On the Appropriate Mode of Justifying a Public Moral Constitution

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As James Sterba recognizes in "Completing the Kantian Project: from Rationality to Equality," humans in society are often confronted by a conflict between self-regarding and other-regarding reasons. We are creatures devoted to our ends and concerns which give us self-regarding reasons, yet we are inherently social creatures and as such recognize otherregarding reasons. Morality, he claims is a way of commensurating these reasons. In particular, he argues for an "incomplete" conception of morality (57–8, 76) — "morality as compromise" — according to which (*i*) both altruistic and egoistic reasons are relevant to choice and (*ii*) while reason cannot necessarily provide the complete ranking of these two reasons, it can be rationally demonstrated that higher ranked altruistic reasons outweigh lower-ranked egoistic reasons. Many readers, no doubt, will be most interested in Sterba's striking claim that this "incomplete" conception of morality can be derived from very basic canons of good reasoning. Although I shall briefly address this ambitious thesis, my focus will be on where, if we accept it, it will take us. I wish to ask: if we accept Sterba's conception of morality as an incomplete compromise between egoism and altruism, how might we think about "completing" it — developing a more specific view of how a plausible human morality might "balance" egoism and altruism?