

POLITICAL LIBERALISM AND THE VIRTUES OF CITIZENS

by

STEPHANE THOMAS CARINI

A thesis submitted to the Department of Philosophy

in conformity with the requirements for

the degree of Master of Arts

Queen's University

Kingston, Ontario, Canada

September 2008

Copyright © Stephane Thomas Carini, 2008

## **Abstract**

This paper takes as its starting point the fact of reasonable pluralism and defends political liberalism as the best means of accommodating diversity and a plurality of different conceptions of the good. I then ask what is needed for a social order characterized by diversity and a multiplicity of different ways of life to come into existence and perpetuate itself over time. First, I defend political liberalism and argue that the creation of a society that is accommodating of diversity requires that the state be mindful of the spillover effects between public institutions and the private lives of citizens. Second, I argue that the individuals living in such a society must adopt certain virtues, both publicly as well as privately. I achieve this by presenting an account of the virtues of citizens in a political liberal society. Third, I draw out the implications of having a society characterized by reasonable pluralism and many different conceptions of the good, by arguing that such a society should avoid adopting too expansive a role, since an overly ambitious conception of social justice risks stifling the diversity a political liberal society is trying to protect. I conclude with some general remarks about the current state of liberal theorizing and the need for liberal theorists to provide an account of liberalism that includes more than one's conception of distributive justice and legitimate state coercion.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would first like to thank Will Kymlicka whose comments and advice during this process greatly contributed to the success of this project. Thanks also to my examining comity for their helpful comments and questions, which helped make this a better paper. I would also like to thank Hilliard Aronovitch, who inspired me to pursue political philosophy at the Master's level, and Antoine Côté, for his animated and eccentric teaching style, which first attracted me to the study of philosophy. Thanks, as well, to all the faculty members at both Queen's University and the University of Ottawa, for many interesting and engaging classes.

I would also like to thank all the philosophy graduate students at Queen's for many thoughtful discussions. Our many disagreements made for a very entertaining and intellectually stimulating year.

I would like to thank my parents, Sylvie-Emanuelle Bourbonnais and Tom Carini, for their love and support over the years. I would not be here if it weren't for them. I owe them more than I could ever say.

Finally, many thanks to Natalie Foster, who provided me with constant love, support, and understanding, during what was at times a difficult process. She was a source of inspiration and our many stimulating discussions helped me clarify my own positions on a number of topics.

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	i
Acknowledgements.....	ii
CHAPTER ONE	
Introduction.....	1
CHAPTER TWO	
Political Liberalism, Neutrality and Perfectionism.....	11
Political Liberalism Defended .....	16
Challenges for Political Liberalism .....	19
Neutrality Examined .....	21
The Public and Private Lives of Political Liberal Citizens.....	29
Justice in a Well-Ordered Society.....	34
CHAPTER THREE	
The Virtues of Reasonable People: A Political Liberal Account of Civic Virtue .....	41
Necessary Public Virtues: Public Reasonableness and Respect for Rights .....	44
Necessary Private Virtues: Reciprocity, Mutuality and Responsibility.....	53
Contingent Public Virtues: Participation and Protestation .....	59
Contingent Private Virtues: Pluralism and Diversity.....	62
CHAPTER FOUR	
In Defence of Pluralism: What it means to be a Political Liberal .....	65
Religion, Neutrality and Liberal Education .....	66
Political Liberalism and Public Policy.....	72
Political Liberalism and Social Justice .....	76
Political Participation and Civic Engagement .....	83
Internalizing Responsibility .....	84
Conclusion .....	89
Bibliography .....	94

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Since the beginning of the 1990s, in response to many communitarian critiques of liberalism, the focus of liberal theorizing has shifted from an almost exclusively justice-oriented standpoint to a much broader view of what it means to be a citizen in a liberal-democratic society. While most accounts of liberal theory still take justice to be the primary virtue of a liberal polity, it is now widely recognized that liberal societies need more than just institutions in order to thrive. As Kymlicka puts it:

the health and stability of a modern democracy depends, not only on the justice of its basic institutions, but also on the qualities of its citizens: e.g. their sense of identity and how they view potentially competing forms of national, religious, ethnic, or religious identities; their ability to tolerate and work together with others who are different from themselves; their desire to participate in the political process in order to promote the public good and hold political authorities accountable; their willingness to show self-restraint and exercise personal responsibility in their economic demands, and in personal choices which affect their health and the environment (Kymlicka 2001a: 284-85).

It is no longer taken for granted that a society which satisfies the requirements of some account of liberal justice is necessarily a desirable place to live, even if it is a legitimate political arrangement. Liberal accounts of justice used to, and often still take the institutional arrangements of society, as well as the distribution of entitlements to be of primary importance, leaving questions related to the roles and duties of citizens, as well as the impact of social arrangements on its citizens, virtually unanswered. From this perspective, the social interactions of the individuals who make up the society don't matter, as long as these interactions don't affect the overall justness of society.

Liberal accounts of justice have taken (and continue to take) a variety of forms, but most traditional accounts had in common a concern with a specific set of questions

related to justice and state legitimacy. These so-called ‘institutional’ accounts of justice require only that the basic structure of society be just.<sup>1</sup> On this view, an answer to the question of whether or not the institutions and laws of a society are just, is enough to yield an answer to the question of whether or not a society itself is just. An answer in the positive to the former question would amount to an answer in the positive to the latter.

On G.A Cohen’s account, justice has a much broader scope, and is made to include not only society’s institutional structures, but also the interactions of the citizenry and the ways in which individuals treat one another in their daily lives. On this more demanding account of justice, individuals may need to develop certain capacities (or virtues) in order for the requirements of justice to be met. While a just legal system and just institutions will contribute to a society’s being just, such provisions (although necessary) are deemed to be insufficient in the achievement of justice. There is another necessary condition that needs to be fulfilled on this view. Namely, the people within the society need to foster certain attitudes and beliefs about justice and their choices must reflect these beliefs. Virtue or what Cohen calls an ‘ethos of responsibility’ is in a sense ‘built-into’ his conception of justice.<sup>2</sup>

This approach changes the demands of justice, not only for the state, but for citizens as well, since it expands the scope of the concept to include more than Rawls’ ‘basic structure.’ This view does add an important dimension to the overly limited view of institutional justice, but even on this view, justice remains the central concern of liberal theory. This account of justice does include talk of social or civic virtues, and the

---

<sup>1</sup> On Rawls’ account, for instance, the ‘basic structure’ of society should be the primary subject of any liberal theory of justice (Rawls 1971: 7; 2005: 257-89).

<sup>2</sup> See Cohen (2000) chapters 8-10.

need for citizens in a liberal society to develop certain attitudes or dispositions, but such virtues are useful only insofar as they contribute to the overall justness of society and are not valued in their own right. From a liberal perspective, it may seem that civic virtues can only be regarded as instrumentally useful; as useful insofar as they contribute to the pre-existing goals of liberal justice and well-orderedness. When the right is given priority over the good, as it is in most liberal theory, one cannot defend any particular conception of the good, save those that are preconditions for the exercise of liberal rights. As such, liberal virtues are usually those that contribute to the justice of society's 'basic structure' and help individuals exercise their rights. Thus, most liberal theories only promote those virtues which are necessary contributors to some account of liberal justice and to the free exercise of individual rights.

A large part of the literature on citizenship and civic republicanism is dedicated to elaborating lists of the civic virtues required for the flourishing of a polity. Liberal accounts of virtues are usually limited to elaborating lists of political and social virtues conducive to promoting liberal values and a liberal conception of the good. For instance, liberals require that at least a portion of the population participate in public life and engage in the political process. They also require that individuals respect the rights of others and act with a certain sense of 'civility' or 'decency' (Kymlicka 2001a: 300-1). The central difficulty with much of what is written on the subject of citizenship is that most accounts of liberal virtues say little about how these virtues are to be promoted or supported in society and what needs to change in order to make these virtues a central focal point not just of theorizing, but of practical politics. Some have come to regard the recent literature on liberal citizenship as a new way of addressing (or perhaps

camouflaging) old problems of distributive justice and state legitimacy. Kymlicka says, for instance, “it is not clear whether adopting the perspective of citizenship really leads to different policy conclusions from the more familiar perspectives of justice. It may instead be a matter of putting old wine into new bottles” (2001a: 319).

Although theories of justice are increasingly being supplemented by theories of citizenship, many share Kymlicka’s scepticism at the prospects of such theories actually proposing anything substantially different than traditional theories of justice. Kymlicka points out, correctly I think, that for the most part, recent work on citizenship, while fruitful in certain ways, has failed to yield any major returns with respect to real policy proposals. The failure of most theories of citizenship at showing what the practical effects of their theories are has led many to call into question the alleged distinctiveness, as well as the usefulness, of the citizenship approach.

Even though there is reason to be worried about the inability (or perhaps unwillingness) of citizenship theorists to address real policy issues, I think it would be a mistake to dismiss the debate as a subsidiary of older problems of distributive justice. It is true enough that questions of justice have been transposed into the language of citizenship, but this is not the only dimension the debate need take (or in fact has taken). Kymlicka rightly points out the ways in which old debates between liberal egalitarians and libertarians, conservatives and multiculturalists have been recast in new terms, but this only captures part of what the debate on citizenship is (or should be) about. This is an important part to be sure, but it is nonetheless only a part of what is at stake when considering the issue of citizenship in a liberal society. The literature on citizenship has also raised a new set of questions regarding the membership and role of citizens within a



liberal democracy that are not justice-related. This move has forced liberals to expand the scope of political theory away from a merely entitlement-focused view of citizens, to a broader conception of citizenship, as involving questions related to political membership as well as the obligations or requirements of citizenship, many of which are not institutionally enforced (Moore 2001: 178-9).

Institutional accounts of justice have focused on the entitlements of citizens at the expense of other important questions. Two things in particular are missing from institutional accounts of justice. First, such accounts have neglected the relationship between the attitudes, values and civic virtues of a country's citizens on the one hand, and the social institutions of justice, on the other. There is a constant spillover between public conceptions of justice and the private lives of citizens. This spillover can have an important impact on the overall demands of citizenship and affect the range of ways in which individuals can organize their lives as well as the goals they can legitimately pursue. This spillover effect is not one-directional either; one's conception of justice has an impact on the demands of citizenship, but one's conception of what kind of citizens a liberal-democracy requires is also bound to have an impact on one's theory of justice and the institutional structures of society. These spillover effects between public institutions, public conceptions of justice and the private morality of citizens are often ignored by institutional accounts of justice.

Second, not all matters of citizenship are matters of basic justice. There may be reason to be concerned with some of the effects of policy decisions on the citizens within a country that are not, strictly speaking, matters of basic justice. As Tomasi rightly points out: "what citizens really want to know is whether political liberals, as such, can do

*anything* regarding their non-justice-based concerns” (Tomasi, 2001: 55; emphasis original). Whether or not a society is just is undoubtedly an important question, but it is not the only question liberals should ask or seek answers to. For many individuals, the ways in which public institutions affect their private conceptions of the good is just as important, as the question of whether or not the institutions of society are just, if not more important. Insofar as these individuals make reasonable demands, their concerns must be acknowledged and addressed in a fair and equitable manner.

Part of the key to liberal citizenship, as Tomasi conceives of it, lies in developing an account of virtues that would remain consistent with liberalism, but would reject “the *derivative interpretation* of liberal citizenship” (Tomasi 2001: 61; emphasis original). On a fuller (perhaps more Aristotelian) account of justice “for any society to do well or flourish is for the people within it (all those recognized as citizens at least) to do well or flourish” (Tomasi 2001: 63). Tomasi is one of the only theorists to draw out some of the implications of adopting political liberalism as a political framework. This includes recognition of and the need to mitigate spillover effects between liberal public institutions and the private lives of citizens, as well as the need to have citizens with the kinds of attitudes and values that will help them lead fulfilling lives in a society characterized by reasonable pluralism and many different ways of life. This paper takes as its starting point the need to develop a liberal theory that is able to support a plurality of different ways of life and conceptions of the good, while creating the conditions necessary for each of these to flourish in its own distinctive way. I attempt to build on some of Tomasi’s ideas in order to develop an account of liberal citizenship which explores the boundaries and the demands of citizenship in a political liberal society. I ask what a commitment to

political liberal principles such as public reasonableness and respect for individual rights requires of citizens in a liberal society and how political liberalism can be made to be a desirable political arrangement for individuals with as many different reasonable conceptions of the good as possible.

I argue that the focus of liberal politics needs to shift away from the merely procedural or formal aspects of justice and move towards: (1) a broader conception of justice, which would include an analysis of the interplay between institutional accounts of justice and the demands of citizenship; and (2) a direct and honest answer to the non-justice related concerns of citizens. In saying this, I do not mean to downplay the importance of justice. However, I think it is important to recognize that justice in the broadest sense can never be achieved without the proper social ethos and certain fundamental changes in the attitudes and values of people. No matter how just the institutions, a society will never be just until the people themselves adopt the right kind of attitudes and start treating each other in a fair and equitable manner. Furthermore, even if a society is just, this does not mean it is a desirable place to live for a number of people, whose way of life may be threatened by overly expansive or distinctly liberal accounts of social justice.

Developing an account of justice is only part of what a liberal theory needs in order to gain widespread support and be a 'complete' political theory. Justice shouldn't, therefore, be regarded as the only important virtue of a liberal society and liberal theory shouldn't limit itself to the promotion of this one central virtue (however conceived). As Tomasi points out:

affirming a liberal conception of justice does not commit us to considering only a derivative interpretation of one's responsibilities as a liberal social constructor, any more than affirming the liberal principle of legitimacy constrains us only to theorize about the formal grounds of justified coercion. We can affirm a liberal conception of politics – whether grounded ethically or politically – and yet not think that a concern for public values, though foundational, is *all* that is required of liberal citizens if their society is to succeed or flourish as a liberal society (Tomasi 2001: 67; emphasis original)

The citizens of a liberal society need more than a sense of justice in order to live their lives well. They need to develop the capacities required to effectively manage their lives in a liberal society and to develop a conception of the good, which is not given to them by liberal institutions. Citizens in a liberal society need to learn how to balance acceptance of liberal political norms with their private view of the good and their conception of what makes life valuable for them. If liberal institutions are meant to be neutral vis-à-vis competing conceptions of the good, it is because they don't tell individuals how to lead their lives beyond setting limits on the types of activities that are deemed to be legitimate in a liberal society. A political liberal theory cannot, therefore, inform individuals on questions of the good. These questions need to be answered in the private lives of citizens or in the institutions of civil society. Just because the liberal state doesn't tell individuals how to lead their lives beyond requiring adherence to liberal norms of public reasonableness and private civility, how individuals choose to lead their lives in a liberal state matters, because it will have an impact on the flourishing of the liberal community. Two societies that are equally just are not, de facto, equally desirable to live in for a great number of the citizens in these societies.

Liberals need to spend more time exploring the non-institutional side of justice as well as the non-justice related aspects of liberal society. Instead of focusing on the

requirements of distributive justice, liberals should be asking themselves what kinds of virtues their citizens would require in order for a society to be just even when justice-promoting institutions were lacking in a variety of ways or even completely absent. They should also be asking themselves what else is required, other than justice in order to make a society a desirable place to live. Some might argue that liberal justice is a necessary requirement for any kind of good life, but even if it is, it is certainly not the only requirement, and therefore should not be the sole focus of liberal theorizing.

In the following, I will be defending a version of political liberalism that attempts to reconcile a liberal account of neutrality with the need for a certain kind of citizen in society.<sup>3</sup> The purpose of the following will be to show that the best liberal theory is one that does more than simply allow for a multitude of ways of life to coexist together. Political liberals should not blindly aim to be neutral among all competing conceptions of the good; rather they should actively defend the legitimacy of all reasonable ways of life without undermining the content of any of these by trying to mould them according to liberal values. In order to achieve this goal, a liberal state must set limits on the acceptable forms of the good that may be pursued by their citizens. This is done by demanding of all citizens, an acceptance of certain norms of public reasonableness and of private civility. In this sense, liberalism will appear far from neutral, but once the line is drawn between reasonable and unreasonable conceptions of the good, a political liberal state should aim at neutrality among all reasonable conceptions of the good. This will

---

<sup>3</sup> This may sound like an attempt to reconcile neutrality with perfectionism, which are often cited as conflicting aims. To some extent this is true. However, if the argument presented in this paper is correct, these goals are not as incompatible as they seem, since a society committed to neutrality of aim among reasonable conceptions of the good needs citizens that respect each other and abide by the norms of public reasonableness.

require that liberals be mindful of the spillover effects between the public and private lives of citizens.

In chapter two, I will examine political liberalism as a political doctrine and distinguish it from comprehensive liberal accounts of the good, in order to establish the distinguishing features of political liberalism and to defend it from its critics. In chapter three, I will attempt to elaborate a conception of the values and virtues required in a society committed to political liberalism. Even a conception of political liberalism, which does not accept or promote any particular conception of the good, is committed to certain values and it requires its citizens to have certain virtues; namely, those that support reasonable pluralism and those that help individuals negotiate between the demands of public citizenship and their private moralities. Finally, in chapter four, I will draw out some of the implications of accepting an account of political liberalism and evaluate the implications of this position on practical policy issues. This will involve an application of the values and virtues developed in the previous chapters to actual social situations. The goal will be to come to a better understanding of some of the consequences of a political liberal account of virtues and citizenship on practical policy issues. Many conclusions will be drawn from this analysis about the value and the effects of a society committed to political liberalism. Practical prescriptions aside, one theme will be clear throughout this paper: no matter how we choose to conceive of justice, more needs to be said about virtue and citizenship and the demands of liberal citizenship.

## Chapter 2

### Political Liberalism, Neutrality and Perfectionism

Most early conceptions of liberalism were comprehensive doctrines aimed at promoting a certain way of life and a particular conception of the good. Although liberal theories have traditionally been open to a vast array of different ways of life, the liberalism conceived by thinkers such as Kant and Mill present strong defences of certain values and conceptions of the good. Mill, for instance, is a strong promoter of individualism and autonomy as important components to all lives and to the flourishing of any community. As he sees it: “If a person possesses any tolerable amount of common sense and experience, his own mode of laying out his existence is the best, not because it is the best in itself, but because it is his own mode” (Mill 1991: 75). Mill presents many persuasive arguments as to why the examined life is a life worth living. His defence of autonomy and of individual liberty are quite compelling and many liberals have been greatly influenced by his arguments.<sup>4</sup>

Mill’s ideals of individual liberty and self-expression haven’t gone without their share of criticism, however. It is often argued, for instance, that comprehensive liberal doctrines, such as Mill’s, exclude many potentially valuable ways of life. For example, if a group of individuals wanted to sacrifice much of their individual liberty in order to live in a community of collective decision-making or a traditional way of life, such as the Amish, it would be hard to view this as unreasonable,<sup>5</sup> but it would be incompatible with Mill’s picture of the good. Other groups of people (here I’m thinking of many religious

---

<sup>4</sup> Included among those greatly influenced by Mill’s arguments are Rawls, Dworkin, Nozick, Raz, Kymlicka and many more.

<sup>5</sup> At least, that is, on the view of the reasonable that is taken in these pages, which is meant to be inclusive of a wide variety of ways of life and different conceptions of the good.

groups in particular) see the promotion of individual self-expression and autonomy as damaging to their traditional way of life. Certain traditional values (religious or otherwise) are said to be compromised by Mill's (seemingly) unconstrained individualism. So-called 'communitarians' such as Taylor, MacIntyre, Sandel and Walzer<sup>6</sup> have challenged liberal theory, calling it too individualistic, too rationalistic, and overly focused on the entitlements of citizens rather than their civic obligations and virtues (Mouffe, 2005: 24-5).

According to these 'communitarian' critics, liberal individualism, as defended by comprehensive liberal doctrines, risks eroding the values of more 'traditional' groups of people. The fear is that liberalism will turn everyone into a rights-focused individualist of sorts and undermine (if not destroy) many valuable ways of life. Even a number of liberals such as Macedo and Galston have admitted that liberal institutions can threaten some ways of life and have a homogenizing effect. As Macedo put it rather memorably: "liberalism holds out the promise, or the threat, of making all the world like California" (Macedo, 1990: 278). Macedo goes on to point out some of the distinctive features of a liberal society that not only rule out certain ways of life, but also promote certain liberal values, whether it tries to or not. According to Macedo, liberalism not only precludes certain ways of life, it also positively encourages certain typically liberal forms of the good. The citizens of a society with liberal institutions will develop distinctively liberal values and have a tendency to move in the direction of being more and more liberal in

---

<sup>6</sup> The term 'communitarian' may not be the most appropriate term to describe the views of these four individuals, given the vast differences in their views. The fact of disagreement with much liberal theory seems to unite these authors in a much stronger way than the substance of their specific criticisms.



their private as well as their public life.<sup>7</sup> Although Macedo recognizes this as a cost of accepting liberal political institutions, especially for some groups, it is, on his view, a cost worth bearing in order to live in a liberal society. But, other theorists are less willing to accept these costs.

In response to many of the communitarian critics of liberalism, Rawls, who once defended a comprehensive account of liberalism, famously argued that his commitment to liberalism was ‘political’ not ‘metaphysical.’ Rawls (1985 and 2005) and Charles Larmore (1990) were among the first liberals to draw a distinction between two kinds of liberal doctrines: (i) comprehensive liberal doctrines, which are meant as general philosophies of life, or moral doctrines with implications for all areas of life; and (ii) political liberalism, which takes many of the same principles as its comprehensive cousin, but limits the scope of these principles to the political realm. Political liberals tend to draw a sharp distinction between the public and the private life of individuals within society and maintain that individuals need only accept liberal values in their public or political life, and not necessarily in their private lives. Another way to put this distinction is to distinguish between the roles of individuals *qua* individuals and *qua* citizens. According to political liberals, individuals may hold a number of illiberal views, as long as these are confined to their private lives and left out of the public sphere. When it comes to their public life, all citizens must accept the equal liberty of other citizens, even if they choose to lead traditional, hierarchical or parochial lives in private.

---

<sup>7</sup> In some cases this may be because individuals freely choose a liberal way of life, which is not problematic. However, there are times when the public institutions of a liberal society risk shaping the lives citizens in a way that can be deemed to be detrimental to certain legitimate ways of life.

In this chapter I defend a version of political liberalism against some of the charges from defenders of comprehensive liberal accounts of the good. I argue that the best liberal theory is also the one that is capable of gaining the most widespread support, without compromising any of the central elements of liberal thought. This view of liberalism is not morally neutral, since it clearly defines and rejects ‘politically unreasonable’ views as illegitimate conceptions of the good. However, properly defined, political liberalism should aim at neutrality among ‘politically reasonable’ accounts of the good. This involves a commitment to neutrality of aim, as opposed to neutrality of effect, which is both undesirable and impossible. A liberal theory can’t (and, on that basis, shouldn’t try to) have neutral effects, but it can aim at neutrality among all reasonable conceptions of the good by avoiding the promotion of any of these. Neutrality of aim also requires a sincere attempt to mitigate the spillover effects between liberal public institutions and the private lives of citizens. In this sense, effects matter, even from the standpoint of neutrality of aim. Indeed, if it is not my intention to harm others with my actions, I can be said to be aiming at this goal (of not harming others), but my intentions won’t be taken very seriously if the practical effects of my actions are harmful, and I am or it is judged that I should be aware of this fact. Thus, while non-neutral effects should not immediately count against neutrality of aim, harmful effects, when brought to the attention of those aiming at neutrality, have to be acknowledged, and should be mitigated, whenever possible.

In order to show this, it would be useful to draw upon an example. Suppose I have a habit of throwing tomatoes at a target in my backyard. Suppose further, that my activity has some kind of social value (perhaps I make tomato sauce for the other members of my

community). Every once in a while, however, a tomato misses the target by a considerable margin and hits my neighbour's house. This is of course not my intention, but my neighbour nonetheless has grounds to complain about my actions. He is right to be angry about my actions, even though they are not meant to harm him. Similarly, when one aims at neutrality, it may be the case that some feel the effects of certain 'neutral' laws more than others. This is not necessarily a reason to change the law, especially if the law in question can be shown to be vital to the proper functioning of the community and no alternative law can fulfill the function of this law. That does not mean, however, that the effects don't matter. Presumably, if there is a way of avoiding laws that favour some conceptions of the good over others then such a course of action would be preferable to keeping the burdensome law. Thus, it can be said that neutrality of aim requires that one make an effort to mitigate the unintended effects of having one institutional structure rather than another.

Mitigating spillovers can be done in a variety of ways depending upon the situation. Sometimes it will require a re-evaluation of laws and social institutions in order to ensure that these don't favour some groups and disadvantage others. Other times, neutrality among conceptions of the good may require differential treatment and accommodation of those reasonable views that are threatened by liberal public institutions. This differential treatment can never require sacrificing individual rights for the sake of a community, but may allow some individuals or groups the opportunity to be exempted from certain laws, when it can be shown that these groups or individuals are disadvantaged by norms of uniform treatment.

## **Political Liberalism Defended**

One of the central features of political liberalism, as opposed to comprehensive or as it is sometimes called, ethical liberalism, is its starting point. Political liberalism doesn't begin with any particular concept of the good or with any fixed idea of moral personality and then try to derive principles of justice and the institutional arrangements of society from this particular conception of the good. Instead, political liberalism "starts with a very general ideal of *society* – something like the idea of a moral union, or democratic agreement, in the face of reasonable pluralism" (Tomasi 2001: 9; emphasis original). Political liberals then ask how such a society is possible. One of the conditions of having a society characterized by a reasonable pluralism is that all members of this society share certain moral principles. As Macedo points out, liberal society requires a "common subscription to liberal rights, and encourages a uniformity of tolerance, openness, and broad-mindedness" (1990: 279). All individuals in a liberal society "must share the moral idea that humans are the kinds of beings who are owed reasons, in terms that they themselves can accept, that justify coercive actions undertaken by the state with respect to them" (Tomasi 2001: 9). Political liberals are committed to the notion that "whatever their differences, all people in liberal societies should be respected as free and equal for political purposes" (Tomasi 2001: 7). Even political liberals place certain requirements on their citizens, namely that they respect the political principles of justice and norms of fair treatment. This is a commitment to a moral ideal of what the necessary conditions are for any society characterized by reasonable pluralism.

Despite this need for a limited moral commitment to certain political norms or ideals, the requirements of political liberalism are far less stringent than those of

comprehensive liberal doctrines. In order to be admissible in a society committed to political liberal norms, citizens need not change their private views of the good unless their view of the good comes into conflict with the publicly acceptable liberal norms of fair treatment and respect for persons. Comprehensive liberal doctrines, on the other hand, require individuals to adopt certain liberal values in their public as well as their private lives. Even the most limited comprehensive doctrines demand far more from their citizens than political liberalism and are therefore far less accommodating of reasonable pluralism.

Political liberal societies are built on the premise of trying to accommodate reasonable pluralism. They are therefore very hospitable to a wide range of ways of life and social practices. Certain groups of people are nonetheless excluded from liberal societies (although not literally) in all its forms.<sup>8</sup> The beliefs of certain groups are sometimes deemed to be unreasonable from a liberal perspective and in that sense are incompatible with liberal political institutions. The main practical difference between political and comprehensive liberalism is the range of views that are excluded or undermined in a liberal society on each of these views. For comprehensive liberals, it is required of all citizens within society that they develop a certain range of capacities such as autonomy or critical self-reflection and that they adopt a number of liberal values. Thus, many reasonable groups of people are forced to liberalize and adopt these comprehensive liberal norms, in both their public as well as their private lives. For political liberals, on the other hand, the only requirement is that citizens abide by the

---

<sup>8</sup> No liberal society can afford to be tolerant to all forms of life, since complete tolerance would require tolerating intolerant groups, which would make one's society intolerant. As Macedo puts it: "if liberalism stands for mere toleration or an indiscriminate spirit of accommodation, then it stands for everything, and it takes a stand for nothing" (1990: 258)

norms of public reasonableness<sup>9</sup> and accept that all persons ought to be regarded as free and equal for political purposes.

Political liberalism is not equally hospitable to all ways of life, and in this sense is not morally neutral. It importantly restricts the range of views that are deemed to be acceptable in a liberal society in much the same way as comprehensive liberalism. This is not necessarily a strike against liberalism in either form. It is not a matter for apology when the unreasonable views held by some groups of individuals are forced to change because they violate the rights of others, or because they wish to dominate their own members, or force everyone to see the world in their terms. Nonetheless, the fear that liberal ideals of autonomy and individual freedom will force citizens into a liberal mould is a legitimate cause for concern. Political liberals take the view that whether or not there is one way of life that is better than others, it is not a question that should be answered politically. Thus, the task of political institutions is not to take a stand on any particular conception of the good, but rather to create a society in which the widest range of different conceptions of the good can flourish in their own way.<sup>10</sup>

Liberalism has long been a tradition of tolerating a large number of attitudes, values and practices within its ranks and of supporting genuine value pluralism, but if a liberal society is going to be successful at accommodating as wide a range of views as possible, then it must not promote certain views at the expense of other reasonable views of the good. A number of values risk being lost when a comprehensive liberal worldview

---

<sup>9</sup> By the term 'public reasonableness' I mean to include acknowledgment and respect for the rights of other individuals, recognition of their public status as equally worthy of respect, and an acceptance of the legitimacy of conceptions of the good other than one's own.

<sup>10</sup> This is not meant to be a promotion of diversity for the sake of diversity itself, but rather can best be seen as means of allowing many reasonable ways of life to coexist together within a single society. If there are many reasonable ways of life, there is no reason to think that one of these should be promoted (at least politically) at the expense of others.

is adopted, since liberal values such as individual autonomy and critical self-examination can conflict with other reasonable values. In this circumstance, a legitimate case can be made by defenders of those values, against the promoters of liberal values.

Political liberalism offers a response to this conflict between competing conceptions of the good by limiting the scope of necessary agreement to the realm of political principles. In this way, political liberalism avoids taking a stand on any comprehensive view of the good. This is the sense in which political liberalism's aim is neutral, since the political principles it defends are not reflective of any particular conception of the good, but rather are proposed as the best way of accommodating many different worldviews. Political liberalism amounts to a defence of political principles judged to be necessary in order to mediate between many different conceptions of the good in a peaceful manner. These political principles could be called the 'principles of any well-ordered society' since they are proposed as requirements of any society characterized by reasonable pluralism that wants to mediate between this pluralism rather than impose one conception of the good on others. Defenders of political liberalism are not sceptical about questions of the good. They may believe very strongly in their own conception of the good, but they believe equally strongly in the need not to impose this view of the good on others. Thus, political liberals are committed to the ideals of freedom and equality in the public realm and to only those private virtues that are required in order to maintain the integrity and the proper functioning of public institutions.

### **Challenges for Political Liberalism**

Despite political liberalism's popularity in recent years, the view is often criticized by comprehensive liberals and communitarians alike. These criticisms take a

variety of forms, but they tend to converge on a few interrelated points of contention. The first of these targets the alleged neutrality of political liberalism. It is often argued that political liberalism hides its more comprehensive commitments behind the veneer of neutrality among conceptions of the good. It is said that political liberalism is nothing more than another comprehensive liberal doctrine masked by a (false) pretence of neutrality and therefore is less honest than comprehensive liberalism, since it subverts non-liberal conceptions of the good, while pretending to be neutral.

Another criticism of political liberalism has to do with the sharp distinction between the public and the private lives advocated by political liberals. Critics argue that such a sharp distinction between public and private conceptions of the good is bound to be impossible in practice. Individuals cannot be expected to accept liberal norms of liberty and equality in their public life when they don't believe them in private. Such a task would require that individuals compromise their private allegiances to the public norms of society, or risk losing their private moralities.

Finally, it has been argued that a consensus on political principles of justice or political principles is no more likely than a broader moral consensus, or a consensus on the proper ends that should be communally pursued. Political liberals, such as Rawls, assume that an 'overlapping consensus' can be reached on principles of justice in a society characterized by reasonable pluralism, but there is little evidence to suggest that such a consensus is present, let alone possible. Why then, should individuals risk sacrificing the pursuit of collective ends for the sake of political principles, when these political principles are just as likely to be a source of conflict as different conceptions of the good?



These criticisms have some merit, and each is worthy of a response. Political liberals can provide different answers to each of these concerns and the way in which these concerns can best be addressed is informative to the project of creating a liberal society characterized by reasonable pluralism. I will, therefore, take the time to answer these worries by clarifying the following three issues: (1) the sense in which political liberalism aspires to be neutral; (2) the distinction made between public and private, which includes a discussion of the demands made on the citizens of a political liberal society; and finally (3) the relationship between justice and political liberalism and the possibility of achieving an ‘overlapping consensus’ on principles of justice.

### **Neutrality Examined**

Although comprehensive accounts of liberalism have sometimes aspired to various forms of neutrality, it is one of the mainstay features of political liberalism that it attempts to treat various conceptions of the good as neutrally as possible. This means political liberals don’t justify their public institutions or their principles of justice by resting these on a conception of the good, and nor do they try and promote one conception of the good at the expense of others. Critics of political liberalism, such as Callan and Galston, have criticized the view on the basis of its alleged neutrality. They argue that political liberalism claims to a false pretence of neutrality, which serves to mask the ways in which liberal societies shape the lives of their citizens in distinctively liberal ways. Galston says, for instance, that liberalism “can hardly take a step without appealing to some understanding of the good” (1991: 8).

Galston is one of the strongest critics of liberal neutrality. On his view, not only is liberalism not neutral among conceptions of the good, but more strongly, it is “committed

to a distinctive conception of the human good, a conception that undergirds the liberal conception of social justice” (Galston 1991: 18). Moreover, he argues that many policies typically defended by liberals as neutral “are experienced by many religious communities as hostile.” We must therefore “work harder to understand the strained relations between liberalism and religion” (Galston 1991: 13). Although I agree with Galston on these last two points, these should not be taken to imply a rejection of neutrality. Neutrality of effect may indeed be impracticable, but that does not mean political liberals shouldn’t strive towards a neutrality of aim. This task may, however, require a re-evaluation of what neutrality means, and what its requirements are.

What does neutrality mean for political liberals? The best way to understand the sense in which political liberalism attempts to be neutral is by stating the central way in which it is **not** neutral. Political liberalism is not neutral with respect to all moral doctrines or ways of life. It does not try to be and could never be neutral in this respect, because an acceptance of all ways of life would amount to a relativism about the values that are worthy of pursuit and would serve to justify the imposition of some ways of life on others. Rather political liberalism starts with the presumption that there exists a plurality of reasonable conceptions of the good and that there is a need for a political arrangement in which all these different views of the good can coexist in a peaceful manner. Political liberals do make certain presumptions about the good life, namely that forms of the good which require being imposed on other individuals are illegitimate forms of the good, that coercion is an illegitimate means to achieve one’s goals and that persons are to be treated as free and equal for political purposes. In this sense, political

liberalism is not, and does not try to be, neutral. It clearly rejects ways of life that conflict with these liberal norms of public reasonableness.

Once the line is drawn between politically reasonable and unreasonable conceptions of the good, and politically unreasonable worldviews are rejected, then political liberalism attempts to be neutral among different ‘politically reasonable’ conceptions of the good.<sup>11</sup> I say ‘attempts to be neutral’ because neutrality of effect is both impracticable and impossible to achieve, and therefore is not one of the goals of political liberalism. But, that does not mean the aim of political liberalism cannot be neutral. Contrary to comprehensive doctrines of all kinds, including comprehensive liberal doctrines, political liberals do not take a stand on which reasonable ways of life are to be adopted. The only requirement in order to be accepted as a reasonable member of a political liberal society is an acceptance of the basic political principles of mutuality and respect for persons as free and equal, with rights and their own legitimate conceptions of the good that may be different from one’s own.

There is another concern, however. Although “political liberalism does not seek to cultivate in citizens the distinctive personal virtues of autonomy or individuality” as Tomasi rightly points out (2001: 12), the effect of living in a liberal society may be in the direction of increasingly autonomous and individualistic modes of thinking and being. Citizens living in a liberal society may over time be influenced by liberal institutions and become ‘liberalized,’ even if this is not the aim or intention of political liberals. Because of the constant spillover from the public to the private realm, some have argued that

---

<sup>11</sup> It is worth mentioning that so-called ‘politically reasonable’ views are not set in stone. Whatever line is drawn between ‘politically reasonable’ and ‘unreasonable’ views is likely to change over time. The point remains, however, that political liberalism does not try to be neutral among all conceptions of the good, but only those which are deemed to be politically reasonable.

political liberalism is simply a disguised form of comprehensive liberalism. As Callan puts it: “the political virtues that implement the fair terms of cooperation impose educational requirements that bring autonomy through the back door of political liberalism” (1997: 40). According to Callan, the distinction between political and comprehensive liberalism is misleading since both doctrines have similar practical effects, making it hard to distinguish them in practice. Moreover, political liberalism masks some of these effects by trying to remain neutral vis-à-vis conceptions of the good.

These are legitimate worries and they identify one of the central problems with trying to remain neutral with respect to different ways of life, namely that this ideal may be impossible to realize in practice. Achieving neutrality among reasonable views is like trying to achieve objectivity in one’s outlook on the world. Neither of these ideals can ever quite be attained. As we try to approach an objective view of the world, we come up against our own subjectivity and realize the impossibility of seeing things from a completely objective perspective. The same is true, when we try to achieve the ideal of neutrality. Individuals are bound to have certain biases that will inevitably affect their judgment and influence what they perceive to be neutral or objective. Yet, trying to achieve objectivity in our judgements about a number of things is in principle a very good thing to do. Impartiality in law requires, as much as possible, that one’s subjective opinions be left out of one’s considerations. While neutrality and objectivity can never quite be attained, both are useful goals in a number of contexts and are worth striving for.

Aiming at neutrality is not such a good thing if it blinds us to the ways in which we are failing to be neutral (for instance, because we think we have already reached it). But, it is a good thing if it leads us away from favouritism among conceptions of the good

or prejudiced views of some groups of individuals. The ideal of neutrality is one that would treat all reasonable views as equally worthy of respect and dignity. This ideal may be impossible to achieve in practice, because all individuals have certain biases, but that does not mean its pursuit is undesirable. There is nothing wrong with pursuing impossible ends, if the process of trying to achieve those ends is itself of value and not just the achievement of the ends themselves.

Thinking neutrality can be achieved may actually be a hindrance to the process of trying to be neutral, since it serves to mask the ways in which complete neutrality will continuously fail to be achieved. No matter how hard we try to be neutral among conceptions of the good, our own ideals will undoubtedly have some impact on our public decisions. This spillover may be unavoidable, but that does not mean neutrality of aim should be rejected. It means, rather, that neutrality ought to be pursued in the right way. There is a need for a greater awareness of the ways in which public institutions and the principles of justice defended in the public realm spillover and influence the private lives of citizens. Likewise, there is a need to be aware of the ways in which the privately held views of citizens will impact the types of laws and social institutions of a society.

The recognition of a problem is the first step toward fixing it. In this case, there is a need for political liberals to recognize that neutrality of aim requires more than a half-hearted commitment to treating groups equally. Just because neutrality of effect is impracticable, does not mean the effects of social policies don't matter. Aiming at neutrality involves the recognition that some of the effects of public decision-making are destructive to certain forms of life. Aiming at neutrality requires, at minimum, a re-examination and possible change in the laws and political institutions that are subversive

to the views of reasonable people in a liberal society. As long as political liberals make an honest effort to achieve a neutrality of aim among reasonable conceptions of the good, then neutrality is a legitimate goal, and it is not a deception, as some critics have claimed.

The following example may help clarify what neutrality of aim requires of a political liberal state whose aim it is to try to make it easier for individuals with various conceptions of the good to pursue whatever reasonable ends they see fit. In the context of liberal education, states have traditionally sought neutrality by aiming to remove all religious teachings from the school curriculum. However, as Tomasi recognizes, “keeping discussion about religion out of the classroom does not necessarily make for classrooms that are more neutral between religions and secular perspectives” (Tomasi 2001: 89). On the contrary, since religions have been removed and replaced with secular ideology aimed at teaching children how to function in the modern world, there is a heavy bias in favour of secular interpretations of many important questions that children might ask. As Tomasi puts it: “omission of discussion of religious perspectives and attitudes can give children the false impression that religion is dead” (ibid). Thus, rather than requiring the elimination of religion from the school curriculum neutrality may require a new approach to how religion should be taught in schools.<sup>12</sup>

Instead of responding to the promotion of a particular religion in schools by eliminating all religious teachings, the aim of a political liberal civic education should be to expose children to a number of different religions, and cultural practices and traditions, without actively promoting any of these. Children should be taught about a number of

---

<sup>12</sup> Noteworthy on this point, the *Abington Township School District v. Schempp* case is often interpreted (or I should say misinterpreted) as forbidding religious teachings in public schools. Although the case famously “disallowed devotional Bible study in public school” it did not forbid all religious teaching. Justice Clarke only objected to the advocacy of religion, not the teaching of it (Tomasi 2001: 90).

different religious and metaphysical views. In being exposed to a number of different types of views, children will have a better understanding and appreciation for the views of others, whether they agree with them or not. This would be a far more balanced approach than ignoring religious teachings, since this latter approach risks giving children the (false) impression that religion and spirituality don't matter, which is not a view that is shared by most citizens. A large number of citizens in most nations believe religion and spirituality to be vitally important topics, even though they often disagree with their fellow citizens about the specific content of their spiritual or religious beliefs. It is also sometimes argued by defenders of religious doctrines that by "teaching children the detached, rights-based forms of thinking central to public reason, liberal civic education unintentionally encourages those forms of thinking in all domains of reason, including ones where such ways of thinking are transformative beyond what the bare attainment of political autonomy requires" (Tomasi 2001: 90). Political liberals should seek to avoid these problems created by overly comprehensive liberal approaches to public education, which too often seek to 'liberalize' citizens a number of ways.

Of course, some conservative parents may object to letting their children learn about views of the good that conflict with their own. Thus, it is not immediately obvious that comparative religious courses offer a better alternative to the removal of religious teachings from the school curriculum. At the end of the day, some citizens may still be unhappy with the practical effects of liberal public norms and institutions no matter what educational approach is chosen. It is unlikely that any society could find a social arrangement that is pleasing to all citizens. No society can be accommodating of all ways

of life, since there are simply too many competing ways of life, even in the category of the so-called 'reasonable' worldviews.

I will address the specific issue of religious education in more detail in chapter three when I discuss the practical effects of adopting a political liberal framework. For the meantime, however, I should mention that as long as a reasonable effort is made to limit the damaging effects of liberal public institutions on all reasonable conceptions of the good, it can be expected that most citizens who hold reasonable conceptions of the good will at least have the opportunity to maintain their beliefs in a political liberal society. It can be hoped that this will satisfy most reasonable citizens. Some individuals will undoubtedly choose to change some of their views and may over time adopt new values or norms. In some cases, the loss of certain ways of life may indeed be regrettable. In other cases, it may not be lamentable, because certain forms of life will simply reveal themselves to be unattractive to its members, when they are faced with other possibilities.

Political liberals are not at liberty to make judgments about which reasonable conceptions of the good should be pursued and which ones should be rejected. Rather, they must embrace all reasonable conceptions of the good that are chosen by the citizens of a political liberal society. Some views may eventually be abandoned in favour of others and although this is at times regrettable, this is a fact about how most societies function and should not reflect badly on political liberals who at least give each and every reasonable way of life the opportunity to perpetuate itself over time. The political liberal commitment to respecting pluralism should not stifle opportunities for individuals to change their conceptions of the good, but it must allow all individuals the possibility of maintaining their own reasonable conceptions of the good if that is their choice. Political



liberalism must make an effort to mitigate spillover effects that wrongly disparage or denigrate reasonable ways of life, but also those that make particular ways of life more costly than they need be for their adherents. In short, one of the central roles of political liberals should be to address any concerns their citizens may have about their ability to maintain their reasonable conception of the good.

This takes us to our second problem, which is largely related to the first, since part of what trying to be neutral requires is recognition of and an attempt to mitigate the subversive effects of liberal public institutions on private conceptions of the good. Many critics of political liberalism have argued that the sharp distinction between the public and the private realms required by political liberals is impracticable. It is argued that the publicly endorsed principles of justice will shape the lives of its citizens in a distinctively liberal way, and undermine the private views of citizens in a way that jeopardizes the political liberal commitment to neutrality among reasonable conceptions of the good. This is the problem to which I now turn.

### **The Public and Private Lives of Political Liberal Citizens**

It is worth noting that although political liberalism seeks to “maintain a distinction between the point of view of people as citizens and the various ethical points of view people take as members of families and other non-public associations” still, Tomasi points out quoting Rawls: even political liberalism “does not regard the political and the non-political domains as two separate, disconnected spaces, each governed solely by its own distinct principles” (Tomasi 2001: 41). Political liberals need to recognize the potential for spillover between the two realms and the ways in which the private lives of citizens are affected by public institutions. If the aim is neutrality among competing

conceptions of the good, the impact of public institutions on the private lives of citizens matters not only from the standpoint of justice, but mainly from the standpoint of trying to make a liberal society the kind of place that is accommodating to a wide range of reasonable views. As Tomasi puts it: “While recognizing the foundational importance of justice, liberal state-institutions must adopt all available means to limit the impact of public values on the compass concepts that guide the various kinds of politically reasonable citizens” (2001: 55). These ‘compass concepts,’ as he calls them, are the concepts that orient citizens in their interpretation of “the meaning of their public rights and liberties” and act as their guide, as they navigate their way through the social world (Tomasi 2001: 46). In Tomasi’s terms:

For a state to be neutral about the meaning and value of life means that the state must seek all available means to neutralize messages it unintentionally sends about the ultimate meaning and proper exercises of people’s political autonomy. Liberals must minimize all compass recalibrations beyond those directly required by people’s affirming the principles of justice (Tomasi 2001: 55).

What this means for political liberals is that neutrality of aim among reasonable conceptions of the good is not enough to ensure the fair treatment of all reasonable ways of life. Certain positive measures may be required in order to protect those ways of life that risk being undermined by public institutions. This is a point political liberals have often neglected. Too many political liberals are content with a so-called ‘neutrality of aim’ among competing conceptions of the good and ignore the ways in which liberal political institutions shape the lives of their citizens in distinctly liberal ways. This has left political liberalism open to the charge of claiming to a false pretence of neutrality, while influencing the lives of their citizens in a number of ways.

The point of political liberalism is to aim at neutrality among reasonable conceptions of the good, while rejecting only those conceptions of the good that are deemed to be politically unreasonable. Political liberals can't shield their citizens from the influence of liberal public institutions. But, nor can they simply shrug off these effects as the unintended effects of living in a liberal society and not an active goal of liberal institutions and leave it at that. If liberal institutions "unavoidably influence the ethical worldviews of all reasonable citizens" (Tomasi 2001: 14) as Tomasi points out, then something needs to be said about the ways in which the private lives of individuals are shaped by public institutions. The fact that these are unintended effects of liberal institutions for political liberals does not justify these effects. As long as the public institutions of a liberal society undermine the private moralities of its reasonable citizens the neutrality of political liberalism can be called into question.

Part of the problem stems from political liberals sometimes conflating two distinct issues. The first is the liberalizing of unreasonable views, which is a legitimate cause for celebration by liberals of all persuasions, including political liberals. The second issue has to do with the liberalizing tendencies of liberal institutions on the reasonably held views in society. This is what Tomasi calls the 'spillover' effect between the public and the private lives of reasonable citizens. While ethical liberals can be committed to the promotion of values such as autonomy and critical self-reflection, political liberals must not make it their task to promote these values. Groups of people who hold publicly reasonable views cannot be made to change their private views in the direction of these liberal values.

Macedo, who claims to be a defender of political liberalism, is guilty of conflating these two issues. There are times when Macedo praises the transformation of unreasonable views into reasonable ones, which is not a problem. At other times, however, Macedo seems to be endorsing “the gradual but unintended transformation of views *within* the domain of the politically reasonable” (Tomasi 2001: 30; emphasis original). This move is not available to him as a political liberal, since political liberalism is “committed to recognizing that there are many reasonable people who are committed to political freedom and yet for whom ethical autonomy does not settle every issue and justify every social outcome” (Tomasi 2001: 30-1).

If political liberalism is to be taken seriously, it must do more than simply aim at neutrality by avoiding the promotion of a comprehensive liberal doctrine. More than that, political liberals must try and mitigate the spillover effects between liberal public norms and the private lives of citizens within a liberal society. A political liberal state must protect the reasonable ways of life of individuals living within a liberal society that risk being undermined by liberal public institutions. As Tomasi puts it: “it is one thing to recognize that complete neutrality of effect is impracticable. But it is quite another to then act as though that admission excuses one from saying anything more about those effects and their consequences for the personal lives of the citizenry” (Tomasi 2001: 32).

If political liberalism is truly going to be more accommodating of diversity than ethical liberalism, political liberals need to offer some assurance to the reasonable citizens in society that their private views really can be maintained and that they will not be undermined by liberal public institutions. This is not a question of accepting trade-offs between individual rights and other social goods, but of accepting the legitimate fears of

reasonable citizens that their views risk being undermined by liberal public institutions, and attempting to mitigate the spillover from the public to the private.

If many of the spillovers between the public and the private can be mitigated, it suddenly becomes far more coherent for individuals to accept liberal principles in public life, while maintaining their own private morality in their family or as members of their immediate community. This is because individuals with competing conceptions of the good come to realize that acceptance of liberal public values will give them the opportunity to maintain their own private values and offer them protection from other individuals who would seek to force their conception of the good onto them. Moreover, for reasonable citizens committed to their own private conception of the good, it makes sense for them to accept whatever political arrangement will allow them to maintain their own conception of the good, even if this political arrangement will stop them from actively promoting their views in certain coercive ways. Of course, some individuals will fail to see things in such terms and some will undoubtedly continue trying to impose their views onto others. These individuals cannot be accommodated in any society, including a political liberal one. The best a political liberal society can do is attempt to mitigate the spillover from the public to the private, in order to allow all reasonable conceptions of the good a chance to perpetuate themselves.

This is not the same as the achievement of absolute neutrality among conceptions of the good, since such an ideal is impossible to achieve. However, it is by attempting to mitigate the spillover effects between public and private that liberalism best approximates this ideal. Although completely neutralizing the spillover from public to private is likewise impossible, it nonetheless represents the way in which we might approximate

neutrality and make a liberal society as accommodating as possible of all reasonable conceptions of the good. The central remaining task has to do with drawing the line between reasonable and unreasonable conceptions of the good and determining what kind of a consensus is possible on basic political principles. Indeed, what constitutes a reasonable view? Which groups of individuals are to be considered reasonable people? And more importantly perhaps (at least from the liberal perspective) who gets to decide what is reasonable and what isn't?

### **Justice in a Well-Ordered Society**

The cut-off point for political liberals must be the line between reasonable and unreasonable citizens. The question of knowing what constitutes a reasonable person or group is subject to disagreement, however, and it is far from clear what criteria should be used in order to make this distinction. What is clear from the political liberal perspective, on the other hand, is the commitment to neutrality of aim among all *reasonable* conceptions of the good. It is the task of a political liberal society to treat all reasonable individuals as equally worthy of respect and not try to change their views. No single conception of the good (however limited) can be promoted in a political liberal society, which means that a political liberal society will have a role to play in attempting to mitigate the spillover effects between public liberal norms that have to be accepted by all reasonable citizens and private worldviews of individuals, which can take a variety of forms and can be seen as legitimate so long as they stay within the limits of public norms or the publicly defined principles of justice or of well-orderedness.

Some political liberals (here, I'm thinking of Rawls in particular) take the view that a common consensus (or what Rawls calls an 'overlapping consensus') is possible

over basic principles of justice, even though such a consensus is impossible regarding a single version of the good. It's hard to see though, why individuals (even reasonable ones) would be more likely to agree about principles of justice than about any particular conception of the good. A conception of justice is undoubtedly more limited in scope than a conception of the good, but reasonable individuals already disagree about the principles of justice that ought to be invoked to govern social interactions. To say then, that there exists (or could exist) an overlapping consensus within society on principles of justice seems fallacious. General agreement on something as broad as an overarching conception of justice seems like far too demanding a task, even within a broadly liberal society. Mouffe takes the view that "there could never be, in a modern democracy, a final agreement on a single set of principles of justice" (2005: 52). She is probably right given the vast disagreements that have divided and continue to divide political theorists of all political stripes.

Galston also challenges the notion that a line can be drawn effectively between reasonable and unreasonable conceptions of the good. He points out that "Rawls takes for granted the existence of a demarcated society whose members already accept the necessity of living together under common rules." He goes on:

From this perspective, the question is not *whether* I shall seek grounds of cooperation with the other members of society but, rather, *what form* that cooperation will take. But it is perfectly possible to treat as problematic precisely what Rawls takes for granted. The costs of cooperation under common rules with individuals who differ radically from me may appear prohibitive, especially if those rules are to be drafted under procedures that require free and willing consent. It might well be rational for me to prefer a multiplicity of separate homogeneous communities, one of which is my natural home, to a single pluralistic community in which I fear I may have no real place (Galston 1991: 147-8; emphasis original).

This is an issue that cannot be shrugged away by political liberals (or any liberals for that matter). Galston rightly points out that for some groups who feel marginalized in a liberal society, the most reasonable thing to do might be to disengage from liberal society. Thus, we should not necessarily view a group as unreasonable simply because they reject liberal public institutions and conceptions of justice. For some groups, such as the Amish and the Mennonites, the costs of living in a liberal society are deemed to be too high and disengaging from the liberal political process becomes the best option for such groups. Although political liberalism can't accommodate these groups (except by allowing them to disengage from the broader community), groups like the Amish and the Mennonites do not pose a threat to the overall liberal structure of society (unless of course everyone suddenly decided to join their communities). The Amish have no problem living alongside liberal institutions and thus the relationship between liberals and the Amish does not have to be strained. Other groups, however, are not so accommodating of liberalism and so cannot expect to be accommodated in return.

Political liberalism only excludes those ways of life that are deemed to be politically unreasonable, either because adherents of these ways of life try to impose their views on others or because they reject the rights or the equal worth of other individuals. Mouffe rightly points out that there is still a need for a common good in a pluralistic liberal society, but this common good "must be understood in strictly political terms" (2005: 47). Political liberalism rests on the acceptance of political principles of liberty and equality, and although there is no consensus on how these terms are themselves to be understood, there is a need for a consensus on the priority of those principles over other considerations. In other words, while any substantive conception of justice is unlikely to



be agreed upon by all reasonable people, the protection of individual rights and the equal respect for persons can nonetheless be given priority over any broader conception of the common good, since these principles are deemed to be necessary for the maintenance of all reasonable views within a society. Individuals who cannot recognize the need for these protections must be regarded as politically unreasonable and cannot be accepted as full participants in a liberal society, since they do not even respect others as equal persons.

The notion that all individuals are deserving of respect, that they ought to be treated as ends in themselves and not as means to other ends, and that they should be regarded, at least politically, as free and equal and have their rights protected, are principles that can be accepted by all reasonable persons. Of course, this will exclude certain views, but insofar as such groups reject norms of public reasonableness, their exclusion is not to be lamented, and is a necessary part of any well-ordered society. It can be said then, that the acceptable principles of a political liberal society are less expansive than a full blown conception of justice and closer approximate principles of a well-ordered society. They are those principles that must be accepted by any society characterized by value pluralism and whose citizens accept the legitimacy of multiple versions of the good and therefore abstain from trying to impose their own view of the good on everyone else.

Complete acceptance of even these most basic commitments is unlikely, and probably impossible. Galston rightly points out that:

from the standpoint of social stability, the best that can be hoped for is that the overwhelming majority of individuals and groups will find sufficient space within liberal society for expression of their distinctive conceptions

of the good. But for those who are left out, it is hard to see how liberalism can be experienced as anything other than an assault (Galston 1991: 149).

While it is undoubtedly true that even political liberal societies will inevitably clash with certain worldviews, this fact is not entirely regrettable. Political liberals attempt to be as inclusive as possible of a wide range of worldviews, but one of the requirements of accepting various worldviews is that the adherents of these worldviews respect one another and treat each other as political equals. Otherwise, acceptance of multiple worldviews amounts to an acceptance of whichever one comes up on top in the battle between these competing views of the good. Political liberalism is meant to be accommodating of reasonable pluralism only, and not of all worldviews. Individuals who reject the foundational principles of political liberalism, mentioned above, cannot be tolerated in any liberal society, since tolerating them would be tantamount to sanctioning intolerance and the use of force as a means to persuade others within society.

It is important to note that those ways of life which must be rejected, even by political liberals, are not rejected because their views are contrary to liberal values of autonomy or individualism. Rather, these groups are inadmissible because they refuse to accept the worth of other individuals in the public arena, or because they violate individual rights, or simply because they demand that all individuals accept their own preferred conception of the good and try and force others to see the world in their terms. Insofar as these 'D-people,' as Tomasi calls them, engage in such activities, they must be regarded as unreasonable and their activities can legitimately be sanctioned and be made to stop. In some cases, they may even be subject to expulsion from a liberal society. As Tomasi explains: "It is the D-People's rejection of the political norms of mutuality and

reciprocity, norms widely accepted by their fellow citizens despite their many diverse viewpoints, that makes the D-people intolerable” (2001: 21). And, because of this unreasonableness, D-people cannot be regarded as genuine members of the liberal political community.

Other groups might lose out in a liberal society not because they are politically unreasonable, but simply because of the spillover of liberal public norms on their private lives, which do not fit well with comprehensive liberal principles. These ‘admissible citizens’ hold a number of views in their private lives that are perhaps anti-liberal in a number of respects, but insofar as they remain politically reasonable and they respect the rights of others they are welcome members of a political liberal community. Some of the private views held by such groups might be at risk, because of the spillover from the public realm, but it is the task of political liberals to try and mitigate the costs of holding any reasonable view of the good. Aiming at neutrality vis-à-vis all reasonable conceptions of the good is only part of the task taken on by political liberals. The other part of being a political liberal involves adopting the right kind of attitude towards diversity and making sure that all reasonable views get a fair chance to perpetuate themselves within society.<sup>13</sup> This does not involve a sacrifice of basic rights or core liberal principles, but it does involve that some work be done outside the context of justice-related issues.

Rawls (2005: 198) thinks some reasonable groups will feel marginalized or be alienated by liberal public norms. Although he sees this as a regrettable cost, he takes it to

---

<sup>13</sup> Again, I should mention, this is not so much as a means to the end of maximizing diversity for its own sake, but rather as a way of treating reasonable conceptions of the good in a way that can be judged to be fair.

be an unavoidable consequence of liberal institutional structures. The problem with Rawls' position is that he fails to provide any reason to think that such groups would embrace a political liberal framework in the first place, when they know that their reasonable ways of life are essentially doomed to die out over time. Such individuals might, in a number of respects, feel more at home in a society of D-People, since publicly reasonable and unreasonable individuals may well share many substantive commitments of other kinds.

Political liberals can do better than this. To be a political liberal is to be committed to more than simply neutrality of aim or of procedure; it is to be committed to answering any reasonable questions their citizens may ask about how the public institutions affect their private lives and their private morality. All views will be influenced by the public institutions of any society, but political liberals are obligated to recognize and to uphold the legitimacy of all reasonable views and to allow these to interact in the public realm in ways that will allow these views to shape the public discourse as well as be shaped by it. Citizens of a political liberal society will need certain virtues in order to be effective managers of their sometimes conflicting public and private roles. These kinds of virtues cannot be forced, but can nonetheless be deemed essential for all citizens, if they want to remain committed to living in a well-ordered society. I now turn to a discussion of the virtues of citizens in a political liberal society.

### Chapter 3

#### The Virtues of Reasonable People: A Political Liberal Account of Civic Virtue

In the previous chapter I defended political liberalism from a number of different critiques and argued that the best version of liberalism is one that is built politically as a means to the end of accommodating a wide range of different views of the good. In order for this to be a successful enterprise, political liberals must limit their accommodation to only those views that are ‘politically reasonable’ since acceptance of all views would serve to undermine the political project itself. Finally, if the liberal state wants to be as neutral as possible vis-à-vis a number of different ways of life (in the sense of trying not to give preferential treatment to one conception of the good over others), then it must do its best to mitigate the spillover between the public institutions and the private lives of citizens. Although certain political principles, such as individual rights, cannot be compromised (what I have called ‘the principles of a well-ordered society’) in trying to achieve this, there are a number of non-justice related tasks to be performed in the name of accommodating reasonable pluralism.

In this chapter, I turn to the demands of citizenship in a society characterized by reasonable pluralism and a commitment to political liberalism. My goal will be to find out what a commitment to political liberalism requires of its citizens, and what virtues can be deemed necessary for citizens in a political liberal society in order for them to lead their lives in a fulfilling way. In other words, what are the requirements of citizenship that would make a political liberal society a successful one?

Within a broadly ‘political liberal’ framework, where neutrality is often cited as a central aim, perfectionism and talk of civic virtue is easily left aside, since it appears to

be taking sides with certain conceptions of the good life. As such, a large part of the debate between political and comprehensive liberals revolves around the issue of neutrality and perfectionism and what the appropriate role of the state is in shaping the lives of its citizens. If what I have argued in the last section is correct, these goals are not as incompatible as they seem. This is because a commitment to neutrality of aim among reasonable conceptions of the good itself amounts to a form of perfectionism since it requires citizens to adopt certain attitudes towards other conceptions of the good. The goal of this chapter will be to develop an account of liberal citizenship, and of the virtues of citizens in a political liberal society. I will ask what traits, dispositions and virtues can be required of citizens in a liberal society, and what virtues would contribute to making society a more prosperous, more desirable, and an overall better place to live for a number of different kinds of people.<sup>14</sup>

The demands of citizenship in any liberal society tend to be fairly limited, given the extensive personal freedoms defended by liberals. That being said, there are nonetheless a number of restrictions that must be placed on the pursuits that can be deemed acceptable of citizens in any liberal society. In chapter two, I talked about the need to draw a line between reasonable and unreasonable conceptions of the good, and the need to defend the legitimacy of only the former. As such, citizens cannot engage in practices that undermine the principles of public reasonableness and they must respect the rights of other citizens, even if they disagree with their values or their different

---

<sup>14</sup> To clarify, a political liberal state is not actively promoting any single means to these ends, since political liberals should try to be neutral towards the reasonable pursuits of citizens. However, since citizens care about their well-being and about how prosperous and desirable their society is to live in, political liberals must be receptive to these goals and allow citizens to develop the capacities necessary in order for them to lead the kinds of lives they want to live, in accordance with whatever reasonable conception of the good they choose.

conceptions of the good. This limited set of demands is not exhaustive, however, of all that can be required of citizens in a liberal society. Indeed, there are a number of attitudes and dispositions that are necessary in any working liberal society, even though these may not be demanded on the basis of justice per se. Many of these important attitudes and dispositions cannot be required of citizens, but are nonetheless important if a society committed to political liberal values is going to be a prosperous one.

I now turn to the task of elaborating a list of the virtues of political liberal citizens. In performing this task it is important to remember what political liberalism stands for, namely the legitimacy of any reasonable conception of the good. A commitment to reasonable pluralism and the legitimacy of different individuals having different conceptions of the good also includes a commitment to a plurality of different ways of life as well as different sorts of virtues that will contribute to making the lives of citizens worthwhile, each in their own distinctive way. As such, the virtues of a political liberal society are importantly plural and ever-changing, since there are a number of different virtues that may be required for one group, but not for another, or at one time, but not at another time.

The virtues of liberal citizens can also be categorized a number of ways. One could draw a distinction between civic and private virtues, between required (or necessary) and merely beneficial virtues, and between distinctly liberal virtues and virtues that can be required or are preferable in all workable societies. The categories of virtues I have chosen to identify cut across a few of these lines. I will proceed by distinguishing between four categories of virtues, which are: the 'necessary public virtues,' the 'necessary private virtues,' the 'contingent public virtues,' and the

‘contingent private virtues.’<sup>15</sup> I will discuss each of these categories in turn, followed by an analysis of the connection between justice and virtues and the way in which non-justice-related virtues are for the most part ignored in liberal theory.

### **Necessary Public Virtues: Public Reasonableness and Respect for Rights**

The ‘necessary public virtues’ are those virtues that can be required of all citizens in their public lives. I call these the ‘necessary public virtues’ because they are the attitudes and dispositions at the heart of any political liberal community. A rejection of these virtues would be tantamount to a rejection of the political liberal values discussed in chapter one.<sup>16</sup> It is therefore necessary for political liberals to promote a broad acceptance of these basic principles and require that all citizens adopt these virtues, since they are the basis of a political liberal community and are necessary in order for the community to function properly and to flourish.

The ‘necessary public virtues’ are the virtues associated with public reasonableness, a commitment to the norms of the political liberal community and the principles of a well-ordered society. They include a political commitment to the equal worth of others and to the need for political institutions that are accommodating of all reasonable ways of life. Publicly virtuous individuals in a political liberal society can be expected to actively endorse the basic political principles espoused by political liberals and to defend the equal liberty of all citizens in a society. Some individuals may not abide by these norms and they may perform certain activities that conflict with the basic principles of a political liberal society. When this is the case, such individuals can be

---

<sup>15</sup> Although I recognize that the lines between these four categories are often blurred, it is nonetheless useful to draw these distinctions in order to identify what is often missing in most accounts of liberal virtues, namely an elaboration of non-justice related virtues.

<sup>16</sup> What I called the ‘principles of any well-ordered society.’



sanctioned in a number of ways in order to prevent the destruction of other reasonable ways of life. If there are too many of such individuals, a political liberal society cannot sustain itself any longer, since the maintenance of any political liberal society requires at minimum that the majority of the citizens endorse the basic political liberal values of tolerance and respect for other ways of life.

Political liberalism is built upon the notion that many ways of life and conceptions of the good are reasonable and that one shouldn't be promoted at the expense of others, and that individuals should be free to decide how they want to live their lives, what they want to value and whom they want to associate with. In order to make this possible, a political liberal society needs citizens who go about pursuing their goals and projects, alone or in a community, and who recognize that others are entitled to do the same and that they have a duty to respect these other persons and their respective projects and values (even if they disagree with them). They have a duty, then, of public reasonableness that cannot be abandoned or compromised. Public reasonableness and respect for rights trump other considerations, such as the private views these citizens might hold about the worth of other members of society.

When one's private views come into conflict with the norms of public reasonableness, the former must always yield to the latter. For instance, an individual who is a member of a religious organization, such as the Catholic Church, may believe that women are not the proper recipients of certain positions within the church, such as priesthood. This view is not incompatible with a political liberal ideal. Women still have a choice, they can choose to leave the Catholic Church and join a church where they can hold a similar position. Where one's beliefs become problematic for political liberals is

when one holds that women should be banned from running for public office, or from working outside the home. Such views are in direct contravention of the basic political norms of reciprocity and respect for others. These norms require that citizens be politically reasonable in their views of others and in the demands they make on the polity.

As Rawls puts it:

citizens are reasonable when, viewing one another as free and equal in a system of social cooperation over generations, they are prepared to offer one another fair terms of cooperation according to what they consider the most reasonable conception of political justice; and when they agree to act on those terms, even at the cost of their own interests in particular situations, provided that other citizens accept those terms (Rawls 2005: 446).

To be reasonable, then, is to act towards others with a certain degree of reciprocity, to treat others as equals, especially in public matters. To be reasonable requires that one be willing to provide one's fellow citizens with reasons that they could reasonably accept as their own when one proposes political principles to be followed by all or when one tries to influence public policy. To be a liberal is to be committed to reasons that can be accepted by all reasonable persons. As Galston puts it: "a reason is not publicly valid if it appeals to, or rests upon, the presumed superiority of any particular conception of the good life" (1991: 102). Individuals who are committed to political liberalism must be committed to giving reasons for any belief they wish to make publicly effective (either by trying to influence legislation or by making demands on the polity) that others could reasonably accept. Respect for persons requires that they be treated as

ends and not as means to the projects of others. This means that all citizens deserve an explanation that they could, if they were reasonable, accept as their own.<sup>17</sup>

According to Charles Larmore, “To respect another person as an end is to insist that coercive or political principles be as justifiable to that person as they are to us” (1990: 348-9). Galston rightly recognizes that, as stated, this criterion of respect for persons is implausibly demanding. As he points out: “When we arrest, try, and convict criminals, we show respect for their moral personality by offering the reasons embedded in the law” (Galston 1991: 109). These reasons are sufficient (provided the law is just) whether or not the criminal accepts them. It is, indeed, far too demanding a task to come up with reasons for treating individuals a certain way that literally all individuals are likely to accept. Such reasons probably do not exist. That being said, I don’t think Larmore’s point should be taken quite so literally. It is not implausible for citizens to demand reasons that they can accept, the proviso being that these persons must be equally reasonable when considering these reasons. Reasonable citizens should be able to respect one another, even when they disagree about questions of the good and public policy issues. It is quite conceivable that reasonable people disagree as to what reasons can or can’t be reasonably rejected, but a criterion of reasonable rejectability can nonetheless satisfy the respect for persons Larmore seeks, since, at the very least, reasonable disagreement is characterized by an attempt to see things as others see them and to provide reasons of one’s own in support of one’s convictions. As long as disagreement

---

<sup>17</sup> As Galston rightly points out, there are instances where a number of conflicting reasons could be given and no clear agreement may be reached. He states: “That there is common ground does not mean people will actually reach agreement, nor does it mean that only one belief is reasonable on the evidence” (Galston 1991: 112). But the point remains that reasons that are not publicly reasonable, in that they cannot reasonably be accepted by any and all members of society, are inadmissible reasons when used to influence public policy. For instance, reasons based upon one’s personal faith or convictions and that rely on one’s own experience or inner convictions are not publicly valid reasons.

between citizens is characterized by respect and attempts at understanding, then disagreement isn't such a bad thing at all.

There are two ways in which one's political convictions can be deemed to be unreasonable. The first way a view can be politically unreasonable is when it seeks to restrict the rights of others, or when it makes others less than equal citizens (such as advocating slavery, or racial segregation of some kind). The second way a public position can be politically unreasonable is when one is unable to provide public reasons in defence of one's view. Let us take as an example an individual who believes that women should not be allowed to work outside the home, because of what he was taught as a child, or because it is written in a religious text of some sort. Such an individual is free to hold this position and he may even express this view publicly. However, if this individual defends his view publicly and tries to influence public policy on the basis of his conception of how individuals ought to live their lives, this individual is being politically unreasonable in both of the above-mentioned ways. First, his view is unreasonable because it is attempting to restrict the rights of other citizens (by not allowing them to engage in important activities permitted to others). Second, his view is unreasonable, because the reasons he provides in defence of his conviction are not public reasons. Others cannot accept them unless they share his childhood experiences or accept his broader religious convictions. The view this individual defends does not stand on its own, independent of metaphysical beliefs of sorts.

Some views are politically unreasonable in only one of the above-mentioned ways. For instance, if one defends the view mentioned above (that women should be made to stay home) by presenting publicly accessible reasons, then one is only being

unreasonable in the first way, but not in the second. Even bad reasons can be publicly accessible, but it can be hoped that they will be overwhelmingly rejected by other citizens who see them for what they are (bad reasons). For instance, if one were to argue that women should stay home and raise children because children need full-time care and men are more suited to working outside the home, while women are better suited for childrearing, one is providing publicly accessible reasons in defence of one's view. These reasons can be evaluated and judged by other citizens, and the argument can be accepted or (it is hoped) rejected.

On the other hand, it is possible for a view to be reasonable in the first of the above-mentioned ways, while being unreasonable in the second way. This is the case, when an individual defends a view that is benign in terms of effects (it does not try to restrict individual rights or the equal liberty others), but has no reasons to offer in defence of that view, except reasons that are not publicly accessible. For instance, if one makes a case to increase funding for the arts on the basis of what is written in religious scripture, the reason provided is not publicly valid, even though other reasons could be found to replace the ones given.

It's not obvious what should be done with politically unreasonable individuals, and how their views should be treated. There are many possible responses to these kinds of views and liberals disagree on the appropriate measures that should be taken in order to encourage fruitful dialogue and respect for reasonable pluralism. One response is to place restrictions on individual freedom of speech and association in order to limit the types of views that can be publicly defended in the first place. This seems to be a rather illiberal approach, however, and can only be warranted in cases where the views

expressed pose a threat to certain members of society. For instance, hate speech can legitimately be made illegal, and so can organizations whose purpose it is to harm certain members of society (such as the Ku Klux Klan). The maintenance of peace and the protection of citizens can warrant fairly extreme measure in these cases, but in most cases politically unreasonable citizens do not pose a threat to others. When this is the case, limiting their freedoms to speak freely and to associate seems like a rather harsh approach.

That being said, it may not be unwarranted to limit the types of political office that may be held by politically unreasonable individuals. It would be unfortunate to have judges, for instance, who were persuaded by private reasons that could not be made the subject of public scrutiny. But this approach is equally problematic since it is not always obvious who will hold certain politically unreasonable views once in office. Moreover, it is not clear who would (or should) be in a position to decide which views are reasonable and which are not and therefore who should be banned from public office. These difficulties make this a somewhat problematic approach.

Another approach could be to allow individuals to put forth non-public reasons even in political matters, but to then submit their entire conception of the good to critical public scrutiny. An individual would still have a choice on this approach. He can restrict his sexist, racist or otherwise unreasonable views to his private life and abide by the norms of public reasonableness, or he can bring his private views to the fore and attempt to influence public change, but once this commitment is made, his defended views, as well as all his reasons for holding such views can be the subject of critical scrutiny. This individual's entire set of values and beliefs about the good can become fair game in the

arena of public debate. This individual cannot use scripture to defend his beliefs about women in the workplace unless he is willing to allow that scripture to be the subject of criticism and debate. Non-public reasons can be brought into the public realm, on this view, but when they are, they can be evaluated and criticized just like any other reason that is put before the public.

None of these scenarios represents the political liberal ideal. Political liberals, of course, hope that individuals choose to be committed to public reasonableness and treat other citizens with respect, even those with differing conceptions of the good. The ideal citizen in a political liberal society is committed to norms of public reason and does not try to undermine the public equality of other individuals. In order for the sexist individual to be considered a reasonable citizen, he must not try and make his illiberal views politically effective, but instead restrict them to his private life, which as I have indicated is possible for a number of people. A commitment to public reasonableness entails that one will not try to enact one's privately held, doctrinal beliefs in law, when these will undermine the political equality of others and when only non-public reasons can be offered in their defence. Public reasonableness requires individuals to accept that some of their views should remain in their private lives, and not be matters of public debate. To be a virtuous citizen in a political liberal society is, at minimum, to be committed to these 'necessary public virtues.'

This is not a view shared by all liberals, however. Many liberals, Galston included, believe that expecting citizens to provide 'public reasons' in defence of their beliefs is far too demanding and restricts the modes by which citizens may try to influence public policy. According to Galston, the criteria used by advocates of different

accounts of public reason, such as Rawls, Nagel, Larmore and Gutmann-Thompson, are overly burdensome and restrictive. On his account, 'secular' or 'scientific' reasons, which many of the defenders of public reason take to be legitimate public reasons, are just as controversial as many 'religious' reasons or reasons embedded in religious texts. Moreover, Galston thinks it is legitimate for individuals to invoke experiences or images rather than argument in some instances. These can also have an influence on one's beliefs, since they invite individuals to consider what another person feels, by sharing in an experience or in a narrative. This is why "prolife advocates display disturbing pictures of second-trimester fetuses, and why prochoice defenders respond with graphic accounts of back-alley abortions." The point of invoking these images, argues Galston: "is to widen the sphere of shared experiences in order to evoke evaluative judgments that seem closely linked to them" (1991: 106).

The problem with this approach is that such images, while compelling in certain ways, do not provide reasons for doing X instead of Y. They do not advance the debate, since both sides are able to invoke such images and they are not arguments for one position rather than another. Such emotivist tendencies do not need to be completely rejected by political liberals, but at the end of the day, publicly accessible reasons need to be given in favour of one's position in order for deliberation of any kind to take place. This may be a rationalistic way of approaching public debate, but some degree of rationalism is necessary in any political culture. Decision making processes are illegitimate when they are characterized by the use of brute force, appeals to doctrinal evidence, or by one's own personal experiences. The only way for a political liberal society to make decisions, in a fair and equitable manner, is by evaluating reasons in



favour of different positions and to pass judgments accordingly. Although it can at times be difficult to differentiate public from non-public reasons, it is nonetheless essential that liberal citizens be committed to engaging in public discourse with terms that are acceptable to all. It is a sign of respect for others to make one's argument in terms that they can at least understand, even when they do not agree with the substance of the argument itself.

The necessary public duties of citizens are for the most part negative. They involve abstaining from activities that are likely to harm others, as well as treating others as ends in themselves, rather than as means. Individuals must choose to pursue only those ends that are not in conflict with the like pursuits of others and act out of respect for other individuals. There are, however, positive elements involved with public virtue. Individuals must be committed to the norms of public reasonableness and endorse (however grudgingly) the equal worth of other individuals, at least in the public sphere.

#### **Necessary Private Virtues: Reciprocity, Mutuality and Responsibility**

The 'necessary private virtues' are, as the name suggests, less concerned with the public activities of individuals, and more focused on the ways in which individuals conduct themselves in their private lives. It is tempting to think of political liberalism as remaining silent on the views held by individuals in their private lives, since it involves a commitment to political norms only. There are, however, certain essential elements of a well-functioning community that are not strictly speaking commitments to certain public norms of behaviour. The necessary private virtues are those virtues that are required of individuals in their private lives, since a failure to abide by these norms would undermine the political institutions of a political liberal society. These virtues include norms of

reciprocity, mutuality and respect for the rights of others.<sup>18</sup> They are necessary elements of a thriving political liberal community, since their absence would contribute to making a so-called ‘liberal society’ something of a farce. Indeed, how liberal is a society with liberal laws and institutions, but where the members of society regularly violate individual rights, engage in harmful practices of various kinds and fail to act with a certain level of decency in their everyday lives?

In order for a political liberal community to thrive, there is a need for citizens to accept not only the public norms of reasonableness, but also to adopt certain attitudes and dispositions in their private lives. These are, in a sense, more limited than the public virtues, since a number of views that cannot be politicized can nonetheless be held privately. In other ways, however, they can be seen as even more demanding, since the task of maintaining and promoting political liberal values publicly itself requires far more than an acceptance of public reasonableness. It is also essential that the citizens of a political liberal society adopt a tolerant attitude towards others and that they be accepting of the reasonable pluralism for which a political liberal community stands.

It is not enough to say that a society is accommodating of reasonable pluralism, or even to have political institutions that allow for many different ways of life to coexist in a society. There is a need for the individuals within this society to adopt certain attitudes towards others and to truly embrace political liberal values (and not merely consent to abide by the laws of society). If political liberal society is going to be able to perpetuate itself over time and be a political community where people can trust one another (not to

---

<sup>18</sup> Respect for rights is only marginally a private issue, since rights violations are public issues. But, what I mean by respect for rights here, as a virtue, is not merely that individuals should abstain from violating them, but that individuals actually be committed to the legitimacy of individual rights for all.

mention remain the defender of reasonable pluralism that it claims to be), then the citizens of a political liberal society need to adopt certain kinds of attitudes towards others and be willing to take responsibility for themselves and for those around them. Responsible citizenship involves moderation and the fulfillment of one's role in society, as well as the willingness not to abuse state welfare provisions and other services paid for collectively.

The way in which individuals choose to lead their private lives matters from the perspective of political liberals because private action has an important impact on public institutions (and the reverse is also true). As Kymlicka points out, "public policy relies on responsible personal lifestyle decisions." He goes on:

the state will be unable to provide adequate health care if citizens do not act responsibly with respect to their own health, in terms of maintaining a healthy diet, exercising regularly, and limiting their consumption of liquor and tobacco; the state will be unable to meet the needs of children, the elderly or the disabled if citizens do not agree to share this responsibility by providing some care for their relatives; the state cannot protect the environment if citizens are unwilling to reduce, reuse and recycle in their own consumer choices; the ability of the government to regulate the economy can be undermined if citizens borrow immoderate amounts or demand excessive salary increases; attempts to create a fairer society will flounder if citizens are chronically intolerant of difference and generally lacking in a sense of justice. (Kymlicka 2001b: 295)

Kymlicka is pointing to something here that is both widely accepted, but far too often greatly underappreciated. Although it is often acknowledged that the citizens in liberal society need to take responsibility for the way in which they choose to live, the implications of this statement are too often left unexplored or underdeveloped. Little is said about how individuals can be made to be more responsible for their actions and how they can be held accountable for their choices about how to live. If the feasibility of

healthcare provisions requires individuals who try and remain healthy, and if recycling programs require individuals to participate in these programs, then what can be done to make them participate in these activities short of coercively making them perform these tasks? The short answer is by offering incentives to individuals who perform activities that are deemed to be important if a liberal society is going to flourish over time. Free-marketeters often praise the market economy as a great teacher of virtues, such as self-reliance, initiative and responsibility. Although they do point to some important ways in which markets can promote virtue, there are a number of limits to the laissez-faire approach when it comes to the promotion of virtues. The notion of encouraging private virtue, and ideas about how this can be done will be more thoroughly explored in chapter four when I talk about ‘internalizing responsibility.’<sup>19</sup>

Individuals in a liberal society must also treat their fellow citizens with respect and be accepting of the different ways in which people choose to live their lives. This does not mean that individuals cannot disagree with how others choose to live. They may very well express their disapproval or try to influence others by teaching them about how they themselves live. However, they must be willing to recognize that these attempts to persuade others may fail and that others have the right to continue living in the manner of their choosing. It is not the place of any citizen in a political liberal society to try to make all citizens accept their own conception of the good. Much as one may be committed to one’s own private views, one must also be committed to the right of others to have their own, perhaps very different, conceptions of the good.

---

<sup>19</sup> Term borrowed from Schmidtz (1998), p. 8-12.

Of course, citizens in a liberal society (or in any society for that matter) will inevitably change some of their views. Some traditions and beliefs will be abandoned and others adopted. There are ways in which one's privately held beliefs may eventually become harder to hold in a liberal society, either because the liberal principles themselves will cause inner conflict in individuals who try to hold them, or because so much of society has moved in another direction, making it difficult to hold one's previous conception of the good. For this reason, some liberals, including political liberals, such as Macedo, claim that liberalism has a homogenizing effect. Indeed, certain shared commitments are necessary for any liberal society, even a political liberal society and these commitments will shape the private lives of citizens in a number of ways.

It is true, as mentioned in chapter two, that liberalism entails a certain commitment to a number of moral ideals that cannot be compromised. However, there is little reason to hold that political liberalism needs to be as homogenizing as Macedo (and others) contend. Macedo declares: "you cannot really choose to be an Amish after working for a few years on a Wall Street brokerage firm" (Macedo, 1990: 279). But it's hard to see why not. Perhaps he means this would be difficult for the vast majority of citizens. Of course, most people in western society don't choose Amish lifestyles, but that does not mean that such a choice cannot, in principle, be made. This claim also doesn't square well with other claims Macedo makes. For instance, he says, a page earlier, that liberalism allows for the possibility that "I might quit my career in banking, leave my wife and children, and join a Buddhist cult" (Macedo 1990: 278).

It's hard to see what the distinction could be between an Amish lifestyle and a Buddhist one that would make the former an impossible choice for an individual to make

and not the latter. Macedo assumes too much about the effects of liberal autonomy on the private lives of citizens. Political liberals need only be committed to political autonomy and not full blown ethical autonomy, defended by many comprehensive liberals. A politically autonomous individual will, in principle, be open to a number of possibilities. Choosing to live a simple life, or rejecting materialist culture (as the Amish do), or even rejecting one's own private autonomy are among the possibilities available to the politically autonomous individual. Many ways of life, which may be chosen by individuals with full political autonomy, require a rejection of a number of aspects of modern western liberal democracies. This does not make such choices impossible, nor in many cases, does it make them bad choices.

A number of politically reasonable views or ways of life that conflict with comprehensive liberalism can legitimately be pursued in a political liberal society. The rejection of western society's materialism, individualism and obsession with growth<sup>20</sup> do not amount to a rejection of the core liberal values of accommodation for reasonable pluralism and respect for others. It would be a mistake to regard many of the values currently embraced by the west as necessary components of a liberal society. The liberal values defended in these pages have more to do with embracing reasonable pluralism and with the respect for individual rights and freedoms and very little to do with what could be called the 'liberal economic order.'

According to Chantal Mouffe "it is important in order to understand political modernity to distinguish two traditions, liberal and democratic" (2005: 42). It is also

---

<sup>20</sup> By western society's obsession with growth I am referring to the widely held belief (especially in economics) that the primary function of most political policy should be focused on encouraging growth and increased productivity. Although these are in many respects extremely important values, it is sometimes argued that they should not be given the heightened status that they currently receive in our society.

essential, on her view, to recognize that “the acceptance of political liberalism does not require us to endorse either individualism or economic liberalism” (ibid). To regard all these values as part of one ‘liberalism’ would be to conflate economic and political liberalism, which are in reality very different doctrines. Economic liberalism is concerned primarily with markets, trade, and the production of capital, while political liberalism draws attention to the fact of pluralism and proposes a way of accommodating reasonable pluralism within society. If an individual chooses to be ‘simple and unworldly’ in the sense of rejecting many of the basic tenets of the capitalist market economy or capitalist values of consumption and growth, this is not the same as a rejection of political liberal values and should not be seen as incompatible with, or as a rejection of political liberalism.

### **Contingent Public Virtues: Participation and Political Dissent**

Contingent public virtues can best be seen as those virtues required of a certain portion of the population, but not necessarily of all individuals. These virtues are essentially the virtues needed for participation in political affairs and the concerns of the community. It also includes much simpler tasks such as voting and accepting jury-duty. In order for any political association to work, some individuals need to fill certain public roles and participate in the management of public affairs. In a liberal democracy specifically, a number of people also need to vote and some citizens need to voice their discontent, when political leaders perform their roles inadequately.

A liberal society does not need to require all individuals to participate in such activities. Some individuals can spend their entire lives in a liberal democracy without voting and never reading anything politically related. However, if all individuals did this,

the democratic society in which this occurred would be a massive failure. It can be said, then, that there is a critical threshold of political participation below which a society has to avoid falling in order to sustain itself.

Some might argue that the higher the level of participation the better, since an actively engaged citizenry is one that will perform these tasks more effectively than one in which only a few individuals care about matters of public interest. While this is often the case, it is not always so. In some cases, an overly active public, especially one concerned with the political promotion of private interests can be a hindrance to the functioning of the political community. There is a need, therefore, to set certain limits on the demands that can be made on the polity. Part of the contingent public virtues involves knowing when to abstain from making demands on the public. Individuals need a sense of restraint and moderation when actively participating in public affairs and when benefiting from the services provided by the state. I mentioned taking responsibility and a sense of moderation as necessary private virtues, since they are privately held, but their impact is also felt publicly. These are essential virtues in any working political community, not only because of their private benefits, but also because they involve limiting one's public demands.

Individuals also need to hold public officials accountable for their decisions and their actions. A failure to do so could result in many abuses of power and the eventual loss of political liberty that holds the political liberal community together. When the state oversteps its bounds, it is the responsibility of all citizens to denounce the infringement of their liberty and to oppose the enforcement of illegitimate laws. It is also the responsibility of citizens in positions of power not to abuse of their power and to act with



the interest of the community in mind. Individuals who hold public office have an especially important moral obligation towards the citizens of their country to uphold the political liberal values and to ensure the protection of their individual rights. It is the role of public officials to oppose any law that would undermine the principles of political liberalism or risk the abridgement of individual rights. And, it is the role of individuals to alert public officials of their concerns and to hold them responsible when they fail in these tasks. It is also the role of individual citizens to contest unjust laws.

Laws, such as the infamous ‘patriot act’ in the United States, are in direct violation of individual civil rights and liberties and must not be allowed to pass. And, when they do pass, it is the responsibility of citizens to proclaim their disapproval (and in some cases outrage) at the blatant violation of their constitutionally protected rights. If individual rights are going to be worth the paper they are written on, they need to be upheld and protected. This can only be done effectively by a citizenry that is unafraid (and I would say eager) to hold public officials accountable for their actions. Corruption and mismanagement cannot be tolerated, or else they will become the norm in any society, including a political liberal one.

It is also the role of citizens to publicly proclaim their disapproval of government policies that violate the rights of citizens in other countries, such as unjust wars. Public protests and manifestations should not be shied away from but embraced, since they are necessary conditions to the maintenance of justice and state legitimacy. The governing officials must be concerned with the well-being of their citizens and (perhaps to a lesser degree) of all individuals around the world. Passivity and a lack of engagement in public affairs leave the door open for tyranny, corruption and the ultimate failure of the liberal

state. It is for this reason that these public virtues are so important, even though they cannot be required of all citizens.

### **Contingent Private Virtues: Pluralism and Diversity**

The ‘contingent private virtues’ are necessary in order for citizens to live successful lives, but are contingent in the sense of being different for different individuals and in the sense of not being enforceable by state laws. These virtues are not instrumentally useful in the pursuit of justice, but rather are useful for citizens themselves, in order for them to live successful and prosperous lives. Part of what this involves is a commitment to one’s own (or one’s groups) ends. Although a liberal state will try to be neutral among differing conceptions of the good, neutrality of effect is impracticable, as mentioned. Even if a state does its best to mitigate the spillover between public and private life, citizens of a political liberal state may need to develop certain virtues, such as resilience and dedication to their ends, in order to maintain their views in a liberal society, especially those who are a part of the minority, since there may be certain pressures to conform to norms and practices held in high esteem by the majority culture.

In a liberal society characterized by reasonable pluralism, individuals are likely to come into contact with a large number of different views that will diverge from their own. Whenever individuals are confronted with these competing views, their own convictions may be put to the test. Individuals sometimes need to be willing to challenge their own convictions on the one hand, but they also need to be able to resist the influence of other cultures, on the other. For instance, as Tomasi points out: “citizens of faith need to develop dispositions that enable them to resist the commercial and secular culture of

mass society” (Tomasi 2001: 77). This does not need to be incompatible with openness to other views either. One can be very committed to one’s way of life and yet be very open to learning about how others live their lives, and even be willing to incorporate certain new elements into one’s old way of doing things.

The contingent private virtues are the virtues required of citizens in order to make them better able to navigate the interface between their public and private lives. Citizens in a liberal society have to be committed to a number of public ideals (of reasonableness and to the equal worth of others), but they may have a number of private views that may be in conflict with these commitments or just as importantly, with the private views of other citizens, since the political liberal ideal presupposes that individuals with varying comprehensive conceptions of the good will converge on certain minimal political norms or principles (even when they do not necessarily agree on specific policies). One must possess the virtues of tolerance and openness to other views, as mentioned earlier, but if one is equally committed to one’s own private views, then one must also possess whatever virtues will enable one to effectively maintain these private views in a society that is publicly committed to diversity and a plurality of different ways of life.

These virtues are importantly plural and no precise list can be drawn. They are nonetheless important parts of any liberal society, but especially of a political liberal society. It is important to note, moreover, that these virtues are not derivative or justice-related virtues in the way that most of the other virtues are. This last category of virtues is meant to represent virtues that are useful in themselves. The ‘contingent private virtues,’ as I call them, are not merely instrumentally useful in the pursuit of justice. They are useful because individuals need them in order to maintain their commitments to views

that will not always be shared by all. I mentioned earlier that liberalism does not need to be as homogenizing as Macedo seems to think. But, if individuals are going to maintain their own distinctive ways of life, then they must be privately committed to the maintenance of certain traditions, customs, languages and social practices. Just how homogeneous a liberal society ends up being depends primarily on the citizens themselves rather than on any particular policies or laws.

Although a political liberal state cannot actively promote or enforce this last category of virtues that does not mean such virtues are unimportant or uninteresting from the perspective of making society a desirable place to live for all reasonable persons. In order to give individuals a fair opportunity to maintain the practices and beliefs that they regard as essential elements of their lives, a political liberal society must do its best not to promote any particular conception of the good. As mentioned in chapter two, a simple neutrality of aim is not enough. Political liberals must be willing to address any reasonable concerns expressed by their citizens about how public institutions will impact their private conceptions of the good and their private attachments. Political liberals must be committed to giving a full account of all the ways in which the policies they develop are necessary in the maintenance of the political order and to reducing the negative impact of public institutions on the reasonably held views of their citizens. The next chapter is dedicated to figuring out what kind of impact these commitments and virtues have on policy-making.

## **Chapter 4**

### **In Defence of Pluralism: What it means to be a Political Liberal**

In the first three chapters, I defended political liberalism and identified a number of virtues that can be required of all (or of some) citizens in a political liberal society, as well as a number of virtues that are useful for citizens to have in order for them to lead fulfilling lives in a political liberal state. I argued that many of the virtues in a political liberal society are necessarily plural and in this sense are representative of the diversity that is characteristic of a liberal society. Because individuals can lead their lives in many different ways, depending upon their attachment to particular conceptions of the good, they may require different virtues in order to successfully pursue their goals. I also pointed out some of the virtues that can be required of citizens on the basis of making the state run effectively. These civic virtues can be promoted in different ways without favouring any particular conception of the good, since they are defended on the basis of their contribution to the proper functioning of the polity and not on the basis of being good in and of themselves.

In this fourth and final chapter I turn to a discussion of the effects of accepting political liberalism and a political liberal account of civic, as well as private virtues on policy decisions and social justice. This will be an attempt to draw out some of the implications of accepting a commitment to political liberalism and to elaborate what the political liberal virtues mean in more concrete terms. I will do this by addressing a few issues that are of concern for virtue theorists and political liberals who are concerned with the promotion of certain virtues. My first task will be to further discuss the impact of political liberalism on public education, which I briefly outlined in the second chapter. I

will establish the requirements of a political liberal curriculum and discuss the implications of accepting neutrality of aim among reasonable conceptions of the good in the context of civic education.

After discussing education in a political liberal society, I will turn to some of the broader effects of political liberalism on social policy at large and on one's conception of social justice. This discussion will focus attention on some of the ways in which acceptance of political liberalism affects the range of possible options available to policy makers who are committed to its basic purpose. Since a political liberal society is characterized by pluralism and diversity, a political liberal state should adopt policies that help maintain this diversity by ensuring that all reasonable conceptions of the good are given the opportunity to coexist in a peaceful manner. I will conclude with a few general remarks about the limits of political liberalism and the type of society that ought to embrace the aspirations of political liberalism.

### **Religion, Neutrality and Liberal Education**

I argued earlier that neutrality of effect is impracticable, but that this does not mean the effects of policy decisions don't matter. Part of what neutrality of aim requires is a concern for the unintended consequences of public policies. As Tomasi rightly points out, the political liberal commitment to neutrality of aim among reasonable conceptions of the good requires more than a simple acknowledgment of the spillover between public institutions and the private lives of citizens. It requires that a genuine effort be made by political liberals to reduce the costs associated with maintaining reasonable conceptions of the good by addressing the concerns of citizens who fear that their way of life risks being denigrated (or is otherwise becoming too costly for them to maintain) because of

the spillover from liberal public institutions. In order for one's aim to truly be neutral, one must at least be aware of and attempt to lessen the impact of public policy decisions on private conceptions of the good held by citizens. In order to make this point, I argued that neutrality vis-à-vis different conceptions of the good may require that different religious and spiritual views be taught in schools, as opposed to being avoided, since avoiding these issues may give students the false sense that such issues are unimportant to the average citizen.

As I mentioned earlier, however, it is not clear what the response would be by conservative and religious groups, who may feel that teaching their children about ways of life that conflict with their own values and norms will run the risk of being subversive of their way of life by making their children less likely to maintain their allegiance to traditional norms and modes of thought. Many parents, especially in religious communities, worry about the potentially subversive effects of exposing their children to values and norms that conflict with their own. They feel that external influences of certain kinds (and especially liberal values) will be bad for their children's development and pose a threat to their way of life as a community with attachments to certain values and traditions. It is worth asking, then, whether it is fair to characterize these parents as unreasonable simply because they wish to shield their children from the influence of other ways of life.

The answer to this question depends to a large extent on the exact content of their claims. On the one hand, it is not unreasonable for a group of people to worry about the subversive effects of certain popular trends and values, which can sometimes have negative effects on the values and traditions of smaller, perhaps less influential groups.

Nor is it necessarily unreasonable for a group to wish to separate themselves from mainstream society in order to maintain their own traditional norms and beliefs. The Amish and Mennonites are examples of groups who have opted for this kind of approach and a reasonable case can be made for accommodating these groups, especially since they are willing to maintain their own traditional mode of being without trying to make everyone adopt their way of life. It is for this reason that they can be tolerated and even accommodated in a political liberal society. If, on the other hand, they wanted to shield their members from mainstream society, while attempting to influence public policy and actively promoting their views in the public domain, this would not fall within the domain of the politically reasonable and could not be accommodated by political liberals. A decision must be made by the members of such groups; they must either abide by the norms of public reason, or withdraw from the political liberal community entirely and become ‘partial citizens’ of sorts.<sup>21</sup>

Even conceptions of the good that advocate a single good, or a single path to a particular good, are nonetheless compatible with political liberalism, provided that the defenders of this good do not try to force this view on others. They must allow other members of society to come to these realizations on their own. It is also worth mentioning, that although I have used the example of religious education in order to demonstrate the types of spillover effects that can occur and that must be addressed by political liberals, not all conceptions of the good are religious. For instance, many ‘new age’ spiritual teachings advocate goals such as increased awareness or presentness, or as some put it: individuals need to experience an ‘awakening’ of sorts. While most of these

---

<sup>21</sup> For a more in depth discussion of this topic and the idea of ‘partial citizenship’ see Spinner (1994).



teachings are not advocating a particular religious worldview, they nonetheless constitute conceptions of the good, since they advance a particular view of how human beings should lead their lives. Whether the path to enlightenment (or to some other higher purpose) presented in these teachings is uniform (in the sense of being the same for all) or plural, does not matter from the political liberal perspective, which is concerned merely with ensuring that some views are not forcibly imposed on others and that the costs associated with living according to one's reasonable conception of the good do not become overly burdensome for individuals who wish to lead their lives in a particular way.

Some might argue that the mere presence of so-called 'false conceptions of the good' is enough to offend them, and that their children should not be exposed to them, or worse still, be taught that they are all equally reasonable ways of life. However, someone who is confident that their view of the good is really the right (or best) one, should have no problem with having their children being exposed to different ways of life and competing conceptions of the good, as long as these are not actively promoted. If a way of life is truly as valuable as a group claims, then the members of this group should trust that others (including their children) will be able to recognize this and adopt the norms and traditions they advocate. If a way of life is rejected by all members of society, then there is good reason to suppose that this way of life was simply unattractive or undesirable to most people. This does not mean that it is objectively bad, or that some would not benefit from it, but these are decisions that can only be made by each individual and cannot be forced upon others in any society that claims to be liberal. How each member of society finds meaning in their life is not something that can be

determined by the state, or even their community. A person's community and neighbours may influence, but cannot determine how individuals should lead their lives, since that is a choice that must be made by each member of society. The state will, of course, play a role in limiting certain ways of life (e.g. those that are harmful to others), and individuals will undoubtedly receive influences from a variety of sources, but at the end of the day, it is up to each individual to make up their own mind as to what will give value to their lives, and what their goals and pursuits will be.

On the question of religious education, the only reasonable approach is whatever approach gives each reasonable way of life the opportunity to perpetuate itself over time. It cannot be assumed that all ways of life will survive over long periods of time (it can, in fact, be expected that some will eventually lose most of their adherents), but as long as all reasonable ways of life are not purposefully interfered with, and provided certain measures are taken in order to limit the harmful effects of liberal public institutions on these reasonable conceptions of the good, little else can be done to protect these reasonable ways of life. The political liberal state still needs to find a way to be accommodating of different ways of life (which is in itself a difficult task, since many groups will make competing demands on the polity), while maintaining the conditions necessary in order to perpetuate the political liberal community over time. Part of this task may involve teaching the members of society about other reasonable ways of life in order to promote tolerant attitudes and respect for difference, since these are necessary to the continued success of a political liberal society.

Presumably, the goal of civic education should not be limited to teaching children about politics. It should also teach them about life in a society characterized by a

particular set of political norms. However, since there are many ways one could choose to lead one's life in a liberal society, it is the task of a political liberal education to expose children to a number of different conceptions of how they may choose to live their lives. This is important not only so that they can learn how to respect others as political equals, but also so that they can see how others, with conceptions of the good that may be different from their own, are able to integrate liberal public values into their own private conceptions of the good. In other words, children need to learn about other ways of life for two important reasons: first, by learning about other ways of life, children can be taught the importance of tolerance and respect for other persons, as well as other views of the good; second, learning about other ways of life provides children examples of how politically autonomous individuals who agree with norms of public reason can nonetheless hold "a variety of incompatible, moral, religious, and philosophical outlooks" (Tomasi 2001: 93).

We must reject the notion that adherence to religious doctrines and texts requires an uncritical acceptance of traditional authorities and acts as a hindrance to personal autonomy. To think that free and open dialogue, as well as progressive attitudes and an acceptance of reasonable pluralism, are characteristic only of liberal conceptions of the good is to stack the deck against all other conception of the good life. It is simply not the case that all politically autonomous individuals will choose to lead anti-traditionalist lives and place a high value on being critically self-reflective in their private lives. The only kind of autonomy defended by political liberals is a political autonomy that does not allow some groups of individuals to impose their views of the good on others.

Politically autonomous individuals may well choose to lead non-autonomous private lives. Individuals may accept the political liberal principles without being comprehensive liberals privately. Some may even value a certain degree of autonomy in their private lives without being comprehensive liberals. Individuals can be critical of their ends and of their conceptions of the good, and yet choose to accept the values upheld in traditional and religious texts. Accepting the teachings of religious authorities can be done critically, and it can be one's choice to give up one's personal autonomy for the sake of one's convictions (whatever these may be).

To think that such choices are impossible is to think that only liberal ways of life are reasonable, which is precisely what political liberalism is seeking to avoid. Political liberalism defines itself in contrast to more comprehensive doctrines, precisely because it sees these as overly focused on promoting liberal values in all aspects of life. The goal of political liberalism is to make room for other reasonable conceptions of the good within a common political framework. Although this goal sounds simple enough, it is far from clear what exactly the practical prescriptions of this doctrine are. I have mentioned one of the effects of adopting a political framework; namely that public education in a political liberal society ought to aim at neutrality among different conceptions of the good, not by eliminating talk of the good from the school curriculum, but rather, by allowing a wide variety of different views to be expressed and presented in the classroom setting. I now turn to some of the other implications of adopting political liberalism.

### **Political Liberalism and Public Policy**

Political liberalism does not specify any detailed list of policies that must be adopted. As I said earlier, a political liberal society doesn't have one mould of ideal

citizenship, but many, since as Mouffe puts it: “A modern conception of citizenship should respect pluralism and individual liberty” (2005: 56). As such, there isn’t any single set of policies or institutions that can be identified as the institutional requirements of a political liberal community. Different communities can adopt different policies, while remaining committed to political liberal norms. However, as mentioned in chapter two, political liberalism does set limits on the types of policies that are admissible in a political liberal society. For instance, public policies that attempt to shape the ethical outlook of citizens (whether in a liberal or illiberal way) are illegitimate in a political liberal state, since it is one of the central tasks of political liberalism to aim at neutrality among differing conceptions of the good. Political liberals cannot, therefore, attempt to promote any particular conception of the good at the expense of others, but rather must make room for all reasonable ways of life.

The central distinguishing feature of political liberalism, as opposed to ethical liberalism, is its stance on diversity. As Tomasi says: “ethical liberals must attend to the role of policy makers in gently *shaping* diversity toward public ends. Political liberals, by contrast, must be concerned about the ways of gently *protecting* diversity from the pursuit of legitimate public ends” (Tomasi 2001: 107; emphasis original). If political liberals are going to achieve the goal of protecting diversity, they must, first and foremost, adopt policies that are consistent with, or better yet, that are conducive to fostering, many different forms of the good. But, how is this to be done?

Tomasi argues that a political liberal state, in order to be accommodating of diversity, must not adopt too expansive a role. What he calls ‘high liberalism’ must be rejected, on his view, since it involves making assumptions about the kinds of institutions

that are desirable for all citizens. However, given the fact of pluralism, there are a great number of different individuals, each with different pursuits and different goals and it would be wrong to assume that any expansive institutional framework would be favourable to all citizens.<sup>22</sup>

This does not mean that institutions can never be justified in a political liberal society. Nor does it mean that all institutions must be acceptable to all citizens. Both of these requirements would be far too demanding and would risk making political liberalism an implausible political structure. Tomasi's point, rather, is that we ought to allow for a space between a liberal social theory and a theory of justified coercion. In other words, a political liberal theory ought to be more than a theory of justice and of legitimate coercion; it ought to be a theory about what the necessary conditions are in order for individuals, from multiple different backgrounds, to live well together.

High liberalism, according to Tomasi, doesn't leave enough space between the values it embraces and the theory of social justice it defends. In Tomasi's words: "for a high liberal to care about some value *just means* to set out state-backed guarantees concerning that in terms of justice" (2001: 113; emphasis original). But, this approach does not leave room for important values that are not a part of a liberal account of justice. High liberals jump straight to the question of what an appropriate conception of social justice should look like. This is an important question, of course, but not the only important question to be asked by political liberals. Tomasi points out another question

---

<sup>22</sup> As H.L.A. Hart rightly points out: "Very few social changes or laws are agreeable to or advance the welfare of all individuals alike. Only laws which provide for the most elementary needs, such as police protection and roads, come near to this. [...] In most cases law provides benefits for one class of the population only at the cost of depriving others of what they prefer" (Hart 1997: 162). This point about laws is also true of a number of social policies and institutions.

that is worth asking: “what is the role of social justice as a concept, within the boundaries of a liberal theory?” (Tomasi, 2001: 114). It is often assumed, by comprehensive and political liberals alike that a liberal account of social justice is equivalent to an account of liberalism, but this is problematic, since a liberal theory needs to include more than simply an account of justice in order to be a complete theory of social and political life.

The citizens in a liberal society need certain virtues in order to help them navigate the interface between public and private life. Moreover, they may have concerns about their society that are not related to the fairness of the institutional structures, as argued in the last two chapters. Citizens care about the fairness of social institutions, but they may have ethical concerns beyond these justice-related considerations. As Tomasi puts it: “A successful political liberal society is a fair *and ethically satisfying* system of cooperation over time” (Tomasi 2001: 115; emphasis original). A society can be just without being ethically satisfying for a number of its citizens. This is because most citizens spend only a small portion of their lives engaging and interacting with public institutions and political life. As pointed out by Kymlicka and Norman: “most people find the greatest happiness in their family life, work, religion, or leisure, not in politics” (1994: 362). Even within a fair political structure in which citizens have many opportunities, these individuals may not be happy with their ability to pursue their own version of the good, either because conflicting values are unintentionally being promoted by the state, or simply because the majority of citizens in society hold to other views of the good and act in ways that marginalize these other groups, either intentionally or at other times unintentionally.

A liberal theory has to take account of this, and state institutions must, as best as possible, not be reflective of any particular conception of the good. Political liberals must

refrain from shaping the lives of citizens in a way that would be necessitated by a comprehensive conception of the good. As Tomasi puts it: Political liberals “must seek to avoid recalibrating their citizens’ personal compasses with respect to the meaning of their political autonomy, consistent with honouring all the basic rights and equality of opportunity” (Tomasi 2001: 104). Liberal principles of justice and respect for rights are consistent with a wide range of different policy outcomes. Policy decisions should take into account the impacts these decisions will have on the members of society and on civil society organizations.

### **Political Liberalism and Social Justice**

The political liberal commitment to pluralism and to protecting all reasonable conceptions of the good has a number of important consequences which pertain to the role of social justice in a political liberal society. For the most part, liberal political theorists (including political liberals) have ignored this dimension of the debate and have continued to focus attention on elaborating expansive theories of social justice that, in many instances, run the risk of being hostile to the diversity a liberal society is meant to protect. The tendency among liberals has traditionally been to incorporate whatever values one accepts as important into one’s conception of social justice, without thinking about the impact an expansive conception of social justice may have on citizens with a wide range of different conceptions of the good.

There is good reason to rethink this approach, in light of what has been said about the goal of protecting various reasonable forms of the good. The general trend among liberals has been to create social programs aimed at creating opportunities and at providing security to their citizens by guaranteeing the provision of certain goods. The



goal of creating better opportunities for citizens is a noble one and it should not be abandoned. But creating opportunities is not the same as guaranteeing provision of basic goods. The notion that the state should be responsible for the provision of basic goods needed by citizens, which has long been held as a dogmatic truth by liberal egalitarians, ought to be rejected.

One should not move too quickly from the claim that ‘individuals are in need of X’ to the claim that ‘the state should guarantee the provision of X’ or ‘individuals are entitled to X.’ Just because something is good does not imply that everyone should be guaranteed to have it. There are times when the best thing a state can do is allow citizens the space to provide important things for themselves and for their fellow citizens, while simply protecting their ability to do so. As Schmidtz points out: “moral institutions get the best results not so much by aiming at the best results as by imposing constraints on individual pursuits so as to bring individual pursuits into better harmony with each other” (Schmidtz 2006: 174). If we want to encourage better relations between the citizens of a society characterized by diverse conceptions of the good, we need to allow individuals the liberty to pursue their various goals, without forcing them into a liberal mould. For example, while it is self-evidently true that many elderly individuals need to receive certain forms of care, it does not straightforwardly follow from this that the state should be the sole provider of this care.

In a number of East Asian countries influenced by Confucianism, it is widely accepted that children have a duty to care for their elderly or ailing parents. The duty of care need not be the state’s duty in such cases since citizens willingly fulfil this role. The point is not to defend the Confucian model over most typically western ones, but to point

out the plurality of ways in which a duty of care can manifest itself (another way would be to make community associations and civil society organizations responsible for elder care). The point is that insofar as one is a political liberal, one should not promote one of these views of the good, at the expense of others. Rather, political liberals must seek out methods of accommodating the multiple different ways of life and conceptions of the good that are likely to be defended in a political liberal community.

Tomasi rightly points out that even welfare policies have costs, not only at the economic level, but at the cultural level as well. Groups who have a long tradition of caring for their elders, to some extent, lose the possibility engaging in certain activities that may be important to them, when the state intervenes and takes care of the needs of all citizens. It may be argued that this is of little importance, since the elderly are being cared for in both instances. There may be questions about which approach does so more efficiently or with fewer people who fall through the cracks, but these are not the only relevant questions that may be asked. It is also worth asking what the impact of government provided services is on the institutions of civil society and the private lives of citizens, and the limits that are (inadvertently) placed on reasonable conceptions of the good.

There are a number of pressing questions that need to be asked related to the impact of public policy decisions on the values and the virtues of a country's citizens and not all of these are questions of basic justice. The point is not that the state should stop interfering in the private lives of citizens and adopt a laissez-faire approach. Rather, the point is that politicians should take into account the wider impacts of policy decisions on the norms and values of other cultures and on the institutions of civil society. In some

cases, the state may well be the best provider of certain goods and services, but it should not be taken for granted that this is the case. In a number of instances, the best provider of certain goods and services might well be the citizens themselves.

If the state provides its citizens with a number of entitlements in the form of institutionally claimable rights, there may not be a need for an actively engaged citizenry that provides and cares for the other members of society. An increase in institutional guarantees can decrease the need for active engagement and virtuous citizenship. Sandel (1998) rightly points out that justice is a remedial virtue. The need for justice signals the absence of other virtues. If justice is the primary virtue of society, then that society will be lacking in some other respects. Sandel, unwittingly, presents an important challenge to the notion that the state should act as a guarantor of basic goods. Virtues, such as generosity and charity, can no longer be exercised with the same degree of significance, when the state steps in and provides for all the needs of citizens. If the needy are provided with what they need as a result of state sanctioned coercion (through taxation), as opposed to the exercise of social virtues, there is something to be said about the somewhat lessened nature of this type of aid.<sup>23</sup>

By forcing the provision of these goods, the state is leaving no room for virtuous action aimed at providing these very same goods. Moreover, since the state provides goods in a bureaucratic, impersonal manner, recipients of this aid don't even get the opportunity to acknowledge and be thankful for the help they are receiving. Abuses of state-provided welfare programs are far more likely than abuses of private charity

---

<sup>23</sup> Some might be inclined argue that justice should trump other considerations, such as private virtues, but even if our conception of justice requires us to take care of the needy (for example), it is not clear that it is the state's role to enforce this duty of justice, or if it does, that the proper way to enforce this duty is through the types of social guarantees often advocated by liberal egalitarians.

organizations, since recipients will be less likely to abuse the trust of their fellow citizens whom they interact with on a daily basis (and insofar as they do, they may be less likely to receive aid in the future). Individuals are less inclined to take advantage of members of their immediate community than they are when receiving impersonal aid from government agencies. They are also less likely to view this aid as an entitlement when they receive it from the other members of their community, but will instead regard it as a kind gesture.

Some might argue that the means by which the needy get what they need does not matter so long as they get what they need. This view must be rejected, however, since the means by which an outcome occurs is very important to determining the worth of an action (or in this case a policy decision). It is important that individuals do not starve, and that all citizens be given opportunities to better their life chances. But, it is also crucial that they develop good relationships with their fellow citizens and that they be able to pursue their own conception of the good life. Proper relationships between citizens can best be developed by allowing, and in fact, encouraging meaningful interaction between them. At times, this may involve including citizens in the provision of goods that all individuals need. At other times, it may involve letting citizens develop the right kinds of organizations that will take care of these needs on their own. Political institutions should not simply be concerned with achieving a desirable distribution of resources. A society that is distributively just is not yet a society that is desirable to live in, for all (or even most) members of society.

Part of making society a desirable place to live involves having certain kinds of citizens in that society. Some might want to say that this is at best a secondary goal, to be

subordinated to concerns of distributive justice, but such an approach ignores the importance of having good citizens and good people in a society. In a number of ways, the interactions of individuals on a daily basis and the virtues they possess are more important than concerns related to just resource distribution. A society will not thrive in the long run if its citizens do not adopt certain attitudes and values towards one another. On the other hand, a society with an unjust distribution of resources could still be a desirable place to live for most (and even all) citizens, as long as these citizens were confident that their concerns were being listened to and that other citizens cared about how they fared as citizens, but also as persons.

In a prosperous and well-ordered society, individuals should foster fruitful relationships with each other, and these relationships are only possible when individuals are allowed to engage with others in meaningful ways. When the role of providing certain services is filled, the perceived need for individuals to step in and play their part won't be there to the same extent as it would be if it was expected that each and every individual should fill the role of being the best citizen, but also the best person that one can be. In order to be compatible with many different conceptions of the good a political liberal state has to leave enough social space for individuals to act in virtuous ways that may be required by their conception of the good. Instead of focusing on the question of how we can make society more just, we should be asking what kinds of virtues would make justice less important a value in society.

In order to achieve this, we must come up with more creative solutions to old problems of distributive justice, ones that emphasize and allow for the diversity of ways welfare provisions can get to those who need them, while sending positive messages to

citizens and promoting civic (as well as private) virtues. Part of this may simply involve fostering better citizenship, by promoting toleration and respect for diversity, so that individuals themselves take on the responsibilities of caring for others. Alternatively, it may involve providing incentives for citizens who help their fellow citizens and who engage in activities that are beneficial to the wellbeing of the community and to other members of society. In any case, it definitely involves leaving enough room for a variety of different conceptions of the good to be pursued with ease.

Political liberalism may be about protecting diversity, but political liberals may still promote certain virtues or values that can be deemed to be essential to the working of the political community. Any virtue that contributes to the overall effectiveness of the political community can legitimately be promoted, even by political liberals. These include virtues of public reasonableness, tolerant attitudes, respect for rights, as well as virtues of public participation and civic engagement. Although this last category of virtues is not enforceable, it is nonetheless an important part of a well functioning society and can be promoted by political liberals in non-coercive ways. It is important to recognize, however, that there are a number of ways to encourage public participation. It is equally important to recognize that not all forms of public participation require an active involvement in political matters per se. A successful liberal society may need a certain level of citizen engagement in public life, but this public engagement can take a variety of forms, and political liberals should not define public involvement in a rigidly liberal way.

## **Political Participation and Civic Engagement**

Galston worries about growing trends of political apathy and lack of civic engagement among young people in the United States. Fewer young people are voting than used to be the case, and many express little to no interest in politics. Many of them, however, see value in volunteering, which they regard as “an *alternative* to official politics” (Galston 2004: 263; emphasis original). According to his study:

They [young people] understand why it matters to feed a hungry person at a soup kitchen; they do not understand why it matters where government sets eligibility levels for food stamps or payment levels for Earned Income Tax Credit. They have confidence in personalized acts with consequences they can see for themselves; they have less confidence in collective actions (especially those undertaken through public institutions), whose consequences they see as remote, opaque, and impossible to control (Galston 2004: 263).

Although these findings are supposed to be distressing, they are, on the contrary, very encouraging in an important way. According to Galston’s report, young people are compassionate and tolerant. They understand that they have responsibilities to care for themselves and for those around them. These are important values, and they should be promoted and encouraged. But this is not done by forcing them to engage more actively in political affairs. If today’s youth don’t understand the value of politics, perhaps it is because they (rightly) see it as an ineffective means of arriving at ends which they themselves agree with (helping those in need). Forcing citizens to participate in a political system they see as ineffective is a sure-fire way of further increasing their discontent and disenchantment with the current state of political affairs.

If we want to re-engage citizens, not only at the political level, but at the level of civil society, then the state must play an active role in providing the right kinds of

incentives to citizens, rather than play the role of provider. Political liberals must recognize that taking on the task of providing goods for individuals entails certain costs. Goods that are provided by the state are not free; they are paid for by someone else. Not only does providing goods for citizens give them a sense of entitlement, but of greater importance for political liberals is the impact these guarantees of social goods can have on many reasonable views of the good. Political liberals should be concerned about how their social policies impact these views of the good and what can be done to lessen the impact of social interaction on reasonably held private views. Politically reasonable citizens in a liberal society shouldn't feel that the costs associated with being a part of such a society are too high; otherwise they may choose not to be a part of it at all.

There is also a need for more avenues where individuals can meet and discuss their conceptions of the good life. The private realm needs to be made public in a number of ways, not in the sense of publicly promoting one conception of the good at the expense of others, but rather in the sense of giving citizens the opportunity to engage with one another and discuss important issues related to their various conceptions of the good. Citizens cannot be forced to engage in such activities, but for those who wish to learn about the beliefs held by their fellow citizens and teach them about their own beliefs, opportunities need to be in place in order to encourage citizens to participate in the free exchange of ideas and information with all who wish to participate.

### **Internalizing Responsibility**

In a liberal society, or any society concerned with mitigating the costs of social interaction, a concern with internalizing responsibility is a must. Internalizing responsibility has to do with bearing the costs of one's actions, or to put it in the negative,



it has to do with not making others bear the costs of one's actions. For instance, if I own a factory that dumps its waste in a nearby river, internalizing responsibility involves paying for that portion of the cost of cleaning up the river which I am responsible for. In many instances, knowing who is responsible for what portion of the costs associated with certain activities is far from clear. However, the point is clear: those who engage in cost-generating activities must be responsible for bearing the costs associated with performing those activities.

This is especially important for political liberals since they need to give their citizens certain assurances pertaining to their ability to pursue whatever reasonable conception of the good they choose to engage in. One's ability to follow one's own conception of the good, to some extent, relies on others doing the same without creating obstacles that hinder one's ability to act on one's pursuits. Citizens must be held responsible for the outcomes of their actions, and not leave the task of cleaning up their mistakes to others. Otherwise, other citizens will (quite reasonably) not want to engage in social interactions with these citizens and will reject a political liberal society in favour of a society that promotes their own conception of the good.

The state can still have an important role to play in helping citizens by creating opportunities for individuals to improve their life chances. This can be done in a variety of way including providing public education to all citizens up to a certain age and subsidizing higher education with merit-based grants, as well as providing healthcare benefits to citizens. However, it should not be the role of the state to provide its citizens with everything they need or want in order for them to live a fulfilling life. Some ways of life will be more costly than other, both to the citizens themselves and to society, and it is

not the one of the responsibilities of the state to ensure that citizens be allowed to engage in cost-generating activities. These should, in fact, be discouraged in a number of ways since a political liberal society must lessen the costs of associated with joining. Likewise, if a cost-generating activity also produces a social benefit, then the burden of the cost may be lessened in proportion to the benefit provided. However, since many (if not most) activities are beneficial to some and costly to others, those who bear the greatest benefits may be responsible for mitigating the costs (for others) associated with these benefits.

The notion of internalizing responsibility is meant to avoid the problem of having some individuals engaging in activities that are beneficial to themselves, and for a select group of the population, while leaving others to clean up the costs. In a society characterized by a plurality of different conceptions of the good, this is an important concern since different groups want to be assured that other groups will not be engaging in activities that will undermine their ability to pursue their own conception of the good. This is not meant to be a principle of justice so much as an important concern for political liberals who wish to mitigate the costs of social interaction among groups of individuals with a plurality of different conceptions of the good. Thus, internalizing responsibility does not trump other concerns, but is an important (often ignored) consideration that needs to be weighed against other factors, including justice-related concerns.

There are a number of different approaches one could adopt to try and make a liberal society a better place for its citizens and I am not pretending to have demonstrated what the best overall solution would be for most members of society, but that is precisely the point of this discussion. One of the main effects of accepting political liberalism is an acceptance that there isn't one way of organizing political and social institutions but

many. A political liberal society needs to be receptive to the needs of its citizens, not so that they may promote their own self-interested ends at the expense of others, but rather so that their legitimate concerns can be heard and so that the costs associated with living in a society where others hold competing conceptions of the good can be limited. There is no single way of achieving this goal, no formula that will guarantee success. This means that there could be a number of very different looking societies, each of which would remain committed to political liberalism. But that is the project political liberals signed up for. It is one of the entailments of trying to create a society in which all reasonable ways of life can live in harmony with one another according to principles that are acceptable to all.

Political liberals understand that there are a number of reasonable ways for individuals to lead their lives and need to recognize, on that basis, that to force them into one mould of citizenship would be wrong. Many liberals tend to defend conceptions of social justice that are meant to apply to all societies, at all times. Political liberalism doesn't allow for this possibility. While the citizens of a political liberal society need to make certain commitments (to the equal worth of others and to their right to live according to their own reasonable conception of the good), they do not need to agree on even a limited conception of justice, or on any public values beyond those that are necessary in order to safeguard the pluralism defended by political liberals. An overly rigid conception of social justice amounts to a conception of the good, and when forced on the citizens of a society, it does not leave room for other reasonable conceptions of the good to be adopted. Political liberal society must adopt a pluralism that spans the institutional structures it allows and the private lives of citizens and the various

conceptions of the good compatible with the limited political demands of politically reasonable people.

## **Conclusion**

Political Liberalism was originally conceived as a political theory which aimed to accommodate as many reasonable conceptions of the good as possible. In order to achieve this goal, political liberals draw a distinction between the public principles that must be accepted by all members of society and the privately held views of citizens, which can remain diverse and, in many cases, are incompatible with one another. Liberalism requires certain attitudes and dispositions such as “respect for the equal rights of others, a willingness to persuade rather than coerce, the subordination of personal plans, projects and desires to impersonal rules of law, and a contribution to the provision of public goods” on the one hand (Macedo 1990: 259), but the citizens in a political liberal society may hold a wide variety of different conceptions of the good, on the other. As Mouffe puts it: “Citizenship is vital for democratic politics, but modern democratic theory must make room for competing conceptions of our identities as citizens” (2005: 7). Thus, although citizens in a political liberal society must hold certain publicly reasonable views, they are free to live their lives according to whatever (reasonable) conception of the good they feel most inclined to accept as their own.

This acceptance of reasonable pluralism about various conceptions of the good is one of the distinctive features of political liberalism. By accepting pluralism as a fact about modern society, political liberals are making a commitment to be accommodating of a wide range of worldviews. In doing so, political liberals are moving towards the creation of a fair social arrangement that is acceptable from the perspective of individuals with a wide range of different conceptions of the good. In order to truly make a political liberal society a fair social arrangement, however, more needs to be done in the domain

of mitigating the spillover effects between the public principles of a political liberal society and the private lives of their citizens. In order to achieve this, liberalism may need to allow for, and help foster, a more engaged civil society in which citizens can participate in common activities and be a real part of the decision-making processes that help shape their political community. In the words of Jurgen Habermas: “the institutions of constitutional freedom are only worth as much as a population makes of them” (1992, 7). And, a liberal society must do all it can to encourage individuals to make the best of the opportunities that are provided for them. This means that individuals need opportunities to participate in decision making processes, in order for them to be able to voice their concerns, and the liberal state may even offer them incentives to take advantage of these opportunities. However, at the end of the day, it is up to each and every individual to make decisions about what is important in their lives. They must choose their values and beliefs, their friends, their goals and the projects they wish to pursue. Whether and how their lives have meaning is essentially up to them to decide and cannot be decided by liberal public institutions, whose role it is only to provide individuals with opportunities, in order to facilitate their pursuits of whatever reasonable ends they choose. That, in short, must be the role of liberal public institutions.

In order to be accommodating of diversity and of a plurality of different conceptions of the good, political liberals must not promote any single version of the good, since this would serve to undermine the project of creating a society characterized by genuine value pluralism, where a number of very different individuals with diverse worldviews can flourish in their own distinctive ways. Part of the task of defending reasonable pluralism involves fostering certain attitudes and values in citizens, such as an

acceptance of public reasonableness, respect for the rights, and the political equality of other citizens. The other part of defending reasonable pluralism has to do with mitigating the spillover effects between liberal public institutions and the private conceptions of the good held by the citizens in a political liberal society. Liberal public institutions can at times conflict with the reasonably held views of citizens and undermine their privately held beliefs about the good. In the name of defending reasonable pluralism, political liberals have a duty to try and mitigate these spillover effects, since to be a political liberal is to be committed to the legitimacy of all reasonably held conceptions of the good and therefore to address any concerns their citizens may have about how the public institutions of society impact their private beliefs.

Although mitigating spillover effects cannot be achieved at the cost of infringing the rights or liberties of individuals, certain measures can be taken by political liberals in order to ensure that the reasonable concerns of citizens are listened to and addressed. It is clear that one of the central roles of political liberals lies in addressing the concerns of citizens who fear that public institutions might erode their private conceptions of the good and undermine their ability to lead their lives in meaningful ways. In this sense, much of what is at stake for political liberals lies beyond the scope of distributive justice and state legitimacy. There is work to be done by political liberals in developing a theory of liberalism that does more than provide an account of justice and legitimate coercion. This is not to downplay the role of justice-related concerns for political liberals, but a central part of what must be done by political liberals is not, strictly speaking, a matter of basic justice and state legitimacy. Rather, it has to do with protecting the diversity and promoting the virtues that will allow liberal pluralism to perpetuate itself over time.

Tomasi is one of the only political liberals to recognize the need for liberalism to move beyond justice and to address issues pertaining to citizenship, virtue and the creation of a political order that is accommodating of multiple different ways of life. My task in this paper has been to defend a position similar to his in many important respects, while drawing out some of the implications of his position in order to highlight the ways in which a commitment to political liberalism can manifest itself and what this commitment entails. Tomasi rightly points out the need for political liberals to be mindful of the potentially damaging effects of liberal institutions on the private lives of citizens, and the need for liberal theorists to do more than merely develop theories of justice. My project has been to focus attention on these issues in order to further explore the implications of these claims. I did this by defending political liberalism, by developing an account of the virtues needed by citizens in a political liberal society and by further exploring the effects of accepting political liberalism as a political framework. This project will have been a success if the reader takes away a sense that liberal theorizing must take a new direction, one that takes us away from liberal theories that are nothing more than an account of social justice and state legitimacy. I do not mean to treat justice as unimportant, but contrary to the view held by far too many liberal theorists, developing an account of liberal justice is not all a liberal theory should be about.

Regardless of one's conception of justice, liberal theorists must spend more time on the notions of citizenship and virtue and less time with questions of institutional justice and legitimacy. Liberals must ask themselves what kinds of attitudes and values their citizens need in order to be good citizens, and good people. They must also engage in meaningful discussions about the ways in which they can mitigate the effects of their



public commitments on the private lives of citizens. This is the direction future liberal theories must go if they are to gain support not only from those already sympathetic to the liberal cause, but from the whole range of individuals that are meant to participate in a liberal society and embrace liberal public institutions. A society that is distributively just (that is, one in which the distribution of resources and opportunities satisfies one's criteria of justice) is not enough, on its own, to make a society desirable to live in. Nor does it guarantee prosperity or justice in the broader sense of the term. Even if justice is conceived of in this broader sense, there is still reason to take seriously the notion that a liberal society must be able to engage and accommodate the demands of a wide range of different worldviews without foisting an autonomy-driven, individualist conception of the human good on all members of the liberal polity. How individuals choose to lead their lives is, after all, up to them to decide. While some choices need to be restricted in order to maintain peace and a properly functioning social order, a political liberal society that is concerned with protecting diversity and pluralism offers individuals, with multiple different backgrounds, beliefs, customs, traditions and conceptions of the good, an avenue where they can coexist peacefully and pursue whatever ends they see fit to pursue. It is for this reason that a political liberal society is a desirable place to live for a number of individuals, and why it is most likely to gain widespread support from all sorts of different kinds of people.

## Bibliography

- Callan, Eamon. 1997. *Creating Citizens: Political Education and Liberal Democracy*. New York: Clarendon Press.
- Cohen, G.A. 2000. *If You're an Egalitarian How Come You're so Rich?* Cambridge, Harvard University Press.
- Galston, William. 1991. *Liberal Purposes, goods, virtues, and diversity in the Liberal State*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Galston, William. 1995. "Liberal Virtues and the Formation of a Civic Character" in Glendon, Mary Ann and Jeremy Blankenhorn, eds. 1995. *Seedbeds of Virtue: Sources of Competence, Character, and Citizenship in American Society*. Lanham, MD: Madison Books.
- Galston, William. 2004. "Civic Education and Political Participation" in *The American Political Science Association*. Vol. 37, No. 2, p. 263-266.
- Habermas, Jurgen. 1992. "Citizenship and National Identity: Some Reflection on the Future of Europe," in *Praxis International*. vol. 12, p. 1-19.
- Hart, H.L.A. 1997. *The Concept of Law*. Chap. 8 "Justice and Morality" New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kymlicka, Will. 2001a. *Contemporary Political Philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press. Chapter 7.
- Kymlicka, Will. 2001b. *Politics in the Vernacular: Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Citizenship*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Kymlicka, Will and Wayne Norman. 1994. "Return of the Citizen: A Survey of Recent Work on Citizenship Theory" *Ethics*, Vol. 104, p.257-289.
- Larmore, Charles. 1990. "Political Liberalism" in *Political Theory*. Vol.18, No.3, p.339-360.
- Macedo, Stephen. 1990. *Liberal Virtues: citizenship, virtues and community in liberal constitutionalism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mill, J-S. 1991. *On Liberty and Other Essays*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Moore, Margaret. 2001. "Liberal Nationalism and Multiculturalism" in *Canadian Political Philosophy* by Beiner, Ronald and Wayne Norman. New York: Oxford University Press. p. 177-193.
- Mouffe, Chantal. 2005. *The Return of the Political*. First Published in 1993. New York: Verso.
- Rawls, John. 1971. *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Rawls, John. 1985. "Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical" in *Philosophy and Public Affairs*. Vol. 14, No. 3, p.223-251.

- Rawls, John. 1987. "The Idea of an Overlapping Consensus" *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies*, Vol.7, No.1, p.1-25.
- Rawls, John. 1988. "The Priority of Right and Ideas of the Good" *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 17, No. 4, p.251-276.
- Rawls, John. 2005. *Political Liberalism*. Expanded Ed., New York: Columbia University Press.
- Sandel, Michael. 1998. *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*. Second ed. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Schmidtz, David. 2006. *Elements of Justice*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Schmidtz, David and Robert E. Goodin. 1998. *Social Welfare and Individual Responsibility: For and Against*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Spinner, Jeff. 1994. *The Boundaries of Citizenship: Race, Ethnicity and Nationality in a Liberal State*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Tomasi, John. 1992. Review of *Liberal Virtues: Citizenship, Virtue and Community in Liberal Constitutionalism* by Stephen Macedo. *Ethics*, Vol. 102, No.2, p.397-399.
- Tomasi, John. 1994. "Community in the Minimal State" *Critical Review*, Vol. 8, No. 2, p.285-296.
- Tomasi, John. 2001. *Liberalism beyond Justice*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.