



Routledge Studies in Social and Political Thought

HUMAN FLOURISHING, LIBERAL THEORY, AND THE ARTS

Menachem Mautner



Human Flourishing, Liberal Theory, and the Arts

This book claims that in addition to autonomy, liberal tradition recognizes human flourishing as an ideal of the good life. There are two versions of the liberalism of flourishing: for one, the good life consists in the ability of an individual to develop her intellectual and moral capabilities, and for the other, the good life is one in which an individual succeeds in materializing her varied human capabilities. Both versions expect the state to create the background conditions for flourishing.

Combining the history of ideas with analytical political philosophy, Menachem Mautner finds the roots of the liberalism of flourishing in the works of great philosophers, and argues that for individuals to reach flourishing they need to engage with art. Art provides us with wisdom, insight, critical social and political thinking, and moral education. Thus, a state which practices the liberalism of flourishing must play an active role in funding the creation and dissemination of art. Consequently, the liberalism of flourishing is better equipped than autonomy liberalism to compete with religion in the domains of meaning and over the shape of the regime, the political culture and the law in countries in which liberalism is contested.

Political theorists and lawyers will find interest in engaging with this version of liberalism, as will students of social democracy and art policy.

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First published 2018
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A catalog record has been requested for this book

ISBN: 978-0-815-39620-8 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-351-18252-2 (ebk)

Typeset in Times New Roman
by codeMantra

For Shira, Tom, Tal and Anna



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Acknowledgments

I am grateful to the following individuals for their reading of the manuscript or chapters thereof and enriching me with their insights: Yitzhak Benbaji, Daniela Bifulco, Yishai Blank, Alon Chasid, Joseph David, Avihay Dorfman, Khaled Furani, Michalle Gal, Ruth Gavison, Moshe Halbertal, Orna Harari, Hagi Kenaan, Roy Kreitner, Shai Lavi, Ruth Lorand, Menachem Lorberbaum, Ron Margolin, Ori Mautner, Noa Naaman-Zauderer, Zvi Triger, and Moshe Zuckermann.

Chapters of the manuscript were presented at faculty seminars and workshops at Bar Ilan University, Haifa University, Hebrew University, The Interdisciplinary Center, Tel Aviv University, Sapir College, and Shenkar College for Engineering, Design and Art. I am grateful to the participants in these fora for their comments.

I am grateful to Jamie Savren for her excellent research assistance.

I am grateful to my editors at Routledge, Robert Sorsby and Claire Maloney, for their excellent treatment of the manuscript.



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Introduction

There is a division in liberal political theory of the past generation between “political” liberalism and “comprehensive” liberalism. According to political liberalism, the fundamental problem for political theory is how to accommodate the lack of consensus among citizens who adhere to diverse moral, philosophical, and religious doctrines as to the good life. Comprehensive liberalism usually views personal autonomy as a constituent element of the good life and holds that the liberal state should enhance the autonomy of its citizens.

This book discusses another comprehensive strain that is part of the liberal tradition. I call it *the liberalism of flourishing*. It has its roots in John Stuart Mill, and it was subsequently developed mainly by British thinkers of the second half of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century. However, several thinkers active in the second half of the twentieth century have put forward versions of the liberalism of flourishing, as well. Yet when the history of liberalism is presented, particularly by American writers, the liberalism of flourishing is usually not mentioned.¹

I suggest that there are two versions of the liberalism of flourishing. The first is *intellectualist-moralist* liberalism of flourishing. It claims that the good life is one in which an individual succeeds in developing her intellectual and moral capabilities, and that it is the state’s function to create the background conditions that allow individuals to develop these capabilities of theirs. The second version is *comprehensive* liberalism of flourishing. It claims that the good life is one in which an individual succeeds in developing and exercising her varied human capabilities, and that it is the state’s function to create the background conditions that allow individuals to develop and exercise their varied capabilities. Both versions of the liberalism

1 Avital Simhony and D. Weinstein, ‘Introduction: The New Liberalism and the Liberal-Communitarian Debate,’ in *The New Liberalism – Reconciling Liberty and Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Avital Simhony and David Weinstein eds., 2001) 1, 3. John Dewey, referring, broadly speaking, to autonomy liberalism and to what I call “the liberalism of flourishing,” writes about “an inner split in liberalism.” John Dewey, *Liberalism and Social Action* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1933) 26.

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of flourishing therefore expect the state to be active in promoting the social conditions for flourishing. Indeed, the policies advocated by the liberalism of flourishing usually overlap those put forward by proponents of social democracy. It is for this reason that the liberalism of flourishing has often been referred to as “social liberalism” or “liberal socialism.”

Perfectionism

Both autonomy liberalism and the liberalism of flourishing are perfectionist political theories. Generally speaking, perfectionist *ethical* theories hold that there are some human capabilities that constitute human perfection, or the excellences of human life, and that it is essential for the attainment of the good life by individuals that they develop these capabilities.² Perfectionist *political* theories expect the state to act for the creation of the background conditions that enable its citizens to reach human perfection and excellence.³ This, not by way of *ex post* intervention to correct the actions of markets and other civil society institutions, but *ex ante*, as part of initiated, planned action.

It is often claimed that the transition from perfectionist ethical theories to perfectionist political theories is natural.⁴ This transition can be found in Aristotle, Spinoza, and John Stuart Mill, as well as in the writings of contemporary perfectionist political theorists. Also, it has been claimed that for most of its history, Western political thought has been perfectionist.⁵

Perfectionist political theories address two issues: First, which human capabilities are essential for individuals to develop if they wish to live a life of perfection?⁶ (Indeed, a major problem faced by perfectionist thinkers is how to determine the capabilities whose development is essential for human perfection; see also Chapter 2).⁷ Second, what measures should the state take to enable individuals to develop these capabilities?

Some perfectionist ethical theories hold that it is important for individuals to develop the whole gamut of their human capabilities. This is usually the position of religions. Also, according to one reading of Aristotle, a life

2 Douglas B. Rasmussen, ‘Perfectionism,’ in *Encyclopedia of Applied Ethics*, vol. 3 (San Diego: Academic Press, 1997) 473.

3 Thomas Hurka, *Perfectionism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) 147; Steven Wall, *Liberalism, Perfectionism and Restraint* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 8; Albert W. Dzur, ‘Liberal Perfectionism and Democratic Participation,’ (1998) 30(4) *Polity* 667, 668; Peter De Marneffe, ‘Liberalism and Perfectionism,’ (1998) 43 *Am. J. Jurisprudence* 99, 102, 108.

4 See e.g., Joseph Raz, ‘Facing Up: A Reply,’ (1989) 62 *S. Cal. Law Rev.* 1153, 1230.

5 Joseph Chan, ‘Legitimacy, Unanimity, and Perfectionism,’ (2000) 29(1) *Phil. Pub. Aff.* 5, 5; Aaron J. Rappaport, ‘Beyond Personhood and Autonomy: Moral Theory and the Premises of Privacy,’ (2001) *Utah Law Rev.* 441, 456–458.

6 Hurka, note 3, at 4, 32, 37; Wall, note 3, at 12, 15.

7 Michael Stocker, ‘Some Comments on Perfectionism,’ 105 *Ethics* (1995) 386, 389.

of perfection for him is one in which an individual develops and exercises the full range of her capabilities. This is also the position of comprehensive liberalism of flourishing. Other perfectionist theories are premised on a narrow view of the capabilities that comprise human perfection. Thus, according to a second reading of Aristotle, a life of human perfection is one of theoretical contemplation. According to yet a third reading, human perfection consists jointly of excellent theorizing and morally virtuous activity. Intellectualist-moralist liberalism of flourishing draws on this last account in holding that individuals need to develop and exercise their intellectual and moral capabilities. Autonomy liberalism manifests a still narrower position as to human perfection. For it, the central human capability that individuals need to develop is their practical reason so that they will be able to make considered choices as to the contents of their lives.

As to the measures to be taken by the state to enable individuals to work for their perfection, there are two extreme positions. Theocracies often employ severe coercive measures to mold individuals into their model of the good life. In contrast, autonomy liberalism and the liberalism of flourishing, being liberal political theories, aim merely at creating the background conditions necessary for the good life.

It is sometimes claimed that perfectionist political theories are paternalistic.⁸ When it comes to the liberalism of flourishing, this allegation is baseless. Being a liberal political theory, the liberalism of flourishing does not expect the state to coerce its citizens into developing any of their capabilities. Rather, the state is merely supposed to create the background

8 For discussion, see: Rappaport, note 5, at 458–459. See also: Charles R. Beitz, ‘Book Review,’ (1981) 9(3) *Pol. Theory* 447, 447 (“liberalism and perfectionism are normally thought to be antithetical doctrines, since the apparent tendency of perfectionist views is to justify illiberal and inequalitarian social arrangements.”). Isaiah Berlin has famously claimed that “the search for perfection does seem to me a recipe for bloodshed, no better even if it is demanded by the sincerest of idealists, the purest of heart.” Isaiah Berlin, ‘The Pursuit of the Ideal,’ in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity* (London: John Murray, Henry Hardy ed., 1990) 19. See also: Isaiah Berlin, ‘Two Concepts of Liberty,’ in *Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Henry Hardy ed., 2002) 166; Jeremy Waldron, ‘Isaiah Berlin’s Neglect of Enlightenment Constitutionalism’ (unpublished paper). A similar theme can be found in Albert Camus’s, *The Rebel* (London: Penguin Books, Anthony Bower ed., 1953, 1971). Camus distinguishes between rebellion and revolution. Rebellion is based on an acknowledgement of the limits built into human life, whereas revolution aspires to exceed these limits for the pursuit of an ideally just, utopian future. For Camus, life should be lived in the present, and in keen recognition of the bounds of the human condition. In the same vein, Karl Popper cautioned against utopian “dreams of perfection,” i.e., “a really beautiful new world” from which suffering, injustice, and war have been eliminated. Popper advocated, instead, the method of the “the piecemeal engineer,” i.e., trial and error, and small adjustments and improvements. Karl R. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950) chapter 9. Historian J. L. Talmon similarly claimed that a state that aims at the implementation of ideals too high is bound to end up if not in tyranny and serfdom, at least with monumental hypocrisy and self-deception. J. L. Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1952, 1986) 253–255.

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conditions for flourishing, leaving it to each individual to decide whether and to what extent she opts to make use of these conditions and develop her capabilities. The liberalism of flourishing shares with autonomy liberalism the view that the good is to be subjectively determined by each individual for herself.⁹

Likewise, perfectionist political theories are sometimes accused of a bent for elitism.¹⁰ But when it comes to the liberalism of flourishing the reverse is true. The liberalism of flourishing is concerned with narrowing inequalities in the life chances of the citizens of the liberal state by providing the mass of the citizens with the conditions necessary for flourishing that are available to the citizens benefiting from superior material and cultural capital.¹¹

Waste

Waste is the opposite of the ideal of development of capabilities. We often use the language of waste when we speak about the untimely death of a young person. (For Hobbes, the major justification for the state is its ability to make life longer than what it is in the state of nature.) On such occasions, we envision the enormous richness of the experiences and gratifications a person can go through in the course of her lifetime, and we express sorrow at the fact that because of an untimely death a particular person won't be able to go through these experiences and gratifications. And by the same token, when an old person passes away we sometimes comfort ourselves by saying that she had a full and rich life – family, friends, success in work, knowledge, engagement with art, travels, etc.

The liberalism of flourishing is premised on the assumption that too many (probably most) individuals throughout history have lived, and contemporarily do live, a life of waste in which they do not even come close to realizing their human capabilities. John Stuart Mill, the founding father of the liberalism of flourishing, was well aware of the waste resulting from impeding individuals from developing their capabilities. Mill was particularly aware of the socially bred obstacles that block *women* from developing their capabilities and realizing their potentialities.¹² Interestingly, Mill was also

9 See also: Wall, note 3 at 19 (perfectionism is not committed to the idea that the state should use its coercive power to impose a single way of life on all its subjects); Jeremy Waldron, 'Autonomy and Perfectionism in Raz's *Morality of Freedom*,' (1989) 62 *S. Cal. Law Rev.* 1097, 1102 (neutrality so dominates modern liberalism that it is natural to think of perfectionism as an anti-liberal doctrine).

10 For discussion, see: Hurka, note 3, at 147; Wall, note 3, at 15–16.

11 See also: Hurka, note 3, at 161 ("perfectionism's broad thrust is egalitarian, favoring substantial resources for all and not just for some elite").

12 In *The Subjection of Women*, Mill wrote about "the feeling of a *wasted* life" that women experience in a society that bars them from fully utilizing their intellectual capabilities. John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., Susan

well aware that the waste of human capabilities may deprive people in generations to come.¹³ Very much like Marxism, the liberalism of flourishing is adamant in holding that the waste involved in undeveloped human capabilities is wholly the product of human deeds, namely repugnant social arrangements. The *raison d'être* of the liberalism of flourishing is to suggest some correctives to this dismal situation.¹⁴ Moreover, for the liberalism of flourishing, the notion of waste applies not only to individuals but also to those surrounding an individual: those living in her society and at times even the world community in its entirety, and even those not yet born, i.e., people of future generations.¹⁵

Moller Okin ed., 1988) 108 (my emphasis). “[T]he most direct benefit of all” to arise from the elimination of the subjection of women to men, Mill wrote, would be “the unspeakable gain in private happiness” of women, following the elimination of “the dull and hopeless life to which it so often condemns them, by forbidding them to exercise the practical abilities.” Id., at 107–108. Additionally, Mill was also well aware of the waste to *society at large* that comes from the subjection of women to men. To bar women from serving as physicians, advocates, or members of parliament, he wrote, “is to injure not them only, but all who employ physicians or advocates, or elect members of parliament, and who are ... restricted to a narrower range of individual choice.” Id., at 55. Thus, in addition to the gain to women as human beings in allowing them to unrestrictedly use their capabilities, society as a whole would benefit from

doubling the mass of mental faculties available for the higher service of humanity. Where there is now one person qualified to benefit mankind and promote the general improvement, as a public teacher, or an administrator of some branch of public or social affairs, there would then be a chance of two. ... [T]he loss to the world, by refusing to make use of one-half of the whole quantity of talent it possesses, is extremely serious.

Id., at 89

Cf. G. H. Turnbull, *The Educational Theory of J. G. Fichte* (Liverpool: The University Press of Liverpool, 1926) (according to Fichte, though women are not inferior to men in intellectual talent, their minds have naturally quite a different character. Therefore, women are not supposed to attend universities).

- 13 John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., Elizabeth Rapaport ed., 1978) 16.
- 14 Several authors use the term waste when writing about human capabilities. Bernard Bosanquet envisions a situation in which the state effects “the realization of all human capacity, without waste or failure.” Bernard Bosanquet, *The Philosophical Theory of the State* (London: Macmillan, 1899, 1958) 141 (my emphasis). Michael Freeden writes that for David Ritchie, the state was “the chief instrument by which waste could be prevented by setting free the individual from the mere conditions of life and making culture possible.” Michael Freeden, *The New Liberalism – An Ideology of Social Reform* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978) 132 (my emphasis). Freeden cites Ritchie’s saying that an ideal state would be one in which “there was no waste at all of the lives, and intellects, and souls of individual men and women.” Id. (my emphasis). Martha Nussbaum writes that her Capabilities Approach “uses the intuitive idea of waste and starvation to indicate what is wrong with a society that thwarts the development of capabilities.” Martha C. Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities – The Human Development Approach* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011) 23 (my emphasis).
- 15 The idea that individuals have an interest in the attainment of excellences by others may be found in Rawls’s discussion of personal good. Rawls defines “a good person” as one who

In all of that, the liberalism of flourishing shares much with the politics of identity of the second half of the twentieth century. The politics of identity is an egalitarian politics in the realm of cultural representations. It is premised on the assumption that demeaning and constraining cultural stereotypes of members of minority groups (women, people of color, homosexuals and lesbians, people with disabilities, etc.) are internalized by members of both the majority and the minority groups. Consequently, these stereotypes make members of the majority groups curtail the life chances of members of the minority groups; perhaps even worse, such cultural stereotypes are internalized by members of the minority groups and make them set for themselves life goals that are way below what their potentialities may allow.¹⁶ The result is terrible waste, the kind of waste the liberalism of flourishing aims at eliminating, or at least diminishing.

Creativity

Autonomy liberalism views individuals as creative: creative of their own lives. As Richard Rorty put it, a liberal society is based on “a consensus that the point of social organization is to let everybody have a chance at self-creation to the best of his or her abilities.”¹⁷ The liberalism of flourishing shares with autonomy liberalism a concern with creativity, but it views human creativity as reaching well beyond the autonomy-based creativity of an individual’s life plan. Rather, it views individuals as creative in varied realms, such as plastic art, music, fiction and poetry writing, theater, science, technology, interpersonal relations, etc., and it aims at creating the educational, material, social, and cultural conditions that will allow each individual to realize the distinct creativity that lies in her to the utmost extent possible. As Nietzsche stated, the task before each of us is “to bring the philosopher, the artist and the saint, within and without us, to the light.”¹⁸

has to a higher degree than the average person properties that it is rational for persons to want in one another. Rawls lists among these properties fundamental moral virtues, intelligence and imagination, strength and endurance. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973) 435–437. In the same vein, Steven Wall writes that when people develop their talents and capacities, everyone can benefit; we have reason to encourage others to develop their talents because we can often share in their accomplishments. Wall, note 3, at 158.

16 Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and 'The Politics of Recognition'* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); *The Identity Question* (New York: Routledge, John Rajchman ed., 1995).

17 Richard Rorty, 'Private Irony and Liberal Hope,' in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 73, 84. See also: Joseph Raz, *The Morality of Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) 370 (“Autonomy is an ideal of self-creation.”); Id., at 390 (“Personal autonomy is the ideal of free and conscious self-creation.”).

18 Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Schopenhauer as Educator,' in *Thoughts out of Season* (Part II, New York: Russell and Russell, Adrian Collins trans., 1964) 103, 153.

The liberalism of flourishing rejects the idea that creativity is a trait with which only exceptional human beings, the geniuses, are endowed. Rather, it views creativity as a constitutive feature of humanity, something all human beings share. Likewise, in the spirit of Hans-Georg Gadamer's claim that meaning is created by way of a "fusion of horizons" between mind categories and meaning-bearing objects,¹⁹ the liberalism of flourishing also understands that creativity is not something that comes "from within" a person; rather, it necessitates the ongoing internalization of meaning-bearing contents. The liberalism of flourishing is mindful, therefore, of the connection between artistic, philosophical, and technological creativity, on the one hand, and the conditions, educational, material, and otherwise, in which individuals live, on the other, and it aims at creating the conditions that will enable the greatest number of individuals a possible outlet for the creativity that lies in them. Moreover, the liberalism of flourishing understands that human creativity is a prime motor of cultural development, i.e., something that may greatly enrich the lives of other members of society and, at times, even the lives of all other human beings living in the world, whether today or in the future.

Art

Developing one's intellectual and moral capabilities is a concern of both intellectualist-moralist liberalism of flourishing and comprehensive liberalism of flourishing. Intellectualist-moralist liberalism of flourishing of the second half of the nineteenth century focused on establishing a universal system of education for *children*. But since the twentieth century, more than 99 percent of the children in the West attend school and gain literacy. Moreover, developing one's intellectual and moral capabilities is a never-ending, lifelong project. In the twenty-first century, the liberalism of flourishing should focus therefore on *adults*.

Many philosophers and authors, throughout history, have claimed that *art* provides us with wisdom, insight, oppositional political consciousness, and moral education. Engagement with art therefore is a primary means of intellectual and moral development. Put differently, engagement with art directly bears on the ideal of the good life put forward by the liberalism of flourishing.

Engagement with art can take two major forms: creation of art, and experiencing artworks by way of internalizing their contents. Though I think a strong case can be made for the claim that creation of art provides artists with intellectual and moral enrichment, in this book, I focus on the experience of internalizing the contents of artworks as readers, viewers, listeners, etc.

19 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Continuum, 2nd rev. ed., Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall trans., 1993); Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, David E. Linge trans., 1976).

I shall therefore use terms such as “engagement with art,” “experiencing art,” and “internalizing art” interchangeably.

If one accepts the claim that art is important for the development of the intellectual and moral capabilities of individuals, three questions are to be addressed by a state that practices the liberalism of flourishing: (a) how to make sure that art is created; (b) how to make sure that art is disseminated and made accessible to the state’s citizens; (c) how to make sure that the citizens have the competence required for meaningful internalization of art.

The market can generate art, but only at its margins; in the main, the market produces entertainment, i.e., cultural products made for profit. I claim therefore that it is the function of a state that practices the liberalism of flourishing to create the background conditions necessary for the creation of art (support of individual artists, support of art institutions, establishment and maintenance of art schools, etc.).

The market can play only a partial role in the dissemination of art. Encountering certain forms of art requires music halls, theater auditoriums, museums, etc., i.e., premises that, with the exception of major urban centers, only the state can build and maintain. Also, in some instances, e.g., the case of people living in geographically dispersed localities, no market exists for providing artistic products (music, theater, etc.). In instances of this type, only state action can make art accessible. I shall claim therefore that a state that practices the liberalism of flourishing should play a major role in creating the conditions for the dissemination of art and for making art accessible to people. As will be made clear later on in my discussion, it would not be inaccurate to claim that what I am suggesting in this book is a conflation of liberal political theory with some central ideals of the Romantic Movement.

The term “consumption of art” presupposes an encounter with art in the context of the market. Because I hold that the state should play a major role in making art accessible beyond the context of the market, I shall avoid using the term “consumption of art.” In a state that practices the liberalism of flourishing people should experience art as citizens, not as consumers.

It is the ideology of modern liberal states that art should be universally and equally accessible to all citizens of the state. In line with that, all liberal states support the creation and dissemination of art. But as revealed by a series of studies, the experience of engagement with art is confined, to a great extent, to the middle and upper classes, to the exclusion of the lower classes. From the perspective of the liberalism of flourishing, a deficit of flourishing exists therefore in the lives of the lower classes. A major reason for that is that engagement with art requires a certain competence, cultural capital, yet such competence is acquired first and foremost in the family, and as cultural capital is correlated with economic capital, only middle- and upper-class families can furnish their offspring with artistic competence. Moreover, the school system in Western countries does not do a good enough job in offsetting this deficit of the lower classes. The deep logic of the claim that engagement with art is a primary means of intellectual and moral development is

therefore a radical change in the school curriculum of a state that practices the liberalism of flourishing, namely a substantial increase in the resources devoted to artistic and humanistic education.

The argument that engagement with art allows individuals to develop their intellectual and moral capabilities cannot be made in the abstract. It points to the importance of ensuring *leisure* for individuals. This immediately bears on the role to be fulfilled by the state in the area of labor law: state legislation needs to make sure that there is a limit to the daily and weekly working hours to be lawfully agreed upon by employers and employees.

My claim that a state that practices the liberalism of flourishing should create the conditions for individuals' engagement with art may sound elitist, but the contrary is the case. It is an *egalitarian* claim aimed at spreading among the masses what the middle and upper classes hold to be of value. What is true is that it is a claim based on the assumption that in the realm of cultural products there is a *hierarchy*: in terms of their intellectual, emotional, and moral effects, some cultural products are superior to others, and therefore more deserving of our time and attention than others. Such cultural products are currently encountered mainly by the middle and upper classes. This situation should be remedied. A state that practices the liberalism of flourishing should create the background conditions for the creation and dissemination of art, as well as change the curriculum in its schools, so that art becomes part of the lives of *all* citizens of the state.

John Rawls discusses a variant of "the principle of perfection" which he identifies with Nietzsche. According to this variant, institutions are to be arranged, and the duties and obligations of individuals set, "so as to maximize the achievement of human excellence in art, science, and culture." This variant is elitist, claims Rawls, for it expects us to give value to our lives "by working for the good of the highest specimens."²⁰ But as Richard J. Arneson rightly points out, it is not mandatory at all that a perfectionist theory "take a teleological form that builds in a kind of elitism from the outset." Rather, such a theory may be premised on an *egalitarian* principle "that assigns significant positive moral value to the perfectionist achievements that the ordinary mass of human beings can feasibly attain."²¹ This is what the liberalism of flourishing stands for, i.e., to make it feasible for "the ordinary mass of human beings" to perfect themselves intellectually and morally the same way the middle and upper classes do, i.e., by way of experiencing art.

Religion

Liberalism does not evaluate the intrinsic value of the lives of either secularists or religious believers. At least the neutralist version of liberalism

20 Rawls, note 15, at 325.

21 Richard J. Arneson, 'Perfectionism and Politics,' (2000) 111 *Ethics* 37, 41, 42.

holds that the state should also refrain from awarding any preference to religious institutions over all other institutions by way of funding them. This is not the case with the liberalism of flourishing. As it holds that the good life consists of the development of the moral capabilities of individuals, and as religious institutions contribute to the moral development of individuals taking part in their activities, then from the perspective of moral flourishing the liberalism of flourishing should favorably view the influence of religious institutions on the lives of individuals, and it should advocate for the funding of such institutions by the state.

But liberalism's relationship with religion is more complex than that. Traditionally, since Locke, liberalism viewed the *state* as a menace to religious citizens. Therefore, freedom of religion has been made a fundamental liberal right. But the opposite may pertain as well, i.e., *religion* can be a menace to the liberal state, or, more precisely, to the state's citizens who adhere to other religions or who are secular. This was well understood by Rawls who in *Political Liberalism* insisted that the discourse of political justification be composed of the widely agreed-upon "public reason," and not of the comprehensive doctrine of any particular religion.

In some countries, the liberal traits of the state's center, i.e., the state's regime, political culture, and law, are being contested by significant religious groups who aim at replacing the state's liberalism with theocracy. Turkey, Israel, Egypt, and Algiers are obvious examples. In other countries, the liberal traits of the state's center are well entrenched, yet significant religious groups aim at infusing the state's liberal center with extensive religious contents, and thereby to substantially change its traits. This is the case in some Western countries.

Moreover, most liberal states of the world have been carrying out a national project since their inception. Yet nationalism is usually deeply intertwined with religion. When states promote a national project, this often goes hand in hand with the propagation of religious contents (narratives, myths, heroes, etc.). This has been the case throughout modernity, as also in recent decades in many countries, such as Poland, Hungary, Turkey, Israel, and India. In many countries in the world, liberalism therefore finds itself not only in competition with religion itself but also in opposition to religious contents endorsed and propagated by national movements and by states' nationalist projects.

Individuals are moved by an urge for meaning. I call "big meaning" the meaning embedded in a fairly coherent and developed system of propositions aimed at providing a response to fundamental human questions. Religion is the most comprehensive system of big meaning available to us. When autonomy liberalism competes with religion in the realm of meaning, it suffers two major deficits. One deficit concerns *institutionalization*. With the exception of the courts, autonomy liberalism does not have institutions specifically designated for elaborating its tenets and disseminating them. The second deficit concerns *contents*. Autonomy liberalism cannot offer a