The Promise of Virtue, Old and New: On Building Bridges in Contemporary Politics

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I. Introduction

From identity politics on the progressive left to common-good conservatism and nationalism on the right, myriad "post-liberal" movements today find fault with liberal politics as usual.[1] Liberalism is a big-tent tradition, encompassing a range of political persuasions from left to right but united by a commitment to liberty and protection of rights. Typically motivated by some positive moral vision or cause, various political leaders and sectors of the citizenry have formed ranks behind movements challenging liberal politics as causing, or further entrenching, moral damage to society in various ways. Contemporary postliberals are not the first to criticize liberalism, however. The communitarians of the 1980s and 1990s also criticized liberalism on the grounds that it produced atomistic individuals lacking rootedness in community, a sense of duty, or a conception of virtue.[2] Liberal theorists, such as Stephen Macedo and William Galston, responded in turn in the following years, arguing that liberal thought and politics are not necessarily neutral but, like communitarianism, engender and depend on certain virtues.[3] With the propagation of these virtues, they argued, liberal

citizens relate to each other productively in community while still securing such liberal ideals as liberty and autonomy. To be sure, contemporary criticisms of liberalism differ vastly among themselves and from the communitarian critiques of prior decades. However, given the rise of various schools of postliberal thought, it is worth considering, in retrospect, how past contributions of liberal virtue theorists might also speak to today's critics. Could the liberal virtues provide some ground on which to rebuild our politics? The answer depends on what today's postliberals seek and the elaborations of liberalism that liberal virtue theory could offer in response.

Proceeding from their respective moral visions, postliberals on the left and right alike seem motivated by the conviction that particular moral ends and corresponding virtues should be objects of politics. From a social justice or progressive left perspective, Ibram Kendi explains, "There is no such thing as a nonracist or race-neutral policy. Every policy in every institution in every community in every nation is producing or sustaining either racial inequity or equity, racial injustice or justice."[4] Such progressive accounts as this posit a particular moral vision (and contrasting immoral vision) for politics—namely, institutions and policies that advance antiracism. Insofar as this is the ideal toward which to strive, such accounts suggest that individuals ought to cultivate antiracist dispositions or virtues, as it were. Antiracism and the antiracist disposition run deeper than intellectual commitments or behavior. Rather, the holy grail, in Kendi's telling, is to root out "racist policymakers, policies, and habits of thinking."[5] An account of humanity itself is implicit in Kendi's antiracist ideal, moreover, as he explains how "being racist prevents us from *being* fully human."[6] Racist habits of thought and action thus amount to vices in this telling, and antiracist habits to virtues.

On the postliberal right, one finds perspectives ranging from neointegralism and common-good conservatism to populism and nationalism. While different in fundamental ways from the aforementioned left perspective, these oft-overlapping right postliberalisms demonstrate a similar comfort with positing a moral good to

be pursued, with certain corresponding virtues of citizens. Comparable to Kendi's explanation of the impossibility of neutrality in politics vis-à-vis a particular good, Patrick Deneen concludes, "Thus, the common good is always either served or undermined by a political order—there is no neutrality on the matter."[7] In this same vein, conservative postliberal accounts argue for the cultivation of certain moral virtues, both for people's own good and for the good of the community, which are intertwined. Deneen continues:

> It is not enough to ensure their *freedom* to pursue such goods; rather, it is the duty of the political order to positively guide them to, and provide the conditions for the enjoyment of, the goods of human life. "Religious liberty," "academic freedom," "free markets," "checks and balances," etc. are no substitutes for piety, truth, equitable prosperity, and just government.[8]

Hence, this and other common-good conservative accounts seek more than protection of rights and liberties; they also seek some positive good (and goods) from government and politics.[9] This may come in the form of various public services, as well as in fostering certain moral virtues. In light of these postliberal moral visions, both right and left, this essay considers whether the possibility of liberal virtues, and perhaps even the content of many of the specific virtues prescribed, holds potential for galvanizing new dialogue across ideological divides.

The virtues themselves are only a part of the story, however. The potential for building a discursive bridge to postliberal critics hinges on the principles around which the liberal virtues are organized, in addition to what may lead one to identify them as virtues in the first place. Liberal virtue theorists, such as Macedo, for example, tend to hold up autonomy as a kind of liberal ideal. Understood as a principle of maximization and actualization of one's choices, autonomy thus serves as an animating principle giving content and order to catalogues of liberal virtues. Such a

theoretical center or organizing principle points to a kind of subjec-
tive enterprise, one that tries to remain agnostic with respect to
ends even as it posits certain moral ideals. This is in contrast with
the kind of positive objects or goals that drive postliberals. Again,
postliberals are a diverse bunch,[10] and so their catalogues of virtues
are likely to be just as diverse. And yet, some of their common
skepticism of liberalism seems based in a similar understanding of
politics as an inescapably moral enterprise, rather than as a value-
neutral space. Therefore, while some liberals espouse autonomy as
providing a comparatively neutral substitute for thicker moral
understandings of politics and virtue, such an account will by defi-
nition be unsatisfying to postliberals.

The aim of this essay is not to critique as much as to consider
what kind of language may hold promise for building bridges across
contemporary ideological divides. Consensus or uniformity need
not be the goal as much as shrinking the grounds left for a postlib-
eral reaction against liberalism and, simultaneously, uncovering
common ground on which postliberals and liberals may view each
other as even potential political partners. Or, if this be too idealis-
tic, a more modest take on this essay's goal is to argue for a moral
language as necessary in offering deeper justification and making
the best case for liberalism. While certain features of liberal virtue
theory may limit its capacity to achieve this goal, perhaps the basic
insight of these theories retains its promise, specifically, that some
language of virtue may allow liberal thinkers to address the
concerns of and speak meaningfully with their critics. Indeed, one
finds different articulations of the language of virtue throughout
the liberal tradition, some building on a thicker, more objective
moral foundation and, to this extent, occupying a more similar
discursive plane as the postliberals.[11] In particular, many of the
American founders begin with an ontology that gives more search-
ing consideration to human nature and, thus, participate more self-
consciously in conversations about the objects of a good life.[12]

While many contemporary interlocutors may disagree with
accounts of virtue from, say, the American founding, such older
liberal perspectives raise the kinds of political conversations that

postliberals seem to want to have about politics as an enterprise aimed at a thicker moral good and, even more fundamentally, about people as moral beings. From postliberal perspectives, varied as they may be, reintroducing language of and concern for virtue might be described as helping to make contemporary liberal politics more humane[13]—that is, working for humans as moral beings. Opening up the public conversation beyond autonomy to consider more grounded understandings of virtue and what constitutes good character may even facilitate the cultivation of better citizens. This in itself could be a step toward a reinvigorated liberal politics, promoting healthier public discourse and even greater willingness to compromise.

This essay begins with a brief account of how the models of virtue in the work of liberal virtue theorists seek to modify liberal theory as articulated by John Rawls. The essay proceeds by comparing these liberal virtue theories with classical accounts of virtue, showing how, in prioritizing autonomy and other like concepts, the former retains a certain Rawlsian character. The more classical accounts of virtue, which formed the basis for many earlier accounts of virtue in liberal political thought, emerge as the more promising model to make the case for liberalism and speak across ideological bounds. Finally, the essay anticipates various objections, most important among them that virtue talk is often associated with an authoritarian perfectionism and paternalism. Now more than ever, liberals who mean to ameliorate some of our current political ills may need to look beyond a neutral or subjective autonomy, unsatisfying to many diverse movements within our society, to open up a broader conversation about human virtue.

II. Rawls: Removing Human Nature from Liberal Politics

In *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls grounds certain principles of justice in a kind of rationalism. If people were to found a society from behind the veil of ignorance (a hypothetical blindfold preventing knowledge of individuals' actual status and commitments), Rawls maintains, they would employ pure rationality in deciding their governing principles. Upon reaching an agreement on such

principles, or a "reflective equilibrium," participating individuals would be compelled to accept the conclusions at which they had arrived by this procedure,[14] insofar as these principles would appeal directly to each person's pure, unprejudiced rationality. For this reason, the resulting principles could not reasonably be subject to dispute once the veil of ignorance was lifted.[15] Although Rawls intends this to be a thought experiment rather than a procedure that people actually carry out, he maintains that such a thought experiment should sufficiently appeal to people's rationality to induce them to accept his principles of justice in an act of a sort of Kantian autonomy.

We see another episode in this general train of thought in *Political Liberalism*. In this later work, Rawls explains how *reasonable* "comprehensive doctrines" will overlap on certain moral issues in a way that creates a field of common ground or "overlapping consensus." It is within this overlapping consensus that we may carry out political discourse, appealing only to "public reason" when arguing in the public forum. Insofar as human persons are capable of giving and understanding reasons in support of their arguments, individuals must only make arguments in public spaces that abide by this standard of public reason and that are thus cognizable by the rest of the citizenry. While people maintain different moral presuppositions in their comprehensive doctrines, the argument goes, appeals from these comprehensive doctrines cannot by themselves count as reasons in public fora. Again, the aspiration is that adherence to public reason alone will generate an undeniably reasonable and, therefore, comparatively neutral basis on which to conduct public discourse.[16] However, whether Rawlsian rationalism or liberalism in general does or even could achieve neutrality has been variously contested by critics and even by many falling under the umbrella of liberal thought.

III. Reworking Rawls: Virtues from Liberalism

Liberal theorists such as Stephen Macedo, William Galston, James Fleming, and Linda McClain all respond to various critiques of Rawlsian liberalism. Rather than insist that such Rawlsian

constructions as public reason are neutral, they embrace the fact that liberalism does tend to favor certain ways of life over others,[17] and does promote and propagate a certain character among liberal citizens. For example, Macedo takes up the critique that liberalism offers "no understanding of . . . a common set of virtues that would give meaning and direction to our lives and make our polity a moral community."[18] While some liberal theorists following Rawls would argue that the effort to bracket morality and virtue is the fundamental *benefit* of liberal government in a pluralistic world, Macedo argues that liberalism can offer a "common set of virtues," leading to a kind of moral flourishing in liberal contexts.[19] In this way, he seeks to correct certain partisans and critics of liberalism simultaneously in their belief that liberalism aspires to neutrality.

Macedo challenges the understanding that liberal government and politics successfully dodge value judgments, suggesting that while some strains of liberalism fall into relativist and pragmatist thinking, this is not a necessary error of liberal thought.[20] Rather, he states, "Liberal practice, at its best, refuses to banish critical moral thinking," and further, "Liberal citizens exercise their critical capacities by making judgments among various standards and claims . . . and they do this in politics and not only in their free time."[21] Macedo identifies several other characteristics as liberal virtues, citing the utility of these characteristics in supporting such core liberal values as toleration and personal liberty.[22] His catalogue of virtues includes "tolerance and respect for the rights of others, self-control, reflectiveness, self-criticism, moderation, and a reasonable degree of engagement in the activities of citizenship,"[23] among others. Recognizing the relationship between the character of citizens and the state of governance and politics, Macedo constructs this list through reasoning inductively about the characteristics that will facilitate the functioning of the liberal polity,[24] as well as the prospering of individuals according to the liberal vision.

Although liberal government may maintain wide bounds within which citizens are permitted to adopt particular commitments and practices, it is still the case that a certain character in citizens is desirable for achieving such goals and values as toleration and

liberty. Liberal partisans and thinkers thus have an interest in shaping the beliefs and commitments of citizens, structuring and partly determining "the ends, goals and visions of the good life that liberal citizens pursue."[25] To this end, another virtue that Macedo advances in his account is moderation with regard to individual commitments, such as religion.[26] He states that a liberal society could not be well ordered "if composed of people incapable of reflectively distancing themselves from personal commitments for the sake of considering possible conflicts with the basic requirements of liberal justice."[27] Therefore, the liberal virtues are useful for shaping and tempering those competing values that threaten to disturb the status quo and override a liberal conception of justice.[28]

Though Macedo follows Rawls in endorsing some form of public reason, he acknowledges that such a structure for politics asserts "substantive and contestable conceptions of political morality,"[29] so that "the most reasonable position in a public sense will . . . be one that religious fanatics and others . . . will find deeply objectionable."[30] In this way, Macedo is candid about the way that liberal government discriminates among and even bears on the beliefs and commitments of citizens. Ultimately, he suggests that the liberalization of personal commitments is desirable and even necessary to sustain liberal society.[31] He states, "At the end of the political day, liberals must be prepared to make judgments about what range of practices is to be permitted, and so what range of beliefs is reasonable."[32]

William Galston similarly argues that to persist, liberal government and politics require initiative and deliberation in cultivating a certain character in the general populace.[33] He explains that while liberalism is not "tutelary" or "dedicated to the inculcation of individual virtue or excellence,"[34] the viability of liberalism does require certain traits of character in citizens.[35] Galston acknowledges that some virtues, such as courage, law-abidingness, and loyalty, are requisite characteristics for citizens of any polity.[36] Insofar as he identifies the goal of government as the preservation of society,[37] the virtues he lists are those that are necessary to ensure this end of survival. Moreover, "intrinsically linked to liberal

theory," Galston argues, is a "conception of the virtuous or excellent individual," understood as valuable for its own sake.[38] While different thinkers articulate this liberal ideal differently, Galston sums it up as "a vision of individuals who in some manner take responsibility for their own lives."[39]

What these accounts deem to be a virtue is thus a kind of empirical question. In particular, these accounts identify virtues through inductive reasoning, observing what characteristics in citizens might sustain and promote the particular goals in question, for citizens' character[40] as well as for society's survival.[41] Naturally, one could add other virtues to his list depending on variations in government and society. For example, Galston identifies individualism and diversity as virtues necessitated by the defining features of liberal society.[42] On an even more granular level, he points to such attributes as work ethic, moderate delay of gratification, and adaptability as the virtues rendered necessary by the defining features of liberal economy.[43]

In a similar vein, Fleming and McClain argue the role of virtues and responsibility in sustaining liberal constitutionalism, and specifically the need to cultivate "democratic self-government" and "personal self-government."[44] They describe their objective "to tread where communitarians, civic republicans, and progressives rush in," to speak on those very subjects over which these other schools of thought generally assume to have some monopoly, such as responsibility, character, and community. Fleming and McClain even go so far as to embrace a "mild perfectionism,"[45] emanating from their willingness to transcend the conventional boundaries of more Rawlsian liberalism.

All these scholars thus draw parallels between the liberal and classical traditions, painting a picture of a common need to cultivate virtue, even if ultimately for different reasons. Though they generally depart from the classical tradition in their hesitance to speak in terms of a human nature or human good, their theories of liberalism acknowledge that a certain ideal of character would be good for people to emulate and might even be necessary for the preservation of liberal society.[46] In this way, some accounts within

liberal theory concede that perfect neutrality is not possible and that pure rationality is not enough to sustain liberal government. In prescribing certain liberal virtues and describing liberal values, they acknowledge more of a moral space in politics than do some of their liberal counterparts. In recognizing and engaging this moral space, moreover, these liberal virtue theorists seem to transcend the emphasis on neutrality and push us past the kind of deontological understandings of more Rawlsian articulations of liberalism, doing so in favor of virtue talk. While the content of their moral commitments will still differ, their treatment of character and morality puts these general subjects back on the proverbial political table in a way that many postliberals also seem to want. To this extent, their accounts are worth engaging as they have more potential, prima facie, to invite conversation across present ideological divides.

Liberal virtue theorists are thus unified in their project to recognize a moral dimension to liberal thought and politics. However, it is not necessarily the case that their account of virtue and their individual virtues conform to past iterations of the concept over its long history. How, then, do accounts of liberal virtue compare with more classical accounts?

IV. Defining Virtue: Classical and Liberal

Classical accounts of the virtues emerge from conversations about human nature and, specifically, teleological accounts of the human person. From classical and medieval thought to the present, such accounts of virtue maintain that we possess a certain human nature that orders us to our human end. In other words, accompanying our very humanness is an ideal toward which we can and, if we want to be good people, should strive. This, then, raises the question of what sort of beings we are or, as Aristotle put it, what is our human function, of what consists the excellence that makes for good people.[47] Aristotle concludes that our human end consists in a disposition or character, in *being* a certain way, specifically in being virtuous, which is the perfection of our nature. He thereby identifies human virtues, especially the cardinal virtues of prudence,

justice, fortitude, and temperance, explaining that we achieve our human end through the practice of these virtues.[48] This and other classical accounts thus identify virtues by inquiry into human nature. In such tellings, these virtues lead us to be good people but also are constitutive of what it means to be a good person, since ultimately our human end is nothing less than the virtuous disposition. In the words of Alasdair MacIntyre, classical thinkers pursued virtue "for the sake of a certain kind of happiness and not for its utility."[49]

Although the aforementioned liberal thinkers adopt the language of virtue, they tend to waver in how they understand their liberal virtues vis-à-vis the classical tradition. Underlying Macedo's account, for example, is a human ontology that might be described in terms of autonomy. This ontology of autonomy stands in for more thoroughgoing, or teleological, contemplation about the human good found in other theories. At the same time, some liberal virtue theorists maintain that the "tension between virtue and self-interest is a tension within liberalism, not between liberalism and other traditions,"[50] seemingly implying more proximity to classical accounts of virtue. In particular, this seems to suggest that such liberal theories of virtue are robust and substantive enough to pose a challenge to self-interest in favor of, say, the goods and commitments of the community. However, it is not clear that virtues growing out of a central ideal such as autonomy would in fact pose a major challenge or engender a tension with self-interest. Aiming for autonomy, drawing out one's potential capacities, and maximizing one's choices all seem amply subject-centric, such that they would not pose any real charge or serious challenge to conform to an ideal that exists outside of oneself and one's particular projects. Of course, many accounts discuss virtues such as toleration, as well. However, even toleration often amounts to leaving space for the same subjective pursuits among others, rather than conforming one's behavior to some ideal that is external or independent.

To the extent that it adopts autonomy as its center, liberal virtue theory may not ultimately make all that much progress away from a purely Rawlsian liberalism. Indeed, these "virtues" largely

find their worth in a kind of subjectivity, respecting the freedom to choose because people have the capacity to choose, not necessarily because there is any particular thing worth choosing. Therefore, despite shared terminology, liberal and classical understandings of virtue are different at their core, as these liberal theorists remain committed to bracketing discussion about the good even as they hold up certain ideals. As subsequent sections of this essay elaborate, liberal virtue theorists operate in a much narrower moral domain in formulating their virtues, one that has limited potential to speak or invite conversation across ideological bounds.

Ultimately, accounts that take up questions about human nature and the human good admit more of the moral language necessary to make a case for the fundamentality of their virtues, even to outsiders. Autonomy may be good, but even the liberal virtue theorists would not describe this ontological perspective as growing out of any positive statement about the good. This may not pose an obstacle for the initiated liberal who already accepts something like an ontology of autonomy. However, in eschewing any teleological or other similar justification in terms of the good, an ontology of autonomy does not easily provide nonliberals with the same moral reason for adopting the liberal virtues. In a way, this approach to virtue seems to follow Elizabeth Anscombe's suggestion in "Modern Moral Philosophy" that philosophers who do not wish to operate in a teleological context may simply identify which virtues they would promote rather than speak in terms of obligation.[51] Although these liberal thinkers do speak in terms of moral obligation at times, the logic underlying their project of identifying certain liberal virtues does not require such language. Indeed, many identify their virtues simply by demonstrating how particular characteristics support liberalism's vision for government, society, and the individual. In other words, this project is a descriptive one, proceeding from observations about what traits will bring about the goals built into the liberal project.

At the same time, many of the virtues common in liberal accounts seem likely to be accepted widely as admirable traits even across ideological divides. Nonliberals may not view these virtues

as speaking to a full range of the human experience, nor as rising to the level of the most important components of good character. Indeed, the liberal virtues seem unlikely to speak equally to diversely situated people but rather prioritize the experience of a relatively comfortable individual operating in a largely liberal polity. This is not, however, to diminish the accomplishment of identifying virtues capable of garnering some consensus.[52] In a certain way, this even achieves some of the same function associated with Rawlsian public reason. Given current challenges to liberalism, though, as well as the original motivation driving liberal virtue theorists to offer a response to nonliberal critiques of earlier times, it is fair to consider the capacity of these virtues to speak across ideological lines. Ultimately, the liberal virtues may amount to attributes of good character and, to this extent, should not be discounted even by nonliberals. However, the virtues of classical accounts seem to speak more comprehensively across positions and situations and, importantly, still speak to many liberals too.

The next section of the essay explains in greater detail how, in adopting an ontology of autonomy, liberal virtue theory does not escape a Rawlsian commitment to neutrality and subjectivity. While postliberals or nonliberals may find some of the individual virtues admirable, even worthy of emulating, the ontology ground-ing these virtues talks past the postliberal critiques driven by a desire to make liberalism more humane.

V. Autonomy: The "Good" Liberal Life

Although Macedo does not concede any one human good, he does suggest autonomy as a liberal ideal attribute or condition for an individual. Autonomy, or the robust cultivation of a person's critical faculties and power of choice, both supports the liberal project and facilitates individuals in living life howsoever they choose. He discusses certain "virtues" without discussing human virtues, and liberal ends without discussing human ends. While this liberal good still seems to be instrumental, insofar as such "critical faculties" must generally be ordered to another end, Macedo emphasizes how, by dint of humanity's distinctively reasonable nature, the

exercise of reason in determining one's own course is in itself good for human beings. In contrast with the classical understandings, the goodness of an action lies primarily in the subject, rather than in the object chosen. As mentioned, this feature of liberal virtue theory is a kind of holdover of deontological understandings, even as it adopts the language of virtue. While this may admit of some pluralist participation in the liberal virtues, allowing people to emulate these virtues as they pursue different projects, this subjectivity inhibits another level of moral conversation—namely, that which makes propositions about objects to be pursued across different subjects. Thus circumscribing the virtues to a more subjective plane ultimately prevents a kind of pluralism by precluding the kinds of moral conversations that certain sectors of society, liberal and postliberal alike, want to have.

Macedo follows John Stuart Mill when he says, "He who lets the world or his own portion of it, choose his plan of life for him, has no need of any other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation. He who chooses his plan for himself, employs all his faculties."[53] Macedo makes this same basic point when he explains, "To develop more fully the reflective capacities associated with normal personhood leads one toward an ideal of character, an ideal we may call 'autonomy.'"[54] He contends that the end of such development is not mere "instrumental rationality" but the fruition of such distinctly human capacities as the reflective and critical faculties and our potential for "strong evaluation."[55] Conscious of his communitarian interlocutors, Macedo is careful to stipulate that he advocates a sort of "situated autonomy" rather than radical freedom,[56] explaining that even the perfectly autonomous liberal person must be presented with some finite number of choices if he or she is ultimately to make a choice. The liberal ideal, therefore, is to equip oneself to be able to choose from the widest and deepest possible range of choices. In this way, the ideal liberal will bring his or her critical reflection to bear on a great variety of inherited values to choose how to live.[57]

In his own account of a liberal good or ideal of character, Galston turns to the history of the liberal tradition. Ultimately, he

identifies three main conceptions of "intrinsic individual excellence" that are "overlapping yet distinct."[58] These include Lockean rational liberty or self-direction, the Kantian capacity to act on the precepts of duty, and the Millian flowering of individuality.[59] Galston acknowledges a tension among these three accounts of individual excellence, as between the range of potential choices on Locke's model versus the narrower course of duty on Kant's model, for example. Nonetheless, he maintains that all three models of excellence find room in the liberal polity, to the extent that they share a common esteem for "individuals who in some manner take responsibility for their own lives," [60] as explained earlier.

Galston continues that each of the three conceptions of liberal excellence constitutes a "vindication of the dignity of every individual"; for each articulates a profound optimism with regard to humanity's abilities and so, he implies, elicits a presumptive respect for how individuals choose to apply those abilities.[61] In this way, Galston grounds his liberal virtues and standard of excellence in an understanding of human beings as possessing a certain dignity, by which he means a capacity for self-responsibility. These human capacities render individuals' choices worthy of respect and therefore make virtues of those characteristics that facilitate such agency and decision-making. Likewise, they make virtues of those characteristics such as toleration that facilitate similar agency and choices for others.[62]

Although both clearly fall within the bounds of the liberal tradition, Macedo's and Galston's accounts differ from each other in certain ways. Macedo articulates this as *a* difference in each thinker's willingness to broach the subject of the good. Galston's position amounts to a kind of "neo-Aristotelianism," finding a "full theory of the good latent in liberal practice."[63] In particular, the liberal virtues he identifies are good not only on an instrumental level but also intrinsically for people's flourishing, as noted earlier. Autonomy and its cognates become a kind of perfectionist goal. In contrast, Macedo recognizes a tension in such a perfectionist turn when, in certain tellings, anyway, liberalism commits to neutrality with respect to the good. So while autonomy retains its status as an ideal

in his account, Macedo refrains from describing it in more perfectionist terms. Instead, he opts to preserve "the ambiguity of autonomy," explaining that "the good of autonomy has, in a liberal political regime, a status that is independent and worth preserving: the first among equally respectable ideals of life."[64] While Galston and Macedo differ in the precise status they assign autonomy, the fact that both theories hold up autonomy, and cognate values, as an ideal means the account of humanity at the center of each theory of liberal virtues remains similar. The descriptions differ somewhat, though, with Macedo emphasizing the giving of reasons and what he calls "strong evaluation,"[65] whereas Galston focuses more on the human agency involved in making choices. Nevertheless, each account includes both human reasonableness and choice in characterizing liberal excellence.

In their shared ontology of autonomy, we find a common lacuna—namely, that the foundation for the liberal virtues is tied to liberalism in both accounts. In order to offer more robust foundation for the liberal virtues and speak more effectively to nonliberal or postliberal audiences, these theories would have to account more fully for the standard that allows them to call their virtues "good," and not only from a liberal vantage point. One might argue that these liberal theories are simply using old words in new ways and ought not to be held to another meaning of virtue or standard of justification. Although liberal and classical philosophers may mean different things when they refer to the virtues, this fact alone does not address the challenge. These theories aim to demonstrate that an ideal character arises naturally from liberalism and that citizens do well, even live well, in striving toward this ideal. While they are successful in the first part of their project, in showing that certain characteristics are consistent with the full and liberal exercise of human capacities for reason and choice, they are less successful in giving us a reason to strive for liberal excellence above all other conceptions of excellence. For they speak of this ideal and these virtues without offering an independent standard in which to ground, or against which to evaluate, the ideals they set forth. To the extent that their understandings of liberalism preclude them

from offering such a standard, we are left with a list of liberal virtues, but no real reason to pursue them, unless of course we already happen to agree.

This is not to say that these thinkers are oblivious to this problem, nor that they make no attempt to ground their virtues. Indeed, with autonomy at the center, one faces questions about the end to which such individual autonomy should be directed. Efforts to provide justification consist in appeals to such concepts as autonomy and responsibility, and such language as flourishing and excellence, that the classical philosophers understood as entailing intrinsic worth. Macedo seems cognizant of the problem, for example, in his attempt to justify from the mere fact that we as humans have certain capacities of reason that we ought to strive for a certain autonomous character, indeed, that such a character is in some sense "good." It is possible that he is correct in this. Nevertheless, the source and meaning of this evaluative criterion are unclear, perhaps necessarily so, since he remains committed to a liberal agnosticism with regard to humanity's good.

Theories such as Galston's might begin to escape this problem for the very reason that he is more comfortable to use language of "the good." He recognizes the challenge of grounding the liberal virtues when he justifies them in terms of a liberal conception of the good and uses such language as *intrinsic* individual excellence."[66] Indeed, he must say that the ideals of individual excellence he offers have intrinsic value, since further explanation would likely require something like a teleological explanation, external to the liberal tradition. Perhaps the intrinsic and ultimate value of autonomy is self-evident to the initiated liberal.[67] Nevertheless, this point does want further justification, especially today when many people have become less inclined to follow liberal paradigms uncritically.

At first blush, accounts that argue for autonomy in terms of human capacity may not seem all that different from the classical theories about the human telos that we find in Aristotle. However, this would be to misunderstand classical conceptions of people's purpose. Our human purpose or end, according to classical understandings, is rooted in posited conceptions of human nature—that

is, in accounts of an inherent ideal. The reason to pursue our human function exists in the concept itself by virtue of our nature. The understandings of human capacity that we find in liberal virtue theories reflect a kind of human ontology but do not amount to the same kinds of claims about human nature. Rather, they speak of capacities, or things we *can* do. These capacities can be ordered to any variety of ends. They attempt to push the significance of these capacities beyond the instrumental but point only to the fact of these capacities and the weightiness of the choices that an individual must make over the course of life. The difference is between respecting the freedom to choose because we, as subjects, have the capacity to choose,[68] on the one hand, and respecting the freedom to choose because there is some object worth choosing, on the other. Because they do not speak of such objects, even as they reflect that individuals pursue them in their private lives, they are confined to an ontology and to liberal virtues grounded in more contingent elements of the human person.

None of this need render these theorists' projects unsuccessful on their own terms, but rather this is meant to identify a missing element in their human ontology, considered from an outside perspective. In particular, more searching consideration of human nature would furnish deeper justification and likely empower virtues to speak to broader circumstances of life—that is, to a moral life beyond autonomy. Such a move could shore up justification of these theories, thereby making a fuller case for liberal politics in our moment, increasingly marked by skepticism of liberalism. In this way, postliberals may not have quite as much to react against and may even find space to view themselves as potential political partners rather than enemies.

A catalogue of liberal virtues will be attractive to a liberal in a time and place that is friendly to liberalism. Moreover, prescriptions of tolerance, diversity, and critical thinking may even be accepted as virtues or at least admirable traits by nonliberals. Ultimately, however, despite the emphasis on justification in theories of public reason, the prescriptions that we find in such concepts as liberal virtues are, at base, unmoored, in that the human ontology that

grounds them does not offer nonliberals a sufficient account or justification for their adoption. Put differently, they do not offer nonliberals, from progressive left and conservative right scholars to the average person on the street, justification as rigorous as do accounts of virtues anchored in accounts of what is truly good and what ends should be pursued as a function of our nature.

VI. Earlier Liberal Virtues: The American Framers' Accounts

In *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls suggests that unlike in the classical tradition, the goal of liberal government is not to make just individuals but to preserve society.[69] This raises the question, to what end do we wish to preserve society? And, more specifically, why do we want to preserve liberal society in particular? If liberalism and liberal society are not neutral, as Macedo and Galston concede, then it seems all the more necessary that individuals accept the fundamentals of liberal theory and approve of the sort of society it produces. Macedo addresses this very point of establishing legitimacy in the liberal state:

> In making a self-conscious personal choice about whether to support liberal politics, it would be necessary to weigh liberal and pro-liberal values against the strongest competing package as one sees it. (Is the freedom to debate, choose, and live one's own way really more important than struggling to establish a common culture that supports piety and other-worldliness and punishes blasphemers? Is peaceful pluralism really more important than the ideal of Christian Unity?) In order to vindicate its overriding status, a liberal political morality will have to speak directly to illiberal personal ideals, arguing that these are false or less important than competing liberal values, or that they can be mended and made compatible with liberalism.[70]

With such a depiction of nonliberal philosophies of governance, it is difficult to see how anyone could opt for anything but a thoroughly liberal polity, with only liberal virtues informing public discussion.

And yet, as highlighted in the introduction, to opt for illiberal alternatives is exactly what many are doing. Moreover, and more to the point, it is not clear that other theories of virtue, which begin with understandings of what is good for human beings, are opposed to the "freedom to debate, choose, and live one's own way" or collapse into support for "other-worldliness" or religious law. To suggest as much sets up a false dichotomy and rests any argument for the superiority of liberal virtues on this basis.

In fact, some thinkers may be characterized both as liberals, in that they put a premium on freedom and the need to wrestle with pluralism, and as heirs of classical thought, in that they have an interest in the character of the citizenry as conceived through some account of human nature. The American founders are a quintessential, if contested, example. In their recent book, Kody Cooper and Justin Dyer argue the broad continuity of the American founding with the classical and Christian natural law tradition.[71] This includes a requisite teleology and understanding of virtue. Arguably in line with most liberal accounts of constitutionalism, the authors state, "The capacity to maintain social peace and order by accommodating rival visions of the good is, of course, a constitutional virtue."[72] At the same time, they find a thicker basis grounding the liberalism of the American framers, explaining, "Founding era natural rights philosophy began with objective human goods and our duty to protect them, implying that government failure to respect natural rights was an offense against the dignity of human nature itself."[73] The founders' liberalism did not proceed from or pursue neutrality with respect to these questions, nor did the founders feel constrained to begin their line of argument with the particular regime type. Rather, in Cooper and Dyer's telling, underlying the framers' preferred form of government, their understanding of the purpose and scope of government, and their attention to virtue was a human ontology that derived its content from "real goods" according to "the necessities of our nature."[74]

Of course, this is not to say that all the crucial figures of the founding agreed in every way on these matters. However, Cooper and Dyer argue, there was sufficient common ground to consider

the American founding moment as an heir to this long tradition. More to the point of this essay's argument, we see in this account of the political thought of the American founding how attention to human virtue fit, even supported, liberal politics. This was not a matter of mere civic virtue, for example, taking the regime or constitution as the point of departure, but involved propositions about human nature and goodness. Summarizing the classical natural law vision of morality of the founding-era politician James Otis, the authors explain,

> the will is directed toward real goods (the necessities of our nature) and therefore is not *sovereign* in the sense of a power intrinsically indifferent to the good, which confers value through choice. Such a voluntarist and subjectivist view "overturns all morality, and leaves it to every man to do what is right in his own eyes."[75]

Thus, propositions about "real goods" and "the necessities of our nature" undergirded accounts of virtue and justified the very constitution and regime. That these liberal figures could talk about human virtue grounded in teleology, even talk about it as being relevant (and important) to politics as they did, uncovers a path to expanding the contemporary liberal imagination to accommodate such discussion in our own time.

This is not to argue for the necessity of complete agreement concerning human nature or the content of the virtues, such as might be the project of a more civic understanding of virtue whose primary focus is unity. Indeed, some liberal theorists worry that articulating ideas of what constitutes good character in people might start us down the slippery slope of coercing belief in certain metaphysical realities or religious dogma.[76] However, that Cooper and Dyer find substantial ground on which to argue that even the likes of Thomas Jefferson was, in many ways, also heir to the natural law tradition illustrates the sheer breadth of perspectives still possible within classical understandings,[77] let alone this essay's conception of teleological accounts more generally. They explain,

"Although the founders did not embrace liberal neutrality about the good life, they did deny to the civil authority—both federal and state—competence to coerce citizens to accept the state's judgment as to the content and meaning of the doctrines of divine revelation."[78] Far from collapsing into authoritarianism as some contemporary liberals may fear, ample room for heterodoxy remains even when taking the human good as a starting point for politics and virtue.

VII. Addressing Liberal Concerns about Virtue

Some might push back that in its concern with virtue, the classical model is still more authoritarian and less libertarian than more recent versions of liberalism.[79] Indeed, even those who would advocate a return to classical virtue in modern government would likely concede that as characterized by such political philosophers as Isaiah Berlin, for example, ancient liberty is less than attractive.[80] Nevertheless, it is worth making a few distinctions before settling on this conclusion that the classical model, or other models of virtue that posit some sort of teleology, necessarily tend toward authoritarianism.

First, it is worth distinguishing the practice from the philosophy of politics and government. While versions of ancient and medieval society are largely remembered as touching on many matters of private life that we would think to be beyond government's reach today, theorists such as Thomas Aquinas charged lawmakers with recognizing their proper limits of competence and efficacy, that law must "not exceed the power of the lawgiver,"[81] something that the American framers also embraced. As Cooper and Dyer explain, "What is distinctive about the integralist response is its rejection of the classical liberal elements of the founding and its return to medieval Christian forms of polity."[82] In contrast, it is perhaps telling that Thomas Aquinas formulated a harm principle about 600 years before Mill.[83] He explains that law should direct itself, not at private interests or the good of the individual, but at the good of the community.[84] All this is to say that while it is worth assessing both the political thought and actual

politics of a given era, an honest account of both will make clear
that they are not one and the same and may not even necessarily
overlap in substance or merit.

Second, one can distinguish between a general concern with
virtue and human nature from the form that this concern some-
times takes when combined with civic republicanism. While the
former need not have authoritarian consequences, the latter often
does,[85] as it calls on individuals to submit their own private good
(including that of the family and other institutions of civil society)
to the public good. Given the great personal sacrifice that doing
this inevitably entails, it is not difficult to understand why Berlin
might have feared that the adoption of some theory of the good
equips governments to "coerce men in the name of some goal."[86]
Some liberal virtue theorists similarly conflate an appreciation for
human virtue with the civic republican prioritization of the
common good over the private good, so forming a picture of
virtue as more intrusive than it really need be.[87] Galston defines
perfectionism as "the thesis that society should be so arranged as to
maximize the achievement of individual virtue or excellence."[88]
The language of "maximization" can be misleading, however, since
it may be taken to imply that there are few limits on governments
in promoting the good of individuals, that governments can do
whatever they like and in fact expect to make everyone perfectly
good. However, this characterization does not account for limits
that some theories within older traditions (including classical,
Christian, and liberal) acknowledge. This includes the recognition
that government should limit its reach to those issues that bear on
the common good and should hold back from penalizing those acts
that do not transcend some conception of the private.

In addition to the limits on law and government found explicitly
in these older models of government, moreover, one can distinguish
between coercion and simply making judgments that engage more
transparently the question of what is good.[89] Certainly, public policy
cannot but bear on the character of citizens.[90] If a society's goal is to
nurture a virtuous citizenry, then statesmen may well have reason to
be discriminating in how they apply the force of law—for classical

accounts understand virtue as a disposition, suggesting that this character in people ultimately *cannot* be coerced.[91] Fleming and McClain,[92] as well as Corey Brettschneider,[93] themselves acknowledge how the state may encourage their own liberal virtues without resorting to coercive means. If they would in this way have public entities support the character traits and behaviors that facilitate liberal society, it seems their nonauthoritarian methods could apply just as well to those virtues formulated in more teleological terms, independent of the society or regime they happen to inhabit.

In the end, moreover, other institutions are likely to be better teachers of virtue than is government. In this vein, many invoke subsidiarity or presumptive respect for and deference to institutions that are local and closer to the people's daily life. Governments may respect institutions such as the family and churches, for example, because they are likely to have more of a personal interest in helping their members in developing good character and pursuing what is good for them.[94] In these and other ways, we can have a government that gives due regard to virtue and our human good without threatening individual freedom. In comparison, liberal theorists sometimes treat civil society with more suspicion than confidence when it comes to teaching virtue, or they even instrumentalize civil society toward political ends rather than to the teaching of virtue proper. For example, according to Fleming and McClain, "the family can be useful to a political conception of justice as long as it fulfills the tasks of social reproduction and does not run afoul of other political values."[95] Of course, every society will be concerned with its own preservation and, to this extent, concerned with fostering virtues in citizens to that end. The point of this essay is that such civic virtues should not supplant or be beyond the scrutiny of higher inquiry into the human good. However, liberal virtue theory sometimes prescribes the reverse, suggesting, for example, that "a political conception of justice should shape the social world, including the background culture of civil society."[96]

At least some versions of the classical tradition and other human-centric models have a similar respect for liberty and

reason-giving in government as that which the liberal tradition maintains. However, the agnosticism of some liberal virtue theorists regarding what is good for human beings may also be deleterious to certain goals and principles of liberalism and more intrusive in the lives of citizens than some might suspect. For one thing, by not grounding their virtues in a way that will be meaningful outside of a liberal framework, liberal virtue theorists effectively deprive citizens of deep and thorough reasoning in law and politics. Justifications, or public reasons, for legislation and policy are likely to be shallower and, contra liberalism, more subject to majoritarian whims than those grounded more thoroughly and independently in accounts of the human good. Even if that conception is continually subject to debate, the crucial difference is that it takes humanity as its reference point rather than liberalism itself. An external referent is crucial when it comes to shoring up theories of liberal politics as both a theoretical and a practical matter. And as has been suggested in this essay, we do find invocations of such concepts within the history of liberalism, such as the frequent invocations of natural rights and even virtue during the American founding and early republic.

Though the practice of providing justification and reasons for legislation seems to be foundational to liberal government, what we often see in law and public policy is an ad hoc construction of standards of good.[97] Of course, politics in any form is ad hoc and messy, consisting of negotiation and compromise. However, in committing to agnosticism rather than engaging standards of what is good for people, those arguing in the public forum have a great deal of leeway in what arguments are considered acceptable. And indeed, liberal virtue theorists do not necessarily require that reasons concern only rightness and wrongness; rather, they explain a mere point of view may be adequate to bind a people as a matter of law.[98] While such a scenario may align with some majoritarian systems, it would sit in some tension with a government subject to reasons and reasonableness. Perhaps our human good will rarely play an explicit role in a legislature's deliberation and the ensuing law. Still, it seems at least possible that government may be more

cautious and more inclined to justify the reach of its actions, if operating on the understanding that something like the human good may be affected by its legislation. Conversely, the denial of this relationship, between law and the human good, seems to enable greater government recklessness. And while many laws may be innocuous with respect to our pursuit of the good, it is unlikely that they all will be.

Finally, not admitting the possibility for deeper inquiry into the human good in theory may actually increase the amount and reach of legislation in practice. As explained in the foregoing discussion, consideration of the competencies of government and the anticipated effects of law on people's character actually encouraged a certain humility, sobriety, and prudence in some older theories of politics. Indeed, law cannot but shape character, and character cannot but have an impact on the common good. The labels "paternalist" and, when intended pejoratively, "perfectionist" perpetuate the reflexive rejection of this insight, however, potentially to the detriment of modern liberalism itself and its professed ends. For the classical insight that the regime bears not simply on a person's character but also on the human good offers resources and perspective that might make for more effective laws and even reduce the degree to which law is necessary at all. In this way, the classical account and other teleologic models of virtue and government offer us valuable insights about effective and accountable governance.

VIII. Conclusion

Modern liberalism has arguably brought with it many benefits, including more stable peace and rights protections.[99] One must nevertheless view it for what it is, one possible political arrangement among many, and not necessarily a given as we look toward the future. In this light, liberals ought to be prepared to offer thoroughgoing justification for liberal government and politics, for liberal values and virtues. Why and how can liberalism be good for people? This is not to say that liberals must adopt a fixed conception of the ultimate human good, only that they cannot afford to

recoil from searching inquiry into fundamental questions concerning what is good for people, including what constitutes good character. Three decades ago, the liberal virtue theorists began to recognize this insight. However, these theories largely assume a liberal starting point, particularly in the way they assume an ontology of autonomy. Considered from the perspective of contemporary postliberal challenges, these liberal virtue theories fall short.

In contrast with the liberal virtues, other accounts of virtue, such as in the classical teleological school, offer explanation for the virtues in more fundamental terms of the human good. As a result, the classical virtues arguably offer more points of entry for a wider range of people to engage, even if ultimately to disagree. In discussing prudence, for example, rather than focusing on one of the typical liberal virtues such as "critical thinking," we engage more readily in a transtemporal, transpatial conversation about what makes for good people and even good citizens.[100] As Deirdre McCloskey puts it:

> The Western list is paralleled in every ethical tradition from Confucius to the *Mahabharata* and the coyote tales of Native Americans. Such virtues are "elemental" in the precise sense, thoroughly argued by Aquinas, that all other virtues are made up from them, like molecules from physical elements. Honesty, for example is justice and courage in speech, with a dash of temperance.[101]

Such inquiry will not, and is not intended to, bring an end to debate. Indeed, it may well give rise to more debate. It does, however, offer more robust basis on which to debate and carry out politics. It may also serve to change the orientation in some liberal accounts, from taking liberal politics for granted to a renewed urgency to offer more thoroughgoing justification.

Of course, postliberals may or may not respond to such efforts suggested in this essay. For one thing, some on the postliberal right might contest this essay's step of identifying teleological accounts of virtues with the American founding. In particular, some argue

that the American founders exploited this inheritance from classical political thought but that their liberal ontology was ultimately different and could never support the classical virtues for the long term.[102] While clearly relevant to this discussion, this larger debate is beyond the scope of the present essay. However, that some liberals are willing, even eager, to revive discussion of the classical virtues, as well as to admit of an "objective good for humans that is not simply the aggregation of individual opinion,"[103] seems as promising an entrée as any for right postliberals also to engage in the conversation, even if in a limited or qualified manner.

Likewise, some on the progressive left might be skeptical of the suggestion that any classical theories or perspectives from the American founding could assist in furthering the goal of antiracism,[104] beyond, say, the kind of formal equality cemented in the Civil Rights Movement. However, the arguments of some American founders on race and equality, undergirded by teleology, have a potentially convicting quality. Cooper and Dyer explain how James Otis's "teleological anthropology is seamlessly tied to an account of the fundamental political equality of human persons."[105] They go on to quote Otis's condemnation of the slave trade of kidnapped Africans as "the most shocking violation of the law of nature." If nothing else, this framework employed in the arguments of early liberals may offer progressives yet another language in which to voice grievances. Indeed, the underlying ontology cries out for us to take injustice seriously and perhaps even seek more ambitious remedies than hitherto seen.

While greater engagement across ideological lines is a worthy endeavor, this essay is primarily addressed to liberals, its chief goal to argue the need for more thoroughgoing justification in some accounts of liberalism and liberal virtues in particular. Put differently, this essay constitutes yet another reminder that liberalism is a bigger (and older) tent than what neutralist theories offer. Now more than ever, liberals have an interest in harnessing older elements of the tradition that engage in deeper inquiry into human nature. In addition to furnishing a fuller justification for liberalism, such inquiries may even facilitate a more effective politics insofar

as they offer fresh insights into the nature of both the objects and the subjects of governance. The liberal virtues may well offer some such insights, too, and even some basis for dialogue across ideological lines. However, we do even better if the referent for our discussion of virtue, and the beneficiary of government, is human flourishing rather than liberalism itself.

Notes

1. Francis Fukuyama, *Liberalism and Its Discontents* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2022).
2. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981); Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (New York, Cambridge UP, 1998); Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1989); Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).
3. Stephen Macedo, *Liberal Virtues* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990); Stephen Macedo, *Diversity and Distrust* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2000); William Galston, "Defending Liberalism," *American Political Science Review* 76, no. 3 (1982); William Galston, *Liberal Purposes* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991); William Galston, "Liberal Virtues and the Formation of Civic Character," in *Seedbeds of Virtue*, ed. Mary Ann Glendon and David Blankenhorn (Lanham, MD: Madison Books, 1995); Peter Berkowitz, *Virtue and the Making of Modern Liberalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1999); James E. Fleming and Linda C. McClain, *Ordered Liberty: Rights, Responsibilities, and Virtues* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2013).
4. Ibram X. Kendi, *How to Be an Antiracist* (New York: One World, 2019), 22.
5. Kendi, 245.
6. Kendi, 13 (emphasis in original).
7. Patrick J. Deneen, *Regime Change* (New York: Sentinel, 2023), 231.
8. Deneen, 2023, 231.
9. Adrian Vermeule, *Common Good Constitutionalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2022).
10. Both the postliberal left and right, as characterized here, object to neutrality. However, while those on the right maintain an understanding of morality as objective, certain veins of the progressive left reject objectivity in the very choice to foreground identities of groups (i.e., subjects). Crenshaw et al. explain, for example, that critical race theory "rejects the prevailing orthodoxy that scholarship should be or could be 'neutral'

and 'objective.' We believe that legal scholarship about race in America can never be written from a distance of detachment or with an attitude of objectivity" (Kimberlé Crenshaw et al., introduction to *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement* [New York: The New Press, 1996], xiii–xxxii). While they frequently eschew the objective, however, they still posit certain objects or substantive goals to be ascertained through the exercise of political power. And it is on this basis that they do not suffer any claims to neutrality.

11. See, e.g., David Walsh, *Politics of the Person and the Politics of Being* (South Bend, IN: Notre Dame UP, 2015).

12. Kody Cooper and Justin Dyer, *The Classical and Christian Origins of American Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2022); Vincent Phillip Muñoz, *Religious Liberty and the American Founding* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2022), chap. 3.

13. See also Deirdre Nansen McCloskey, *Why Liberalism Works* (New Haven, CT: Yale, UP, 2019).

14. Rawls maintains that such a procedure would lead to his two principles of justice.

15. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1971), chap. 3.

16. John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia UP, 1993), 144.

17. Galston, "Liberal Virtues," 44.

18. Macedo, *Liberal Virtues*, 14.

19. Macedo, 14, 203. However, Macedo's liberal flourishing is not to be confused with the classical understanding of human flourishing, as I discuss in the next section.

20. On this, see also Sotirios Barber, *Welfare and the Constitution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2003).

21. Macedo, *Liberal Virtues*, 37.

22. Macedo, 9.

23. Macedo, 2.

24. Macedo, 3; Stephen Macedo, *Diversity and Distrust* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2000), 49, 85.

25. Macedo, *Liberal Virtues*, 5, 54–55.

26. Macedo, 71–73; Macedo, *Diversity and Distrust*, 125.

27. Macedo, *Liberal Virtues*, 56.

28. Macedo, 54. See also Macedo, *Diversity and Distrust*, x.

29. Macedo, *Liberal Virtues*, 51.

30. Macedo, 52.

31. Macedo, 52. See also Macedo, *Diversity and Distrust*.

32. Macedo, *Liberal Virtues*, 59.

33. Galston, "Liberal Virtues," 39.

34. Galston, 38.

35. Galston, 39.

36. Galston, 42–43.

37. Galston, 41–48.

38. Galston, 48.

39. Galston, 50.

40. Galston, 48–51.

41. Galston, 41.

42. Galston, 43–44.

43. Galston, 44–45.

44. Fleming and McClain, *Ordered Liberty*, 3, 115.

45. Fleming and McClain, 4.

46. Galston, "Liberal Virtues," 41.

47. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 2nd ed., trans. Terrence Irwin (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1999), bk. 1, chaps. 1, 7–10.

48. Aristotle bk. 1, chap. 13, bk. 2, chaps. 1–4; see also Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ*, 2nd ed. (1920), trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, *New Advent*, 2008, I–II, Q. 55, 61.

49. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame UP, 2008), 242.

50. Galston, "Liberal Virtues," 39.

51. G. E. M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33, no. 124 (January 1958).

52. In the course of identifying what they call "subprime virtues," Avramenko and Boyd demonstrate how these transcend many boundaries of time, tradition, and place. Their subprime virtues include truth-telling, promise-keeping, moderation, frugality, foresight, commitment, and judgment (Richard Avramenko and Richard Boyd, "Subprime Virtues: The Moral Dimensions of American Housing and Mortgage Policy," *Perspectives on Politics* 11, no. 1, [2013]: 111–31). Considering this list alongside a list of virtues Patrick Deneen offers in his 2023 book, we see some potential of such virtues to garner consensus even across the liberal-postliberal divide. Deneen states, "In a good society, the goods that are "common" are daily reinforced by the habits and practices of ordinary people. Those habits and practices form the common culture, such as through the virtues of thrift, honesty, and long memory, which in turn foster gratitude and a widespread sense of mutual obligation" (Deneen, *Regime Change*, 230).

53. John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, ed. Elizabeth Rapaport (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1978), 56.
54. Macedo, *Liberal Virtues*, 216.
55. Macedo, 216–18.
56. Macedo, 220.
57. Macedo, 220.
58. Galston, "Liberal Virtues," 49.
59. Galston, 49–50.
60. Galston, 50–51.
61. Galston, 50.
62. Galston, 44.
63. Macedo, *Liberal Virtues*, 5, citing Galston, "Defending Liberalism." For a useful discussion of how Galston's later work takes a kind of Hobbesian turn, see James Bernard Murphy, "From Aristotle to Hobbes: William Galston on Civic Virtue," *Social Theory and Practice* 33, no. 4 (October 2007).
64. Macedo, *Liberal Virtues*, 253.
65. Macedo, 216–18.
66. Galston "Liberal Virtues," 49 (emphasis added).
67. Macedo, *Liberal Virtues*, 75.
68. Macedo, 216.
69. Galston, "Liberal Virtues," 41; Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 436–37.
70. Macedo, *Liberal Virtues*, 60.
71. Cooper and Dyer, *Classical and Christian Origins*.
72. Cooper and Dyer, 176
73. Cooper and Dyer, 233.
74. Cooper and Dyer, 46. Earlier in the book, they describe the "shared background assumptions of man of the framers" that a moral law of human nature "clarifies what constitutes genuine human well-being and thereby helps man to pursue his own happiness, or flourishing, by living a life of virtue" (14).
75. Cooper and Dyer, 46.
76. See also Cooper and Dyer's discussion of John O. McGinnis and Michael B. Rappaport's *Originalism and the Good Constitution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2013) in *Classical and Christian Origins* at 175–77.
77. Cooper and Dyer, chap. 3.
78. Cooper and Dyer, 227.
79. Macedo, *Liberal Virtues*, 98.
80. Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty" (1958), in *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1969).
81. Aquinas I–II, Q. 96, art. 2, 4.

82. Cooper and Dyer, *Classical and Christian Origins*, 224–25.

83. I am grateful to J. Budziszewski for this point.

84. Aquinas I–II, Q. 90.

85. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 237–38.

86. Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," 9.

87. In some ways, the liberal virtue project is closer to this characterization of civic republicanism in that it does take a particular regime as its starting point and makes the preservation of liberal politics its goal. In contrast, in aiming at the good of people rather than the preservation of regimes, classical understandings of human virtues arguably have greater capacity to appreciate the value of the individual.

88. Galston, "Liberal Virtues," 40.

89. J. Budziszewski, "The Illiberal Liberal Religion," in *The Line Through the Heart* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2009), 184.

90. Avramenko and Boyd, "Subprime Virtues."

91. See also Galston, "Liberal Virtues," 44: "Tolerance is fully compatible with the proposition that some ways of life can be known to be superior to others. It rests, rather, on the conviction that the pursuit of the better course should be (and in many cases can only be) the consequence of education or persuasion rather than coercion."

92. Fleming and McClain, *Ordered Liberty*, 166.

93. Corey Brettschneider, *When the State Speaks, What Should It Say?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2016).

94. Fleming and McClain, *Ordered Liberty*, 166.

95. Fleming and McClain, 100.

96. Fleming and McClain, 108.

97. Budziszewski, "The Illiberal Liberal Religion," 178.

98. Macedo, *Liberal Virtues*, 48.

99. Fukuyama, *Liberalism and Its Discontents*; McCloskey, *Why Liberalism Works*.

100. See also Martha Nussbaum, "Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach," in *The Quality of Life*, ed.
Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993).

101. McCloskey, *Why Liberalism Works*, 100.

102. See Patrick Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2018); also see Cooper and Dyer's discussion in *Classical and Christian Origins* at 208.

103. Deneen, *Regime Change*, 228.

104. Kendi, *How to Be an Antiracist*.

105. Cooper and Dyer, *Classical and Christian Origins*, 46.