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METAPHYSICS, POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY, AND THE PROCESS OF LIBERAL POLITICAL JUSTIFICATION*

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I

THE PRESENT ARTICLE IS AN ATTEMPT TO EXPLICATE two largely neglected ideas from a past president of the Metaphysical Society of America, Charles Hartshorne. The first is the thesis that, although political questions are much harder than metaphysical ones, due to entangling influences in the former, mistakes at the metaphysical level ensure that political disasters will follow. Hence, the most important function of metaphysics is to help us in any way possible to enlighten ourselves and to encourage us in our agonizing struggles in politics.[1] The second is the claim that a political liberal is one who knows that he or she is not God.[2] This explication will borrow widely from the thought of the greatest political liberal, John Rawls, and another great liberal thinker, Alfred North Whitehead. That is, my article can be termed an exercise in process liberalism in which I will be arguing for both the processual character of political liberalism and the politically liberal character of process metaphysics. How can people live together in a free yet peaceful manner in a condition of pervasive pluralism of religious, moral, and metaphysical comprehensive doctrines? It is precisely this question that will be the focus of the present article.

I will start with two assumptions that deserve more attention than I am able to give them at present. The first is that the best available

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[1] See Charles Hartshorne, *Creative Experiencing*, ed. Donald Viney and Jincheol O (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), chap. 13; *Hartshorne and Brightman on God, Process, and Persons*, ed. Randall Auxier and Mark Davies (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2001), 93; and *Creative Synthesis and Philosophic Method* (LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court, 1970), 55–56, 119.

[2] See Charles Hartshorne, *Creativity in American Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 9.

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method in both political philosophy and metaphysics (indeed, the only available method, according to Thomas Scanlon[3]) is that of reflective equilibrium or Aristotelian dialectic. We should be wary of the proof paradigm in these disciplines in that any attempt at deductive rigor or finality is always met with further questions and qualifications. As should be evident from Plato's dialogues, attempts to move beyond dialectic are themselves to be located within a dialectical context. Or again, the results of other proposed philosophical methods (for example, the transcendental method) are nonetheless subject to the dialectical criticisms that other thinkers typically offer.

Nonetheless, there are relatively fixed points such that to neglect or reject them is to put into disequilibrium everything else that we consider important. Reflective equilibrium is thus compatible with a sort of weak foundationalism, as in Lincoln's claim often quoted by Rawls to the effect that slavery is wrong if anything is wrong. In this regard, it should be noted that the relative fixity provided by the principles agreed to in the Rawlsian original position is itself part of the overall dialectical process of reflective equilibrium in which agreement is sought between our ordinary unreflective political beliefs and some theoretical structure that might unify and justify these beliefs. Or again, in the method of reflective equilibrium we do not have to choose between moral particularists, who think that morality should be based on particular intuitions concerning which we are most certain (for example, that the killings at Auschwitz were immoral), and moral generalists, who think that what is most important is that we get clear on the general principles that justify political beliefs and behavior. Rather, we ought to be engaged in the process of finding the most appropriate fit between intuition and theory so as to do justice to both. At times we have to criticize theory, and at other times we have to alter or even abandon intuition. Three moments can be isolated in this method: identifying initial beliefs or intuitions about justice, trying to account for these from some objective point of view, and trying to reach equilibrium when the previous two moments diverge.

The second assumption is that political liberalism is one of the greatest discoveries in the history of philosophy as a result of its ability

[3] See Thomas Scanlon, "Rawls on Justification," in *The Cambridge Companion to Rawls*, ed. Samuel Freeman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 149.

to solve, both theoretically and practically, the wars of religion in Europe in the early modern period. Preliberal political philosophy or political theology concentrated on two major tasks: (a) to figure out the characteristics of the good (the definite article is crucial here), and (b) to figure out how to get those who understood the good into power and to make sure that they were succeeded by rulers who were equally knowledgeable. This characterization of preliberal political thought applies equally to thinkers who were otherwise quite different: Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin. They may have differed in their accounts of the good, but they agreed that one of the main tasks of political thought was to come to grips with it intellectually. In addition, they may have differed regarding how many individuals were equipped to understand the good, how difficult it would be to get them into power, and how best to solve the problem of succession, but they agreed that the overall goal was to get those who understood the good into power and to keep them there.

One very interesting feature of preliberal political thought was that in these views toleration was not seen as a virtue. Indeed, it was a vice. The reason why preliberal political theorists wanted those who understood the good to be in power was to guard against those who did not understand it. To cite just three examples, think of Plato's expulsion of the poets from the ideal city (for example, *Republic* 605b), Aquinas's willingness to have recalcitrant heretics put to death (*Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 11, a. 3), and Calvin's willingness to kill Servetus, which was noticed more than once by Hartshorne.[4] An admirable ruler, in preliberal political thought, guarded the populace against heresy or against anything else that would lead them away from the good. In fact, not to do so would be to fail to do one's duty as a just ruler in that their very success as rulers was measured in terms of the degree to which they could lead the populace toward an approximation of the good. In sum, preliberal political thought was characterized more by force than by persuasion.

In the early modern period in Europe something of a crisis occurred in political theory. What are we to do when two competing metaphysical

[4] See Daniel Dombrowski, *Rawls and Religion: The Case for Political Liberalism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), chap. 1; Charles Hartshorne, *The Zero Fallacy and Other Essays in Neoclassical Philosophy*, ed. Mohammed Valady (LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court, 1997), 70, 79.

conceptions of the good (in Rawlsian terms, competing comprehensive doctrines) each claim to have *the* truth (once again, the definite article is crucial here) on their side and each claim absolute political authority, such that as a result society is ripped apart in religious warfare? Locke's rightly famous "A Letter Concerning Toleration" is an initial attempt to deal with this crisis. Either one could wait until one of the competing metaphysical doctrines eventually got the upper hand and dominated the other, or one could develop a political theory that would allow adherents to competing metaphysical doctrines to coexist in peace. Political liberalism is the disciplined effort to think through carefully and to justify the latter approach. In contrast to preliberal political thinkers, political liberals see toleration not as a vice but as a virtue. Indeed, it is seen by political liberals as one of the key virtues that is necessary for people not only to survive but to flourish in a state with a plurality of metaphysical doctrines. In other words, in order for politically liberal states to flourish, there has to be a certain victory of persuasion over force.

In order to bring about justice in a condition of a plurality of competing metaphysical doctrines, however, questions regarding the good largely have to be taken off the table in politics, although it makes sense to debate them elsewhere. That is, politics is not the place to debate ultimate questions regarding the purpose of human life, the meaning of death, the existence of God, or the theodicy problem. Rather, political questions are penultimate and concern the conditions under which defenders of different metaphysical doctrines can nonetheless get along with each other in a peaceful and fair manner. In short, political liberals concentrate in politics on justice or fairness in contrast to the good or the truth of any metaphysical doctrine, whether religious or nonreligious.

II

Some Objections. Rawls is widely acknowledged to be the most influential political philosopher of the twentieth century. But the implications of his views for metaphysicians are hotly contested. Some think that he is largely on the right track, indeed that he solves many of

the traditional (and bloody) problems regarding the relationship between politics and metaphysics.[5] Others are critical of his approach.[6]

A terminological issue should be treated at the outset. By "comprehensive doctrine" Rawls means an overall view of what is valuable in life and that covers all recognized values and virtues in a rather precisely articulated system. Rawls's "comprehensive doctrine" has at least a family resemblance to the comprehensive order of reflection engaged by metaphysicians, who question and reflect on what the meaning of human life is in the context of the wider cosmos. To be specific, metaphysics is the critical study of what must be the case regarding everything that exists. Metaphysics is transcendental in the sense that it studies what is the case in every experience of the real, rather than concerning itself with what is outside of or beyond experience.

Thus, it makes sense from a Rawlsian point of view to say that process metaphysics is but one among many comprehensive doctrines in a contemporary liberal democracy. However, there are two different senses of "metaphysics" that have to be distinguished. Metaphysics-1 refers to any general worldview that orders values and virtues and is roughly synonymous with Rawls's "comprehensive doctrine," whereas metaphysics-2 refers to the study of the really abstract and ubiquitous features of all reality. Or again, metaphysics-2 refers to the discipline that discovers and articulates the general ideas that are indispensable to the analysis of everything that happens. Whereas metaphysics-1 roughly corresponds to Rawls's "comprehensive doctrine," it is only metaphysics-2 that is truly comprehensive.

It is understandable why some claim that if a metaphysical-2 claim is true, it is true about everything, including claims in political

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[5] See Dombrowski, *Rawls and Religion*; also see Daniel Dombrowski, *Rawlsian Explorations in Religion and Applied Philosophy* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011); Samuel Freeman, *Rawls* (New York: Routledge, 2007); and Thomas Pogge, *John Rawls: His Life and Theory of Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[6] See Paul Weithman, *Religion and the Obligations of Citizenship* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); also Paul Weithman, *Why Political Liberalsim?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008); and Christopher Eberle, *Religious Conviction in Liberal Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); also the writings of Franklin Gamwell cited below.

philosophy. But it is also understandable why political liberals pull these two areas apart. Rawls is well known for his distinction between the concept of justice (or the right), on the one hand, and the concept of metaphysical truth or the good, on the other. These two must be separated, he thinks, because of the plurality of opposed concepts of the good that reasonable people defend, sometimes uncompromisingly so. Such opposition, he thinks, need not be a political problem if we can nonetheless agree on democratic principles and procedures that will enable us to live in peace and prosperity and in a fair manner. That is, Rawls thinks that although we cannot agree (or at least that we do not in fact agree) regarding the comprehensive good—some are Catholics, some are Jews, some are Buddhists, some are agnostics—we can (and largely do, in democratic societies) agree regarding the procedures that should be followed in a just society.

(1) It might be claimed that Rawls's separation of justice from the comprehensive good violates those who defend such a comprehensive doctrine, at least if it is truly comprehensive or metaphysical (metaphysics-2).[7] Liberalism in general, however, arose as a specific kind of political theory that was meant to deal with the insistence and persistence of diversity. The religious wars of the early modern period were ruinous. So in addition to the need for comprehensiveness there is also the fact of diversity, the latter of which must in some fashion be tolerated if politics is to avoid both anarchy and coerced uniformity. The distinctive task of liberal theory has been to define the terms on which metaphysical plurality can be civilized.[8] To put the point in interrogative fashion, how can toleration be given reasonable grounds?[9]

[7] See Franklin Gamwell, *Beyond Preference: Liberal Theories of Independent Associations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), ix, 151. It will be noted that Gamwell is, because of his insightful criticisms of political liberalism from the perspective of process metaphysics, the source for many of the criticisms in this section; several other critics could have been cited. Also see Jeffrey Stout, "Public Reason and Dialectical Pragmatism," in *Pragmatism and Naturalism*, ed. Matthew Bagger (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

[8] See Franklin Gamwell, *Democracy on Purpose: Justice and the Reality of God* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2002), 238.

[9] See Franklin Gamwell, *The Meaning of Religious Freedom* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 9.

The Rawlsian, politically liberal response to this question, it might be argued, violates popular sovereignty by offering a freestanding view that is independent of, or separated from, ideas of the comprehensive good. The violation presumably occurs with respect to those who defend comprehensive doctrines that really are comprehensive (that is, that constitute a metaphysics-2 view), in contrast to those who hold "comprehensive" doctrines that are only nominally so.[10]

Granted, liberalism can mean many different things to many different thinkers.[11] What critics of political liberalism often have in mind is the idea that, should there be a severing of principles of justice from the comprehensive good, this would be a separation that is unfair to those who defend truly comprehensive doctrines because the very idea of the separation of justice from the good militates against comprehensiveness. The concept of a freestanding view of the just does the same.

(2) Another criticism is that Rawls's refusal to consider comprehensive doctrines in politics amounts to a denial that any such doctrine could be true. This critique is rooted in a concern voiced by Whitehead in the 1930s: that democracy without metaphysics loses its intellectual justification.[12] We will see that the issue here is whether "without metaphysics" necessarily means "antimetaphysics."[13]

In this regard Rawls is, it might be alleged, in the lineage of Kantian thinkers who assert that rights are independent of any inclusive *telos*, thus democratic rights are solely the creatures of historical context. For Rawls's critics, however, the moral status of human beings cannot even be articulated, much less defended, in a nonteleological way. Thus, the Kantian-Rawlsian project is self-destructive because metaphysical

[10] See Franklin Gamwell, *Politics as a Christian Vocation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 41.

[11] See Gamwell, *Democracy on Purpose*, 248; also Franklin Gamwell, *Religion Among We the People: Conversations on Democracy and the Divine Good* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015), especially 68–71, 94–96, 105–09; finally see Jurgen Habermas, *Religion and Rationality: Essays on Reason, God, and Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2002).

[12] See Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: Free Press, 1967), 36.

[13] See Franklin Gamwell, *Existence and the Good: Metaphysical Necessity in Morals and Politics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), essay 2, part 1.

theories or comprehensive doctrines give to their adherents the very terms for political evaluation.

For some of Rawls's critics who think that there is no relevant distinction between refusing to consider comprehensive doctrines and denying their legitimacy, by seeking neither to assert nor to deny any particular comprehensive doctrine Rawls ends up simply refusing (or, more forcefully, denying) the comprehensive order of reflection. Although I think that there is an important distinction here, it should not escape our notice that in the effort to conflate refusal and denial the critics shed light on the complex development of Rawls's thought. One wonders about the transition from Rawls's early essay "Two Concepts of Rules" (1955), to *A Theory of Justice* (1971), to *Political Liberalism* (1993). In the early essay Rawls defends the idea that the justification of a practice, in contrast to the justification of a particular action falling under it, appeals to utilitarian principles.[14] Yet by the time of *A Theory of Justice*, nonteleological principles are highlighted. Why? One might float the hypothesis that Rawls was spellbound by the Kantian conviction that political theory must be independent of a metaphysical *telos*. Although he left the impression that he was a comprehensive liberal in *A Theory of Justice* (with comprehensive liberalism, in contrast to political liberalism, consisting in an overall view that competes with other comprehensive doctrines for our allegiance), the fact that he was uneasy about this impression, along with the fact that he altered his view in *Political Liberalism*, highlights this Kantian conviction.[15]

(3) Critics are also likely to claim that Rawlsian separation of the just from the good means that individuals' conceptions of the good are privatized and hence relativized. The separation that leads to privatization is claimed to be a problem because metaphysical conviction involves a self-understanding that should be exemplified without duplicity in all human activity, including political activity. This is why some critics opt for metaphysics-2 and for a comprehensive doctrine that is truly so.

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[14] See John Rawls, "Two Concepts of Rules," in *Collected Papers*, ed. Samuel Freeman (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999); also see John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999); and John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

[15] See Gamwell, *Democracy on Purpose*, 185–87, 304–05.

Because Rawls denies the comprehensive order of reflection, he implicitly asserts that political activity is always, even in the condemnation of slavery, relative to given historical and cultural conditions, it might be claimed. One might even claim that relativism itself is ironically a comprehensive doctrine to the extent that it asserts a moral comparison of human activities: all of these activities are historically and culturally specific.

To sum up the criticisms thus far: Privatist, putative refusal to consider the comprehensive order of reflection *is* a denial, some critics think, and such a denial oddly leads to comprehensive, oppressive relativism. In effect, to assert that one's choices are never bound by a norm is ironically to assert a norm, namely, that human authenticity as such is always and in all respects particular or relative to the activity in question.[16]

(4) As a result of the alleged privatization and relativization of the good, the most that one can hope for on a Rawlsian basis is a mere *modus vivendi* (a Hobbesian truce that is temporary because there is no genuine meeting of minds). That is, a stronger overlapping consensus (where those with differing comprehensive doctrines nonetheless agree on the concept of justice) is not possible. To be precise, the critic can admit that Rawls's view is compatible with some "comprehensive" doctrines, but only those that are not truly comprehensive. That is, his political liberalism is incompatible with comprehensive doctrines that have a universalist conception of justice. Democracy implies a truly comprehensive purpose, on some interpretations, such that a nonteleological theory of justice is as self-refuting as a nontheoretical theory of justice.[17] Without a *telos* justice is purely (the critic might say "merely") procedural; hence the best we could hope for under a nonteleological theory of justice would be a *modus vivendi*, contra Rawls's obvious intent to be arguing for something more than a *modus vivendi* in terms of an overlapping consensus.[18]

Without metaphysical backing, justice as fairness has to remain a type of *modus vivendi*, it might be claimed, and cannot rise to the level of overlapping consensus. If we get along with each other on a Rawlsian

[16] See Gamwell, *The Meaning of Religious Freedom*, 141, also 139–43.
[17] Gamwell, *Democracy on Purpose*, 277–79.
[18] See Gamwell, *Politics as a Christian Vocation*, 42.

basis, it has to be due to a contingent and fortunate convergence of interests rather than to an adherence to commonly held and necessarily true principles.[19] As a result, it might be alleged that no defender of a really comprehensive doctrine could ever accept an explicitly freestanding and implicitly *modus vivendi* conception of justice. On this view, it is the comprehensive doctrine that justifies the political principles rather than the other way around. In fact, only a true comprehensive doctrine could justify political principles. In this vein it might also be said that there is simply no such thing as a reasonable religious conviction or a reasonable answer to the comprehensive question.[20] Here the critic is assuming the Rawlsian distinction between the reasonable and the rational. The former refers to a willingness to abide by fair terms of agreement, and the latter refers to the ability to follow arguments and to adjust means to ends. Simply put, it takes a reasonable person to willingly enter the Rawlsian original position (the place where the hypothetical decision-making procedure takes place in the effort to find the abstract principles that would obtain in a just society) and a rational person to deliberate there.

But even with this distinction in mind it is easy to misunderstand the critic's point, which could easily be taken to involve opposition to toleration of metaphysical beliefs (or nonbeliefs) different from one's own. Nothing could be further from the truth. When doing metaphysics-2 one is dealing with those most abstract features of all reality and of our experiences of it, such that when doing metaphysics-2 there is simply no need to reasonably adjudicate disputes regarding more concrete and more contentious aspects of comprehensive doctrines found at the level of metaphysics-1.

It is true that there are also differences of opinion regarding metaphysics-2 claims (for example, regarding whether becoming should take precedence over being), but these differences are not the sort that people literally fight over or that destroy the basis for a just society. These differences of opinion concern questions as to whether "Something exists" or "God exists" are necessarily true. I personally agree with affirmative responses to both of these questions,[21] although

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[19] See Gamwell, *The Meaning of Religious Freedom*, 66–67.

[20] Ibid.

[21] See Daniel Dombrowski, *Rethinking the Ontological Argument: A Neoclassical Theistic Response* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

we will see that I am a bit skittish as to whether the latter question is politically innocuous.

(5) Despite what has been said above, Rawls's view of justice does, in spite of itself, involve a comprehensive doctrine, according to some critics. In fact, it amounts to an established comprehensive doctrine, they think. Because of the counterintuitiveness of this criticism, it will be worthwhile to try to understand the point being made. The major problem, and an unnoticed one, with Rawls's theory, it is alleged, is that any proposed separation of justice and the good implies a concept of justice that involves its own concept of the good, hence any such proposed separation involves a performative self-contradiction.[22] That is, the separation of justice from concepts of the comprehensive good nonetheless itself involves the creation of another such concept, hence such a separation cannot unify politically a diversity of such concepts.[23]

It will be claimed that the very statement that no universal concept is valid is itself a statement of what is universally the case.[24] The attempt to avoid metaphysics is futile, on this view, because the denial of all universalist concepts is contradicted by the confident assertion of a supposedly nonuniversalist one. Here the critic pushes Rorty and Rawls together in a joint denial of the claim that comprehensive doctrines that are truly comprehensive are reasonable. The alleged problem with this view is that democratic discourse itself requires a substantive principle that is universal; in Rawlsian language, it requires a comprehensive doctrine.[25]

All of Rawls's talk of separation is merely on the surface in that critics might think that by refusing or denying the comprehensive question, Rawls ironically ends up with a metaphysical position: that no metaphysics is ever required for the purposes of politics.[26] "Irony" may

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[22] See Gamwell, *Politics as a Christian Vocation*, 119; also see David Ray Griffin, *Reenchantment without Supernaturalism: A Process Philosophy of Religion* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2001).

[23] See Gamwell, *Existence and the Good*, essay 5.

[24] See Gamwell, *Democracy on Purpose*, 272–74.

[25] See Gamwell, *Democracy on Purpose*, 275–76; Gamwell, *The Meaning of Religious Freedom*, 136; also Richard Rorty, *An Ethics for Today* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

[26] See Gamwell, *The Meaning of Religious Freedom*, 47–58.

be too weak a word here because critics might think that the Rawlsian project is plagued with internal incoherence.[27]

One may detect in Rawls an awareness of the criticism being leveled against him.[28] The Rawlsian distinction between the reasonable and the rationally discoverable true must itself be true for Rawlsian political philosophy to make sense. That is, Rawls cannot consistently deny metaphysical commitments. And, as before, metaphysics-2 is conceived not as the articulation of just any general view but, in Hartshornian fashion, as the articulation of the a priori or necessary conditions of human (and other) activity. On this basis the critic might be willing to grant to Rawls that no particular metaphysical view has to be affirmed if some of the traditional metaphysical views are kept in mind, but regarding the most comprehensive aspects of comprehensive views Rawls cannot remain neutral.[29]

Of course, some metaphysicians are reasonable and some are not, despite the language above regarding the claim that there is no such thing as a reasonable answer to the comprehensive question. The former are those who believe that comprehensive convictions can be publicly assessed, and the latter are those who are not prepared to defend their comprehensive doctrines in a public forum. On this account it is Rawls himself who is unreasonable in that he is not willing to admit that justice as fairness is (at least implicitly) a comprehensive doctrine, hence *a fortiori* he is not willing to defend it in public as such. Further, on this account the turn in Rawls's thought from *A Theory of Justice* to *Political Liberalism* has failed to achieve its principal purpose, namely, to propose a political theory that is not itself part of a comprehensive doctrine.[30] Part of this failure lies in the tendency of the privatist view to assert that none of the comprehensive convictions in the community are important in politics.[31]

(6) The criticisms thus far are aimed directly at Rawls's view, and they prepare the way for others that illuminate a positive alternative to Rawlsian separation or, better, "separation." Every moral claim at least implicitly includes its metaethical grounding, it might be claimed. This view applies to all moral claims, including not only those in one's

[27] Ibid., 68, 136–37.
[28] See Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 29.
[29] See Gamwell, *The Meaning of Religious Freedom*, 58–59.
[30] Ibid., 74.
[31] Ibid., 119.

personal morality but also those in political philosophy. One may call this stance the compound character of justice in that the democratic principles enshrined in the constitution, say, must rest on something more basic. In different terms, justice is both formative and substantive, and these two aspects of justice cannot be separated.[32] To put the point in Rawlsian language, a concept of justice cannot be freestanding because it must involve a concept of the comprehensive good.

(7) One might go even further and claim that only a true comprehensive doctrine can redeem political prescriptions, although this does not necessarily mean an established metaphysics. The critic might claim not only that the separation of justice and the good in effect slips in through the back door an implicit concept of the good; it also slips in what amounts to an established religion or metaphysics: the religion or metaphysics of separation. The critic will not likely discuss in detail the fact that the Rawlsian view is *pro tanto* (to be discussed later) and that, because Rawls's political liberalism is not meant to be universalist, it is a poor candidate for status as a comprehensive doctrine. Only a view that is universalist, in the sense that adherents to the view think that it alone can redeem political prescriptions, can be really comprehensive. That is, on the critic's view an authentic comprehensive doctrine is incompatible with the Rawlsian translation proviso, wherein one's own comprehensive doctrine can be brought into the public sphere only if its terms can be translated in such a way that any reasonable-rational citizen could understand and possibly accept such terms.[33]

Opposition to Rawlsian separation does not itself imply religious or metaphysical establishment but, rather, only implies that some universal principle or principles could be redeemed in political discourse. Such redemption would, if it were successful, reduce the need for the Rawlsian method of reflective equilibrium among various factors that would have to be balanced within public reason. This method works on the assumption that there are no convenient algorithms available for determining what a just society would be like. Rather, one must work hard, on the basis of this method, to think through how all of the relevant factors are to be brought into harmony with each other. That is, if one factor is overemphasized we are put into

[32] See Gamwell, *Democracy on Purpose*, 232.
[33] Ibid., 266–71.

an uncomfortable disequilibrium. Or again, on the critic's view, in contrast to Rawlsian reflective equilibrium, a zero-sum game is involved in political philosophy: If political liberalism is defensible then every universalist theory or truly comprehensive doctrine is invalid.

(8) Finally, it might be held that metaphysical convictions can be rationally defended and hence are amenable to public debate. In this regard the critic is commendably militating against the commonly held view that metaphysical convictions are based on personal preferences and are thus not legitimate parts of our common moral (including political) enterprise. But metaphysical convictions, the critic argues, have no wider comprehensive scope than Rawls's principles of justice. That is, Rawls's refusal to consider (or denial of) comprehensive claims is universal, and if there is a true concept of human authenticity, it would likewise be true under all conditions.[34]

Critics might grant that the critique of traditional metaphysics that began with Kant led many thinkers to discredit normative ethics as well. In this regard Rawls is one of the heroes in the effort to reclaim a central place for normative ethics and politics in philosophy. But the critic might nonetheless think that Rawls's achievement is attenuated because of his refusal to consider, or his denial of, rationally intelligible metaphysical claims regarding the comprehensive good.[35]

The truncated Rawlsian approach might nonetheless have a profound effect on his critics' theory of distributive justice, which can be formulated in Hartshornian process terms: maximize the general conditions of creativity to which all have equal access. All three principles in Rawls—the principle of equal basic liberties, the principle of fair equality of opportunity with respect to any inequalities in the distribution of goods, and the difference principle wherein any inequalities or differences in the distribution of goods will work to everyone's advantage (especially the least advantaged)—can inform his metaphysical critics, especially the idea at the core of the difference principle that undeserved talents won in the natural and social lotteries are justified only if they advantage the least advantaged. That is, there

[34] See Gamwell, *The Meaning of Religious Freedom*, 135–45.
[35] See Gamwell, *Existence and the Good*, preface.

is much that is accomplished on the attenuated basis of Rawlsian political philosophy.[36]

Nor are Rawls's metaphysical critics necessarily opposed to the overall method at work in Rawls that was discussed above: reflective equilibrium. Particular convictions that we have no reason to question (commitment to democracy, opposition to racism) are easier to bring into equilibrium than those convictions that are readily criticized. But this method, once again, is attenuated because, although it works well as moral philosophy, it does not work as moral Philosophy in terms of a foundation or grounding for the moral theory reached in reflective equilibrium.[37] Because there is no transcendental grounding offered for reflective equilibrium, its results are always tinged with arbitrariness, hence the charge of relativism articulated above.[38] This last criticism therefore deals not so much with the lack of rationality in Rawls as the lack of Rationality.

III

In Defense of Separation. Regarding the criticism that political liberalism violates those who defend truly comprehensive doctrines, the following can be said in reply. Critics are no doubt well aware of the problem created by the pluralism of comprehensive doctrines that citizens affirm, very often uncompromisingly. The question can be put in the following way: How can metaphysical plurality be civilized? But the response given by critics of political liberalism is quite different from the response given by political liberals like me.

The critics think that toleration can be given reasonable grounds by requiring metaphysicians (at least some of them, if I understand correctly) to give a public defense of the comprehensive doctrine that they affirm. If such a defense is truly public it will require civil discourse, which in turn requires toleration. The politically liberal response to the question at issue, by way of contrast, is to take the truth or falsity of comprehensive doctrines off the table in politics for at least two

[36] See Gamwell, *The Divine Good: Modern Moral Theory and the Necessity of God* (New York: Harper Collins, 1990), 201–02; Gamwell, *Politics as a Christian Vocation*, 91–92; and Gamwell, *Democracy on Purpose*, 294, 310.

[37] Franklin Gamwell, *The Divine Good*, 116.

[38] Ibid., 123–24.

reasons. Either defenders of comprehensive doctrines themselves might not be willing to give a rational articulation of their view (after all, fideism, or the idea that metaphysical belief is based on faith rather than reason, has had the upper hand since the time of Kant), or, if they are willing to offer a rational, publicly articulated version of their view, it might be hopelessly at odds with conflicting articulations.

It should be noted that critics are not only encouraging metaphysicians to develop rationally (that is, publicly) defensible versions of their beliefs, but they are also basing the continued existence of civil society on the ability of metaphysicians to develop such publicly defensible versions of their beliefs. One wonders what would happen if most remained steadfast in their fideism and did not see the need for or even the appropriateness of, say, rationalized religion with metaphysical backing. I would like to make it clear that I personally see a strong role for reason in one's comprehensive doctrine,[39] but I am also painfully aware of the fact that there is no swarming multitude that agrees with me in this regard.

What are we to make of the idea that defenders of a truly comprehensive view are treated unfairly in political liberalism? I personally do not think that I would be treated unfairly if my comprehensive doctrine did not provide the metaethical support for liberal toleration. As Hartshorne himself put the point, a liberal is a thinker who knows that he or she is not God, as we have seen. It should also be remembered that Whitehead, like Hartshorne, was a liberal in politics,[40] such that his view could be interpreted as saying, as Rawls's

[39] See Daniel Dombrowski, *Analytic Theism, Hartshorne, and the Concept of God* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996); Daniel Dombrowski, *Divine Beauty: The Aesthetics of Charles Hartshorne* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004); Daniel Dombrowski, *A Platonic Philosophy of Religion: A Process Perspective* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005); Daniel Dombrowski, *Rethinking the Ontological Argument: A Neoclassical Theistic Response*; Daniel Dombrowski, *A History of the Concept of God: A Process Approach* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016); Daniel Dombrowski, *Whitehead's Religious Thought: From Mechanism to Organism, From Force to Persuasion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2017); and Daniel Dombrowski, *Process Philosophy and Political Liberalism: Rawls, Whitehead, Hartshorne* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019).

[40] See Randall Morris, *Process Philosophy and Political Ideology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991).

view could be interpreted as saying, that liberal political beliefs require the backing provided by some comprehensive doctrine. But which one?

It makes sense to distinguish between toleration of reasonable comprehensive doctrines and toleration of different conceptions of justice. Some might think that Rawls is intolerant in the latter case. Another way to look at the matter, however, is to suggest that Rawls is very tolerant of different concepts of justice within the politically liberal family, which includes a large number of well-known political philosophers. Nonliberal concepts of justice are not so much the victims of intolerance as they are rejected in a fair decision-making procedure, such as that found in the original position behind a veil of ignorance.[41]

I think that we should commend Rawls in this regard. The argument for such rejection, which should not be seen as flippant, relates to reflective equilibrium. That is, if we adopted illiberal stances on the right or left, which in their different ways actually denigrate justice as either a convenient foil for the unwise or as a bourgeois fetish, respectively, we would put into disequilibrium most of the important beliefs held by reflective citizens in contemporary democracies. Among these beliefs is the idea that in politics citizens should be viewed as ends-in-themselves who are free and equal, reasonable and rational. If these beliefs were false, then admittedly nonliberal concepts of justice would look more attractive. But as it stands, with these beliefs assumed as relatively stable, one would pay far too great a price by adopting a nonliberal concept of justice. We should be concerned if debates in democratic politics appear to citizens to be trivial because there is much at stake in these debates.

Regarding the criticism that Rawls's refusal to consider comprehensive doctrines in politics amounts to a denial of them, several different responses are in order. We should not move too quickly, I think, from politically liberal principles that do not rely on any particular version of metaphysical support to the concept that such principles are antimetaphysical. Likewise, we should not move too quickly from the idea that politically liberal principles can be articulated without comprehensive religious backing to the idea that such principles are antireligious. These "offsides" infractions (if the American football

[41] See John Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy*, ed. Samuel Freeman (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), 319–72.

metaphor be permitted) are prompted by the assumption that Rawlsian political philosophy is a variety of secularism.

This assumption deserves scrutiny. Granted, modern liberal thinkers like Kant, Mill, and Dewey seemed to think that as citizens became more enlightened, and hence less attracted to traditional religious or metaphysical understandings of politics, a secular utopia could be approximated. But the later Rawls clearly tries to distance himself from these varieties of comprehensive liberalism, which were meant as replacements for what was thought to be the outmoded metaphysical wisdom of the Judeo-Christian ages. We have seen that Rawls thinks of comprehensive liberalism as just one more comprehensive doctrine that must be brought within the sweep of politically liberal institutions. Indeed, Rawls thinks that comprehensive liberalism can, and historically has, led to messianic and imperialistic forays that were actually at odds with liberal political principles. Or again, it might be more accurate to view Rawlsian political philosophy as postsecular rather than as secular. The very fact that Rawls uses the label "comprehensive doctrine" rather than "religion" indicates, as we have seen, that he thinks that both religious believers (or metaphysicians) and nonbelievers have to submit to reasonable criteria developed in fair decision-making procedures, such as those found in the Rawlsian original positions at both the domestic and international levels. That is, political liberalism is postsecular for the same reason it is postreligious: In a condition of pervasive pluralism of comprehensive doctrines we do not want an "established" comprehensive doctrine of any sort, whether religious or nonreligious. Disastrous historical examples of each can be easily found.

Or again, some think that political liberalism, in addition to being antimetaphysical and antireligious, is also antiteleological. There is a grain of truth in this position, but I think that a more accurate way to put the point would be to say that no single *telos* can be isolated that captures the various (and at times conflicting) ends that reasonable citizens affirm in contemporary democracies: the greater glory of God, pleasure, sexual liberation, artistic excellence, wealth, scientific truth, a life of virtue, and so on. In fact, it is not too much of a stretch to say that, rather than being antiteleological, political liberalism is hyperteleological in that it permits as many ends as are compatible with

justice. Likewise, political liberalism can be seen as hypermetaphysical and hyperreligious.

Although it is correct that Rawls rejects the comprehensive order of reflection in politics, the point of such rejection is to make the conceptual world safe for the comprehensive order of reflection in other areas: the academy, churches, the arts, and responsible journalism. If the comprehensive order of reflection yielded only one concept of the good (as we have seen Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin thought), then political matters would be much simpler than they are in the polyglot conceptual world that we inhabit at present and for the foreseeable future.

The criticism that Rawlsian separation of the just from the good both privatizes and relativizes the good is problematic for several reasons. The contrasting term to "public" in Rawls is "nonpublic" rather than "private." This last term is etymologically related to the negativity associated with privation, lack, or deficiency. There is nothing in political liberalism, however, that associates metaphysical belief with privation. People just happen to believe what they do, and there is nothing lacking in them in this regard. "Nonpublic," although not the ideal term, is nonetheless better than "private" when describing various conceptions of the good.

Further, it is not the case that metaphysicians are required to sequester their conceptions of the good. In political liberalism they are permitted to do intellectual work with them, even in the public square, as long as the terms of the translation proviso are met.[42] As I see things, these terms are not onerous or unfair to defenders of various comprehensive doctrines. Once one acknowledges that reasonable citizens affirm many different conceptions of the good, one comes to realize that it would be a sign of disrespect to enact laws (especially those that use the coercive apparatus of the state to restrict the freedom of citizens) that are based on the terms of a single comprehensive doctrine that many citizens could not accept.

For example, consider the thought of Martin Luther King (or those he influenced), who easily could have met the terms of the translation proviso by providing for his agnostic listeners, in addition to his appeal to comprehensive religious grounds, a nonreligious explanation of why he advocated a society free of discrimination on the basis of race. Or

[42] See Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, li.

again, Rawls himself, who was a defender of abortion rights for women, nonetheless commended Joseph Bernardin, the Catholic cardinal of Chicago, for trying to defend opposition to abortion in terms that were compatible with public reason. On Rawlsian grounds Bernardin may have been wrong, but by fulfilling the terms of the translation proviso he was at least being respectful of fellow citizens.[43] If opponents to abortion are not as successful as King was in changing the laws of the land, this in itself is not reason to abandon the translation proviso so as to allow the use of one comprehensive doctrine to trump the concepts of the good found in others.

It is true that some comprehensive religious beliefs (for example, belief in the Trinity or in the dual nature of Christ) might not be amenable to the rational articulation that is the hallmark of public reason, but it is precisely these beliefs that are least political in that we can easily imagine a just *polis* where there is reasonable disagreement on these matters. Whereas some comprehensive religious beliefs are overdetermined in the sense that they could be justified either in line with public reason or on religious grounds (for example, that murder is wrong), and hence are easily amenable to the terms of the translation proviso, other comprehensive religious beliefs seem to be justifiable only on nonpublic grounds. These latter beliefs are not appropriate bases for public policy in a democracy, as I see things.

The stable beliefs that are the subjects of widespread agreement in contemporary democracies (for example, that women deserve political equality with men) are shared by all reasonable parties, whatever their comprehensive doctrine. This is fortunate because abandonment of these beliefs would most egregiously put our moral lives into disequilibrium. In other words, it is rational to think that we pay too great a price for abandoning these beliefs, hence it is more accurate to say that political liberalism contextualizes comprehensive belief than it is to say that it privatizes such belief. After all, politically liberal freedoms are not only individual, as critics often suggest, but also associational.

The fixed points within political liberalism (for example, that citizens should be seen as politically free and equal, reasonable and

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[43] See Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, lvi; also Daniel Dombrowski, *A Brief, Liberal, Catholic Defense of Abortion* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

rational), the abandonment of which produces a dangerous disequilibrium with respect to morality, in general, and political philosophy, in particular, are of course open for discussion. But this is a far cry from suggesting that the results of such a discussion among reasonable and rational parties would lead to the abandonment of human authenticity. These beliefs are stable precisely because reasonable citizens who lead authentic lives affirm them (albeit in many different ways).

My response to the criticism that the most one can hope for in political liberalism is a *modus vivendi*, rather than an overlapping consensus, follows from what has been said above. In logic it is clear that one can reach the same conclusion (X) starting from several different sets of premises (a, b, c), either directly:

a	b	c
	X	

or indirectly:

a	b	c
d	e	f
	X	

If something analogous can be said in political philosophy, then overlapping consensus is possible in that X can be agreed to by all reasonable parties.

I understand what critics have in mind when they say that political liberalism can achieve only a convenient *modus vivendi* because it is nonteleological. We cannot decide in politics among a, b, or c's ends. Likewise, it is nontheoretical in the sense that we cannot decide in political philosophy about whether a, b, or c is true. If these are mutually exclusive options, however, we can know that they cannot all be true and that some of them (but which ones?) are false.

What some metaphysical critics of political liberalism want in politics are both commonly held principles (which is what overlapping consensus is all about) and necessarily true principles. Regarding the latter, political liberalism admittedly falls short. Although necessarily true principles are not denied in political liberalism, they are left to metaphysicians to deal with. Decisions regarding necessarily true principles should occur at scholarly conferences and in academic

journals, in religious councils and in theological discourse, rather than in the halls of Congress or in courthouses.

Critics are correct to be suspicious regarding a *modus vivendi*, however. The question is whether political liberalism can achieve something greater in terms of overlapping consensus. The problem with a *modus vivendi* is that it lacks stability and can fall apart at any time. The reason for this is that there is no meeting of minds or like-mindedness in a *modus vivendi*, only a truce that could easily be violated when the forces arrayed on either side are diminished. It should be noted that over time a *modus vivendi* can develop into an overlapping consensus as mutual trust develops. Look at how well Catholics and Protestants get along these days. It should also be noted that an overlapping consensus can over time degenerate into a *modus vivendi* as trust wanes and as political opponents in a friendly *agon* gradually come to be viewed as hated enemies.[44] The election of Donald Trump as president of the United States leads one to realize that the latter is a real possibility.

We have seen that another criticism is that Rawls develops a comprehensive doctrine in spite of himself. The first point that should be made in this regard is that if Rawls's view is in fact a comprehensive doctrine, it is not very comprehensive. There is no statement for or against the existence of God in Rawls, no stance regarding the afterlife, no theodicy. There is not even a theory of human nature other than an articulation of the parameters within which a political person as free and equal, reasonable and rational, can maneuver. There is no stated view regarding the mind–body problem (the greatest philosophical problem since the seventeenth century) and no resolution to the problem of human identity over time other than how this problem relates to political agency. Rawls has no stated metaphysical view regarding the status of universals, the problem of the one and the many, or the relationship between being and becoming. There is not even a general theory of axiology that deals with moral as well as aesthetic value. And, perhaps most significantly, there is no developed theory regarding why human beings are ends-in-themselves, dignified subjects worthy of respect, as would be the case if he had a truly comprehensive doctrine.

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[44] See Daniel Dombrowski, *Contemporary Athletics and Ancient Greek Ideals* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009).

To say that Rawls also implies an established comprehensive doctrine (of separation) is to elicit a response to the effect that it would be a very odd established comprehensive doctrine in that Jews, Christians, Muslims, atheists, and agnostics are not only tolerated but are also afforded political equality with all other citizens. As we have seen, the separation of the just from the good is not absolute or "religious" in Rawls due to the translation proviso. Between pure exclusivists, like Rorty, who would utterly prohibit comprehensive doctrines in politics, and pure inclusivists, like Wolterstorff and Gamwell, lies Rawls and his partial inclusivism. It is true, however, that Rawls is closer to Rorty on this continuum than he is to Wolterstorff or Gamwell in that, if the terms of the translation proviso are not met, Rawls thinks that the exclusion of one's particular concept of the good from politics is itself a good thing. However, some comprehensive convictions are very important in politics, that is, those that are reasonable and translatable. An example would be the conviction that human beings are made in the image of God, which can be translated (not without remainder, to be sure, but translated well enough to do significant intellectual work, in Wittgensteinian fashion) into the language of rights and respect.

It is hard for me to see how Rawls falls victim to the charge of performative self-contradiction. Rawls admits that a thin theory of the good is required in a theory of justice, which is a theory of the good that involves basic things that would be required in any thicker and wider theory of the good that is reasonable. When Rawls separates justice from the good it is this thicker and wider concept of the good that is separated, not the thin theory. Perhaps it would have been less confusing if Rawls had called the thin theory of the good a theory of (Nussbaumlike) capabilities or (Aristotelian) requirements so as to avoid the appearance of contradiction.

It is futile, it might be claimed, to try to avoid metaphysics. In a peculiar way, a Rawlsian could agree with this claim in that, because political philosophy is only a part of an overall moral philosophy, some conception of the good is required in order to deal with all of the questions that are not spelled out in *A Theory of Justice*. As the cliché has it, politics is not the whole of life, even if it affects everything else. Another way to put the point is to say that it is misleading to suggest that no concept of the comprehensive good is required in political

liberalism; rather, several different metaphysical views and their concomitant comprehensive goods are compatible with justice. Hence there is no incoherence in eschewing any particular metaphysical view in politics while permitting one, encouraging one, perhaps even requiring one elsewhere. The fact that political liberalism permits metaphysical views is well known, but the fact that it encourages or requires them should be better known.

Very early in *A Theory of Justice* Rawls makes it clear that justice is the first virtue of social institutions, just as truth is the first virtue of systems of thought.[45] There is no principled opposition in political liberalism to truth. So it is insightfully correct to say that the Rawlsian distinction between the reasonable and the rationally discoverable true itself must be true. But this very abstract truth is clearly not the whole truth or the less abstract truth found in a comprehensive doctrine or in metaphysics-1. That is, political liberalism is not challenged in any significant way when it is claimed that it cannot remain neutral regarding all of the abstract aspects of truly comprehensive doctrines.

It should now be clear how I would respond to the criticism that Rawls does not submit to the idea that any moral claim at least implicitly includes its metaethical grounding. This is another way of objecting to Rawls's idea that a theory of justice should be freestanding. My response relies on a distinction between two different senses of "freestanding." The first connotes the idea that a theory of justice should be freestanding in the sense that it does not rely on any particular metaethical view, whereas the second stands for the idea that a theory of justice should not rely on any metaethical stance. The second sense is admittedly problematic for several reasons. But it is the first sense that a political liberal should defend, and it is not clear what is wrong with freestandingness in this sense.

The criticism that political liberalism lacks a true comprehensive doctrine and that only such a comprehensive doctrine can redeem political prescriptions should be addressed in terms of Rawls's admission that his view of political philosophy is *pro tanto*. Literally, these Latin words mean to pay in part, as when in a legal context someone in debt escapes penalty by paying part of the debt on the pledge to pay the remainder at a later time. *Pro tanto* pledges are quite different from bankruptcies, where one is under no obligation to repay

[45] See Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 3.

the remaining debt. Given this distinction, one can interpret Rawls to be saying that one pays one's "debt" in moral philosophy in two stages (or better, in two different ways, in that I am speaking of logical stages here and not temporal ones). First one needs to get clear on the abstract principles of justice that would guide a democratic society in a condition of reasonable pluralism, then one needs to deal with all of the other questions in moral philosophy that are not primarily questions regarding justice.

Because the second payment involves one of the two moral powers that are individually necessary and jointly sufficient in the moral life—a sense of the right or the just and a sense of the good—no bankruptcy proceedings are appropriate here. Whereas metaphysical critics of political liberalism speak as if Rawlsian political philosophy is a type of bankruptcy proceeding (in that the sense of the good is not exercised in the effort to understand the comprehensive order, indeed it is denied), it would perhaps be more accurate to say that the sense of the good is postponed. Or better, because one's concept of the good may antedate one's concept of justice, it might be even more accurate to say that it is not so much postponed as it is relegated to a different part of moral theory and the moral life.

Not to engage in this sort of *pro tanto* postponement or relegation is to run the risk that one would end up with an explicit or implicit established comprehensive doctrine (whether religious or nonreligious). To say of one's favored universalist concept of good that it alone can redeem political prescriptions is to flirt with the possibility that overlapping consensus would disintegrate into a *modus vivendi* or worse.

Of course, there is something messy about *pro tanto* reasoning in particular and about reflective equilibrium in general, as we have seen. But this is because reflective equilibrium is a type of dialectic; and this generic philosophical method (once again, *the* method of philosophy, according to Scanlon) always involves some unfinished business and some questions only partially answered.

The effort to develop a universalistic concept of the good, such that only in its terms could political prescriptions be redeemed, itself is open to dialectical criticism and to further clarification. The Hartshornian way to make the point is to say that if we are lucky enough to reach necessary truth, this fact itself will be contingent. We have no viable

alternative to the back-and-forth movement involved in the process of reflective equilibrium: intuition, rational argument, counterargument, response to counterargument, then new intuition. The regional resolution of the problem of justice that this processual method has produced is the sediment associated with political liberalism. No doubt improved versions of liberalism may be in the offing, but the disequilibrium that would be brought about by radical shifts to the illiberal right or left continues to be unpersuasive. There is nothing arbitrary in accepting the provisional results of dialectical argument in political philosophy. The disastrous results of disequilibrium make this readily apparent.

However, in a way I am in agreement with the criticism that metaphysical convictions at the most abstract level (for example, regarding the existence of God or regarding the features properly connected to the concept of that than which no greater can be conceived) are rationally defensible. My agreement here, however, is as a metaphysician, not as a political philosopher. It should be clear that I am in the minority regarding the defensibility of the ontological argument.[46] And my belief that creation ex nihilo is unintelligible is also controversial even in (especially in!) religious circles. That is, in political theory, in contrast to metaphysics, we will have to rest content with philosophy rather than Philosophy, with rationality rather than Rationality.

I would like to make it clear that I share the concern that metaphysical conviction ought to be exemplified without duplicity.[47] But I do not see duplicity at work in trying to understand philosophically and to implement practically the biblical advice to "let both grow together until the harvest."[48] Taken literally, "both" refers to wheat and weeds, but here I am taking it to refer to true and false comprehensive doctrines. I have previously admitted that some comprehensive doctrines must be false. This is a logical point in that, when comprehensive doctrines contradict each other, one realizes that they cannot both be true.

My point here is not merely logical, however. I agree wholeheartedly with the belief that there are convincing reasons for

[46] Once again, see Dombrowski, *Rethinking the Ontological Argument*.
[47] See Gamwell, *The Meaning of Religious Freedom*, 49.
[48] Mt 13:24–30.

thinking that neoclassical or process theism is true. I do not so much hide this belief in public, and hence behave duplicitously, as I refrain from calling attention to it unless it seems both effective to do so in politics (largely it is not) and respectful to do so (sometimes it is, per the translation proviso, sometimes it is not).

I also share the fear of postmodern refusal or denial of metaphysics and metanarratives (which often conceal an implicit metaphysics and metanarrative). But I have tried to show how the freestanding character of political liberalism enables one to be nonmetaphysical in one sense and as committed to metaphysics as one would like to be in another as long as one is reasonable. I have previously argued[49] that the problem here is, in Whiteheadian fashion, misplaced concreteness. The locus for integration of political principles and metaphysical ones is not at the societal level as long as many reasonable citizens either eschew metaphysics or defend different metaphysical views from one's own. Rather, the locus for such integration is at the individual or associational level.

As I see things, until all rational beings agree at the level of comprehensive doctrine (the "harvest"), we have a duty to be reasonable. As the biblical image makes clear, one danger is that by prematurely pulling the weeds the wheat itself might be ruined. Finally, it seems to me that it would be a mistake to view this stance as metaphysics-lite; instead it should be viewed as religion or metaphysics come of age, given the long history of intolerance.

IV

Process Metaphysical Background. In the remainder of this article, I will emphasize the fact that the above views are attempts to make explicit those that are implicit in the thought of Whitehead and Hartshorne, who illustrate one among many ways in which politically liberal principles can be inserted into, or be deduced from, a metaphysical view. Although neither Whitehead nor Hartshorne developed a systematic political theory, they did explicitly identify themselves as liberals in politics. Whitehead worked tirelessly on the issues of egalitarian educational reform and women's suffrage, causes

[49] See Dombrowski, *Rawls and Religion*, 159.

that led him to be pelted with rotten eggs and oranges. His overall sympathies were with the Labour Party in England. And Hartshorne was one of the founders of the Liberal Club at Harvard, although there is a certain tension in his political thought: his idealism pushed him toward democratic socialism, and his defense of freedom pushed him toward some version of free enterprise. Further, his social background (this is probably true of Whitehead as well) gave him a certain sense of noblesse oblige.[50] By "liberalism" here I do not mean the laissez faire version of liberalism popular in the nineteenth century, which Whitehead thought had given to us a remarkably unconvivial industrial slavery at the base of the state.[51] This type of classical liberalism relies on a view of human persons as independent substances that are unrelated to the rest of nature and to each other, a view that is opposed to Whitehead's and Hartshorne's metaphysical commitments to events (rather than substances) as the *res verae* and to a relational worldview (rather than to a worldview that emphasizes independent substances). So although Whitehead and Hartshorne were political liberals at least in part due to their theism (as in Whitehead's religious beliefs as they developed from the 1920s on), they were not classical liberals if this means a commitment to laissez faire economics. In Whitehead's case, at least, his own label for his overall view, philosophy of organism, applies not only to his view of nature, but also in a way to his view of the state as quasi-organic and relational.

In process metaphysics, to be is to have the (Platonic) dynamic power to be affected by others and the dynamic power to affect others, in however slight a degree.[52] In different terms, to be is to be causally implicated in the lives of others. One result of this view is that, although it enshrines freedom or creativity in every event, it is also at odds with the laissez faire fetish for absolute freedom or independence. The past actual world both supplies the possibilities for creative advance and

[50] See Alfred North Whitehead, "Autobiographical Notes," in *The Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead*, ed. P. A. Schilpp (LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court, 1941), 13; Alfred North Whitehead, *Essays in Science and Philosophy* (New York: Philosophic Library, 1947), 13; *Dialogues of Alfred North Whitehead*, ed. Lucien Price (New York: Mentor Books, 1954), 358; Charles Hartshorne, "An Economic Program for Religious Liberalism," *The Christian Century* (June 5, 1935); Charles Hartshorne, *The Darkness and the Light* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 69–70, 155, 168.

[51] See Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 34.

[52] See Dombrowski, *A Platonic Philosophy of Religion*, chap. 2.

limits the degree to which this freedom can be exercised. Freedom is always canalized and social. By metaphysically excluding both absolute determinism and absolute freedom, process thinkers provide the context within which we can better understand the peacefulness that characterizes social relations with others in a democratic state. Or again, Whitehead and Hartshorne share an aesthetic theory wherein both the uniformity and monotony of collectivist states, on the one hand, and the diversity bordering on chaos in laissez faire states, on the other, are deviations from beauty that are extreme. It is the intensity of the experience of unity in the midst of diversity that is the ideal.[53]

If one were to alter the data from the past that are prehended by a present event, then one would alter the subject of the experience. Thus, this is a view that could be described as either partial freedom or partial determinism. In this view God establishes optimal limits within which this partial freedom can be exercised, although political rulers are nonetheless needed to protect this freedom when it is threatened. Process metaphysicians reject the idea of God as a tyrant who decides on all of the details. In fact, political power should ideally be modeled after divine power in being persuasive and peaceful rather than coercive, although less than ideal circumstances sometimes threaten to overwhelm this ideal. Too little government control (as in the minimal laissez faire state) flirts with anarchy, whereas too much government control dampens creativity. The optimal limits for the exercise of partial freedom in human beings that are set by God ensure that political arrangements are local exemplifications of cosmic or metaphysical variables.[54] In different terms, as Whitehead sees things, "morality of outlook is inseparably conjoined with generality of outlook."[55]

Although both Whitehead and Hartshorne abhorred the mechanistic view of the state, they nonetheless thought that connectedness was in the order of things, specifically the internal relations between a present event and its past causal influences. Both saw time as asymmetrical in that a present event is not internally related to "its" future (if there be such) in that until future determinables are

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[53] See Dombrowski, *Divine Beauty*, chap. 2; also Hartshorne, *Creative Synthesis and Philosophic Method,* 97.

[54] See Bernard Loomer, "The Size of the Everlasting God," *Process Studies Supplements* 18 (2013): 1–45.

[55] See Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald Sherburne (New York: Free Press, 1978), 15.

rendered determinate by some decision they cannot be prehended, and hence they cannot be internalized. The state is the result of several present lines of inheritance being shaped by the same or by significantly overlapping causal influences from the past.

We have seen that the most important function of metaphysics, on Hartshorne's view, is to help in any way possible to enlighten us and to encourage us in our agonizing struggles in politics. In the mid-decades of the twentieth century this meant that the tenuous status of the state as a quasi-organism, as found in Whitehead and to a lesser extent in Hartshorne, made both communism and fascism as metaphysically indefensible as the near absolute freedom that is required for the laissez faire state. A metaphysics that makes intelligible the claim *Deus est caritas* (God is love) is efficacious in relieving this agony, a relief that is not given in the classical view of God as strictly permanent and immune to human and other influence. Neoclassical or process metaphysics has us take very seriously the historical struggles of creatures as well as the history of divine reception/response to these struggles. In fact, because of scientific and metaphysical problems with simultaneity, even perception is historical in the sense that it takes a finite amount of time to receive the information that we see and hear in everyday perceptions, as becomes clear to us when we perceive really distant events, as in the epistemically present perception of a star that burned out eons ago. In effect, history should be our cognitive paradigm, not mathematics.[56]

The ultimate roots of political freedom can be seen as lying in the very nature of things, on the process view, hence it is important in politics to develop institutions that are compatible with this fact. As before, the freedom in question does not refer to the absence of influence from others. Although Hartshorne admits that, as a result of entangling influences, political questions are much harder than metaphysical ones, he is nonetheless convinced, as we have seen, that mistakes at the metaphysical level ensure that political disasters will follow.

[56] See Hartshorne, *Creative Synthesis and Philosophic Method*, 55–56, 119.

V

Different Emphases. It must be admitted that there are differences in emphasis in the political liberalisms of Whitehead and Hartshorne. Whitehead is more likely than Hartshorne to subscribe to the view of the state as a quasi-organic whole. Although Hartshorne has a view of organic wholes that is similar to Whitehead's (in that both see them as being compounded out of organic, feeling microconstituents, in contrast to a mere aggregate of microscopic feeling as found in a plant or a rock), he is reticent to talk of states as organic wholes. For Hartshorne, political democracies (and other forms of government) are also metaphysical democracies in that they lack a presiding actual occasion that would make them metaphysical monarchies or true "ones." A cell is a true one or a center of experience, an animal with a central nervous system is a true one or a center of experience, and God as the soul for the whole body of the world is a true one (the Truest One) or a center of experience, hence all of these are metaphysical "monarchies." But a state is a metaphysical "democracy," no matter what form of government is in place, and despite the fact that such a state is composed of various metaphysical monarchies. Although we whimsically personify the state in the United States in terms of "Uncle Sam," there really is no organic center of experience in this state. It is a collection of parts, some of which are metaphysical monarchies and some of which are metaphysical democracies. It must be admitted, however, that Whitehead was aware of the fact that a national hero could become a symbol that could metaphorically animate the activities of the state.[57] To put the point in terms of political theory, Hartshorne could be seen as having a bit more in common with classical liberals than Whitehead does. Whitehead could be seen as leaning more in the direction of a modern liberal view, as Randall Morris insightfully argues.[58]

The differences between the two can be easily overstated, however. This is due in part to the fact that even in Whitehead the state is only a quasi-organic whole and is not to be literally identified as a super-organism like "Mother Russia" or the Heideggerian "Fatherland." That

[57] See Alfred North Whitehead, *Symbolism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1985), 77.

[58] Again, see Randall Morris, *Process Philosophy and Political Ideology.*

is, in both Whitehead and Hartshorne there is opposition not only to anarchic and substantialist individualism but also to collectivism. These oppositions lead us to realize that political moderation is metaphysically grounded. Both Whitehead and Hartshorne were very familiar with communism and fascism (having lived and suffered through the early and mid-decades of the twentieth century) and decidedly opposed to the remarkably unconvivial relations among people found in those states, both communist and fascist, that had totalitarian aspirations based on their aggressively organic view of the state. Although both had severe criticisms of fascism, Whitehead thought that the Soviet system might have been a slight improvement over political relations in Russia under the czars; and Hartshorne was thankful for the role the Soviet Union played in making an asymptotic approach to the political ideal possible by defeating the Nazis, even if the Soviet Union did not itself closely approximate the ideal: the synthesis of order and freedom.[59]

However, the differences between the two can also be easily overstated at Hartshorne's end. Like Morris, one could interpret his greater reticence to view the state as an organism in its own right as a tip of the hat to the grain of truth (if the mixed metaphor be permitted) found in defenders of free enterprise. But it could also be interpreted as further evidence of his theocentrism, which is by all accounts somewhat more pronounced than Whitehead's. Hartshorne is a bit more insistent than Whitehead (although the point may well be implicit in Whitehead, too) that we are more citizens of the cosmos than we are citizens of any quasi-organic (at best) state. Once again, the cosmos as a whole is an organism, according to Hartshorne, that is animated by a panentheistic God.

In effect, Whitehead sometimes tempts us in a communitarian way to have communitarian values seep into our appreciation for politically liberal institutions, whereas there is less of a temptation to do this in Hartshorne. On my own Hartshornian view, liberal values should remain somewhat abstract not only due to the desire to be fair to others in a condition of pervasive pluralism of metaphysical doctrines, but also to remind us of the more concrete sorts of organic reality found in lived

[59] See Whitehead, *Dialogues of Alfred North Whitehead*, 128, 220, 294; also Charles Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1948), xvi, 150; Charles Hartshorne, *Wisdom as Moderation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 44–47; Hartshorne, *Creative Experiencing,* 143.

communities in contrast to the politically liberal state as a whole. (It might make sense in this regard to view matters in terms of a Peircian synechism such that there is a continuum of unities from the low end—say a pile of leaves—to the significant unity found in an organic whole; this would allow us elbow room to appreciate unity where and when it exists at various levels.) Nonetheless, Hartshorne is as much a political liberal as Whitehead, with a "liberal" once again being defined as one who knows he or she is not God. Further, Hartshorne is insightful in pointing out that most political incompatibilities involve a conflict of good with good; it is the mark of unconvivial dogmatism to think that the major source of discord is the conflict between good and evil.[60] The noticeable unconviviality evidenced in recent United States politics seems to be due to a failure to acknowledge Hartshorne's point here. The problem, as political liberals have long noticed, is the unmitigated intensity with which religious, metaphysical, and political beliefs are often held. Hartshorne tellingly admires Jews and Christians who are friends without the (especially Christian) temptation to convert the other.[61]

In both thinkers there is, on the one hand, an affirmation of the partial freedom of the individual and, on the other, an affirmation of what Hartshorne calls reality as social process. And in both thinkers there is an admiration for a mixed economy that includes both individual initiative and socialized industry and projects (like universal health care). Like Whitehead, Hartshorne saw contemporary capitalism as ugly. The mixed economy need not be seen as a lukewarm compromise, but could be seen as a use of bold contrasts in an overall aesthetic harmony.[62] It is interesting to note that in Rawls, too, there is an admiration for a mixed economy in that the demands of the two (in reality three) principles of justice could be met by either some version of a market economy, but not laissez faire capitalism, or some version of democratic socialism, but not a centralized command economy, or both.[63] For both Whitehead and Hartshorne there is an attempt to avoid the twin evils of abstract individualism and abstract or mythically

[60] See Charles Hartshorne, *Reality as Social Process* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1953), 99.

[61] See Charles Hartshorne, *The Zero Fallacy*, 67, 77.

[62] See Hartshorne, *Reality as Social Process*, 47.

[63] See Rawls, *A Theory of Justice,* 239–40.

organic collectivism. There is never a vacuum of power in that when the gods leave, the half-gods arrive. Among these half-gods are state worship, Nazi power worship, Lenin or Mao worship, commodity fetishism, but also self-worship or despair.[64]

The differences in emphasis in the two thinkers are thus not as striking as their similarities, on my view. No mere state is a subject because it does not experience. (Nor do corporations experience, hence they ought not to be seen as persons.) To say that a state does experience is shorthand for saying that the state's members do. Likewise, states are real and important because their members are real and important. The intrinsic value in the world is to be found in experiencing individuals (that is, metaphysical monarchies) in that only they enjoy or suffer. If Whitehead and Hartshorne are panpsychists, as I think they are, this is not to be taken to mean that literally everything feels or experiences. To be a panpsychist is to hold that all concrete singulars feel or experience, but not abstractions or abstract aggregates of concrete singulars. Animals (including human ones) are distinctive in the ways that they can take the feelings of concrete singulars like cells and then gather them together and transmute them at the multicellular level such that, as Hartshorne emphasizes, if you hurt my cells you can hurt me. But states are only metaphorically sentient. Any whole that has less unity than its most unified parts is not a sentient organism in any morally relevant sense.[65]

Hartshorne bridges whatever gap there might be between his view and Whitehead's when he devotes an entire chapter to the elements of truth in the group mind concept. The key idea here is that the characters of individuals vary in light of the characters of groups to which they belong.[66] But a state cannot love us, as God can. Hence extreme organicism should be avoided. We need to resist the absolutization and personification of the state or the party, just as we should resist the selfishness that is permitted (despite Adam Smith's distinction between rational self-interest and selfishness) in capitalist countries.[67] The

[64] See Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity*, 148; Hartshorne, *Reality as Social Process*, 68.

[65] See Hartshorne, *Creative Synthesis and Philosophic Method*, 111, 141; *The Logic of Perfection* (LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court, 1962), 192.

[66] See Hartshorne, *Reality as Social Process*, chap. 3.

[67] See Charles Hartshorne, *Beyond Humanism* (Chicago: Willett, Clark, and Co., 1937), 33–34.

process metaphysics of democracy, for both Whitehead and Hartshorne, also involves a critique of the classical theistic God, who functions as a despot, who provides a model for various political dictators, and who is even compared by Whitehead to Hitler! That is, the worship of sheer omnipotence is not unconnected to a hierarchical and undemocratic view of ecclesial or other polity. By contrast, the model provided by the neoclassical, process God is that of a divinity who is not only influenced by the creatures, but who is omnibenevolently most influenced by them. It is a poor ruler (or dialectical partner) who only speaks and does not listen.[68]

It should be noted that, strictly speaking, in process thought the most concrete realities are neither states nor individuals, but sequences of events that are characterized by a high level of symbolic functioning and a certain degree of creative freedom. Both Whitehead and Hartshorne militate against the dominant Western tradition of taking individualism as ultimate. This tradition prevented many people in the West during the Cold War from seeing the ignoble side of individualism in addition to the noble (human rights) side. This failure is not unrelated to metaphysical confusion regarding the relation of events to enduring things (which are called "societies" by Whitehead and Hartshorne). Event pluralism "cuts the nerve" of even subtle forms of self-interest theory in politics.[69] Process thought involves a social conception of the universe that Hartshorne even calls "societism." The divine attributes themselves are types of social relationship (for example, being affected by the object known or the person loved). And our own feeling is really a feeling of feeling at the cellular level, hence human experience itself is inherently social: The individual freedom of action found in an event is conditioned by its partial passivity to the influence of preceding others. This power to prehensively receive influence from others and to creatively respond to it is spread throughout the universe on the process

[68] See Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity*, 50–51, 111; Charles Hartshorne, *Philosophers Speak of God* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1953), 20; Hartshorne, *Creative Synthesis and Philosophic Method*, 232. Also see *Dialogues of Alfred North Whitehead*, 176.

[69] See Hartshorne, *Creative Synthesis and Philosophic Method*, 190–91, 198; Hartshorne, "Beyond Enlightened Self-Interest: The Illusions of Egoism," in *The Zero Fallacy and Other Essays in Neoclassical Philosophy*.

view.[70] But in this regard we are functioning as metaphysicians doing Philosophy with the aid of Rationality, in partial contrast to the more modest, yet necessary, efforts of liberal political philosophers who are equipped with a carefully circumscribed rationality.

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[70] See Charles Hartshorne, *The Philosophy and Psychology of Sensation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1934), 193–95; Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity*, 134, 156; Hartshorne, *Reality as Social Process*, 24.