Political Perfectionism

- An analysis of John Rawls' neutrality and his notion of self-respect

Øyvind H. Henriksen

Rest not! Life is sweeping by,

Go and dare before you die.

Something mighty and sublime,

Leave behind to conquer time.

Goethe

Preface and Acknowledgements

I here put into your hands some of my most intense hours. Supported by even more idle hours, it has given me new insight in life. It feels as if I have climbed a bit higher on the mountain of wisdom, only to discover that the zenith reaches even further above the clouds than what I earlier believed. Yet I am now even more motivated to keep on climbing.

The Brazilian educator Paulo Freire wrote: "Washing one's hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral." The question of neutrality is the first central issue in this thesis. The second is the notion of self-respect. I have always had a strong belief in myself. I regard this as an invaluable asset. But it is not my merit. I blame it on my family, friends, teachers, and the society in general. Unfortunately, there are many who lack this belief. I am convinced that there are many things the state can do to improve this.

I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Raino Malnes, for inestimable encouragement, solid support, and illuminating conversations. I am also very grateful for the improvement Arild Høie Henriksen, Assistant Professor in English language and my brother, has given my unsteady prose. I apologize for any mistakes still remaining in style or argumentation; I shall be the only accused. Several others deserve gratitude, among them all the professors and teachers who have given me stimulating guidance throughout my studies, and of course my family and friends.

It is not an assignment of mine to assess the quality of the following lines. I grant you that task. If you have but a tenth the pleasure in reading as I have had in writing this thesis, you will as little think your time, as I do mine, ill spent.

Oslo, 18 May 2003

Øyvind H. Henriksen

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

"Absolute freedom mocks at justice. Absolute justice denies freedom." These famous words by Albert Camus epitomize one of the predominant problems of contemporary political thought. The paradox of sustaining both individual freedom and social justice can be characterized as a conflict between the individual and the state. In this interpretation, an extensive structure of government is seen as necessary to uphold justice, whereas individual freedom requires a minimum of government. Camus might mean that only an anarchic state can guarantee absolute freedom, and at the same time that such a state defies justice. And he might also mean that only a communist state can guarantee absolute justice, and at the same time that such a state represses freedom.

We do not need to analyze what Camus meant with his statement, but we must assert that both an anarchic state and a communist state would suppress freedom and justice in decisive ways. For freedom and justice go hand in hand; we cannot have one without the other: Justice presupposes freedom. Freedom presupposes justice. A society must therefore balance both of them against each other with due precaution. The liberal theories we will concentrate on in this thesis are more plausible candidates for respecting both freedom and justice. In fact, each of these theories argues that it sustains both freedom and justice best.

One such theory we find in liberal perfectionism. This theory promotes the good life, and claims that it provides freedom and justice to a larger extent than other theories do. Perfectionism is an ancient form of political theory which still has an apparent appeal to many. One appealing element lies in the central idea of becoming fully human. This we can become by developing our human capacities, which among others consist of our abilities to be rational, moral, creative, and emotional.[1] The

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[1] For instructive writings about the good to develop human capacities, see C.B. Macpherson (1966; 1973). His books created a sparkle in me which still burns brightly; it resulted in a paper (Henriksen 1998) on liberal democracy.

better we know our true self and the world we live in, and the more we are given the chances to develop our capacities, the better our life will be. Perfectionism maintains that this development of human capacities must be encouraged by the state. Thus, the state promotes a conception of the good. Though this is far from being neutral in terms of what constitutes a good life, contemporary perfectionist theories recognize the value of tolerance, autonomy and equality, and are thus considered liberal theories.

In contrast to perfectionism we have neutralism. This theory does not promote a conception of the good. It claims that freedom and justice are best secured when the state leaves matters of the good life aside. Neutralism is not one coherent theory, and so it is best to take a closer look at one of its proponents, namely John Rawls.

1.1 John Rawls

In 1971 John Rawls (1921-2002) published his world-famous book *A Theory of Justice*.[2] Throughout the next twenty-two years he revised, reformulated, and reinforced his theory. In 1993 this gave birth to *Political Liberalism*. The remaining nine years of his life he continued to provide important contributions to contemporary political thought. In this thesis we will primarily focus on the two abovementioned books. They will, as Rawls intended, be seen as one giant theory.[3] The first book is a large-scale attempt to try to set forth the main principles of a just society. The second book specifies that all aspects of justice must be in the political sphere.

In laying out a theory of a just society, Rawls writes: "Justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought." (1999: 3) For Rawls, institutions are the backbone in the structures of a just society. Institutions regulate society in many ways, and they are the media through which the authority speaks and acts. He sets forth a theory of fair cooperation between free and equal persons. Rawls' theory

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[2] In this thesis I am using Rawls' revised edition from 1999.
[3] Lots of criticism have pointed out divergences between these two books, but, however plausible, this will not concern our matter here. For these critics see especially Barry (1995), but also Hurley (1999-2000).

is a liberal theory which provides extensive rights and liberties to each individual; it is an egalitarian theory which guarantees fair equality of opportunity. Further, it emphasizes solidarity with the weak members of society by ensuring that social and economic inequalities are "to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged" (ibid: 266). And, since Rawls' theory is agnostic towards the good life, it is a theory of neutrality.

Even though Rawls' theory adheres to the neutrality principle, he finds, like most liberals, distinctive value in toleration and autonomy, and interprets justice as giving freedom to the individual. He maintains that we must tolerate that people have different views on the good life, and therefore the state should be neutral and not promote any conceptions of the good. He is agnostic towards the good because it is hard to agree on what involves a good life. The good varies from person to person, Rawls argues. As a result a society should organize institutions so that each individual can – to an equal extent – pursue his own view of the good life. For Rawls, justice demands individual freedom.

Nevertheless, one might reasonably argue that Rawls' ideal government would interfere with people's life to a greater extent than liberal governments in the western world actually do. We can especially see this in the weight he puts on redistribution of primary goods. And we can also see this in our everyday life where the market has much more influence than it most likely would have in a Rawlsian society. Yet Rawls envisions his theory as giving more autonomy to the individual than what our current society does. The reason is that more state interference does not automatically result in less individual autonomy. Rawls would not redistribute primary goods if he thought it would restrict autonomy. He rather does it out of a concern of autonomy; he wants to treat people as free and equal.

For Rawls, modern society comprises a plurality of incompatible and irreconcilable doctrines. But he still believes we can agree on justice as long as we only focus on strictly political matters. Thus he argues for a division between political and nonpolitical matters, where only the political matters concern justice. His theory is

therefore a theory of political liberalism. The thin theory of the good, which his theory relies on, is seen as a political conception of the good. It includes the primary goods of rights, liberties, opportunities, income and wealth, and self-respect. These goods are promoted by the state. But it is only the political aspect of the primary goods that is at the disposition of society.

1.2 The questions

There are several crucial problems in this thesis. However, we can pinpoint the three most relevant questions:

(1) *What kind of neutrality does Rawls endorse?*
This question looms large in this thesis. In contemporary political theory the question of neutrality is still hotly debated. It has been an increasingly pivotal task to find out how a state can avoid guiding people towards a good life. Neutralists argue that the ideal must be to be completely neutral towards the good, and only promote what is right. This, they argue, results in most freedom for each individual.

Rawls is primarily seen as advocating neutrality, but it has been pinpointed from several writers that his conception of the person is controversial and some have argued that it is perfectionist. Moreover, his thin theory of the good, and especially the primary good of self-respect,[4] indicates that he is promoting a conception of the good. Rawls argues, however, that his thin theory of the good has a valid claim to neutrality since it is based on what we share as free and equal, moral, agents. A clarification of what he means by neutrality will hopefully reveal how his theory avoids promoting ways to lead a good life, and how it promotes ways to lead a good life. Rawls' emphasis on fundamental ideas shared by free and equal persons and on the political conception of justice plays a significant role in his *neutrality of aim*, which he claims is neutral between people's conception of the good.

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[4] My initial thoughts about Rawls' notion of self-respect appeared in a paper (Henriksen 2001) written two years ago. Although my arguments in this thesis will draw on this paper, they are much more developed now.

(2) *Are Rawls' arguments against the principle of perfection sound arguments?*

Rawls argues against the principle of perfection. This principle is nonneutral towards the conception of the good, and hence it favours people who share this conception. Rawls neutral theory rejects this favouring of one particular conception of the good. To understand this rejection it is important that we inspect Rawls' explicit arguments against perfectionism. It is important to have in mind that Rawls is not formulating the principle of perfection in a liberal manner suitable to contemporary perfectionist theories. We have therefore good reasons to analyze his arguments against the liberal version of perfectionism, and there will be no surprise if his arguments fail.

(3) *Should the primary good of self-respect be limited to the political sphere?*

One essential premise for Rawls is that it is very important to have self-respect to live a worthwhile life. Self-respect is therefore given a role as a primary good in his theory. But Rawls limits his support of self-respect to the political sphere. As a result he does not appear to promote the values of self-respect as much as he initially suggested. The result does not match the premise. We will therefore rationally analyze the discord between what the notion of self-respect suggests for Rawls' theory and how it is promoted as a political good.

In trying to understand why Rawls limits his promotion of self-respect, we must first undertake the task of finding out how his theory can be said to be neutral. This is a crucial element since it explains in what way his theory permits promoting substantial values, such as the values of self-respect. Rawls' theory only permits promoting political goods, and thus we can find out whether his promotion of self-respect only should be limited to the political aspect of self-respect.

1.3 Why these questions?

There are three main reasons why these questions are of importance. The first concerns perfectionism, the second concerns neutrality, and the third concerns the importance Rawls' theory has on contemporary political theory.

The first reason is that self-development is necessary for a good life. Given this, the state should encourage self-development, especially through education. It is essential to be able to devote some time to your own self, and find out your own place in the world. This is exactly what self-development is all about. To know yourself and the world is of uttermost significance in order to be able to make good and steady decisions for yourself, and thereby to live a life in harmony with everybody around you. The main point, given that human development is a good thing, is that the state should do its best to provide the circumstances for every single individual to develop. Today it might seem like western societies have many perfectionist tendencies since education, art and sport are subsidized by the state. By adhering to neutralism it might appear as if contemporary thought is eager to limit promotion of the good life. A defence is therefore necessary. Perfectionism needs to be reinforced so that the state, to a larger extent, encourages individuals to lead good lives.

The second reason is based on the false assumption about neutralism frequently used in contemporary political thought. This assumption devours neutralism as intuitively fruitful and forgets that every theory has to appeal to a conception of the good. No theory can avoid substantial values in its fundament. Many theorists draw a distinction between the good and the right, but they lack both theoretical and empirical support for this distinction. In its most extreme case, neutralism equals impossibility. So-called neutral theories are based on this impossibility and hence they will easily become murky. In building a theory it is therefore important to always explicitly state and argue for a conception of the good. The same is also valid in a government's policymaking. With this thesis I hope to confirm the arguments for the inherent falsity of neutralism.

The third reason why these questions are of importance focuses on the significance Rawls' thought has had upon contemporary political theory. Despite this, his notion of self-respect has gained little attention. Rawls claims that self-respect is perhaps the most important primary good. Maybe it is the most vital ingredient in an individual's life. It is therefore important that the place Rawls gives this notion is analysed in

more detail. Even though there exists some perfectionist-influenced criticism of Rawls, his notion of self-respect has been largely ignored.

1.4   How will we answer these questions?

The **second chapter** will be an analytical view of Rawls' neutrality. We will try to capture in what way his theory is neutral. Contemporary political theory emphasizes justificatory neutrality, which is an approach similar to Rawls' *neutrality of aim*. But there are some differences. If we dig deeper into his neutrality of aim, we will learn that it is intimately related to his idea of what is *shared by free and equal persons*. Because the theory relies on a thin theory of the good that is seen as shared, the theory becomes neutral between different people's aims. But his neutrality is also intimately related to the idea of what is *political*. In a way it might seem like his stress on the political is in fact congruent with his stress on neutrality. Neutrality is interpreted as only concerning the political sphere. Thus we will find two important elements in Rawls' neutrality, namely that it is seen as shared and that it only concerns the political sphere.

The **third chapter** is an overview of liberal perfectionism as it is presented in Thomas Hurka's *Perfectionism* (1993) and George Sher's *Beyond Neutrality* (1997). A characteristic feature of these modern perfectionist theories is that they both are liberal in the way that they appreciate the plurality of valuable lives. Thus they both affirm moral pluralism. Liberal perfectionism believes that the individual must choose for himself his own way of living. The mission of the state is to encourage people to make an informed and rational choice towards a good life. In this chapter we will see that Hurka finds perfectionist values in both individual autonomy and equality, whereas Sher is more concerned with clarifying why neutralism is incoherent and thus why we should promote a conception of the good.

The **fourth chapter** will inspect Rawls view on the principle of perfection. It is a relatively short chapter with point by point argumentation. When Rawls writes about the principle of perfection he divides it into a teleological version and a moderate

version. In his explicit arguments he provides forceful objections against these versions of perfectionism. But if we utilize these objections on the liberal versions of perfectionism we discover his objections are no good. Thus Rawls offers no explicit arguments that are convincing against liberal perfectionism.

The **fifth chapter** will begin with an inspection of Rawls' notion of self-respect. This notion can be divided in a political aspect and a nonpolitical aspect, which in sum make up a general aspect of self-respect. Rawls promotes his conception of the good as a superior political conception. Hence, he can be said to be a political perfectionist. We can especially see this in his promotion of the political aspect of self-respect. However, he does not provide good reasons for not promoting the general aspect of self-respect. With this in mind we will briefly consider how different versions of perfectionism would promote the notion of self-respect.

The **sixth chapter** will draw some conclusive remarks. Here we will answer the three questions posed in 1.2. But we will also ponder upon how to draw the lines for the political sphere. As we will have already noted it is unclear where Rawls draws these lines. My constructive conclusion is that Rawls should extend the limits for the political sphere and include the whole notion of self-respect as a primary good.

1.5 Method

Before we dig deeper into the problem, some words about method is appropriate. In this thesis I have simply used my own critical view to scrutinize a philosophical theory. My chief assignment has been to analyze what Rawls' theory really means – and to a certain extent, what the implication of this could be.

I will operate within Rawls' framework. His concepts are very appealing since they set forth a framework which, I think, most normative theory about social institutions can fruitfully operate.[5] I find most of his liberal thought and logical analyses coherent

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[5] It is evident that criticism against this framework is also fruitful. Alternative approaches should be considered with equal importance.

and very promising. Consequently, this will be more intelligible for liberals, since I do not try to defend liberalism on any conceptual grounds. Still, I surely hope the positive emphasis perfectionism has on human development can strengthen the liberal stance in opposition to non-liberal theories. It is definitely a weakness to take this approach considering the multitudes of theories that reject Rawls' liberalism, but it can also be deemed an advantage since it, I would argue, limits the discussion to what is essential within political thought.

I will draw on Rawls' (1999: 18f; 42-45) idea of *reflective equilibrium*. This is a method of moral reasoning founded on both theoretical principles and our considered convictions. Theoretical principles are based on what people in general think and believe. It is meant to be a point of departure that most people can share, and therefore the arguments will not immediately be discarded on the grounds that they are in disagreement with everyday moral thinking. The first step is then to formulate a theoretical principle "so that it represents generally shared and preferably weak conditions" (ibid: 18). Then we replace vague assumptions with more precise ones until they generate a reasonable set of principles.

Our considered convictions are based on intuitions which are instant and on intuitions which are contemplated, i.e. convictions independent and dependent on theoretical analysis. This means that our intuition can be modified and revised, for even our firm convictions can be changed. The second step is then to test each principle – and the whole set of principles – formulated in the first step against our considered convictions. If the principles and our convictions do not match each other, we have to keep on working and revising both the principles and our convictions until we eventually reach a theory that is in harmony with our revised considered convictions. When this is reached – by going back and forth between the first and the second step – we have reflective equilibrium. "It is an equilibrium because at last our principles and judgments coincide; and it is reflective since we know to what principles our judgments conform and their premises of their derivation." (ibid)

Thomas Nagel says that there should be room for intuition, and that it can be so strong that if it tells us that something is wrong without telling us what is right, we can still trust it (1991: 7). In the method of reflective equilibrium this means that we have to go back to the theory itself and work on it until it matches our intuition. In this process our intuition is liable to change, and hence both theory and intuition will be revised. "This is to say that neither theories nor intuitions have unconditional primacy; adjustments must be made and compromises found along the way." (Malnes 1995: 38f) We have to go back and forth – intuition to theory, theory to intuition – until we reach principles that match our considered convictions.

This method of moral reflection is mainly how I have attacked the questions of this thesis. The alternatives – to leave out intuition or to base the whole theory on intuition – do not seem attractive. "Both leave out an important element of moral reflection as we know it from everyday life." (ibid: 39) Of course, I will not go through this process in this thesis, but the result of the process will be presented as clear and straightforward as I am capable of.

2.   Rawls and neutralism

The key mission with this analytical chapter is to reveal what kind of neutrality Rawls endorses. Although several different forms of neutralism exist, we will only be occupied with liberal versions similar to Rawls' neutrality. First, a distinction should be made between the idea of being neutral and the idea of neutralism. To be neutral can be defined with phrases such as, *being impartial to*, *not taking a side in*, or, *being indifferent to a subject matter*. But it can also mean *help or hinder to an equal extent*. The issues to which a neutral stance can be taken concern all disputes in which something can be evaluated, from a single practical problem to multiple theoretical ones. To be neutral is then to avoid taking side (or part) in a dispute, i.e. refraining from evaluating the disputed matter, and not letting the subject affect any part of your theories, plans, or actions.

Neutralism, on the other hand, maintains that the *government* should be neutral; it advocates neutrality at state level. More specifically, as it is used in contemporary political theory, the government should be neutral towards ideas of the good. To the crucial question: *Should a state promote a conception of the good?* Neutralism answers: *No*. If we use the definitions above, it means that the government should *be impartial to*, *not take a side in*, or, *be indifferent to* any conceptions of the good, or also that the government should *help or hinder* any conception of the good *to an equal extent*.

Rawls seems to create a kind of neutrality in terms of no state interference into individuals' view on the good life. He argues that there exists a plurality of different conceptions of the good in a society so that a just theory cannot promote any one of these conceptions without discriminating against the other ones. The state must then be indifferent to all conceptions of the good – within reasonable constraints of justice – and hence individuals can pursue their own idea of a good life at fair and equal levels. For Rawls individual autonomy is thus achieved by state neutrality.

It the first section we will look closer at the neutral aspect of Rawls' theory. The aim is to find out what is meant by neutrality of aim. This will then lead us to Rawls' emphasis on how we should only concentrate on practical *political* ideas, and not get involved in metaphysical notions. We should only stick to what we are able to agree on. In the second section we are going to examine this emphasis on the *political*. Rawls introduces a *political conception of justice*. Ideas of the good can be a part of this political conception as long as they are political ideas, i.e. as long as they are shared among free and equal citizens. The third section will bring forth some concluding remarks. Rawls' theory appeals to shared substantial values and not, as liberal perfectionism does, to higher or intrinsic values. Still, there will be no surprise if we find these shared substantial values controversial.

2.1 The neutralist aspect

In this section we will look at the arguments behind, and try to grasp the gist of Rawls' *neutrality of aim*. To be able to do this properly we must look at the intuitive idea behind neutralism. This will be done in the first subsection. Here we will note that complete neutralism is an impossible idea, even in theory. In addition we will note that the connection between individual autonomy and state neutrality is obscure.

In the second subsection we will clarify what is meant by *justificatory neutrality*, namely that the superiority of a conception of the good is precluded as a justification for a theory. This means that a government cannot justify its policies by arguing that one conception of the good is better than another. We will take a brief look at how this neutrality has been used by contemporary writers, and we will find out that Rawls' neutrality is in line with justificatory neutrality.

In the third subsection we will see that Rawls' neutrality of aim is justified by a shared conception of the good. This means that it is also neutral *between* different people's conceptions of the good. Rawls does not justify his theory by arguing that a conception of the good is better than others, but by arguing that a conception of the

good is seen as shared. The state will therefore appeal to substantial values, but this is not a problem since these values are seen as shared. Rawls' theory is neutral in aim.

2.1.1 The intuitive idea

Rawls writes that "any ethical view is bound to rely on intuition to some degree at many points" (1999: 35). The idea of neutralism seems predominantly to rely on the belief that a state should not appeal to a conception of the good because we cannot agree on what is good and so it will favour some persons over others. According to this view, individual autonomy requires state neutrality. This idea we will call the intuitive idea of neutralism. According to Joseph Raz (1986) and George Sher (1997), this idea is not coherent because the connection between autonomy and neutrality is too obscure. Before we dig into Rawls' neutrality we will, however, look closer at this idea.

Approaches to neutralism come in different guises. In general, it is a popular position which intuitively seems to be fair and just, given the fact of pluralism. This is the fact that there exists a plurality of different philosophic, religious, and moral doctrines with their various associated conceptions of the good. I have provided a tentative illustration (see illustration 1) that shows how Rawls' freestanding theory relates to these comprehensive doctrines. With this plurality of different doctrines there is no consensus on what is good for humans, and hence all conceptions of the good are controversial.

Yet if people want to live harmoniously together with their radically different values they should agree on the fundamental issues concerning justice. Neutralism tries to create a consensus on justice, while it is neutral towards the good. If this succeeds, citizens will be free in making up their own mind on what they believe are good and they can pursue their own ideas of a good life. This they can do to an equal extent since the state is not biased towards any particular conception of the good. Neutralism, then, gives each individual as much autonomy as possible. This is the intuitive idea of neutralism. Individual autonomy seems to require state neutrality.

The arguments for neutralism are founded on the difficulties with the conception of the good as opposed to the conception of the right. We are all different and we have different conceptions of the good. To respect the individual the state should therefore not promote any particular conception of the good. To ensure freedom for everybody to choose and pursue one's own conception of the good, it is believed that the state must be neutral. If the state is nonneutral it means that some people are imposing their conception of the good on others. A government must therefore promote justice (or what is right), while it must not promote what is good, because conceptions of the good are outside the limits of justice.

More systematically, Sher (1997: 44) lists three main arguments for neutralism: (1) we have different conceptions of the good but we still want to live in harmony; (2) it is impossible or very difficult to know the good so the state should not promote any conception of the good; (3) individual autonomy is of first importance so the state should not deny it by promoting a good that an individual might not agree on.[6] An analytical defence of neutralism can separate one of these three arguments and not refer to the others.[7] However, they are best seen together as one argument where they all reaffirm each other: The state should not promote a conception of the good because we have different conceptions of the good; it is difficult to know the good; individual autonomy is important; and we want to live in harmony. As we can see these arguments are all based on a distinct division between the right and the good. The distinction is mainly that the good is controversial while the right is not.

So far we can already find nonneutral evaluative claims. The value of harmonious unity, cooperation, equality, and individual autonomy are prominent. By taking these values into its account, it seems like the state justifies its system by claiming that at least these goods should be constituents of all permissible conceptions of the good. This is clearly not completely neutral. Most liberals, however, admit the impossibility

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[6] For a better understanding of these arguments, see Sher (1997: 44). Larmore (1987: 51f) mentions three similar arguments, in the second, however, he focuses on the importance of experimentation.

[7] For instance, it seems like Galston (1982: 622) and Hurley (1999-2000: 105) are using the two first arguments as one, while Hurka (1993: 163) divides them into two different arguments.

of this neutrality since it is hopeless to create, organize, and maintain social institutions without, at least, appealing to some values.

> "Any judgment that an activity, way of life, or any aspect of it is either good or bad to any degree is a partial description of a conception of the good. So are statements on various aspects of the value of the organization of society, or any other judgments about the value of any state of society." (Raz 1986: 135)

So what are we to make of the intuitive idea of neutralism? It is a popular notion which appeals to individual autonomy. It is also a complex notion that seems to contain contradictions. It claims that a state should avoid favouring a conception of the good, but at the same time it appears to be impossible to avoid appealing to some substantial values. And with an appeal to values, some conceptions will inevitably be favoured. If we want to create a society based on justice, some substantial values must be used as a fundament. Justice must be interpreted one way or the other, and this interpretation will necessary appeal to substantial values within a conception of the good.

Charles Larmore advances another way of justifying neutrality, namely with "a universal norm of rational dialogue" (1987: 53). This is supposedly a neutral justification without "appeal to the values of *skepticism*, *experimentation*, or *individual autonomy*" (ibid: 51). Bruce Ackerman (1980) argues for neutrality with a neutral dialogue that refers to the belief that nobody can ever use as a justification that their view is better than any others. Still one might argue that both of these theories rely on the values of debate and rationality. Ackerman writes: "Indeed, it would be a category mistake to imagine that there could be a Neutral justification for the practice of Neutral justification – for Neutrality makes no sense except as a part of the practice it constitutes." (1983: 387) Even though Larmore (1987: 161*n*) says he disagrees with Ackerman, he maintains that neutrality must appeal to values, but that these values can be considered neutral. However plausible this version of neutrality is, it will not concern our discussion since Rawls (1993: 192*n*) takes a clear stand

against it when he refers to Larmore's idea of a neutral procedure.[8] We will therefore maintain that complete neutralism is impossible.

In sum, it seems to be a matter of balancing neutrality between complete neutralism on one hand and a narrow value-based theory on the other. There are no examples of complete neutralism since this idea is impossible to achieve in practice. However, examples of a narrow value-based theory can be a strong form of perfectionism, a strong form of liberalism, a strong form of a religious state authority, or any other extreme government in which one specific conception of the good life prevails. Nevertheless, this balancing can be made in several different ways. The intuitive idea of neutralism appears to favour those theories most open to different conceptions of the good. In other words, the intuitive idea is liberal and endorses extensive individual autonomy. One form of neutralism seems to dominate in current liberal theory, i.e. neutrality used as a justification.

2.1.2 Justificatory neutrality

To get a better grip on Rawls' neutrality we will now look at how neutralism is conceived by contemporary writers. The focus will be on the liberal version which emphasizes that the justification of a theory must be neutral. Let us deal with Raz first. He divides theories of anti-perfectionism into two different forms of governmental restriction. The first view he calls *the exclusion of ideals*, the second view he calls *neutral political concern* (or *neutrality between ideals*):

> One is the view that governments should be blind to the truth or falsity of moral ideals, or of conceptions of the good. That is, that neither the validity, cogency or truth of any conception of the good, nor the falsity, invalidity or stupidity of any other may be a *reason* for any governmental action. The other, related, view is that governments must be neutral regarding different *people's conception of the good*. That is, that governments must so conduct themselves that their actions will neither improve nor hinder the chances individuals have of living in accord with their conception of the good. (Raz 1986: 108, emphasis added)

The first view could be interpreted to mean that the state should be neutral and limited out of a concern for individual autonomy. A government is able to coerce people and it can therefore easily be used to impose somebody's view on somebody

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[8] For forceful arguments against such forms of neutralism, see Sher (1997).

else. "All coercion invades autonomy by subjecting the will of the coerced." (ibid: 155) Raz argues that individual autonomy does not require neutralism. One of the reasons is that coercion from a liberal government does not harm autonomy as much since it is in fact motivated by a concern for autonomy. Raz interprets Rawls to be in the second view. This view can mean that governments should rely on a conception of the good based on what people share, but not on more. It would then not favour anyone's conception of the good but rather be neutral *between* different people's comprehensive conceptions. We will not dwell on this form of neutralism before the end of the next subsection.

If we focus on *reason* in the first view, an interpretation can be that no government should act out of the reason that a conception of the good is better than another. Even though Raz does not expand on this interpretation, it is in accordance with what Will Kymlicka calls *justificatory neutrality*:[9]

> One, which Raz calls 'neutral political concern,' requires that the state seek to help or hinder different life-plans to an equal degree – that is, government action should have neutral consequences. The other, which Raz calls the 'exclusion of ideals,' allows that government action may help some ways of life more than others but denies that government should act *in order to* help some ways of life over others. The state does not take a stand on which ways of life are most worth living, and the desire to help one way of life over another is *precluded as a justification* of government action. The first requires neutrality in the *consequences* of government policy; the second requires neutrality in the *justification* of government policy. I will call these two conceptions consequential and justificatory neutrality, respectively. (Kymlicka 1989: 883f, emphasis added)

Consequential neutrality is the same as complete neutralism and hence it is seen as an impossible idea to implement in practical political life. According to Kymlicka (ibid: 885) Rawls endorses justificatory neutrality. The crucial point behind this idea is that a justification should never be that a conception of the good is better than another. Still it allows some conceptions of the good to have an advantage. It is unavoidable that state policies "have the effect of making it easier for one conception to be realized than another, thus leading to growth in adherence to the one as opposed to the other" (Nagel 1991: 166). Larmore confirms this inevitable bias: "It is a general

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[9] As we will see Raz (1986) and Kymlicka (1989) seemingly disagree: Raz claims that Rawls belongs to the idea of *neutral political concern*, whereas Kymlicka claims that Rawls belongs to the idea of *justificatory neutrality*. It might be, however, that they both are correct; in that case Kymlicka's interpretation of Raz' neutrality distinction is inaccurate.

truth that what the state does, the decisions it makes and the policies it pursues, will generally benefit some people more than others, and so some conceptions of the good life will fare better than others." (1987: 43) This truth is also (and maybe more) valid for the basic structure of a society, and perhaps even more so. But even though some conceptions are favoured, there is no intention in this favouring; it is not used as a justification for the theory that these conceptions are better than others. Thus the theory can still be justificatory neutral.

Several other theorists have also emphasized justificatory neutrality. It is impractical to quote all, so a few will do. William Galston calls it a *formal justification*: "According to this view, the liberal state is desirable not because it promotes a specific way of life, but precisely because it alone does not do so. The liberal state is neutral among different ways of life." (1982: 621) Larmore also emphasizes the justificatory aspect when he favours neutrality of *procedure* and not of *outcome*:

> Its neutrality is not meant to be one of *outcome*, but rather one of *procedure*. That is, political neutrality consists in a constraint on what factors can be invoked to justify a political decision. Such a decision can count as neutral only if it can be justified without appealing to the presumed intrinsic superiority of any particular conception of the good life. (1987: 44)

Sher puts emphasize on *intention*, when he favours weak (justificatory) and not strong (consequential) neutrality:

> The standard response is to distinguish a stronger and a weaker version of neutralism. The stronger version asserts that governments may not adopt any laws or policies that *have the effect of* promoting any particular conceptions of the good, whereas the weaker asserts only that governments may not take any actions *in order to* promote any such conceptions. (1997: 4)

Hurka accentuates the justificatory aspect when he distinguishes philosophical neutrality from state neutrality. About the last one he writes:

> According to this ideal, the state must not only not coerce citizens to make them better, it must never aim, coercively or otherwise, to promote one set of values over others. It must be neutral about the good, never having as its justification for acting that some ways of life are intrinsically preferable to others. (1993: 158f)

As we can see the wording is a bit different form one writer to the other. The meaning is probably also a bit different. But, in general, justificatory neutrality allows that some conceptions of the good will have a better chance to survive and will sometimes be encouraged more than others. This is not desired by neutralists, but, they admit, it will happen inevitably. It is accepted as a feature of neutralism, or more precisely, of any kind of government power. The crucial point in justificatory neutrality is that justification of government policies must not be that a conception of the good is better than another. But Rawls writes that "showing something justified appears to involve an appeal to some values" (1993: 191). If a justification cannot appeal to the superiority of a conception of the good, to what can it then appeal?

Justificatory neutrality does not give a positive answer to this question. One might believe that a theory must *rely* on some conceptions of the good as long as it does not intend to favour these conceptions. These ideas about justification are hard to grasp. But a theory could rely on substantial values as long as it does not intentionally favour any particular conceptions of the good. These substantial values must not be justified by the belief that they are superior to other values; rather, they must be justified in another way. For instance, values can be justified by the fact that they are seen as shared among free and equal persons. This is chiefly the justification Rawls uses. So instead of listing up all possible scenarios for how a justification could be for justificatory neutrality, we will be satisfied with an analysis of Rawls' neutrality.

2.1.3 Neutrality of aim

Rawls advocates neutrality in what he calls *neutrality of aim*. He is very careful with the term *neutrality*; indeed he only uses it to a very limited extent in *A Theory of Justice* (1999), and when he introduces it in *Political Liberalism* (1993) he writes: "I believe, however, that the term *neutrality* is unfortunate; some of its connotations are highly misleading, others suggest altogether impracticable principles." (Rawls 1993: 191) Neutrality should therefore not be viewed by its extreme connotations, but rather as a device for impartiality. In describing how his theory is neutral, Rawls starts with defining procedural neutrality:

> A neutral procedure may be said to be one justified by an appeal to neutral values, that is, to values such as impartiality, consistency in application of general principles to all reasonably related cases […], and equal opportunity for the contending parties to present their claims. (1993: 191)

Neutral values have a central place in Rawls' theory, e.g. his formal constraints of the right: generality, universality, publicity, ordering, and finality (1999: 117). These values are consistent with procedural neutrality. But Rawls dismisses that his theory is in accordance with procedural neutrality since his principles and his conceptions of society and person appeal to substantial values. He insists that he has always relied on a thin theory of the good, and in his last book he explicitly writes that six ideas of the good appear in his theory.[10] Implicitly, however, we can find several other ideas of the good. For instance, Galston claims that Rawls and other neutralists

> covertly rely on the same triadic theory of the good, which assumes the worth of human existence, the worth of human purposiveness and of the fulfillment of human purposes, and the worth of rationality as the chief constraint on social principles and social actions. (Galston 1982: 625)

Nevertheless, Rawls considers his theory to be neutral in a special way, namely in *aim*:

> A very different way of defining neutrality is in terms of the aims of basic institutions and public policy with respect to comprehensive doctrines and their associated conceptions of the good. Here neutrality of aim as opposed to neutrality of procedure means that those institutions and policies are neutral in the sense that they can be endorsed by citizens generally as within the scope of a public political conception. (Rawls 1993: 192)

According to this statement Rawls' theory is neutral in virtue of being shared by citizens generally. This is reaffirmed in the rest of his theory. *Neutral* is the same as *shared* or *agreed upon*. As we remember, this can be interpreted as Raz's second form of anti-perfectionism. Rawls' theory is neutral because the substantial values that institutions and policies appeal to are seen as shared among citizens. His ideas of the good are a matter of agreement. Of course, he does not expect all individuals in

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[10] In *Political Liberalism* there were only five goods: "a) the idea of goodness as rationality; b) the idea of primary goods; c) the idea of permissible comprehensive conceptions of the good (those associated with comprehensive doctrines); d) the idea of the political virtues; and e) the idea of the good of a well-ordered (political) society." (Rawls 1993: 176) The last one is now further divided into two goods: "the idea of the political good of a society well ordered by the two principles of justice [and] the idea of the good of such a society as a social union of social unions." (Rawls 2001: 142)

our present society to agree on these values, but he expects that we would agree on them in reflective equilibrium.

Still there are, again, several different interpretations of this kind of neutrality. If we look closer at neutrality of aim, the word *aim* might refer to the belief that by avoiding controversial values the theory is neutral between citizens' aims. The state is not biased towards an individual's aim as long as the aim is permissible. Rawls gives us two plausible interpretations of what it can mean:

> a. that the state is to ensure for all citizens *equal opportunity* to advance any [permissible] conception of the good they freely affirm;
> b. that the state is not to do anything *intended* to favor or promote any particular comprehensive doctrine rather than another, or to give greater assistance to those who pursue it; (1993: 192f, emphasis added) [11]

According to the first interpretation the state is neutral because citizens have *equal* opportunity to pursue their aims. They have equal opportunity because the state only supports goods that are seen as shared. Everybody wants these goods, and everybody has them as a part of their aims. But there is no equal opportunity if, as Rawls admits, a "society is bound to encourage and support certain kinds of plans more than others" (1999: 373). Then the shared goods are biased towards some conceptions of the good, and some aims would be easier to pursue than others. The theory is biased even though it solely relies on shared goods. Moreover, he argues that

> it is surely impossible for the basic structure of a just constitutional regime not to have important effects and influences as to which comprehensive doctrines endure and gain adherents over time; and it is futile to try to counteract these effects and influences, or even to ascertain for political purposes how deep and pervasive they are. We must accept the facts of commonsense political sociology. (1993: 193)

The citizens with the plans that are supported the most have a better opportunity to pursue their aims. There is no equal opportunity. The state is biased towards some lifestyles. This means that the first interpretation, considered strictly, does not fit Rawls' neutrality. Although one might believe that Rawls' theory is biased towards

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[11] The first meaning has been amended so that only permissible conceptions are allowed. Rawls himself wrote that this amendment was necessary for it to be in accordance with justice as fairness.

those conceptions of the good which better exploit or are in more need of primary goods, it is not a task for this thesis to find out which conceptions are favoured. As we just saw, Rawls claims that it is hopeless to find out how *deep and pervasive* this favouring is. We will therefore only assume that some conceptions have an advantage.

According to the second interpretation the state is neutral because it does not *intend* to help citizens to pursue a particular aim rather than another. The objection against the first interpretation can be rejected: Even though the state is bound to encourage and support some certain lifestyles and thereby help some particular aims more than others, there is no intention to do this. The state is neutral in a way that allows some unintentional support and encouragement. This corresponds with justificatory neutrality. It states that governments can never use as a justification the argument that some conceptions of the good are better than others. Still, we must also include the fact that the doctrines must be permissible since the justification appeals to values considered permissible and suppresses values considered outside the limits of justice. If this second interpretation only includes permissible doctrines, then it can be said to fit Rawls' neutrality more accurately than the first interpretation.

Neutrality of aim is then in harmony with justificatory neutrality. It is only unintentionally biased towards some permissible conceptions of the good, and it does not use as a justification that a given conception of the good is better than others. But neutrality of aim has another dimension as well. While justificatory neutrality does not provide any account of what the justification should appeal to, neutrality of aim argues that the justification must appeal to values seen as shared by free and equal persons. This idea is, as we have noted, similar to Raz's second form of anti-perfectionism. It is neutral *between* different people's conception of the good because it relies on substantial values people share. Raz argues that this "is in fact not a doctrine of neutrality but of moral pluralism" (1986: 133). Such a doctrine asserts that a wide variety of moralities are incommensurable and they should therefore be given equal chances to thrive and prosper. This pluralism is, as Raz (ibid: 161) claims,

compatible with nonneutral theories such as perfectionism. In the last chapter we will see that this is at least valid for liberal perfectionism.

Briefly summarized, we have so far discovered the following about Rawls' neutrality of aim: It does not use as a justification that some conceptions of the good are better than others. Consequently it is in accordance with what Kymlicka (1989) labels justificatory neutrality. The justification for the theory is that the values it appeals to are seen as shared, and hence people are still free to choose comprehensive doctrines they consider valuable. This is a form of neutralism similar to what Raz (1986) labels *neutral political concern*. Moreover, unintentional support for some lifestyles is inevitable. But this support is not intended; it is only an inescapable consequence.

With this account of neutrality of aim, Rawls unwraps what may be said to be his main point with his political liberalism: the political aspect. Since this neutrality is in fact justified by a shared conception of the good, we must next look at why this conception is shared. Rawls' answer is that these substantial goods are considered shared because they are political goods. His neutrality is in fact best used to shed light on how the state should only operate within the political realm.

2.2 The political aspect

Rawls' *Political Liberalism* (1993) is penetrated by the idea of the political realm, even in the account of the primary goods. All the values Rawls appeals to are seen as political values. He constructs a political conception of justice which is the only thing we need to agree on to attain an overlapping consensus. This political conception is a moral conception, and it is therefore evaluative. This is obvious since it relies on substantial values within the thin theory of the good. However, these values are considered shared. Thus the political conception of justice only limits the range of rational plans to what all individuals – under the veil of ignorance – agree are good. "The theory of justice does, indeed, presuppose a theory of the good, but within wide limits this does not prejudge the choice of the sort of persons that men want to be." (Rawls 1999: 230)

2.2.1 A political conception of justice

When Rawls highlights the importance of a political conception in his theory he contrasts it with a comprehensive conception (see illustration 1). A political conception concerns the sphere of justice, whereas a comprehensive conception concerns all spheres, the metaphysical as well. With the metaphysical Rawls seems to mean everything that is not political, for instance, philosophical, religious, or moral conceptions concerning human existence in general. Hence, a conception is comprehensive when it concerns society and life in general, i.e. when it includes the nonpolitical sphere. In Rawls' own words:

> It is comprehensive when it includes conceptions of what is of value in human life, and ideals of personal character, as well as ideals of friendship and of familial and associational relationships, and much else that is to inform our conduct, and in the limit to our life as a whole. A conception is fully comprehensive if it covers all recognized values and virtues within one rather precisely articulated system; whereas a conception is only partially comprehensive when it comprises a number of, but by no means all, nonpolitical values and virtues and is rather loosely articulated. (1993: 13)

The distinction between the political and the comprehensive is a matter of scope since the political concerns a smaller range of values. Political values do not include values of religion or nonpolitical virtues as "the characterizations of a good father or wife, friend or associate" (Rawls 1999: 355). These values belong to a comprehensive conception of the good.

We are all expected to have some kind of a comprehensive doctrine – with its associated conception of the good – or, at least, we are expected to have a partially comprehensive doctrine. On the other hand, the state is expected only to have a political conception of justice. It should even avoid partially comprehensive doctrines since the political should not include any nonpolitical values. If the state promotes a conception of the good, people would not be treated as free and equal since people affirm different doctrines. Those with a conception of the good similar to the one promoted by the state would be favoured since it would be easier for them to pursue their aims. Hence, Rawls creates what he calls a *political conception of justice*. He further explains:

> The features of a political conception of justice are, first, that it is a moral conception worked out for a specific subject, namely, the basic structure of a constitutional democratic regime; second, that accepting the political conception does not presuppose accepting any particular comprehensive religious, philosophical, or moral doctrine; rather, the political conception presents itself as a reasonable conception for the basic structure alone; and third, that it is not formulated in terms of any comprehensive doctrine but in terms of certain fundamental ideas viewed as latent in the public political culture of a democratic society. (1993: 174f)

As we can see, a political conception of justice has three features. First, it only concerns the society's main legal, social, and financial institutions. These are the institutions we need for a just society in which we can be free and equal. It is what we must agree on to be able to build a society. Thus this feature of the political conception of justice can therefore be seen as covering the area of what we need to share.

Second, it is not a part of any comprehensive doctrines. It is only concerned with the political sphere since we cannot agree on any comprehensive conceptions of any kind. Rawls' theory can therefore be seen as a freestanding view, not dependent on any comprehensive conceptions. He assumes that a consensus is easier to reach when it is presented this way. "To use a current phrase, the political conception is a module, an essential constituent part, that fits into and can be supported by various reasonable comprehensive doctrines that endure in the society regulated by it." (ibid: 12) Each comprehensive doctrine that exists in a society is therefore assumed to support the political conception of justice. This political conception has no particular view on the good life that is not already shared among citizens generally. It does not presuppose any comprehensive doctrines because it relies on values we all agree are values important for our own life. Thus this feature of the political conception of justice can be seen as shared.

Third, it relies on fundamental ideas of the public political culture. These ideas are the value of a well-ordered society with a fair system of cooperation and the value of being free and equal persons. Based on our considered convictions, people in today's public culture implicitly recognize these ideas as valuable. The political emphasis is an emphasis on contemporary values. Thus Rawls' political morality is seen as a

reasonable choice from our current point of view: "What is important about these ideas is simply their wide tacit acceptance" (Sher 1997: 78). It is what we accept as treating ourselves as free and equal persons. Thus this feature of the political conception of justice is considered shared.

In short, the whole aspect of the political conception of justice is shared by free and equal citizens. A government must avoid all nonpolitical conceptions and only rely on a political conception because this is the only conception we share. This fact stems from modern society which has an inherent pluralistic nature where vastly different but reasonable comprehensive doctrines flourish. These doctrines are so different that one excludes the other, and none can be used as a fundament for state authority. To be able to treat each person as free and equal, a society must come to an agreement of cooperation within the basic structure. The aim is therefore to find common ground, to find an *overlapping consensus*.

However, Rawls argumentation is tautological because every aspect of his theory is agreed upon. Several concepts have the same meaning. What is *neutral* is also what is *political*, *right*, *freestanding*, and *shared*. In addition, the thin theory of the good is also considered neutral because it is shared. Sher supports this all-encompassing assumption, when he claims that if we take for granted that our public and political culture supports neutrality, it "must in effect assert that we inchoately accept Rawls's theory itself" (ibid: 126). In the same manner Roberto Alejandro argues that Rawls' reasoning is circular, "we are in front of a circle, and it is not surprising that within the circular reasoning provided by that conception citizens will always arrive at an enduring consensus, thus securing 'stability' and a 'long run-equilibrium'" (Alejandro 1996: 13). If we accept one part of a circular reasoning, the rest follows.

In the same manner we must acknowledge that in Rawls' theory *political* is the same as *shared* or *agreed upon*; that is, the theory is political because the fundamental ideas are shared and agreed upon. But this is exactly the same as our interpretation of the meaning of neutrality. What is neutral is what we all can rationally be said to

share. This might be what Larmore so neatly encapsulates when he says that "neutrality is a *political* ideal" and that "the strategy is to *abstract from* what is in dispute" (1987: 45, 50). Rawls gives us an affirmation of this interpretation:

> The ideas of the good included must be political ideas; that is, they must belong to a reasonable political conception of justice so that we may assume:
> a. that they are, or can be, shared by citizens regarded as free and equal; and
> b. that they do not presuppose any particular fully (or partially) comprehensive doctrine. (1993: 176)

As we can see, there are two criteria Rawls lists up for political ideas: that they are shared and that they do not presuppose any comprehensive doctrine. These criteria obviously reflect the three features of a political conception of justice mentioned in the previous subsection.[12]

2.2.2 Political ideas of the good

Rawls asks: "How is it possible that there may exist over time a stable and just society of free and equal citizens profoundly divided by reasonable religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines?" (1993: xxvii) The answer, he insists, is to find an overlapping consensus based on a political conception of justice. A comprehensive doctrine needs to be in line with this overlapping consensus, if not it is not seen as a just doctrine. And if a doctrine is not just, it will not be allowed sufficient space to survive.

This might seem brutal, but, of course, a doctrine – with its associated conception of the good – cannot be accepted if it, for example, supports religious or racial discrimination. Such a doctrine will not include what Rawls calls a *permissible conception of the good*. It is not within the sphere of justice, and cannot be a doctrine that is integrated in a well-ordered society with fair cooperation between free and equal citizens. But one need not go to extremes, for only the political should be supported. All else is outside the sphere of justice, and cannot be a part of an overlapping consensus. Even artwork, sport and other cultural activities commonly

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[12] We will use these two criteria in 5.1.3 when we investigate whether the lines for the political can be extended to general values as well.

accepted in our societies today, are not supported by Rawls' theory if they do not belong to the political realm. Particular conceptions of the good should not be supported.

> The principles of justice do not permit subsidizing universities and institutes or opera and the theater, on the grounds that these institutions are intrinsically valuable, and that those who engage in them are to be supported even at some significant expense to others who do not receive compensating benefits. Taxation for these purposes can be justified only as promoting directly or indirectly the social conditions that secure the equal liberties and as advancing in an appropriate way the long-term interests of the least advantaged. (Rawls 1999: 292)

The question is where to draw the lines for the political sphere. The lines can be so narrowly drawn that higher education, sport activities, and artwork could be outside the realm of the political.[13] But if, for example, art were shown to belong to the political realm, the state could legitimately promote it. Rawls clearly opens for this possibility. As long as something can be said to belong to a political conception of justice, the state should promote it. So if educational institutions were shown to secure equal liberties, education should be subsidized. One might think that most cultural activities recognized today should be supported, since they probably lead to valuable experiences and knowledge so that most people in addition to the least-advantaged are better off. These cultural activities should then be a part of an overlapping consensus.

However, Rawls does not give a definitive answer to what should be included in an overlapping consensus. He rather seems to leave it open: "Ideas of the good may be freely introduced as needed to complement the political conception of justice, so long as they are political ideas" (1993: 194). Reflective equilibrium will help draw the lines for the political sphere. All we need to show is that ideas of the good belongs to the political realm, i.e. that they have an impact on justice of free and equal citizens.

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[13] Still, under such a scheme Rawls points out that the *exchange branch* can provide public goods and services outside the sphere of the political as long as citizens agree upon it. This branch "consists of a special representative body taking note of the various social interests and their preferences for public goods" (Rawls 1999: 249). My question is then: If these goods are seen as shared, why can they not also be seen as political goods advanced by the state? Rawls provides no good answer. However, this thesis will not enquire into this matter.

In chapter five we will see if we can extend the political to include general values as well.

2.3 Concluding remarks

Rawls admits that his neutrality is a special one. His theory is not intentionally biased towards any particular conception of the good. It is in line with justificatory neutrality: It does not use as a justification that one conception of the good is better than another. The justification relies on substantial values seen as shared by free and equal persons. These values are based on ideas seen as latent in our public political culture. Thus his neutrality of aim can be said to be neutral between different people's aims.

This creates an overlapping consensus for a political conception of justice. Rawls' theory is based on a thin theory of the good seen as what we all would share as free and equal persons. The political aspect emphasizes that the thin theory is only a limited part of a comprehensive conception since it does not concern nonpolitical evaluation of traits or activities. Alejandro suggests that "there are no conflicts about the grounds of justice [because they are] the end result of intuitive ideas upon which everyone agrees;" whereas when we are deciding the good "there are conflicts, and comprehensive doctrines are allowed to play a role" (1996: 21). However, within the notions of neutrality, the political, and the right, we also find a conception of the good, a good that is not controversial because it is shared.

There are many arguments claiming that Rawls' conception of the good – the thin theory – is controversial. His conception of the person, which is the basis for the thin theory, has received much criticism. James Fishkin claims that Rawls' theory is contestable because it is "assuming a particular and controversial conception of a 'moral person'" (1983: 356). If this is right, we cannot expect to share the idea of the primary goods, not to mention the thin theory of the good. Then Rawls' theory cannot be said to be a theory of neutralism. Galston affirms this controversy: "Rawls's conception of moral personality will appeal only to those individuals who have

accepted a particular understanding of the liberal political community" (1989: 714). Aspects of controversy seem to be a general point of criticism of Rawls' theory.[14] Although this debate in itself might show that Rawls' theory is controversial, the theory might, on the other hand, not be controversial after a process of reflective equilibrium. Rawls believes that his conception of the good is necessary if people are to be free and equal. This way it is seen as being shared: It is the fundament of a neutral basic structure, of a political overlapping consensus, and of the right. According to Rawls, the thin theory is indispensable in a theory of justice.

Rawls' theory is criticized by neutralists as well as nonneutralists. Neutralists detect the importance of the thin theory and thereby interpret the whole theory as relying on substantial goods in opposition to neutrality. On the other hand, nonneutralists attack Rawls' emphasis on the priority of right and thereby interpret the whole theory as being one of neutrality. In a way they are both right and wrong. Rawls' neutrality is a special one; it is not completely neutral since it appeals to substantial values. Still the theory has neutral tendencies since it does not intentionally favour some conceptions of the good. It is not intentionally biased towards or does not intentionally interfere with individuals' goals. Moreover, the justification for the thin theory is that it only appeals to fundamental political ideas found in the public culture which by and large can be said to be neutral because they are shared.

The problem is to find out which aspects of the good that should be included in a theory of justice. Rawls argues that the thin theory of the good should be included, but in addition he says that ideas of the good can be freely introduced as long as they are political ideas. He also says that the list of the primary goods can be extended with the same reasons. As Rawls' theory is now, it can be said to be neutral between individuals who would agree to the thin theory of the good. This agreement requires acceptance of his controversial conception of the person, including the notion of self-respect.

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[14] See also, among others, Raz (1986: 127); Larmore (1987: 118ff); Alejandro (1996: 15); Sher (1997: 85); and Hurley (1999-2000: 106).

3. Liberal perfectionism

We will now look closer at the idea of perfectionism. First, we must be aware of the distinction between the idea of perfecting oneself and the idea of perfectionism. The first argues that perfecting oneself is good for the individual; the second argues that it should be a task for the government to promote this idea. The second does not necessarily follow the first – perfectionism does not necessarily follow the idea of perfecting oneself. This is a point well taken by Kant, who argues that each individual has a duty to perfect himself, and that this is only a duty for individuals. The state, Kant asserts, should not promote any principles of perfection since that would restrict the autonomy of individuals.[15] Rawls, like Kant, advocates the idea of perfecting oneself and not the idea of perfectionism.

Perfectionism applies the idea of perfecting oneself at the governmental level by giving incentives and encouraging individuals to improve. It is a "philosophic attempt to identify superior ways of life or traits of character and, once having identified them, to use them as the goals of political life" (Galston 1982: 621). The state advocates what it believes is good for humans, often characteristic features of human beings, e.g. morality and rationality (in various forms) or what is considered our excellences in art, science and culture. To the crucial question: *Should a state promote a conception of the good?* Perfectionism answers: *Yes*. This is in stark contrast to neutralism.

From the classical version, perfectionism has undergone a change to a more liberal version. The classical version, as it originated from Plato and Aristotle and as it continued up to Nietzsche's time, did not emphasize the notion of equality as much as modern theory does. Liberal perfectionists are aware of this, and in their attempt to reinforce the theory they emphasize the importance of equality. It is no longer a

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[15] See for example Galston (1982: 622-4), and, for Kantian ethics, Baron, Pettit, and Slote (1997).

theory about the best and their weighty role in society, but a theory about the importance for everybody to improve the self and the state's responsibility to aid this development. Similarly, another change has also occurred: Individual autonomy is now seen as fundamental for a good life whereas paternalistic state enforcement is considered a hindrance.

Although several different forms of perfectionism exist, we will only be occupied with the liberal version that is relatively close to Rawls' theory. Within liberal perfectionism there are several theories about what is considered inherently good; how the state should promote these goods; and what kind of, if any, moral theories are needed in addition to support perfectionism. To get a glimpse of what liberal perfectionism might mean, we will now look at how it is represented by the ideas of Thomas Hurka (1987; 1993) and George Sher (1997). Even though it is unfair to try to capture their theories in a few pages, the important thing is not necessarily to be true to the original, but rather to get an idea of what liberal perfectionism may imply. This will in the end lead on to a better understanding of Rawls' tendencies towards liberal perfectionism.

3.1 Hurka's perfectionism

In *Perfectionism* (1993) Thomas Hurka advances a moral theory of the good human life as development of human nature. It is an Aristotelian perfectionism with a liberal emphasis. "Like Aristotle's, this theory starts from the idea that, at the deepest level, the intrinsic goods develop properties fundamental to human nature." (Hurka 1987: 728) The emphasis is liberal because it proposes equality and individual autonomy. Self-determination is in fact itself a perfection (Hurka 1993: 158). Hurka is uncertain whether his perfectionism needs support from other moral theories or if it can stand alone, i.e. whether it should be pluralistic or monistic. In fact he does not take a stand on this issue since he believes it is important to investigate pure perfectionism by itself before any supporting theories are considered. In going through this pure perfectionism we will in the first subsection take a look at what Hurka defines to be the good. The second subsection will look at the place given to individual autonomy.

And the third will inspect how the liberal notion of equality is duly taken care of in Hurka's perfectionist theory.

3.1.1 Physical, theoretical, and practical perfection

Hurka writes that "perfectionists find [the good] in such states as knowledge, artistic creation (or contemplation), the carrying out of complex and difficult projects, and friendship" (1987: 727). These states can be found in the three major goods of Aristotelian perfectionism: physical, theoretical and practical perfection. Physical perfection concerns bodily health, and the degree of perfection increases with better health and with better athletic performances. Even though Hurka admits he has "no special argument for this" (ibid: 730), he claims that physical perfection is only a modest intrinsic good. It is not as important as the theoretical and practical perfection which concerns exercise of rationality.

Theoretical perfection is achieved by gaining more knowledge. "The more we understand the world, and ourselves, and our place in the world, the better and more choiceworthy our lives." (ibid: 728) Practical perfection is exercise of rationality in action, which can also be called "nonlucky achievement" (ibid). These three goods can be – and most often are – interwoven in everyday life. Hurka describes how a scientific researcher can mix theoretical goods (subtle strategic thinking) with practical goods (creation of valuable knowledge), and how "team sports can require players to grasp and solve strategic problems at the same time as they exercise their bodies" (ibid: 735). The latter is an example of a mix between rational and physical goods.

These goods are differently ranked within each perfection (e.g. general organized knowledge is more valuable than specific unrelated knowledge), and against each other. Hurka (1987; 1993: 84-98) suggests a general structure of balance between knowledge and action while concerning for specialization. He makes it clear that it is only a rough ranking, since we cannot measure these goods in exact quantities. The best thing to do is to lead a well-rounded life where one can exercise the physical,

theoretical and practical perfections in a wide variety of ways and in addition be able to specialize in a few perfections. Much more could be said about ranking of excellences, but for this overview, suffice it to say that Hurka suggests a plausible balancing solution to the problem.

Perfectionist goods are based on what is fundamental to human nature. Although Hurka argues that Aristotelian perfectionism can stand alone without "any claims about human nature" (1993: 55), his theory is based on morally and intuitionistic appealing ideas about what is valuable with exercise, development, and achievements. He emphasizes a combination of what is distinctive with humans and what is our essence. Both intuition and scientific explanations are used to arrive at an acceptable cause for distinguishing what is our human nature (ibid: 35). But as we have noted, Hurka maintains that claims about human nature are not necessary for a perfectionist theory. Without these claims it can still be an appealing theory with perfectionist values.

Hurka asserts that perfectionism should not be teleological.[16] It should not argue, as Aristotle did, that formal and final causes coincide.[17] There is no room for teleological theories with an argument that says that since perfection is good and purpose must be good, our purpose must be perfection. Hurka calls this *accretions* that are best done without; in this special case the accretion is teleology. Another accretion is to argue that development makes us real, more human, and more free, or that development is the function of rationality. Instead we should rely on developmental theories about human properties that are systematized into a whole, give attractive consequences, and have an intrinsic appeal (ibid: 31). Furthermore, a theory should be objective (though not meta-ethical about what is *objectively true*), and not subjective (as satisfaction is); it should concentrate on what humans ought to wish for, not on short-term desires of individuals.

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[16] It will be clear that Hurka's interpretation of teleology is not the same as Rawls' (or Sher's).
[17] This is, Hurka argues, an idea that also can be found in Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche (1993: 35).

3.1.2 Autonomy as perfection

Although Hurka only focuses on pure perfectionism, he accentuates individual autonomy and thus makes the theory more liberal. Autonomy is seen as a part of what should be developed. It is exercise of reason, and it is therefore highly valuable. Individual autonomy is an inherent good which is equally valued with other perfectionist goods. But it is also a good that often adds itself to other valuable activities, i.e. if that activity is the result of a deliberate choice. Autonomy will then increase the value of any valuable exercise, development, or achievement. Hence, Aristotelian perfectionism values more those activities that follow realization of rationality into a self-determined choice.

Even though extensive autonomy is a vital feature of Hurka's liberal perfectionism, it is not believed to be best achieved by avoidance of state interference with private lives. On the contrary, state interference is necessary to increase future autonomy by restricting present autonomy. Since "autonomy requires knowledge of available options" (Hurka 1993: 152), the state must interfere to the extent that people receive this knowledge. Compulsory education is a good example: It increases knowledge. Restricting autonomy now can increase our knowledge of what we can do later in life and make us more able to exercise our moral powers (that Rawls finds so valuable, see 5.1.1). To increase autonomy the state redistributes resources into activities seen as important for development of perfectionist excellences. In this way, the government "merely makes a valuable option more available and easier to choose from valuable motives" (ibid: 160). Aristotelian perfectionism confines autonomy to the limits of justice, in addition it encourages valuable autonomy.

Paternalism does not necessarily entail less autonomy. In some cases autonomy even necessitates paternalism. But Hurka warns us: We ought to be careful with strong paternalism and state coercion because perfection requires inner states of mind. Perfection is not simply fulfilled by exercising abilities if they are not at the same time done with the right intentions. The state should therefore mainly encourage

perfection through subsidization and through the education system. Coercion can be an option, but

> coercion is a clumsy device. Instead of encouraging rational evaluation, it implicitly tells citizens to obey unthinkingly, without considering alternatives. […] Today perfectionism may approve seatbelt legislation, compulsory medical insurance, and perhaps laws discouraging smoking. But it has serious reservations about these laws. Paternalism should be used only rarely and after a careful weighing of costs. (ibid: 157f)

3.1.3 Egalitarian perfectionism

Hurka insists that "the best government most promotes the perfection of all its citizens" (Hurka 1993: 147). This implies that everybody, and not only the gifted and talented, should be encouraged to improve. Thus, the theory is egalitarian. The following three points strengthen this liberal aspect of Hurka's perfectionism:

> Aristotelian values make three empirical claims plausible: that most people have some significant abilities; that resources are more important for lower than for higher perfections, so there is diminishing marginal perfectionist utility; and that, in several ways, each person is best able to develop in conditions where all can develop. (ibid: 189)

The first point stresses the wide range of excellences promoted by perfectionism. Even though there are vast differences between people in specific excellences, our overall natural abilities do not differ so much. If Tom achieves far more in one specific area than Susan in the same area, Susan has probably achieved more than Tom in at least one other area. And for sure, both will have some areas worth developing. Hurka makes a good point concerning this diversity of excellences: "I must acknowledge that almost everyone is more accomplished than I in some pursuit I consider valuable (a great liberating effect of adopting Aristotelian values)." (ibid: 180) So with a wide variety of excellences within Aristotelian perfectionism, people's overall abilities must be pretty much the same. This equality in abilities requires equality in the distribution of resources; consequently Hurka's perfectionism has certain claims on equality.

The second point argues the case for a diminishing marginal utility principle, i.e. "resources are more effective in helping people move from low to medium levels of

perfection than from there to the highest heights" (ibid: 169). This principle is based on the crucial relevance of basic resources (for survival, security, and education) in achieving modest perfection. Although these basic needs are important for all social theories of justice, they are the most demanding on resources. In most cases we do not need a lot of resources to improve our perfectionist abilities. "Of the many routes to excellence, many are quite undemanding of resources." (ibid: 171) Although a few excellences require complex technical devices, some depend on inexpensive physical exercise, and most excellences depend on inner states. As a consequence, additional resources needed to achieve outstanding perfection are comparatively small.

Hurka admits that the principle does not work in all cases. Some valuable activities might require more and more resources for higher and higher excellences. Still there are several valuable activities that work perfectly well without extra resources. So even if the principle is not valid for all valuable activities, Aristotelian perfectionism allows so many other valuable activities that this argument is seen as no big objection. On the other hand, Hurka argues that "there can sometimes be net benefits from unequal distributions" (ibid: 182). In these cases inequality in distribution is desirable, for instance, when people in general benefit from high performances in art. Nevertheless, Hurka believes the principle of diminishing marginal utility to be strong enough to ensure egalitarian policies in a perfectionist society.

The third point underscores both the positive value of cooperation, and the non-competitive environment of perfectionism. Hurka admits that there will always be competition for resources. But in perfectionism this fact has less impact since, in itself, development of excellences is not entirely competitive because it mainly consists of inner states. In a face to face cooperation, personal relations are strengthened, cooperative virtues and rationality are exercised. As a result cooperation is in itself a valuable activity. "Even a goal of no intrinsic worth has value when it is achieved in concert with other people, and goals that do have worth, such as knowledge and artistic creation, have their value enhanced." (ibid: 177) In fact it is a good that everybody needs resources for perfectionist development,

because then the necessary resources will be provided to a larger extent and hence they will be easier to get hold of.

Cooperation is further amplified by egalitarian policies since they encourage cooperation per se. Equal distribution of resources diminishes economic differences between people, which helps people to be open to each other and focus more on higher values (e.g. on personal relations and self-development) and less on the differences in material wealth. This again encourages cooperation and cooperation as a value is reaffirming itself.

In addition, contributions to an area of excellence will usually strengthen new contributions to the same area since they can take wisdom from the earlier achievements. Competition will in fact lead to cooperation. Hurka attributes a similar thought to Karl Marx: "This idea of Marx's – that each can develop best when all develop – is his greatest contribution to perfectionism." (ibid: 177) If it is best that all develop, it must also be best that all are given good and equal chances to develop. Consequently, under Hurka's perfectionist scheme, egalitarian supporters must find themselves contented.

The inherent values of perfectionist achievements are chiefly found in inner states. This makes the environment of perfectionism non-competitive. Susan's achievement within one area of excellence does not diminish the inherent value of Tom's achievement in the same area. Of course, the net benefit from Susan's achievement would be less – if many other achievements are superior – than if Susan's achievement is the best. But the inherent value of each achievement is the same, and the net benefit from all achievements increase with more achievements. Competition is not as harmful as it is valuable.

3.2 Sher's perfectionism

In *Beyond Neutrality* (1997) George Sher seems mainly occupied with the inherent problems with state neutrality, but in parts of the book he also, in coherence with his

criticism of neutralism, defends a theory of perfectionism. However, Sher is aware of the controversy of his perfectionist theory. "Given the mixture of agreement and disagreement, any attempt to list the constituents of a good life is bound to be contentious." (ibid: 200) It is a fact that there will always be disputes over a specific conception of the good, but Sher asserts that the same is also true about justice. We do not agree on any specific conception of justice. Still this does not prevent us from creating a system based on a conception of justice, so why should it prevent us from basing our system on a conception of the good? One obvious reason for relying on the good, according to Sher, is that it is impossible to avoid it. Even the most neutral government must, at least passively, promote a conception of the good.

The first aim of Sher's book is to show that a state cannot be neutral between different conceptions of the good, since it unavoidably supports some certain lifestyles over others. It is bound to encourage some views of the good more than other views. As a result, "there is good reason to believe that neutralism *is* false" (ibid: 3). Neutralism is not realizable, and therefore it is better to admit this and actively promote a conception of the good, than to claim adherence to neutrality while actually supporting some conceptions of the good, even if the conceptions are supported unintentionally.

Naturally succeeding this first aim, the second aim of the book is to "develop a conception of the good that is worth promoting" (ibid: 1). Sher argues that "there are various traits and activities about whose value most would agree. For example, few would deny that it is good to possess knowledge and insight, to excel at what one does, to display various virtues, and to stand in close and loving relations" (ibid: 199). Relating these traits and activities to goals, they can be seen as near-universal and near-inescapable. The first subsection will look closer at these goals. The second will take a look at Sher's pluralistic emphasis. And in the third subsection we will see different methods of promoting the good.

3.2.1 Near-universal and near-inescapable goals

The human good can be defined in terms of successful exercise of *fundamental* capacities. Capacities refer to what we as humans are capable of in terms of various activities, traits, and forms of relationship. To be fundamental, a capacity must be *near-universal* and its exercise must be *near-inescapable*. A capacity is near-universal when virtually everybody has it, and its exercise is near-inescapable when it is very difficult to avoid exercising it. Sher says that *knowledge* is one such fundamental capacity. As good as everybody has the capacity to preserve knowledge so therefore it is near-universal, and almost all of us seek and act upon knowledge in one form or the other, so it is also near-inescapable. "Each of us has both a native capacity to understand the world and an inescapable tendency to try to exercise that capacity" (Sher 1997: 203).

Exercise of fundamental capacities must be *successful* to be counted as good. If exercise alone was considered good, virtually everybody would lead a good life since it is near-inescapable to exercise our fundamental capacities. But what has inherent value is *successful* exercise of the capacities, and that is not near-inescapable. The rate of success is, according to Sher, measured by its *defining goal*. This goal can be found by further inquiries into each good, for example by defining what is inherently good with knowledge. Sher argues that "it is not at all surprising that general knowledge seems to be worth far more than knowledge of unconnected facts" (ibid: 204). According to this, a person who gains general knowledge would have a better life than a person who is more focused on single facts with no connection, other things being equal. The first person would more successfully achieve the defined goal of knowledge, i.e. general knowledge.

In addition to knowledge, Sher (1997: 204-12) claims that plausible candidates for a list of goods are: practical activity, close personal relations, development of abilities, acting morally, aesthetic awareness, and decency and good taste. All of these capacities are fundamental since they either are near-universal and near-inescapable, or, as Sher shows us, they can be derived from these concepts. After exploring these

candidates carefully and arguing for their defined goal, he claims he has given good grounds for a justification of the argument-schema "virtually all persons find it virtually impossible to avoid pursuing X, so X is good in itself" (ibid: 202).

The next step for Sher is to defend this conception of the good on independent grounds. He does this with a unifying account, an account in which all the elements of a good life can be traced to a single source. This single source can be located in one of four combinations, "either within or outside the subjectivity of the person whose life is involved [i.e. subjective or objective. And] the unifying property or relation may or may not be directed at a goal [i.e. teleological or nonteleological]" (ibid: 219). First, with his approximation to universality, Sher argues the case for objective location of the good. It is not subjective since the fundamental good does not reflect one individual's view of what is good, but rather is a general list of what is seen as inherently good for everybody. Second, with the emphasis on successful exercise of capacities, the good aims at a defined goal. Hence, the theory is teleological. "What unifies the diverse elements of a good life is their connection(s) to near-universal, near-unavoidable goals. Given its reference to goals, this proposal is obviously teleological; given its insistence that the goals be near-universal, it is also objective" (ibid: 229).

This theory of the good does not, Sher claims, rely on controversial ideas of the person or on human nature, and it does not concern itself with the problematic metaphysical notion of essence. Insofar as the theory can be said to be controversial, it is "at least no more so than any other empirical claims" (ibid: 242). It only states that there exist some goals that we necessarily pursue, and Sher insists that these goals are vital for us. This is affirmed if we try to imagine how we would be without them, we clearly see that: We are not ignorant of the truth; we do not follow all our immediate impulses; we are not indifferent to all other humans; we do not let our abilities fade away; we do not lack interest in right and wrong; and we do not respond to beauty in the same way as to ugliness.

This conception of the good can be said to belong to every single person since the goals are necessarily pursued by everybody. Being in so close connection with each person, this conception will always have sufficient *depth*. It will not be a foreign and peculiar conception seen from each person's viewpoint. At the same time it has enough *distance* since it is an objective account. It will give each person enough critical perspective on his own life.

In this way, Sher's perfectionism balances between two extremes, that of grounding the good in human essence (strong perfectionism), and the empirical grounded standpoint that we cannot agree on the good (strong neutralism). From the first view he takes the notion of the good and disposes the notion of essence; from the second view he takes the method of supporting a theory with empirical claims and disposes of the mistrust in the possibility of agreement on the good. Sher argues that it is better to base the good on empirical claims than on the problematic notion of essence. "Because the substitute comes at a far lower metaphysical cost, there is a strong presumption in its favor." (ibid: 240) As a result, such a theory is much less controversial.

3.2.2 Pluralistic perfectionism

Sher does not write much about how his conception of the good life should affect the political sphere. He only implies that even though we should not ground the state in the good, a government has good reasons to promote such lives. Although he is clear in his argumentation, he admits that a more complete account would inevitably discuss how perfectionism would address aspects of more practical political matters within the current political framework, and if (and how) it would change the organization of the basic structure of society (i.e. the framework itself).

What he does say is that perfectionist values are one sort among others. His theory is pluralistic in that it emphasizes values outside the realm of perfectionism as legitimate in social justice. "I mean to imply neither that perfectionists values are the *only* proper grounds for political decisions nor that they should dominate all others."

(Sher 1997: 246) Values from the liberal tradition – e.g. that of equality – might need to play an independent role if perfectionism cannot argue the case for it.

Sher's perfectionism is also pluralistic in a second sense, in its view about the vast varieties of what constitutes a good life. This moral pluralism is in line with liberal thought. Moral pluralism is in fact a general feature of liberal perfectionism. There is no best life, but several good lives, and the state should encourage individuals to choose among these. A state should promote the good, of course, in addition to maintaining strict justice of right and wrong. "When a government can elevate its citizens' tastes, characters, aspirations, and modes of interaction, these too fall within its legitimate aims" (ibid: 246).

3.2.3 Methods of promoting the good

Sher argues that there are four main methods a government can use to promote the good for its citizens: "It can (1) threaten to punish them for not living as it thinks best; (2) offer them incentives to live in the desired ways; (3) nonrationally cause them to prefer to live in those ways, and (4) create the conditions under which they can live in those ways." (1997: 37) Those in favour of neutralism argue that by using these methods to promote the good, the state denies autonomy to the individual. Despite the fact that Sher values autonomy to a high degree, he argues that these methods are legitimate methods for promoting a conception of the good. The reason is that they do not harm autonomy in a critical way since "*all four* methods of promoting valuable lives can issue in autonomous choices" (ibid: 61).

This means that he allows a government to use force, or threats of force, to promote valuable ways of life. Yet the value of autonomy is important for Sher, so his perfectionism is always careful with this method. He seems to argue that threats of punishment should only be used to deter bad behavior that is still within the limits of justice. Neutralists claim that penalties should only be used to sustain justice and not to deter activities that are degraded. Such indecent behaviour can include, for example, having sex in public places, gambling, and using narcotics. The main reason

why these prohibitions enhance the good is that indecent activities can reduce one's ability to appreciate value, especially if they are repeated over and over again. Thus, threats of force are, and should be, a legitimate method. But, Sher argues, we should not criminalize every activity we find indecent. We should take precautions and be very careful. "A government that wishes its citizens to live the best possible lives must neither use coercion indiscriminately nor withhold it altogether, but must consider each occasion on its merits." (ibid: 71)

The second method makes activities more attractive with the use of rewards. The government can manipulate prices, for example, by subsidizing art, literature, and science. This will then give people incentives to take part in these activities to a larger extent than if the free market were regulating the costs. This is probably a less offensive method than the first method which in fact denies certain lifestyles. Incentives only make an option more available, it does not limit our choices directly.

The third method concerns nonrational "influence [of] people's behavior by altering what they like and approve of" (ibid: 36). Schools can, of course, manipulate nonrationally by teaching what is *normal* (e.g. sex education can lead to promiscuity, and patriotism to extreme patriotism) and what our *nature* is (e.g. evolution theory can lead to secularism), but also governmental structures such as social security (e.g. welfare can lead to bad working habits) and other social offers (e.g. availability of abortion can lead to sexual irresponsibility) might change people's preferences (ibid).

The fourth method concerns governmental control over options citizens have, e.g. by creating institutions such as libraries, universities, museums, and theatres (ibid). But the state can also control options by enforcing and recognizing agreements, "for example, by recognizing monogamous and not polygamous marriages, and agreements to sell auto parts but not bodily parts" (ibid: 36f). Often indirect threats of punishment or indirect incentives are used to sustain these agreements

It is a fact that especially the two last methods create structures that penetrate deeply into the whole society, and that they, in most cases, are the result of the dominant culture. These methods can be said to be an inevitable consequence of a societal structure. Thus, justificatory neutrality can allow them as long as the justification does not favour any conceptions of the good. But the harder question is why exactly these structures and not some others (e.g. polygamy) should be created or encouraged. Then it seems that a justification needs to appeal to some values that would favour some conceptions of the good. Sher takes this line and argues that a conception of the good can be used to justify these methods. Rawls is also not foreign to this idea since he uses a shared conception of the good as a justification of his theory.

Although much more could be said, we will not dwell more on these methods. The crucial point is that a perfectionist believes these methods should be used in both deterring bad lives and promoting good ones. Sher's perfectionism is, in conclusion, epitomized thus:

> The resulting theory is perfectionist because it asserts that some activities and traits are valuable for reasons independent of any individual's subjective states; it is pluralistic because it provides only an (unordered) *list* of inherently good activities and traits; it is mixed because it includes pleasure and other subjective states among its significant goods; and it is open-ended because some of the entries on its list can be realized in a wide variety of ways. (ibid: 18f)

4.   Rawls and the principle of perfection

This chapter will look at Rawls' explicit arguments against the principle of perfection. He is crystal-clear in his criticism, and he claims that perfectionist virtues should only be advanced by individuals with their possibilities of forming free associations. In the first section we will go through his explicit arguments against the principle of perfection, i.e. the four arguments he provides in *A Theory of Justice*. In the second section we will apply these arguments to liberal perfectionism. It will turn out that the arguments are not valid against the versions of perfectionism we looked at in the previous chapter.

4.1   Rawls' arguments against the principle

Rawls' explicit statements on perfectionism are obviously limited. He mainly divides perfectionism into two versions, in which one is teleological and the other is moderate. Then he rejects the teleological version, with three main objections. Though he insists that the moderate version is harder to argue against, the main objection is that – like the teleological version – it fails to treat persons as equal. Perfectionism, Rawls declares, promotes a comprehensive conception of the good. Since it is comprehensive it cannot be shared by free and equal persons. It will therefore be unfair against people with other reasonable conceptions of the good. For Rawls, perfectionism is outside the political realm.

A closer examination of these issues starts with Rawls' distinction of perfectionism into two versions. The teleological version defines the good as cultivation of human excellences. Then it defines the right as maximizing the good. The state's mission is then to provide the best circumstances for the best possible growth of human excellences. Theoretically, the moderate version shares the same features, but it also weighs with intuition the principle of perfection against other views. Therefore it is also called an intuitionistic version. What is crucial here is that both versions define

the good prior to the right. The moderate version does this, of course, with different kinds of moderation according to intuition. In Rawls own words the distinction is between

> a teleological theory directing society to arrange institutions and to define the duties and obligations of individuals so as to maximize the achievement of human excellence in art, science, and culture. [And a] more moderate doctrine is one in which a principle of perfection is accepted as but one standard among several in an intuitionist theory. The principle is to be balanced against others by intuition. The extent to which such a view is perfectionist depends, then, upon the weight given to the claims of excellence and culture. (1999: 285f)

He then articulates three main arguments rejecting the teleological theory. The first is that we cannot agree on a conception of the good. The parties in the original position have no reason to adopt the principle of perfection because they do not have the same aims, and hence they do not share the same view on what a good life is (ibid: 289). Behind the veil of ignorance personal characteristics are left out, and consequently the parties do not know their own final aims. These aims are first conceived when each person's comprehensive doctrine is known. Consequently, the parties assume plurality of aims since they obviously cannot agree on any single principle of perfection. The parties do not want to settle an agreement for a comprehensive view when there is a risk that they will not share that view when the veil is lifted. They will, then, only settle an agreement for a political conception everybody agrees to.

When personal aims are known, we see clearly that with the plurality of aims we have in a modern society it would be unfair only to promote the aims of certain individuals, that is in this case, those individuals who share the aim of perfection. This means that perfectionism is not seen as egalitarian; it does not treat persons with different but reasonable aims equally. The parties do not want to risk losing the opportunity to pursue their own personal goals, so the principle of perfection is abandoned. We cannot agree on a conception of the good.

Second, since the right is defined as maximizing the good, in a teleological theory of perfectionism, it does not secure equal rights.[18] If, in some circumstances, unequal rights (e.g. an unequal distribution of basic freedoms) maximize the good, perfectionism will not give different people the same rights. If, for example, the good increases more by giving more resources to the gifted and talented than by giving it to the average (or to the feeble and weak), perfectionism will not give them equal rights. It will rather ensure that maximization of the good would prevail by favouring the gifted and talented.

Equal rights would be sustained with a principle of diminishing marginal value. Such a principle asserts that the good achieved decreases at higher and higher levels of perfection. Consequently, with this principle, resources would first and foremost be used on the feeble and weak. But Rawls argues that "a principle of diminishing marginal value is certainly questionable" (ibid: 290). He does not believe "that, in general, rights and resources allocated to encourage and to cultivate highly talented persons contribute less and less to the total beyond some point in relevant range" (ibid). Thus the principle is dismissed. On the other hand, perfectionism could also guarantee equal rights with a bountiful of resources. But Rawls dismisses this scenario as well. Resources are limited and a principle of diminishing marginal value is not plausible. As a result the teleological theory of perfectionism cannot be said to secure equal rights.

The third reason why perfectionism is rejected is that it is hard to rank perfectionist achievements. If the principle of perfection promotes the good it must, Rawls asserts, provide a ranking criterion in order to guide the main decisions for institutions within the basic structure:

> Very often it is beyond question that the work of one person is superior to that of another. Indeed, the freedom and well-being of individuals, when measured by the excellence of their activities and works, is vastly different in value. This is true not only of actual performance but of potential performance as well. Comparisons of intrinsic value can obviously be made;

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[18] As will be clear, this is not the same egalitarian objection as in the paragraph above. The previous one concerned differentiation between those in favour of perfectionism and those against, while this objection concerns differentiation between the gifted and the weak.

and although the standard of perfection is not a principle of justice, judgments of value have an important place in human affairs. They are not necessarily so vague that they must fail as a workable basis for assigning rights. (ibid: 288f)

Rawls argues that the ranking itself is feasible, but that ranking as a political instrument is not. Perfectionist achievements can be compared in general but they should not be tools for social justice. The reason for this is that "criteria of excellence are imprecise as political principles, and their application to public questions is bound to be unsettled and idiosyncratic" (ibid: 290). This is a clear example of Rawls' distinction between the political and the comprehensive – the right and the good. The latter is a matter of taste and personal preferences, whereas the former is more impartial and has a more definite structure; it is not as subjective as taste and affections. Once again Rawls emphasizes the political as the only sphere concerning justice. Unfortunately, he does not provide good arguments for this distinction. The argument turns back to his first reason: It is not easy to agree on the good since it consists of nonpolitical values.

Though the moderate intuitionistic version is also rejected, Rawls admits that it is more difficult to provide reasons for rejecting this version. His second reason for rejecting perfectionism (i.e. that it does not secure equal rights), can easily be dealt with since intuitionistic values of equality can supersede the principle of perfection. In the same manner other standards can diminish the force of the first and the third reason. Still, all of Rawls' objections must be countered if a moderate version of perfectionism were regarded as a sound theory. In addition, the moderate version also faces a fourth problem, a problem all intuitionistic theories has to deal with, namely, weighing problems. This is Rawls' fourth reason for rejecting a principle of perfection:

> The intuitionistic forms are much more plausible, and when the claims of perfection are weighed with moderation, these views are not easy to argue against. The discrepancy from the two principles of justice is much less. Nevertheless similar problems do arise, for each principle of an intuitionistic view must be chosen, and while the consequences are not likely to be so great in this case, there is as before no basis for acknowledging a principle of perfection as a standard of social justice. (ibid)

The main reason for rejection is, then, that perfectionism is in the nonpolitical sphere. It belongs to the range of comprehensive ideas, while Rawls' theory is only concerned with the political aspect of social institutions. Moreover, Rawls strengthens his arguments with the claim that there is no *natural duty* to develop perfectionist attributes whatever they would be. There is no "duty to develop human persons of a certain style and aesthetic grace, and to advance the pursuit of knowledge and the cultivation of the arts" (ibid: 289). The original position has no room for such duties since they are not political duties necessary within the sphere of justice.

Not only are perfectionist goods controversial because we cannot agree on them, but they are also of another nature. "In these matters we are likely to be influenced by subtle aesthetic preferences and personal feelings of propriety" (ibid: 291). This is just another way of expressing that the concept of the right is prior to the good. The right is objective while the good is subjective. However, Rawls admits that "clearly there are many further questions that should be considered. Other forms of perfectionism are possible and each problem has been examined only briefly" (ibid: 292). One of these other forms is liberal perfectionism. We saw in the previous chapter some elements of what it can contain. Now we can therefore examine whether Rawls' arguments are valid against this liberal perfectionism.

4.2 Rejection of Rawls' arguments

As we have seen, Rawls' main arguments against perfectionism are: (a) with our disparate aims we cannot agree on the good; (b) it does not secure equal rights; (c) it is hard to rank achievements; and (d) it has intuitionistic weighing problems. A critical examination of these points will reveal that Rawls' arguments can be countered by the most plausible forms of liberal perfectionism as we found them in chapter three.

(a) Can we agree on a conception of the good? We have already seen that Hurka (1993) and Sher (1997) promote conceptions of the good. Hurka thinks it is good to

develop our human nature, and he mentions several other philosophers who have had similar ideas.[19] Sher emphasizes successful exercise of capacities that are near-universal and near-inescapable. He argues that it is no harder to agree on what is good than on what is right: "there is just as much disagreement about what is right or just: think, for example, of the lack of consensus about the legitimacy of economic inequalities, or about the scope, or even the existence, of positive duties" (Sher 1997: 144). Richard Arneson agrees with Sher, and they both accuse neutralists for insisting on an asymmetry where the good is more difficult to agree on than the right. Arneson claims that "the asymmetry is not defended, and implausible as stated. We are every bit as reasonably confident about our most considered convictions about the good as about our most considered convictions about right or justice." (2000: 524) Raz specifies the question a bit more, and then answers it flatly:

> the question is: is there reason to think that one is more likely to be wrong about the character of the good life than about the sort of moral considerations which all agree should influence political action such as the right to life, to free expression, or free religious worship? I know of no such arguments. (1986: 160)

These statements are in part addressed to Rawls' insistence on the difficulty of an agreement about the good. He sees the good as something unique to every individual. The parties in the original position do not agree on this good because they do not know their own subjective ideals, and in a pluralistic society "this variety in conceptions of the good is itself a good thing" (Rawls 1999: 393). But we should keep in mind that when Rawls speaks about a conception of the good, he usually means it in a wide sense. He distinguishes between a wide and a narrow sense, the full theory of the good and the thin theory of the good. Rawls denies any discussion of the good in the wide sense, whereas he, in fact, is open for discussing the good in the narrow sense. We cannot agree on the good in the wide sense, whereas we can (and do) agree on the good in the narrow sense.

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[19] Hurka's namedropping includes Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Spinoza, Leibniz, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Marx, Green, Bradley, and Bosanquet (Hurka 1993: 3).

Critics argue against Rawls and say that we can agree on the good. But in doing this they focus on his wide sense of the good, and forget his narrow sense. These critics do in fact agree with Rawls since they are all moral pluralists, neither of them believes that we must agree on everything that is good (i.e. a full theory of the good). Rather, they insist, just like Rawls, that we only should agree on the basics of what is good, i.e. on a thin theory of the good. It might seem like Rawls and his critics only disagree on the contents of the thin theory of the good, and not whether we can agree on the good or not. Kymlicka argues in this line:

> Rawls does not favor the distribution of primary goods out of a concern for the right rather than the good. He simply has a different account of what our good is, of what promotes our essential interests, and hence of what it means to give equal weight to each person's interest. Rawls and a perfectionist do not disagree over the priority of the right and the good. They simply disagree over the nature of the good. (1988: 187)

This is certainly a part of the truth. Both parties are devoted to moral pluralism: A liberal view open to a multitude of conceptions of the good. At the same time they advance state endorsement of a limited theory of the good. Rawls even says we may add to the list of primary goods as long as it is political goods (i.e. it is shared, and it does not presuppose a comprehensive doctrine). So although he maintains that we cannot agree on the wider sense of the good, he allows us to undertake changes in the thin theory of the good. The crucial point is that Rawls provides a conception of the good in similar manners as perfectionists do. Consequently, Rawls' objection to perfectionism is rejected by his own thin theory of the good. Even with our disparate aims we can agree on a conception of the good.

(b) Can perfectionism secure equal rights? Rawls writes that teleology is a feature of perfectionism, and that it defines the right as maximizing the good. The argument then goes: if the good is maximized by unequal rights, a perfectionist state supports this inequality, and hence, it does not secure equal rights. But nothing prevents liberal perfectionism from defining equality as a perfectionist good. We have seen (in 3.1.3) that Hurka (1993) argues for equality in a pure perfectionist theory while still yielding a maximization principle. This equality allows for the maximization of excellences for all individuals.

52

Hurka argues that since there are a multitude of excellences we can develop, our abilities are more or less equal, which again requires equality in distribution of resources. In addition, equality is good since it fosters cooperation which helps us reach perfectionist goals. This cooperation is again supported by the non-competitive environment of perfectionist goals. Accordingly, there is no reason to believe that perfectionism does not secure equal rights.

Sher is uncertain about the plausibility of equal distribution in a pure perfectionist theory, but he asserts that it could nonetheless find "*independent* value in the relatively equal distribution of what makes lives good" (Sher 1997: 243). Here a pluralist view could cover the importance of equality. However, it seems as if Hurka's arguments could also work for Sher, so that equality can be seen as a perfectionist goal.

Another method of securing egalitarian perfectionism can be by dispensing the maximization principle altogether. The focus could then be on rights instead of on maximization, for example in similar lines to the right-based theory drawn by Raz (1986) in the third part of his book. Liberal perfectionism can secure the right for everybody to develop, for instance with a minimum threshold level (see Nussbaum 2000: 125f). Then the right could even be said to be prior to the good – just as Rawls' theory – since equal rights were defined as more important than maximization.

A maximizing perfectionism, however, can also secure equal rights if a principle of diminishing marginal value is accepted. This principle would assert that resources are first and foremost used on the least developed individuals since they can achieve more good with it. Hurka argues the case for this principle: "resources are more effective in helping people move from low to medium levels of perfection than from there to the highest heights" (1993: 169). Even if Rawls finds this principle questionable, constructivism makes it easy to construct such a principle and make it a

fundament of political justice.[20] In general, we must then prioritize less developed excellences instead of more developed ones.[21] The crucial point is that even though some forms of perfectionism do not secure equal rights, there are others that do. These egalitarian forms are the ones Rawls cannot object to.

(c) Can perfectionism rank achievements? Ranking of perfectionist achievements seems necessary if they are to play a part in social justice. Rawls seems unsure whether ranking for social justice is possible, though he admits that "comparisons of intrinsic value can obviously be made" (Rawls 1999: 288). So ranking in the nonpolitical sphere is possible and the only thing we need to do to qualify as a perfectionist is to apply this ranking to the political sphere. We have earlier mentioned (in 3.1.1) that Hurka suggests a system for ranking perfectionist goods. He writes: "The question how goals are ranked is difficult, but I would say the best achievements involve the same organizing structure in a person's intentions as is present in the best knowledge." (Hurka 1987: 729) However, a very accurate ranking system may not be necessary as long as some rough theoretical lines can be drawn. The necessary distinctions can, instead, be resolved at a later stage, i.e. in practical political life. Sher argues in this vein:

> This absence of priority rules is neither unique to perfectionism nor a serious handicap in practice: we regularly face trade-offs between merely instrumental goods. Such conflicts do not prevent us from making reasoned decisions about how to balance health care and national defense, or economic growth and the suppression of inflation, and there is no reason to expect them to be more problematic here. (1997: 244)

The crucial point is that there seems to be no reason to assume that the difficulties of ranking achievements would prevent the soundness of a perfectionist theory.

(d) Can perfectionism solve the weighing problems? In an intuitionistic theory, where perfectionism is weighed with moderation against other theories, a theory of weighing would be necessary. If perfectionism is able to stand on its own feet, these

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[20] Rawls uses political constructivism to construct the principles of justice (see Rawls 1993: 103). To construct a principle of diminishing marginal value seems, to me, to be less controversial.
[21] Exceptions do apply, since we also want higher developed excellences. However, we will not be concerned with this matter.

problems vanish. Hurka's pure perfectionism might do this, but then again he says he is unsure whether this is the best solution or if pure perfectionism needs support from other moral theories. Sher believes that a perfectionist theory must rely on "independent values for which the theory cannot account" (1997: 244). If Hurka opts for a pluralistic theory both he and Sher have to face these weighing problems. Yet neither of them discusses this as a problem. It might seem like they do not believe it is a big issue, but it might also be a result of their underdeveloped theories. They are both open to pluralistic theories, but the intuitionistic grounds for weighing are unsettled.

On the other hand, according to what Sher said about trade-offs within the perfectionist goods, it would be surprising if trade-offs between perfectionist goods and other goods would be more of a problem. It appears to be no bigger problem than for Rawls' theory, for example of weighing liberty, equal opportunity, and income; just "consider an index of primary goods which placed equal opportunity first and liberty second or income second and equal opportunity third" (Fishkin 1983: 356). And as Galston claims, there is "not an unequivocal priority of justice over goodness but rather a complex relation of mutual dependence between them" (1982: 624). The vital point here is, then, that pluralistic perfectionism must at least provide a sketchy weighing theory, whereas a perfectionist theory which does not rely on any other theories does not need a weighing theory. By fulfilling this point Rawls' objection will be countered on this issue as well.

As concluding remarks we note that Rawls would be more prone to accept a perfectionist theory if it can: (a) provide a conception of the good we can agree on; (b) secure equal rights; (c) rank achievements; and (d) provide a weighing solution. But (a) Rawls already provides us with a conception of the good we can agree on, namely the thin theory of the good; (b) equal rights can be secured by affirming perfectionist value in equality, or give it independent value, or through a principle of diminishing marginal value; (c) an accurate ranking system might not be more necessary than a ranking system of instrumental goals, if necessary, ranking of

achievements can be done according to Hurka's theory; and (d) the weighing problems appears to be no more difficult than the weighing of liberty, opportunity, and equality in Rawls' own theory. The major point, however, is that we must agree on a conception of the good. It is time, therefore, to look more carefully at Rawls' thin theory of the good and especially whether his notion of self-respect can be interpreted as supporting liberal perfectionism.

5. Rawls and perfectionism

Even though Rawls is clear and firm in his view that perfectionism should not be a standard of social justice, he puts great emphasis on the importance of perfecting oneself. However, there is a "tension between individual perfection and state neutrality" (Galston 1982: 624). We will now look closer at this tension.

In this chapter we will discern arguments well-known to perfectionism in Rawls' notion of self-respect. In this notion we find values of self-improvement and moral rationality. The Aristotelian principle and our two moral powers highlight the importance of self-development through the mastering of more and more complex tasks. These arguments are actually only arguments for the idea of perfecting oneself. Still Rawls insists that these values must play a role in the design of social institutions. Self-respect is in fact given the role as a social primary good, i.e. it is at the disposal of society and should therefore be provided by the state. This results in state promotion of the idea of perfecting oneself. And as we know, such a promotion can be considered perfectionist. Then, is Rawls' theory perfectionist?

There are several similarities between Rawls' theory and perfectionism, especially concerning the emphasis on self-respect. Considering that Rawls has no explicit arguments against liberal perfectionism, and that he relies on a theory of the good, it will not be surprising that his theory can be interpreted as a form of perfectionism. Since Rawls adheres to a political conception of the good, we will call his theory for political perfectionism.

This political emphasis we find in his primary good of the social bases of self-respect which means that only the political aspect of self-respect is promoted. But we will see that self-respect in general can be perceived as political and thereby as a primary good. This way Rawls' political perfectionism must be revised to include more

goods. The lines for the political sphere must be drawn wider. Such a theory will be even more similar to perfectionism than Rawls' current theory.

One reason for excluding self-respect in general might be, however unlikely, that Rawls advances *social perfectionism*, as Kymlicka (1989) suggests. But we will argue that this is not a plausible reason for Rawls. Consequently, he seems to be left with two choices: He must either define his idea of the political in another more lucid way, or he has to give self-respect a prominent place throughout, i.e. he must support the political goods through encouragement of the equivalent nonpolitical goods. The distinction between the political and the nonpolitical either needs to be clarified, or Rawls must dispense of it altogether.

5.1 The idea of perfecting oneself

Although Rawls does not support state promotion of the idea of perfecting oneself, he appreciates this idea at the individual level. This is clear in his notion of self-respect which builds on both the Aristotelian principle and our moral powers. These elements both say something general about what is good for a person. Rawls claims that a place must be found for the notion of self-respect in a theory of justice. He therefore promotes it through the primary good of the social bases of self-respect. This is, he claims, perhaps the most important primary good.

The social bases of self-respect are only concerned with the political aspect of self-respect, i.e. that people are convinced that society is a just political system in which they are free and equal. In Rawls' theory this political aspect is promoted, whereas the nonpolitical aspect of self-respect is not. Rawls gives us two criteria for ideas to be political. In trying out these criteria on the general aspect of self-respect, we find that Rawls has no reason for not promoting it. Thus he makes an obscure distinction between the political and the nonpolitical (see illustration 1).

5.1.1 Rawls' notion of self-respect

Rawls' Aristotelian principle concerns itself with motivational factors and argues for the value of self-development. It characterizes our *human nature* as generally enjoying complex activities more than simple ones; we enjoy it more when our more advanced abilities are exercised. This is a natural fact of our judgements of value and of our human desires. We are not motivated to do any specific activity, we are just, all else equal, motivated to prefer more complex activities. There are, of course, costs of development, and these have to be weighed against the gains. As most of what we rationally do, we must consider the alternatives and their consequences.

The Aristotelian principle asserts that we are motivated to improve ourselves, i.e. to develop our capacities. The motivational factor is the enjoyment of our present abilities (which we know are the results of earlier development), and of abilities we admire in others. In Rawls' own words: "The Aristotelian Principle runs as follows: other things equal, human beings enjoy the exercise of their realized capacities (their innate or trained abilities), and this enjoyment increases the more the capacity is realized, or the greater its complexity." (1999: 374) We can now see that Rawls appreciates the value of perfecting oneself at the individual level. Self-development is the core of the idea of perfecting oneself.

There are two moral powers essential in Rawls' conception of the person. They concern the right and the good, or, in other words, the political and the comprehensive. "These two powers are the capacity for a sense of right and justice (the capacity to honor fair terms of cooperation and thus to be reasonable), and the capacity for a conception of the good (and thus to be rational)." (Rawls 1993: 302) To be able to use these powers we must in addition have the intellectual powers of reason, judgement, and inference. Thus we do not only have a capacity for these conceptions but we also have the conceptions themselves, i.e. we have a conception of what is right and just in a political society and we have our own conception of what is good.

We are regarded as equal citizens with these powers since we can partake in social cooperation as equals. We are also regarded as free citizens since we are seen as capable of forming and revising our targets of what we want to realize in our lives. These aspects of moral personality are considered as fundamental for the self. It is necessary for us to comprehend terms of fair and just social cooperation and our role in it, and it is necessary that we are able to conceive the good for ourselves. Any person recognized as a normal and cooperating member of society over a complete life must, to a minimum degree, possess these powers. Without them he cannot be regarded as responsible for his own life.[22]

The moral powers are essential in both the nonpolitical sphere and in the political sphere, but the latter is the decisive sphere since we are concerned with finding an overlapping consensus on political fundamentals, i.e. justice. Rawls argues that his theory of justice assures adequate development and substantial exercise of these powers. This is important because individuals experience this exercise as good, and because a just society would not function well without morally alert citizens. Without exercise of the moral powers people would lead dull and meaningless lives, and society as we know it would cease to exist. Once again Rawls affirms the good of perfecting oneself, in this case, of morally perfecting oneself.

Let us then look at the social bases of self-respect, which Rawls considers as *perhaps* the most important primary good. Self-respect includes both *worth* and *ability*. These are the most essential constituents of a valuable life. Roughly, it means that you have confidence in the quality of your own plans and that you are able to pursue them effectively and successfully. Self-respect arrives from others' confidence and trust in your achievements and abilities. When this trigger is pulled, "self-respect is reciprocally self-supporting" (Rawls 1999: 156). It is not you that pull the trigger for yourself, but other people who encourage you to build and demonstrate a strong character. When other people show confidence in a person, this person gets more

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[22] Rawls argues that some individuals lack the capacity of these powers, either from birth or accident, and as a result their political rights and liberties are restricted. However, he continues, since they are seen as having the potential for these capacities, they have the full protection of justice and are treated with due care (Rawls 1999: 83f, 443).

confident which again makes other people show even more confidence in the person and so on.

In addition, self-respect lessens the effect of the collectively disadvantageous feeling of envy. Confidence in the power to control one's own life and value decreases the chance of becoming envious of other people. In sum all this implies that self-respect must be valued by the self and others in creating a collective sense of justice. In a decisive paragraph Rawls accurately defines what self-respect is (that is, the meaning of *worth* and *ability*):

> It includes a person's sense of his own value, his secure conviction that his conception of his good, his plan of life, is worth carrying out. And second, self-respect implies a confidence in one's ability, so far as it is within one's power, to fulfill one's intentions. When we feel that our plans are of little value, we cannot pursue them with pleasure or take delight in their execution. Nor plagued by failure and self-doubt can we continue in our endeavours. It is clear then why self-respect is a primary good. Without it nothing may seem worth doing, or if some things have value for us, we lack the will to strive for them. All desires and activity become empty and vain, and we sink into apathy and cynicism. Therefore the parties in the original position would wish to avoid at almost any cost the social conditions that undermine self-respect. The fact that justice as fairness gives more support to self-esteem than other principles is a strong reason for them to adopt it. (1999: 386)

Now we understand that it is of fundamental importance to have self-respect. To draw the connecting lines, the elements in Rawls' notion of self-respect are dependent on each other. Self-respect presupposes the moral powers, which again are a consequence of the moral psychology in the Aristotelian principle (Rawls 1993: 318, 203; see also Hurley 1999-2000: 107). In other words, self-respect is a primary good because exercise of our moral powers is experienced as good; this exercise is good because of the moral psychology of the Aristotelian principle. What is interesting to note is that Rawls also claims that his theory supports self-respect more *than other principles*, and that this is a sort of argument for the theory as such. In looking closer at this claim, we must first understand how Rawls' supports self-respect.

5.1.2 The political aspect of self-respect

For Rawls, self-respect is maybe the most important primary good. But it is not self-respect generally speaking; it is not self-respect as an attitude that is a primary good,

but self-respect *as citizens*, the *political* aspect, or *the social bases of* self-respect. What does this mean? The main idea is that the *social bases* of self-respect lie in citizens' public affirmation of the social system. Because people recognize that the laws are given by the people themselves, they view society as a system of political institutions which serves the common end of justice, and they view themselves as free and equal citizens within this society. Everyone has a fair and equal opportunity to pursue his own good and hence any individual's worth of himself is reassured. Public recognition of the fact that society is based on just social cooperation and affirmed as self-government strengthens citizens' political aspect of self-respect.

Most citizens are expected to participate in political decisions, thus they can feel political competent. It is this *political aspect* of self-respect that the state must support. Rawls has in his last book managed to be more exact:

> Note that it is not self-respect as an attitude toward oneself but the social bases of self-respect that count as a primary good. These social bases are things like the institutional fact that citizens have equal basic rights, and the public recognition of that fact and that everyone endorses the difference principle, itself a form of reciprocity. (2001: 60)

This political aspect of self-respect is what you have if you believe that you – on equal terms with your fellow citizens – may take a rational and reasonable stand on political issues and partake in a just political society. The role of the Aristotelian principle and our moral powers in this political aspect is that we enjoy complex deliberation about political matters, and that it is experienced as good since our moral powers are exercised. Since it is a complex and intricate task to construct, maintain, and consolidate a just political system, deliberations on and achievements in political matters will be enjoyed. The more complex analysis and restructuring we make we will enjoy it more, and society as a whole will benefit from our analytical suggestions and improvements.

With this notion of the *social bases* of self-respect Rawls distinguishes between what we will call a political, a nonpolitical, and a general aspect of self-respect. The general aspect includes the other aspects. The nonpolitical aspect of self-respect is

roughly what you have if you are convinced that your conception of the good is worthwhile and that you are confident that you can pursue this conception with success. All these aspects of self-respect presuppose the moral powers, but it seems like the first moral power is more important for the political aspect, whereas the second power is more important for the nonpolitical aspect (we will come back to this point in 5.2.3).

For Rawls, the general aspect of self-respect is too extensive to be supported by the state. He argues that the social bases of self-respect are the most important social primary good at the disposition of society, whereas the natural bases of self-respect are a natural primary good not at the disposition of society. These natural bases of self-respect are what we called the nonpolitical aspect of self-respect. Rawls asserts that only the political aspect of self-respect should be promoted by the state; the nonpolitical aspect should only be promoted by individuals. Since self-respect in general is comprehensive and includes nonpolitical values that do not concern justice, the state should not promote the general aspect of self-respect. One might then ask what distinguishes the political from the general.

As we remember (from 2.2.1), Rawls answers that there are two criteria for a value to be considered political, namely that (a) it must be shared and (b) it must not presuppose any particular (partially) comprehensive doctrine. Thus, in addition to being shared, he insists that his theory must be perceived as political and freestanding: "It works entirely within that domain and does not rely on anything outside it." (Rawls 1993: 374) It does not rely on any comprehensive doctrines. Therefore it is only the political aspect of self-respect that is a primary good.

5.1.3 The general aspect of self-respect

The reason why the general aspect is not promoted must then apparently be that it is either (a) not shared or (b) it presupposes a comprehensive doctrine. Since self-respect is maybe the most important primary good, it would then be natural if Rawls showed that self-respect in general does not fulfill these criteria. But he does not

show this; he only assumes that the distinction is well-founded. We will therefore try to see if the general aspect of self-respect can be considered shared and political. Even though it is hard to separate these two criteria since the arguments coincide, we will try to inspect them one by one.

(a) The first criterion says that the values must be shared. It is assumed, then, that the general aspect of self-respect is not shared, whereas the political aspect is. But clearly, the political values of self-respect are directly connected to the values of self-respect in general. If we recognize the value of the political aspect of self-respect, i.e. of using our abilities and moral powers to the extent that we feel pride in our just social system where we are considered free and equal citizens, we will also recognize the general aspect as valuable, i.e. of exercising our more developed abilities and of exercising our moral powers to the extent that we feel pride in our choice of life in general, including our private and social life. Rawls (1993: 205*n*) admits that the values of self-respect are good in our nonpolitical lives; it is a valuable aspect of the mutually supporting sides of the political and the nonpolitical realms. If this is so, then the general aspect of self-respect seems to be shared, for whatever is recognized as a valuable aspect by free and equal persons must also be recognized as a shared good.[23]

The political aspect of self-respect must rely on the same range of natural facts, on the same conception of the person, and on the same conception of society as the general aspect. The political aspect has the same idea of our abilities but it only promotes using these abilities in the political sphere. Yet Rawls admits that these abilities are good in the nonpolitical sphere. The general aspect will therefore not in any deeper sense be more controversial than the political aspect. If the political idea is shared, the corresponding general idea is shared. If the general idea is controversial, the corresponding political idea is controversial. As we will note (in 5.2) Rawls has received much critique on exactly his conception of the person. The

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[23] It is interesting to note that when Rawls writes about the natural primary goods that are not at disposition of society, he seems to agree that these are goods everybody agrees are valuable. After all he calls them natural *primary goods*.

reason must be that this conception relies on substantial values seen as controversial. It makes no difference that Rawls stresses that his conception is political, because the political goods it supports concern the same values as the corresponding general goods. If we share the values of the political aspect of self-respect, we must share the values of the general aspect of self-respect as well.

(b) If it is correct that the general aspect of self-respect can be seen as shared, we must look at the other criterion for fulfilling Rawls' idea of the political, namely that ideas of the good must not presuppose any particular comprehensive doctrine. However, Rawls has not shown that general self-respect presupposes a comprehensive doctrine. In this matter (as well as in the previous) he only assumes a link, i.e. that the general aspect of self-respect automatically presupposes a comprehensive doctrine.

At first blush it seems as if his definitions are circular: he first defines the political as avoiding comprehensive doctrines; then he defines a comprehensive doctrine as including nonpolitical values. But later he explains more accurately (see 3.2.2) that nonpolitical values include "what is of value in human life, as well as ideals of personal virtue and character" (Rawls 1993: 175). Thus political values should only include conceptions of what is of value in political life, and ideals of character and virtue should only be political ideals.

We undoubtedly see that the general aspect of self-respect says more generally *what is of value in human life* than the political aspect of self-respect does. It applies the values behind self-respect to a wider range of issues. But the general aspect is not more specific than the political aspect. The general aspect does not include other values; it only applies them at the nonpolitical level in addition to the political level. Self-respect in general includes what is of value in human life, but no more specifically than the political aspect of self-respect.

Rawls mentions that *ideals of personal virtue and character* are also nonpolitical values. Self-respect in general includes exactly such ideals. But the political aspect of self-respect is also including these ideals. The argumentation works in the same way as above. In the general aspect of self-respect, ideals of character and virtue are only applied on a more general level, to a wider range of issues, but they are not more specific. Imagine that these ideals are, for instance, to be tolerant, respectful, polite, determined, and cooperating. The political aspect of these ideals is then only concerned with sustaining these ideals in political life for upholding the social system of justice, whereas the general aspect of these ideals is also concerned with sustaining them on the personal level, e.g. in friendship, in the family, and in smaller communities. General ideals concern a wider range of issues but do not include more ideals. To support general self-respect, there is apparently no more need for belief in a comprehensive doctrine than what is necessary for support of the political aspect of self-respect.

It is worthwhile to look at how Rawls' own theory can be said to presuppose a comprehensive doctrine. Alejandro shrewdly writes:

> '*What is of value in human life.*' The Rawlsian individual has a clear understanding of what is valuable in human life; namely, to have a higher-order interest, which is justice; to construct and pursue a rational plan; to have the possibility of revising it; and to possess a plurality of final ends, which means a capacity for an understanding of the good.
> '*Ideals of personal virtue and character that are to inform our thought and conduct as a whole.*' The Rawlsian individual is expected to respect rights, to be tolerant, to have a sense of fairness; to be self-supporting, and to be a fully cooperating member of society over a complete life. (1996: 15)

Rawls would probably agree that these elements are important for his theory. But whether this means that his theory is comprehensive or not is a matter of defining what a comprehensive doctrine is, and what nonpolitical values are. We will look closer at this problem in the concluding chapter. Alejandro argues that the abovementioned "features are virtues of a comprehensive philosophical doctrine, or at least as comprehensive as the definition Rawls offers of the liberalisms of Kant and Mill" (ibid). On the other hand, Rawls would most likely argue that they are political elements, and therefore they concern justice. Nevertheless, the elements Alejandro

66

finds in Rawls' theory does not in any distinct way seem less controversial than the general aspect of self-respect.

Compared to the political aspect of self-respect, the general aspect does not identify other substantial values or ideals of human life, virtue and character. The general aspect of self-respect relies on substantial values, but the political aspect of self-respect relies on the same substantial values. Since we share these values as free and equal persons, *this does not* – to use Rawls phrase (see 2.2) – *prejudge the choice of the sort of persons that men want to be*.

To conclude this section, the general aspect of self-respect can be considered as shared among free and equal persons. It is no more controversial than the political aspect of self-respect. The general aspect does not presuppose a particular comprehensive doctrine. The values of self-respect are only a kind of technical device strengthening your own belief in your own conception of the good. Hence it would be better to build the theory on this general notion rather than on a narrower political one.

5.2 The idea of perfectionism

In a notable paragraph Rawls shows us tendencies towards perfectionism as he writes about the *human goods*:

> The familiar values of personal affection and friendship, meaningful work and social cooperation, the pursuit of knowledge and the fashioning and contemplation of beautiful objects, are not only prominent in our rational plans but they can for the most part be advanced in a manner which justice permits. (1999: 373)

These familiar values are exactly what liberal perfectionists want the state to promote. In a Rawlsian perfectionist theory they could be promoted through the notion of self-respect. Raz argues that in general, perfectionist principles "are not more controversial nor more evaluative than some of the psychological facts available to the parties, such as the Aristotelian principle and the considerations concerning self-respect on which the priority of liberty is based" (1986: 126f). The

same can be said about these human goods. These familiar values are not controversial; rather they can be seen as shared values. But for Rawls these goods are only a part of the idea of perfecting oneself. When he writes that these values can be *advanced*, it is clear that this is a task for individuals and communities, and not for the state. The state should only make room for private promotion.

Despite Rawls' claims, drawing parallels between his theory and perfectionism seems to be no unusual feat. Sher writes that the "arguments for the design of the basic structure are themselves rooted in an ideal of the person that many consider perfectionist" (1997: 247). And, Galston finds perfectionist tendencies in the conception of our moral powers: "The gap separating this conception of moral agency from the perfectionism Rawls elsewhere castigates is exceedingly narrow." (1982: 625*n*) Alejandro continues: "Rawlsian political liberalism is thus committed to at least a minimalist form of perfectionism in which certain forms of moral character and certain moral virtues are encouraged and affirmed." (1996: 17)

I could not agree more with these observations. However I would accentuate self-respect as being the crucial notion where perfectionist values are best expressed by Rawls. This notion clearly includes ideas of perfecting oneself. And since it is a primary good, it also has a very similar role as perfectionist goods have.

We will now go through three different versions of perfectionism, and try to find out, among other things, which of them fit with Rawls' theory. Social perfectionism – which is the same as state neutrality – does not seem to fit since Rawls appeals to substantial political values. Social perfectionism would probably not appeal to substantial values at all, and it would certainly not support the political aspect of self-respect. With his emphasis on the political, Rawls would rather be in the category of political perfectionism. Here, there is room for state support of the political aspect of self-respect, whereas the nonpolitical aspect of self-respect is not supported. This is

exactly in concord with Rawls' theory. State perfectionism[24] would definitely include the general aspect of self-respect as a primary good, so this would be too inclusive for Rawls. State perfectionism is not concerned with whether the goods are political or nonpolitical; it only regards the inherent value of these goods. Yet, as we will note in the last subsection, if the lines for political goods are drawn a bit wider, political perfectionism could also support the general aspect of self-respect.

5.2.1 Social perfectionism

Rawls denies any promotion of the general aspect of self-respect. One reason could be that even if this aspect is seen as a shared good, the state should not promote it because the state would not be a good device for promoting nonpolitical values. The free-market in civil society would be a better device for promoting nonpolitical values. Even if a wide range of goods would be agreed to be good, only a few are supported since the other goods would be supported better through the market. This view is reflected in an article where Kymlicka defends Rawls' theory of *liberal neutrality*. Kymlicka argues that liberal neutrality also wants to promote the good, but instead of using the state apparatus, the *cultural marketplace* evaluates what is good:

> A perfectionist state might hope to improve the quality of people's options by encouraging the replacement of less valuable options by more valuable ones. But it is worth repeating that liberal neutrality also hopes to improve the range of options, and the cultural marketplace is valued because it helps good ways of life displace bad. Each side aims to secure and improve the range of options from which individuals make their autonomous choices. What they disagree on is where perfectionism values and arguments should be invoked. Are good ways of life more likely to establish their greater worth when they are evaluated in the cultural marketplace of civil society, or when the preferability of different ways of life is made a matter of political advocacy and state action? Hence the dispute should perhaps be seen as a choice, not between perfectionism and neutrality, but between social perfectionism and state perfectionism – for the flip side of state neutrality is support for the role of perfectionist ideals and arguments in civil society. (Kymlicka 1989: 895)

As we know, Rawls advocates state neutrality. According to Kymlicka, Rawls would therefore also advocate social perfectionism. If Kymlicka is right, this is probably the reason why self-respect gets so little support in the theory as a whole compared to the prominent place it has in the list of primary goods. On this interpretation, the state

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[24] With *state perfectionism* I will in the following only concentrate on the liberal version, i.e. the same as what I previously called *liberal perfectionism*. These two terms will be used interchangeably.

promotes the political aspect but not the general aspect of self-respect. The reason is that even if self-respect in general is good for people, the cultural marketplace can promote it better.

We could of course discuss whether state or social perfectionism would be more effective in promoting the good – and in particular, the general aspect of self-respect. But we will not do that here because Kymlicka's claim does not appear to fit Rawls' theory. Rawls does not advocate social perfectionism. His theory has nothing to do with the state's inability (or ability) to promote nonpolitical goods. Still, Rawls does not provide a good answer to why he limits the good to the political. He would most likely argue that justice has nothing to do with nonpolitical conceptions of the good because they are comprehensive. The goal is to achieve an overlapping consensus in a plural society. Consequently, we should not try to agree on any comprehensive notion of self-respect. The nonpolitical sphere belongs to the individual and the communities where individuals are members. The only values a state should promote are political values.

5.2.2 Political perfectionism

The political aspect of self-respect includes the idea of perfecting oneself. At the same time, state support of the idea of perfecting oneself leads to perfectionism. Since Rawls supports the political aspect of self-respect through a primary good at the disposition of society, one might ask whether he is a neutralist or a perfectionist. A neutralist – in the normal and previously used meaning of the term – does not want state support of the idea of perfecting oneself and would support neither the general nor the political aspect of any goods, whereas a perfectionist wants state support of the idea of perfecting oneself and would support the general aspect of these goods. Rawls supports the political aspect of self-respect so he is not a neutralist, and he does not support the nonpolitical aspect of self-respect so he is not a perfectionist.

Rawls sees a certain form of life as valuable, namely participating in political life and feeling confident that there is a just political system and that one is able to influence

decisions. Habermas (see Rawls 1999: 206; 419ff) criticizes this favouring of lives devoted to political matters. The ideal life is then, like in the ancient Greek theories, a political life concerned with what is best for society. Even though Rawls rejects this criticism, his emphasis on the social bases of self-respect favours those who achieve a larger part of their good in activities of political life. So to a certain extent Rawls' theory is biased. Rawls would counter and say that this is not an intentional bias, and that it is in accordance with justificatory neutrality. But Rawls' theory seems to say that his conception of the good is better than other conceptions of the good. Thus it breaks with the principle of neutrality.

But Rawls' bias is a special bias, for he is not a perfectionist either. Since Rawls' conception is political, it does not say anything about the nonpolitical sphere. Thus his political conception of the good is only better than other political conceptions of the good. The supported values are only political, regardless of nonpolitical values. Rawls' belief about valuable activity has only to do with what people do as citizens, not with what people do in general.

As a result Rawls' theory should be placed in between neutralism and perfectionism, or to use Kymlicka's (1989) terms, between *social perfectionism* and *state perfectionism*. Rawls supports some substantial values, but only the political aspect of these values, just as he only supports the political aspect of self-respect. Political values are seen as necessary for a just society, and they are at the same time seen as more neutral since they are less extensive than general values. Rawls' theory can then be baptized *political perfectionism*.

Yet we must not exaggerate the perfectionist aspect in Rawls' theory. He does not promote his thin theory of the good as a superior conception of the good. Rawls only argues that some primary goods must be supported because they are essential for the political system; without these political goods the society would not work. Nevertheless, Rawls implicitly justifies his theory by the superiority of a political conception of the good. Thus he can correctly be called a political perfectionist. On

the other hand, if Rawls were promoting the general aspect of self-respect, it would be easier to claim that he is a political perfectionist. Then we could almost claim that he is (to use Kymlicka's terms again) a *state perfectionist*.

5.2.3 State perfectionism

We noted earlier (in 5.1.1) Rawls' claim that his theory gives significant support to self-respect. More accurately, he maintains that his theory "supports the self-esteem of citizens generally more firmly than other political principles" (Rawls 1999: 469f; see also Rawls 1993: 318). But is it really true that his theory supports self-respect more *than other principles*? I think not. Although I believe his theory to be supportive of self-respect, the perfectionist theories of Hurka (1993) and Sher (1997) appear to be more supportive. State perfectionists are much more concerned with personal development, which, according to the Aristotelian principle, leads to more self-respect.

But we do not need to go that far. A Rawlsian state perfectionism – which would promote the general aspect of self-respect – would probably be more supportive of self-respect than Rawls' original theory. We have noted (in 5.1.3) that the general aspect of self-respect can be considered shared and that it does not presuppose a comprehensive doctrine. Now we will look at some arguments for including the general aspect of self-respect as a good that the state should promote.

We can argue that it is an attractive effect that promotion of general goods strengthens political goods. As we have noted earlier (in 5.1.3), Rawls appreciates the mutual supporting sides of the political and the nonpolitical goods. In itself this is a very strong argument for supporting the general aspect of self-respect. The political values Rawls supports would evidently be reinforced by promotion of the corresponding nonpolitical values. Deliberation and moral evaluation of political matters would be easier if we were experienced in the same tasks for nonpolitical matters. The same goes for achievements in political life; they would also reap from

personal achievements. The political aspect of self-respect would be strengthened by the general aspect of self-respect.

One might argue that even though Rawls relies on the general aspect of self-respect, he does not act on it. He only promotes political goods. However, it is difficult to support only the political aspect of self-respect. When the political aspect is promoted, the corresponding general aspect automatically follows. These two spheres cannot easily be separated. To distinguish political goods from general goods is very hard; the distinction seems very obscure (see illustration 1). If we agree on a political conception of the good, we must, in most cases, also agree on a general conception of the corresponding good since political notions must, in most cases, rely on general notions. When a political value is considered good, the general aspect of that value should be promoted. Recognition of political goods necessitates recognition of the equivalent nonpolitical goods as well.

The obscurity between political and general values is reflected in Rawls' distinction between *acknowledgement* and *cultivation*, respectively. According to Rawls (1988: 268), his theory only requires citizens to *acknowledge* the principles of justice, and not to *cultivate* the values of autonomy and individuality like the comprehensive doctrines of Kant and Mill. Acknowledgement of a good does not require cultivation of it. Alejandro criticizes precisely this distinction:

> If people should be educated in the principles of justice, isn't that *cultivating* the values of autonomy and individuality which the principles of justice seek to nurture? It is difficult to find convincing reasons to explain Rawls's distinction between *cultivating* values and *acknowledging* them. For if we want to acknowledge the moral character of some values we need to satisfy a previous condition: we need to be educated in a way that leads us to appreciate those values. (1996: 15)

Alejandro points out that when Rawls insists on educating people to acknowledge the political value of the principles of justice, he also educates them to cultivate the general values of autonomy and individuality. In this case – following Alejandro's argumentation – promotion of political values leads to promotion of the equivalent nonpolitical values.

There seems to be no reason for not believing this to be valid for other cases as well, in particular for the notion of self-respect. To strengthen the political aspect of self-respect the state must make citizens understand their role in society, they must be taught about principles of liberty and equality, and political tolerance must be encouraged. People need to be informed about what justice is. But to be able to understand all this, people need to be much more informed and educated in general matters.

They must first understand their role in the family, in the community, and in associations before they can recognize their role in society. They must first learn about principles of liberty, equality, and tolerance among their family and friends before they can grasp these principles for the political sphere. People need to understand what fair dealings are in their personal relations before they can comprehend the legitimacy of a just society. The crucial link is that, for these ideals to be effective in the political sphere, people must learn to embrace the ideals in private life as well.[25]

Galston argues in a similar vein when he writes that "extensive moral education will be essential if citizens of actual societies are to obtain the capacity for acting 'on principle'" (1982: 626f). In political life we need to act on principle, but to be able to act on principle we need to learn about this in general. The political values presuppose an understanding of the corresponding general values. If citizens in a Rawlsian world are to be aware of political values in their society, they have to learn about equivalent general values.

As indicated (in 5.1.2), we can apply these suggestions on Rawls' idea of our two moral powers. If he wants to support both moral powers, this is best done by supporting both the political and the nonpolitical aspect of self-respect. The political

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[25] I am not arguing that all political ideals presuppose general ideals. One might even argue that sometimes political virtue can gain from personal vice (just think of Machiavelli). But in most cases the political relies on the general and the two spheres reinforce each other.

aspect of self-respect supports our first moral power, our capacity for a sense of justice, whereas the nonpolitical aspect of self-respect supports our second moral power, our conception of the good. Alejandro writes: "I suggest that the first power is meant to bring about a public agreement on justice, while the second power is meant to define the individual's private identity." (1996: 10) By encouraging development of the general aspect, individuals will only be more able in pursuing their second moral power. The general aspect of self-respect ought to be supported, for it is by virtue of our moral powers that we are considered free and equal.

Our last point concerns how self-respect can be strengthened. Rawls writes: "It normally suffices that for each person there is some association (one or more) to which he belongs and within which the activities that are rational for him are publicly affirmed by others. In this way we acquire a sense that what we do in everyday life is worthwhile." (Rawls 1999: 387) If a government supports the general aspect of self-respect, and not only the political aspect, it would assist a wider variety of institutions, organizations, and activities. It would then be easier to find an association to which one belongs, and consequently it would be easier to strengthen self-respect. The more important we find the notion of self-respect, the better it is to promote the general aspect of self-respect. Thus we will be more prone to favour state perfectionism. To go from political perfectionism to state perfectionism, we must find the idea of perfecting oneself so important that a theory of justice is dependent on it.

5.2.4 Political perfectionism – revised

Supporting the general aspect of the primary goods because of the valuable effect it has on the political aspect is comparable to supporting perfectionism because of the valuable effect it has on liberty – liberalism's main ingredient. Galston epitomizes this: "The more seriously liberalism takes its commitment to practical rationality, the more blurred becomes the line separating the liberal state from the tutelary, 'perfectionist' state" (1982: 627). The more *serious* Rawls' political liberalism is, the wider the line for the political will be. If political liberalism is very *serious* and would want to promote the political aspect of self-respect to a great extent, it would find it

effective to support the general aspect as well. I have maintained throughout this thesis that Rawls' notion of self-respect indicates this possibility.

Yet it can be argued that many of our private matters do not concern political justice, and so it seems fair enough to draw a line. The question is where to draw the line. Rawls draws the line for the political sphere as narrowly as he thinks possible for a just society. The good in his theory is equivalent to political goods. They are the only shared goods that are essential for justice. Thus his theory is a theory of political perfectionism.

Rawls draws the lines for the political around the social bases of self-respect and argues that this is the right place to draw the line. But his arguments (in 5.1.3) do not demonstrate that the criteria of political values exclude the general aspect of self-respect any more than the political aspect. The general aspect of self-respect is also shared by free and equal citizens and does not presuppose a particular (partially) comprehensive doctrine. The general aspect of self-respect could then be a part of the political aspect of self-respect. This means that the notion of self-respect would be a primary good. In this understanding, the political will still yield the idea of being shared and it will not rely on a comprehensive doctrine. It is just a matter of drawing the line of the political sphere somewhat wider.

If we draw the lines for the political sphere wide enough, broad political perfectionism could be similar to narrow state perfectionism – they could both support the general aspect of self-respect and probably the human goods. This could be the case, for instance, if self-respect is seen as a tremendously important primary good, for then the state must promote it to a large extent. Initially, in Rawls' earlier writings about self-respect, it seems like Rawls would support this deduction. But in his later writings he clearly states that only the political aspect of self-respect should be promoted. However, if we assume that a Rawlsian political perfectionist theory promotes the general aspect of self-respect, this theory would be in line with a plausible theory of state perfectionism.

76

But even though political perfectionism and state perfectionism – which both embrace moral pluralism – could have the same content, the arguments behind them would differ. A political perfectionist would argue for a perfectionist theory on the importance of a political consensus and hence on self-respect as a political good, whereas a state perfectionist would stress the importance of self-development and hence on self-respect as a general human good. Political perfectionism promotes political goods; state perfectionism promotes goods in general. Political perfectionism is neutral between people who affirm these political goods; state perfectionism is neutral between people who affirm these goods in general. As mentioned before, we must therefore not exaggerate the perfectionist aspect in Rawls' theory.

6.   Conclusion

I have maintained throughout this thesis that we must base our societies on certain beliefs of what constitutes good lives for human beings, and that the state should be so organized that it could provide for its citizens – at an equal level – the possibility to live such a life. The state must support and promote a conception of the good.

In doing this I have tried my best to analyze John Rawls' theory of a just society. The main focus has been on Rawls' neutrality and his notion of self-respect. His neutrality is obscure since he relies on a political conception of the good. In this conception we find the political aspect of self-respect. Without self-respect people would find their lives empty and vain. But even though Rawls admits that self-respect is an essential quality, he only promotes the political aspect of this notion. If self-respect really was as important as Rawls seems to intend when he writes about this notion, the general aspect of it should be promoted.

6.1   The answers

Three preliminary questions were proclaimed in the introductory chapter. Three answers will here be given as a brief summary.

(1) *What kind of neutrality does Rawls endorse?*
As a point of departure for this thesis I began with scrutinizing Rawls' neutrality of aim. He relies on a conception of the good but he does not appeal to the superiority of this conception as a justification for his theory. Thus the theory can be said to be justificatory neutral. But there is more to it. The justification Rawls uses is that it relies on substantial values seen as shared and political. This means that his conception of the good is neutral between people's aims, and that it does not presuppose a comprehensive doctrine. It only relies on political ideas. This is in sum

the kind of neutrality Rawls endorses. A theory that is neutral between people who share the thin theory of the good.

In looking closer at the political emphasis in this neutrality, things become a bit obscure. It seems as if the two criteria for political ideas coincide. The conception of the good is political because it is shared, and it is shared because it only concerns the political. The obscurity with this neutrality lies in the apparent superiority of his political conception of the good. A question is then whether the resulting bias is unintentional or intentional. Rawls seems to argue that this conception is better than other political conceptions. Then he cannot maintain that the bias is unintentional. If this is correct, Rawls' theory is justified by a superior political conception of the good. As a result, I have suggested that his theory could be called political perfectionism. It lies in between social perfectionism and state perfectionism, or in other words, between state neutrality and liberal perfectionism.

Furthermore, Rawls opens for including more goods in the thin theory of the good as long as they are political ideas of the good. The lines for the political sphere are therefore not completely laid out in his theory. The extent to which Rawls' theory is neutral is not entirely decided. Therefore there might be an opening for perfectionist goods, as long as these goods can be considered political. The third question looks into this matter more specifically.

(2) *Are Rawls' arguments against the principle of perfection sound arguments?*
Rawls explicitly argues against perfectionism. He provides sound objections to the perfectionist theories he has in mind. But I have proposed that they are not valid against liberal perfectionism. Hurka's and Sher's perfectionist theories were chiefly used for this purpose. Liberal perfectionist theories do provide a conception of the good we can agree on, they secure equal rights, and they can rank and weigh within and between different goods.

Moreover, even if perfectionism promotes a conception of the good and thereby favours people with the same conception of the good, it is not in any significant way different than Rawls' theory on this point. Rawls also favours those who agree with his political conception of the good. Besides, both the perfectionist conception of the good and Rawls' conception of the good are seen as shared by free and equal persons. They both affirm moral pluralism, and thus they can both be said to be neutral in aim. If this is correct, it consolidates my previous indication that Rawls' theory can be regarded as a theory of political perfectionism.

(3) *Should the primary good of self-respect be limited to the political sphere?*
My conclusion suggests that Rawls does not provide good reasons for only having the political aspect of self-respect as a primary good. He has no good arguments for excluding the general aspect of self-respect. Even if he insists on only promoting political goods, self-respect in general should be promoted. Rawls argues that ideas of the good must be political ideas, i.e. they must be shared and not presuppose a comprehensive doctrine. But he does not show why the general aspect of self-respect cannot be a political idea. Hence, if Rawls only wants to promote the political aspect of some values, he must explain in greater detail why the nonpolitical aspect is controversial and/or why it presupposes a comprehensive doctrine.

In addition to my claim that Rawls has no good arguments, I have provided arguments for promoting the general aspect of self-respect. These arguments are based on the hypothesis that when the political aspect is promoted, the general aspect automatically follows. Or at least, political goods seem to be, in most cases, better promoted if the equivalent general goods are promoted as well. It is hard to draw the lines for the political sphere, and since it is no more controversial to draw the lines around some of the general values, the lines ought to be drawn wider than Rawls currently draws them.

I have also pointed out that Rawls political perfectionism has no definite borders. Rawls says that other ideas of the good can be included in his thin theory of the good

as long as they are political ideas. If, as I have argued, the general aspect of self-respect could be considered political, political perfectionism should promote the general aspect of self-respect.

6.2 Some remarks on drawing the lines for the political sphere

At the end of this thesis some final words about where to draw the lines for the political sphere are appropriate. Promotion of political goods makes Rawls' theory political perfectionist. Promotion of the social bases of self-respect makes this political aspect particularly prominent. In addition it seemingly makes the theory more controversial. One might then ask whether his theory would be less controversial without any claims about self-respect. Maybe Rawls should draw the lines for the political sphere much narrower and abandon the notion of self-respect altogether? Then again, this notion is intimately connected with the rest of the primary goods and the idea of free and equal citizens. If the notion of self-respect were taken away, the entire theory would fall to pieces, and it would be a major task to rebuild it.[26]

One way could be to eliminate self-respect as a primary good, but keep the ideas behind it. One might claim that self-respect is included as a primary good solely because it explains the value of the other primary goods. We can especially detect an attachment between self-respect and the idea of being free and equal. This means that if self-respect were excluded as a primary good, the other primary goods would uphold the values of self-respect, and hence the theory would arguably not alter much in substance at all. Moreover, it would still have the same claims to self-respect and would not be more neutral.

Another way is to exclude the psychology of the Aristotelian principle and the importance of our moral powers from the notion of self-respect. If this were done, maybe the political aspect of self-respect would be less controversial and less prone

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[26] One of the reasons is that Rawls included self-respect as a primary good at a very early stage, namely, when he was criticized by David Diamond on his account of equality and status (see Rawls 1999: xix).

to imply that the general aspect also should be promoted. Perhaps this could be a plausible way of limiting the lines for the political. I am not sure whether Rawls' theory would remain similar to its present form, or whether it would be drastically reduced to a theory of no substance. This way of limiting the lines for the political sphere seems to be a plausible solution for a more neutral theory of justice. However, we will not focus on this issue since we are more concerned with the positive aspect of self-respect. The Aristotelian principle and our moral powers do reflect our human nature, and it seems like a clever move to include them. To me, they do not make his theory more controversial.

In fact, it is exactly the capacity for including and defining self-respect that makes Rawls a much more compelling theorist. The theory as it now stands is attractive since it creates room for, and supports, the valuable aspect of belief in oneself and society. Precisely because self-respect is strengthened through the profound activity of developing human capacities (seen as political), the theory becomes commendable, especially for perfectionists. As we remember Rawls writes that our life would be empty and vain without self-respect. In the same way, we can claim, that the theory would be empty and vain without the primary good of self-respect.

This dispute of whether to promote self-respect sheds light on the problematic task of defining what is political. Sharp distinctions are hard to make. The dispute relies on the notoriously obscure distinction between the right and the good. Raz writes about this distinction: "The obscurity of the distinction is, however, an obstacle for those who wish to rely on an independently recognized distinction and employ it to provide a foundation for a doctrine of liberty." (1986: 137) Rawls overcame that obstacle by relying on a thin theory of the good. He correctly claims that the right and the good must be combined: "The right and the good are complementary: no conception of justice can draw entirely upon one or the other, but must combine both in a definite way." (1993: 173)

Rawls insists, however, on a distinction between the political and the nonpolitical. But the lines for the political sphere are hard to draw; a certain degree of arbitrariness is unavoidable. Rawls' political liberalism is therefore blurred. He only promotes the political aspect of self-respect. Yet it seems like we share the values of self-respect in general. If we can agree on the good, why not promote it? One answer could be Kymlicka's suggestion of social perfectionism. But Rawls does not seem to be in favour of that theory, he would rather answer that nonpolitical goods belong to a comprehensive doctrine not to be used in a theory of justice. He believes a division between the political and the nonpolitical is a fruitful attempt to accommodate the plurality of different comprehensive doctrines. But Rawls does not provide good arguments for this case. He needs a more robust definition of what is political and what is comprehensive if he wants a sound theory.

The distinction between the political and the nonpolitical retains the obscurity of the distinction between the right and the good. If this is correct, we can answer Rawls question of why the idea of political liberalism has not been worked out before.[27] The reason is that a political conception of the good relies on the equivalent general conception of the good. Thus, it is no less controversial to promote the general values than only to promote political values. If we assume that political values do not presuppose a comprehensive doctrine, we must in addition recognize that the equivalent general values do not presuppose a comprehensive doctrine either. So if the lines drawn for the political sphere are wide enough, political goods could turn out to include the whole notion of self-respect. Political liberalism disguises a conception of the good in political terms. It is not too far removed from perfectionism. If perfectionism also disguises its conception of the good in political terms, something I believe some perfectionists would be prone to do, political liberalism and political perfectionism could be very similar, and maybe even identical.

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[27] "It is a great puzzle to me why political liberalism was not worked out much earlier: it seems such a natural way to present the idea of liberalism, given the fact of reasonable pluralism in political life. Does it have deep faults that preceding writers may have found in it that I have not seen and these led them to dismiss it?" (Rawls 1993: 374*n*)

This problem of drawing the lines for the political sphere epitomizes the fallacy of Rawls' neutrality. He argues convincingly that we must stick to certain values but he does not provide enough insight into why the political aspect of them should be promoted and the equivalent nonpolitical values should be avoided. We have seen that there is no reason to avoid supporting the general aspect of self-respect and good reasons for this support. The main reasons are: that the general aspect of self-respect can be seen as shared to the same degree as the political aspect; and that general values strengthen the political values because we cannot separate the two spheres as easily as Rawls believes we can.

6.3 The end

I have argued that Rawls' theory is in accordance with the liberal version of state perfectionism. The criticism of Rawls' arguments has been concentrated on his obscure political emphasis (see illustration 1). By relying on this obscure distinction of the political, a door has been opened for perfectionist values. Fishkin argues that by relying on a controversial conception of the person, Rawls opens the "door to alternative model-conceptions of a moral person which would, in turn, support alternative and equally controversial priority rankings for primary goods" (Fishkin 1983: 356). I would aim this argument at Rawls' political emphasis: By relying on political goods, he opens the door to alternative definitions of the political sphere which, in turn, could support alternative perfectionist theories. Thus his theory can be a theory of political perfectionism, in both a narrow and a wide sense, i.e. it can support only the political aspect of self-respect or it can support the general aspect of self-respect.

It is interesting to note Rawls' treatment of self-respect. It is assigned an important role in his theory, but then it seems to disappear in the notions of liberty and equality. It is promised the role of *perhaps the most important primary good*, but in the end it is only realized through the other primary goods and by our knowledge that we are free and equal citizens. My critique can thus be read as an attack on *Political Liberalism* (1993) and a defence of *A Theory of Justice* (1971).

However, whether self-respect is a primary good or not is less relevant as long as the values behind are sustained. The main difference between a perfectionist and Rawls is, then, that Rawls does not want the government to support or promote self-respect as human goods but only as political goods. In this way there is no promotion of general self-respect, it is up to the cultural marketplace to evaluate and preserve this aspect. I have maintained, however, that the reason why Rawls leaves it to the cultural marketplace is not because he believes it is a better way of promoting it, but because the nonpolitical belongs to a comprehensive doctrine and does not concern justice. This way, Rawls clearly takes a stand against perfectionism. So although the notion of self-respect is very influential in his theory, most perfectionists would have made a larger place for it. Yet, according to what he writes about the values of self-respect, it might seem like Rawls also should give them more room. No matter what, we can at least say – with Galston (1982), Alejandro (1996), and Sher (1997) – that Rawls' theory is at least a weak form of perfectionism.

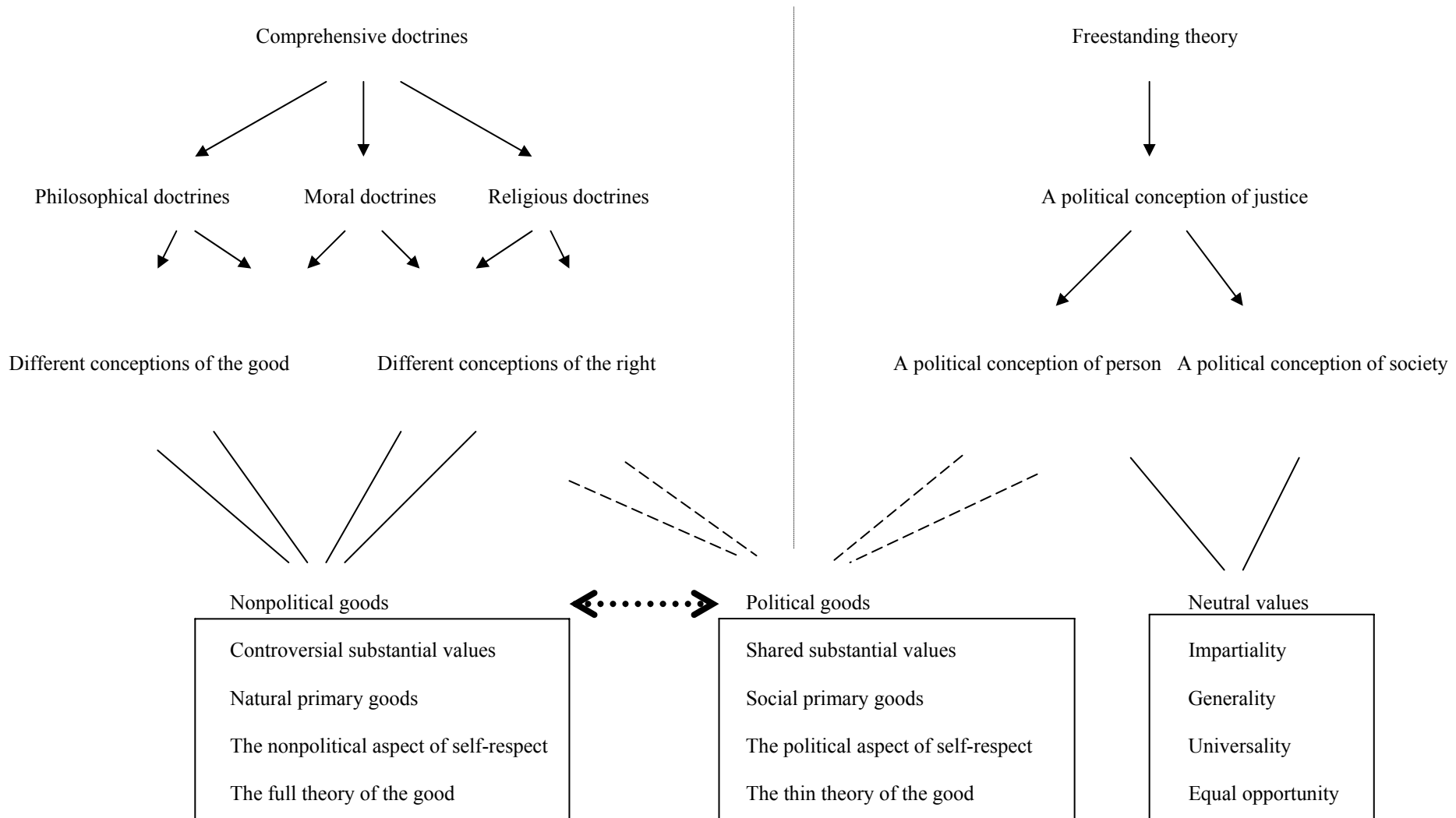> Men lose their high aspirations as they lose their intellectual tastes, because they have not time or opportunity for indulging in them; and they addict themselves to inferior pleasures, not because they deliberately prefer them, but because they are either the only ones to which they have access or the only ones which they are any longer capable of enjoying.
>
> (John Stuart Mill 1861: ch. II, par. 7)

APPENDIX
Illustration 1: A Division between Comprehensive and Freestanding Conceptions

Can a theory be freestanding when it relies on political goods?

This is illustrated by the tension the political goods creates between

the comprehensive doctrines and the freestanding theory.

Comprehensive doctrines

Freestanding theory

Philosophical doctrines   Moral doctrines   Religious doctrines

A political conception of justice

Different conceptions of the good   Different conceptions of the right

A political conception of person   A political conception of society

Nonpolitical goods	Political goods	Neutral values
Controversial substantial values	Shared substantial values	Impartiality
Natural primary goods	Social primary goods	Generality
The nonpolitical aspect of self-respect	The political aspect of self-respect	Universality
The full theory of the good	The thin theory of the good	Equal opportunity

87

Literature

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