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"Virtue and the Making of Modern Liberalism offers both a penetrating analysis of the debate over virtue within modern liberal theory and practice and a careful account of the role of virtue in the classical liberal tradition. This fairminded book advances our understanding of an important topic and deserves a wide audience."

From Stephen Macedo I learned to appreciate the virtues that liberalism calls on citizens to exercise in public life. From Judith Shklar I acquired respect for the virtues that liberalism needs citizens to express in navigating the ordinary rigors of private life. And from Harvey C. Mansfield I am grateful to Martin Peretz and Leon Wieseltier for giving me the opportunity to explore in the pages of *The New Republic* a wide range of issues connected to the defense of the liberal spirit. Adam Wolfson, Executive Editor of *The Public Interest*, invited me to participate in a symposium on liberalism that he organized for the fall issue of *Perspectives in Political Science*, and he asked me as well to be part of a roundtable on liberalism that he put together for the American Political Science Association Convention in Washington, D. C. Rogers Smith read a draft of the book and offered instructive criticism. Steven Smith has been a steady source of moral and intellectual support. Wilson have each helped me to adjust my course and nudged me in a better direction. Robert Howse has set me straight on a number of crucial points concerning the intricate structure of liberal thought. Conversations stretching over several years with my new colleagues Andy Sabl and Russ Muirhead have been good fun and highly instructive. My old law school classmate Tim Lytton has been an invaluable interlocutor. And my old graduate school classmate Yossi Shain has been very kind in providing a frequent forum at the Department of Political Science of the University of Tel Aviv in which I could try out my ideas. My sister Linda Berkowitz has once again saved me from many errors. Luke McLoughlin caught numerous inaccuracies. Stanley Kurtz has been generous with both encouragement and critique. At the last minute Jedidiah Purdy read the entire manuscript and made several incisive suggestions. And studying virtue and liberalism with the students in my classes at Harvard has hastened my progress, and heightened my pleasure, in understanding. Some yield to lofty sentiments, prattling on sanctimoniously about how human beings ought to be; others, presuming to see things as they really are, resolutely search out or grimly describe the self-interested impulses that supposedly define the actual and exclusive motivations of human conduct. Yet airy idealism and narrow realism do not exhaust the range of perspectives from which virtue may be investigated. Getting down off your high horse does not condemn you to running with the pack. To be sure, the mean or middle ground from which the claims of virtue and the charges against it can be fairly evaluated is more difficult to attain and harder to hold than either of the extremes. This is partly because understanding virtue is inseparable from its exercise. Rewarding as the study of virtue for its own sake may be, for students of politics the study of virtue is not a choice but a necessity imposed by the character of their subject matter. Not that the question of virtue has a single formulation or one right answer. Rather, like freedom, obligation, law, the regime, and justice, virtue belongs among the fundamental phenomena of political life. **I N T R O D U C T I O N** for which a respectable theory of politics must give an account and concerning which it cannot but take a stand. Silence is an option but not a solution, for, as I shall argue, a political theory that overlooks the question of virtue spawns fatal theoretical lacunae while passing by key features of the conduct for which it presumes to account. The inescapability of virtue is more apparent in ancient and medieval political philosophy, where virtue, or the promotion of human excellence, was generally held to be the ultimate aim of politics. By contrast, modern political philosophy has tended to reject such lofty goals as impractical, delusive, and dangerous. Especially in its Enlightenment and liberal strains, modern political philosophy put forward a different fundamental goal for politics. Instead of seeking through politics to promote human perfection, the liberal tradition came to understand the goal of politics as the protection of personal freedom. The liberal tradition embraces freedom as the aim of politics on the grounds that it is both more attainable and more just than the promotion of virtue. Indeed, I shall argue that the liberal tradition, through a variety of prominent spokesmen, affirms that maintenance of a political order capable of securing the personal freedom of all depends upon citizens and representatives capable of exercising a range of basic virtues. Liberalism, I shall suggest, can no more do without virtue than a person on

a diet can survive without food and drink. The liberalism to which I refer is a complex and many-sided tradition. But many others— including Thomas Hobbes, Montesquieu, Adam Smith, the authors of *The Federalist*, Burke, and Tocqueville—shared its fundamental premise and in various ways elucidated its strengths and weaknesses. To establish and secure the personal freedom of all, the liberal tradition has articulated a set of characteristic themes including individual rights, consent, toleration, liberty of thought and discussion, self-interest rightly understood, the separation of the private from the public, and personal autonomy or the primacy of individual choice; and it has elaborated a characteristic set of political institutions including representative democracy, separation of governmental powers, and an independent judiciary. The tendency within liberal thought to diminish the significance of virtue in descriptions of, and prescriptions for, political life is well known. It is less remarked that a coherent and comprehensive account of politics, liberal or otherwise, cannot succeed without giving virtue its due. Yet the best of the liberal tradition exhibits an illuminating ambivalence and reveals a range of instructive opinions about the claims of virtue and how they can best be respected. This can be seen even and especially in that part of the tradition famous for getting along without virtue. Moreover, in the effort to accommodate the necessities of political life, Kant makes practical concessions to virtue and devises stratagems by which virtue, having been formally expelled from politics, is brought back in through the side door. And Mill understands both the exercise of individual liberty and the quality of democratic self-government to turn on the virtue of ordinary men and women and their representatives in government. The problem with much contemporary thought, I shall suggest, is not just the lack of a coherent account of the place of virtue in the political theory of liberal democracy but, more telling, the absence of embarrassment in the face of such a lack. Over the past decade, leading liberals in the academy have contributed to the recovery of an understanding of the importance of character to liberalism. Second, the extraliberal or nongovernmental reservoirs from which liberalism has drawn in the past to foster the virtues necessary to maintain itself—in particular, the family, religion, and the array of associations in civil society—have undergone substantial transformations and can no longer be counted on in the way that the classic liberal tradition counsels. Third, liberal principles seem to spawn characteristic vices, vices that are entwined with liberal virtues and which threaten the capacity of citizens to sustain free and democratic institutions. Contrary to much conventional wisdom, the liberal tradition not only makes room for virtue but shows that the exercise of virtue is indispensable to a political regime seeking to establish equality and protect freedom. Of course, I do not mean to say that it is a simple matter to protect or promote virtue in a liberal society; nor do I wish to deny that peculiar features of liberal thought may in the long run put the integrity of virtue at risk. The problem is pronounced because, as Hobbes and Locke are at pains to point out, the meaning of virtue is imprecise and inconstant. Not, of course, as an authoritative statement of a particular catalog of virtues, or as the last word on the ends of a truly human life, or as an entirely adequate account of the means for acquiring and promoting virtue. The primary sense of virtue *arete* in ancient Greek was that of a functional excellence. The virtue of a knife is sharpness, the virtue of an eye is seeing clearly, the virtue of a judge is deciding cases impartially in accordance with law and equity, and the virtue of a human being, Aristotle thought, consisted in a certain activity of the soul in accordance with reason. Rather, human excellence was but an instance or species, perhaps even the most important and noble instance or species, found under the genus virtue. In general, then, Aristotle understood virtue as a condition or state of a thing that enabled it to perform a designated task well. That task could be conventional, a result of human decision, or natural, somehow inherent in a rational order that owes nothing to the will, imagination, or activity of human beings. With regard to human beings, virtue refers to those qualities of mind and character that aid in the performance of particular tasks or in the pursuit of determinate ends. Human beings, of course, can have many ends: And to each of these lesser ends there are corresponding virtues. In other words, the generic definition of virtue as a functional excellence can and ought to be distinguished from such controversial issues as whether human beings have a nature and, if they do, in what manner that nature can be perfected. In the absence of an overarching goal or single perfection, human beings can have or perform many functions. Human beings can be husbands and wives, citizens and store owners, investment bankers and shortorder cooks, philosophers and artists, friends and foes. And each of these roles or functions requires its

peculiar virtues. The distinction between human excellence and excellence at the various and sundry functions that human beings may from time to time perform, and in the diversity of tasks they may choose to pursue, 8 I N T R O D U C T I O N is worth stressing for several reasons: Indeed, the prevailing tendency in contemporary thought is to equate virtue with the idea of human perfection—a tendency which has roots in early modern misrepresentations of Aristotle—and then reject virtue on the grounds that the idea of human perfection is politically irrelevant or morally destructive or no longer intelligible. A human life, as Aristotle understood it, has not only a highest end but also intermediate or lesser ends, and the attainment of these intermediate or lesser ends depends on the exercise of particular virtues or qualities of mind and character. Moral virtue, which governs feelings and actions, is a fixed disposition or character trait acquired through habituation, involving choice, and performed in accordance with right reason. Virtue, however, does not guarantee happiness, since good fortune, which cannot be entirely mastered by human beings, plays an ineliminable role in securing the external goods—reputation, wealth, health, family, and friends—necessary for the effective and full exercise of the virtues. Under most regimes, the virtues of a good citizen and those of a good man will differ because actual regimes tend to exalt forms of life that are partial and incomplete, whereas the good man pursues the best life, which requires the harmonious exercise of the full range of the virtues. At best, the life of the good democrat or good oligarch involves some part of moral and intellectual virtue. It is common for contemporary scholars to ascribe to Aristotle, without qualification, the view that the aim of political life is to promote human excellence and perfect citizens. Aristotelian political science does not seek to transform imperfect regimes, such as democracies and oligarchies, into regimes devoted to human excellence; rather, it aims to institute measures so as to enable imperfect regimes to honor their principles and to moderate their unwise tendencies. The single greatest expedient for preserving a regime, says Aristotle, is the one most neglected by actual regimes: To appreciate the qualified sense in which Aristotle was a perfectionist in politics is certainly not to dispose of all the serious objections that can be raised against his account of virtue. The familiar objection remains that his catalog of virtues in the *Ethics* reflects the particular and contingent sensibilities of the ascendant class in fourth-century Athens. It is, rather, because his overall account of virtue is less dependent upon his metaphysics than has been typically assumed. I do not mean that one can, at the end of the day, understand virtue as a human excellence without implicating controversial doctrines about human nature and the first principles of the cosmos. What I do wish to suggest is that one can begin the inquiry into the relation between virtue and politics and make considerable progress before one has firmly settled all vexing theoretical issues. At least if one takes Aristotle seriously. For in ordinary language and everyday experience we still distinguish good from bad lives, and—though our powers of discrimination, our capacity to articulate our opinions, and our confidence in our judgments may have declined—we still invoke virtues such as courage, generosity, integrity, toleration, decency, delicacy, and the capacity for love and friendship in order to characterize and evaluate both ourselves and others. This is all that one needs, from an Aristotelian perspective, to commence the investigation of virtue and take the question of the political significance of virtue seriously. In the long run, a complete understanding of virtue does require an account of first principles and a defense of controversial opinions about human nature and the cosmos. But, especially in light of the antifoundationalist, pragmatic, and postmetaphysical perspectives that are fashionable today, it is proper to ask why virtue should be held to a more stringent standard than, say, freedom or equality or justice. If, as many contemporary liberal and postmodern political theorists believe, we can discuss freedom, equality, and justice for political purposes perfectly well without invoking foundations or appealing to first principles, then perhaps discussion about virtue can proceed some substantial distance before vexing questions about foundations and first principles receive final answers. It is, rather, to observe that the first principles need not be fixed firmly before an inquiry into the moral and political significance of virtue can get under way and begin to yield benefits. It confuses a strategy of avoidance appropriate to political debate with a dogmatic disavowal of the significance of metaphysics that is quite inappropriate to intellectual inquiry. And it tends to slide rapidly from a reasonable doubt about whether human beings have a nature to perfect into an invincible certainty that human beings do not. Nevertheless, it is possible to wrest an important point from the excesses characteristic of antifoundationalist, pragmatist, and postmetaphysical theorizing: Thus does the contemporary aversion to

metaphysical foundations, by detaching questions about the usefulness of moral and political categories from questions about the theoretical framework that, some may suppose, renders them fully intelligible and absolutely secure, provide an opening for questions about the place of virtue in liberalism. According to widespread beliefs today, tasks are not given and definite but constructed and of infinite variety, happiness is a matter of individual choice, and there exist a thousand and one acceptable styles of life. These opinions, rooted in philosophical ideas that partially constitute liberal, Enlightenment modernity, seem to remove the ground from underneath virtue understood in terms of human perfection by flatly denying that human beings have a nature to be perfected or a circumscribed range of tasks to discharge. And the contemporary critique of foundations quickly and carelessly slides from the view that philosophizing about morality and politics can proceed without perfect knowledge of foundations to the dogmatic insistence that theoretical foundations for morality and politics definitely do not exist. Modernity is, of course, more than a way of thinking, designating a wide range of changes in cultural, economic, social, and political life that began to accelerate in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Yet few would disagree that modernity crucially involves a new understanding of the human condition based on a rejection or dramatic revision of inherited ideas about nature and God. Distinctively modern thought comes into being through an explicit critique of classical Greek philosophy and biblical faith. But to thinkers such as Machiavelli and Hobbes the philosophy stemming from Plato and Aristotle and the religion rooted in the Bible were alike in the most important respect. According to a standard picture of the history of the early modern world, new beliefs and changes in theoretical outlook—in particular, growing skepticism about a moral order external to and independent of human beings—placed the very notion of human excellence under powerful strain. The rise of natural science, the disenchantment of the heavenly spheres, the growth in confidence that human beings could, by focusing their minds and taking matters into their own hands, improve and perfect their condition combined to discredit the claims of theoretical reason and religious authority to guide human life. By calling into question the belief in a natural or divine order that could be known through the exercise of reason, modern philosophy, slowly but surely, seemed to reveal that the idea of human excellence was itself a human invention. And virtue, when understood as a human invention, or as a general name for qualities of mind and character that people in a particular society happened to value and praise, seemed to lose much of its splendor and become scarcely recognizable as virtue.

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Additional Information In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content: University of Chicago Press, , p. Hackett Publishing Company, , chap. Oxford University Press, University of Chicago Press, ; Rogers M. Smith, Liberalism and the American Constitution Cambridge: Harvard University Press, ; Thomas L. University of Chicago Press, ; Harvey C. Free Press, ; William A. Galston, Liberal Purposes New York: Cambridge University Press, ; Virtue: Chapman and William A. Designing the Decent Society New York: On the Theory of Liberal Democracy Chicago: University of Chicago Press, ; Steven B. Cambridge University Press, For an interdisciplinary perspective, see Seedbeds of Virtue, ed. For an account of the connection between the practice of law and the exercise of the virtue of practical wisdom, see Anthony T. Kronman, The Lost Lawyer Cambridge: Harvard University Press, America in Search of a Public Philosophy Cambridge: Harvard University Press, , pp. Ironically, Holmes joins forces with Sandel in advancing the dubious thesis that concern for virtue is foreign to, or incompatible with, the political theory of liberalism. For works that illuminate the problem of virtue by examining the spirit and intellectual framework of liberal modernity, see Charles Taylor, Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity Cambridge: University of Chicago Press, Oxford University Press, , 1. Plato, too, distinguishes between virtues relative to ends of differing dignity but more sharply distinguishes the idea of genuine virtue, which is relative to human perfection You are not currently authenticated. View freely available titles:

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