or of the universal appeal to the value of autonomy: they should

⁹ About Horton’s *modus vivendi* and liberal consensus: Baiasu 2017; Jones 2017.

¹⁰ Rossi 2019.

adopt the language of *modus vivendi*, i.e. of justifying political institutions as the best arrangement between competing interests and conceptions of the good.

I spend now a few words to illustrate the realist perspective on *modus vivendi* defended by Matthew Sleat¹¹. According to Sleat, *modus vivendi* is not, at least in the first instance, a theory of liberalism. It is a theory of politics about the conditions in which politics takes place and the human needs to which it is expected to respond. Similarly, Sleat defends *modus vivendi* as a compromise grounding social order. He assumes compromise to largely depend on the beliefs, values and commitments held by the agents in any particular context. This focus on facts – and it is a fact of politics that what counts as acceptable will depend on the beliefs of those who need to accept them – induces some critics to see *modus vivendi* as a mere description of facts. Such an account is wrong because it is wrong saying that *modus vivendi* is just descriptive and not normative: on the contrary, it makes normative judgements about peace and compromise, although we need to explain why we should value peace and compromise and why we should care about those with whom we disagree. Having said that, the difference between liberalism and *modus vivendi* apparently depends on that between moralist and realist theories, not on that between normative and descriptive theories. The point will be about what normativity in politics means. Indeed, this is part of the current realist debates¹².

To recapitulate, realists generally offer *modus vivendi* as alternative to liberal settlement grounded on consensus. *Modus vivendi* and liberalism have in common a strong commitment to peace, whatever reasons people may have for pursuing it. Nonetheless, their difference should not be elided, especially with regard to the idea of normativity they presuppose.

2.2. *Modus vivendi liberalism*

I come now to sketch some accounts of the so-called *modus vivendi liberalism*, starting from the famous one defended by David McCabe¹³. The core idea is that, through *modus vivendi*, liberalism (or rather liberal order) can be rationally vindicated to

¹¹ Sleat 2015.

¹² Sleat 2014.

¹³ McCabe 2010.

illiberal people. Even if it is still necessary that people should have good reasons to sustain liberal institutions, these reasons need not themselves be exclusively universally moral. There is indeed not only one account of justification but, to quote McCabe, a ‘multivalent account’ of it¹⁴.

This is not only a theoretical issue for liberals, it is a moral question too, because the commitment to ensuring that political order is acceptable to all people relies on the moral status of all individuals as free and equal. This commitment is part of the political morality of liberalism. *Modus vivendi* is, thus, a moral way to conceive political coexistence between liberal and illiberal people.

Interestingly, in a recent essay McCabe deals with *modus vivendi* as a general framework for understanding how to think about political groups departing in significant ways from liberalism¹⁵. This understanding defends liberalism on ‘*modus vivendi* grounds’ as the solution to a specific task, the one of finding political arrangements that might be broadly acceptable to ‘new’ citizens living in the context found in Western liberal democracies. The idea that political institutions should be acceptable to those who live under them and not just coercively imposed is capturing a right that people possess to live under institutions that are broadly agreeable to them. The appeal of *modus vivendi* as an approach to global instances refers to a political morality that is distinct from that of Rawlsian liberal moralism. In this ‘trans-contextual’ view *modus vivendi* liberalism is a *moderate* liberal moralism that endorses liberal ideals (i.e. liberal rights) in a non-absolutist fashion.

This point may be made with Stephen Wall’s words: *modus vivendi* is a *moralized* notion, drawn on ideas from both liberal moralism and *modus vivendi* political theory¹⁶. It reveals the failures of both liberalism and *modus vivendi* when they part company. On the one hand, liberal moralists have failed to address adequately the question of which political arrangements are worthy of support in unfavourable circumstances. Further, they have tended to overstate the relevance of abstract principles and ideal justice. On the other hand, critics of liberal moralism have failed to articulate a worked-out conception of acceptability; and, as a consequence of this, they have failed to appreciate

¹⁴ McCabe 2010: 160.

¹⁵ McCabe 2019.

¹⁶ Wall 2013.

the extent to which doing so requires an appeal to general moral principles¹⁷. These failings on both sides do much to explain the perceived opposition between liberal moralism and *modus vivendi* politics. Moving past these failings puts us in a position to appreciate the deep compatibility of the two sets of ideas.

To conclude, *modus vivendi* liberalisms hold the coherence between *modus vivendi* and liberal moralism, albeit moderate. *Modus vivendi* is a moralized one. In order to reach a moralized *modus vivendi*, the parties must be *motivated* to support and sustain institutions, not just judge that this is what they ought to do. This means that there must be sufficient *convergence* of judgment among the interested parties that a designated political arrangement, in those circumstances, is worthy of support, for whatever reasons¹⁸.

2.3. Remarks

The short overview I sketched above is conducive to a general remark: *modus vivendi* arrangements are quite far away from what the morally best arrangements would be. Although the above accounts offer different perspectives on the normativity of *modus vivendi* (for no one *modus vivendi* is just a descriptive phenomenon), all of them recognize limits to what may count as a *modus vivendi*. There is no place for universally moral criteria that are superimposed from the outside, but intrinsic requirements to what a *modus vivendi* should be. A *modus vivendi* is the arrangement that secures peace or, at least, absence of violence and evil. People who live under it accept it as a second-best, as their superior ideals are not finding any concrete realization; but sometimes people live under it without doing it consciously¹⁹.

In particular, the latter positions propound explicitly a moralized *modus vivendi*: the idea is that *modus vivendi per se* does not give us reasons why we should respect other people and why we should seek peaceful cohabitation. *Modus vivendi* liberalism faults *modus vivendi* realism for not appreciating enough the extension to which *modus vivendi* arrangements presuppose a commitment to moral principles of the sort defended by moral liberalism, a sort of a moral minimum, for instance, respect for others and

¹⁷ Similar considerations can be found in Wendt 2016.

¹⁸ Wall 2019.

¹⁹ Wendt 2019.

toleration of their values albeit unshared. Some liberal authors even believe that *modus vivendi* does not work as an alternative to liberalism, being it part of liberal theory²⁰.

If one accepts a moralized *modus vivendi*, why should one stop at merely minimal moral criteria? Why not moralize further? The answer is easily understandable: *modus vivendi* arrangements are the solution to conflicts, and these conflicts are often moral conflicts, where the parties disagree about the requirements of justice and morality. It would be odd if *modus vivendi* arrangements had to meet moral criteria that are not conceivable by some of the parties. Whether an arrangement can be recognized as a *modus vivendi* arrangement should not depend on controversial moral views. That is why we should invoke only minimal and hence uncontroversial moral requirements like basic rights, as invoked above. A common moral and apparently uncontroversial requirement is the principle that every party's interests should be taken into account. It is a criterion that should be uncontroversial, even though its concrete application may sometimes be contentious.

I acknowledge the general perspectives sketched above. On the one hand, I agree with the realists when they show scepticism about abstract or even extreme idealization in politics. Politics is less and more than ideals, so to say. It is less since what we can realize is still less than what we would like to realize or what we should realize in light of ideals (for instance peace in a teleological or substantive moral sense, not only as a framework of cohabitation). But politics is more than ideals since it asks us for a greater effort in order to understand contexts, to focus on their peculiarities and to sort out solutions for conflicts. I believe that realists' most interesting contribution to the current debate is about consensus: although I recognize the central normative role of an autonomous consensus *à la* Rawls, I am ready to recognize how real politics has to do with situations in which sorts of oppression, subjection, conflict, deception but also scarcity and deficiency run against any possibility to see ourselves and others as free and equal interlocutors. On the other hand, I feel sympathetic with the authors of liberalism *modus vivendi*: being committed to peace, or even to a peaceful coexistence, entails a sort of moral engagement although the adjective 'moral' refers to a sort of intrinsic morality of *modus vivendi*. Not all *modus vivendi* work in order to let people pursue

²⁰ Gutmann 2019.

their own goals but only those arrangement in which people are ready to respect – or at least not to infringe – other people’s existential choices.

Honestly, speaking of respect is hard in some circumstances: by respect I mean at least a non-interference with others’ decisions or actions (when of course not openly contrary to human basic rights). People, whatever their morality, are political actors who may be loyal to institutions for multiple reasons. Their loyalty may be partial: it may result from a calculus of benefits or it may be the outcome of a non-reflexive behaviour. In the latter case, *modus vivendi* may be the name for a system of mutual expectation in which people and institutions rely on a sort of reciprocal commitment. I will go back to this idea in the following.

To conclude: the *moralization* of *modus vivendi* does not lie in a specific political morality focused on the core value of autonomy and consent; rather, it depends on the judgements of people who have different reasons for honouring it. Notwithstanding the variety and possibly conflicting nature of their reasons, they share the value of reaching a settlement with others. Reaching this settlement is a ‘good’ for all, independently pursued.

3. Motives to be part to a modus vivendi practice

In what follows I try and depict my view of *modus vivendi* as a liberal practice²¹.

The variety of *modus vivendi* accounts sketched before confirms somehow that the extent of disagreement among theories of *modus vivendi* goes far beyond the one among the parties to it. It seems a truism: on the contrary, it pushes us to be aware that besides theories we need reasons to seek peace or at least peaceful cohabitation with those with whom we disagree. As most authors of *modus vivendi*, I assume the value of a peaceful and relatively stable coexistence, construed as a precondition for anyone to pursue their life projects, whatever they may be. The conciliation among disagreeing people takes the form of a *modus vivendi*: I trust too that *modus vivendi* is the proper way to cohabit efficaciously with others, despite their different or even contrasting views. The point now is to argue for the reasons people may have to be actively part of a society that is not ideal for those who do not endorse its moral fundamentals. I propound that

²¹ I have defended this view more extensively in Sala 2019.

anyone may comply with liberal institutions *via* a *modus vivendi* supported both by reasons and practices, the intersection of which serves as a guarantee of stability.

My task is to understand how the ‘readiness to join’ institutions in spite of disagreeing with their underlying values may be construed. I recall what said earlier, that reaching a political settlement represents for people a ‘good’, although for peculiar and different reasons. ‘Good’ may be seen as follows: a) good may be a first-person goal-based reason that motivates one to seek its realization²². A goal-based reason may be differently defined as a moral reason (when I pursue a final end or a transcendent ideal prescribing my duties), but also as a prudential or instrumental reason, or even as self-interest. b) ‘Good’ may also be construed as a good in light of social morality: I pursue ends as dictated by a sense of justice and social cooperation. All such reasons act as motives for me to accomplish what I call my ‘good’.

The core idea is that a political settlement may be *reached* backed by first-person reasons and also that it may be a *generalized* goal on the basis of second-person reasons. These last reasons are to be referred to as a way of sharing social rules that people are accustomed to follow: those rules are such as to enable people to apply them to one another, in virtue of their being socially recognized²³. When these rules are socially recognized they become the object of general compliance. To be compliant with social rules does not imply endorsing them; it entails only the acknowledgement to be bound by them. People are generally inclined to follow them, given that generalized conformity with these rules allows the cultivation of a set of *mutual stable expectations*, becoming a sort of reciprocal guarantee of stability and order. These rules function as a precondition for social order: the latter requires such rules if societies are to exist stably and if any individual is to be able to pursue his own ‘good’ with any hope of success.

Now, it is not insignificant that social rules may conflict with first-person reasons: it happens when people perceive social rules as disagreeable restraints, for example, in the cases of a tension between religious beliefs or personal projects and public reason’s requirements. Where the latter infringe on the former, social rules may be complied with, reluctantly or not. ‘Reluctant’ people have second-person reasons to comply with social rules despite their disagreement with them. They comply with rules for whatever motive

²² I follow here Vallier 2015. I take up many suggestions from this contribution, although I reach different conclusions.

²³ Vallier 2015: 213.

other than first-person reasons. It may be because they accept the functioning of a social system, or because they appreciate social order as a precondition for their own personal realizations. Given the possible distance between first-person reasons and second-person reasons to comply with social rules, the political settlement people reach is a proper *modus vivendi*. People involved in a *modus vivendi* have reasons for compliance with social rules although they do not adhere to them wholeheartedly, as when they are supported by first-person reasons.

To summarize, I started by asking what kind of reasons people may have to achieve a political settlement regarded as being good and as a ‘good’ for themselves. They may have first-person reasons and second-person reasons, or they may have just first-person reasons or just second-person reasons to do so. However, first-person reasons *only* subtend social rules as part of one’s own personal morality, neglecting the relevance of public good and community welfare. By contrast, second-person reasons *only* subtend social rules as part of a system of mutual expectations that people share, even if not wholeheartedly. When second-person reasons *only* motivate compliance, we have a *modus vivendi*. These reasons are sufficient for compliance, although not completely²⁴. In short, social rules may be valued as such or they may be followed instrumentally, in order to gain a personal benefit from social order.

Therefore, focusing on *modus vivendi*, it is valuable both for being a precondition of the pursuit of one’s idea of good and for representing a shared commitment to social order. Social order in turn represents the ‘good’ that people are pursuing when they reach a *modus vivendi*. Social order represents both a goal for individuals - they have first-person reasons to comply with a political settlement, for example interpreting social order as peace, which is a moral goal - and a *shared* goal as embodied in the social rules (i.e. all seek order backed by second-person reasons, for the sake of cohabitation on fair terms).

To sum up: *modus vivendi* is valuable insofar as people choose it as a way to stay ‘within’ society differently, without holding that living peacefully with others in a stable way is attainable only through sharing liberal values, and eventually renouncing one’s own projects and morals.

²⁴ For this partial conclusion I have benefited from some relevant remarks of Wendt 2016.

Conclusion

In this contribution, I began by recalling the well-known critique by John Rawls of *modus vivendi* understood as a precarious equilibrium of opposing forces. I, then, debated some views on *modus vivendi* in order to detail why it is preferable to ideal accounts of liberalism based on autonomy and consensus. Given that, *modus vivendi* is a moralized one as far as it possesses an intrinsic morality: adhering to it presupposed pursuing peace, whatever the idea of peace or whatever reasons a person may have for it. Motives besides proper reasons suggest seeing *modus vivendi* as a practice more than a theory. Indeed, there are no specific reasons to adhere to a *modus vivendi*. People may join a mutual commitment among themselves and with institutions for their whatever reasons. And finally, they may stay within a *modus vivendi* spontaneously, as a result of joining common good, first of all the political good of peace.

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