

*The Authority of Virtue:
Institutions and Character in The Good Society*

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ABSTRACT

Political philosophy was once dominated by discussion of the virtues of character and their importance to the good life and the good society. Contemporary political philosophers, however, following the towering influence of John Rawls, have primarily focused on a single virtue of institutions: justice, while largely avoiding controversial claims about the good life. As a result, political philosophy lacks a unified account of the virtues of institutions and the virtues of character. More importantly, we lack an understanding of the connection between the just society and the good life. This book begins to mend this broken seam, which, on reflection, lies at the heart of our deepest political problems. The book's central argument is that the virtues of character require institutions, while good institutions enable persons to live together virtuously. Political institutions are a necessary precondition for the moral agency exhibited by the virtues. But *good* institutions enable virtue to grow, while helping to constrain the excesses of vice. On this view, justice emerges primarily as a virtue of character, not institutions. The just person balances conformity to existing institutional norms with practically wise reforms. Ultimately, this book concludes that the just society and the good life are linked through the common good of virtuous activity within the shared institutions of a political community.