

Liberal Neutrality and Moderate Perfectionism

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Abstract: This article defends a moderate version of state perfectionism by using Gerald Gaus’s argument for liberal neutrality as a starting point of discussion. Many liberal neutralists reject perfectionism on the grounds of respect for persons, but Gaus has explained more clearly than most neutralists how respect for persons justifies neutrality. Against neutralists, I first argue that the state may promote the good life by appealing to what can be called “the qualified judgments about the good life,” which have not been considered by liberal perfectionists including Joseph Chan and Steven Wall. Then I clear up several possible misunderstandings of these judgments, and argue that: (a) moderate perfectionism does not rely on controversial rankings of values and is committed to promoting different valuable ways of life by pluralistic promotion; and (b) moderate perfectionism requires only an indirect form of coercion in using tax money to support certain moderate perfectionist measures, which is justifiable on the grounds of citizens’ welfare. Thus, I maintain that moderate perfectionism does not disrespect citizens, and is not necessarily unfair to any particular group of people. It is, in fact, plausible and morally important. The defence of moderate perfectionism has practical implications for the state’s policies regarding art development, drug abuse, public education, and so on.

Keywords:

Neutrality; Perfectionism; The good life; Gerald Gaus; Public justification

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Introduction

Should the state promote art on the grounds that art can contribute to the good life? Should the state discourage hard-drug addiction because it can be seriously harmful? For most liberal neutralists, the answer to both questions is “no,” but most liberal perfectionists—and many ordinary people too—would answer “yes.” Broadly speaking, perfectionism is the idea that the state should take an active role in promoting the good life. Most neutralists reject this idea, maintaining that the state should have no business in promoting the good life.¹ In this article, I defend a moderate form of perfectionism by using Gerald Gaus’s argument for neutrality as a starting point of discussion.

Many philosophers have argued for neutrality, but I think that there are some reasons for giving more attention to Gaus’s argument (Gaus 2003, 2009). First, many liberal philosophers, such as Rawls (1996), think that neutrality applies only to constitutional matters and basic principles of justice, and there are some neutralists, such as Larmore (1987), who consider that some perfectionist policies may be justified in a neutral way. By contrast, Gaus maintains that neutrality applies to all levels of political decision-making and that almost all perfectionist policies are unjustified. So Gaus’s neutrality, if well argued for, poses a more serious challenge to perfectionism. Second, while he based neutrality on a widely accepted idea of respect for persons (e.g., Larmore 1987, 1996; Nagel 1991), he explained more clearly than most neutralists what this idea means and how it leads to neutrality. Here, one might think that Gaus’s view of neutrality may have changed, with many changes in his view of public justification over the past decade. That is possible.² But I think that the above reasons suffice to show that his argument for neutrality is worth examining.³

How about moderate perfectionism? It was first suggested by Chan (2000) as a distinctive political principle. Some perfectionists also support perfectionism of this kind (Caney 1996; Arneson 2003). Briefly, they think that if we have a more nuanced understanding of coercion, legitimacy, and value judgments, then we should see that the state may promote the good life by using moderate measures. Yet, the case for moderate perfectionism has not been further developed, and most neutralists, including Gaus, have ignored it in their works on liberalism.⁴ It is

¹ For simplicity, these definitions are intended to be rough. I do not think that this will create any problem for my arguments in this article.

² I am grateful to an anonymous referee for pressing me on this point. In my view, briefly, Gaus would now think that some perfectionist policies may be publicly justifiable in some societies—it has to depend on whether reasonable people can converge on the policy in question *or* whether the policy can be chosen through a fair procedure from an “optimal eligible set.” But given the fact of reasonable pluralism, I think that in most societies most perfectionist policies are not justified in any of those ways. Moreover, the form of perfectionism that I defend in this article appeals to certain kinds of perfectionist judgments (as they should be reasonably accepted) and adopts pluralistic promotion of perfectionist goods. Thus Gaus’s convergence conception of public justification (Gaus 2011) cannot authorize my version of perfectionism.

³ Yet, there has not been much systematic discussion of Gaus’s argument for neutrality, except for Wall (2009, 2010) and Lister (2011).

⁴ Quong (2011) is an exception. I will choose to discuss briefly two arguments by him in the penultimate section called “The Problem of Deeper Disagreement” and in fn. 22.

worthwhile to consider whether moderate perfectionism is plausible, especially given that Wall has now become almost the only perfectionist still active in the neutrality-perfectionism debate.⁵

I will first present a streamlined version of Gaus's argument for neutrality. Then I will defend moderate perfectionism against his argument, and engage more extensively with some of the most important anti-perfectionist theses. I maintain that moderate perfectionism is compatible with liberal legitimacy of various forms, that it is not necessarily unfair to any particular group of people, and that it relies on an indirect form of coercion that is morally justifiable.

Respect for Persons and Neutrality

Gaus's argument for neutrality starts with the plausible idea that unjustified coercion is wrong and the use of coercion against moral persons requires moral justification (Gaus 2003, 2009). In his view, this idea is a fundamental to political morality because the exercise of political power is unavoidably coercive (and this is so not only when constitutional essentials or basic principles of justice are in question). He then argues that any state action is morally justified only if it respects people as free and equal moral persons: a person is morally free "insofar as no one is subject to the moral authority of others," and moral persons are equal in the sense that "they possess the minimum requisite moral personality so that they are equal participants in the moral enterprise" (Gaus 2009, p. 84). Since "there are no given antecedent principles external to their point of view to which they are bound," moral justification requires that "one's moral claims can be validated by those to whom they are addressed" (Gaus 2009, p. 85). This leads to the following principle:

The justification of the state official's coercion must not treat differentially reasonable and reflective citizen's differences in their evaluative standards. (Gaus 2009, p. 91)

Call this the *neutral justification principle*. Some neutralists (e.g., Larmore 1987) also endorse such a principle, but different from most others, Gaus thinks that a shared value or reason may not justify any perfectionist policy, because a further requirement should be met:

Any law or state's policy is morally justified only if each rational and reflective citizen has conclusive reason(s) for accepting that law or policy (Gaus 2009, pp. 92–93).

Call this the *conclusiveness requirement*. To illustrate, Gaus uses the example of smoking: we may share the value of health, but we disagree about whether the value of pleasure is worth the badness of ill health; since not everyone has a conclusive reason to accept anti-smoking policies, they are morally unjustified. Thus he thinks that almost all perfectionist policies are unjustified, as we always disagree about the

⁵ Wall's most recent work includes: (Wall 2009, 2010). Other perfectionists, such as Arneson (2003), Raz (1986), and Sher (1997), are not as active in the debate as they were before.

ranking of values.⁶ The neutral justification principle itself also plays a key role in his argument for neutrality. The principle invalidates those laws and policies that are based on any comprehensive doctrine(s). In Gaus's view, contemporary citizens, who are deeply divided by comprehensive doctrines, may not have any reason, not to say a conclusive one, to accept this kind of laws or policies.⁷

The Main Features of Moderate Perfectionism

I will defend a moderate version of perfectionism against Gaus's arguments for neutrality. Throughout my discussion, I will also engage more extensively with some of the most important anti-perfectionist theses by other philosophers. Let me first introduce some of the main features of moderate perfectionism:

(a) Widely accepted judgments:

Some perfectionists (Arneson 2003; Caney 1996; Chan 2000) have pointed out that the state may appeal to some perfectionist judgments that are plausible and widely accepted. Chan (2000, p. 11) makes a useful distinction between two sorts of perfectionist goods: agency goods and prudential goods. Agency goods refer to virtues or dispositions that constitute the good life (e.g., practical wisdom and courage). Prudential goods refer to goods or values that contribute to a person's good life (e.g., aesthetic experiences and human relationships). So, in my own terms, there can be two kinds of perfectionist judgments:

Judgments about agency or prudential goods: e.g., "practical reason is a constitutive element of the good life" and "human relationships contribute to the good life."

Judgments on impoverished ways of life: these judgments point out that some ways of life are impoverished because they are highly deficient in agency and prudential goods. These judgments may include: "hard-drug addiction is seriously harmful" and "mind-numbing labor which consist simply of the ceaseless repetition of monotonous tasks and long working hours is impoverished" (Caney 1996, pp. 277–278).

Caney and Chan think that perfectionist judgments like these do not propose a particular ranking of goods as Rawls's comprehensive doctrines do, and the state need not disrespect anyone by appealing to them. Later, I will qualify the above two sorts of perfectionist judgments in a certain way, and argue that the state may promote the good life by appealing to these qualified judgments.

(b) Non-coercive measures (or indirectly coercive measures):

Perfectionist measures, in general, can be classified as either *coercive* or *non-coercive* (or, more precisely, as either *directly coercive* or *indirectly coercive*, a s

⁶ This anti-perfectionist argument is a powerful one, but has not been discussed by any prominent perfectionist. I will argue against it later.

⁷ See Gaus and Vallier (2009, pp. 54–55).

will be explained). Coercive measures, such as compulsory education, force people to do or not to do certain things, and these people are liable to penalty or other kinds of punishment if they fail to comply with those measures. By contrast, non-coercive measures, such as non-compulsory education, do not directly force people to live in a particular way. However, some neutralists are right to point out that even non-coercive measures are supported by tax money and taxation is coercive (Gaus 2003, p. 147; Metz 2001, p. 421). In my view, moderate perfectionism certainly has to use tax money to support non-coercive measures (i.e., it requires coercion), but apart from that, it may refrain from all kinds of directly coercive measures, such as compulsory education, and hence does not threaten people's autonomous pursuit of their conception of the good life. I favour this moderate form of perfectionism, for I consider that most coercive measures are counter-productive and less effective than non-coercive measures.⁸ So, with the above remarks in mind, the distinction between coercive and non-coercive measures remains plausible and useful. Surely, if we want to be more precise, we can call them *directly coercive measures* and *indirectly coercive measures*.

Perfectionist Judgments and Liberal Legitimacy

How might a moderate perfectionist respond to Gaus's arguments for neutrality? I will first argue that moderate perfectionism can meet the neutral justification principle by appealing to what might be called *qualified judgments about the good life*. Consider these (nonqualified) judgments: "the exercise of practical reason is a constitutive element of the good life"; "human relationships contribute to the good life"; and "hard-drug addiction is seriously harmful." These judgments seem to be accepted by many people, but a neutralist might argue that some rational and reflective people may reject the value of some perfectionist goods (e.g., human relationships might not be, or no longer be, valuable for some hermits). Moreover, every judgment on impoverished ways of life might encounter some people—call these people *exceptions*—to whom they do not apply (e.g., some rock musicians and novelists might have to rely on hard drugs in order to do their best, and thus drug addiction might enrich their lives rather than impoverish them). But moderate perfectionists, such as Caney and Chan, have not considered these possibilities.

Some other philosophers, on the contrary, have attempted to show that certain perfectionist goods are objectively valuable (Hurka 1993; Sher 1997, chs. 8–9). Yet, even if these value claims are true, they are controversial among philosophers and non-philosophers. It is reasonable to think that state perfectionism, as long as it is a *political* principle, should not explicitly appeal to the truth of any value claim.⁹ Moreover, given the fact of human diversity in terms of taste, character, and systems of belief, I believe that there are some exceptions to the two kinds of judgments about the good life—though I am inclined to think that the number of valid exceptions would be fairly small (for how many people are right to consider human

⁸ Cf. Chan (2000, p. 15, fn. 21).

⁹ See Waldron (1999, part II).

relationships unimportant for them? And how many people are really right to think that hard-drug addiction is not harmful to them?).¹⁰ At any rate, I think that we do not have to give up perfectionism just because there might be some exceptions to each judgment about the good life, and I believe that many perfectionists would agree with me on this point. I will seek to defend moderate perfectionism by taking into account the possible existence of exceptions.

I here suggest that we can qualify the two kinds of judgments about the good life—judgments about agency or prudential goods and judgments on impoverished ways of life—in the following way, so that they become *qualified judgments about the good life* (or, briefly, *qualified judgments*):

Qualified judgments about the good life may include “human relationships contribute to the good life of *most, if not all, people*,” “courage constitutes the good life of *most, if not all, people*,” and “hard-drug addiction is harmful to *most, if not all, people*.”

Expectedly, my suggestion above will lead to certain criticisms,¹¹ which I will address in the following sections. For now, my point is that once we qualify those universal judgments about the good life in the above way, they should be accepted *beyond reasonable doubt*.¹² Here, two misunderstandings should be cleared up. First, qualified judgments point out that certain things are good or bad for most, if not, all people, *even if anyone disagrees about that*. So these judgments should not be taken as meaning that *most, if not all, people think that* certain things are good or bad for mankind. Qualified judgments are value judgments rather than reports of people’s beliefs about value. Second, qualified judgments do not imply a denial of value objectivism or the possibility that some values are objective, although I have expressed my doubt about the universality of some of the nonqualified perfectionist judgments.

Some might question whether qualified judgments should be accepted beyond reasonable doubt. Let me discuss briefly two of them. I want to show that there are strong reasons to accept them:

Human relationships (at least the mutually respectful ones) contribute to the good life of most, if not all, people: we humans occasionally feel bored, lonely, stressed, pessimistic, or even depressed. Spending time with our intimates and friends is one of the best ways of resisting these unpleasant states. More positively, in most cases when we feel happy about something, we feel happier if we can share our joy with our intimates and friends. In fact, those who have deep personal relations with us are generally willing to offer material and spiritual support when we want to accomplish things that we consider important. Without their help, we would have to fight very hard for the good life and our lives would be much more difficult. In addition, human

¹⁰ As I will argue later, if a certain thing or way of life is considerably good or bad for most people, then this gives a strong reason to promote or discourage it.

¹¹ One criticism would be that the qualification strategy is useless because the state’s coercion generally applies to all citizens, not most, if not all, citizens.

¹² That is, there are sufficient epistemic reasons to accept qualified judgments.

relationships are usually valuable in themselves as there are some people we like and care about. Based on all of the above considerations, it is plausible to say that a life with no deep relationship with any other person is very likely lonely, boring, and inauthentic.

Hard-drug addiction is seriously harmful to most, if not all, people: Hard-drug addicts generally have serious health problems, which include mania, paranoia, depression, schizophrenia, and decreased organ function (Staals 2007). Overdoses of any kind of hard drug can cause death. If the addict chooses to quit the drugs after prolonged addiction, he or she would suffer a series of painful withdrawal symptoms, such as malaise, severe muscle aches, diarrhea, and so forth. On cessation of using hard drugs, the addict usually cannot reason in a normal manner. Due to serious health problems and emotional problems, many hard-drug addicts are alienated from normal personal relations.¹³

I think that other qualified judgments (such as “art contributes to the good life of most, if not all, people”), too, should be accepted, but I cannot defend all of them here. At the very least, many people would sincerely agree that human relationships contribute to their good life, that hard-drug addiction is harmful to them, etc., and it would be absurd to say that these people—say, because they suffer from false consciousness—are wrong to think so. Also worth noting is that qualified judgments do not need to rely on Rawlsian comprehensive doctrines in order to be plausible. To see that they are plausible, we do not need to assume a coherent view of the major religious, philosophical, and moral aspects of human life; to organize the values of human life in ways that distinguish it from other moral and religious doctrines; and to affirm the truth of any particular tradition of thought and doctrine. Put more straightforwardly, I think that qualified judgments have two important features: (a) epistemically, they should be accepted beyond reasonable doubt; and (b) they do not rely on any comprehensive doctrine. Hence, I think that the state’s appeal to them can meet the neutral justification principle, since all rational and reflective people are expected to accept them. Moreover, I think that the state’s appeal to those judgments is compatible with Rawls’s idea of legitimacy. In Rawls’s view, the use of political power should be justified in such a way that citizens are respected as free and equal citizens (Rawls 1996, pp. 136–137). Hence, the justification of the use of political power is legitimate only if it is adequately supported by those reasons that citizens “may reasonably be expected to endorse in the light of principles and ideals acceptable to their common human reason” (Rawls 1996, p. 137). So he maintains that without adequate support of public reasons citizens should not invoke comprehensive doctrines in justifying the use of political power (Rawls 1999, p. 152). Now, although qualified judgments about the good life

¹³ I concede that there may be some people who take hard drugs for non-medical purposes but do not become addicted to them. In addition, I realise that some people may still manage to lead a good life even though they are addicted to hard drugs. Nevertheless, I think that the bad effects of hard-drug addiction are very serious for most people, and this is a strong reason for discouraging people to use hard drugs for non-medical purposes.

do not belong to Rawls's (narrowly defined) public reasons,¹⁴ they may, in view of (a) and (b) above, "reasonably be expected to endorse in the light of principles and ideals acceptable to their common human reason." It is therefore possible to treat qualified judgments as a different kind of public reasons, and the state's appeal to them does not seem to contravene Rawls's idea of legitimacy.

The appeal to qualified judgments, however, is open to two challenges. First, if we have to admit that every perfectionist good (or every universal judgment on impoverished way of life) might encounter some exceptions for whom it is not valuable, should we not conclude that no perfectionist policy is respectful to all citizens? Another criticism is that even if moderate perfectionism can satisfy the neutral justification principle and Rawlsian legitimacy, there is no perfectionist policy that every citizen has a conclusive reason to accept—this anti-perfectionist argument by Gaus is both original and powerful, but has not been addressed by perfectionists. I will tackle these criticisms in the following; the suggestion of qualified judgments is just the first part of my defence of moderate perfectionism.

The Holistic View of Perfectionism

As Quong (2011, p. 104) points out, the state is usually unable to make fine-grained distinctions in the way it treats different citizens. So, if no perfectionist policy can be fine-grained enough to account for the exceptions, should we not conclude that perfectionism must disrespect some people? But I will argue that the moderate perfectionist state in most cases does not have to make fine-grained distinctions in the way it treats citizens. My main reasons for that, as will be explained in this and the following sections, are: moderate perfectionism aims to promote all valuable ways of life by pluralistic promotion, and pluralistic promotion requires only an indirect form of coercion that is justifiable on the grounds of citizens' welfare.

Let's first distinguish between two views of perfectionism, namely, *the atomistic view* and *holistic view*:

On *the atomistic view*, we consider the legitimacy of perfectionism by examining each perfectionist policy separately. For example, in considering whether it is legitimate for the state to promote art, we look at this policy on its own, without considering the fact that it is just one among many other perfectionist policies that the state could pursue.

Most, if not all, neutralist philosophers adopt this view, but there can be a different view of perfectionism:

On *the holistic view*, we consider the legitimacy of perfectionism in light of the fact that the state may pursue a wide variety of perfectionist policies (i.e., pluralistic promotion).

¹⁴ To Rawls (1999), political values provide public reasons for all citizens, but these reasons do not include any perfectionist judgment.

How, then, may the holistic view support moderate perfectionism? Consider the following analogy. In some universities, students residing in colleges have to pay college fees. A large part of these fees are used to provide students with many different services and benefits. Obviously, not every service or benefit is useful for all students: for example, a college may organize job interview workshops which are useless for most students who are determined to pursue further studies after graduation. If these students take the atomistic view of those workshops without considering that their college provides a wide range of services to students, they might think that their college fees are not used properly. But it would be more reasonable for them to take the holistic view, because their college serves to meet the needs of different students. Those students who want to study further can benefit from, say, the offering of scholarships and fellowships that are provided or supported by their college. In a similar vein, it is more plausible to take the holistic view than the atomistic view to consider the legitimacy of moderate perfectionism, since moderate perfectionism uses tax money (just a part of it, of course) to support a wide variety of policies, not just one single policy, which benefit different valuable ways of life. So, even if there is a hermit who rightly thinks that human relationships are not valuable for him, he may benefit from the state's promotion of other goods, such as art and knowledge. In fact, each valuable way of life is constituted by a particular range of goods. So if the state supports a sufficiently wide variety of goods, then every valuable way of life can benefit from that.¹⁵ Note that pluralistic promotion does not mean that the state must take license from perfectionist judgments to derive all sorts of perfectionist policies, because perfectionist judgments are just one set of considerations among others in the course of decision making. Sometimes civil society on its own may work very effectively in promoting a certain good and hence state intervention is unnecessary.

At this point, one might argue that I have ignored the conclusiveness requirement. For example, even if smokers can benefit from the whole package of perfectionist policies, they must be disrespected by the state's anti-smoking policies, and the wrongness of disrespect cannot be compensated by the benefit derived from pluralistic promotion. Anti-smoking policies disrespect some people because, as Gaus has pointed out, they *must* rely on the controversial assumption that the value of health is more important than that of pleasure, which rational and reflective people may not have a conclusive reason to accept. The same problem might hold for any perfectionist policy.

I will reject the above anti-perfectionist argument in the following. As will be clear, my counter argument consists of three key ideas: (a) moderate perfectionism does not need to rely on any controversial ranking of values; (b) it requires only an indirect form of coercion that is justifiable; and (c) public welfare ought to be an important moral concern for each citizen. The holistic view of perfectionism needs to be supplemented with these ideas so as to be convincing.

¹⁵ Miller (2004) has made a similar argument for the state's provision of public goods. Yet, my version of perfectionism appeals to qualified judgments about the good life, which have not been considered by Miller or any prominent perfectionist.

Must Perfectionism Rely on Controversial Ranking of Values?

Moderate perfectionism, as mentioned, supports two kinds of perfectionist policies: those policies that promote agency or prudential goods and those policies that discourage ways of life that are seriously deficient in these goods. Even if Gaus's discussion of anti-smoking policies has shown that the second type of policies rely on controversial rankings of values, it is not clear why the first type of policies that promote perfectionist goods necessarily has the same problem. I will first argue that the promotion of goods does not need to assume controversial rankings of values. So at the end of next section, I will be in the position to explain why the state also need not rely on controversial ranking of values in order to discourage those ways of life that are impoverished for most people.

Consider the state's promotion of human relationships. Must some specific ranking of values be assumed here? It seems not, for that policy does not imply that other values, such as art and knowledge, are less important than human relationships. In fact, one main characteristic of moderate perfectionism is that it promotes a variety of agency and prudential goods without assuming any one of them to be more valuable than others. But one might disagree here, by arguing that the state's promotion of human relationships must rely on the assumption that human relationships are more valuable than some other values, such as solitude, for if this kind of ranking of values is not assumed, why does the state not promote solitude instead of human relationships? Similarly, one might argue that the promotion of prudence, which is an agency good, must rely on the assumption that prudence is more important than some value, say, spontaneity, but any such ranking of values can be reasonably rejected.

A moderate perfectionist can have two responses here. First, even if the above criticism is plausible, it does not seem to apply to all cases of perfectionist promotion. Perhaps human relationships and solitude may be treated as a pair of competitive values, but in many cases, it is not clear whether there is any competitive value as opposed to the value at issue. For example, what is the competitive value versus courage? Cowardice? What is the competitive value versus knowledge? Ignorance? Different from courage and knowledge, cowardice and ignorance can hardly be treated as important values that people should deliberately pursue in order to live better.¹⁶ Hence, even if the promotion of courage and knowledge must assume that cowardice and ignorance are bad, there is probably no controversial ranking of values being made here. Second, even in those cases of promotion where it makes sense to talk about competitive values, I think that the state need not appeal to any controversial ranking of values. To see this, consider why moderate perfectionism promotes human relationships instead of solitude. I think that the following argument is plausible: (1) human relationships are of considerable value for most citizens; (2) solitude, though it may be important for some people, does not have such a high value for so many citizens; and hence, (3) if the state has to choose between promoting human relationships or solitude, then

¹⁶ But I do not deny that there are occasions where it is good for a person to appear to be a coward or to be (blissfully) ignorant of something.

from the perspective of public welfare, it has more reason to promote human relationships. Why (3)? I think that the perfectionist state ought to consider all citizens' welfare—not just the welfare of one or a few citizens—when deciding what goods are worthy of promotion, although this consideration, as will be discussed later, cannot justify all kinds of perfectionist measures. It should also be noted that (1)–(3) do not imply that solitude per se is less valuable than human relationships per se, for a moderate perfectionist may well accept that for some people (such as hermits) solitude is more valuable than human relationships; the three points make no universal judgment about the intrinsic value of solitude or human relationships.

One might ask: isn't the promotion of human relationships unfair to those people (such as some hermits) who find human relationships of little or no value for them? Some neutralists think that the unfairness of perfectionist promotion is a compelling reason to reject perfectionism. They contend that perfectionism is inherently unfair and the unfairness cannot be offset by promoting different goods in turns (Waldron 1989; Metz 2001). As Waldron (1989, p. 1148) argues: "If they [government officials] choose to subsidize option A rather than option B, is that not unfair to the adherents of B who, in virtue of their choice of B, have no reason to favor A?" As far as I know, perfectionist philosophers have not addressed this line of criticism. In response to it, I would argue that we need to be clear about what kind of things the state is supposed to promote and what kind of unfairness is at issue. If the state promotes a conception of the good whose truth or value is an object of serious disagreement (e.g., a Christian conception of the good life), then it would be perfectly sensible for those people who reject that conception (e.g., Muslims) to think that such promotion treats them unfairly and that such unfairness cannot be compensated by any kind of pluralistic promotion. However, the moderate form of perfectionism that I propose does not have this problem, since it promotes a wide variety of agency and prudential goods that are compatible with each other, and each of them should be considered as important for most, if not all, people.¹⁷

Thus, even if the state's promotion of human relationships may be unfair to a certain group of hermits, they should not deny the great importance of human relationships for most citizens, and thus they have good reason to think that the state's promotion of human relationships—as long as it does not rely on directly coercive measures—is morally acceptable for them (I will further discuss this point in the next section). So, taking the holistic view of perfectionism, even if the promotion of human relationships causes some unfairness to them, as this kind of unfairness is morally acceptable for the above reasons, it can be compensated through pluralistic promotion: these hermits can benefit from the promotion of other

¹⁷ One main criticism of perfectionism by Waldron (1989, p. 1148) and Metz (2001, p. 426) is that the perfectionist state should not promote different conceptions of the good by turns, as it would be both absurd and wrong for the state to promote different religions alternately. However, moderate perfectionism does not promote any religion, because any religion is an object of serious controversy, and different religions cannot be treated as compatible goods (e.g., to most Christians, their religion is the true one and other religions are false). The promotion of different religions will lead to social conflicts and serious distrust of the government. In contrast, most agency and prudential goods are compatible goods: generally, to promote an agency or prudential good will not imply that another agency or prudential good is not valuable.

goods, such as art, knowledge, good health, and environmental protection. It is hard to say that these hermits or any particular group of people must be treated less favourably than others by pluralistic promotion. For even if those hermits cannot benefit from the promotion of human relationships, they might benefit from the state's promotion of, say, art, literature, and knowledge at a greater degree than many people, as they might be more able than many others to derive value and pleasure from these goods. In that case, they might benefit more from the whole scheme of pluralistic promotion than many others. Besides, even if there are some people (such as some hermits) for whom one or two goods are not valuable, it is unlikely that there is any person for whom many kinds of agency and prudential goods are not valuable. Since each person needs a variety of agency and prudential goods to flourish and different people place different weight on different goods, pluralistic promotion, as long as it is pluralistic enough, is not unfair to any particular group of people.

Note that I am not arguing that moderate perfectionism *in practice* will not be unfair to anyone; rather, my point is that moderate perfectionism is not necessarily unfair to any particular group of people. Here, one might argue that due to socio-economic inequalities and majoritarian decision-making procedures, perfectionism must be unfair to ethnic minorities and some socially disadvantaged people. To this criticism, I have two responses. First, most neutralist philosophers do not reject perfectionism on the grounds of such empirical facts as the above. For example, Waldron and Metz simply argue that perfectionism is inherently unfair, and I have already rebutted this argument. Second, if a government that adopts moderate perfectionism cannot avoid treating certain groups of citizens (such as ethnic minorities) seriously unfairly, then there is a strong reason to give them a tax cut or other forms of benefits.¹⁸ Nevertheless, it can also be reasonably argued that when pluralistic promotion is practiced in the right way, the state will be provided with more opportunities to improve the welfare of ethnic minorities and the socially disadvantaged. For all of the above reasons, it is implausible to say that moderate perfectionism must be rejected on the fairness grounds.

Indirect Coercion and Citizens' Welfare

At this point, some might point out that the most serious problem with perfectionism is about the wrongness of coercion. They might argue that the compensation model suggested above is bound to fail, for the wrongness of coercion cannot be compensated through pluralistic promotion: if a hermit rightly thinks that human relationships are not valuable for him, then the state must not coerce him to support the promotion of human relationships, whether he can benefit from other perfectionist policies or not.

Is this criticism justified? I would say that we should be clear about what sort of coercion is involved in moderate perfectionism. As said, apart from using tax money

¹⁸ This is not infeasible. Governments of developed countries generally can identify those citizens who belong to ethnic minorities or certain socially disadvantaged groups (such as low-income groups).

to support perfectionist policies, moderate perfectionism can adopt only non-coercive measures. But taxation is coercive—can it be morally justified for the state to use tax money, which is collected through coercion, to support non-coercive perfectionist measures? This question has been ignored by most perfectionists. For example, Caney (1991, p. 459) and Chan (2000, p. 14) maintain that perfectionism can be “non-coercive,” without considering that all perfectionist laws and policies are supported by tax money and taxation is coercive. That being said, my answer to the above question is affirmative. To see why, let’s compare these two cases:

- (1) To promote art, the state requires citizens to go to school five times every week for a 3-year art course. Any citizen who refuses to do so will be imprisoned. John, a mature adult, rightly thinks that art is not valuable for him, although it is valuable for most people.
- (2) To promote art, the state uses a small part of tax money to sponsor the establishment of some art museums and non-compulsory art education. Any citizen who refuses to pay tax will be imprisoned. John, a mature adult, is one of the taxpayers. He rightly thinks that art is not valuable for him, although it is valuable for most people.

Indeed, both cases involve coercion, but they should not be lumped together. The coercion involved in (1) is both direct and strong, and hence we need very strong reasons to justify it. Since the purpose of coercion is just to promote art (rather than, say, to save people from damnation in an effective way), the coercion can hardly be justified. What about (2)? I think that the coercion upon each citizen (such as John) in this case is just *indirect*, for it does not threaten people’s autonomous pursuit of their own conceptions of the good. Moreover, the promotion of art in case (2) would only add a purpose to the usage of the huge pool of tax money, and tax money is collected by the state for many other kinds of purposes, such as the maintenance of social justice and the protection of basic rights. Needless to say, John is just one among numerous citizens who have to pay tax if they are qualified to be taxpayers, and the state, expectably, would use only a small part of his tax money to support art. Even the neutralist Metz, who is critical of moderate perfectionism, also concedes: “one may fairly say that it [moderate perfectionism] does do [promotes conceptions of the good] in a substantially ‘less’ coercive manner than the extreme form historically has or probably would. That is enough to avoid charges of constant meddling in people’s lives or of interfering in such a way as to threaten social stability” (Metz 2001, p. 421).

I think that the indirect coercion involved in moderate perfectionism is justified when two conditions are both satisfied: (i) the perfectionist state uses tax money to promote *the welfare of every citizen* in a reasonably fair way; and (ii) each type of perfectionist policy has considerable and undeniable importance from *the perspective of public welfare*. I think that when condition (i) is met, then there is already a good reason for each citizen to accept indirect coercion. When conditions (i) and (ii) are both satisfied, there is a very good case for indirect coercion. Moderate perfectionism can satisfy (i), for, as I have explained, each valuable way of life consists of a particular range of agency and prudential goods, and moderate perfectionism supports all valuable ways of life by pluralistic promotion. This form

of perfectionism, moreover, is not necessarily unfair to any particular group of people. What about (ii)? I think that moderate perfectionism can meet this condition, too. Moderate perfectionism promotes many different agency and prudential goods, and discourages those ways of life that are highly deficient in these goods. Each type of these policies, as explained, is of considerable and undeniable importance for most, if not all, people. Hence, from the perspective of public welfare, each type of those policies carries significant moral weight, and thus moderate perfectionism is of great moral importance.

One might ask: “why should other citizens’ welfare be a reason for me to accept indirect coercion?” I think that any citizen ought not to judge the acceptability of any policy only by considering whether it can benefit himself or not: even if art cannot promote John’s good life, he should not think that the state has no reason to promote it; rather, he should think that since art is of considerable importance for most people, this is a strong agent-neutral reason for the state’s promotion of it, and hence the state has good reason to use tax money, which includes a small part of his tax money, to support art.¹⁹ Here, some might dispute that there is little reason to think that the task of perfectionist promotion always rests on the state rather than other agents. I have no objection to this point per se. But the problem is that other agents and civil society on their own are not always effective in supporting agency and prudential goods. Given the enormous resources and power the state possesses, it ought to take an active role to promote the good life whenever its action is of crucial importance. It may either directly promote a certain good or assist civil society to do so. The perfectionist state can work side by side with civil society in many different ways.²⁰ By stressing the moral importance of public welfare, I do not mean that we should subsume ourselves to the calculations of public welfare and give up our basic rights. My idea, rather, is that the state ought to be concerned with *both* the basic rights of individual citizens (so that any mature adult, such as John, should not be coerced to attend a 3-year art course) and with all citizens’ welfare (so we should not ignore that many people’s well-being can be improved by the state’s promotion of art); a complete disregard of either side is implausible. Moderate perfectionism takes into account the main considerations on both sides by using only indirect coercion to promote the good life.

If my arguments above are by and large plausible, then moderate perfectionism should not be rejected by Gaus’s conclusiveness requirement. This is because moderate perfectionism does not rely on controversial rankings of values, and it involves only an indirect form of coercion, which is justifiable since these two conditions can be satisfied: (i) the perfectionist state uses tax money to promote the welfare of every citizen in a reasonably fair way; and (ii) each type of perfectionist policy has considerable and undeniable importance from the perspective of public welfare. Surely, the practice of moderate perfectionism can deviate from the two conditions. One might argue that the present Russian Government, being

¹⁹ There seems to be another reason, an egoistic one, for helping other citizens to live better: when a large number of other citizens live better, we stand a much better opportunity to flourish. This line of thought seems worthwhile to explore, but has not received much attention from state perfectionists.

²⁰ See Chan (2000, pp. 15–16).

authoritarian and corrupted, is unfit to practise moderate perfectionism as it can hardly fulfill the two conditions. But I think that there are some countries, such as Finland, that may practise moderate perfectionism, since they are likely to be able to satisfy the two conditions owing to their generally satisfactory social and political conditions.

I have been trying to show that the state may promote a wide variety of goods. Yet, I have not explained clearly why it may also discourage those ways of life that are impoverished for most, if not all, people. I think that these policies are justified on similar grounds. Consider hard-drug addiction.²¹ Some might think that to discourage hard-drug addiction the state must controversially assume that the pleasure of addiction is less valuable than health and other goods which may be shared by all people. This is not necessarily so. A moderate perfectionist can argue that to discourage hard-drug addiction the state needs only to assume that the above ranking of values applies to a large majority of people, and that this ranking of values, according to what I have argued (that hard-drug addiction is seriously harmful to most people), is of great moral importance for most people. Hence, even if hard-drug addiction does not make some people's lives worse, they should see that there is a strong moral reason for the state to discourage hard-drug addiction. Moreover, they have to understand that moderate perfectionism does not only discourage hard-drug addiction, as it promotes a wide variety of goods that are valuable for them as well as their fellow citizens. Thus, when citizens' welfare and their basic rights are both considered, the state should use some non-coercive measures to discourage hard-drug addiction, rather than doing nothing about it. Some similar perfectionist policies can be justified on similar grounds.

The Problem of Deeper Disagreement

If my arguments so far are, on the whole, convincing, then respect for persons does not require a blanket rejection of perfectionist policies as Gaus and other neutralists maintain. There are even certain strong reasons for moderate perfectionism. Nevertheless, my position can be challenged in a number of ways.²² For reasons of space, let me focus on one of them in the following. The criticism is that I have ignored the fact that people have *deeper disagreements* over the instances of almost any perfectionist good. For example, even if people agree that art is valuable, they disagree about which kind of art is valuable: some might think that postmodern art

²¹ Actually, I think that the state may discourage people from heavy smoking, alcoholism, and so on through moderate measures on similar grounds. For a useful discussion of the harmful aspects of serious addictive personality, see Nakken (1996).

²² Recently, Quong (2011, ch. 3) has pressed a respect-based objection against perfectionism. He argues that if the state has already distributed resources fairly, then perfectionism is unnecessary *unless* it treats citizens as if they "cannot make effective decisions about their own good" (Quong 2011, p. 102). Such paternalistic treatment of citizens, he argues, diminishes their moral status. A short response: that assumption about citizens indeed appears to be disrespectful, but I think that perfectionism is based on a somewhat different assumption: citizens do not and cannot always make the best decisions about the good life for themselves and for others without some help from perfectionist policies. This assumption, I think, is a plausible and modest one, and does not diminish people's moral status.

is of little or no value, and so the state's promotion of it would disrespect them. More generally speaking, the critic argues, although people appear to have some agreements about the good life, these agreements are just superficial, because people understand each agency or prudential good so differently that any perfectionist promotion must disrespect some people. This echoes Quong's characterization of reasonable disagreement about the good life. In his view, one main reason for neutrality is that people usually have "foundational disagreements" about the good life: "these disagreements can go all the way down, with no shared justificatory framework at the end of the line" (Quong 2011, p. 206).

I agree that people can have deeper disagreements about the good life, but it seems to me that Quong has exaggerated the problem. First, although any nonqualified perfectionist judgment (e.g., art contributes to every person's good life) might be subject to foundational disagreement, qualified judgments (e.g., art contributes to most, if not all, people's good life), as I have argued, should be accepted beyond reasonable doubt and thus can be invoked to support pluralistic promotion. Second, we should distinguish between *two kinds of deeper disagreement* (neutralists seldom distinguish between them):

- (a) Disagreement about the comparative value of the instances of a certain type of good: e.g., although people can agree that Chinese painting and Western painting are both valuable (or both valuable for many people), some of them think that Chinese painting is more valuable, while others think Western painting is more valuable.
- (b) Disagreement about the value of a certain instance of a certain type of good: e.g., some people think that postmodern art is not valuable at all, while others think that it is valuable.

I have already said that moderate perfectionism promotes different *types* of goods. I here suggest that the state, in many cases, may also promote different *instances* of a certain type of good. Consider (a). People may disagree about the comparative value of Chinese painting and Western painting, of jazz and classical music, of visual art and performance art, etc., but I believe that they should not deny that they are valuable (at least valuable for many people). If these things are of considerable value for many people, then the state may support all of them (i.e., pluralistic promotion of different instances of different goods); Quong's anti-perfectionism should not be the only option. Surely, this does not mean that the state must take action to promote all of those things, for, as mentioned before, civil society on its own may already work effectively in providing some goods and hence state intervention is unnecessary.

Of course, people may disagree about how much support each instance of a certain type of good may receive from the state. Here, two points are worth making. First, to be fair and impartial, the state may set up decision-making bodies with members not elected by itself, or it may sponsor NGOs and let them decide how the promotion of goods should take place. Second, before proper deliberation and discussion, the relevant decision-makers are advised not to rely too much on their own judgment of the intrinsic value of the instances of the perfectionist good in question, for there are usually great difficulties in making this kind of judgment

(here we may recall Rawls's "burdens of judgment"). For example, I believe that the better we understand Chinese painting and Western painting, the harder it becomes to make comparative judgments about their intrinsic value, though both of them are worthy of the state's support.

How about the second kind of disagreement (b)? When Quong treats almost all disagreements about the good life as foundational disagreements (i.e., disagreements that "can go all the way down"), he seems to have (b) instead of (a) in mind. However, (b) seems to be less common than (a). For example, while people may disagree over the comparative value of classical music and jazz, of modern dance and classical ballet, of soccer and table tennis, and so on, few people would say confidently that any one of them has no value for any person. Even if there are some such people, it seems doubtful whether their rejection is really justified. At any rate, I don't deny that (b) could happen. What should we do when it happens? I still think that neutrality is not the only option. People may step back to consider their common grounds in order to address their dispute;²³ for example, when people disagree about whether postmodern art is worthy of promotion or not, they may consider if artworks of this kind possess some of the features that make art valuable. These features may include: art may give insight into the human condition; art has the value of allowing some sort of spiritual purgation; and art may call into question the worldview that is dominant in a certain community (actually, these are some of the reasons why I think that art contributes to most, if not all, people's good life).²⁴ In addition, my earlier points about the fairness of promotion can apply to pluralistic promotion of different instances of different goods. One key idea is this: although the promotion of different instances may treat some people less favorably than others in some cases, it is hard to say that any particular group of people must be treated less favourably than others by the whole scheme of pluralistic promotion, because each person needs a variety of goods to flourish and different people place different weight on different things.

Conclusion

Liberal neutralists are, in general, deeply concerned with the despotic character of the appeal to truth in politics.²⁵ In the light of such understanding of politics, it is plausible for many neutralists to contend that the use of political power is justified only if it meets the stringent duty of respect for persons; the appeal to truth alone cannot serve as a proper justification. However, it is not clear that respect for persons must lead to anti-perfectionism, and I have sought to defend moderate perfectionism against neutrality. My main arguments can be summarized as follows:(1) against the charge that perfectionism must disrespect people since there is no conception of the good or perfectionist judgment that should be accepted by all people, I argue that the state may appeal to qualified judgments about the good life,

²³ I owe this point to Chan.

²⁴ A fair procedure is also necessary.

²⁵ This idea about the appeal to truth in politics is from Arendt (1967, p. 114).

which are largely uncontroversial and should be accepted beyond reasonable doubt, and thus moderate perfectionism is compatible with liberal legitimacy of various forms (such as Gaus's and Rawls's versions of legitimacy); (2) in response to the criticism that perfectionism cannot avoid state coercion and such coercion is imposed upon all citizens, I argue that moderate perfectionism requires only indirect coercion in using tax money to support certain moderate perfectionist measures, and this form of coercion is justifiable from each citizen's perspective since moderate perfectionism is committed to promoting all valuable ways of life and is of great importance for public welfare; and (3) in response to the charge that perfectionism is inherently unfair, I argue that moderate perfectionism does not rely on controversial rankings of values and promotes many different types of goods (as well as many different instances of each type of good), and hence it is not necessarily unfair to any particular group of people. Although it is not possible for me to tackle all objections to perfectionism in this article, I think that many of them can be addressed on the basis of my arguments above.

This article begins with the question "Should the state support art and discourage hard-drug addiction in order to promote the good life?" We should now see that a moderate perfectionist would answer "yes" on the above grounds.

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