

SPECIAL ISSUE ARTICLE

An Approach to the Citizens' Capability: Beyond the Dichotomy of Neutralism-Perfectionism in the Theory of the State

Ali Velaei¹  and Seyyed Mohammad Ghari Seyyedfatemi² 

¹ PhD, Department of Public Law, Faculty of Law, Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran.

² Professor, Department of International Law and Human Rights, Faculty of Law, Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran

Corresponding author: Seyyed Mohammad Ghari Seyyedfatemi; Email: M-fatemi@sbu.ac.ir

(Received: 09/05/2025 - Accepted: 27/09/2025)

Extended Abstract

Introduction and Research Problem

Theories of state neutrality and perfectionism are frequently presented in contemporary political philosophy as competing and mutually exclusive approaches to the relationship between political authority and the good life. Advocates of neutrality typically regard governmental restraint among competing conceptions of the good as a requirement of respect for individual autonomy, equality, and democratic legitimacy, whereas defenders of perfectionism argue that the preservation of liberal and democratic institutions themselves depends upon the promotion of certain substantive values and virtues. This article challenges the widespread assumption that neutrality and perfectionism are fundamentally opposed traditions. It argues instead that they are better understood as convergent philosophical approaches whose differences concern primarily the extent and limits of legitimate state intervention.

From this perspective, only the two extremes—strict neutrality and comprehensive perfectionism—are genuinely incompatible. Most contemporary political theories occupy positions somewhere between these

How to Cite: Velaei, A., & Ghari Seyed Fatemi, S. M. (2026). An Approach to the Citizens' Capability: Beyond the Dichotomy of Neutralism-Perfectionism in the Theory of the State. *State Studies*, 12(47), 1-39. <https://doi.org/10.22054/tssq.2026.85745.1662>



State Studies Journal © 2015 by Allameh Tabataba'i University is licensed under Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International.

poles. The central question addressed in this article is therefore whether a political order can remain committed to state neutrality while simultaneously supporting the cultivation of virtue within society. To address this question, the article develops the idea of the capability-fostering state as a virtue-based impartial state. The proposed model seeks to move beyond both the strictly neutral state and comprehensive perfectionism by distinguishing between the virtue of the state and the virtue of society. The argument proceeds from the premise that the primary function of political authority is to expand the conditions under which citizens' capabilities can flourish and their agency can be exercised. In this framework, neutrality is understood not as indifference toward the good but as a political virtue that constrains the manner in which the state pursues public purposes.

Findings and Discussion

The findings of this study are organized around three interrelated dimensions that constitute the normative architecture of the capability-fostering state. First, it examines the institutional virtue of the state. Second, it distinguishes the virtue of the state from the virtue of society. Third, it analyzes the non-coercive means through which the state may promote virtue and foster citizens' capabilities. Together, these three dimensions demonstrate how limited neutrality and moderate perfectionism can coexist within a coherent model of political order.

The Institutional Virtue of the State

The article argues that the institutional virtue of the state is best understood as a form of limited neutrality. Unlike strict theories of neutrality, this conception does not require a complete separation between the right and the good, nor does it demand governmental indifference toward all values. The normative foundations of limited neutrality are identified through four interconnected principles. First, equality of opportunity is required as a condition for the expansion of citizens' capabilities. Second, toleration is understood as recognition of the right to be wrong and as a commitment to respecting reasonable disagreement. Third, autonomy is regarded as a prerequisite for meaningful choice and moral agency. Fourth, republican freedom, understood as freedom from domination and dependence upon the arbitrary will of others, provides the political conditions necessary for the flourishing of human capabilities. Taken together, these principles constitute limited neutrality as an institutional virtue of the state.

The article further argues that the appropriate motivation of the state as a virtuous political institution is reflected in its commitment to neutrality of justification. Political authority should justify laws and policies through publicly accessible reasons articulated in a language available to all citizens. Accordingly, neutrality is located primarily at the level of justification and procedure rather than at the level of outcomes or consequences.

The Virtue of Society and Moderate Perfectionism

Having established the institutional virtue of the state, the article turns to the question of virtue within society. It argues that a distinction must be maintained between the state's obligation to remain impartially structured and society's need for moral and civic virtues. The cultivation of virtue therefore becomes a matter of moderate and indirect perfectionism rather than coercive moral enforcement.

Within this framework, the common good is understood as incorporating a minimal set of shared goods and virtues that emerge through public deliberation, social interaction, and intersubjective exchange of reasons. These values derive their legitimacy not from a comprehensive doctrine but from an overlapping consensus among citizens. The role of the state is to identify these broadly shared goods and to employ them as a basis for public policy.

The article emphasizes that moderate perfectionism differs fundamentally from comprehensive perfectionism. It is non-coercive, pluralistic, democratic, and society-centered. Rather than imposing a single conception of the good, it permits the civic promotion of moral ideals rooted in the shared historical and cultural traditions of a political community. Because it relies upon a minimal and relatively thin conception of the common good, it remains compatible with a significant degree of state neutrality.

Non-Coercive Promotion and Capability Expansion

A central claim of the article is that the promotion of virtue need not take coercive forms. Promotion, recommendation, encouragement, education, and persuasion differ fundamentally from threats, legal compulsion, and punitive enforcement. The most important criterion for evaluating autonomy is whether available and possible options remain open to choice. Since persuasive measures do not remove alternatives or make decisions on behalf of citizens, they need not undermine autonomy.

The article argues that the state may legitimately undertake positive measures aimed at removing obstacles to human flourishing and expanding citizens' capabilities. Such measures are justified insofar as they create the social and institutional conditions necessary for agency, autonomy, and expansion of capability. The article further argues that republican political theory reinforces this position. While republicanism rejects strict state neutrality and emphasizes the relationship between political institutions and civic virtue, it does not require coercive moral regulation. The proposed model therefore rejects punitive and compulsory approaches to virtue promotion. Instead, state intervention should be limited to those minimal, thin, shared, and broadly accepted virtues that command public agreement.

Conclusion

The article concludes that neutrality and perfectionism need not be regarded as mutually exclusive ideals of political order. Its central contribution lies in the distinction between the virtue of state and the virtue of society, which makes it possible to reconcile limited neutrality with moderate perfectionism. The former is expressed through limited neutrality as an institutional virtue, grounded in equality of opportunity, toleration, autonomy, republican freedom, and neutrality of justification. The latter may be advanced through a moderate and indirect form of perfectionism that relies on persuasion, encouragement, and civic promotion rather than coercion.

The capability-fostering state, conceived as a virtue-based impartial state, provides a framework within which citizens' capabilities can flourish while preserving respect for pluralism and individual agency. Such a state need not remain indifferent to virtue, yet it confines itself to the persuasive promotion of a minimal set of shared goods capable of commanding overlapping consensus. Intervention is restricted to the least costly and least intrusive means necessary to achieve legitimate public objectives, while any expansion of state burdens requires political justification and democratic support.

The coexistence of limited neutrality and moderate perfectionism therefore offers a theoretically coherent alternative to both strict neutrality and comprehensive perfectionism. By refining the concepts of neutrality and virtue and assigning each its proper sphere, the proposed model seeks to preserve the strengths of both approaches while mitigating the limitations associated with their independent forms.

Keywords: Capability, Institutional Virtue, Limited Neutrality, Moderate Perfectionism, Overlapping Consensus.

Introduction

Advocates of state neutrality regard this approach as intrinsically connected with democracy and with respect for individual rights and personal autonomy, whereas they view perfectionism as a potential source of authoritarianism, paternalism, and oppression. By contrast, proponents of perfectionism maintain that the preservation of liberalism and democracy itself depends upon a perfectionist foundation. The divergence between these two approaches is less substantive than a matter of degree, since government intervention beyond a certain threshold transforms respect for autonomy into paternalism. It should also be emphasized that there is no necessary correspondence between a “neutral state” and a “minimal state”, nor between a “perfectionist state” and a “maximal state”. While contemporary liberals have moved beyond the minimalist *night-watchman state*, they nevertheless continue to uphold the liberal ideal of state neutrality, even as they endorse a more active role for the state (Larmore, 1987: 44). Rather than defending a minimal state, they advocate a limited state (Gray, 2024: 112). Neutrality and perfectionism should therefore be understood as convergent philosophical ideals whose difference is primarily one of degree rather than kind. Only the two extremes, strict neutrality and comprehensive perfectionism, are mutually incompatible, whereas most contemporary political theorists occupy positions somewhere between these poles (Khakbaz, 2024: 155–159).

For example, Wall seeks a middle path by advancing the ideas of limited neutrality and liberal perfectionism (Khakbaz, 2024: 109). The strategy of liberal perfectionism consists in the indirect moral promotion and the indirect cultivation of virtue: the state creates the necessary conditions for human flourishing and removes obstacles to it, after which it withdraws from further intervention so as to avoid the imposition of particular values and the suppression of belief (Harrison, 2000: 16). Likewise, drawing upon an Aristotelian conception of human flourishing, Hurka develops the theory of maximizing consequentialist perfectionism as an attempt to reconcile liberalism with perfectionism. Consequentialist perfectionism gives priority to the good over the right and evaluates actions according to the amount of good they produce. Thus, maximizing consequentialist perfectionism assigns equal moral concern to the promotion of the greatest possible human perfection across all persons and all times (Hurka, 1993: 55–57). A reflective assessment of the respective limitations of neutrality and perfectionism therefore calls for identifying an optimal position between these two perspectives and for developing an integrative model that rests upon suitably qualified premises while maintaining theoretical coherence.

Against this background, the present article seeks to examine the constituent elements of a virtue-based impartial state as a form of political authority that fosters citizens' capabilities and facilitates the conditions for their flourishing. The impetus for this inquiry arises, in particular, from the experience of governance in contemporary Iran since the Constitutional Revolution. The central question is whether such a hybrid model, despite its apparent paradoxical character at first glance, can retain both theoretical coherence and practical feasibility and, if so, what role it may play in cultivating virtue within the public sphere, as well as through which means and methods such a role may be exercised.¹

This article proceeds from the premise that the primary function of the state is to expand the conditions under which citizens' capabilities can flourish and their well-being can be advanced. The first step toward realizing this objective is the recognition of the distinctive capabilities of each citizen. If the ultimate purpose of the state is understood as the expansion of citizens' capabilities and the safeguarding of their agency, then neutrality may, in a general sense, be regarded as a political virtue of the state. Such a position, however, does not entail acceptance of a strict separation between the right and the good, nor does it imply state indifference toward the good, as is characteristic of strong forms of neutrality. Since the right and the good are not wholly unrelated, the state must, in pursuing its proper ends, assume a non-coercive role in promoting a thin conception of the common good shared by members of society. Accordingly, the article seeks to identify an optimal position between neutrality and perfectionism. More fundamentally, the article argues that the primary political virtue of the state should be understood not as neutrality in its strict liberal sense, nor as perfectionist commitment to a particular conception of the good, but as institutional impartiality. Institutional impartiality refers to a mode of political authority that remains impartial among citizens as free and equal agents while retaining the capacity to support a limited set of shared goods necessary for the expansion of human capabilities. In this respect, institutional impartiality provides the normative foundation of the capability-fostering state and offers a conceptual framework through which the longstanding opposition between neutrality and perfectionism can be reconsidered.

¹ It should be noted that the present study examines the dimensions of this model of the state exclusively from a theoretical and non-empirical perspective, without engaging its sociological aspects. Consequently, the proposed model is not confined to either Iranian society or Western societies, although the concern motivating its formulation arises from the circumstances of contemporary Iran.

By distinguishing between the state's institutional virtue and the virtuousness of society, it examines the place of limited neutrality as a political virtue of the state, together with the application of a moderate and indirect form of perfectionism and the state's promotional role in fostering virtue within society, all within the framework of an integrated model of political authority. By moderate perfectionism in the political sphere, this article refers to a form of perfectionism that is non-coercive, mixed, pluralistic, society-centered, and democratic. More specifically, the distinction between coercive and non-coercive perfectionism concerns the means through which perfectionist objectives are pursued. Legal, security, and judicial instruments, particularly those involving criminalization, may be regarded as coercive, whereas fiscal, financial, educational, and media-based instruments may be considered non-coercive. The distinction between pure perfectionism and mixed perfectionism lies in the relative weight accorded to the realization of the good life in comparison with other values. In pluralistic perfectionism, there exist multiple valuable ways of life, and the state is expected to promote this diversity of worthwhile forms of living. By contrast, monistic perfectionism maintains that there is only one correct conception of the good worthy of public promotion (Caney, 1991: 467). Likewise, whereas state-centered perfectionism takes the state as the primary agent in the pursuit of the good life, society-centered perfectionism assigns the principal role in the promotion of the good to civil society. The critiques advanced thus far have been directed primarily at state-centered forms of perfectionism. Finally, the criterion distinguishing democratic perfectionism from non-democratic perfectionism is the extent to which perfectionist policies and institutions remain consistent with democratic procedures and norms (Rasekh, 2011: 59–76).

Furthermore, a synthesis of neutrality and perfectionism makes it possible to formulate the following conception of limited neutrality: if two or more ideals are valuable for those living within a particular political community, if each of these ideals enjoys support within that community, and if no rational basis exists for ranking them as superior or inferior to one another, then, insofar as the state's aim is to promote the good within that political community, it ought to remain neutral among them in extending its support (Wall, 2010: 232–256; Raz, 1986: 133). Moreover, the conception of limited neutrality defended in this article rejects neutrality with respect to effects and consequences, while endorsing neutrality in matters of justification and procedure. It further confines neutrality of aim to constitutional essentials and basic principles of justice, as well as to genuinely contested questions within society,

namely, matters concerning which reasonable disagreement is both persistent and clearly evident.

In order to address the central question of this study and to formulate the constituent elements of the proposed virtue-based impartial state as a capability-fostering state, the article first explicates the notion of the state's institutional virtue, together with its justificatory foundations and normative requirements. It then seeks to justify the state's role in promoting social, civic, and liberal virtues. Subsequently, attention is directed to the manner in which a desirable framework and a minimal list of virtues and shared goods may be identified through public deliberation and an overlapping consensus among citizens. The discussion then turns to the use of various persuasive and non-coercive instruments available to the state for advancing this framework. Finally, the article argues that the state's most important role is to create the conditions necessary for the flourishing of citizens' capabilities. Accordingly, state intervention is reduced to the minimum level that is both necessary and effective for the realization of this purpose, thereby ensuring that the goal of fostering a virtuous society remains compatible with the requirements of a virtuous state, most notably, its institutional impartiality. So, the central claim of the article is that institutional impartiality, rather than strict neutrality, provides the most appropriate normative standard for evaluating the virtue of political institutions in pluralistic societies.

Limited Neutrality as an Institutional Virtue of the State

The concept of virtue denotes a form of excellence that becomes embodied in a stable disposition or enduring trait and thereby shapes conduct. The nature of virtue varies depending on whether the agent in question is a natural person or a juridical person, as well as according to the motives and ends that guide action. Institutional virtues may be defined as the habits, practices, and policies that enable a social organization to perform its functions more effectively (Cordell, 2010: 135). The cultivation of individual virtues likewise depends upon structural and social conditions characterized by virtue-supporting institutions and relationships, and states play an important role in creating an appropriate environment and facilitating the development of virtue (Khodaparast, 2019:1–4). Moreover, the stable dispositions characteristic of juridical persons may be manifested in organizational culture, while, in the case of the state, they are reflected in its administrative bureaucracy. Such institutional virtues are not independent of the virtues of public officials, whose individual moral qualities contribute to the realization of the institution's foundational virtues.

This article does not attribute virtue to the state in the same sense that virtue is attributed to individual moral agents. Whereas personal virtues are character traits embodied in the dispositions of natural persons, institutional virtues should be understood not as psychological dispositions, but as enduring normative characteristics embodied in constitutional arrangements, public institutions, administrative practices, institutional procedures, organizational culture, and patterns of public justification. Unlike natural persons, the state does not possess beliefs, emotions, or character traits in the ordinary sense. It may nevertheless be described as virtuous insofar as its institutions exhibit stable normative dispositions that guide the exercise of public power. Among the various virtues that may be attributed to political institutions, the present article argues that institutional impartiality constitutes the primary virtue of the state because it governs the manner in which public authority relates to citizens as free and equal persons. As a juridical and political institution, the state manifests such dispositions through the manner in which it exercises authority, distributes opportunities, responds to disagreement, and justifies collective decisions. Institutional virtues are therefore expressed in the regular and systematic operation of political structures rather than in personal character. Correspondingly, neutrality of justification provides the normative orientation that guides public reasoning and political decision-making. The virtue of the state thus lies not in possessing moral character, but in embodying institutional arrangements and justificatory practices that reliably support citizens' agency, capability expansion, and freedom from domination.

The virtue of justice occupies a central place both in political philosophy, where it is generally understood as an institutional virtue, and in virtue ethics, where it is regarded as an individual virtue. Different accounts of the relationship between these two dimensions' assign priorities either to individual virtue or to institutional virtue. In what may be termed a compositional conception, individual virtue is primary and institutional virtue is defined in relation to it. On LeBar's view, a just society is composed of just individuals, and institutions and public rules are designed so as to sustain just relations among them. By contrast, in the structural conception associated with Rawls, the primary focus is on just institutions and a just basic structure, while the duties and obligations of individuals are defined in relation to those institutions. In what Slote characterizes as an analogical conception, individual virtue remains fundamental and institutional virtue is understood by analogy with it, although institutional justice does not require that all members of society themselves be just (Huang, 2020: 277–294).

Just as Rawls regards justice as the first virtue of social institutions (Rawls, 1971: 3) and Dworkin identifies equality as the sovereign virtue (Dworkin, 2000: 1), neutrality may likewise be understood as the most important virtue of the state as a political and social institution, insofar as it constitutes a requirement of justice grounded in the equal standing of citizens. According to prevailing accounts in the literature on virtue ethics, assessing the virtue of the state requires attention to two considerations: its purpose (or function) and its motivation. The state's task is the peaceful governance of collective human life, and its purpose or function is the promotion of the common good. Despite their disagreements concerning the content and specification of the common good, competing approaches in political philosophy have generally not disputed this fundamental function of the state (Rasekh, 2015: 89–96). Any conception of the common good, when articulated as a function of the state, gives rise to a corresponding political virtue.

If one such specification of the common good is understood as the fostering of citizens' capabilities and the safeguarding of their agency, it requires the establishment of inclusive conditions for citizens' participation in public decision-making, together with the adoption of certain normative commitments, including equality of opportunity as a condition of capability expansion, toleration as recognition of the right to be wrong, autonomy as a prerequisite for meaningful choice, and republican freedom as non-domination as a condition for the flourishing of human capabilities. These commitments and presuppositions, in turn, require acceptance of limited neutrality as an institutional virtue that culminates in state impartiality. Alongside this purpose, the appropriate motivating principle that renders the state, as a juridical person, virtuous consists in adherence to neutrality of justification and the provision of impartial reasons by an institution whose role is to serve as an arbiter among citizens. The following discussion briefly elaborates upon these claims.

Habermas, who characterizes the social order of the present age as a "post-secular society", remains committed to Rawls's "idea of public reason" while advancing what he calls "the institutional translation proviso". According to his view, religiously grounded political claims must be translated from the language of a religious community into a public language that is secular in character and neutrally accessible to all citizens. Only then can such claims attain political legitimacy and become subject to the judgment of public reason. At the same time, Habermas maintains that the burden of translation does not rest solely upon religious citizens. Citizens holding secular worldviews are likewise expected to

participate in this process of mutual translation rather than treating religion as inherently incompatible with public deliberation or engaging in a confrontational stance toward it (Habermas, 2008: 138). According to the principle of secular justification, any norm or rule that cannot be justified in a neutral manner reflects a situation in which one party has imposed its will upon another (Habermas, 2008: 114–147). Nevertheless, religious citizens may face a form of cognitive dishonesty if they are required to invoke public reasons merely to support reasons that they fundamentally regard as religious. Moreover, there is no guarantee that appropriate secular reasons will always be available. The identity-related tensions generated by such restrictions may lead many believers to reject any sharp separation between their public-political selves and their private-religious selves. In the absence of publicly acceptable arguments corresponding to their convictions, they may be driven toward a form of self-censorship and therefore be prevented from participating in the public sphere on equal terms with secular citizens.

A liberal state committed to protecting diverse religious ways of life should therefore relieve religious citizens of the burden of strictly separating secular and religious reasons in public discourse, particularly when such a separation is experienced as an intrusion upon their personal identity. The separation of the public from the private, the political from the ethical, and the secular from the religious, or, in other words, the exclusion of religion from the public sphere, amounts in practice to the exclusion of a portion of the citizenry from participation in public affairs (Zarei, 2018: 90). Habermas's model of secular translation is not addressed equally to all citizens; rather, it is directed primarily toward state officials and institutional actors. Religious citizens may therefore acknowledge the institutional translation proviso without being compelled to divide their identity into distinct public and private spheres when participating in public discourse. They should be permitted to express and justify their convictions in the informal public sphere through religious language whenever they are unable to formulate an adequate secular translation of those convictions (Greenawalt, 2003: 275). Once such claims enter the legislative process, however, they must be translated into secular language and expressed in terms of a freestanding political conception that can reasonably be accepted by all citizens.

It should be noted that Habermas does not regard the translation of religious convictions into secular reasons as giving rise to cognitive dishonesty or as threatening the existential integrity of religious citizens, since he assumes that the cognitive foundations of public reason are shared by all participants. He accordingly proposes a two-track model of

democracy, consisting of two distinct yet interconnected spheres: an active informal public sphere and an institutional sphere encompassing parliaments, courts, ministries, and administrative agencies (Habermas, 2008: 130). By distinguishing between “the context of discovery” (the stage of political articulation and proposal) and “the context of public justification”, this model permits the use of religious reasons in the initial formation and articulation of political claims, while requiring appeal to public reason when those claims are subject to collective judgment and legal justification. In this way, religion may retain an active civic presence within political society, and forms of governance inspired by transcendent moral sources, without relying upon a legalistic or scripturalist conception of religious law, may contribute valuable resources to existing secular models of governance.

On the other hand, state neutrality is often regarded as a product of conditions of social diversity and pluralism, as well as of toleration and respect for citizens. Raz, however, draws attention to two important logical gaps and denies that any necessary connection exists between the concepts involved. The first is the gap between “moral pluralism” and “state neutrality”; the second is the gap between “perfectionist political action” and “the coercive imposition of a controversial way of life” (Raz, 1986: 396). It has often been assumed that recognition of moral pluralism necessarily entails acceptance of state neutrality. Raz challenged this assumption by formulating a perfectionist political morality that remains compatible with moral pluralism. Likewise, many perfectionist policies neither impose controversial conceptions of the good nor rely upon coercive means; rather, they employ promotional or encouraging measures in support of genuinely valuable forms of life. For this reason, Raz argues that framing the debate as a choice between a neutral state and a state that coercively imposes a controversial way of life is misleading. Moral pluralism appears to require a form of limited neutrality, one that is incompatible with coercive and perfectionist imposition, yet it does not establish the case for strict neutrality.

Similarly, respect for persons as a criterion for assessing the legitimacy of state action is accepted by both perfectionists and their critics. The disagreement concerns the meaning of respect itself. According to one interpretation, the state is required to respect citizens only as rational agents and bears no obligation to respect beliefs that may be mistaken and subject to repeated revision. Such an approach, however, may be seen as implying that some citizens are regarded as less worthy or that they are not treated as equals (Nussbaum, 2011: 22). Moreover, if respect for persons is understood as respect for citizens’ rational

capacities and their ability to assess and revise their conception of the good, and if the state is able to justify, through sound public reasons, its support for a particular conception of the good, then such a view would not be consistent with principles of neutrality (Wall, 2021). Toleration, moreover, does not require equal esteem for all beliefs or the assumption that every view is equally valuable. Rather, it presupposes disagreement and criticism with respect to beliefs, while maintaining respect for those who hold them. Without embracing skepticism or relativism, there is no basis for claiming that all ways of life possess equal value, although every way of life may be valuable, at least from the standpoint of the person who pursues it. Respect for beliefs is not something that can reasonably be expected to be distributed equally among all views. Respect for persons, by contrast, consists in acknowledging that others possess the capacity to form justified beliefs from their own perspective, and thus amounts to respect for their autonomy (Larmore, 1987: 64).

By distinguishing between the claim that some human beings possess greater intrinsic worth than others and the claim that some ways of life are intrinsically superior to others, Haksar argues that only the former is incompatible with the requirements of toleration and equal respect for citizens. He defends the latter position and maintains that the state, while tolerating comparatively less valuable ways of life, may nevertheless discourage them. Put differently, the claim that some ways of life are intrinsically more valuable than others, does not imply that some individuals are of less moral worth, are entitled to less respect, or may justifiably have their interests subordinated to those of others. Haksar therefore rejects the ideal of strict state neutrality, regarding it as incompatible with moral equality, and instead defends a form of non-consequentialist perfectionism. On this view, one may affirm the intrinsic superiority of certain ways of life without attributing superior worth to some individuals or denying the state's equal respect for all citizens (Haksar, 1979: 14, 284, 297). Accordingly, the state should possess a system of priorities that enables it, in light of the social and economic structure of a society as well as its cultural and historical context, to identify those principles and values that are most conducive to the flourishing and well-being of the community.

It is worth noting that the conception of toleration endorsed by liberals encompasses freedom of individual conscience and safeguards the right of persons to dissent from the beliefs and practices of their own groups. In this sense, liberals commonly regard toleration and autonomy as two sides of the same coin (Kymlicka, 2017: 316–317). Wall, however, defends a perfectionist account of toleration grounded in the assumption

that some ways of life are objectively superior to others. The central insight of his approach is that toleration of what is bad may, under certain circumstances, be a condition for showing proper respect toward what is good. According to Wall's basic argument, we have reasons to respect, that is, not to interfere with, obstruct, or suppress, actions and ways of life that are valuable overall. Actions and ways of life are valuable overall when their valuable features outweigh any disvaluable (that is, value-diminishing) features they may possess. Some actions and ways of life that are valuable overall are inseparably bound up with features that are, considered in themselves, genuinely valueless. Consequently, we may have reasons to respect certain disvaluable features when they are inextricably connected to actions and ways of life that are valuable overall (Wall, 2003: 238–239). By implication, if a way of life possesses no valuable features whatsoever, or if its disvaluable features decisively outweigh its valuable ones, there is no reason to extend toleration toward it. For this reason, it becomes necessary to broaden the otherwise narrow scope of toleration by providing a plausible account of the indirect respect owed to what is genuinely valuable. According to Wall's extended argument, members of society have reasons to preserve and cultivate a social morality of restraint with respect to practices and beliefs they regard as valueless. This optimal social morality, which may vary across societies, promotes respect for what is valuable to the greatest extent possible. Moreover, in the absence of countervailing considerations, sustaining and advancing such an optimal social morality may sometimes require members of society to show restraint toward practices and beliefs that they themselves regard as valueless (Wall, 2003: 242–243).

The Role of the State in Promoting Civic and Liberal Virtues

A number of liberal theorists have emphasized the necessity of cultivating and promoting certain intellectual and civic virtues within a liberal state. From their perspective, liberalism itself rests upon a set of normative presuppositions and cannot function effectively or endure over time without certain dispositions, character traits, and intellectual virtues among both citizens and political leaders (Berkowitz, 1999: 71–72). The Reclamation of Virtue approach criticizes the exclusion and erosion of virtue from political practice, especially within liberal-democratic regimes. According to some proponents of liberal virtue cultivation, the structure of a liberal society can promote such political virtues as justice, fairness, and equality, strengthen neutrality, and create common ground for agreement among citizens who hold diverse conceptions of the good, all without violating individual rights and liberties (Tütüncü, 2013: 42).

Even if the liberal state refrains from directly cultivating virtue or shaping citizens' character, it must nevertheless provide space for certain virtues that are regarded as essential to the preservation of liberalism and cannot remain indifferent to the role that virtue plays in peacekeeping and safeguarding individual rights (Berkowitz, 1999: 7).

Macedo argues that although liberalism accepts the plurality of ends, it is not value-neutral. He identifies a range of virtues that enable individuals to pursue a wide variety of self-chosen ends and contends that a liberal state may legitimately cultivate these virtues, and encourage their internalization by citizens, and thereby contribute to the preservation of liberal institutions (Macedo, 1990: 98, 251). Accordingly, the liberal state should not be confined merely to prescribing and enforcing laws, for without civic virtue there can be no guarantee of respect for rights, liberties, and the rule of law, and the absence of such virtue ultimately threatens democratic order itself (Boot, 2017: 156–157). Civic virtues, insofar as they are compatible with state neutrality, dispose citizens to subordinate narrowly private interests to the common good of the political community. It is also noteworthy that the public sphere functions as an informal school of civic virtue and serves to cultivate social solidarity. Yet when significant inequalities and class divisions emerge, affluent citizens often withdraw from public services and common spaces, thereby undermining one of the principal social settings in which civic virtues are learned and sustained.

For a liberal state to secure its own stability and flourishing, liberal values must be internalized by its citizens, and the most effective means of achieving this objective is the promotion of liberal virtues (Macedo, 1990: 2–5). Advocates of liberal virtues do not seek to construct a political theory grounded entirely in virtue ethics; rather, they focus on those character traits that enable citizens and liberal societies to flourish (Cordell, 2010: 50). To be sure, many liberal theorists leave little room for an active governmental role in the formation of virtue, including civic virtue, because they believe that such involvement would jeopardize state neutrality. Kant's and Rawls's opposition to the Aristotelian conception of justice stems in part from the concern that when law aims at cultivating good character and endorses a particular conception of the good life, it may leave insufficient room for freedom (Sandel, 2017: 241). Yet if, under the principle of strict neutrality, the state is prohibited from participating in the cultivation of virtue, it will be unable to foster the dispositions necessary for the stability of a political society. From this perspective, some degree of state involvement in character formation appears unavoidable, and limiting the legitimate scope of state action

solely to the regulation of the basic structure cannot be fully justified. Consequently, neither strict neutrality nor a narrowly conceived understanding of liberal neutrality can be fully sustained. At the same time, because projects of character formation have often been associated with authoritarian regimes, any program aimed at cultivating civic virtue must carefully distance itself from that legacy. The state may adopt measures to promote civic virtue, but it should refrain from shaping citizens' personal virtues through the imposition of a particular moral or religious doctrine, thereby preserving an important dimension of state neutrality (Boot, 2017: 157–158).

On this view, the state may legitimately concern itself with the virtues of its citizens so long as the purpose of cultivating and promoting civic virtue is not to impose a particular conception of the good life or a comprehensive religious or moral doctrine governing personal virtue, but rather to protect the stability of the political community and safeguard individual rights and freedoms. Such a position is compatible with limited neutrality, or what may also be described as a more moderate conception of neutrality, rather than with strict neutrality (Boot, 2017: 161–164). The cultivation of civic virtues provides a firmer foundation for the protection of individual rights, whereas approaches that insist upon strict neutrality while entirely rejecting the state's role in promoting civic virtue leave justice and individual rights more vulnerable (Mirzazadeh, 2023: 297). Accordingly, the state may promote civic virtue insofar as it contributes to being a good citizen, while refraining from promoting personal virtue or attempting to shape citizens into morally good persons according to a particular substantive ideal.

Rawls, despite being a leading defender of liberal neutrality, acknowledges the necessity of a democratic state's role in cultivating political virtues, that is, those virtues that define the ideal of good citizenship in a democratic society. In his view, although political liberalism seeks a shared basis of social cooperation and remains neutral in its aims with respect to competing comprehensive doctrines, it may nevertheless affirm the superiority of certain forms of moral character and encourage specific virtues such as fair social cooperation, civility and toleration, reasonableness, and fairness. At the same time, political virtues that characterize the good democratic citizen must be distinguished from virtues that define particular ways of life and belong to comprehensive religious or philosophical doctrines, from virtues associated with the ideals of various associations such as churches, universities, professional guilds, and voluntary groups, and from virtues governing family

relationships and interpersonal conduct more generally (Rawls, 1971: 194).

Rawls thus recognizes the inadequacy of a strict conception of liberal neutrality that would prohibit the state from playing any role whatsoever in the cultivation of citizens' virtues. He develops an account of those virtues that are both necessary for and compatible with life in a liberal polity, and that contribute to the preservation of liberal institutions and practices (Cordell, 2010: 49). However, one criticism often directed at Rawls is that within his account of political liberalism he does not provide a sufficiently developed conception of civic virtue, nor does he offer a detailed account of the character traits that distinguish the good or virtuous citizen. Nevertheless, Rawls maintains that although political liberalism is neutral, it may still endorse and foster certain forms of moral character (Hartley, 2014: 421). An important point of contrast with perfectionist accounts of civic virtue is that, for political liberals, civic virtues possess an instrumental value confined to the political domain. Liberal justice requires a critical threshold at which a sufficient number of citizens possess civic virtues to a sufficient degree. Consequently, from the liberal perspective, the virtues of citizenship derive much of their significance from their role in sustaining just institutions (Kymlicka, 2017: 394).

Classical liberals, on the other hand, maintained that liberal democracy could function effectively through institutional mechanisms and systems of checks and balances, even in the absence of citizens possessing particularly elevated moral virtues. Over time, however, it became increasingly apparent that institutional arrangements alone are insufficient to align private interests with public purposes and that a certain level of civic virtue is indispensable (Galston, 1991: 217; Macedo, 1990: 138). Accordingly, attention must be directed not only to the basic structure of society, its decision-making procedures, and its social institutions, but also to the character traits and dispositions of the citizens who operate within those institutions (Sandel, 1996: 305). Put differently, just as virtuous individuals are often ineffective within defective institutions, well-designed institutions cannot fully realize their purposes when occupied by citizens lacking the requisite virtues. Theories of citizenship may therefore be understood as a necessary complement to theories of institutional justice (Kymlicka, 2017: 386). From this perspective, one must speak of a more virtue-oriented form of liberalism in which attention is paid not only to "how government is conducted" but also to "who governs", so that political power is not entrusted to the base or unworthy. Otherwise, even the world's greatest democracies may come

to exemplify political decline. Exclusive reliance on either virtuous individuals or just institutions is problematic; each must complement the other. This is especially true where public officials exercise discretionary powers. In such circumstances, it is insufficient merely to establish democratic, transparent, and fair institutional procedures; equal attention must be given to ensuring that those procedures are implemented by persons possessing the relevant civic and moral virtues.

Public Deliberation and Overlapping Consensus: Toward a Minimal List of Shared Goods

From one perspective, public goods and perfectionist goods may be distinguished from their respective counterparts. Non-perfectionist public goods, such as education and healthcare, are directed toward the common benefit of all citizens and are typically supported through public funding in order to secure fair opportunities for everyone. Perfectionist public goods, by contrast, such as the arts and sports, primarily serve the interests of certain groups yet may also receive public subsidies, even though equal opportunity and access to a sufficiently broad range of valuable options might arguably be secured without such support. One may likewise distinguish perfectionist private goods, such as travel, visiting museums, or dining in restaurants, from non-perfectionist private goods, such as love, friendship, and trust (Franken, 2016: 58). According to Rawls, state support for public goods such as the arts is justified and legitimate only if it accords with the principles of justice, if the market is unable to make such goods adequately available to citizens, and if there exists a broad public consensus both regarding the value of these goods and regarding the manner in which they are supported through taxpayers' resources. In addition, several further conditions must be satisfied for liberal state support of the arts to be justified: the fair distribution of non-perfectionist goods, openness to subsidizing other perfectionist goods, the positive contribution of state support to equality of opportunity and autonomy, the preservation of citizens' freedom of choice, broad public access to the relevant goods, the absence of value judgments favoring particular conceptions of the good, and adherence to neutrality in public justification (Franken, 2016: 56–68).

If certain values are shared by all conceptions of the good, or function as presuppositions of those conceptions, and if appeal to such values is necessary for the realization of the good, then state support for them raises no difficulty (Weinstock, 1999: 55). In this respect, "Towards a Global Ethic: An Initial Declaration", for example, may be regarded as expressing a set of moral commitments shared across diverse schools of

thought, ideologies, and moral and religious traditions, and thus as a minimal catalogue of shared goods. Nevertheless, disagreement typically arises concerning the ranking of values and their relative priority. On a more radical view, even though smoking contributes to cancer and the failure to wear helmets or seat belts exposes citizens to serious risks, the state may not be justified in restricting such conduct if pleasure and freedom of choice occupy a higher position within a society's hierarchy of values (Rokeach, 1973: 110). Consequently, public decision-making cannot avoid taking account of citizens' views concerning the ordering and relative importance of values within a given society, for political judgment inevitably requires value trade-offs among competing goods and legitimate social objectives. No public decision can be made without, in some justified manner, preferring one value over another. Rather than imposing a particular conception of common goods or privileging their own ranking of values, policymakers ought to identify the overlapping understanding of public and shared goods that emerge among competing social and political perspectives and make that understanding the basis of public policy (Weinstock, 1999: 47).

A conception of the common good is likewise present within liberal political thought. Rawls's primary goods constitute a shared foundation among citizens and represent a common conception of the good that is essential to the realization of justice and therefore may legitimately be promoted and protected by government. Defenders of neutrality generally maintain that identifying a politically appropriate shared conception of the good requires the recognition of a set of broadly common primary goods (Lecce, 2008: 21). On this view, Rawlsian primary goods are those goods that every rational person, situated behind the veil of ignorance and regardless of his or her conception of the good, would want to possess in the greatest possible measure. Rawls maintains that intrinsic values, as perfectionist values, are grounded in contested conceptions of the good. Since such conceptions are typically subject to reasonable disagreement in a pluralistic society, the state should remain neutral among competing views. Nagel, by contrast, argues that some things are intrinsically valuable and that reasonable persons can be expected to agree on these legitimate ends. Accordingly, the state may justifiably employ public resources and institutions to promote them (Nagel, 2020: 85).

Rawls's political conception of justice, as a freestanding political conception, seeks to identify a list of primary goods and to achieve an overlapping consensus by drawing upon the fundamental ideas of free and equal citizens and a democratic society (Rawls, 2014: 123). Although Rawls rejects comprehensive doctrines as a basis for the exercise of state

power, he does not regard a political conception of the good as incompatible with neutrality. To explain the nature of such goods, he relies upon a “thin theory of the good”, notwithstanding the fact that reasonable persons typically hold more comprehensive or “thick conceptions of the good”. It should be noted that Rawls’s theory rests upon a distinction between the right and the good; yet the concept of right cannot be specified without some orientation toward the good. Since a complete separation between right and good is impossible, the solution must be sought in distinguishing between two levels of politics: politics informed by the thick dimension of moral principles and politics informed by their thin dimension, or, in Rawlsian terms, between the rational and the reasonable. Politics grounded in the thick dimension is concerned with the rational and therefore with questions regarding the validity of particular ways of life and competing conceptions of the good. Politics grounded in the thin dimension, by contrast, is directed toward regulating political relations among communities and societies that embrace diverse ways of life and distinct forms of rationality, and it is at this level that common ground may be found. The thick and thin dimensions, however, cannot be understood in isolation from one another; every moral value possesses both a thin and a thick aspect. A less expansive conception of the good is therefore more compatible with pluralism and with liberal neutrality (Rogers, 2020: 426).

According to Rawls, virtues such as toleration, political cooperation, reasonableness, and a sense of fairness are among those virtues that generate significant public benefits when they become widely established within society. Some perfectionist theorists, likewise, have adopted an objective approach grounded in fundamental human capacities and have identified certain characteristics or activities as intrinsically valuable, thereby proposing lists of objective goods (Sher, 1997: 202–214). For example, Galston rejects the idea of a single good and argues that no single virtue can be regarded as the supreme virtue of social institutions. Rather, there exists a plurality of public goods and virtues whose relative importance varies according to context and circumstance. He distinguishes between basic goods, which form part of any human life worthy of choice, and the broad and legitimate diversity of personal conceptions of the good life, cultural commitments, and public purposes that fall within the domain of individual liberty and democratic decision-making (Galston, 2004: 6). From Galston’s perspective, responsible citizenship requires four categories of civic virtue: (a) general virtues, such as courage, law-abidingness, and loyalty; (b) social virtues, such as independence and open-mindedness; (c) economic virtues, such as a

strong work ethic, the capacity to defer self-gratification, and the adaptability to economic and technological change; and (d) political virtues, such as the capacity to discern and respect the rights of others, the willingness to demand only what can be paid for, the ability to evaluate the performance of public officials, and the willingness to engage in public discourse (Galston, 1991: 221–224).

The task of identifying a minimal list of shared goods, primary goods, and common virtues is, however, both difficult and beyond the scope of the present study. The aim of this article is therefore not to specify the substantive content of such a list, but rather to explain a method for identifying it. The approach defended here proceeds through public deliberation and the achievement of an overlapping consensus.

The idea of an overlapping consensus is that each comprehensive doctrine arrives at a shared political conclusion based on its own distinctive reasons. According to Rawls, a *modus vivendi*, understood as a temporary compromise or strategic accommodation among competing parties, is inherently unstable and may dissolve once the balance of political power changes. By contrast, when an overlapping consensus is grounded in principles and a particular outcome is supported by different lines of reasoning, each of which is accepted by different groups within society, the resulting agreement is politically legitimate and sufficiently stable over time (Rawls, 2014: 244). The principles of justice, together with other liberal values and fundamental political ideas that Rawls does not regard as subject to the requirement of neutrality, are in fact the object of such an overlapping consensus and emerge through public deliberation within a shared political culture. The extent to which a society can achieve an overlapping consensus regarding common values, and thereby achieve a politics based on public agreement, depends upon factors such as its degree of diversity as well as its shared historical and cultural background. Greater religious and cultural diversity may reduce the scope of attainable consensus, yet it does not eliminate the possibility of reaching an overlapping consensus on a minimal set of fundamental values. Indeed, overlapping consensus is indispensable for fostering social cohesion and cooperation among diverse groups through a deliberative process. It promotes inclusiveness, mutual understanding, and reciprocal respect. Political disagreements should therefore be managed with an emphasis on building consensus, enabling society to develop a culture of dialogue and mutual understanding in political life (Taylor, 1970: 124).

Deliberative democracy seeks the exchange of competing arguments and rival claims so that political decisions emerge not through imposition

or censorship, but through fair participation and interaction among citizens who may disagree with one another. Democratic outcomes should be the product of public deliberation and reasonable discussion and should generate agreement concerning the common good through public reasoning. Deliberation is therefore a necessary condition for the legitimacy of democratic political decisions. In this model, the quality of the decision-making process is more important than its merely quantitative features. Deliberation is an intersubjective, justificatory, and public practice. It involves engaging with others concerning the objections, questions, and challenges directed at the reasons offered in support of political proposals. The arguments employed in deliberation should possess characteristics such as reciprocity, accessibility, force of reasons, and dynamism; equally important is that they be intelligible and reasonably acceptable to other participants (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004: 3–7). One of the clearest illustrations of deliberative democracy is the jury system, in which participants engage in collective deliberation before reaching a verdict. If deliberation does not result in agreement among jurors, the process may end in a hung jury, leaving the final decision unresolved.

Legitimate deliberation requires several conditions, including access to accurate and relevant information, substantive balance among competing perspectives, adequate representation of the most significant viewpoints present within the public sphere, fairness in assessing the merits of competing arguments, and equal consideration of the reasons advanced by participants (Fishkin, 2009: 160). Cohen argues that one of the defining conditions of deliberative democracy is a commitment to respecting the plurality of values and ends within a political community. The purpose of deliberation is to achieve a rational agreement and to identify reasons that can be accepted by all those committed to this mode of collective decision-making. When consensus, or something sufficiently close to it, cannot be achieved, majority decision-making may serve as a fallback procedure. Democratic decisions are legitimate insofar as they represent the outcome of the deliberation that is possible among citizens under appropriate conditions. Accordingly, the democratic state has a responsibility to facilitate and secure the conditions necessary for public deliberation among citizens (Cohen, 1989: 17–34).

The difference between liberal and republican conceptions of deliberation is also significant. The liberal model adopts an “ex-ante perspective”, emphasizing the process of opinion- and will-formation and the provision of the inputs required for democratic decision-making. The republican model, by contrast, adopts a more “ex-post perspective”,

focusing on whether decisions can withstand public contestation and remain open to challenge as a condition of legitimacy (Talissee, 2012: 210–213). This difference reflects the republican ideal of living in a society in which contestability is institutionally recognized. On this view, what matters is not necessarily that governmental action directly reflects public preferences or consent, but that it remains capable of surviving public scrutiny and challenge (Pettit, 2021: 321). Republican freedom, understood as freedom as non-domination, therefore requires either deliberative democracy or a contestatory form of democracy that secures the continuing possibility of public challenge and review (Pettit, 2003: 153).

Persuasive and Promotional Instruments: Fostering the Internalization of Values

The presumption of liberty is a foundational commitment of liberalism, according to which coercion and compulsion require justification (Feinberg, 1984: 9). It should be noted, however, that even educational and promotional measures adopted by government may sometimes assume a coercive character. Public authorities must inevitably rely on tax revenues collected from citizens, and the use of such resources may impose burdens or penalties upon individuals while also raising concerns regarding equality. At the same time, different forms of coercion vary significantly in degree and severity; for example, requiring citizens to pay one percent more in taxes is not equivalent to imposing a term of imprisonment. Accordingly, once distinctions are drawn among different forms of coercion and compulsion, the justificatory standards applicable to more severe forms should be distinguished from those appropriate to less intrusive forms, and the reasons demanded should be proportionate to the degree of coercion involved (Gaus, 2003: 147). The intermediate position defended in this article seeks to develop a form of perfectionism that neither imposes a particular moral or social perspective on society nor aims to homogenize citizens. Rather, it seeks to preserve diversity and individual autonomy while relying on what may be called a “promotional approach”, that is, the encouragement of certain activities through non-coercive and persuasive means. (Cohen-Almagor, 1994: 227). Although advocates of state neutrality reject forcing citizens to adopt a particular conception of the good, their arguments do not generally extend to the non-coercive promotion of valuable ways of life (Hurka, 1993: 159).

A state committed to a particular conception of the good may pursue that objective in three principal ways. First, it may compel individuals to live in accordance with that conception or prohibit ways of life deemed

undesirable. Second, it may support its preferred conception through education, public funding, or the allocation of resources and opportunities. Third, it may adopt policies that make one conception of the good easier to pursue than others and thereby increase adherence to it. The first strategy is the least legitimate, while the second raises concerns regarding equality among citizens and the appropriate use of tax revenues collected from them. The third strategy, however, appears largely unavoidable, even for many liberals and defenders of state neutrality (Nagel, 2020: 95, 308). According to the harm principle, a central liberal principle of liberty, perfectionist policies are generally justified insofar as they do not rely upon coercion or compulsion. Coercive state intervention aimed at promoting the good is legitimate only when it is necessary to prevent clear and direct harm to others. The harm principle therefore need not be interpreted in an anti-perfectionist manner, although it does impose important constraints on the permissible means by which moral ideals may be pursued (Raz, 1986: 419–420; Wall, 2021).

The state may promote valuable forms of life through education in schools, public awareness campaigns, and economic instruments such as taxation and subsidies. For example, a government may support a particular form of artistic or athletic activity by granting licenses, providing venues for performances or competitions, or reducing ticket prices in order to facilitate broader access to options that it seeks to encourage. In areas where disagreement is relatively limited, the state may therefore intervene through non-coercive means. By subsidizing valuable activities, it ensures that high costs do not prevent citizens from discovering them or gaining access to them (Hurka, 1993, : 159). Moreover, when the state subsidizes a particular form of art, it merely offers individuals an additional valuable option. Because it does not compel anyone to take advantage of that opportunity, such support is not inconsistent with individuals' moral responsibility to choose their own ends. Rather, by making less familiar or less accessible activities available, it expands the range of options before citizens, thereby enhancing their freedom and enabling them to make more informed judgments about their own preferences. Nevertheless, because subsidies are financed through taxation, they may create concerns regarding equal respect for citizens' diverse preferences and conceptions of the good and may therefore appear to compromise state neutrality (Arneson, 2003: 198).

On the other hand, it seems possible to design institutional arrangements under which citizens themselves may decide which perfectionist goods should receive support from the taxes they pay,² an arrangement that remains compatible with a broadly liberal framework (Franken, 2016: 69). Similarly, one might establish a system in which citizens voluntarily contribute additional taxes earmarked for the promotion of their preferred perfectionist goods (Feinberg, 1994: 102). For example, in Italy taxpayers may indicate on their tax forms which religious community they wish a designated portion of their tax contribution to support. Provided that different religions enjoy comparable opportunities for official recognition and that citizens are genuinely free to choose among them; such an arrangement need not conflict with state neutrality. This stands in contrast to the Belgian model, in which all citizens contribute through taxation to the support of officially recognized religions regardless of their individual preferences (Franken, 2016: 87).

One of the most important non-coercive instruments available to the state is the use of media and public communication. In the past, censorship was often implemented by restricting access to information. Today, however, it may operate not through exclusion, but through overwhelming individuals with a flood of trivial and irrelevant information. Another significant instrument is “social nudging as choice architecture”, a mechanism that is especially compatible with the theoretical approach advanced in this article. It should be recognized that there is no such thing as neutral choice architecture. Some degree of soft governmental influence is unavoidable, since in many circumstances it is impossible not to affect people’s choices, and the enactment and implementation of laws inevitably shape some options rather than others. A choice architect is responsible for structuring the environment in which individuals make decisions and inevitably has to determine a particular arrangement that influences their choices, for example, by designing a

² For example, the Executive By-law on Tax Earmarking, adopted by the Iranian Council of Ministers on 30 June 2024, provides for the allocation of one percent of total tax revenues to capital development projects. The regulation also requires that taxpayers be presented with a list of projects that are expected to be completed by the end of the fiscal year, thereby enabling them to choose the destination of a portion of their tax payments. These projects may include initiatives in such areas as water-supply development, road construction, the construction and equipping of hospitals and health centers, sports and recreational facilities, culture, the arts and tourism, the development and construction of universities and schools, the expansion of judicial facilities, rural development projects, and environmental protection.

ballot paper or arranging food options on a menu. Defaults constitute one of the most influential forms of nudging. They specify what outcome will occur if individuals do nothing and thereby shape decisions by establishing a preselected option for otherwise passive decision-makers (Sunstein, 2014: 140).

This approach has been described as “libertarian paternalism” or as a soft and weak form of paternalism that operates through choice-preserving means rather than coercive mandates. It neither blocks options nor substantially increases the costs of choosing them; rather, it influences decisions through non-coercive and non-imposing means (Sunstein, 2014: 19, 152). For an intervention to qualify as a nudge, it must impose only negligible costs, remain easily avoidable, and be readily reversible. Individuals should not be forced into a particular choice, nor should alternative choices become significantly more difficult to pursue (Thaler & Cass, 2018: 50–54). Although nudges steer citizens’ choices in particular directions, they do not decide on their behalf. Nevertheless, concerns about bias, self-interest, and the competence of choice architects must always be taken seriously, since those who design choice environments may use their influence in ways that undermine citizens’ interests (Thaler & Cass, 2018: 425, 431). Nudging is therefore proposed as an alternative to commands, mandates, and prohibitions. By reducing reliance on coercion and fostering a smaller yet more effective state, it seeks to provide a “third way” capable of attracting support from both the political left and the right (Thaler & Cass, 2018, pp. 55–61).

Many advocates of liberty who oppose paternalism and remain skeptical of nudging instead argue for maximizing the range of available options. Their underlying assumption is that individuals generally know their own interests better than others and will therefore choose in ways that enhance their welfare. Yet this assumption is often unrealistic. Human beings are not flawless decision-makers. Choices concerning diet, smoking, and alcohol consumption, for example, contribute to thousands of premature deaths each year in the United States. Under such circumstances, appropriately designed choice architecture may improve people’s lives, even according to their own considered judgments. Governments must therefore make evaluative judgments about different ways of life and ensure that a sufficiently rich range of worthwhile options remains available. The nature and extent of governmental intervention should, however, vary according to the significance or risks associated with the activity in question. Examples include congestion pricing schemes, taxes on tobacco, gasoline, and alcohol, restrictions on tobacco advertising, age limits on gambling, subsidies for public

transportation, incentives for physical fitness, and free admission to public libraries, museums, and art galleries (Parvin & Chambers, 2023: 375–377).

A well-known example of nudging that exploits predictable cognitive biases can be found on Lake Shore Drive in Chicago. Because certain stretches of the roadway are particularly hazardous and require drivers to reduce their speed, a series of road markings were painted on the pavement before dangerous curves. The decreasing distance between the painted lines creates the perception of increased speed. This perceptual illusion induces drivers to slow down instinctively, thereby improving safety without coercive intervention (Thaler & Cass, 2018: 102). Nudging also frequently relies on social norms and social influence. Because individuals are highly responsive to social norms, one of the most effective forms of nudging relies on social influence and conformity. Governments may likewise promote desirable behavior through influential public figures and celebrities. For example, to reduce littering along highways in Texas, a public campaign was designed around themes that resonated with the cultural identity of Texans and was promoted through television advertisements featuring members of the Dallas Cowboys football team. During the first year of the campaign, roadside litter decreased by 29 percent, and within six years' litter along highways had fallen by 76 percent (Thaler & Cass, 2018: 139).

Another illustrative example comes from an experiment conducted in Minnesota concerning tax compliance. Researchers tested several approaches, including providing information about how tax revenues are spent, emphasizing legal penalties for non-compliance, offering assistance with completing tax forms, and informing citizens that 90 percent of their fellow residents paid taxes as a matter of civic responsibility. Among these alternatives, this latter approach, appealing to prevailing social norms, proved significantly more effective in increasing tax compliance (Thaler & Cass, 2018: 148). Similarly, one of the most successful initiatives of the United Kingdom's Behavioural Insights Team (the "Nudge Unit"), established in 2010, involved adding the statement "Most people in your area have already paid their taxes" to tax reminder letters, resulting in a 15 percent reduction in late payments. Another intervention involved including photographs of impounded vehicles in notices sent to individuals who had failed to pay traffic fines, leading to a 49 percent increase in payments (Thaler & Cass, 2018: 44). In the same way, informing individuals about the energy consumption, alcohol use, or smoking habits of their peers can influence their own behavior. Moreover, simply asking people to express a view about a future course of action

often increases the likelihood that they will subsequently act in accordance with that commitment; a phenomenon known in behavioral science as “the channel factor” (Thaler & Cass, 2018: 152).

Nudging has been widely employed in areas such as tobacco control, obesity prevention, environmental protection, energy conservation, organ donation, charitable giving, and consumer protection (Sunstein, 2014: 12). For example, the United Kingdom has adopted a policy aimed at gradually phasing out smoking by incrementally increasing the legal age for purchasing and using tobacco products. More generally, a variety of policy responses to smoking may be arranged along a spectrum of increasing intensity, ranging from requiring cigarette packages to display graphic health warnings, to public awareness campaigns portraying smoking as undesirable or antisocial behavior, to restrictions on package size and product presentation (Sunstein, 2014: 82–83). Similarly, although the use of mood-altering and recreational drugs is often harmful, some individuals may nevertheless wish to consume them and oppose state prohibitions. A similar argument is advanced by libertarians in relation to motorcycle helmet laws: if individuals are willing to assume greater risks, why should they not be permitted to do so? From the perspective of nudging, however, such individuals might be required to obtain a special driving license, complete additional training, and secure supplementary health-insurance certification, thereby bearing the additional costs associated with exercising that freedom (Thaler & Cass, 2018: 406).

The most important criterion for evaluating autonomy is whether available options remain open to choice. Promotion and recommendation, unlike threats, coercion, and compulsory measures, do not eliminate or restrict existing choices and therefore do not constitute infringements of autonomy. Given both the absence of any inherent conflict with citizens’ autonomy and the fact that autonomy is a matter of degree, there is no compelling reason to prohibit governmental efforts at promotion and guidance, provided that similar forms of advocacy by citizens are not themselves restricted. Although this approach incorporates perfectionist elements and is therefore incompatible with strict or absolute neutrality, it remains fully consistent with a more limited and qualified conception of state neutrality.

The Spontaneous Cultivation of Virtues and the Flourishing of Capabilities: Creating the Conditions for Human Agency

Contrary to some classical interpretations, neo-Aristotelian approaches to virtue ethics maintain that the existence of a plurality of goods and values is itself valuable, and that individuals’ capacity to choose among such

goods constitutes a central good that ought to be respected and protected. From this perspective, coercive intervention, threats, the use of physical force, and even governmental preference for a particular conception of the good or ideals of the good life may threaten individual autonomy (Rasmussen, 1991: 131). Accordingly, a number of contemporary defenders of virtue ethics argue that the most appropriate framework for cultivating virtue and promoting citizens' self-realization is a model resembling the neutral state or a form of liberal perfectionism (Cordell, 2010: 1–3).

For Martha Nussbaum, autonomy is an integral component of human flourishing. The state can contribute to human flourishing only by creating the conditions for autonomous living and by ensuring that all citizens have access to an adequate range of diverse and valuable options (Khakbaz, 2024: 136). Joseph Raz likewise excludes the direct promotion of citizens' well-being from the proper functions of government and, while emphasizing the potentially disastrous consequences of such a project, limits the role of the state to that of facilitating the conditions under which individuals may pursue flourishing for themselves (Khakbaz, 2024: 150). Raz does not assume that the best human lives, or even all good human lives, must be lived autonomously. Rather, his account of the value of autonomous agency is instrumental in character. He regards autonomy as only one valuable form of life, valuable for those who choose it, while those who reject autonomy are not necessarily worse off for doing so (Raz, 1986: 390–391; Gray, 2024: 144).

According to Nussbaum, the role of the state is to secure capabilities and to provide the material, institutional, and educational conditions within which human goods become genuinely available for choice. Once the necessary opportunities for flourishing have been established, however, the state should step back (Nussbaum, 1990: 214). The capabilities approach directs governments to identify the obstacles that prevent individuals from effectively developing and exercising their capabilities and to devise measures aimed at removing those obstacles (Nussbaum, 2016: 148–150). The protection of rights likewise requires institutional support, positive action, and the provision of the material conditions necessary for their exercise, rather than merely refraining from interference or creating a formally non-interventionist environment. The state is also responsible for protecting minority ways of life, ensuring opportunities for expression for all citizens, and preventing those who possess economic or political power from using the media to privilege a particular conception of the good. In this sense, creating the conditions necessary for the expansion of capabilities, fostering autonomy, and

enabling individuals to exercise agency may properly be regarded as among the central responsibilities of the state.

Nussbaum therefore advocates a state that respects the autonomy of its citizens: a state that makes the expansion of capabilities possible, places resources at citizens' disposal, but leaves the ultimate choice to individuals themselves and allows them to decline the opportunities provided. The role of the state is not to coerce, pressure, or compel citizens to pursue allegedly valuable ways of life. Rather, it should ensure that all citizens possess the resources and conditions necessary to pursue such ways of life should they choose to do so (Nussbaum, 1995: 95). Because room must be preserved for individual autonomy, Nussbaum maintains that legislators should concentrate on the expansion of individuals' basic capabilities and the conditions necessary for their realization (Nussbaum, 1990: 214). On this view, cultural transformation and the promotion of virtue within society should emerge primarily through the spontaneous activities of citizens themselves rather than being directed by the state (Nussbaum, 2010: 168–169).

It should also be noted that the problem of justifying political authority and legitimate political order occupies a central place in modern political thought because the justification of state-imposed constraints has long been a fundamental concern of liberal theory. In Nussbaum's account as well, the justification of political authority rests on the role of the state and the political community in securing the conditions under which citizens are able to deliberate on the basis of their own practical reason, choose their own conception of the good life, and expand their diverse human capacities (Nussbaum, 1988: 153). Although this aspect of her theory reflects a form of weak perfectionism, it does not seek to prevent individuals from making poor or mistaken choices (LeBar, 2013: 272).

Non-coercive perfectionism may, however, take two distinct forms or pursue two different objectives. One aims at supporting and strengthening autonomous agency in order to enable citizens to make their own choices. The other seeks to assist citizens in pursuing valuable choices and ways of life, an objective that may come at the cost of respecting their dignity as autonomous agents (Wall, 1998: 197–198; Wall, 2021). Some critics nevertheless argue that even non-coercive state intervention is unjustified because it embodies a paternalistic attitude and implicitly treats individuals as incapable of independent moral judgment (Waldron, 1989: 1145). It should be recognized, however, that the extent to which perfectionists are willing to employ coercive means in promoting the good depends significantly on the place they assign to freedom and

autonomy within their conception of the good. If autonomy is accepted as a perfectionist good and as a central component of a good life, then, given that autonomy is a second-order and content-independent good (Barry, 1995: 129–133), individuals, as moral agents, possess the right to make the major life-shaping decisions for themselves, and the state is under an obligation to respect that right (Wall, 2021). In a society in which individuals do not exercise control over the course of their own lives and are confronted not with genuine freedom of choice but only with a limited set of imposed alternatives, the cultivation of moral virtues is itself undermined. Moral agency requires the capacity to choose among different courses of action, and there is no guarantee that the outcome of such choices will always be morally correct or desirable.

According to Raz, therefore, the state has not only a negative duty to refrain from undermining citizens' autonomy but also a positive duty to preserve and promote the social conditions necessary for the exercise of autonomy and agency. Among the most important conditions of autonomy are adequate mental capacities, an appropriate range of options, and independence (Raz, 1986: 372). An autonomous person is the author of his or her own life, and autonomy, understood as a capacity or form of agency, rests upon two fundamental conditions: not being subject to the will of another and not facing an unduly restricted range of available options (Raz, 1986: 155, 204). Autonomy is exercised through choice, and meaningful choice requires a diversity of alternatives such that selecting among them makes a genuine difference to the individual's life (Raz, 1986: 398). Coercion and manipulation, by contrast, reduce the range of available options, undermine independence, encourage an instrumental attitude toward persons, and render individuals' wills dependent upon the wills of others. At the same time, autonomy is largely indifferent both to the objective quality of the options available and to the quality of the option ultimately chosen. What matters is that individuals pursue what they themselves regard as worthwhile. It is sufficient that they believe they have access to a range of valuable options from which they are able to choose (Raz, 1986: 412).

It is important to note that viewing freedom as non-interference and viewing it as non-domination, that is, as freedom from dependence on the arbitrary will of others, lead to two markedly different understandings of autonomy. For republicans, because non-dependence is built into the very definition of freedom, even dependence upon a particular ideal or conception for the sake of becoming autonomous remains a form of

dependence.³ Although responsibility is often assumed to arise from the independence of the will, it is in fact the degree of responsibility that individuals assume that reveals the extent to which their will is genuinely independent and provides an indicator of both their freedom and their independence from the will of others (Skinner, 2002: 262–263). From a republican perspective, the problem with procedural liberalism is that the conditions under which agreements or contracts are formed may fail to serve the avowed interests of the party subject to power, despite the fact that republicans regard the protection of such interests as an important indicator of freedom and non-domination. Instead, such arrangements may merely reinforce the advantages enjoyed by the more powerful party. The issue here is one of structural domination, whether class-based, gender-based, religious, national, or ethnic, in which social rewards and opportunities are already structured in favor of those who possess power rather than in accordance with the avowed interests of those subject to it. Accordingly, a critical republican understands autonomy as part of an ongoing and never-ending struggle to secure an effective political voice and to enhance citizens' capacity and power to advance their own interests.

At the same time, it should be recognized that not every form of imposition undermines citizens' autonomy. If an imposed measure does not significantly restrict an individual's ability to direct his or her own life and does not diminish his or her sense of self-worth, its effect on autonomy is likely to be minimal (Wall, 1998: 135). Hurka likewise regards autonomy as an intrinsic and fundamental, though non-absolute, good. Restrictions upon autonomy may therefore be justified when they contribute to greater autonomy in the future. From this perspective, certain limitations on individual liberty may be justified insofar as they promote a broader expansion of freedom and autonomy over time (Hurka, 1993: 149). Wall, however, rejects the view that political action should aim at maximizing either the autonomy of each individual or the number of autonomous persons within society. He does not regard such maximization as a legitimate political objective, since increasing the number of autonomous individuals and deepening the autonomy of individuals may sometimes come into conflict with one another (Wall,

³ The distinction between "liberty", understood as non-interference, and "freedom", understood as non-domination (that is, freedom from dependence on the arbitrary will of another), may likewise be interpreted in this context. See: Peterson Andrew, *The Civic Republican Revival*, in *Civic Republicanism and Civic Education*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

1998: 184). If there is no reason to believe that everyone ought to possess the same degree of autonomy, there is likewise no reason to suppose that individuals ought to be as autonomous as possible. Rather, citizens need only be autonomous to a sufficient degree. Wall also rejects the claim that autonomy requires access to the greatest possible number of options. Such a requirement would make autonomy more difficult to exercise and is inconsistent with ordinary intuitions about what it means to be autonomous. It would imply, for example, that a person who has consciously chosen their goals from among a range of alternatives should not be regarded as autonomous merely because one additional option was unavailable, even if that option was of no interest to the person in question. Such a view rests upon the assumption that additional options can never diminish autonomy. Yet an ever-expanding range of alternatives may instead overwhelm individuals, creating confusion and impairing their capacity for autonomous and intelligent choice (Wall, 1998: 187). To illustrate, if a friend gives you fifty dollars to visit a national park, this does not undermine your autonomy, even though it alters the opportunity costs associated with your decision. By the same token, a governmental tax incentive designed to encourage visits to a national park should not be regarded as an infringement of autonomy,⁴ since it imposes nothing upon those who remain free to choose otherwise (Wall, 1998: 201).

Conclusion

The principal theoretical contribution of this article lies in its defense of institutional impartiality as the primary virtue of the state. Institutional impartiality functions as the organizing principle of the capability-fostering state and provides a middle position between strict neutrality and comprehensive perfectionism. This study has sought to move beyond the two opposing models of the strictly neutral state and comprehensive perfectionism in the public sphere by advancing an alternative approach that constitutes the central concern of the article. Its aim has been to reconcile two seemingly conflicting ideals, state neutrality and a virtue-based political order, and to offer a synthesis in which the state remains committed both to neutrality and to the promotion of virtue. On the one hand, limited neutrality may be understood as a political virtue of the state; on the other hand, the promotion of individual virtues is

⁴ While the imposition of taxation for the sake of a particular objective may be thought to compromise individual autonomy, a tax reduction or tax incentive directed toward that objective is not vulnerable to the same objection. Such measures may, however, remain open to criticism on grounds of equality.

indispensable for the maintenance of a virtuous society. The capability-fostering state, conceived as a virtue-based impartial state, rejects the atomistic individualism often associated with liberalism, while remaining concerned with the shared and relatively thin values that sustain social life. It also affirms a close relationship between the good and the right. Accordingly, it remains possible to conceive of a liberal state that promotes individual virtues while resting upon theoretically coherent and non-contradictory foundations. A liberal state need not remain entirely indifferent to virtue; rather, it may confine itself to the persuasive promotion of virtue rather than to its coercive enforcement or penal imposition. Within this framework, the common good may be understood as incorporating a minimal set of virtues upon which citizens achieve a form of overlapping consensus through public deliberation, social interaction, and intersubjective exchange of reasons. The role of the state is to identify these broadly shared virtues and employ them as a basis for public policy. Consequently, the persuasive and non-coercive promotion of such virtues need not constitute a departure from state neutrality with respect to the plurality of competing value systems present within society.

The civic promotion of moral ideals rooted in shared historical and cultural traditions of a society gives rise to a form of moderate perfectionism that relies upon soft rather than coercive instruments. Because such an approach does not amount to a comprehensive doctrine that would necessarily be rejected by competing religious or philosophical traditions, it remains compatible with a significant degree of state neutrality. The most important criterion for evaluating autonomy is whether available and possible options remain open to choice. Promotion, recommendation, and encouragement, unlike threats, coercion, and compulsory measures, do not restrict the range of available options. Instead, they guide citizens' choices in particular directions without making decisions on their behalf. For this reason, they do not constitute infringements of autonomy. Although the approach defended here contains perfectionist elements and is therefore incompatible with strict neutrality, it remains fully consistent with a more limited conception of state neutrality. From a republican perspective as well, complete state neutrality is neither attainable nor desirable. Republican political theory has traditionally emphasized the connection between political institutions and civic virtue. Yet this commitment should not be reduced to coercion or legal compulsion alone. The proposed model is therefore not one of punitive or coercive enforcement of virtue. Rather, the state, conceived as a necessary evil whose powers must remain limited, should concern itself only with those minimal, thin, shared, and broadly accepted virtues that

command public agreement. Even then, intervention should proceed through the least costly and least intrusive means capable of achieving its objectives. Across the spectrum of available policy instruments, from the softest forms of influence to the most coercive forms of regulation, each imposing different psychological, physical, and financial costs upon citizens, the state should employ only the minimum degree of intervention necessary. Any increase in the burdens imposed by public policy requires both a convincing justification grounded in political legitimacy and the support of a majority of citizens.

Adopting this perspective also suggests an alternative institutional arrangement. If additional financial contributions were collected only from citizens who support a particular political approach and were subsequently used to promote the corresponding conception of the good, equality among citizens would not necessarily be violated, even if such an arrangement appears somewhat unconventional within the framework of the modern nation-state. Under such conditions, each group could, while fully respecting the rights of minorities, temporarily employ democratic institutions to promote its own vision of the good and to persuade others of its merits. Since minorities may subsequently become majorities, no conception of the good would enjoy a permanent political advantage. A democratic government may therefore, for a limited period, adopt a particular conception of the good as a guide for public policy, provided that it remains subject to revision through democratic processes whenever citizens withdraw their support. Such a state must nevertheless remain committed to neutrality at the level of justification. It must provide publicly acceptable reasons for its laws and policies, refrain from restricting citizens' efforts to promote their own conceptions of the good, and avoid limiting freedom of expression or the public advocacy of alternative moral viewpoints. The state should ensure that autonomous citizens have access to a sufficiently diverse range of options, enabling broad experience, informed judgment, and independent evaluation. Yet none of these requirements precludes a democratic government from promoting its preferred conception of the good, provided that it respects the conditions outlined above, does not obstruct citizens' awareness of alternative possibilities, and relies exclusively upon non-coercive and non-imposing means of persuasion and encouragement.

Viewed in this way, institutional impartiality is not merely a modified form of neutrality. It represents a distinct normative ideal that combines impartial public justification with a limited concern for shared goods and human capabilities. By locating the virtue of the state in institutional impartiality and the virtue of society in moderate perfectionism, the

proposed framework seeks to reconcile two traditions that have often been regarded as irreconcilable.

References

- Arneson, R. (2003). Liberal neutrality on the good: An autopsy. In *Perfectionism and neutrality*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Barry, B. (1995). *Justice as impartiality*. Oxford University Press.
- Berkowitz, P. (1999). *Virtue and the making of modern liberalism*. Princeton University Press.
- Boot, E. (2017). *Human duties and the limits of human rights discourse*. Springer International Publishing.
- Caney, S. (1991). Consequentialist defences of liberal neutrality. *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 41(165), 457-477.
- Cohen, J. (1989). Deliberation and democratic legitimacy. In *The good polity: Normative analysis of the state*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Cohen-Almagor, R. (1994). Between neutrality and perfectionism. *Canadian Journal of Law & Jurisprudence*, 7(2), 217-236.
- Cordell, S. (2010). *Virtue ethics in the contemporary social and political realm* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Sheffield.
- Dworkin, R. (2000). *Sovereign virtue: The theory and practice of equality*. Harvard University Press.
- Feinberg, J. (1984). *Harm to others*. Oxford University Press.
- Feinberg, J. (1994). Not with my tax money; The problem of justifying government subsidies for the arts. *Public Affairs Quarterly*, 8(2), 101-123.
- Fishkin, J. (2009). *When the people speak*. Oxford University Press.
- Franken, L. (2016). *Liberal neutrality and state support for religion*. Springer.
- Galston, W. (1991). *Liberal purposes: Goods, virtues and duties in the liberal state*. Cambridge University Press.
- Galston, W. (2004). *Liberal pluralism: The implications of value pluralism for political theory and practice*. Cambridge University Press.
- Gaus, G. (2003). Liberal neutrality: A compelling and radical principle. In *Perfectionism and neutrality*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Gray, J. (2024). *Liberalism* (S. A. Hosseini Beheshti, Trans.). Tehran: Rowzaneh Publishing. [In Persian].
- Greenawalt, K. (2003). Religion, law, and politics: Arenas of neutrality. In *Perfectionism and neutrality*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Gutmann, A., & Thompson, D. (2004). *Why deliberative democracy?* Princeton University Press.
- Habermas, J. (2008). *Between naturalism and religion: Philosophical essays*. Cambridge University Press.

- Haksar, V. (1979). *Equality, liberty and perfectionism*. Oxford University Press.
- Harrison, R. (2000). Government and morality (M. Rasekh, Trans.). *Kiyan*, No. 53. [In Persian].
- Hartley, C., & Watson, L. (2014). Virtue in political thought: On civic virtue in political liberalism. In *Virtues and their vices*. Oxford University Press.
- Huang, Y. (2020). Justice as a personal virtue and justice as an institutional virtue: Mencius's Confucian virtue politics. *Yearbook for Eastern and Western Philosophy*, 277-294.
- Hurka, T. (1993). *Perfectionism*. Oxford University Press.
- Khakbaz, A. (2024). *Perfectionist autonomy in non-liberal societies* (Doctoral dissertation). Tarbiat Modares University, Tehran. [In Persian].
- Khodaparast, A. (2019). *Translator's introduction to Virtue: Ethical and epistemological investigations*. Tehran: Kargadan. [In Persian].
- Kymlicka, W. (2017). *Contemporary political philosophy: An introduction* (M. Badamchi & M. Mobasheri, Trans.). Tehran: Negah-e Moaser. [In Persian].
- Larmore, C. (1987). *Patterns of moral complexity*. Cambridge University Press.
- Lebar, M. (2013). Virtue and politics. In *The Cambridge companion to virtue ethics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Lecce, S. (2008). *Against perfectionism: Defending liberal neutrality*. University of Toronto Press.
- Macedo, S. (1990). *Liberal virtues: Citizenship, virtue and community in liberal constitutionalism*. Oxford University Press.
- Mirzazadeh, A. (2023). *Virtue ethics and human rights* (Doctoral dissertation). Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran. [In Persian].
- Nagel, T. (2020). *Equality and partiality* (J. Heydari, Trans.). Tehran: Nashr-e No. [In Persian].
- Nussbaum, M. (1988). Nature, function, and capability: Aristotle on political distribution. *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*.
- Nussbaum, M. (1990). Aristotelian social democracy. In *Liberalism and the good*. Routledge.
- Nussbaum, M. (1995). Human capabilities, female human beings. In *Women, culture, and development: A study of human capabilities*. Oxford University Press.
- Nussbaum, M. (2010). *Liberty of conscience*. Basic Books.
- Nussbaum, M. (2011). Perfectionist liberalism and political liberalism. *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 39(1), 3-45.
- Nussbaum, M. C. (2016). Capabilities as fundamental entitlements: Sen and social justice. In *Liberalism and the question of justice*. Tehran: Tarjoman. [In Persian].
- Parvin, P., & Chambers, C. (2023). *Political philosophy: A complete introduction* (J. Heydari, Trans.). Tehran: Soroush Molana. [In Persian].

- Pettit, P. (2003). Deliberative democracy; The discursive dilemma and republican theory. In *Debating deliberative democracy*. Oxford University Press.
- Pettit, P. (2021). *Republicanism: A theory of freedom and government* (F. Majlesipour, Trans.). Tehran: Shirazeh. [In Persian].
- Rasekh, M. (2015). *Lectures on the philosophy of right and the philosophy of public law*. Tehran: Khaneh-ye Andishmandan-e Olum-e Ensani. [In Persian].
- Rasekh, M., & Rafiei, M. R. (2011). The relationship between government and the good life: A study of the perfectionist approach. *Islamic Law Quarterly*, 8(30), 59–76. [In Persian].
- Rasmussen, D., & Den Uyl, D. (1991). *Liberty and nature: An Aristotelian defense of liberal order*. Open Court.
- Rawls, J. (1971). *A theory of justice*. Harvard University Press.
- Rawls, J. (2014). *Political liberalism* (M. Akrami, Trans.). Tehran: Sales Publishing. [In Persian].
- Raz, J. (1986). *The morality of freedom*. Oxford University Press.
- Rogers, T. (2020). A virtue politics for liberal democracy. *The Journal of Value Inquiry*, 55(3), 417-435.
- Rokeach, M. (1973). *The nature of human values*. New York Free Press.
- Sandel, M. (1996). *Democracy's discontent: America in search of a public philosophy*. Harvard University Press.
- Sandel, M. J. (2017). *Justice: What is the right thing to do?* (H. Afshar, Trans.). Tehran: Markaz Publishing. [In Persian].
- Sher, G. (1997). *Beyond neutrality: Perfectionism and politics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Skinner, Q. (2002). A third concept of liberty. *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 117, 237-268.
- Sunstein, C. (2014). *Why nudge? The politics of libertarian paternalism*. Yale University Press.
- Talissee, R. (2012). Deliberation. In *Oxford handbook of political philosophy*. Oxford University Press.
- Taylor, C. (1970). *The pattern of politics*. McClelland and Stewart.
- Thaler, R., & Sunstein, C. (2018). *Nudge* (M. Habibollahi, Trans.). Tehran: Shafaf. [In Persian].
- Tütüncü, K. (2013). Liberalism, neutrality and the politics of virtue. *SEER Journal for Labour and Social Affairs in Eastern Europe*, 16(1), 41-58.
- Waldron, J. (1989). Autonomy and perfectionism in Raz's morality of freedom. *Southern California Law Review*, 62, 1097-1153.
- Wall, S. (1998). *Liberalism, perfectionism, and restraint*. Cambridge University Press.
- Wall, S. (2003). The structure of perfectionist toleration. In *Perfectionism and neutrality*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

- Wall, S. (2010). Neutralism for perfectionists: The case of restricted state neutrality. *Ethics*, 120, 232–256.
- Wall, S. (2021). Perfectionism in moral and political philosophy. In *The Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy*. Retrieved from <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/perfectionism-moral/>
- Weinstock, D. (1999). Neutralizing perfection: Hurka on liberal neutrality. *Dialogue*, 38(1), 45-62.
- Zarei, A. (2018). *Post-secularism: Religion, the state, and the public sphere in the West*. Tehran: Ney Publishing. [In Persian].