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**Perfectionism, Public Reason, and Excellences**

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Perfectionism is the view that the state may, or should, promote valuable conceptions of the good life and discourage conceptions that are worthless or bad. So understood, much of contemporary political philosophy is centred around debates over perfectionism, as political philosophers hold divergent views on the role of the state, the nature of the good life, and the value of freedom. It is also important to note that in recent years, there has been a steady growth of works on public reason liberalism, most of which converge in their rejection of perfectionism despite their contrasting philosophical approaches (e.g. Gaus 2010; Quong 2011). Public reason liberals hold the view that laws and policies must be justifiable to all reasonable citizens. Generally, they concur with John Rawls (1993) that perfectionist policies are not publicly justified because they are based on religious or philosophical comprehensive doctrines that cannot be affirmed by all reasonable citizens. However, many perfectionists do not think that the use of political power has to be publicly justified. They maintain that the state may enact laws and policies by appealing to the comprehensive doctrine of the good life that is convincing or true (e.g. Raz 1990; Wall 1998). These perfectionists have been called comprehensive perfectionists.

It is against such a background that Collis Tahzib’s *A Perfectionist Theory of Justice* makes original contributions.[[1]](#footnote-2) While many perfectionists have treated Rawls merely as an opponent to perfectionism, Tahzib mobilizes various Rawlsian methodological devices, including the constructivist approach to public reason, to justify and defend perfectionism. In Tahzib’s view, both comprehensive perfectionists and public reason liberals are only partially right; what is suitable for modern liberal societies is a non-comprehensive form of perfectionism grounded in a revised version of Rawlsian public reason. In addition, he holds the perfectionist view of justice that modern liberal states have moral duties to establish and maintain social conditions conducive to excellent and flourishing lives.

More details of Tahzib’s perfectionist theory will be given in due course. While Tahzib’s book contains many interesting and intelligent responses to some of the most forceful criticisms of perfectionism (see esp. Chapters 8–10), my focus here is on two central aspects of his perfectionist theory: his attempt to merge public reason and perfectionism, and his use of Rawls’s idea of lexical priority. I will argue that there are some serious difficulties with his idea of perfectionist public reason. Additionally, Tahzib, like many other perfectionists, has neglected that many excellences are at once personal and civic. In this regard, I will sketch a perfectionist account of civic virtue, with the hope of opening up space for defending and justifying perfectionism.

1. **Perfectionism and public reason**

Tahzib’s attempt to marry perfectionism and public reason is quite unusual. While perfectionists generally deny that the use of political power has to be publicly justified, Tahzib maintains that it makes little sense for them to throw public reason out of court. He argues: ‘perfectionists can and should accept that many perfectionist values – including Christian, Confucian and Aristotelian values – are subject to reasonable disagreement and so cannot be invoked to justify political decisions, even if true’ (214). Moreover, perfectionists need only claim that ‘not all claims about the good life and human flourishing are subject to reasonable disagreement’, since ‘certain thinner perfectionist values – including in particular moral, intellectual and artistic excellence – are beyond reasonable rejection and so can legitimately figure in political reasoning’ (214). These general values, he thinks, can be used to formulate a freestanding conception of human flourishing, which does not purport to embody the full truth about the good life but can effectively inform perfectionist policymaking.

Furthermore, Tahzib believes that political liberals – that is, those who avoid presupposing any particular comprehensive doctrine and derive liberal views in a freestanding manner from values and beliefs that all reasonable citizens can be expected to accept – have rightly emphasized the crucial importance of respect, civic friendship, social trust, and egalitarian justice for political discussion and decision-making. Tahzib argues: ‘there is no reason why perfectionists should not be troubled by precisely the same considerations and concerns that motivate political liberals’ (215). Once perfectionists recognize that people can reasonably disagree over comprehensive doctrines of the good life and that various values are crucial for political discussion and decision-making, perfectionists should find themselves in need of a freestanding conception of human flourishing for purposes of public political justification. And in such a way, perfectionists should apply a ‘political turn’ to perfectionist theory, turning away from comprehensive perfectionism (215–16).

As we have seen, Tahzib believes that certain general perfectionist values, including moral, intellectual and artistic excellence, are beyond reasonable rejection and thus can figure in political reasoning. But on what grounds do we regard those who do not endorse moral, intellectual, or artistic excellence as unreasonable? Tahzib adopts a constructivist approach to public reason. With this approach, ‘certain perfectionist commitments, namely moral, intellectual and artistic excellence, are baked into the notion of reasonableness in much the same way that many political liberals make reasonableness conditional on acceptance of certain liberal commitments such as freedom, equality and fairness’ (198). So, a reasonable citizen must accept the basic liberal values of freedom, equality and fairness, *as well as* the basic perfectionist values of moral, intellectual and artistic excellence. It then follows that many perfectionist policies can pass the public justification test, because ‘a citizen who rejects, say, the value of artistic excellence… would count as unreasonable, and so her veto would have no more normative force’ (199).

Such a constructivist approach opens Tahzib to the criticism of preaching to the converted, as he appears to care to justify perfectionism only to those who already buy his package of three excellences. Yet, Tahzib is fully aware of such criticism; he writes: ‘unless some compelling independent reasons are given for accepting these three excellences and their political relevance, the perfectionist definition of reasonableness is at risk of being convincing only to card-carrying perfectionists’ (211). Tahzib then makes clear that it is the perfectionist conception of society that ‘sets the bounds of the perfectionist definition of reasonableness’ (220). According to the perfectionist conception of society, society should be viewed as ‘a fair striving for human flourishing between free and equal persons’ (75), rather than a non-perfectionist fair system of social cooperation between free and equal persons as proposed by Rawls (1993).

Note that before Tahzib elaborates on the constructivist approach to public reason, he takes pains to demonstrate that it is the perfectionist conception of society, rather than Rawls’s conception of society, that should be favoured, considering how the perfectionist conception of society fares as cultural interpretation and as a means of attaining reflective equilibrium (see Chapter 3). In short, Tahzib claims: ‘to say that some policy is justified to all reasonable persons is no more, and no less, than to say that this policy can be derived from the fundamental idea of society as a fair striving for human flourishing between free and equal persons and the values implicit within it’ (242).

Whether Tahzib’s perfectionist conception of society should be chosen over Rawls’s political-liberal conception of society is no doubt a subject that can be debated. I personally find Tahzib’s argument about the perfectionist conception of society illuminating and useful, as it can help perfectionists present their claims in a more systematic and forceful way. For the sake of argument, let us assume that we endorse Tahzib’s perfectionist conception of society. I would like to comment on his rejection of comprehensive perfectionism and his constructivist approach.

Unlike Tahzib, I do not think that it is necessarily mistaken for a perfectionist to advocate comprehensive perfectionism. After all, a perfectionist can sensibly argue about what sort of life is best for human beings and what laws and public policies are most capable of promoting human flourishing. In this connection, Aristotle is an eminent comprehensive perfectionist, and his work will most likely continue to inspire future legal and political philosophers. Nevertheless, such perfectionist arguments are not concerned with how citizens of modern liberal societies should justify the use of political power to each other in a civil and respectful manner and what they might expect each other to accept in the process of mutual justification, given that they do not agree on any comprehensive doctrine in the first place. These problems concerning mutual political justification seem to be too important for any contemporary political philosopher (comprehensive perfectionists included) to ignore.

I might be accused of moving too fast. One can argue that what perfectionists need is only a sophisticated form of comprehensive perfectionism that gives a plausible account of mutual political justification. Any such account, comprehensive perfectionists can agree, must take the value of civility, among other moral values pertaining to mutual political justification, very seriously. Indeed, there is no reason to think that comprehensive perfectionists are essentially immoderate, seeking to impose their favoured comprehensive doctrine on citizens and ignoring completely deep and persistent moral disagreements in modern liberal societies.[[2]](#footnote-3)

Let us agree that this type of sophisticated comprehensive perfectionism could exist, but it seems unreasonable to expect that all citizens of a liberal democratic society would agree on such a comprehensive doctrine and that they would justify their political stance to one another in terms of it. Note that the problems concerning mutual political justification are not about what a particular citizen or politician or group of people should do in a specific social or political situation, but rather, what public and shared moral norms there should be with regard to how citizens justify the use of political power to one another.

Here, a comprehensive perfectionist might argue that citizens do not have to be informed about, and still less, agree on, the highly controversial part of this type of sophisticated comprehensive perfectionism, namely the full philosophical justification of the value of civility and the values pertaining to human flourishing. Rather, for perfectionist politics to work, citizens need only to accept, and know each other to accept, the much less controversial parts of the doctrine, namely the importance of civility for citizens’ mutual justification and the relevance of general perfectionist values such as moral, intellectual and artistic excellence for human flourishing. Yet, to the best of my knowledge, no prominent comprehensive perfectionist has pursued such an argument. In any case, it is unclear how any perfectionist philosopher or politician could manage to inform citizens only of the presumably less controversial part of a comprehensive perfectionism and expect them to agree on it while not informing them of the highly controversial part of it.[[3]](#footnote-4)

In short, unlike Tahzib, I do not think that comprehensive perfectionism should be rejected, though it has certain limitations concerning mutual political justification. Let me turn to comment on Tahzib’s constructivist approach to perfectionist public reason.

Having rejected comprehensive perfectionism, Tahzib argues that general perfectionist values – in particular, moral, intellectual and artistic excellence – should be baked into the definition of reasonableness, and, as such, any citizen who rejects moral, intellectual or artistic excellence should be deemed unreasonable. Tahzib’s stipulation of the meaning of reasonableness (or reasonable), as we have seen, has certain deep normative foundations concerning what constitutes an ideally just society, namely, one that accords with a certain perfectionist conception of society. However, what compels him to define ‘reasonable’ in this special way, rather than simply arguing that the perfectionist conception of society is convincing and the three excellences are important? On this matter, Tahzib has explained:

Since derivations in political philosophy, unlike those in mathematics, are not an exact science, the point of introducing the constituency move [i.e., that of stipulating the meaning of ‘reasonable’ in a particular way] is to make things as vivid and pellucid as possible. So, while strictly speaking dispensable, the process of considering whether a given policy could be reasonably rejected helps us to focus intuitions, to organize ideas and to make more transparent derivations and extrapolations. (242)

While I agree that political philosophy is unlike mathematics, it is not clear to me how his stipulation of the meaning of reasonableness helps to make things ‘vivid and pellucid’; if anything, it may make his readers confused and unsatisfied, and I will explain why.

First, the plausibility of political liberalism is dependent upon the concept of reasonable being used in an ordinary and non-technical way. To see this, let us look again at Tahzib’s criticism of comprehensive perfectionism. Tahzib plausibly argues that ‘citizens *reasonably* disagree about what constitutes human flourishing’ and therefore ‘the perfectionist state may not act on the basis of highly specific conceptions of human flourishing such as Christianity or Confucianism, even if these conceptions are true, and must instead only act on the basis of moral, intellectual and artistic excellence… since these are values that all *reasonable* citizens can be expected to endorse’ (211; emphasis added). Obviously, the force of the argument here crucially depends on the concept of reasonable being used in a normal and non-technical way. If this concept were to follow Tahzib’s perfectionist definition of it through and through, then his criticism of comprehensive perfectionism would become quite weak, if not simply unintelligible. I am inclined to think that if Tahzib is to retain the normative appeal of the concept of reasonable, he cannot stipulate its meaning in the way he does, and vice versa.

Additionally, there may be another difficulty with the constructivist approach. If the concept of truth, or that of the whole truth, is likely to lead to mutual distrust and conflicts among citizens, as Rawls and many other political liberals think, then on what grounds do we believe that the strategy of stipulation, which lies at the heart of the constructivist approach, can do a better service to citizens?[[4]](#footnote-5) If the philosophical critics of the constructivist approach have already found the strategy unconvincing and even confusing[[5]](#footnote-6), then on what grounds do we believe that citizens’ general reception of it will tend to be more positive when it comes to applying such approach to citizens’ mutual political justification? The constructivist approach seems hard to defend, partly for these reasons, but surely this is an issue for further debate.[[6]](#footnote-7)

In short, Tahzib’s perfectionist public reason seems to have some serious difficulties. In my view, for a perfectionist to take citizens’ mutual justification seriously, it is unnecessary to maintain that some judgements about the good life are beyond reasonable rejection or that reasonable citizens must accept some judgements about the good life.[[7]](#footnote-8) A moderate, non-comprehensive perfectionist can, and probably should, maintain that in mutual political justification, citizens should do their best to justify their political stance in terms of reasons that are sound or true, provided that the force of these reasons is not dependent upon the truth of any particular comprehensive doctrine or tradition of thought.[[8]](#footnote-9) In any case, I believe that Tahzib is importantly right in arguing that perfectionist politics and public policy of our time should be based on a freestanding and non-comprehensive view of human flourishing.

1. **A neglected dimension: Excellences as civic virtues**

The freestanding conception of human flourishing that Tahzib endorses consists of the enjoyment of moral, intellectual and artistic excellence. As such, one might think that the state may promote the three excellences while at the same time endeavouring to satisfy some basic principles of justice, such as Rawls’s principle of equal basic liberties. But, for Tahzib, the story is not so simple. Tahzib has argued that we need to apply Rawls’s lexical priority, such that the principle of perfection that he himself proposes is lexically posterior to the equal basic liberties principle and the fair equality of opportunity principle (Chapter 4). In my view, this poses problems that could be avoided had Tahzib clarified that many excellences are at once personal and civic virtues. In this connection, I will move away from a close study of Tahzib’s arguments, and outline a perfectionist account of civic virtue.

In Tahzib’s view, if we accept the perfectionist conception of society, we would be presented with a menu that includes the following four principles of justice (99–100):

(1) Each person has the same indefeasible claim to a fully adequate scheme of equal basic liberties compatible with the same scheme of liberties for all (the equal basic liberties principle);

(2) Social and economic inequalities are to be attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity (the fair equality of opportunity principle);

(3) Social and economic inequalities are to be to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged members of society (the difference principle); and

(4) Social conditions promotive of and conducive to flourishing ways of life are to be established and maintained (the principle of perfection), where (1) is lexically prior to (2), (2) is lexically prior to (3) and (4), and (3) and (4) are not ordered in terms of lexical priority but must instead be intuitionistically balanced against each other.

Clearly, the first three principles are adopted from Rawls’s justice as fairness, whereas the fourth principle, the principle of perfection, is Tahzib’s own invention. Tahzib refers to all four principles collectively as the perfectionist principles of justice in order to mark the contrast with Rawls’s principles of justice (100n46).[[9]](#footnote-10) Importantly, he claims: ‘on the perfectionist principles of justice that I am proposing, the provision of an environment that is promotive of and conducive to flourishing ways of life is conditional on the other lexically prior principles of justice being met’ (117).[[10]](#footnote-11)

My problem with such a view is not about how the difference principle and the principle of perfection are to be intuitionistically balanced against each other, although that no doubt raises difficult philosophical and practical issues. My problem is, rather, this: given the serious and persistent socio-economic inequalities that typically characterize a modern liberal society, at what point can the prior principles of justice, namely, the equal basic liberties principle and the fair equality of opportunity principle, be said to be fully satisfied in order for the principle of perfection to be taken seriously?

Tahzib might argue that in many cases, we do not have to face the hard choice between satisfying the prior principles of justice and satisfying the principle of perfection, because the pursuit of basic equal liberties and of fair equality of opportunity needs not only the state’s support, but also changes of people’s minds as well as sufficient time for social development. So, whenever tax revenues or other resources of the state can be used to promote excellence without hindering the progress of achieving basic equal liberties or fair equality of opportunity, the state should proceed with promoting excellence.

However, this argument also illustrates how lexical priority can hang a sword of Damocles over state pursuit of perfectionist ideals – since, whenever there is reason to believe that there is conflict with the progress of achieving the prior principles of justice, state perfectionist initiatives may be prevented from moving ahead. It would be no exaggeration to say that in any actual and nonideal liberal society plagued with serious social, economic, and political inequalities, people always find themselves in need of more resources for achieving basic equal liberties and fair equality of opportunity. If this is the case, then the principle of perfection at the heart of Tahzib’s perfectionist theory of justice appears to have little or no *practical* importance – due to lexical priority.

Perhaps Tahzib should forgo lexical priority. Alternatively, perhaps such problems would not appear so pressing, had he clarified that many intellectual and moral excellences are simultaneously civic virtues, and thus are crucial for achieving justice. In what follows, I will outline a perfectionist account of civic virtue, arguing that many intellectual and moral virtues are at once personal and civic.[[11]](#footnote-12)

It is a common understanding among perfectionists that state promotion of excellences is necessary for enabling citizens to lead flourishing lives.[[12]](#footnote-13) However, little has been said by contemporary perfectionist philosophers about how human excellence may be related to civic virtue, and if these two things are found to be closely related, then how this should affect the way we see the value of perfectionist public policy.[[13]](#footnote-14) Here, it may be beneficial for us to take a detour away from Tahzib’s arguments, in order to reflect briefly upon those important issues and consider how our reflections may bear on Tahzib’s perfectionist view of justice.

At the beginning, it is necessary to note that one need not be a republican political theorist in order to affirm the importance of civic virtue. As Paul Weithman has rightly emphasized, ‘Even political theories which do not claim to be republican – deliberative democratic theories and some liberal theories, for example – claim that citizens need some of the qualities of character which political republicans describe as civic virtues’ (Weithman 2004: 288). In fact, Rawls’s theory of justice as fairness also ‘includes an account of certain political virtues – the virtues of fair social cooperation such as the virtues of civility and tolerance, of reasonableness and the sense of fairness’ (Rawls 1993: 194). However, ‘admitting these virtues into a political conception does not lead to the perfectionist state of a comprehensive doctrine’ (Rawls 1993: 194–95), since ‘the political virtues are identified and justified by the need for certain qualities of character in the citizens of a just and stable constitutional regime’ (Rawls 1993: 195n29).

For argument’s sake, let us accept the rather uncontroversial view that some civic virtues, such as the willingness to discuss with other citizens in civility, are crucial for achieving social justice. It is then open to perfectionists to argue that the willingness to discuss with other people, open-mindedness, prudence, fair-mindedness, and certain other qualities of character are at once civic and personal virtues, since these qualities of character contribute to an excellent or otherwise valuable life. Additionally, perfectionists can, against Rawls, claim that civic virtues should be understood in terms of human excellence.[[14]](#footnote-15)

I think that these perfectionist views are convincing. To illustrate, it is useful to discuss intellectual virtues. By intellectual virtues, I mean those acquired intellectual excellences that contribute to reliable success in reaching the truth or enhancing a person’s understanding. These virtues may include: open-mindedness, prudence, fair-mindedness, attentiveness, intellectual humility, and intellectual courage. It seems very difficult to deny the importance of intellectual virtues for a society’s development. For example, if the proportion of close-minded citizens in a modern society increases significantly, we should expect that the ability of this society to function successfully will diminish. In contrast, if the proportion of open-minded, prudent, and intellectually humble citizens in this society increases significantly, we should expect this society to become more capable of achieving justice.

Rawls and other political liberals can agree that open-mindedness and many other intellectual virtues are civic or political virtues. However, they would not say that these are personal virtues or human excellences. But, in my view, if a citizen is to reliably demonstrate and exercise those civic virtues in politics, then she (or he) must possess the relevant intellectual virtues as personal virtues or excellences in the first place. To emphasize my point: can we expect someone who is biased, prejudiced, closed-minded, dogmatic, and self-serving in her private life to be fair, impartial, open-minded, prudent, and morally responsible in her public life? I think that we cannot. Generally speaking, if a person is fair, open-minded, prudent, and morally responsible in her public life, then she is similarly virtuous in her private life. Intellectual and moral virtues are commonly deep-rooted and broad-based: when a person possesses a certain intellectual or moral virtue, then this virtue, normally, shows itself in many different areas of this person’s life.[[15]](#footnote-16)

The broad-based nature of intellectual virtues is hardly surprising; intellectual virtues have internal psychological components that lead to external acts in different areas of a person’s life. As Linda Zagzebski has insightfully pointed out, we ‘admire open-mindedness the same way we admire moral virtues’, and ‘there is something in the person’s psychology that is expressed in the observed behavior, and it is the internal psychology that is the object of our admiration’ (Zagzebski 2019: 28, 29). So, if one is deeply concerned for the truth or reality, not merely for winning a debate or quarrel, then one normally has the desire and motivation ‘to be open to the views of others even when they conflict with one’s own views’ and ‘to be careful, attentive, and thorough in getting evidence, evaluating it, and reaching a conclusion’ (Zagzebski 2019: 30). Thus, a person who possesses a variety of intellectual virtues would naturally exercise them in different areas of their life.

Moreover, intellectual and moral virtues are closely related. Let me explain this point by drawing further on Zagzebski’s work. Zagzebski perceptively observes: ‘Envy, pride, and the urge to reinforce prejudices can easily inhibit the acquisition of intellectual virtues’ (Zagzebski 1996: 159). Thus, very often, intellectual failings are outcomes of moral vices. In addition, many moral virtues, such as patience, perseverance, and courage, are causally necessary for the possession of intellectual virtues. For instance, there is ‘a close causal connection between moral perseverance and intellectual perseverance’ (ibid.). Furthermore, it can even be noted that patience, perseverance, courage, and some other virtues simply ‘apply both to the moral and to the intellectual realm’ (ibid.). For these reasons, a person’s moral and intellectual character are inextricably linked.

Thus, whether a person can reliably demonstrate and exercise civic virtues in her public life is dependent on her *intellectual and moral character as a whole*. In this light, it would make little sense to claim that citizens can be virtuous in politics regardless of their private intellectual and moral character. If we are concerned about civic or political virtue, we should be no less concerned about intellectual and moral excellence.

Tahzib claims that the state should establish and maintain social conditions conducive to morally and intellectually excellent ways of life. I do agree; however, perfectionist policies are important not only for enabling citizens to lead flourishing lives, but also, crucially, for cultivating excellent moral and intellectual character traits so that citizens are able to act justly and to pursue justice. In this spirit, the kind of education that is important for future generations of citizens should not be solely citizenship-based education, which seeks to nurture reasonable and cooperative members of society; rather, it should be humanity-based education, which aims to create intellectually and morally good human beings.[[16]](#footnote-17) My perfectionist account of civic virtue supports humanity-based education, and, more generally, can strengthen Tahzib’s view that modern liberal states have moral duties to establish and maintain social conditions conducive to excellent and flourishing lives.

Nevertheless, Tahzib’s idea that political justification should not be based on the truth of any comprehensive doctrine of the good life remains extremely important. Insofar as we are concerned about citizens’ mutual justification in politics, the state’s promotion of intellectual and moral virtues should be justified by reasons that are freestanding from comprehensive doctrines of the good life. As far as I understand, my brief argument about the importance of intellectual and moral virtues above is not dependent on the truth of any particular moral or religious comprehensive doctrine. This, I hope, already indicates that it is possible for citizens to argue for and support state promotion of a variety of moral and intellectual virtues without invoking any particular comprehensive doctrine, and without recourse to the constructivist approach to public reason that Tahzib has advocated.

To conclude, Tahzib’s theory of perfectionism has advanced the longstanding philosophical debates over perfectionism. I do not expect my brief comments on Tahzib’s theory and my perfectionist account of civic virtue to be accepted without further ado. However, I will be satisfied if they promote discussion leading to more elaborate views.

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1. Tahzib, Collis. 2022. *A Perfectionist Theory of Justice*. New York: Oxford University Press. Unless otherwise stated, page and chapter numbers enclosed in parentheses within the text refer to this book. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. This line of defense of comprehensive perfectionism has been pursued by Steven Wall (2014). For a brief discussion of it, see Mang and Chan (forthcoming). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Rawls would reject this kind of partial concealment of the justification of political principles. To Rawls (1993: 66–71), the full philosophical justifications for the principles of justice should be knowable by and acceptable to all reasonable citizens. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Some might think that the strategy of stipulation is merely a philosophical manoeuvre: in fact, citizens do not have to be informed about it, and still less do they have to agree on it; citizens need only agree and expect each other to agree that they must believe certain things in order to be regarded as reasonable. I have already criticized this line of reasoning, which involves partial concealment of the justification of political principles from the public. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. For recent criticisms of the constructivist approach to public reason, see, e.g., Billingham (2017); Vallier and Muldoon (2021). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. In contrast, moderate perfectionists, Joseph Chan (2000) and I (2013) included, do not seek to define the concept of reasonable in the way Tahzib suggests. Like Tahzib, they claim that legislation and public policy making should not be based on any comprehensive doctrine of the good life, but unlike him, they use the concept of reasonable only to talk about the moral and epistemic reasonableness of citizens and the epistemic soundness of various kinds of judgements about the good life. However, I agree with Tahzib’s criticism (2022: 207) that moderate perfectionists have not been clear about the contractualist details, such as the constituency of reasonable citizens that political liberals have agonized over. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. In this respect, I depart from my view expressed in Mang 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. That said, I have some reservations about public reason as a political ideal. See Mang (2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. It may be argued that it is misleading for Tahzib to call all four principles perfectionist principles of justice while only one of them is genuinely perfectionist. But I will not press this point. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. See also Tahzib 2022: 248–50. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. While I also think that the cultivation of artistic excellence can in some ways help citizens to pursue social justice, I will focus my attention here on intellectual and moral excellence. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. However, it is worth noting that Matthew Kramer (2017) has recently proposed what he calls aspirational perfectionism. Unlike most perfectionists, Kramer argues that the state should pursue a wide range of policies that are typically associated with perfectionism for the reason that the attainment of excellence by a society through the emergence of impressive feats within it is crucial for the warrantedness of a robust sense of self-respect on the part of each individual who belongs to that society. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. See, for example, the arguments for perfectionism in Raz (1986), Sher (1997), and Wall (1998). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. Some liberal theorists consider liberal virtues as both civic and personal virtues. See Galston 1991: Chapter 10 and Macedo 1990: Chapter 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. I borrow the useful term ‘broad-based’ from Weithman (2004: 303), who characterizes temperance as a broad-based moral virtue as it tends to show itself in many areas of a person’s life. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. For a similar view of education, see Appiah 2021: 7, 19. Note that Rawls’s view of education for children is non-perfectionist and citizenship-based; see Rawls 1993: 200. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)