Neutralism for Perfectionists: The Case of Restricted State Neutrality*

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Joseph Raz’s work in political philosophy is distinguished by, among other things, its forceful rejection of the claim that the state should be neutral among different ideals of the good life and its welcoming acceptance of the thesis of value pluralism—roughly, the idea that there exist a range of different and incompatible ways of living a good human life. In *The Morality of Freedom* Raz stressed that there is no necessary connection between these two ideas. Acceptance of value pluralism does not necessitate neutral political concern. There is, as he put it, a logical gap between pluralism and neutrality.

In this essay, I articulate a principle of state neutrality that takes...
Raz's lesson to heart. I present a principle of state neutrality that is broadly compatible with a perfectionist approach to politics, and I appeal to the thesis of value pluralism to do so. Here is the basic idea. Perfectionists who also accept the thesis of value pluralism must allow that there exist a plurality of equally or incommensurably valuable ideals of the good life. Perfectionists believe that it is permissible for the state to favor good ideals over bad ones; but this belief is consistent with the belief that the state should be neutral among ideals of equal or incommensurable value. So perfectionism and state neutrality are consistent so long as the state neutrality in question is restricted to ideals that are of equal or incommensurable value—or, as I shall sometimes say, ideals that are equally worthwhile.

In one respect, this claim is not surprising. We know that principles of state neutrality must specify a domain in which neutrality is to be sought. The domain, for example, should not be specified to include all moral values. For no clearheaded person thinks that a principle of political morality—such as the principle of state neutrality—could be neutral with respect to itself. Commonly, the domain of the principle of state neutrality is specified by reference to conceptions of the good or comprehensive doctrines that have adherents in the society in question. The principle of state neutrality that I seek to defend specifies the domain in a more restricted fashion. Neutrality is owed to ideals of the good that have adherents in the society and are equally worthwhile. I call it the restricted neutrality principle (RNP).

In Section I, I characterize the thesis of value pluralism. I do not give arguments in support of the thesis; but I do attempt to bring the thesis into clear focus. In Section II, I clarify RNP, distinguishing it from

3. On a perfectionist approach to politics, it is permissible for state officials to favor, actively and intentionally, some ideals of the good life over others on the grounds that they are more worthwhile for human beings. Two clarifying remarks should be noted. First, since critics of perfectionism sometimes claim that it is permissible for the state to support shared ideals of the good, the perfectionist commitment to promoting valuable ideals should be construed to include controversial ideals as well as shared ones. Second, the claim that it is permissible for the state to favor some ideals of the good over others should be understood to be an in principle claim. For any particular society at any particular time, there may be various pragmatic reasons that speak against undertaking perfectionist political action. Perfectionists are not committed to rejecting the possibility of such reasons. For recent defenses of perfectionism in politics, in addition to Raz's work, see Thomas Hurka, *Perfectionism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), chaps. 11–13; George Sher, *Beyond Neutrality: Perfectionism in Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); and Richard J. Arneson, "Perfectionism in Politics," *Ethics* 111 (2000): 37–69.

the more familiar liberal principle of state neutrality. Here I note a number of important differences between the two principles. With these tasks behind me, in Sections III and IV, I turn to the key question of whether perfectionists who affirm value pluralism have good reason to accept RNP. As will emerge, I offer a mixed answer to the question. I argue that RNP is not plausible if it is understood to be a general principle that applies to all perfectionist political action, but that it is plausible if it is understood to apply more narrowly to a range of important issues. Properly understood—or so I argue—RNP can account for some of the reasons that have led many to affirm state neutrality, and it can explain why perfectionist politics need not be objectionably sectarian, as many of its critics allege.

I. PLURALISM AND THE HUMAN GOOD

Despite its current popularity with political and moral theorists, value pluralism is an eminently controversial thesis. It is inconsistent with a range of influential philosophical and religious claims about the nature and content of a good human life. Moreover, the case for accepting the thesis is by no means conclusive. Still, as indicated, I will not attempt to defend the thesis here. I want to assume that it is true in order to consider some of the implications its truth would have for politics, and especially for perfectionist politics.

It is incumbent on me to specify what the thesis asserts, however. Value pluralism is a general thesis about value. My present concern is with one category of value—the value involved in living a good human life. (One could be a value pluralist and still maintain that one way of life, say, the contemplative life, is best for human beings. One might think, for example, that moral and aesthetic values are irreducibly plural and diverse, while thinking that the components of a good human life are unitary.) So, in fact, my concern in this essay is with pluralism about the human good. I do not need to take a stand on whether other categories of value are pluralistic or monistic.

Applied to the human good, the value pluralist, as I shall construe him, is committed to (at least) the following three claims:


6. In speaking of different categories of value, I don't wish to suggest that there are deep, philosophically important divisions between them. Perhaps there are, perhaps not. I merely wish to allow for the possibility that one could be a pluralist about some kinds of value and not about others.
a) There is a plurality of conflicting goods (activities, states of being, relationships, character traits, etc.) that contribute to a good human life.

b) Not all of these goods can be reduced to a common good or combined in a single human life.

c) The choice between some conflicting goods in some choice situations is not rationally determined.⁷

To illustrate these claims, consider three candidate goods for human beings—friendship, knowledge, and achievement. Suppose that these goods are irreducible in the sense that they cannot be reduced to a single good that accounts for their value, such as pleasure. And suppose further that they conflict in the sense that it is not possible to fully realize each good in a human life. Trade-offs between these goods will need to be made. Then claims a and b are true.

Still, each of these goods, while irreducible, remains a good for human beings. So it is natural to think that in choosing between them we should always select the good that will contribute most to a good human life. Claim c implies that this is not always possible. In some choice situations there is no rationally determined answer as to what choice would be best between goods.⁸ For example, to complete some important project I may need to move away from my friend, thereby damaging the friendship. Should I value the achievement of the project over my commitment to the friendship? In some choice situations, there may be no right answer to this question. That, at least, is what claim c states.

Claim c presents its own puzzles. If reason fails to provide guidance in a choice situation in which significant human goods are at stake, then the choice of one good over another in that choice situation will be—in one crucial sense—groundless. An important concern about the idea of a groundless choice between goods is that it makes the choice not fully intelligible to the choosing agent. The agent feels inclined to

⁷ There are different explanations for this possibility. The goods in question might be "on a par" or of equal, incommensurable, or incomparable value. I leave this issue open. For discussion, see the papers in Ruth Chang, ed., *Incommensurability, Incomparability, and Practical Reason* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

⁸ To say that a choice between two or more goods in a given choice situation is "not rationally determined" is to say that reason does not settle which good should be chosen over the others in that situation. And to say that reason does not settle which good should be chosen over the others in that situation is to say, or so I here stipulate, that there is no consideration, or set of considerations, that count conclusively in favor of choosing one over the other in that situation.
opt for good x over good y, but he may not understand why.\textsuperscript{9} Call this the "intelligibility worry."\textsuperscript{10} A second concern about the possibility of a groundless choice between goods is more directly relevant to the argument of this essay. If a group of agents must make a groundless choice between conflicting goods, and if different members of the group are inclined to favor, or are invested in the pursuit of, different goods, then the choice of one good over the other may be arbitrary in the sense that the will of some members of the group may be favored over the will of other members of the group and for no good reason. Call this the "arbitrariness worry." I will have more to say about this concern, and the problem that it points to, later on.

A final piece of terminology will prove to be helpful. Some statements of value pluralism are more radical than others. Claims a–c do not tell us how many irreducibly distinct goods exist. Nor do they tell us how common are the choice situations in which there is no rationally determinate choice to be made between plural goods. Value pluralists disagree with respect to the scope of the thesis. The scope of the thesis is fixed by two variables:

i. The number of choice situations typically present to human beings in which a choice must be made between plural and conflicting goods and in which none of the options is rationally determined.

ii. The evaluative significance of these choice situations.

No effort will be made to present a formula that combines these two variables. For my purposes, a rough and ready formulation of the idea should suffice. The greater the number and significance of choice situations in which reason does not settle which of two or more conflicting goods ought to be chosen, the wider the scope of value pluralism. In what follows, and for simplicity's sake, I shall speak simply of wide- and narrow-scope value pluralism to mark the difference in degree.

II. PLURALISTIC PERFECTIONISM AND STATE NEUTRALITY

Much discussion of value pluralism—or more precisely pluralism about the human good—in the philosophical literature focuses on choice sit-

\textsuperscript{9} To clarify: the agent will know why good x is worth pursuing—it is, we are assuming, a genuine human good—but he will not understand why he is moved to favor it over good y.

\textsuperscript{10} The intelligibility worry is premised on a number of controversial claims, such as the claim that intelligible choice is based on reasons and the claim that the brute fact that an agent wants something does not provide him with a reason for choosing it. This is not the place to consider these claims. Nor is it the place to consider just how serious the intelligibility worry is. On this latter issue, compare Joseph Raz, "Incommensurability and Agency," 110–28, esp. 126–28, with Donald Regan, "Value, Comparability and Choice," 144–50, both in Chang, \textit{Incommensurability, Incomparability, and Practical Reason}. 
uations in which individual people confront a choice between plural and conflicting goods. Examples abound. An artist must choose to pursue his work in a foreign land or to stay at home with his family. A woman must decide to pursue either a career of scholarship or one of public service to her community; or, more mundanely, a man must decide whether to spend a weekend at the beach or to stay at home and work on his garden. My focus in this essay is on choice situations in which groups of individual people—specifically, the members of modern political societies—confront choices as to which goods, if any, should be favored over others by political action in their society.

The perfectionist holds that it is permissible for the state to promote the good. But if value pluralism (with respect to the human good) is true, then to say that the state should promote the good will not tell us all that we need to know, for it will not tell us which goods the state should promote. To be sure, one can respond that the state should promote all of the human goods that can be effectively promoted by state action. But if there are a plurality of such goods, and if the promotion of one can impede the promotion of another, then this answer will not be very helpful. The promotion of one good can impede the promotion of another if the two goods are constitutively incompatible. Less dramatically, the promotion of one can impede the promotion of another, if resources are scarce. Support for one good leaves less left over for the support of others.

The point I am calling attention to here should not be overstated. Not every human good or good way of life is an option for members of each political society. Some goods are no longer available for those who live in modern societies because their pursuit requires social practices that no longer exist. We can define an eligible good as one that can be successfully pursued or realized by a member of a political society, given the conventions and practices otherwise in place in the political society in which he resides. The pluralistic perfectionist—that is, the perfectionist who is also committed to value pluralism—confronts the issue of which eligible human goods the state should support or promote over others in the political society with which he is concerned.

To keep matters simple, suppose that there are three, and only three, ideals of a good human life that are both eligible and worthy of pursuit in a political society. An ideal of a good human life identifies a set of goods that are to be realized by human beings and a ranking, more or less precise, of the relative importance of these goods. Now designate the three ideals with the letters A, B, and C. Stipulate that it is true that reason does not dictate for any member of the society which

11. In what follows, I will sometimes use the term "ideal of the good" as a shorthand for "ideal of a good human life."
ideal should be pursued. Each person in the society is free (i.e., free from the standpoint of reason) to pursue either A, B, or C. Stipulate further that a significant number of people in the society opt for each of these ideals.

The perfectionist holds that it is permissible for the state to promote the good. But, in this example, it might be thought that the state should be neutral in its support of these three ideals. Since each ideal is worthy of pursuit, and since none can be ranked as better or worse than the others, the state, or so it may be thought, should not take sides between them. If it were to do so, then it would engage in state action that was objectionably sectarian. As indicated above, I will refer to the principle that expresses this thought as the restricted neutrality principle (RNP). Put more formally, the principle holds:

If two or more ideals of a good human life are eligible for those who live in a particular political society, and if these ideals have adherents in that political society, and if these ideals cannot be ranked by reason as better or worse than one another, then the state, to the extent that it aims to promote the good in this political society, should be neutral between these ideals in its support of them.

This principle leaves open the scope of value pluralism. It is compatible with narrow- as well as wide-scope views. The principle also construes neutrality in terms of the aims of state officials. It does not require the state to ensure that the consequences of its actions are neutral with respect to the ideals of the good that are entitled to neutral treatment.

To my knowledge, no one has proposed a principle like RNP. Political perfectionists tend to reject neutrality requirements out of hand. Proponents of state neutrality interpret the neutrality requirement much more broadly to include all conceptions of a good human life that are eligible in modern societies, or at least all such conceptions that are compatible with the requirements of justice. To bring out the important differences between RNP and the more familiar liberal principle of state neutrality (LSN), it will be helpful to have before us a clear formulation of the latter principle:

12. Plainly, this is all very artificial. In reality, the differences between people's talents and temperaments and past choices can make it the case that some rationally should pursue one ideal over others. But here I am trying to keep the example as simple as possible.

13. This may strike some readers as unmotivated. I myself believe that a stronger case for neutrality of effect can be made than is commonly thought by proponents of state neutrality; see Steven Wall, “Neutrality and Responsibility,” Journal of Philosophy 98 (2008): 389–410. But in this essay I follow common practice and construe the neutrality requirement in terms of the aims or intentions of state officials.
It is impermissible for the state to intend to favor or promote any permissible ideal of a good human life over any other permissible ideal of a good human life, or to give greater assistance to those who pursue it.  

A permissible ideal of a good human life, for the purposes of this principle, is an ideal of a good human life that is consistent with the requirements of justice for a modern democratic society, where the requirements of justice are not themselves founded on or tied to any particular ideal of a good human life.  

Given social conditions under which members of the same political society pursue a wide range of different ideals of the good, many have thought that the best, or perhaps only, way for the state to comply with LSN is for state officials to recognize a general constraint on the kinds of considerations that can be invoked to justify political decisions. Controversial ideals of the good are to be excluded from political argument that is publicly advanced to justify state action. However, a proponent of LSN could allow controversial ideals to justify state action providing the state action was not intended to favor any permissible ideal over others. It is also possible for state officials to exclude controversial ideals of the good from justificatory political argument while flouting LSN. For example, they could aim to favor a particular ideal of the good while invoking only considerations in support of it that were admissible in public political argument.  

I turn now to three key differences between the two neutrality principles here distinguished, RNP and LSN. First, and most importantly, RNP, unlike LSN, allows the state to aim to favor some permissible ideals of the human good over others. It therefore is fully consistent with the core perfectionist commitment that is permissible for the state to promote the good and discourage the bad. Earlier I presented the simplified example of a society in which there are three, and only three, valuable ideals of the human good available for pursuit—A, B, and C. Each ideal, it was stipulated, had adherents in the society, and reason

14. This formulation of the principle closely follows Rawls's characterization of the "neutrality of aim" interpretation of the liberal principle of state neutrality—an interpretation that Rawls himself endorsed. I have substituted "permissible ideal of a good human life" for Rawls's term "particular comprehensive doctrine" (see Rawls, Political Liberalism, 193–94). Some writers hold that LSN applies only to what Rawls terms "constitutional essentials and matters of basic justice." Others insist that it applies generally to all state action.

15. See, e.g., Larmore's discussion of procedural neutrality in Patterns of Moral Complexity, 44–45.

16. Thus, to be precise, we should distinguish state neutrality from a principle that enjoins the exclusion of ideals from public political argument. See Raz, Morality of Freedom, chaps. 5–6.
did not determine, for any member of the society, which ideal he or she should pursue. In this example, RNP would forbid the state from taking action designed to favor any of these ideals over the others, but it would not forbid the state from discouraging other less worthy ideals. Imagine now a fourth ideal, D, which is, let us assume, an ideal that is not worthy of pursuit, but one that has adherents in the society in question. Assume further that the pursuit of D is consistent with compliance with the requirements of justice. RNP would allow the state to favor A, B, and C over D. LSN, by contrast, would not.

Second, and relatedly, RNP does not attribute normative significance to the fact that people disagree, reasonably or not, about the nature of the human good. It recommends neutrality with respect to ideals of the human good that are, in fact, of equal or incommensurable value. The claim that there exist plural ideals of a good human life that reason does not rank is a metaphysical claim. It is not an epistemological claim about what reasonable people would believe on this or that occasion. And it is an obvious—albeit fairly common—non sequitur to infer from the fact that reasonable people disagree about the merits of two or more ideals to the conclusion that there is no fact of the matter as to which ideal is more worthy of pursuit than the other. LSN, by contrast, requires the state to be neutral among permissible ideals of the human good. And a permissible ideal of the good, for the purposes of this principle, is one that is believed, or perhaps reasonably believed, to be worth pursuing. The upshot of this difference between the two principles is important. LSN requires state officials to refrain from discouraging certain ideals of the good, even when they judge correctly that these ideals are not worthy of pursuit. On the principle, so long as some persons in the society pursue the ideals and believe they are worth pursuing, the state must not aim to disfavor them.

17. One could extend RNP to cover ideals of the good that, while not in fact of equal or incommensurable value, are such that correct reasoning, given awareness of all available present evidence, would require a person to believe are of equal or incommensurable value. I shall not pursue this epistemological extension of the principle here. It should be noted, however, that this extension of the principle would not make it equivalent to a principle, such as LSN, that calls for neutrality among noncontroversial ideals or ideals that are subject to reasonable disagreement.

18. Following Rawls, some proponents of LSN speak of “reasonable pluralism” as opposed to pluralism as such. They believe that the state should be neutral with respect to opposing reasonable ideals of the good. But the adjective “reasonable” here does not denote reasonable belief in the epistemic sense. A person can pursue a permissible ideal of the good, even if he or she is epistemically unreasonable in believing that the ideal is worthy of pursuit. Reasonable belief in this context, then, should not be taken to refer to an epistemic assessment.

19. Provided, of course, that the ideals in question are not inconsistent with the requirements of justice.
Third, and as a consequence of the second difference between the principles, RNP, but not LSN, is tied to the truth of value pluralism. This point is best appreciated by considering the possibility that the thesis of value pluralism is false. On this possibility, it would follow that RNP would have no application. The same would not be true of LSN, for this principle appeals to beliefs about the human good, not to facts about the human good. So long as members of a political society believe in and adhere to different and opposing ideals of the human good, then the principle has application.

The difference between the two principles here, in fact, cuts deeper. There is a sense in which value pluralism not only is not necessary for the defense of LSN, but also stands in tension with it. The tension is subtle, and it is not present for every defense of LSN; but it is worth mentioning, nonetheless. To explain: consider the popular argument for LSN that invokes the value of citizens' justifying their political arrangements to one another by appealing to considerations that are not the subject of ongoing reasonable disagreement between them. The idea behind the argument is that political justification, including justifications of principles of political morality, should not rest on claims that are subject to reasonable disagreement. This is the so-called political liberal motivation for accepting LSN. Accordingly, if one accepts the political liberal motivation and if one defends LSN itself by appealing to a controversial thesis about the nature of value—such as value pluralism—then, in defending LSN, one will be violating the underlying motivation for the principle. The lesson to draw is that the political justification for LSN should be freed from any commitment to the truth of value pluralism.

(As I said, this tension is not present for every defense of LSN. Some proponents of the principle reject the political liberal motivation. But it is noteworthy that the most influential defenses of LSN, by and large, accept this motivation. For them, the tension highlighted here between LSN and the political affirmation of value pluralism would apply.)

20. This is not quite right. If value monism were true, then there still could be choice situations in which the options were of equal value. But, in the main, the truth of value monism would undercut the whole point of insisting on a principle like RNP.


22. Rawls included a commitment to value pluralism in his account of the “burdens of judgment” (*Political Liberalism*, 56–57). As Larmore points out, this was an error. It is more consistent with the spirit of political liberalism to avoid altogether any commitment to a comprehensive thesis about the nature of value.

23. Of course, political liberal proponents of LSN are free in private to affirm value pluralism from within their own comprehensive doctrines.
Having now canvassed the key differences between the two neutrality principles, we are in a position to see, at least preliminarily, why RNP might look attractive to pluralistic perfectionists. Recall that pluralistic perfectionism combines the perfectionist commitment that it is permissible for the state to promote the good and discourage the bad with an affirmation of value pluralism. Recall further that value pluralism is committed to the claim that the choice between some conflicting goods—and by extension some conflicting ideals of the good—in some choice situations is not rationally determined. If the state favors a worthwhile ideal over a worthless one, then it has reason on its side. But if it favors a worthy ideal over another ideal that is just as worthy, then its decision to do so, or so it may seem, is groundless. This gives rise to the arbitrariness worry mentioned earlier.

Recall now Raz's claim that there is "a logical gap between pluralism and neutrality." The pluralist holds that there exist a plurality of worthwhile ideals of the human good, but he can allow, in Raz's words, that "certain conceptions of the good are worthless and demeaning, and that political action may and should be taken to eradicate or at least curtail them." So far, so good. But now we are supposing that the recommended neutrality is not that between the worthy and the worthless, but rather between the worthy and the worthy—as enjoined by RNP. Let us suppose further that it is illegitimate for the state arbitrarily to favor some ideals of the good over others. Adding these two suppositions to the commitment to pluralism goes some distance toward closing the logical gap, identified by Raz, between pluralism and neutrality.

III. FAIRNESS AND AGGREGATION

The foregoing remarks were intended merely to indicate, in a rough and ready fashion, why pluralistic perfectionism and restricted state neutrality might be thought to be complementary. If two or more ideals of the human good are, by hypothesis, of equal or incommensurable value, and if each of these ideals has adherents in a political society, then state support for one over the other in that society may amount to arbitrary discrimination. Contrast this with the case of an individual person who confronts a choice between options of incommensurate value. Here it is appropriate for the person simply to plump for the option that appeals to him. The same cannot be said of the collective choice of a group of persons if that group includes members with conflicting wills. When the representative of such a group favors one ideal over others that are just as worthwhile, it exposes itself to the charge that it arbitrarily discriminates in favor of some and against other members of the group.

This kind of arbitrary treatment by the state, I am assuming, would be unjust. However, on closer inspection, matters are not so straightforward. There may be other ways, besides complying with RNP, for the state to avoid the charge of arbitrary discrimination. There is, in short, a logical gap between nonarbitrary state action and restricted state neutrality. Thus, to assess the plausibility of RNP we must consider the plausibility of alternative strategies for avoiding the charge of arbitrary discrimination. Only then will we be in a position to judge whether pluralistic perfectionists have good reason to affirm the principle.

The state acts arbitrarily when it aims to favor one ideal of the good over another in circumstances in which it does not have reason on its side. But, importantly, the state can have reason to favor some ideals over others even when reason does not rank them as more worthwhile for human beings to pursue. The state could decide which ideals it will support by using a fair decision procedure. For example, consider a randomizing decision procedure, one that is designed to ensure that each adherent of each valuable ideal of the good has an equal chance of winning state support. The fact that a particular ideal was selected by this procedure then would provide a reason—grounded in fairness—for the state to support it.25

Random selection would allow the state to avoid the charge of arbitrary discrimination, but it is suspect for other reasons. In its simple form, random decision is not appropriately sensitive to the numbers. For suppose the state can support opera or baseball, but not both; and suppose opera and baseball are equally worthy of support. If the number of opera lovers and baseball lovers were not equal, then random choice between the two would not be appropriately sensitive to the numbers. True enough—a weighted randomization procedure would overcome this problem. The differences in numbers could be reflected in the proportional chances of winning state support assigned to each ideal. But weighted randomization can yield perverse results. For example, it would allow the state to favor an option that very few of its citizens affirm over one that the vast majority of its citizens affirm, so long as the favored option were selected by a randomizing procedure that adjusted the probability of an option being selected to the number of those attracted to it.

The shortcomings of random selection, however, point the way to a more promising response. The state could decide which goods to favor by using a decision procedure that was designed to be sensitive both to the claims of individuals to be treated fairly and to the aggregate

goodness of the outcomes it yields. To explain: in some contexts, a coin toss or a simple vote is a fair procedure for balancing conflicting claims. But when this is the case, it will be so because the procedure in those contexts does a decent job of yielding outcomes that fairly balance the interests of the rival parties. In other contexts, procedures of this kind may not do well on this score and so may not be appropriate. If this is right, then the appeal to fair decision-making procedures leads us naturally to consider the deeper issue of fair aggregation.

Recall the issue that we are now considering. The perfectionist state seeks both to promote the good and to avoid the charge of arbitrarily discriminating among people who pursue worthwhile ideals. Complying with RNP is one way for it to do so. But a promising alternative is for the perfectionist state to support ideals of the good in a way that fairly balances the interests of their adherents. The plausibility of RNP depends in large on measure on the attractiveness of this alternative approach. With respect to goods like baseball and opera, the fair aggregation strategy looks like it would work quite well. In discussing this example above, I stipulated that the state could support either opera or baseball, but not both. But this was fairly obviously an unrealistic stipulation. The state can support both, and it can apportion its support in proportion to the numbers of opera lovers and baseball lovers. Intuitively, fair aggregation here would be fairer than the outcome recommended by RNP, which would enjoin the state to provide equal, or no, support to both goods.

Focusing exclusively on this type of example, however, can be misleading. Baseball and opera are divisible goods, and state provision of one does not foreclose state provision of the other. In contrast, consider a perfectionist good like the ideal of individual autonomy. As several writers have pointed out, state support for this ideal requires political action that aims to sustain a certain kind of social environment. An autonomy-supporting social environment contains practices and insti-

26. This is vague, to be sure. But I do not need a more precise account of the decision procedure for present purposes.
27. Some may think that we can design a fair decision procedure without any belief at all as to what would count as a fair aggregation of conflicting interests. Though not much turns on it here, I believe this view is mistaken. Purely procedural decision procedures can lead to unfair outcomes (as the following footnote illustrates) and to design a fair decision procedure we need to take such possibilities into account.
28. For example, consider contexts in which there are permanent, entrenched minorities. Here simple voting might systematically yield outcomes that fail to aggregate the conflicting interests of the different parties fairly. And so, on the view sketched here, simple voting would not be an appropriate decision procedure for this context.
tutions that favor individual choice and are inhospitable to some traditional ways of life. A state sustained autonomy-supporting social environment is decidedly nonneutral with regard to all ways of life, including some that may be fully good. This social dimension to perfectionist political action makes it difficult to conceive how the state either could be neutral in its support of the good, as RNP enjoins, or fair in its support of the good, as the fair aggregation strategy recommends. For valuable social environments are indivisible goods. They are not goods that cannot be divided up and apportioned according to the numbers.

The case of nonautonomous cultural subgroups that reside in modern societies illustrates the problem well. Let me stipulate, for the sake of discussion, that at least some of these groups pursue a way of life that is fully good, but nonautonomous. In sustaining an autonomy-supporting social environment, the state would not be neutral among valuable autonomous ways of life and these nonautonomous valuable ways of life. But, since the state can sustain only one social environment, it should sustain an autonomy-supporting social environment. By doing so, it best promotes the good of its members. In this context, it is doubtful that RNP is a viable principle. Perhaps the state could aim to refrain from shaping the social environment in ways that were nonneutral. It might aim to support social institutions and practices only by appeal to reasons that all adherents of worthwhile ways of life could rationally accept. But whether this is even possible, it is not a course of action that will look attractive to perfectionists. In practice, it would prevent the state from taking measures designed to promote the good for the vast majority of its members.

At the same time, however, the social dimension of perfectionist political action makes it difficult to see how the fair aggregation of interests can be fully achieved. At most, the state may be able to provide some compensatory relief to those groups that are disfavored by the social environment that it sustains. An analogy may be instructive here. Nations desire to rule themselves. Not infrequently more than one nation claims the right to rule in the same territory. But political self-determination over a specified territory is an indivisible good. Rival nations cannot govern the same territory at the same time. Here, assuming that the rival claimants have an otherwise equal moral claim to rule, it is plausible to hold that the larger nation, particularly if it is significantly larger, has the stronger claim. The numbers matter. This does not mean, however, that it is fair to dismiss entirely the interests of those with the weaker claim. Perhaps some kind of accommodation is possible. The members of the smaller nation might be given some leeway to govern themselves in a portion of the territory, for example. Much here will depend on context and what kind of accommodation,
if any, is possible in the circumstances. The same general point applies to the nonautonomous subgroup mentioned above. On the assumption that its way of life is valuable, an autonomy-supporting state may have a duty to mitigate the disadvantages imposed on it, provided that, in the circumstances, there is some viable way to do this. 30

The lessons to be drawn from this discussion can now be brought together and stated more explicitly. The plausibility of RPN hinges on the plausibility of alternative strategies for treating persons—who pursue different but worthwhile ideals of the good—fairly and nonarbitrarily. When the state provides support for divisible goods, it can apportion its support to the numbers of people who pursue the goods. In many contexts, this course of action is preferable to the demand that the state remain strictly neutral in its support of the goods. However, as we have seen, much perfectionist political action is not concerned with the provision of divisible goods, but with sustaining a valuable social environment. Here the strategy of apportioning support for different goods according to the numbers is not an option. Still, it does not follow from this fact that the state should not intend to sustain a valuable social environment. It is reasonable and nonarbitrary for it to take into account the number of its members who pursue different valuable ideals. If a substantial majority of its members would benefit from perfectionist political action that sustains a certain kind of social environment, then it is appropriate for it to undertake it. Doing so, however, may require the state to compensate, if possible, those who are disadvantaged by this social environment. 31

IV. EXPRESSIVE RESPECT AND SELF-WORTH

Given the attractiveness of the fair aggregation strategy in the contexts considered so far, the case for accepting RNP is not strong. There are other contexts to consider, however. The alert reader will have noticed that the examples discussed in the previous section had one of two

30. Consider, in this context, the much discussed case of the Old Order Amish in the United States. On the assumption that the Amish way of life is worthwhile and that it will continue to provide its members with the opportunity to lead a good human life, an autonomy-promoting perfectionist state might have duties to help this community survive.

31. Suppose that, in the circumstances, adequate compensation is not possible. Would this show that the envisioned state action would be unfair and therefore unjust? I don’t think so. John Broome proposes the following maxim: "if some act would be a little unfair to someone, but would bring large benefits to many people, it might be right to do it" (Weighing Lives [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004], 38). Along similar lines, one might think that the state action envisioned here, while reasonable and appropriately undertaken, would remain unfair to some. For present purposes, I do not think much turns on whether the best description of the envisioned state action is that it is “fair because rightly undertaken” or “unfair, but rightly undertaken.”
features. Either they involved divisible goods that are not, at least not
typically, bound up with people's sense of self-worth (such as opera or
baseball) or they involved indivisible goods, like the good of living in
one kind of social environment rather than another, in which the state
aims to further the well-being of the vast majority of its members. Both
features contribute strongly to the plausibility of the fair aggregation
strategy. Other examples without these features may exert pull away
from fair aggregation and toward restricted state neutrality.

To consider this possibility, I now will introduce a distinction be-
tween perfectionist political action that sustains an autonomy-support-
ing social environment and perfectionist political action that favors some
goods over others within that social environment. For present purposes,
I will assume that, by and large, people who live in modern societies
need to be autonomous if they are to lead successful lives. I hasten to
add that I do not have an exalted notion of autonomy in mind. To be
autonomous, people must have certain basic capacities that enable them
to pursue different goods and plan their lives. They must be substantially
free from the coercion and manipulation of others. And they must have
certain important liberties protected, and the means to pursue a range
of different pursuits, in the environment in which they live. That is
sufficient for autonomy in the nonexalted sense I am assuming here.

Now if value pluralism is true, then it is almost certainly the case
that there exists a variety of incompatible ways in which people in mod-
ern societies can lead valuable autonomous lives. These lives will be
distinguished by the goods that give meaning to those who lead them.
The significance of the distinction between the types of perfectionist
political action just introduced should now be apparent. On the as-
sumptions I have made, it will not be a viable option for the state to be
neutral with respect to the social environment that it sustains. State
officials will need to favor an autonomy-supporting social environment.
Only by doing so will they be able to advance the welfare of the vast
majority of those subject to their power. Nevertheless, it may be possible
and desirable for the state to take an evenhanded approach toward
supporting different valuable ways of life that can be, and are pursued,
by its members within the broadly autonomy-supporting social environ-
ment that it sustains. In the remainder of this essay, it is this possibility
that I shall be concerned with.

As we have seen, with respect to some goods, nonneutral state action
can be legitimate because it has been selected by a fair decision pro-
cedure. But some perfectionist policies, or so I now want to argue, would
not be rendered legitimate by such a procedure. With respect to the
issues raised by them, the state should refrain from taking sides between
those who support worthwhile, but opposed, ideals of the good. The
task is to explain what it is that makes a perfectionist policy fall into
this category. The answer will identify the domain in which RNP is a sound principle of political morality for modern states.

I have already gestured toward a key element of the explanation. Perfectionist policies that promote goods that are bound up with peoples' sense of self-worth are not on the same footing as policies that promote goods that do not have this kind of significance for peoples' lives. To be sure, if the state promotes an ideal of the good that a person affirms, then there is no special problem. The problem arises when the state promotes an ideal of the good that a person rejects and when its doing so damages his sense of self-worth. This is a problem because a fitting sense of self-worth over a substantial portion of a person's life is a necessary condition for that person to lead a good human life.  

These remarks point us in the right direction. But they need to be developed and qualified before we will have an adequate explanation for what it is that makes a perfectionist policy the kind of policy to which RNP applies. I begin with Rawls's discussion of the notion of self-worth, since I think that what Rawls says on this topic is important. My own views on self-worth will emerge from an engagement with his discussion. According to Rawls, a secure sense of self-worth comprises two elements. First, it includes a person's conviction that his projects and ideals are worth pursuing. Second, it includes a person's sense of confidence in his ability to successfully pursue or realize his projects and ideals. Rawls thus accentuated the active side of our nature. But while Rawls was right to call attention to the link between our sense of self-worth and our views about our projects and our ideals—and in this essay I will follow him in doing so as well—it should be noted that a person's sense of self-worth also is a function of his membership in various groups to which he belongs and identifies with. A person's sense of self-worth

32. Naturally, a person's sense of self-worth can ebb and flow over time. One can lead a fully good life, even if one has moments of self-doubt and self-hatred. But I will not try to say anything more precise than what is stated in the text.

33. Rawls does not distinguish self-respect from self-worth. There are contexts in which it is advisable to do so. (See David Sachs, "How to Distinguish Self-Respect from Self-Esteem," Philosophy and Public Affairs 10 [1981]: 946-60). However, I do not need to press the distinction here.


35. The secure conviction and the sense of confidence mentioned here plausibly include both beliefs and emotions. To have a secure sense of self-worth one must not only believe that one's pursuits are worthwhile and that one is well suited to pursue them, but also one must have emotions of esteem that are appropriate to these beliefs. See the discussion in David Copp, "Social Unity and the Identity of Persons," Journal of Political Philosophy 10 (2002): 370-72.
can be damaged if he becomes ashamed of who he is, as opposed to what he has done or is doing in pursuit of his projects and ideals.\textsuperscript{36}

Now the state cannot guarantee that all its members have a secure sense of self-worth, but it can establish social conditions that affirm the self-worth of its citizens and it can refrain from taking actions that predictably will damage the sense of self-worth of its citizens. This important point was recognized by Rawls in his discussion of the social bases of self-respect. By upholding the equal liberties of all its citizens, the state publicly expresses the equal standing of all.\textsuperscript{37} Rawls was right to call attention to the importance of the expressive meaning of state action. He was also right to explain its significance in terms of its impact, or potential impact, on the sense of self-worth of its members. But, or so I believe, Rawls's discussion of self-respect erred in its steadfast refusal to countenance political evaluations of conceptions of the good. Those who pursue pointless ways of life, such as Rawls's infamous grass counter, or those who pursue worthless ideals or engage in degrading projects do not have a claim on others to have the value of their pursuits publicly affirmed. In short, self-respect is valuable, but only conditionally. It is valuable on the condition that it is merited, and to merit self-respect a person must pursue a way of life that is worthy of pursuit.

These claims are controversial. But it is not necessary for me to provide a defense of them here. For present purposes, the notion of merited self-respect, or, as I shall say, "a fitting sense of self-worth," is the one we need; for it is an idea that perfectionists can happily accept.\textsuperscript{38} The point I want to press is that an otherwise sound perfectionist policy could be illegitimate because it makes it hard for some to have a fitting sense of self-worth. But why exactly is this the case? We now are to imagine the state promoting a sound ideal of the good after its action has been selected by a fair decision procedure, and yet the sense of self-worth of some citizens, who merit it, is still damaged. In this scenario, would not a rational citizen recognize that the state is fairly promoting

\textsuperscript{37} Rawls, \textit{Theory of Justice}, 544-45.
\textsuperscript{38} Some readers may think that there is a kind of self-respect that does not need to be merited. Following Darwall, they might call this "recognition self-respect." They then could argue that the state must not act in ways that would undermine this kind of self-respect in those who are subject to its power. This constraint, or so it might be argued, in turn supports LSN. I do not pursue this line of argument here, since my purpose in this essay is not to reject antiperfectionist views. I am seeking to defend a principle of state neutrality that is compatible with a perfectionist approach to politics. For his discussion of recognition respect, see Stephen L. Darwall, "Two Kinds of Respect," \textit{Ethics} 88 (1977): 36-49, and, more recently, \textit{The Second Person Standpoint} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press: 2006), 119-47.
the good and that its support for some valuable ideals over others does not express disregard to those who are committed to the disfavored ideals?

This is the right question to ask, but it cannot be answered in the abstract. For what a state expresses by its actions is a function of the beliefs of its members. And the beliefs of its members, in turn, are conditioned by all sorts of historical and social facts about the political society in question. For example, suppose that a political society includes a range of ways of life that are equally worthwhile. And suppose that the state provides support for one, but not for the others. In some contexts, the members of the disfavored groups will be able to judge with warrant that the state's action expresses the view that their way of life is not fully valuable or that they do not have equal standing in the political society. This, in turn, could damage their sense of self-worth. However, in other contexts, such a judgment might not be warranted.

The idea here can be expressed a little more precisely as follows. Sometimes when the state promotes the good, its action expresses a message to its citizens. The expressive meaning of state action is a complex belief-dependent fact. The state action expresses the message that it does because citizens hold, and not irrationally, certain beliefs that are relevant to interpreting the state's action. These beliefs form, so to speak, the backdrop against which state action is interpreted by citizens as offensive. Furthermore, if citizens judge with warrant that state action is offensive because it expresses the message that their way of life is not worthwhile, then the consequence may be that their sense of self-worth is damaged. I say that this consequence "may" follow, not that it must. Not everyone is deeply affected by the messages that the institutions of their society express. But argument I am presenting speaks to the general or typical case. To state the obvious: state action to promote the good does not exist in a social vacuum. Perfectionist policies condition how members of a society view themselves and one another. And it is an all too common phenomenon that people who know that others in their society view them as inferior come to share these attitudes as well. Might it not be said, once again, that sound perfectionist policies that have been selected by a fair decision procedure can be understood by all to have no discriminatory intention? No one with a sound conception of the good must think that the policies express the view that his or her ideals are unworthy. But this reply is too high-minded. In many contexts, it may be reasonable for people to conclude that the state's decision to favor some ideals over others does express an official judgment concerning the merits of the rival ideals. It should be remembered that value pluralism is not a universally accepted doctrine. Even if it is

true, many people, including many who pursue worthwhile ideals of the good, reject it. Those who are on the losing side of perfectionist policies, accordingly, may have good grounds for distrust.

These facts about the expressive meaning of perfectionist state action and its potential to damage the sense of self-worth of some citizens constitute compelling reasons for not going forward with some perfectionist policies that are otherwise sound. To be sure, as I have stressed, these facts are contingent. Everything turns on the social context in question. Still, in modern pluralistic societies, state action that is designed to favor some ways of life over others is likely to have the kind of expressive meaning here considered. When it does, there is a strong case for restraint in the pursuit of perfectionist political goals. Consequently, citizens who wish to enlist the state in support of perfectionist ideals may be wrong to do so, even if the ideals they seek to support are sound and even if they have sufficient political strength to pass their political measures through a fair decision procedure. This is the limited domain in which the principle of restricted state neutrality applies.

The argument for RNP presented here can be clarified by considering a couple of objections to it. The first objection holds that if a sense of self-worth is as important as I have suggested, then the expressive argument extends further than I have allowed. For, it can be said, those who pursue inferior ideals of the good also have an interest in having a secure sense of self-worth. There is one respect in which I want to concede to the objection. RNP, at least as I have formulated it, requires the state to be neutral among ideals of the good that are equally worthwhile. But, at least on some forms of pluralism, we can judge some ideals of the good to be inferior to others, but still worthy of pursuit. Moreover, it may be true of some persons, for various reasons, that the best life for them involves the pursuit of inferior, but still worthwhile, ideals. These people, nonetheless, may have a legitimate interest in not having their state express the view that their pursuits are inferior—even if this view is true. But this is as much as I want to concede.

40. The interest a person has in getting the state to support him in the pursuit of a worthwhile ideal of the good should not be aggregated, even by a fair decision procedure, with the interest a person has in having a fitting sense of sense of self-worth. The latter interest, but not the former, is a precondition for a leading a good human life. That is why the appeal to a fair aggregative procedure is not appropriate in this context. (It is possible that there are other interests relevant to state neutrality that should not be aggregated in this way. If so, RNP may have wider application than I have been suggesting.)

41. As I have formulated it, RNP requires the state to be neutral among eligible ideals of the good that have adherents in the society and that cannot be ranked by reason as better or worse than one another. In light of the present concession, it might be thought that pluralistic perfectionists should accept a principle that recommends neutrality among eligible ideals of the good that meet some threshold of value. Such a principle would enjoin the state, at least in some cases, to be neutral among ideals of the good for which
The important point is that the expressive argument for state neutrality that I have advanced does not extend to cases in which people are mired in bad ways of life. Consider a person whose sense of self-worth is bound up with his membership in a racist hate group. When the state enforces racially neutral laws and actively encourages racial tolerance, this citizen could rationally interpret the state’s action as expressing the view that his way of life is unworthy. This, in turn, could damage his sense of self-worth. But, or so I have suggested, this citizen has no interest in having his sense of self-worth affirmed. Like other people, he has an interest in leading a good human life and a part of this is having a fitting sense of self-worth, but this interest can be furthered only if he abandons his mistaken convictions.

This response can seem too harsh. We may know of a person that he will not abandon his convictions about how to live. We may also suspect that his life will go worse if, in addition to having mistaken convictions about the value of his life, his sense of self-worth is damaged. As I have said, a secure sense of self-worth is a conditional good. But it is possible for a person to have a worthwhile life overall, even if he engages in some worthless endeavors. The person whose sense of self is bound up with his membership in a racist hate group, after all, is an extreme example. Others who engage in worthless pursuits to varying degrees may nonetheless lead on balance good lives. If so, they too would have an interest in having a secure sense of self-worth.

This point can be pursued a bit further by considering some claims from Raz on the topic of the justification of coercive moral paternalism. Raz, in an essay entitled “Liberty and Trust,” claims that modern governments should extend “full citizenship” to all their members. Full citizenship is, in his words, “the status of citizenship which makes it rationally possible for people to regard themselves as fully belonging to the political community, and similarly to regard its law as their law, and its government as their government.” Now a person can, of course, have this status and not have a secure sense of self-worth. But Raz’s account of full citizenship resembles Rawls’s account of the social bases of self-respect in a crucial respect. When either condition is secured, members of the state can rationally identify with their government. They need not view it as opposed to the values that give meaning to their life and are the focal points of their self-worth.

Raz argues that if a government engages in coercive moral paternalism against a citizen then, special cases aside, it will undercut his status as a full citizen. By preventing him from engaging in his way of

reason could rank some as better than the others. But I will not attempt here to formulate the envisioned threshold standard. Having noted this complication, I will put it to one side. Thanks to Alan Patten for discussion on this point.

life, it will make it rationally impossible for him to view the government as giving due consideration to his interests. The key claim, for present purposes, is that this analysis applies equally to those who are engaged in worthless as to those who are engaged in worthwhile ways of life.43

Now, as I have made plain, Raz’s target was the justification of coercive moral paternalism. I do not wish here to defend coercive moral paternalism. My concern is with a natural extension of his argument. The worry is that perfectionist political action that aims to favor the worthwhile over the worthless, whether by coercive means or not, should not be undertaken because it could make it rationally impossible for some members of the state to be full citizens and consequently harder for them to have a secure sense of their own worth.

Let me give an example. The perfectionist state could attempt to discourage polygamous marriage not by coercively interfering with it, but by granting legal recognition to monogamous marriage and by denying it to polygamous marriage. In many contexts, it would not be unreasonable for polygamists to interpret this state action as expressing official condemnation of their way of life. And this, in turn, could make it rationally impossible for them to identify the state as their state and as responsive to their interests. Now when I think about this example, I think that it is crucial whether polygamy is indeed a bad practice. Yet if the status of full citizenship is as important as Raz suggests, then even if polygamy is a bad practice, it may be wrong for the state to discourage it because doing so would undercut the standing of some as full citizens, a standing which is crucial to their sense of self-worth.

A couple of considerations militate against the appeal to full citizenship in this context, however. First, it is, in general, disrespectful to a person to treat him on the assumption that he cannot abandon his mistaken views about how to live. Respect for a person, understood as an agent who is capable of recognizing and responding to reasons, requires that one engage his capacity for rationality. I am assuming here that the reasons that establish that an ideal is false or that a pursuit is worthless—such as, for example, that polygamy is a bad practice, if indeed it is a bad practice—can be grasped by all persons of normal intelligence, even if it is significantly harder for some to do so than others. So the state that discourages worthless pursuits may be attempt-

43. Raz is explicit on this point. After discussing the example of the treatment of homosexual persons in many societies, he writes: “In considering the case it is important to remember that the case I am making does not depend on the fact that homophobia is an unfounded prejudice. Groups whose own beliefs and ways of life are misguided and worthless have the same claim to be admitted as full citizens as do gay men and lesbians” (ibid., 126).
ing to engage the rational capacities of its citizens. (Notice here that when we say that a person can rationally identify with his government we might mean that, given his commitment to his way of life, he can rationally believe that his government is responsive to his interests as he perceives them. But we could also mean that it is rationally possible for him to come to see that he should abandon his commitment to his way of life, and, when he does so, it is rationally possible for him to believe that his government is responsive to his interests. On the argument I am now considering it is the former construal that is in play. But, or so I am suggesting, one can move to the latter construal to turn back the argument.)

Second, in considering the permissibility of perfectionist state action that discourages certain pursuits, we must attend not only to the effects such action has on those who engage in those pursuits but also to the effects it has on others in the political society. Those who grow up and live in a political society that effectively discourages the pursuit of bad options are less likely to engage in them and, accordingly, are more likely to lead valuable lives.

Neither of these considerations is present when the ideals that are disfavored by state action are not bad, but fully good or worthy of pursuit. That is why the expressive argument that I have outlined supports RNP and does not extend further to support neutral treatment between the worthwhile and the worthless.

The second objection that I want to consider maintains that the expressive argument I have invoked makes RNP too parochial. The objection is based on the thought that principles of political morality should not be tied too tightly to contingent social conditions. Few will deny that the application of general principles to particular cases requires judgment and that good judgment must be informed by the facts of the case. But those who would press the present objection go further. They ask: could we not say everything that needs to be said if we drop all talk of state neutrality and instead hold that the perfectionist state has strong reasons to avoid taking action that predictably will damage the sense of self-worth of citizens who are pursuing worthwhile lives? Perhaps we could. Sometimes the right thing to do is to look behind a purported principle and focus on its underlying rationale. Philosophical interest in principles of state neutrality, however, arose in a particular

44. For a related elaboration of the thought that it is generally disrespectful to treat persons on the assumption that they cannot abandon their mistaken views, see James F. Bohman and Henry S. Richardson, "Liberalism, Deliberative Democracy, and "Reasons That All Can Accept," " Journal of Political Philosophy 17 (2009): 253–74, 270. Recall that state action that discourages the bad need not take the form of coercive threats. So it is no objection to this point to say that issuing coercive threats is never a good way of engaging a person’s capacity for rational agency.
social context. This was the social context of modern societies marked by religious and cultural diversity. In these societies, many writers came to believe that nonneutral state action by its very nature is objectionably sectarian.

This was a mistake. The state can legitimately promote the good in nonsectarian ways, but there is an important element of truth in the belief. If the state actively and intentionally promotes a single ideal of the good, then, at least for modern societies that contain a plurality of religious and cultural groups, it very likely will become—and be seen by its members to be—a sectarian state. The pluralistic perfectionist, like the liberal neutralist, should be concerned with sectarianism, for he allows that in modern societies there is a plurality of good ways for human beings to live. The restricted neutrality principle, like the more familiar liberal principle of state neutrality, speaks directly to this concern. However, it remains the case that we need an explanation for why sectarian state action is objectionable, when it, in fact, is objectionable. To provide such an explanation one must look behind neutrality principles to their underlying rationales. I have been arguing that when we do so, at least with respect to RNP, we find a recognizably perfectionist value—the value of having a fitting sense of self-worth in the pursuit of a worthwhile ideal of the good.

V. CONCLUSION

I said that I would offer a mixed answer to the question of whether perfectionists who are also committed to pluralism about the human good should accept a restricted principle of state neutrality. The reasons for my indecision should now be apparent. If RNP is construed to be a general principle that applies to all state action, then it is not a plausible principle. There are contexts in which it is proper for the state to favor some ideals over other equally worthy ideals provided that it does so in a way that does not arbitrarily discriminate between its members. These are contexts in which the nonneutral, but fair, aggregation of conflicting interests is appropriate. But there are other important contexts in which the expressive meaning of nonneutral state action looms large. Here, in order for the state to do its part in enabling its members to have a fitting sense of self-worth (itself a key component of a good human life), it needs to avoid taking sides, and being seen to be taking sides, between worthwhile ideals of the good that have adherents in the political society over which it exercises authority.

The restricted neutrality principle, in this way, supports the common belief that the legitimate state, at least under modern conditions of diversity, is not a sectarian state. But as I have explained, it is fully compatible with the perfectionist claim that there are no reasons, at least no reasons of high principle, why the state should not aim to favor
the good and the worthwhile over the bad and the pointless. The application of RNP, I have also said, depends on the scope of value pluralism—an issue on which I have taken no stand. Aside from a few glancing references to examples, I have not attempted to identify particular ideals or pursuits as worthless or degrading. Different readers will have different views on these matters. Acceptance of RNP leaves us free to debate the merits of different ideals and to debate whether, in the circumstances in which we find ourselves, it is advisable to get the state involved in attempting to discourage those pursuits that we judge to be unworthy.