PHIL 6360 Political Morality: Promoting the Good in the Liberal State
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Recent years have seen considerable interest in turning governments toward the promotion of well-being: well-being policy. As well, the protection of the natural environment has become an urgent practical concern, and many believe that environmental preservation is a good beyond its relevance to human interests. It is controversial, however, whether states can legitimately promote these and other goods; or, if they can, what sort of moral reasoning may legitimately be used to justify such policies. Broadly, there are three questions in political morality about such policies:

1. What are the *moral norms* governing state promotion of the good? (E.g., justice, beneficence, restrictions on paternalism…)
2. What *manner of goods* (if any) may the state permissibly promote? (E.g., resources, capabilities, happiness, excellence, happiness, biodiversity…)
3. How are such claims *justified*? (E.g., comprehensive ethical doctrines, public reason…)

This course will focus on the second and third of these questions, at a high level of generality that will extend to many other questions in political philosophy. We probably will not engage extensively with debates over the specifics of well-being or environmental policy.

In the liberal tradition, on which liberty has primacy as a political value, it is widely believed that governments must be neutral about the good, abstaining from taking sides on such matters. Indeed, perhaps states may not directly promote the good at all, but may only aim at the provision of *resources* or *freedoms* to enable individuals to pursue the good as they see fit. If *liberal neutrality* is correct, then well-being policy, or policies aimed at protecting the environment that presuppose controversial notions of the good, might be severely constrained or ruled out altogether.

The neutrality doctrine is standardly contrasted with (the perhaps misleadingly named) *perfectionism* about politics: policy should foster better ways of living, even if not everyone recognizes them as such. (What exactly this means for environmental policy, say, is not entirely clear, but presumably controversial views about environmental value such as ecocentrism would likewise be out of bounds.) Theocratic governments that coercively enforce sectarian ideals represent a classic form of the worries neutrality is meant to deal with, and indeed the avoidance of religious conflict has historically been a significant motivation for liberalism.

A broader question concerns the nature of the moral principles that may legitimately be employed in the political sphere. According to *political liberalism*, the fact of reasonable pluralism in modern societies rules out the use of comprehensive moral doctrines in at least some aspects of political deliberation; we need, for instance, to seek an "overlapping consensus" among citizens. Relatedly, the idea of *public reason* is roughly that policies must be justifiable to all concerned for the exercise of state power to be legitimate. This will naturally place some limits on state promotion of the good, and is often thought to include some form of neutrality constraint.

From a practical standpoint, one reason to care about these debates is that there are widespread, and related, worries about the effects of current social arrangements both on human well-being and the environment. At the same time, we are deeply divided on many questions of value. And it is not clear how we can effectively address issues of well-being and environmental degradation, among others, while being appropriately mindful of the fact that reasonable people have sharply differing views about the values at stake.

In this course, we will examine some of the recent literature bearing on these questions. In particular, given the fact of reasonable pluralism, what manner of justification can be offered for policies aimed at making things better? Must we set aside our convictions about human well-being, excellence, beauty, and value in the natural world when we enter the policy arena? Must we set aside our religious convictions? Can we do policy from a robustly critical evaluative perspective without being imperious or otherwise failing to treat our fellow citizens with respect?

To this end, we will read a number of articles by influential contributors to these debates, with about half the semester devoted to two recent books defending versions of the public reason idea—one taking a strongly anti-perfectionist stand and the other arguing that reasons of faith can legitimately be deployed in the political sphere. We will start with a brief introduction to the concerns animating this seminar, followed by a review of Rawls' seminal contributions, reading a short volume revising and summarizing his views.

Assignments
One 20-page term paper (due Dec 16), *or* two shorter 8-10 page papers (due Oct 16 and Dec 16)

Books
I will make readings available electronically in a Dropbox folder, but I recommend buying these books
- Rawls 2001, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* (Harvard)
- Vallier 2011, *Liberal Politics and Public Faith* (Routledge)
- Quong 2011, *Liberalism Without Perfection* (Oxford). This one is quite expensive; if you'd like to buy a copy through me at the author's discount (40% off), let me know

Schedule
Tentative; we will cover the three books, but might skip portions

1. Aug 26 Course intro. Haybron and Tiberius 2015, "Well-Being Policy: What Standard of Well-Being?" (read by Sep 9)
2. *Sep 2 Labor Day*
3. Sep 9 Rawls 2001, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, Secs 1-28
4. Sep 16 Rawls, Secs 29-60
5. Sep 23 Perfectionism
    1. Wall 2009, "Perfectionism in politics: a defense" (19pp)
    2. Raz 1986, *The Morality of Freedom*, selections (20pp)
    3. Arneson 2010, "Neutrality and Political Liberalism" (19pp)
6. Sep 30 Anti-Perfectionism
    1. Gaus 2003, "Liberal Neutrality: A Compelling and Radical Principle" (30pp)
    2. Nussbaum 2011, "Perfectionist Liberalism and Political Liberalism" (43pp)
7. Oct 7 Vallier 2011, *Liberal Politics and Public Faith*, Intro-ch. 2
8. Oct 14 Vallier, chs. 3-5
9. *Oct 21 Fall Break*
10. Oct 28 Vallier, chs. 6-conclusion
11. Nov 4 Quong 2011, *Liberalism Without Perfection*, Intro-ch. 2
12. Nov 11 Quong, chs. 3-5
13. Nov 18 Quong, chs. 6-8
14. Nov 25 Quong, chs. 9-conclusion
15. Dec 2 TBA (likely critical responses)
16. Dec 9 TBA or catching up