

A LIBERAL THEORY OF CIVIC VIRTUE*

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I. INTRODUCTION

A democratic society cannot flourish if its citizens merely pursue their own narrow interests. If it is to do more than survive, at least a substantial proportion of its citizens must fulfill responsibilities that go beyond simply avoiding the violation of others' rights and occasionally casting a vote. The vitality and success of a democracy requires that many citizens—ideally all of them—contribute something to their communities and participate responsibly in the political process.¹ The disposition to do these things is a large part of what constitutes civic virtue. But that virtue encompasses considerably more. My task here is to explore civic virtue. I first outline a conception of virtue in general and, with that set out, pursue the question of what makes a virtue civic. My special concern is to articulate what constitutes civic virtue in relation to an enduring problem for democratic societies and especially for the pluralistic democracies of the Western world: how to determine what constitutes a proper relation between religion and politics and, in the lives of religious citizens having civic virtue, an appropriate balance between religious and secular considerations.

II. VIRTUES AS NORMATIVELY STRUCTURED ELEMENTS OF CHARACTER

To have a virtue is to have a certain kind of character trait. The trait may be more or less deeply rooted; it may be more or less dominating in the person's behavior; and it may be variable in many other ways. Moreover, both cognitive and motivational elements are central in any virtue. A virtuous person, say one with the trait of veracity, must have certain beliefs; some would say, indeed, that these must constitute knowledge, such as knowledge of when it is appropriate to avoid an unjustified question rather than either answer it truthfully or lie. Virtuous people must also have desires (or other motivational elements, such as inten-

* This paper has benefited from discussions at the United States Military Academy and at the University of Nebraska School of Law. I have also profited from comments by Richard Duncan, Robert Schopp, Robert Solomon, and, especially, Ellen Frankel Paul.

¹ I use the term 'citizen' broadly, to apply to both permanent legal aliens and citizens. I do not include illegal aliens, but take it that conscientious citizens, even if they favor deporting the former, should be at least humanely concerned with their well-being.

tions) appropriate to the virtue, such as, in the case of fidelity, a desire to stand by friends.²

There are at least six conceptually important dimensions of a virtue of character. These correspond to situational, conceptual, cognitive, motivational, behavioral, and teleological dimensions of the trait itself and the actions proper to it—actions from virtue, as we might call them.³ These dimensions are, first, the *field* of a virtue, roughly the kind of human situation, such as voting in an election, in which it characteristically operates; second, the characteristic *targets* it aims at, such as, in the case of civic virtue, election of the best candidate and, in the case of honesty, avoidance of deceit; third, the agent's *understanding* of that field, for instance understanding of criteria for being the best candidate; fourth, the agent's *motivation* to act in that field in a certain way, where that way is appropriate to the virtue, say a desire to contribute to the well-being of the nation as opposed to wanting just one's own enrichment (the former but not the latter desire is appropriate to civic virtue); fifth, the agent's acting on the *basis* of that understanding and motivation, for instance on the basis of a concern with national prosperity rather than with one's own professional advantage; and sixth, the *beneficiaries* of the virtue, above all (and perhaps solely) the person(s) who properly benefit from its realization: for civic virtue, citizens in general; for honesty, one's audience; for fidelity, family, friends, or larger groups such as one's community or country; and so forth.⁴ These six notions are specially appropriate to explicating action from virtue, including political actions. The notion of the field of a virtue (an *aretaic* field) is particularly important.

The field of justice might be roughly retribution and the distribution of goods and evils; that of fidelity might be conduct required by explicit or implicit promises; and so forth. Such fields may overlap other aretaic fields, but each has some distinctive features. How does a virtuous person

² For discussions of many aspects of virtue ethics, see Peter A. French, Theodore E. Uehling, Jr., and Howard K. Wettstein, eds., *Midwest Studies in Philosophy XIII, Ethical Theory: Character and Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988). The studies by Robert C. Solomon, on love, and Gabriele Taylor, on envy and jealousy, are helpful investigations of specific virtues; the papers by Marcia Baron ("Remorse and Agent-Regret"), Amélie O. Rorty ("Virtues and Their Vicissitudes"), Nancy Sherman ("Common Sense and Uncommon Virtue"), and James D. Wallace ("Ethics and the Craft Analogy") are among the helpful studies of more general aspects of virtue ethics. For a detailed treatment of virtue ethics that contrasts it with common-sense and Kantian ethics and stresses its elements of continuity with utilitarianism, see Michael Slote, *From Morality to Virtue* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

³ Here and in the next few paragraphs I develop ideas in my "Acting from Virtue," *Mind*, vol. 104 (1995), pp. 449–71.

⁴ Special problems are created by such groups as religious communities and military units, particularly in times of crisis or war. Here there may be explicit promises of obedience that make fidelity more far-reaching than it would otherwise be; and in extreme cases, such as wartime military service, conduct that would ordinarily be required by one virtue, such as beneficence or compassion, may be prohibited by another, say fidelity to the war effort. The latter, however, should not be understood so as to license atrocities.

understand the field of, say, citizenship? It would be natural for the appropriate understanding to manifest itself in believing that elections create a duty to vote, that listening to the candidates provides information citizens ought to use in judging the issues, and so on. But suppose someone did not use the concepts of duty or obligation (at least here) and thought simply that it is *good* to vote and to criticize people who do not. A virtuous person could be skeptical about moral concepts or might think them indistinguishable from aretaic concepts in general. We need not require of virtuous citizens that they approach citizenship with any specific normative concepts, only that, as citizens, they operate with any of a range of acceptable concepts and commitments.

A moral field cannot be understood without a sense of its (moral) normativity, but that sense is not restricted to either virtue concepts (as Aristotle may seem to imply) or hedonic ones (as some utilitarians perhaps tend to think) or deontological principles (as Kantians may tend to think). There *do* seem to be some general requirements for understanding any moral field, for example that a kind of impartiality be recognized as necessary,⁵ that the well-being of people must be given some weight, and that the relevant norms be, if not “designed” to overrule self-interest, then capable of conflicting with it. It may be that action from virtue requires an exercise of some normative concept, if only that of what is in some appropriate way good or bad; and certainly the possession of a virtue entails a *recognition capacity* regarding the appropriate occasions for the exercise of the virtue. A conscientious citizen, for instance, must have a sense of when to act to promote a social policy that will relieve poverty or to oppose one that will lead to war. This is part of what it is to understand the field of a virtue, and without that understanding one would not act from virtue.

It is useful to conceive the relevant traits—at least traits of broadly *moral* character, which is where I would place civic virtue—as constituted by fairly stable and normally long-standing wants and beliefs, or at least beliefs, provided they carry sufficient motivation.⁶ Consider fairness. Surely it requires appropriate wants, such as desires to treat people equally, and certain beliefs, say the belief that providing the same opportunities and rewards for people in the same circumstances is morally required. The

⁵ This is a subtle matter. As Bernard Gert points out in *Morality*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming), in certain cases, those he calls matters of moral ideals (as opposed to strict duties), such as when one must decide which of several deserving charities to give to, one need not be impartial and can choose as one simply prefers. Notice, however, that one could not permissibly exaggerate the merits of one charity in order to justify preferring it over another.

⁶ Two points are in order here. First, this formulation is intentionally vague, but should serve our purposes. Second, I do not think beliefs can carry all the motivation required; but for this essay, as opposed to a full-scale analysis of traits, what is essential to the point is only that traits require both a cognitive and a motivational dimension. It is at least more perspicuous to separate these as I do in the text.

more *self-consciously fair* an agent is, the greater the moral content of the appropriate wants and beliefs, or at least the greater the tendency for the agent to entertain the relevant content; but even being spontaneously fair is more than a matter of simply doing the relevant kinds of deeds. The deeds must be appropriately aimed, in terms of what the agent wants and believes, or they are not moral—in the sense of morally performed—but (at best) merely consistent with morality. If I give my seminar students the same grade only because I like them equally well, then even if they all deserve that grade I am not exhibiting fairness in my grading; the fairness of my resulting grades is quite coincidental.

If traits are conceived as cognitively and motivationally constituted in the way I have illustrated, then we each normally have a measure of indirect control over our own traits, by virtue of the kind of indirect control we have over our wants and beliefs. To be sure, normal agents are not directly responsible for producing either their beliefs or their wants. We can produce them *by* doing certain things, but normally we cannot produce them except through indirect and often tedious means. This does not imply, however, that we are not indirectly responsible for having produced certain of our traits. A selfish person who, as a foreseeable and resistible result of the selfishness, is unfair but wants to reform, can, through repeated self-discipline, become unselfish and fair. In this way, one could both recognize indirect responsibility for a bad trait and successfully take responsibility for replacing it with good ones. Given sufficient moral commitment, it is sometimes possible to become to a significant extent morally self-made.

Civic virtue seems less basic than certain other broadly moral traits; it is, for example, constituted largely by fairness, veracity, loyalty, and a measure of benevolence toward fellow citizens. If so, then at least for those who already have those traits, some degree of civic virtue should be not unexpected and can certainly be cultivated. Even given these basic elements, however, the cultivation is no trivial matter, since civic virtue has a distinctive field and can demand much in the way of self-discipline. Why that is so can be best determined in the light of a conception of what constitutes civic virtue. Developing such a conception is the main business of the next two sections.

III. THE GROUNDS OF CIVIC VIRTUE

Rather than directly approach the question of what constitutes civic virtue, I want to consider how it might be conceived in relation to its grounds—roughly, the standards one must fulfill in order to have the virtues. Doing this presupposes, of course, that we have *some* conception of it; but it will probably be uncontroversial to say that whatever else civic virtue is, it is a trait appropriate to citizens as such. We may, in addition, consider it mainly from the point of view of citizenship in a liberal

democracy—the kind of society of concern here. Let me briefly consider four plausible kinds of grounding.

First, one might take the view that there are universal standards of morality that should be the framework within which civic virtue develops. This approach does not require an overarching moral theory, such as Kantianism or utilitarianism. One might hold, as W. D. Ross and others have, that there are basic moral principles which any thoughtful, relevantly informed person will tend to abide by, even if without the least self-consciousness.⁷ One might also hold, with Aristotle and others, that there are basic virtues that guide moral conduct and may be presupposed as a framework for understanding civic virtue. As Ross viewed morality, its central demands come in principles of *prima facie* duty: there are duties of fidelity (promise-keeping and veracity—conceived as fidelity to one's word) and reparation, of justice and gratitude, of beneficence and self-improvement, and of non-injury.⁸ Now clearly duties of non-injury, reparation, fidelity, justice, and beneficence go a long way (though not the whole way) toward indicating how one should (*prima facie*) behave as a citizen.⁹ (Self-improvement and gratitude play a significant but lesser role in citizenship.)

A second major approach to grounding civic virtue is contractarian: civic virtue is the kind of trait appropriate to citizenship of the sort that would be agreed to under proper contracting conditions—for instance, the sort of citizenship in which mutual respect and equal basic rights are fundamental. One might follow here a Hobbesian, Lockean, Rawlsian, or other line. If, for example, one followed John Rawls and made his two principles of justice fundamental to the constitution of civic virtue, that virtue would imply at least a disposition both to permit the greatest liberty all citizens can mutually enjoy and to nurture a system of distribution in which inequalities satisfy the difference principle and are thus in the interest of the worst off and attach to positions filled by fair competition. In addition, one would construe what Rawls calls *public reason* as the primary mode of thinking appropriate to civic behavior, and the only kind appropriate to certain official conduct, especially that of the

⁷ Without endorsing (or rejecting) a broadly intuitionist approach like Ross's, Sissela Bok has suggested a minimal morality freed of theoretical baggage that might divide people; see her *Common Values* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1995).

⁸ See W. D. Ross, *The Right and the Good* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1930), p. 21.

⁹ Ross himself thought that there is a *prima facie* duty to obey the law grounded partly in the duty of gratitude (to one's country), partly in the implicit promise to obey that goes with permanent residence, and, for countries with laws that are "instruments for the general good," partly in that fact; see *ibid.*, pp. 27–28. For discussion of Ross's view and of the case for the duty to obey the law being a basic one, see M. B. E. Smith, "The Duty to Obey the Law," in D. Patterson, ed., *Companion to the Philosophy of Law* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1996). A different perspective on the duty to obey the law is explored in relation to jury nullification (roughly, a jury's acquitting a defendant despite legal guilt) in Robert Schopp, "Verdicts of Conscience: Nullification and Necessity as Jury Responses to Crimes of Conscience," *Southern California Law Review*, vol. 69 (1996), pp. 2039–2116.

judiciary.¹⁰ There would be other elements implicit in a Rawlsian approach, but my purpose here requires only specifying in outline how any of these approaches would work.

The third approach I have in mind is pragmatic: one considers our present sociopolitical situation and seeks a conception of citizenship that yields a notion of civic virtue that would command wide assent. This approach might be eclectic and might constrain conditions for assent in various ways, for instance to agreement under adequate relevant information. Thus, one might consider a specific society, like that of the United States today, note how it operates and what constitute some of its major problems, and construct a conception of citizenship that addresses those problems in the context. On the one hand, this pragmatic approach will seem to many to need grounding in something more fundamental, or at least the backing of a contractarian argument showing that its results would be accepted under idealized conditions; but, on the other hand, a strength of the approach is that it does not require, and arguably does not even invite, the achievement of agreement on fundamentals. That kind of search for consensus may easily divide us.

A fourth approach is at least partly historical: one seeks to find part of the basis of civic virtue, and even of political obligation in general, in the historical conditions of the society in question, say in long-standing agreements to which the people have at least tacitly consented. On the assumption that either initially—say, on contractarian grounds—or at some point in the past, the overall conditions of a society merited allegiance to its government and civility among citizens, one can identify injustices thereafter for rectification. Moreover, given continuity in the social conditions meriting allegiance to the state, one might establish the permissibility of other patterns (say of ownership and control) on the basis of their arising by just processes, such as legitimate transfer between generations. To be sure, this approach is severely limited if one does not have adequate standards for determining what *merits* allegiance and what constitutes an injustice; but given an adequate set of such standards, a historical conception can lead to insight about what is appropriate to civically virtuous conduct at a given time. Such a historical exploration might reveal injustices so severe as to require moves to change the prevailing governmental structure; it might also reveal less serious deficiencies, for instance that some patterns of distribution, say high rates of taxation, are unwarranted; and it might provide some justification for elements in the status quo that would otherwise seem objectionable.¹¹

¹⁰ For the two principles of justice, see John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971); and for an account of public reason and its place in a liberal democracy, see Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), esp. Lecture VI.

¹¹ Robert Nozick's *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), develops a partly historical conception of the basis of the state that is instructive in this context.

I find something of value in all four approaches, and I believe that there is a great deal of convergence among them when they are conscientiously applied in the light of the same relevant data, such as socioeconomic information about the working of the kind of society in question. Any of them can be combined with a theistic approach; but although I will try to articulate a framework of principles that takes account of theistic conceptions of the proper foundations of the state, I will not separately consider them. As establishing grounds for political obligation and civic virtue, they are problematic in ways that will become apparent.

The first approach (based on universal standards of morality) may need separate comment because to some it may smack of a dogmatic appeal to intuition. If, however, we distinguish between agreement *in* reasons, which is simply a matter of accepting the same first-order *prima facie* normative judgments on the same grounds, and agreement *on* reasons, which requires agreement on some theoretical or other general proposition about those grounds, this worry diminishes greatly. More specifically, an extensive agreement in moral practice is compatible with absence of agreement or even sharp disagreement in moral theory. Consider a policy of waste disposal that exposes a community to a cancer risk. We are much less likely to disagree about whether this danger provides us with a reason to oppose the policy than on a theory of reasons showing why it does so. Rather than argue here for the significance of this distinction,¹² I shall proceed to frame a conception of civic virtue and indicate (sometimes only implicitly) how it might be given support by one or more of these four approaches to the question.

IV. CIVIC VIRTUE AND THE GROUNDS FOR SOCIOPOLITICAL ACTION

If virtue is conceived as I have suggested, it is essentially connected with reasons for action, in both the normative and the motivational senses of that phrase. A loyal person must, for instance, have, or at least recognize, normative reasons why people *should* be treated in a certain way and, sufficiently often, must do an appropriate kind of thing *for* some such reason,¹³ in a sense which implies being motivated by the reason. If this double-barreled requirement is correct, then we have at least two kinds of question to consider here: what normative reasons should guide the aims of citizens insofar as they have civic virtue, and what motivational role should the relevant reasons play in their civic conduct? I take these in turn.

¹² I have defended the distinction in, e.g., "Intrinsic Value and the Dignity of Persons," in my *Moral Knowledge and Ethical Character* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). The approach of the book as a whole has elements in common with both the universal standards and the pragmatic approaches.

¹³ In "Acting from Virtue" (*supra* note 3), I present a detailed account of acting for one or more reasons that are connected in the relevant way with a virtue.

Some of the relevant ground has already been covered, at least if we may take Ross's common-sense list of *prima facie* moral duties, such as those of justice and non-injury, as a reasonable starting point in approaching the ethics of citizenship—the broad area of ethics of which the theory of civic virtue is part. If, however, we think of the civic context, in which one may need to speak (in a public meeting, say) to others who may be total strangers, at least one further requirement also arises. It concerns what might be called *public comprehensibility*.¹⁴

Particularly where one's civic behavior, such as a vote to pass a new law, would substantially restrict the behavior of citizens—as with the passage of a military draft or the prohibition of abortion—it is important to be able to explain it (and if possible justify it) in terms comprehensible to normal adult citizens (taking them as they are in the English-speaking world today to get a baseline—since a standard relativized to normality in just any historical situation could be too low); in short, it is important to be able to meet a certain standard of public comprehensibility. Granting that there may be special conditions under which secrecy is needed, the health of a democracy requires that, by and large, citizens speak to each other honestly about their preferences and, often, provide reasons in support of their judgments favoring one or another specific policy or candidate. Presented with reasons by the opposition, we are often content to be outvoted; persistent loss with no explanation can easily produce alienation among the outvoted minority. And if one does not understand the reasons given—if, for example, they are expressed in obscure terms or presented as results of the deliverances of a sixth sense—both alienation and civil strife may result. Furthermore, one cannot even tell in such cases whether one's opponents got what they wanted when the candidate in question takes office or the law or policy in question is in force. Not having a comprehensible statement of a reason for preference, one can only conjecture on this matter, whereas one can reason with people much better regarding the future when one knows why they wanted the status quo and whether it gave them what they wished for in supporting it.

Alienation and civil strife are less likely, and certainly less likely to result in a breakdown of civil order, where the policies or laws at issue are non-coercive, but there is virtually always some restriction involved in a new law or policy—unless it is itself a *liberalization*, such as a deregulation or a lifting of a ban, say on alcohol (even then it restricts the behavior of the enforcers and imposes costs that are typically defrayed from tax revenues, a coercive and often resented basis of social action). There are, to

¹⁴ The notion in question is close to what Rawls, in *Political Liberalism*, describes under the heading of *public reason*, and what Kent Greenawalt calls accessibility; see Greenawalt, *Private Consciences and Public Reasons* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), esp. ch. 3. For a proposal of some definite rules of civic virtue for public officials, see Michael Davis, "Civic Virtue, Corruption, and the Structure of Moral Theories," in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy XIII* (*supra* note 2), esp. pp. 355–57.

be sure, enabling laws, such as those making a kind of contract valid; here the implied restriction is only on people (of whom there may be none) who would be materially affected, such as those who would interfere with what is enabled, say those who would interfere with the use of contracts. These laws are not typical of the laws or policies calling for sociopolitical action by citizens, but they can serve to bring out a sense in which laws need not be coercive. Even if there is also a sense in which any law is coercive, there are degrees and kinds of coercion, and (other things equal) the *prima facie* obligation of public comprehensibility becomes stronger as the degree of coercion rises.

It should also be noted that there are coercive choices of how to realize a policy or law that are less burdensome than the kind of coercion represented by the draft or universal taxation. Suppose there is already a law mandating a program of medical research and a democratic decision is then made to direct more funds to cancer than to AIDS. This might be called *specificatory coercion*—a secondary kind that determines in which of several permissible ways an existing requirement will be carried out—as opposed to *primary coercion*, which makes a determinate kind of conduct, such as paying a certain percentage of one's income for social security, mandatory.¹⁵ Even where primary coercion is warranted, not just any kind of specificatory coercion is permissible; but other things equal, it takes more to justify the former than the latter.

There is, then, a public comprehensibility requirement that belongs to the conception of civic virtue. I would now add a further consideration so far left implicit: that a comprehensible reason should be (evidentially) *adequate* to the use made of it. Roughly, this is to say the reason is such that, if it should be true, it would justify the law or public policy in question. The corresponding principle—call it the *principle of civically adequate reasons*—might be put thus: civically virtuous citizens in a liberal democracy have a *prima facie* obligation to have, and under appropriate conditions to be willing to offer, publicly comprehensible and evidentially adequate reasons for their support of laws and public policies. This applies especially where the laws or policies in question would restrict the behavior of citizens, but it applies to some degree in any case of such support, since the principle specifies virtuous citizens.

Naturally, a fully conscientious effort to find a comprehensible and adequate reason may fail; if so, it is excusable. But to say just that one simply prefers a candidate one is voting for is not in general to give an adequate reason for the deed (though it may suffice to break a tie where one has equally cogent reasons favoring each of two competing candidates); to say merely that the candidate was born on the second Tuesday

¹⁵ This is not a sharp distinction; there are, e.g., different ways to collect social security taxes even when the tax rate is specified. But there is an important difference between choices among ways to do a mandated thing and among substantially different kinds of mandated things.

of a year that begins a decade is not to offer a comprehensible *or* adequate reason. The words are intelligible, of course, but *as* expressing a reason they are neither comprehensible nor adequate.

What I mean by 'public comprehensibility' is similar to what others have meant by 'accessibility', but the latter term has often been taken to imply that the reason in question is not dependent on a person's comprehensive view of the world but draws only on something like (in Rawls's phrase) public reason.¹⁶ This requirement is not entailed by public comprehensibility as I understand it; for there might be such views that at least in the relevant parts are comprehensible to normal adults in the required way. The importance of public comprehensibility, however, like that of accessibility insofar as it is different, is largely a matter of communicability in a sense appropriate to avoiding alienation and civil strife.

If we take avoidance of alienation and civil strife as important goals of citizens who have civic virtue, and if, beyond that, we suppose that such citizens positively seek to promote the flourishing of the civil society in which they live (where flourishing is understood largely though not entirely in terms of the physical and psychological well-being of citizens), we can also say something further about the adequacy of reasons for supporting or advocating laws and social policies. Roughly, I suggest that we call a reason *negatively, or preventively, adequate* provided that (in comparison with the alternatives) it indicates that without the law or policy the society will be worse off in relation to avoiding alienation or civil strife, and *positively, or melioratively, adequate* provided it indicates that the law or policy will (in comparison with the alternatives) make the society better off in moving it closer to flourishing or further from an undesirable condition such as poverty or civil strife. A reason may of course be adequate in both respects; improved education may be both required to prevent backsliding and adequate to enhance prosperity.

Virtuous citizens will give special attention and weight to negative and positive adequacy, probably preferring the former in cases of conflict (a preference that seems widely shared by people of differing theories, especially in similar cases of choice between relieving someone's suffering and making someone who is already well-off better-off). One could go so far as to say that it is a civic duty to give substantial weight to such considerations in one's sociopolitical conduct. Taking this to be a civic duty is meant to indicate that it is essential for civic virtue. The point is not, however, that there is no moral *right* not to do it, say to vote on a selfish basis (though a case can be made that there is at most a right not to be coerced to do the virtuous thing, as opposed to a positive right to vote selfishly). I take it that virtue requires that we do things not strictly

¹⁶ On accessibility and public reason, see Rawls, *Political Liberalism*; Greenawalt, *Private Consciences and Public Reasons*; Thomas Nagel, *Equality and Partiality* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); and Charles Larmore, "Beyond Religion and Enlightenment," *San Diego Law Review*, vol. 30 (1993), pp. 799–815.

demanding by the narrow morality of rights, for instance by people's rights against us—the domain of morality in which we may be subject to morally coercive pressures such as wide disapprobation if we commit a violation, as when we encroach on someone's rights of free speech. These rights are often backed by legal coercion as well; but the appropriateness of that is not a defining property of a moral right, just as being backed by the appropriateness of such behavior as strong moral condemnation is not a defining property of a moral virtue.

Any of the four approaches to the basis of civic virtue noted in Section III could be invoked in grounding civic virtue so conceived, though each would do it in a different way. The details are not essential here; my point is only that the conception of civic virtue I am developing, apart from minor differences in how it should be exercised, is neutral among the various kinds of accounts of the basis of political obligation and civic responsibility. The plausibility of this neutrality claim will emerge more clearly if we pursue just what is involved in civic virtue.

Let us begin with a case in which mere personal preference is politically determinative. Suppose one simply likes one candidate more than another but thinks, from the impersonal point of view of adequate reasons, that the other is appreciably better. May one, consistently with civic virtue, support the former on the basis of mere preference? If the question is whether there is a moral right to do so in the context of a liberal democracy, the answer is apparently yes (there is also a legal right, but that is not at issue here). If, however, the question is whether one ought to do so, in a sense of 'ought' that goes with ideals of citizenship, I think the answer may be negative. It is in a way selfish to allow a personal preference to outweigh a judgment of objective difference in how well the candidates will serve society as a whole.

To be sure, if the preference for one candidate over another is not merely a matter of personal liking but of one's financial gain, then at least others can identify with it as a rational preference tied up with the possibility of realizing material goods of one or another kind that is universally appreciated. Moreover, there may be those who believe democracy will work best, even by partly non-material ideals of flourishing, if each citizen honestly pursues self-interest within the constraints of mutual respect. I consider this a contingent matter and will not contest it, doubtful though I find it. But surely such motivation, as a pervasive feature of character and sociopolitical conduct, is not what constitutes civic virtue, and I doubt that this *is* a contingent matter. Perhaps civic virtue is consistent with indulging sheer preferences or selfish desires some of the time and where little is at stake sociopolitically; but the exceptions are limited (in ways I cannot now try to detail).

The importance of public comprehensibility for sociopolitical reasons suggests that religious considerations may constitute a special problem in a liberal democracy. For at least some of them will not be comprehensible

(as normative reasons) to some citizens, for instance either non-theists or certain radically disagreeing theists who, because of their own religious commitments, cannot see reasons offered from another religious point of view as (normative) reasons at all.¹⁷ Even apart from this, there are, in view of the commitment of a liberal democracy to separation of church and state, questions about the appropriateness of religious reasons in the sociopolitical conduct of citizens. Given the importance of the issue, I want to pursue it at some length and to suggest some further principles appropriate to civic virtue.

V. CIVIC VIRTUE AND THE BALANCE OF RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR REASONS

If we are to understand how civic virtue is realized in religious citizens, it is well to think about how a mature, rational religious person who is a conscientious citizen will approach sociopolitical issues in a liberal democracy like that of the contemporary Western societies. It seems plain that most such citizens will be aware of their fallibility in interpreting their religion as it applies to public life and will be sensitive to moral standards, as well as to specifically religious ones, differing from their own.¹⁸ Those in what we may loosely call the Hebraic-Christian tradition, which encourages beneficence and charity, will also try to contribute to the welfare of others, including others beyond their immediate community.

To be sure, many religious people are not particularly sensitive to moral or religious standards differing from their own. Many of these, however, can be persuaded to reflect on such differences. In any case, I am proposing a standard worth achieving, and if it *can* be achieved by normal citizens (as I hope will seem clear) then we may focus mainly on its merits and leave aside for the present how to institute the standard. In the light of the conception set out above of the likely shape of civic virtue in a religious citizen, I want to propose and defend some further principles of civic virtue, as specifically applicable to a liberal democracy and highly relevant to religious citizens in a pluralistic society like that of the United States and other Western societies today.

The first principle I want to discuss (which, in earlier work, I have called the *principle of secular rationale*) says that as a citizen in a liberal democracy one has a *prima facie* obligation not to advocate or support

¹⁷ If we count as religious the significant number of theological noncognitivists who identify themselves as such, e.g. as Christian, there is further difficulty in understanding the normative force of religiously grounded reasons: since on this view religious language is (roughly speaking) expressive rather than assertive of propositions, the authority of normative claims which are supposed to be grounded in divine command is at best problematic.

¹⁸ These points are argued at some length in my "Liberal Democracy and the Place of Religion in Politics," in my book (with counterpart essays by Nicholas Wolterstorff) *Religion and the Public Square: The Place of Religious Convictions in Political Debate* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997).

any law or public policy that restricts human conduct, unless one has, and is willing to offer, adequate secular reason for this advocacy or support (say, for one's vote). I am taking a secular reason as roughly one whose normative force, i.e., its status as a *prima facie* justificatory element, does not evidentially depend on the existence of God (or on denying it) or on theological considerations, or on the pronouncements of a person or institution *qua* religious authority.¹⁹ This is similar to the principle of civically adequate reasons expressed above; but it addresses religious reasons directly and, in part because it is more demanding, specifies only laws and public policies that would restrict human behavior.

The principle of secular rationale might seem to place a burden on the religious. It would, to some degree, in some cases. But suppose we assume a broadly Western theism, as I do here since my main concern with the problem of how to balance religious and secular considerations is anchored in that context. Central to Western theism is the conception of God as omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent (this is not to deny that these attributes can be central in any other theism). We can then take God to have properties in the light of which there is reason to doubt that the principle of secular rationale, when conscientiously applied, would be seriously burdensome for a great many people in the Hebraic-Christian tradition. Begin with the idea that God is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent. On this basis, we might expect God to structure us and the world so that there is a (humanly accessible) secular path to the discovery of moral truths, at least to those far-reaching ones we must abide by in order to have a civilized life. The absence of such a path is at best difficult to reconcile with omnibenevolence (given the knowledge and power to provide it). To be sure, there are theologies and traditions that affect interpretation of the relevant truths; but rational persons who accept the basic conception of God in question should be willing to view those elements in terms of that conception, as well as to interpret the conception in terms of them.

If, given God's omniscience and omnibenevolence, there is as much reason to expect alignment between religiously well-grounded, and secularly well-grounded, moral standards as I suggest, then following the principle of secular rationale should not generally put a religious person into disequilibrium over a conflict between religious and secular consid-

¹⁹ See my "The Separation of Church and State and the Obligations of Citizenship," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, vol. 18 (1989), pp. 259–96. The principle applies with differential force in different contexts. Moreover, the adequacy requirement rules out some *non*-religious reasons, e.g. those that are ill-grounded; but my concern here is with the specifically religious in relation to the political. I might add that the principle is not meant to require that an adequate reason be objectively correct in a sense implying its equivalence to a true proposition. A false proposition that is sufficiently well justified can count here as an adequate reason. As to the *prima facie* qualification, the relevant factors that can defeat the obligation are the sorts of considerations a morally conscientious person would take to be such, e.g. the need to argue from religious grounds in order to muster opposition to genocide strong enough to stop it.

erations except where there is an error, for instance where at least one of the two sets of grounds is erroneous. The Bible might be misinterpreted, or there might be a reliance on a false (secular) ethical premise or on an invalid inference. Moreover, the principle of secular rationale is intended to be helpful in interdenominational relations *within* a religious tradition, as well as *between* different religious traditions and between religious and non-religious people. Intramural strife can be deadly. It seems less likely to occur where the principle of secular rationale is adhered to.

If the principle of secular rationale seems to reflect a bias against religious reasons, it should be noted that there are some respects in which religious reasons are special in relation to liberal democracy. I have in mind particularly the respects making it appropriate to constrain them in the moderate way the principle does. First, the kinds of religious reasons that concern us most are directly or indirectly taken to represent an infallible authority, in a sense implying that the propositions expressing those reasons *must* be true.²⁰ Second, religious reasons often dictate practices that are distinctively religious in content (such as prayer) or intent (such as preserving a fetus on the ground that it is a gift from God), and therefore are plausibly seen in some cases as forcing others to observe a religious injunction. Third, owing to some of these points, religious people often tend to be highly passionate about the importance of everyone's abiding by religious reasons, and non-religious people often tend to be highly passionate about not being coerced to do so. Fourth, partly because religious liberty is a constitutive foundation for liberal democracy, citizens in such a state are naturally and properly resentful about coercion based on religious factors, in a way they are not properly resentful concerning coercion based on, say, considerations of public health.

If these points are roughly correct, then there will be less difficulty appreciating the second principle I suggest—which in earlier work I have called the *principle of secular motivation*. That principle addresses the motivational side of virtue and reflects the point that in a virtuous person the normative reasons connected with the virtue also motivate the conduct they indicate. The principle of secular rationale is a justification principle; this one is a virtue principle: it adds to the former that one has a (prima facie) obligation to abstain from advocacy or support of a law or public policy that restricts human conduct, unless one is sufficiently *motivated* by some (normatively) adequate secular reason, where sufficiency of motivation here implies that some secular reason is motivationally sufficient, roughly in the sense that (a) this reason explains one's action and (b) one would act on it even if, other things remaining equal, one's other reasons were eliminated.²¹

²⁰ Given the assumption of God's infallibility, it is impossible that they be *both* endorsed by God and false, though they need not be regarded as necessarily true in themselves.

²¹ See my "The Separation of Church and State," esp. pp. 284–86.

Since an argument can be tacitly religious without being religious in content, one might fail to adhere to at least the second of these principles even in offering arguments that on their face are neither religious nor fail to provide adequate secular reason for their conclusion. It might be argued, for example, that some people, in presenting a genetic argument for the personhood of the zygote, are not sufficiently motivated by the secular considerations cited in their argument, and (quite apart from whether it is objectively sound) would not find the argument convincing apart from their underlying religious beliefs. Similarly, some people might offer a slippery-slope argument against legalizing physician-assisted suicide when what motivates their conclusion is a conviction that only God may take innocent human life. A person dying of painful inoperable cancer who notices that the same people are undeterred by slippery-slope worries regarding passive euthanasia—which, let us suppose, they describe as “letting nature take its course”—may resent being restricted by what appears to be a religious conviction.

One might think the principle of secular rationale is enough, on the ground that abiding by it will ensure justified sociopolitical actions. Why should motivation matter if the quality of one's justifying reasons is good enough? From the point of view of virtue ethics, at least, it does matter. Insofar as the advocacy in question or other public behavior is supposed to be action *from* virtue, we should look not just at what kind of act it is and what can be said for it abstractly, but also at how it is grounded in the agent's character.²² Just as Kant distinguished acting merely in conformity with duty and acting *from* duty, and Aristotle distinguished—as any virtue theorist should—actions that *express* virtue from those not virtuously performed but merely “in the right state,” i.e., of the right type, we should distinguish actions from civic virtue and actions merely in conformity with it. The woman prevented from having an abortion, and the patient prevented from getting medical assistance in suicide, will tend to resent the preventive legislation as religiously motivated even if the secular arguments offered in support of it seem plausible. Even if they are secular and objectively cogent, moreover, passing the legislation on the basis of religious motivation will be only acting in conformity with civic virtue rather than acting from it. Furthermore, those who acquiesce in the legislation for the cogent reasons given are still likely to wonder what might have happened if the religiously motivated supporters had not found a cogent secular case to offer the opposition.

The main point here may be more readily seen by reflecting on the difference between what we *say* to others and what we *communicate* to them. This difference is particularly relevant to public debate, where voicing, attitude, and even body language can be important elements. We

²² In “Acting from Virtue,” I provide an account of such action which supports the conception of it employed here.

speak with different voices on different occasions and for different purposes. Even when they carry the same content—say that a certain candidate is overall best for the nation—human voices can differ as radically as the timbres and resonances of different musical instruments sounding the same note; and, just as it is the causal basis of those notes, and not their pitch, that produces the quality of the instruments sounding them, with human speech it is the causal basis of what we say, including our motivation, and not the content of what we say, that yields our voice. Our voice is determined more by why and how we say what we do than by the content of what we say.²³ And both in public and in private contexts we tend to listen for voicing as well as content: we try to hear more than just *what* people say, and quite commonly we accept—or reject—what others say because of how they voice it as well as because of what it is. Indeed, the less well we know someone—and we commonly are not well-acquainted with many of our fellow citizens—the more we may depend on voicing to help us get a sense not only of others' sincerity but also of their credibility, cooperativeness, and other traits relevant to the kinds of things we have in common as citizens.

Part of civic virtue consists in having and using an appropriate *civic voice*; part of civic harmony in a framework of pluralism and disagreement consists in using that voice as the primary mode of communication in debating issues important for citizens, especially fundamental ones such as the extent of our liberties, but also lesser matters. It need not be any citizen's only voice, not even for argumentation, and certainly not for self-expression. But a civic voice is achievable by any rational citizen committed to liberal democracy; and if I am right about the prospects for achieving an equilibrium between religiously enjoined moral obligations and secularly grounded duties toward others, then a civic voice is available—in part through adherence to the principle of secular motivation—to most rational religious people without compromise of their basic religious commitments.

One has a voice as a writer and can also have a civic voice as such. In some ways the voice of a writer is less easily, in some more easily, discerned; but the same general points seem to hold. If the writings in question are either expressions of legislative decision or, especially, expressions of judicial decision, then the need for a civic voice is even

²³ Our voice is, however, likely to be also determined *in part* by what we say, and, other things equal, a civic voice is not fully achieved if one is proposing religious reasons as grounds for public policy decisions. It may be possible, however, to present such reasons in a context that preserves a certain balance, e.g. by noting that, in addition to whatever sufficient secular reasons may exist for supporting a piece of legislation such as permitting state aid to handicapped children in religious schools, many religious citizens will support such legislation because they feel it will enhance their ability to provide for their children services they believe God requires. Thus, the emphasis on achieving a proper civic voice as part of civic virtue leads to no simple rule about the admissible content of advocacy of laws or public policies.

greater, and it becomes greater still in proportion to how high up the relevant court is or how large a proportion of the population the legislative body represents. For in these cases there is a sense in which the legislative or judicial voice is supposed to be that of the people or at least representative of the citizenry as a whole.

To be sure, on a different view of democracy, elected representatives might regard themselves as primarily representing their immediate constituents (those who elected them). This seems to me to go too far if it extends to using a voice that would avoidably alienate a minority of their constituents—or indeed would avoidably alienate people eligible to be their constituents who, for such contingent reasons as the place where they reside, are not among these constituents. The issue here is whether civic virtue in a liberal democracy is tied more to a constitutional conception of proper conduct or to a more narrowly representative one. Given the broadly moral grounding of democracy that I prefer as a rationale for democratic government, and given the possibility that majority decisions may in any case fail to preserve our moral rights, I prefer a constitutional conception (which is not to say there should be no provisions for amending constitutions).²⁴ Indeed, since even a duly adopted constitution can be morally corrupt, I leave open the possibility that the *prima facie* moral duty to obey the law (which citizens of liberal democracies at least normally have) is not *basic* in a constitutional democracy and that a sense of that duty is not necessarily an element in civic virtue. Under a constitution permitting slavery, there might be a law requiring one to report escaping slaves. One would surely have no *prima facie* moral obligation to obey it.²⁵ Even apart from this reservation and the preference for a constitutional conception of proper civic conduct, however, there are reasons to adopt the view of civic virtue I propose.

In bringing out further reasons to adopt this view, it may help to stress that it does not imply that civic virtue is intrinsically better than religious virtue; they are good in different ways. Moreover, one can also act from two (or more) virtues, just as one can act from two motives. If one takes in a homeless family from a sense of religious mission *and* in order to keep

²⁴ For an example of the representative position on standards for coercion, see Richard J. Regan, S.J., who suggests “that legislation to enforce public morals, as a matter of prudence, should satisfy two principal conditions. First, such legislation should concern activities which cause serious harm to citizens and the community. Second, the legislation should enjoy broad support from citizens of different religious and ethical persuasions” (Regan, “Virtue, Religion, and Civic Culture,” in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy XIII* [*supra* note 2], p. 346). The results of adopting this proposal would very often be the same as those of adopting mine; but the principles are very different, and his principles embody weaker safeguards against a domination of the non-religious by the religious and even of some subset of religious groups by others. This is particularly so if the relevant notion of harm is not secular (and in Regan’s essay, it seems not to be).

²⁵ There are theoretical problems in the way of grounding a general *prima facie* obligation to obey the law of the kind associated with political obligation. For a detailed treatment of some of the major problems, see A. John Simmons, *Moral Principles and Political Obligations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

the community safer and more peaceful, one might be manifesting both the religious virtue of agapistic love and the civic virtue of responsible citizenship.

As important as civic virtue is in motivating citizen participation of any constructive kind, it is needed above all when one is advocating or otherwise supporting laws or public policies that would restrict human freedom. Much of human life does not involve such conduct; much that does can be guided by cooperating religious and secular motives, motives that, like secular compassion and religious benevolence, urge one to roughly the same conduct. It is often noted how powerful religious considerations were in motivating the civil rights movement in the United States. Their prominence should not lead one to underplay the force of moral convictions entirely compatible with them, nor to think that those whose motivation might have been entirely religious would have been incapable of seeing and being adequately motivated by a moral case for the same social changes.²⁶

Given the importance of such cooperating religious and secular motives, it is appropriate to formulate a second-order principle that facilitates the application of, and adherence to, the principles of secular rationale and secular motivation. This higher-order principle is based on the idea that there is much to be gained, intellectually and motivationally, from seeking what may be called *theo-ethical equilibrium* in deciding a wide range of important questions. This is roughly an equilibrium between a person's religious views and secular ethical considerations, in which the two sets are mutually consistent and are interconnected in a balanced way. For those who are religious, then, I propose a *principle of theo-ethical equilibrium*: in matters of morality or political choice on which religious considerations appropriately bear, religious persons have a prima facie obligation—at least insofar as they have civic virtue—to seek an equilibrium between those considerations and relevant secular standards of ethics and political responsibility. It is important to note that even where no equilibrium can be found on a moral matter, for instance on the purely moral status of abortion, it may be possible to achieve equilibrium on the associated sociopolitical issue of whether to prohibit abortion by law. If this seems highly unlikely, that may be because it may seem inevitable that many who oppose abortion morally must in conscience regard it as *murder*, which is already a grievous crime. But if murder requires anything close to *intention* to kill a person, then holders of that extreme view should be willing to give a description that makes it at least far less obvious what the appropriate laws should be.²⁷

²⁶ There are kinds and degrees of alignment between religious and secular motives, and even cooperating motives can, given changes in circumstances, support divergent conduct; but these complexities need not be pursued here.

²⁷ In "Preventing Abortion as a Test Case for the Justifiability of Violence," *Journal of Ethics*, vol. 2 (1977), I argue that for many abortions, even if they are culpable killings of an innocent person, 'murder' is an incorrect description, and that seeing why is of some significance.

All three of the principles I have described are good candidates for internalization in citizens, particularly religious citizens. This is not in the least to suggest that *genetically* the relevant virtuous conduct must arise from such an internalization. My point concerns only the appropriate “content” of civic virtue, in the broad sense of what is required for the relevant virtues to issue in actions performed from them. How that content arises—say from childhood imitation of good role-models or from internalization of principles acquired in adulthood—is secondary.

VI. INSTITUTIONAL DIMENSIONS OF CIVIC VIRTUE

In the same spirit, let me tentatively suggest two further principles. One of them extends the idea of civic virtue to institutions, especially churches (in the generic sense of religious institutions of any faith). The other articulates an ideal of civic virtue for clergy as individuals who must consider the tendency of many people to regard even their unofficial statements as in some way expressing their clerical authority.

The first, institutional ideal is expressed in the *principle of ecclesiastical political neutrality*: in a free and democratic society, churches committed to being institutional citizens in such a society have a *prima facie* obligation to abstain from supporting candidates for public office or pressing for laws or public policies that restrict human conduct (as at least most of them do). This principle applies not just to institutions as social entities but to their official representatives acting as such.²⁸ Even for churches not committed to citizenship in a liberal democracy, a case can be made that it would be good for them (as for citizens in general) to recognize such an obligation of political (as opposed to moral) neutrality, for instance because dissemination of political positions from the pulpit can produce factions in the congregation. A number of other comments are also appropriate.

First, the neutrality obligation should not be expected to prevail under just any social conditions. Under conditions of corruption in which democratically elected officials have become tyrannical, freedom and democracy might be restorable only if churches *do* support candidates for (public) office or others opposed to the regime. The neutrality principle will be too strong if we construe ‘political’ in the broad sense of ‘contested in the arena of politics’; it must be taken rather narrowly, so that *moral* issues are not included, even if they enter into distinctly political debates, but it must not be taken so narrowly that pressing for restrictive laws or public policies—e.g. policies requiring periods of prayer or meditation in public schools—does not in certain cases count as political. A sharp distinction seems out of the question, but presumably the closer the issue comes to a matter of what persons or affiliated groups of persons (other than the

²⁸ Nothing less than the holism-individualism issue lurks here; for our purposes an individualistic reading of the principle is best, but the normative issues could be similarly treated if one plausibly formulated the principle as applying directly to institutions as such.

citizenry in general) are to have social power, the more *prima facie* reason there is to consider it a political issue. The separation of church and state does not require, however, nor do any sound principles demand, that churches should not take moral positions, even if there is political controversy about them. Taking moral positions is indeed a positive religious obligation in many religions.

One should not expect churches in general to abstain from taking moral positions on, for instance, the moral permissibility of abortion. There are, in addition, moral aspects of the question whether abortion should be legally permissible. But there are also political aspects of the latter question. One of them is what political party (if any) has the best program for instituting or enforcing the appropriate laws; another is how this issue should be weighted in relation to other contested ones to yield an overall political choice of party or candidate. Civic virtue, in institutions as in individuals, is in part a matter of judiciously adhering to the inevitably somewhat elastic standards we are forced to live by. It is one thing for churches to defend moral positions in ways that guide parishioners in making political choices; it is another to endorse candidates or propose detailed public policies, say a specific welfare system as opposed to the compassionate treatment of the poor by individuals and governments.

Ideals of civic virtue apply, of course, to clergy as individuals as well as to churches as institutions. I suggest that even in making avowedly personal statements, clergy who believe in freedom and democracy should follow an individual principle that complements the institutional principle of ecclesiastical neutrality, which concerns their conduct as church representatives. This is a *principle of clerical political neutrality* to the effect that clergy (as individuals) have a *prima facie* obligation to (i) observe a distinction between their personal political views and their views *as* clergy, especially in making public statements, (ii) prevent any political aims they may have from dominating their professional conduct, and (iii) abstain from officially (as church leaders) supporting candidates for public office or pressing for laws or policies that would restrict human conduct.

This principle is quite consistent both with the clergy as individuals following the principles of secular rationale and motivation—with all the freedom to use religious reasons that those principles provide for—and with the point that applying religious principles and insights to issues of law and public policy can be highly beneficial. Nonetheless, it is appropriate that clergy exercise restraint—*clerical virtue*, we might say—in touching on political issues, particularly in public. If they do not, they invite peers who disagree to use religious leverage for opposite ends; and the public, quite possibly including their own congregations, may suffer. There is certainly a risk of inducing political discord in parishes or denominations that might otherwise enjoy a deeper unity.

Because the special concern of this essay is civic virtue in relation to achieving a good balance between religious commitments and secular concerns of citizenship, I have emphasized clerical responsibilities under

the heading of civic virtue. But the points I have made can, to some degree, be generalized to at least some other professions and to at least some other institutions besides churches. Let us consider some representative cases.

Educators, especially of the very young, share with clergy a certain moral and intellectual authority. There remains the important difference that the authority of educators as such is (often avowedly) secular and clearly fallible; nonetheless, a principle of political neutrality applies—if to a lesser degree—to educators as well, again with a distinction to be made between public and private conduct. There is no sharp line between these, but there are distinct differences between, for example, moral criticism of a policy, such as the United States' containment policy in the Vietnam war, and political attack on its proponents. Moreover, with educators there is a further distinction between private and public institutions, and in some cases the avowed purpose of a private educational institution could be in part political; this would weaken the *prima facie* obligation the principle expresses. I leave aside the plausible point that political purposes tend to be inimical to the core mission of an educational institution and that political neutrality tends to facilitate concentration on the work of learning.²⁹

Insofar as institutions—particularly churches and other institutions not maintained for profit—can be viewed as citizens, we may ask what constitutes responsible citizenship on their part and, correspondingly, what counts as civic virtue on the part of their officers in acting as such, say in abstaining from pollution and in donating to civic causes or political campaigns. With the obvious exception of political parties and other political organizations, there is good reason to think that political neutrality is a *prima facie* reasonable posture for a great many institutions, especially those that, like certain foundations, exist to serve, or even significantly engage, a large segment of a pluralistic public. There may also be dangers of corruption from within, as with churches or educational institutions that become politically involved to the detriment of their proper business. With public institutions, such as state universities and public power companies, the *prima facie* obligation of neutrality tends to be more important than it is in the case of private institutions.

VII. CONCLUSION

Virtue is a feature of character with a significant capacity to influence conduct. A virtue supplies its possessor both with normative reasons indicating what sorts of things should be done in a wide range of contexts

²⁹ A special exception regarding neutral behavior is advocacy, especially the *representative* kind of advocacy appropriate to someone like an attorney officially taking the point of view of another, as opposed to the *subscriptive* kind of advocacy appropriate to individuals speaking for themselves in letters to newspapers. In such individual statements, clergy and others should not be uncritically taken to represent their respective institutions. In "The Ethics of Advocacy," *Legal Theory*, vol. 1 (1995), pp. 1–31, I offer a theory of advocacy that supports the general position of this essay on the nature of civic virtue.

and with motivation to do such things for the right kind of reason. Virtue is not a mere capacity for good deeds, but a settled tendency to do them for an appropriate reason. Civic virtue, in particular, is constituted—at least as conceived as appropriate to citizenship in liberal democracy—above all in relation to protection and promotion of the flourishing of civil society. This implies a disposition on the part of citizens to participate in sociopolitical decisions and a determination to do so with respect for the freedom and autonomy of other citizens. It implies (within limits) a commitment to having, and a willingness to offer, publicly comprehensible, evidentially adequate reasons for one's sociopolitical conduct, particularly when that conduct is in support of a law or public policy that would restrict the liberty of citizens.

Given the special character of religious reasons for sociopolitical conduct, civic virtue is also best realized by a commitment to principles of secular rationale and motivation, requiring that one recognize a *prima facie* obligation to have and offer adequate secular reason for such conduct, and a related *prima facie* obligation not to act in certain coercive ways without being sufficiently motivated by such a reason. If these principles express justificational and aretaic requirements for civic virtue, they also contribute to a further element in such virtue: a civic voice. This is affected even more by our motivating reasons than by the content of the reasons we publicly give for our civic and political conduct; but both our offering secular reasons and our being motivated by them contribute to a civic voice.

The principles of secular rationale and motivation not only hold for ordinary citizens but have some application to clergy and officials in religious institutions. For clergy committed to a liberal democracy, however, civic virtue also seems to require a *prima facie* obligation of political neutrality. Conscientious adoption of the principles of civic virtue I have proposed is unlikely to be an undue burden for reflective religious people, clergy or lay, provided they are committed to seeking something that, on the assumptions of Western theism, one might expect them to wish for—theo-ethical equilibrium. If adherence to these principles is in some cases a burden, that may be offset by the incalculably large contribution such adherence can make to harmony between the religious and the non-religious and even among religious people whose visions of the good society are sharply different. There is no way to maintain a flourishing pluralistic democracy without some sacrifices or at least self-discipline on the part of nearly everyone. I have tried here to outline some of the minimal sacrifices highly consonant with civic virtue.

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