On Berlin's Liberal Pluralism

An examination of the political theories of Sir Isaiah Berlin, concentrated around the problem of combining value pluralism and liberalism.

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1. Introduction

The steps of those who are not here,
Across the resplendent parquet,
And the bluish smoke of cigars.
And all the mirrors reflect
A man who has not come
And could not penetrate this hall.
He's no better than others, nor worse,
But he breathes not of Lethe's chill,
And in his hand is warmth.
Guest from the Future! Can it be
He will really come to me,
Turning from the bridge to the left?

-- Anna Akhmatova[1]

1.1 Isaiah Berlin's thought and the ensuing debate

Isaiah Berlin (1909-1997) was an atypical political philosopher because he never tried to construct or defend any "grand theories" on how we ought to organise all aspects of society. He was rather a thinker that emphasised time and again the dangers of such overarching theories, and the perils of trying to fit human lives into such schemes rather than the other way around. But even if he was not a very abstract political theorist, his name is associated with several theoretical novelties. His idiosyncratic version of liberalism, regrettably never comprehensively formulated in any *magnum opus*, continues to this day to be both relevant and thought-provoking, which is especially remarkable given the virtual renaissance that political theory has gone through in the years after his retirement from full-time scholarship.

His most famous contribution to political theory is probably his essay *Two Concepts of Liberty* (Berlin 2002:166-217), originally given in 1958 as his inaugural address as Chichele Professor of Social and Political Theory at Oxford. It is a compact version of his political thought, in itself a source of much controversy on

[1] From "A Poem without a hero", in Carl R. Proffer's translation. The "Guest from the Future" is Berlin visiting Akhmatova during her years of isolation in Leningrad in the 1940's. Akhmatova was denounced by Stalin after the war and rehabilitated only after his death (Akhmatova 1976:164).

many disparate problems in political theory. In it, he propounds two chief ideas of, if not "enormous", then at least some "subversive force" (cf. Gray 1996:1).

The first of these ideas, of which the address both begins and ends, is that of *value pluralism*, the view that all the ideals and values we ought to promote in our political and moral situation does not fit together quite as easily as one could wish for. This means that moral conflict constitute an *ineradicable* portion of the human condition. In fact, Berlin claims that this pluralism of values is the start of all political theory. If not ends collided, he says, there would be no need for political and moral theory – the questions asked in these fields of inquiry would be either utterly incomprehensible or reduced to problems of a "technical" nature (Berlin 2002:166; 1999:149; 1961:316).

In our day, "pluralism" has become somewhat of a buzzword, usually lumped together in political speeches along with other baroque phrases intended to declare one's good will towards all mankind. In scholarly writing also, the word takes on a variety of meanings, but is perhaps most frequently used as a synonym for 'diversity' (cf. Rorty 1990; Rawls 1996). In Berlin's time, also, pluralism was a well-known philosophical concept connected both to the 'political' pluralism of some British theorists on the political left, for instance Harold Laski, and to the American tradition of philosophical pragmatism (cf. Dewey 1927; James 1977; Hirst (ed.) 1989; Kramnick and Sheerman 1993; Galston 1999). It seems at least plausible to believe that Berlin drew on this body of thought when he denoted his views in moral theory as 'pluralism' rather than something else (cf. especially Berlin 2001; 2002; Lamprecht 1920; 1920a; Brogan 1931). In this study, I will adopt the conceptual scheme put forward by George Crowder (2002:2): *"Value pluralism is the view, associated in particular with the late Isaiah Berlin, that fundamental human values are irreducibly plural and 'incommensurable', and that they may, and often do, come into conflict with one another, leaving us with hard choices."* While several overlapping concepts have some claim to the word 'pluralism' without any adjacent qualifying adjectives, I choose here to use the freestanding term to denote value pluralism.

The second idea is, as the title of the essay indicates, that there are two conceptions of liberty[2]. He goes on to claim that these conceptions of liberty began at "no great logical distance from each other", but ended up after tumbling through our intellectual history in "direct conflict" (Berlin 2002:178-9). The conflicting notions he speaks of are what he calls positive and negative liberty, the former being an understanding of freedom as the capacity for self-rule, or self-mastery, especially on a collective level, and the latter emphasising the importance of leaving the individual alone in her private affairs and responsibilities. The conceptual divide Berlin adopts is, to be sure, not an entirely novel one. A probable source of inspiration is Benjamin Constant's division between the liberty of "the ancients" and that of "the moderns" (Constant 1988:309-328). Phillip Pettit (1997, especially pp. 1 and 43-44) and Quentin Skinner (1998:82-3), on the other hand, trace Berlin's concepts to John Lind, one of Jeremy Bentham's correspondents.

Berlin, however, never made any claims to originality in his essay, but he certainly started a debate on the nature of freedom that continues to this day (cf. Wall 2003). In a later interview with Steven Lukes, Berlin lays out how he wants *Two Concepts* to be understood, namely as "anti-Marxist, quite deliberately" – he confirms here the suspicion cast out by several critics that his critique of positive conceptions of freedom ought not to be understood as a general, semantic or conceptual argument, but rather in this limiting context (Lukes and Berlin 1998, especially pp. 92-93). His claim is not, as some seem to believe, that the positive notion of liberty is always a misguided one – by necessity authoritarianism waiting to happen – but that a certain measure of negative liberty is a prerequisite of a *liberal* political order. At the same occasion, he laments the fact that he in *Two Concepts* did not point out that positive liberty is "basic", and a worthy human pursuit, even if he did restore some balance already with his introductory essay of 1969 (Berlin 1969:xxxvii-lxiii; 2002:30-54).

[2] Throughout I will use "liberty" and "freedom" interchangeably.

Berlin claimed to be a “liberal rationalist”, “deeply sympathetic” to the values of the French Enlightenment *philosophes* (Jahanbegloo 2000:70-71, cf. also Riley 2000; Berlin 2003). His project in political theory, if he ever had one, was to combine this kind of liberalism and progressivism with the belief in value pluralism. The plot thickens, however, because pluralism is a belief he himself shows to be a product of the Counter-Enlightenment, the critics of the Enlightenment, represented in his own works by Hamann, Vico and Herder, but with roots also in the theories of pre-liberal thinkers like Montesquieu and Machiavelli (cf. Berlin 2000; 1997, especially pp. 1-24, 25-79 and 130-161). He claims, furthermore, that liberalism and pluralism are mutually independent ideas – It is possible to be a liberal without being a pluralist, just as one could combine pluralism with non-liberal views.

This is probably where Berlin is at his most controversial from the standpoint of more recent liberal theory, in that he without any ado assumes that liberalism ought to be understood in the main as a ‘political’ programme rather than as a complete or ‘comprehensive’ philosophical anthropology, to use the phraseology put forward by Rawls (1996) and Larmore (1990). The claim, made only implicitly by Berlin, is that the liberal polity is capable of finding support in several different ‘metaphysical’ theories, with Berlin combining his liberalism with a theory about morality first propounded by pre-liberals and Counter-Enlightenment thinkers.

But even if Berlin interprets the metaethical views he shares with the thinkers of the Counter-Enlightenment in a liberal way they did not, certain blind spots seem to remain. There are several views on this matter. John Gray (1996; 1998; 2000) claims, for instance, that what follows from value pluralism is not liberalism, but a regard for peaceful coexistence aimed at accommodating both liberal, non-liberal and fiercely anti-liberal ways of life and of organising society. Under this view, liberalism is just another cultural tradition and nothing more. In fact, liberalism, and especially its ‘Enlightenment’ pretences, can not according to Gray be justified under pluralism: Value pluralism, then, positively undermines the liberal commitment Berlin claims to represent.

One rebuttal to this is to say, as Michael Walzer (1995) does, that if there is not a tight link between Berlin's views in metaethics and politics, there certainly is common ground between them: Value pluralists of the Berlinian moulding tend to be liberals, because they value among other things personal freedom and the pursuit of truth and not merely variety like Gray seems to claim. Pluralism does not on this view necessarily lead to liberal conclusions, but as doctrines go they are certainly not inimical to each other. Berlin lends his support to this contention when he proclaims that "[p]luralism and liberalism are not the same or even overlapping concepts. There are liberal theories which are not pluralistic. I believe in both liberalism and pluralism, but they are not logically connected." (Jahanbegloo 2000:44)

Another dismissal of Gray's thesis comes from those who claim that liberalism and pluralism are in fact mutually supportive theories. George Crowder (2002) and William Galston (2002), for instance, regard them as such. Berlin gives support also for this line of argument, when he comments on the thought of the Counter-Enlightenment (Jahanbegloo 2000:73): "If you allowed that there can be more than one valid answer to a problem, that in itself is a great discovery. It leads to liberalism and toleration."

Berlin is a theorist not easily overlooked, even if his style of writing and his lack of respect for the boundaries between the disciplines he works within are unorthodox to say the least. Even though he was celebrated for his skills as a lecturer to the general public – his radio lectures in the 1950's being of the most memorable and remembered in British public service broadcasting – his more theoretical essays are complex reading. Berlin's political thought is also almost completely intertwined with his views in more theoretical fields of philosophical inquiry, such as metaphysics (the problem of free will), epistemology (scepticism about alleged knowledge of the future), and the philosophy of language (the nature of meaning and verification) (cf. Berlin 1999; 2001:1-23; 2002:3-54). I choose here to limit the discussions on these more theoretical matters to the greatest degree possible in order to concentrate this study around the problem of combining liberalism with value

pluralism, even if a definitive account of Berlin's political theories ought to have indulged in them.

Berlin himself claimed on more occasions than one, that he left philosophy for the history of ideas early on in his career (cf. Berlin 1996; Ignatieff 2000). Even though this comment is nothing more than debonair irony on his part, it really helps in my view to understand his way of writing. His articles then become something more than philosophy, while his literary essays could be seen as a fertile hinterland for his political theorising, done so under the constant peril of not being able to see where Berlin the political theorist ends and Berlin the empathic historian of ideas begins. Given the nature of the Berlinian corpus, with many essays spread across time and space and no larger theoretical work, any comment must to a greater or lesser degree indulge in reconstruction from scattered fragments. The effort put down by Berlin's editor and literary trustee Henry Hardy, both in publishing his collected works and in compiling concise bibliographies, is clearly of invaluable importance to anyone who wants to study Berlin's works, and definitely a *conditio sine qua non* for this present study. (Cf. also "Further resources" in the bibliography below.)

Even if it sounds frightfully deterring to anyone who wishes to study and write about Berlin, there is much truth in the words of another of his literary trustees, Alan Ryan (1996:8): "*Sir Isaiah has chosen to write about politics in his indirect, historical and biographical fashion because he wishes not to be committed to one view of human nature, one view of the nature of liberalism, one view of the problems of the modern world. In which case the attempt to tidy him up will be, at best, an instructive failure."* Berlin was, when everything is accounted for, a fox, and never a hedgehog (cf. Lukes 2001 and section 2.4. below).

1.2 About this study

1.2.1 Questions – and the reasons for asking them

A substantial portion of the debates in contemporary political theory can be said to revolve around liberalism – what kind of theory it is, what its defining properties are, and what policies committed liberals ought to support in matters of contemporary

importance. Berlin's political theories could be construed as amounting to a sceptical and gradualist liberalism, perhaps more oriented around the historical development of our values and political commitments, rather than around discussing abstract principles in the manner of more recent liberal theory (cf. Berlin 2004a:667). This leads to a more acute sense of the reality all politics must work within. His essays are occasional papers, not orchestrated around any grand ambitions of answering all the "eternal questions" humans have asked, even if he has a few *idées fixes* that saturates many of his texts. We are therefore dealing with a political thinker of a different moulding – less systematic, perhaps, but hardly less readable – than those that have been dominating debates in the last decades.

I will endeavour to spread light upon a number of problems, questions and issues during the course of this study. *Most importantly, I will ask whether value pluralism is combinable with liberalism in the manner envisioned by Berlin. In this, I will use Berlin's theories as a backdrop and starting-point for my discussions, and then move on to describe and evaluate parts of the ensuing debate. My study will then culminate in a discussion on what consequences an endorsement of value pluralism will have for some central liberal commitments and debates.*

There are several reasons for me wanting to devote this study to Berlin's political thought, but I will be satisfied if I mention only the two most important ones. First of all, I have for some time now found his writings inspiring as a vaccine against a decoupling of political theory from our close history. I therefore take this chance to really study Berlin's thought, even though I of course will not be able to traverse the entire array of persons and topics covered by Berlin.

Another reason for studying these matters is derived from a growing concern over the status of liberal theory and the future of liberal politics. Even if the liberal way of organising society has proved to be very successful, the liberal theoretical position is far from unchallenged, both from the left and the right. This, of course, is not a novel situation, but what seems to be a permanent feature of "the liberal predicament" (cf. Berlin 1973). Although I do not subscribe to these criticisms, I do see that some of the dissenting arguments on the non-liberal side are not entirely without force. In particular, I tend to be persuaded by those who claim that much of

the recent liberal theory is being unnecessarily abstract and hence removed from immediate political questions of the day. Be that as it may, I find less of this in the 'penultimate' liberal theory of which Berlin is a prominent representative. His realism and worldliness is never far away in his writing, and it is for this reason I think he must continue to be a source of inspiration for political theory (cf. Lilla 2002).

1.2.2 Theory and method

This study takes place within the confines of normative political theory, which I understand to be a particular brand of practical philosophy – i.e. one that starts from actual and present arrangements of the political aspects of our lives, rather than from an Archimedean lever taken from a speculative argument in metaphysical theory (cf. Williams 1985). This does not mean however that political theory ought to be understood entirely independent of other areas of philosophical investigation, but rather that one cannot expect to construct a relevant political theory from metatheoretical premises alone, without the aid of historical knowledge or practical wisdom. Sound political judgement, it seems, is helped by theory, but not itself reducible to theory (cf. Berlin 1997a: 40-53).

The most basic aim is to modify our "antecedent beliefs and intentions" by developing some of them further and perhaps discarding others, and not to rethink the whole world from scratch (Harman 1999:46). A primary assumption is that it is possible to resolve if not all, then at least some of the difficult problems and conflicts we think of as moral or political, by way of rational inquiry and deliberation. A natural strategy for reaching such a state of mind is to examine the content of normative propositions, their premises and the context into which they are formulated (cf. Malnes 1997:100f; Berlin 1991:1-2).

A particularly delicate problem in normative inquiry is the lack of recognised standards of success for a normative argument (cf. Kymlicka 2002:5-7). There simply is not at present any general agreement as to when everyone should be convinced by any one argument. Most of the efforts in political theory have consequently sought refuge within a larger tradition or ideology with its own standards of argumentative excellence, wrought with tacit assumptions only discernible with great difficulty.

This state of the discipline probably stems from a quandary as to what properties a normative sentence might take on. As for descriptive propositions, I think it is implausible to claim that these could be wholly indeterminate – they are, at least for all practical purposes, either true or false (cf. e.g. Taylor 1998). But in what sense could normative propositions be either true or false? In this question controversy has seeped in, making it difficult to see how they could be resolved any time soon, if at all (cf. Beauchamp 2001:57-98; Malnes 2001).

While it of course could be claimed that moral judgements and normative inquiry are hollow practices, and that one instead could take part in more fulfilling or productive tasks, few people, I believe, would condone such a position. Rather, moral judgements and inquiry are common phenomena, both in writing and everyday life. While indulging in this practice that is normative inquiry, I will take for granted that it is possible to refine those normative beliefs we think of as valid, and not attempt to justify ethical theorising as such, which is an endeavour of such magnitude that it alone would shatter the formal requirements this study is forced to comply with.

We are, then, without any conclusive methods in the field of normative political theory with general approval. The question as to when enough has been said in order to justify any given political institution or arrangement remains in dispute. Instead, we must be contented with tentative norms of argumentative success. Such norms include compliance with the principles of logic – no argument being satisfactory if its conclusions do not follow from its premises. Another guiding norm is that an acceptable argument should be in tune with our considered convictions or judgements on related matters (cf. Rawls 1971:46-53). We naturally aim at greater levels of coherence in our beliefs, since holding mutually exclusive beliefs would be intolerable for any person claiming to be rational. That any given normative theory coheres with our prior intuitions and beliefs must, at least tentatively, be considered as an argument in favour of that theory. A third norm concerns itself with the mode of presentation of the theory. A theory should be *complete* in the sense that it does not leave vital parts of itself in the dark. Malnes (2001) suggests *comprehensiveness* and *acuteness* as virtues when it comes to presenting and systematising normative

theories. This means, respectively, that everything relevant to the problem at hand is given due consideration and ranked according to relative importance.

In the following I will try to live up to these norms because they are preconditions for *clarity* in any normative inquiry – the flouting of these norms seems to necessarily hurt all arguments by leaving natural questions unanswered. They constitute a rudimentary methodology – a methodology that is unfinished, but inevitable if one is to make sense of normative inquiry.

1.2.3 Outline

Chapter 2 will be a presentation of Berlin's political theories. It will be a charitable interpretation, and not so much aimed at critique. I will begin with Berlin's views on political theory in general. I then examine some fundamental, but elusive concepts central to his political thought, namely pluralism, liberty and liberalism. Next, over the last two sections of the chapter I shall attempt to outline his political theory.

In the chapters 3-5 I will present, under the common heading "Pluralism and Liberalism", the debate following Berlin's formulation of his key ideas and evaluate the arguments given on both sides. Chapter 3 will be devoted to the initial arguments for a pluralistic liberalism from Berlin and other writers. Chapter 4 is concentrated around John Gray's and John Kekes' criticism of this position. In chapter 5 I will present the more recent attempts at combining liberalism and pluralism from Crowder and Galston. Ending chapter 5, I will sum up and argue against the belief that liberalism and pluralism are an incoherent set of beliefs, even if it is not entirely without consequence to one's liberalism whether one adopts value pluralism or not.

Chapter 6 and 7 will constitute the concluding portion of the study. Chapter 6 will be aimed at discussing what consequences there are for the liberal outlook, if value pluralism is accepted as a valid description of morality. Berlin's liberalism, I conclude, is perhaps more tentative than most theories in the same tradition, but still undoubtedly recognisable as liberalism. During the course of this chapter, I will attempt to show how pluralism affects liberal commitments and values such as liberty, equality and democracy, as well as other problems in contemporaneous liberal theory such as the handling of international relations with non-liberal states

and stubbornly antiliberal subcultures in a liberal state. Chapter 7 will be reserved for formal conclusions, reiterating my findings, or lacks thereof, from the previous chapters.

2. Isaiah Berlin in political theory

2.1 Introduction: La théorie politique, existe-t-elle?

Berlin was an embodiment of the 20th century, of its upheavals and divisions, but also of its elements of constancy. His autobiographical essay *The Three Strands of My Life,* as well as Michael Ignatieff's biography of him describes how his identity in triplicate – Russian, Jewish and English – was shaped by the quirks of our recent history (Ignatieff 2000; Berlin 1998:255-259). The complex and cataclysmic history of the century just ended, which he on occasion witnessed up close, is an ever-returning theme in Berlin's texts.

Like so many of his generation, the world wars and the accompanying cruelties and atrocities shaped his political and moral views in a profound way. What began as seemingly benign intentions – the quest for national solidarity, equality and harmony; "true progress" and "real liberty" – ended in carnage and genocide. Consequently, the underlying motive behind a great deal of Berlin's texts is the wish to expose the faults of the theories and great expectations that led to these catastrophes. His political theory is therefore first and foremost anti-Utopian and anti-totalitarian. When the idea of a perfect society is presented as attainable, people will, according to Berlin, do things they otherwise would not even contemplate – "*For if one really believes that such a solution is possible, then surely no cost would be too high to obtain it: to make mankind just and happy and creative and harmonious for ever – what could be too high a price to pay for that?"* (Berlin 1991:15).

Berlin's political thought, like anyone else's, needs to be understood as a product of his times. His liberalism, and his pluralism, ought in my view to be appreciated as an attempt to salvage what is decent and civilised at a time of infamous political experiments and almost unspeakable suffering (cf. e.g. Glover 2001; Margalit 1996). This demands a careful and critical reading of the Berlinian corpus: Just as one cannot understand Plato fully without knowledge of the

Peloponnesian War and subsequent events, it is difficult to separate Berlin's works in political theory from the affairs of their time (cf. Plato 1980; 1991).

It almost seems like ancient history now, but not more than forty-three years ago, it was a perfectly intelligible question to ask whether political theory still existed (Berlin 1961). If questions like this were to be asked today, it would most certainly stir up more controversy than it did then. To interpret the political theory of such a prolific author, one must be clear as to what he thought political theory was, and what its proper subject matters were. It is therefore a welcome relief that he wrote his thoughts on this on several occasions. He understood political theory to be essentially philosophical – unable to be reduced to questions of a formal or empirical nature, as in mathematics or physics (cf. Berlin 1999:11). In the Berlinian vocabulary, being a "philosophical" discipline also entails an element of fatalism, in that the study cannot hope to answer all of its questions once and for all. For Berlin, the basic aim of philosophical studies is to evaluate and improve our ways of thinking and of using words, making both "less internally contradictory", while remaining conscious of the never-ending nature of the study (ibid.).

It is a piece of conventional wisdom that political theory went into a state of suspended animation some time during *la belle époque,* only to emerge again with the publication of John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* (Rawls 1971). Although I do not subscribe to such sweeping beliefs, it puts into view the intellectual atmosphere in which political theory found itself during the period in which Berlin was at his most active in the field. These decades were a time of real political upheavals on a global scale, making it perhaps less appropriate to indulge in the most abstruse theories about politics. Such sentiments of scepticism towards abstract theory are all but obvious in Berlin's works, but also present in the publications of other theorists of that period, such as Karl Popper (1966:I:1-5) and John Plamenatz (1960). It is however true that ethical and political theory as fields of inquiry have grown both in volume and prestige since then, and that this is a turn in the history of philosophy few anticipated. At any rate, this development does not signify that the self-conscious and historically sensitive approach to political theory characteristic of Berlin and many of

his contemporaries has been made irrelevant. Quite the contrary, they offer useful contrasts to more recent theory, which often is more abstract and general in character (cf. Lilla 2002).

If Akhmatova thought of Berlin as a Guest from the Future, a future without the angst one only feels when terrorised by one's own government, he is also in important respects a guest from the past. His essays resonate at times a literary-cum-scholarly genre which is quite uncommon in the present, but with an abundance of precedents in history. Reading academic articles today is rather frequently a test of one's patience, even if much progress has been made in stringency and concision compared with the more flamboyant writings of previous times. Berlin tends to oscillate between the two extremes. Sometimes this ends in exemplars of scholarly writing, and other times the finished work is of a more literary persuasion. This presents the student of Berlin with some extraordinary challenges one would not find with more conventional theorists, but as long as one is aware of his eccentricities, they should pose no greater problems (cf. Ryan 1996; Lukes 2001).

2.2 Elusive concepts and categories

2.2.1 Pluralism

Value pluralism, or ethical pluralism, may have been put centre stage by Berlin, but his theory was not totally without predecessors (cf. Hardy 2001). The most remarkable of these was probably Sterling Lamprecht (1920; 1920a; 1921), a philosopher who worked in the pragmatic, and in its own zenith frequently called pluralistic, tradition of among others John Dewey and William James. Although acknowledgement of genuine ethical dilemmas between values or ends goes back to the tragic drama and the mythology of the ancient Greeks (Nussbaum 1986; Stocker 1990), Lamprecht is the first to state in a clear manner the belief that strife is a permanent feature of the human morality. His is probably the classical statement of value pluralism: *"I find myself driven to recognize an ultimate and irresolvable pluralism – a basic pluralism of the goods which men may properly seek to achieve and from among which they must choose, and a resulting pluralism of obligation or*

duty, such that it is impossible to maintain, at least in some cases, that one and only one, among several possible choices, is alone morally right. (...) There seems to me to be neither one unified summum bonum, nor one single course of right conduct." (Lamprecht 1920:562, emphasis deleted).

This, Lamprecht wrote at a time when Berlin was a schoolboy of eleven and a recent arrival to Britain. But if Lamprecht was the first with an explicit notion of value pluralism, Berlin was to be the one that made it into something other than an esoteric and half-forgotten theory. This he did when he almost forty years later held his lecture on the *Two Concepts of Liberty.* This was the first occasion in which he clearly stated his adherence to ethical pluralism, even if he came close to doing so two years before, in his article *Equality* (Berlin 1956:319f; Hardy 2001).

Later, in the posthumously published essay *My Intellectual Path*, he more than ever places pluralism at the heart of his thought (Berlin 1998a; 2001:11-14). In it, he declares that value pluralism occupies a sort of middle ground between value monism, the belief that there are only one genuine value or one unified *summum bonum*, and moral relativism, the belief that there are no universal values, only local ones (cf. also Galston 1999:878-880). But pluralism definitely has more in common with monism, in that they are both variants of the belief that we can separate right from wrong. As Berlin (2001:12) puts it: "[T]he multiple values are objective, part of the essence of humanity, rather than arbitrary creations of men's subjective fancies."

In this his last account of pluralism he sums up his views (Berlin 1998a; 2001:11-12): *"I am not a relativist; I do not say 'I like coffee with milk and you like it without; I am in favour of kindness and you prefer concentration camps' – each of us with his own values, which cannot be overcome or integrated. This I believe to be false. But I do believe that there is a plurality of values which men can and do seek, and that these values differ. There is not an infinity of them: the number of human values, of values which I can pursue while maintaining my human semblance, my human character, is finite – let us say 74, or perhaps 122, or 26, but finite, whatever it may be."*

In some respects, however, Berlin's moral theories come across as less than ideally clear. It is for instance left in obscurity how many "objective" values there

are, what they are called or what standards a given "subjective" fancy must meet in order to become or be counted among the genuine values (cf. though Raz 2001; 2003). When we come to the more theoretically oriented liberal pluralists, namely Crowder and Galston, there is also some technical questions of this sort to be resolved including for instance how many values there are, and what it means to accord liberal values a "robust though rebuttable presumption" (Galston 2002:3; cf. also chapter 5 below). In this study, I choose to limit the discussion on these metatheoretical matters, and instead reserve these issues, which definitely deserves careful attention, for a later occasion.

There are some disagreements in the literature on what the central features of value pluralism are. Crowder (2002:2-3) defines value pluralism as consisting of four claims about our moral world: First, pluralists will claim that there are some *universal values*, dispositions that would be of value in all conceivable circumstances. Second, these values are said to be *irreducibly plural* or many. As Lamprecht stated above, what distinguishes the pluralist from the monist is that the former does not believe in any one *summum bonum*, a good that absorbs all other goods. Third, some values are *incommensurable* with one another, a notion I must return to below. Fourth, these values, the ones the ethical pluralist claims are both objective, several and at times incommensurable, are also on occasion in conflict with each other. They are, as Berlin (2002:216) says, in a state of "perpetual rivalry", incompatible in the sense that one cannot fulfil the demands of all of them during the span of a lifetime. Morally agonising choices between rival goods (or evils) is then thought to be a permanent feature of any life that is recognisably human. To this list, some theorists might add or subtract items, but Crowder's account remains the most faithful rendering of Berlin's position in a theoretical language (cf. though Kekes 1993; Gray 1996).

Of these four items, the notion of incommensurability is the one that has sparked the most controversy among theorists of pluralism. Incommensurability is not at all a clearly defined property, and Berlin himself left this metaphor taken from geometry undefined (cf. Chang 1997; Crowder 2002:49-54; Berlin 2002:212-217).

John Kekes (1993:21), for instance, equates incommensurability with incomparability, deducing from this that choices between conflicting values are in most cases completely arbitrary, while Crowder (ibid.) denies this simple identity. Instead, Crowder claims that incommensurability is the same as *incomparability in the abstract*, but not incomparability in particular cases. In the abstract, so the argument goes, justice and friendship are incommensurable values, whilst it is clear that a trial judge should prioritise justice over his friendship with any of the parties in matters put before him. Incommensurability then does not, still according to Crowder, entail incomparability in isolated cases as Kekes seems to claim, but rather that the values that conflict in such situations are "*unrankable"* in the abstract. The most important thing to remember, however, is that incommensurability is first and foremost a relationship between pairs of values, and not between different combinations of values or ways of life. There is, however, some interpretations that transfer this notion of incommensurability to the level of cultures as well, resulting in attitudes reminiscent of cultural relativism, with John Gray (1996:43-4) being a notable representative of such a view (cf. Wolf 1992).

The competing notions of incommensurability are, I think, a significant source of disagreement in political matters between the various theorists of pluralism. Gray's cultural relativism leads him for instance towards a rejection of liberalism, understood as a comprehensive philosophical anthropology, and especially the claims made by some liberal theorists that their values command universal authority (cf. Gray 1995a; 1996). Kekes is on the other hand drawn towards conservative conclusions by his restrictive view of incommensurability, which ends up in an all-out scepticism towards recent liberal theory and eventually in an embracement of traditionalism (Kekes 1993; 1997; 1998). Crowder accordingly rejects these views and claims instead to have found a path from pluralism to liberalism, one that goes through a more relaxed way of understanding incommensurability, and one that opens up for rational solutions to many moral conflicts between values and ultimately to an acknowledgement of the importance of certain *liberal virtues* when coping with a world of ever increasing complexity.

Berlin, I believe, would most likely concur to Crowder's belief that there are some instances where only one course of action is the most correct one, even if alternative possible actions would embody universal values as well (cf. section 5.1 below). In the penultimate paragraph of *Two Concepts,* for instance, he only claims that "human goals are many, not all of them commensurable", and not that every single value is incomparable to everything else (Berlin 2002:216). In my view, Crowder comes closest to Berlin's notion of value incommensurability, and both carefully avoid Gray's position. Instead, they grant that there are several possibilities for moral progress and growth in which barbarisms of the past are substituted for more humane ideals (cf. especially Lamprecht 1921; Berlin 1956; Crowder 2002). This makes their version of pluralism less radical than the one advocated by Gray, but at the same time perhaps more believable.

The question whether pluralism is true will not be answered in any great detail, although I believe that once pluralism has been carefully defined, it is indeed an attractive theory of how values stand in relation with each other, particularly because it explains why moral conflicts occur so frequently and why more elegant theories must be qualified when faced with conflicting considerations and puzzling counter-examples. In this respect, pluralism occupies a middle ground between the unyielding precipitancy of monism and the dry lands of moral relativism. But even if pluralism is quite popular among contemporary theorists, it is certainly not an unchallenged doctrine. One of the most vocal adversaries to pluralism is probably Ronald Dworkin (2001; 2001a). Dworkin's most important reason for rejecting value pluralism comes from his dismissal of the quite common belief that there is a fundamental conflict between liberalism's core values, liberty and equality. But his is probably the only recent direct attack on ethical pluralism from a manifestly liberal position (cf. Dworkin 2002; 2003; 2003a). Instead, liberal theorists have generally adapted to the challenge of Berlinian pluralism, either indirectly by building on Berlin's terminology as Rawls does (cf. especially Rawls 1985:248-9; 1996, pp. 57 and 197-8) or by actively combining their support of liberalism with ethical pluralism, as with Crowder and several others.

2.2.2 Liberty

What does it mean to be free? Throughout our intellectual history, this question has sparked controversy. The most recent wave of strife over what liberty ought to be understood as was inaugurated by Berlin's *Two Concepts* and has continued to this day (Swift 2001; Wall 2003). Berlin's project when it comes to liberty is straight forward enough, in that he wants to separate the liberal or negative, originally Hobbesian, view of liberty from the rest, such as the 'effective freedom' of the socialist tradition, the republican notion of collective 'non-domination', Platonic 'self-mastery' or Kantian 'autonomy'.

His rationale for doing so is probably to show that the enemies of uncoerced individual choice in life-defining decisions, so conspicuously present at the time he held his lecture, can claim to be the champions of 'real' or 'true' liberty on behalf of a 'higher' self, while repudiating 'licence' on the level of the empirical individual, even if it must seem absurd to anyone but the staunchest ideologues. As mentioned earlier, there is scant documentary evidence in support of a claim that Berlin at any point thought of positive liberty as anything less than a fundamental human value on the same level as justice, friendship or negative liberty. What he claimed was rather that this conception of liberty is more easily perverted into its own opposite than the negative one. A measure of individual negative liberty is therefore a necessary constituent, according to Berlin, of any conception of liberty deserving its name.

Berlin's position has sparked a number of responses. One of the earliest rebuttals comes from Gerald MacCallum (1967), who claims on rather technical grounds that there ought to be only one triadic concept of liberty, containing both 'positive' and 'negative' elements, instead of two dyadic ones (cf. also Crocker 1980:5-7; Swift 2001:51-90). His argument has some force from the standpoint of the philosophy of language, but begs the question on two points. First, he fails to show that Berlin's conceptual divide is not useful in the study and refinement of political ideas. Second, Berlin never claimed that this divide of his ought to have taken place. It seems as if MacCallum confuses the historical argument made by Berlin – "this is

how the concept of liberty has developed" – with a hypothetical semantic argument – "liberty is best understood as two separate dyadic concepts".

A more potent set of criticisms comes from those that set their view of liberty apart from the two Berlin makes room for, in that they claim to have formulated a third concept of freedom. This is perhaps most explicitly done by authors of a republican persuasion – theorists claiming to be pointing backwards to a pre-liberal theory of liberty. Notable representatives of this school of thought are Quentin Skinner (1998; 2002) and Phillip Pettit (1993; 1997; 2001).

As Skinner points out, republicans see a connection between political and personal freedom which liberals are said to miss out on with their narrow individualism. These neo-neo-republicans view liberty as a collective matter: Free men are free to the extent the polity to which they belong are not dominated by foreign forces, despots and tyrants. When the autonomous polity interferes with its citizen's lives, freedom is not impeded, because liberty is only derivatively an individual matter. Unsurprisingly, these new republicans are silent about the potential and actual tyranny of unrestrained democratic institutions, imprudent legislation or unexamined traditions. While this collective freedom is no doubt older than Berlin's negative conception, with roots stretching as far back as to Thucydides and Cicero, it is nonetheless clear that Berlin explicitly anticipates the case for republican liberty, and treats it as a variety of *positive* liberty (Berlin 2002:178f).

A still more important line of criticism comes from those who believe that Berlin is giving positive freedom an unnecessarily damaging reputation. In the Kantian vein, liberty could be viewed as a form of *personal autonomy,* as the moral subject's victory over carnal desires and unexamined traditions. A related criticism comes from those inspired by egalitarian thought, sceptical towards negative freedom, which they view as narrowly procedural rather than "effective" or "material".

The former position is well represented by Joseph Raz (1986), when he claims that personal autonomy, "being the author of one's life", is what's important and valuable with liberty, and also what makes us value freedom-supportive political

arrangements (cf. also Taylor 1979; Benn 1988; Wall 2003). What we value, according to this view, is not naked non-intervention, but rather the fact that a measure of liberty makes it possible to choose, in part at least, the course of one's life. Privacy and freedom from coercion (negative liberties) are valued because they facilitate individual autonomy (positive liberty), and not because they are intrinsically valuable. The latter, egalitarian view of freedom is equally well represented by Lawrence Crocker's *Positive Liberty* (1980). For Crocker, the important thing is to have a wide range of valuable options to choose from. Negative liberty is, according to this particular argument, of a formal nature, and actually worthless if all we have to exercise our negative liberty on are trivial matters.

To me, these two last arguments are the weightiest, because they point to weaknesses in the libertarian position in which negative freedom is made all-important. They are, however, devastating to Berlin only if he at any point believed that negative liberty were the only worthy form of freedom, an interpretation that is demonstrably false (cf. especially Berlin 2002:3-54). Instead, Berlin concurs to their objections: Negative liberty is a necessary part of a decent existence, but it does not alone constitute a dignified human life. All values and virtues thought of as objective or fundamental must be seen in conjunction with each other, tempered by the realisation that they conflict, and that they for this reason could not all be realised fully in a single life or society. At the very least, the quest for liberty ought to be tempered by a proper sense of what is right or wrong, combined with a generosity towards those that err in life-defining decisions or those that are plainly unfortunate in their circumstance.

2.2.3 Liberalism

Few concepts are so central to the debates in political theory and yet so highly disputed as that of "liberalism" (cf. e.g. Ryan 1993; Waldron 1987; Raz 1986:1-19). Theorists argue passionately for or against liberalism, most of the time without a common understanding of what it means to be liberal or not, or how demanding a doctrine it really is (cf. Walzer 1990; Larmore 1990; Galston 1995). Definitions ranges from liberalism being a full-fledged philosophical anthropology to it being a

more modest programme for political action aimed at realising a handful of goals (Larmore 1987; Shklar 1989; Gray 1995a; 2000; Crowder 2002; Galston 2002).

But there are, in spite of all this, some more easily discernible patterns of conflict in the debate over liberalism, making the picture a bit tidier. One of these simplifying patterns is that some liberals view liberalism as a wide-ranging philosophical system, usually centred on a concept of personal autonomy or human rights, where others tend to understand liberalism as primarily a set of political beliefs inspired by a fear of repression and a belief in the efficacy of legislation to overcome brutality in political conflicts (cf. e.g. Raz 1986; Waldron 1987; 1999; Shklar 1989). Where the former focuses on the possibility to attain overall moral growth and a rational consensus on matters pertaining to the good life, the latter understanding is more pessimistic and less ambitious, wishing not for a wide-ranging consensus it views as practically unattainable, but rather for a compromise between rivalrous groups or subcultures resulting in domestic tranquillity without the use of excessive force (cf. e.g. Waldron 1987:134-150; Shklar 1989; Galston 1995).

Another dimension of conflict that frequently reaches the surface of debates between self-declared liberals is to be found in economic policy issues, where one in the liberal camps can find not only advocates of unbridled *laissez-faire* capitalism or those that favour extensive government redistribution in the form of large welfare programmes funded by taxation, but also virtually every possible intermediate position. Even in such a fundamental policy area, it seems, liberal politicians and theorists have little in common setting them apart from their non-liberal counterparts. But even if it is difficult to point the finger at a core or an essence of liberalism all those that view themselves as liberals are likely to agree upon, it is a concept that has received a wide circulation and one that deserves a more careful definition. But sadly, I can not even pretend to give a serious contribution to such an effort in this study, due to natural spatial constraints.

Since this hard way out is not open to me, I am forced to go looking for easier ways of arriving at a workable definition that avoid both of the opposing vices of controversy and vacuity. One such easy way out would be an ostensive definition in

which one could describe liberalism as the beliefs held by a group of authors forming some sort of inner core of the liberal tradition. Here I think Berlin is on the right track when he invokes the trinity of "Constant, Mill, Tocqueville" (Berlin 2002:211). These are thinkers that are no doubt liberal in intentions and temperament, and they are also moderate in debates internal to liberalism, such as economic policies or questions concerning what kind of theory liberalism is. All three are advocates of individual liberty, democratic order and moderation and prudence in economic policy issues and other immediate matters. They have their principles intact, and yet they also managed to expound those principles in a sensible way and devise practicable solutions to political problems of their day.

But even if this informal definition would be agreeable to large numbers of liberals, it leaves much to be desired on greater levels of detail. As a preliminary and minimal understanding of liberalism, I wish to suggest that it is best understood as a political programme whose goals include most prominently the spread, deepening and preservation of constitutional democracy, individual liberty and those basic human and civil rights that are deemed to be instrumental to any decent existence. This definition is, I hope, in tune with Berlin's ostensive one and also congenial to the definitions given by Crowder (2002) and Galston (2002, cf. chapter 5 below).

In the Western world today, the goals and ideals the theorists of the Berlinian trinity furthered are to a large degree already realised. Democracy and civil rights are taken for granted together with there being, for most people at least, a wide variety of meaningful options in life-defining decisions. Liberals have thus in these parts of the world increasingly become spokesmen of the established order against those who want to replace arrangements liberals have fought for with something else. There are, to be sure, other parts of the world in which the liberal position is still a radical one, but in its native countries, the deepest commitments of nineteenth century liberalism are to a large extent the starting-point of political debate, and not itself subject to serious strife.

Liberalism thus understood is primarily a fairly limited programme for political action rather than any comprehensive philosophical system. Such systems of

thought could very well be part of the liberal tradition, but will hardly be able to absorb every possible stance that is recognisably liberal. The most attractive feature of this understanding of liberalism is, I think, that it at least potentially avoids both controversy and vacuity. It passes clear of controversy because it focuses on those things that as many self-declared liberals as possible are likely to agree upon, namely immediate commitments and values, and less so on concrete policy recommendations or their theoretical justifications, which probably are contested matters. It also avoids vacuity, I think, due to the fact that such an understanding evades the trap of making "only the very deluded or the very wicked" into non-liberals (Ryan 1993:292): Reasonable people do not have to agree that individual liberty or the protection of human rights should be prioritised over, say, concerns for the health of communities or economic efficiency when these ends collide.

As such, liberalism is one loosely demarcated set of political commitments and attitudes with unclear boundaries to other broad, political programmes. It is capable of finding support among people that disagree on more fundamental issues than purely political ones, and of being integrated into different philosophical systems. It is a political theory distinguishable from others, but it does not in itself contain answers to every conceivable political question or tight links to only one type of ethical theory or philosophical anthropology.

2.3 Berlin's political theory: An attempted reconstruction

I will attempt here to show that Berlin's political theories could be subsumed under five points, forming a quite distinctive kind of liberal theory and outlook: First, his political thought is *Anti-Utopian* in that he rejects the very notion of being able to attain a state of perfection in politics and morality, due to the assumed plurality of values we naturally endorse. The first source for anti-utopianism comes from historical knowledge, and Berlin's contention is that once perfection is made the goal for politics, one embarks on a psychologically slippery slope that easily leads to an instrumentalisation of all other considerations. The second source is more theoretical, and originates in his pluralism, in which perfection in human affairs is thought of as

an incoherent notion to begin with. The conflicting nature of our values is under this theory of a permanent nature, meaning that we well enough could choose other values than the ones we normally decide on, but that it is impossible to realise all of them concurrently. This scepticism towards moral and political images of perfection remains constant throughout his works, beginning already in preparatory school, and suggesting that this is one of his most deeply seated convictions (Berlin 1998a).

Second, Berlin stands for *a balanced interpretation of Enlightenment values,* acknowledging both their validity and that these values have been, and could well again be perverted by political projects that have previously ended in butchery and totalitarianism. Berlin was committed to such values as rationality, liberty and equality, while he also repeatedly warns us against a total devotion to only one or a few of these goods. There is on this view nothing wrong with the values that have inspired such atrocious regimes as those of the Jacobins or the communists. On the level of values, they are both genuine heirs to the Enlightenment (cf. e.g. Brinton 1928; Berlin 2004). The problem with these regimes lies not in the values they claim to embody, but rather in how they conceptualise these values, what they are willing to sacrifice in order to achieve their goals, and in their analysis of what it takes to realise their ultimate intentions. These perverted variants of the Enlightenment "project" are in Berlin's works rightly repudiated because they are willing to trade off too much of some of the things that one ought to value in order to achieve bliss on other scores. If religion is nothing but a pie in the sky, then the Utopian pie in the twenty-third century ought to receive no less scepticism (cf. Speake, ed. 2000).

When Berlin writes about such thinkers as Marx, Helvétius or Saint-Simon (Berlin 1996a; 2003), this rejection of the idea that human misery now ought best to be compensated for in a future Eden, is at its most passionate. Berlin tempers his commitment to Enlightenment values with an admiration for the historical sensitivity and proto-pluralism of thinkers such as Vico and Herder (Berlin 2000). He does not, however, adopt their endorsement of unexamined and authoritative traditions, and so remains firmly committed to the diffusion of freedom and enlightenment, no matter

how uncomfortable they must seem at first (Berlin 1999:1-11; 2002:36-52; cf. Kant 1967, especially pp. 55-61).

Third, and this is probably his most famous contention, he gives *negative liberty* a special position in the pantheon of human values. He does not, to be sure, place negative liberty above all other considerations moral and political, but he does argue that negative liberty is a precondition for a "humane" society (Berlin 2002:216), just as he in an earlier article argued for a concern over equality as a prerequisite for a decent society (cf. Wollheim 1956; Berlin 1956). As Gray (1996; 2000) however points out, the relationship between pluralism and a priority of negative liberty is not one of strict, logical entailment, since there are ways of life that does not put non-intrusion centre stage, but that nevertheless embodies other values not to be dismissed out of hand. Berlin's argument, it seems, must be helped by an additional premise sponsoring individualism on behalf of the empirical self, rather than some 'real' or 'higher' self, such as a nation, a social class, or even one's conscience when opposed to one's desires. This is not, to be sure, an entirely uncontroversial piece of assistance, but it is nonetheless one that Berlin makes use of.

Value pluralism, thus retained by the boundaries of this kind of individualism and humanism, will lead to an acceptance of the attitude put forward by Berlin, namely that negative liberty ought to be given considerable weight when reshaping policies or political practice, without making it into a surrogate for the *summum bonum,* trumping all other concerns. The pluralism of a Gray or a Kekes is perhaps a more radical form of value pluralism, but it goes against the spirit and letter of Berlin and Lamprecht's theories. Clearly, for Berlin it is coercion and intrusion into a person's private life that needs rigorous justification, and not the absence of it. In this sense, he is a liberal without being a libertarian, in that he values negative liberty, but at the same time paves the way for its curtailment when good sense or other values would be substantially furthered by so doing. It is "equality of liberty", not "total liberty for wolves" that adequately sums up Berlin's moderate defence of extensive, negative liberty (Berlin 2002:172; 1991:12). His pluralistic liberalism is clearly inimical not only to those ideologies he views as enemies of individual, negative

liberty, but also to those theorists who attempt to make non-intrusion into an all-important concern (cf. Berlin 2002, especially pp. 3-54; cf. also Sen 1999 for a more recent and empirically informed survey into the intricacies of liberal freedom).

Fourth, his life-long commitment to *Zionism*, the quest to establish a Jewish nation-state in Palestine, deserves some comment. Berlin remained a Zionist, in spite of Israel's repression of the Palestinian people, even if he seldom let an opportunity pass to criticise the policies of the various Israeli governments. His Zionism is probably tightly knit to his stance on nationalism in general, understood as a robust fact of our recent history not likely to go away any time soon. Cosmopolitanism, no matter how liberal, was to Berlin nothing more than a variant of the Utopian imagery he despised so much (cf. Wollheim 2001; Margalit 2001). His was always the temperate and moderate, secular Zionism of Chaim Weizmann and later the Israeli Labour Party, and not the ferocious kind of Israeli conservatives and the religious right (cf. Berlin 1997b; 2001:143-194; 2004a:663-693; Galipeau 1990; Worms 1999).

When Berlin wrote about nationalism, as in his seminal essay *The Bent Twig* (Berlin 1991:238-261), one is struck by his lack of contempt so apparent among other liberal thinkers. Of course he acknowledges that nationalism often, if not usually, is a piece of reaction and only rarely allied with progress and liberality. But he recognises also that patriotism is a valuable source of political mobilisation against injustice and oppression which liberal cosmopolitanism could not hope to match. Given that it is unlikely that national fervour will go away any time soon, it is imperative for Berlin to temper it with a sense of shared humanity. This, rather than insisting on a cosmopolitanism few people is likely to embrace, is the surest way of guaranteeing that benign nationalism is not turned into aggressive jingoism or oppressive and murderous fascism.

Finally, his version of liberalism is one tempered by the application of *practical wisdom*. This is perhaps most evident in his endorsement of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal programme for revitalising the American economy in the 1930's. This was a programme attacked by other liberals as it redistributed private

property and regulated commerce centrally, and thereby trading off a measure of liberty in order to increase overall productivity. His liberalism is on this and related matters clearly of a more pragmatic and tentative flavour, when compared to the more legalistic strands of liberal theory.

His political theorising strived always to be empirically and historically informed, but at the same time leaving room for matters of principle. The thing that made him admire such liberal-minded politicians as Franklin D. Roosevelt and Chaim Weizmann was most importantly their ability to combine a firm defence of their own values with an equally acute sense of practicality. The practical wisdom that guided their political vocation could perhaps be described, by other theorists more deeply enveloped in jurisprudential ways of thinking, as an equivocation from the straight and narrow liberal path. Such an attitude would definitely find little support from Berlin (2004a:667): *"I was, and remain, an incurably sceptical liberal, a convinced gradualist."* His liberalism was not only moderate or tempered by the belief that values conflict, but also a work in constant progress, flexible enough to absorb the shocks of unexpected upheavals.

2.4 Conclusion: Cautious liberalism

The preliminary exposition given above of what I believe to be the central elements in Berlin's political thought, speaks of a liberalism that is sensitive to the quirks of history, to say nothing of the various *perceptions* of it, as well as the often mysterious ways in which practical politics take place. It is a *cautious* liberalism. What Berlin endorses is not that one should become a liberal out of convenience – he often writes how it is the least convenient position, trapped between fanatics of opposite flavour – but rather that liberal values and goals should be supported because they are constituents of any decent and civilised society (cf. Margalit 1996).

The summarised version of Berlin's political thought is, I believe, that being a liberal in a world where ends collide (cf. Berlin 1961) is tantamount to subjecting oneself to conflicting demands and aspirations, and to forging a precarious balance between as many of them as possible (cf. also Williams 1999). This is why, I think,

he spent so much time dwelling on political theories claiming universal authority, theories that history had already discredited. And because he thought of such theories as the most dangerous intellectual devices around, he wanted to expose their faults and logical absurdities without trying to replace them with yet another grand and potentially perilous theory of his own.

This is decidedly a different picture than the one drawn up by Gray (1996), in his book about Berlin. It has become somewhat of a cliché to divide people into foxes and hedgehogs modelled after Berlin's portrayal of Tolstoy's theory of history (Berlin 1998b:436-498). In it Berlin describes the fox as someone who knows many internally confusing things, and the hedgehog as a type of person that know only one big thing and holds on to it for dear life. *Timeo lectorem unius libri.* What Gray seems to be doing, is to present Berlin as a hedgehog, as a thinker only interested in his one big insight of value pluralism, at the expense of everything else. This move has provoked several of Berlin's closest colleagues into giving passionate responses to the contrary (cf. e.g. Ryan 1996; Lukes 1995a). Gray's portrait of a theorist immersed in a world where every single decision is riddled with moral conflict, where even the most prosaic of choices must be a radical one between equally fundamental values is perhaps an intriguing one, but it fails, I think, to capture Berlin's basic view of moral decisions. When one views Berlin in the fashion after Gray, it is not difficult to see that he mistakenly could be construed as a critic of rational deliberation in matters of moral or political importance, rather than someone who merely points the finger at cracks in the more ambitious ethical and political theories (cf. Weinstock 1997; Malnes 1997:133-161; Kenny 2000).

Gray claims (e.g. 1996:141-168), that the Berlinian brand of liberalism is "agonistic", named so after the theatrical expression for a character torn by inner tensions right up to the point of tragedy. Berlin's liberalism consists, according to Gray, of a loose set of positions on political matters that does not add up with his one big idea in metaethical theory. But this must stem, I think, from a confusion as to what Berlin meant when he described himself as a liberal. Gray builds his portrayal of Berlin on a highly controversial understanding of liberalism as a philosophical

system covering most provinces of theoretical inquiry, whereas it is doubtful that Berlin ever understood liberalism to be something other than a programme for political action (cf. Gray 1995a; 2000; Berlin 2002:208-212; Lukes 1994).

Berlin's lack of final answers, the willingness he shows to admit that some questions are thorny ones, may also be viewed as a liberation. This is perhaps most poetically described by Joseph Brodsky, when he takes his readers back to his youth in the Soviet Union, where he illegally obtained a copy of the *Four Essays on Liberty*, and actually felt relieved to discover that it was possible to think outside of large-scale philosophical systems like those of Hegel or Marx (Brodsky 1989). Berlin is perhaps a thinker that in his lack of an over-arching theory about man and his condition may seem to allow much messiness in the way we think about the world. But then again it is certainly not absurd to think that the world is a fundamentally messy place. In any way, the attempt to mine something reminiscent of a comprehensive theory on morality and politics out of Berlin's texts, as Gray seems to be doing, runs aground on the fact that Berlin never wrote according to a pre-set theory, but aspired rather towards a less Procrustean way of dealing with existence.

In conclusion, it is tempting to say that Berlin is in many respects an odd man out on the scene of political theory as it has developed over the last decades. Because he is a liberal of a sceptical and gradualist shading, he does not meet every problem with insolence and absolute certainty. Rather, he quite often ends without a solid conclusion after guiding his readers, as his manner dictates, through an astonishingly large chunk of intellectual history. But when it comes to presenting his convictions as well as the thought of others, he does display the sensitive touch that Vico called *fantasia.* I believe his endorsement of pluralism, his one idea of "enormous subversive force", will be to the layman nothing more than a statement of the pervasive feeling of uneasiness when faced with morally agonising choices. From the perspective given by Western philosophy from Plato and onwards, pluralism is a provocative stance, but I think an argument could be made for it diminishing in subversiveness once we move out into everyday life or practical politics. It is, in

essence, a theory for those practical men that does not try to look for *Sophía* in the land of *Phrónēsis.*

3. Pluralism and Liberalism I: The liberal morality

They [Western liberals] believe, with good reason, that individual liberty is an ultimate end for human beings; none should be deprived of it by others; least of all that some should enjoy it at the expense of others. Equality of liberty; not to treat others as I should not wish them to treat me, repayment of my debt to those who alone have made possible my liberty or prosperity or enlightenment; justice, in its simplest and most universal sense – these are the foundations of liberal morality.

-- Isaiah Berlin[3]

3.1 Introduction: Liberalism and pluralism?

The problem is thereby set: Is value pluralism really companionable with liberalism? On closer inspection, however, this question seems quite peculiar. The reason for this is not only that so many liberal theorists have viewed pluralism as a plausible description of things, but also that there is so much elasticity in the concepts that it becomes a small order to devise a genuinely liberal understanding of pluralism or conversely a pluralistic type of liberalism (cf. e.g. Lukes 1994; Riley 2001). This also has some precedents in the history of liberal thought, for instance with John Stuart Mill's development of a moderate utilitarianism in order to accommodate metaethically his liberal, political conclusions. At least, this is how Berlin interprets Mill (Berlin 2002:218-251).

There seems to be clear limits however as to what kinds of political theory that could be accommodated by pluralism. For a political theory to be combinable with pluralism, it must be able to be reconciled with its basic tenets, most importantly that there are plural values that sometimes conflict, such that there can not be, at least in some cases, only one morally correct course of action. Political theories featuring some sort of 'end of history' or 'final solution' to all our agonising moral and political problems must therefore be eschewed. Such theories include not only certain types of revolutionary socialism and their fascist mirror images, but also the

[3] (2002:172)

prophecies of managerial perfectibility envisioned by thinkers such as Helvétius and Comte.

Also those theories that are not really Utopian in character, but that explicitly try to reduce fundamental human values into rigid hierarchy cannot either be combined with pluralism. *Laissez-faire* libertarianism, for instance, understood as a theory that attempts to present negative liberty as an overriding consideration in every major political question, could only by a long stretch of the imagination be thought of as congenial to pluralism. The same is probably also the case with the most unyielding varieties of egalitarian thought. If anything, pluralism is allied with moderation and gradualism in political affairs. Liberalism is on the other hand not as easily opposable to the claims of value pluralism, and several cases have been made for them being mutually supportive theories on different levels of abstraction (cf. Galston 2002; Crowder 2002). But even if one assumed that such a firm, theoretical link was missing, one could instead imagine that pluralists still could be persuaded by "cultural and pragmatic arguments" in favour of liberalism (Walzer 1995).

There are to be sure non-liberal pluralists around, but they are, at least the two presented in the fourth chapter of this study, quickly revealed as *non*-liberals rather than *anti*-liberals. John Gray is for instance by virtue of self-description a "post-liberal". He rejects what he views as the liberal *mission civilisatrice* of creating a cosmopolitan and egalitarian "universal regime", bereft of burdensome and obstinate diversity and strife, and places instead considerable value on variety in human affairs (cf. Gray 2000, e.g. p. 2). As is common among those who reject liberalism in name these days, Gray too, however, fails to criticise more immediate liberal commitments such as the protection of privacy, personal liberties and democratic order (Gray 1995; 1995a; cf. also Hampton 1997:191-209; Walzer 1990).

John Kekes, who is a pluralist, a conservative and "against liberalism" could also hardly be counted on the same list as anti-liberals such as Joseph de Maistre or Carl Schmitt (cf. Kekes 1993; 1997; 1998). Kekes is conservative on behalf of American society *and its liberal laws.* He warns repeatedly against what he views as the shallowness and abstractions of the new liberal theory, especially in its egalitarian

variety, but does not seem quite ready to reinstate racial segregation or compulsory Christian prayer in state schools. Both authors reject what *they* understand as liberalism, but do so only under the tacit supposition that institutions and laws that liberals have fought for in the past are not touched or rescinded.

Gray is of a different moulding in that he welcomes variety and diversity, even delightful chaos and experimentation. Instead of being a conservative critic, he repudiates liberalism for being ethnocentric and narrow-minded. When doing so, he speaks in favour of such "soft" authoritarian regimes as that of Singapore or the Ottoman Empire in its last moments, which climaxed in military dictatorship, expulsion of unwanted peoples and finally genocide of the Armenians in Anatolia. Gray's contention is that it is possible to be both respectable and anti-liberal, as long as one respects other cultures in a *modus vivendi*. Not surprisingly, he fails to mention that tolerant despotism has usually been of an ephemeral kind, and so fails to convince anyone with more than a perfunctory grasp of history (Gray 1998; 2000).

The rejection of Grayesque cultural relativism and its accompanying "post-liberalism" epitomises the kind of pluralistic liberalism submitted most prominently by Crowder (2002; 2003) and Galston (1995; 1999; 2002). What they have in common is that they have tried to reconcile their initial belief in liberalism *simpliciter* with a growing acceptance of ethical pluralism. They differ, however, both in approaches to political theory and in a handful of questions on a more detailed level. Crowder starts for instance from the level of political and philosophical ideas, and proceeds by carefully elaborating value pluralism in order to overcome the arguments against liberalism under pluralism posited by Gray and Kekes. Galston on the other hand begins in the opposite end with public policy issues, and ends up in an acceptance of both ethical pluralism and liberalism, after reflecting on American legal precedents in the field of private education and religion (cf. e.g. United States Supreme Court 1972). They also differ on the question of what kind of theory liberalism actually is. While Crowder seems committed to the view that liberalism is a wide-ranging philosophy based on Enlightenment values, Galston assumes the contrary position where it is seen as a more limited political programme based in

historical and practical experience (cf. e.g. Crowder 2003; Galston 1995). In other words, they both claim to have found a way of combining pluralism with liberalism, but as it turns out they talk about different liberalisms.

In the following sections, I will first introduce the positions adopted in a few key texts from Berlin's hand, and then move on to presenting some other contributions to liberal pluralism, commenting on issues raised by Berlin. In the next chapter, there will be presentations of the already mentioned selection of pluralists that, in name at least, reject liberalism. The fifth chapter will be devoted to the responses supplied by Crowder and Galston. This discussion will also point forward to my sketch on the consequences an adoption of pluralism will have for central liberal debates and policy issues, submitted in the penultimate chapter of this study.

3.2 Berlin: Pluralism and the liberal morality

Even if it is the privilege of the philosopher to critically examine his own *Weltanschauung* as well as those of others, it is not easy to liberate oneself from one's most deeply seated convictions and presuppositions, if it is possible at all. Such fundamental beliefs will always lurk in the background of any systematic investigation. In Berlin's texts, a "deeply and uniquely English" common sense type of empiricism is never far below the surface, and quite often above it (Berlin 1998:257).

Whenever he rejects ethical monism, this becomes apparent: Monism must, in order to explain (or explain away) the appearance of conflict between values we only with a sense of loss would give up on, rest on the metaphysical dogma that all genuine values or legitimate goals we have must in the end be able to be reconciled with each other. Such positing of alleged *a priori* truths in ethical theory is wholly unacceptable to Berlin, not only because he rejects them as false, but also because he views them as "responsible for the slaughter of individuals on the altars of great historical ideals" (Berlin 2002:212). He does not recognise any reasons outside the realm of metaphysical imagery to support the tenets of ethical monism. Since relativism is also unbearable, he ends up in value pluralism, understood as a "truer

and more humane ideal" (Berlin 2002:216; cf. also Berlin 1956; Berlin 2002:212-217).

There are, I believe, two places to go after one has reached the pluralist conclusion. One way is to try and find some sort of surrogate for the previously rejected dogmatic certainty of monism. This could for instance be achieved by embracing the authority of traditions and customs without supposing that they are eternal truths or above suspicion, as is the recommendation put forward by for instance Michael Oakeshott (1962) and those he has influenced. The other way is Berlin's own, and it tries to avoid such surrogates and instead focus on the immediate things that make lives more decent and bearable. His cautious and fallibilistic liberal conclusions does not constitute a theoretical or ideological faith, but are rather made out of the fears and the optimism recent history gives grounds for entertaining.

Berlin's closest affinities lies neither with the excessively enthusiastic progressives of the Enlightenment nor with their *Sturm und Drang* counterparts of the Romantic epoch. Just as his greatest heroes from nineteenth century liberalism, Berlin is a moderate kind of liberal or nothing at all. He might on occasion have entertained sympathies for radical movements whose fundamental goals he shared, but the ferocious cry for violent confrontations or final solutions was never his own. The kind of *liberal morality* Berlin endorses is modest in scope and aspirations compared to the vast philosophical systems he comments on and in due course rejects, but only after enriching his own theories and the thoughts of his readers with their unevenly scattered insights (cf. Berlin 2000; 2002). The proper goals of politics and political theory is not, according to this view, to devise and uphold a perfect constitution for the benefit of all posterity, but rather that one should concern oneself with "promoting and preserving an uneasy equilibrium" between the conflicting demands of human ideals and values in order to minimise the seriousness of inevitable "social or political collisions" (Berlin 1991:19).

The liberal morality he speaks of consists of many different values, and he places a shifting emphasis on them in his various articles. Because of the asymmetrical reception his texts have been given up until now, with the *Two*

Concepts soaring above everything else he ever did in fame, he is, at least in some circles, seen as leaning towards the libertarian side of the liberal tradition (cf. Swift 2001). A more careful reading of this text and his larger corpus would however quickly reveal this as an ill-founded piece of prejudice.

When it is put together with for instance his article on *Equality* (Berlin 1956) or with his introduction to the *Four Essays* (Berlin 2002:3-54), a more nuanced depiction can emerge. What remains is that Berlin places a strong and permanent emphasis on the respect for individual freedom from coercion and intrusion, as a necessary constituent of any civilised morality or decent society, but this accentuation is always tempered by other considerations that may or may not conflict with negative liberty. When Berlin claims that value pluralism "entails" a "measure of negative liberty" (Berlin 2002:216), he does not say that other values he holds dear are unimportant or easily expendable, but merely that negative liberty should not be sacrificed entirely in order to realise these other goals or values.

He is similarly preoccupied with moderating the demands for greater equality and more perfect forms of justice, not because he does not want to see more of these things in the world, but because a radical move towards these goals stands the risk of ruining the pursuit of other values. More economic equality, for instance, must be paid for in the form of massive and permanent government intervention into the economy. In turn this will transfer imprudent amounts of power into the hands of the state and threaten individual liberty also on other scores than the purely economic one (Berlin 1956; Walzer 1983:xi-xiv). The central insights of ethical pluralism is that few things of any value come for free, and that we must learn to live with uneasy compromises whenever we try to reform our way of organising society. As Rawls said in one of his most Berlinian moments, "there is no social world without loss" (Rawls 1996:197). These ideas have clear political implications, not in the sense that they lead to any detailed programme for political action, but because they reflect a cautious optimism towards our ability to make a better world for ourselves and our posterity, and a dark fear that we instead might do the exact opposite.

The spirit of compromise that permeates so much of his ethical theorising is taken almost directly from his support of pluralism. But this is not the same as to say that ethical pluralism lies hidden at the bottom of all liberal conclusions, or that ethical monism is necessarily inimical to liberalism (cf. Shklar 1989:28-29; Galston 1999). Rather, political conclusions are often underdetermined by metaethical affinities and moral convictions. They are frequently also made out of practical experience and the lessons drawn from history as well as non-moral considerations like personal gains or group interests.

Berlin's liberal conclusions are grounded in a larger view of the world in which his rejection of ethical monism and his scepticism towards grand theories, ideologies and prophesies play a leading part. He is basically a liberal because he rejects the alternatives, and not because he believes liberalism to be the product of divine inspiration, the unalterable flow of history or other purportedly impeccable mechanisms. If one accepts ethical pluralism, it will have consequences for one's general outlook, but it will not, at least by way of strict entailment, lead to political conclusions at a more detailed level. What an acceptance of pluralism will do for the handling of political problems is rather, I will argue, that it adds a sense of awe and wonder to the enterprise of political theory and practice, and a prudent humility towards our prospects of reaching ultimate solutions in moral and political matters. This I think also is the core of Berlin's political beliefs, making him the liberal sceptic and gradualist he described himself as.

3.3 After Berlin

Berlin's pluralistic liberalism has been the inspiration for many works in political theory over the last few years. While I in this study could not even hope to comment on all of them in their entirety, it will be necessary to mention at least some of these authors and their efforts – In his closest students and colleagues as well as those larger works written on Berlin's thought (Galipeau 1994; Gray 1996). While these short remarks could not hope to give justice to any author taking part in the debate on

pluralistic liberalism, the goal remains to present a frame of reference that makes the other discussions below more intelligible and relevant to the reader.

Berlin was never one to compress his thoughts into more austere forms of theoretical writing. Of his texts, most are written for a specific occasion or as the result of him being asked to write about a certain topic. The majority of his texts are also broad, literary essays concerning a given period or author, whose primary intent was never to spread light upon Berlin's own views or current issues in philosophy or political theory. Even in his more theoretical works, he generally writes in a style reminiscent of the literary essay. One of the greatest risks in writing about Berlin, and one that several authors have fallen for, is that there lies a temptation to try and raise his theories to the higher level of abstraction one has grown accustomed to in political theory over the last few decades. More than once, Berlin felt compelled to comment on attempts to use a few quotes from his more famous texts as a runway for even more unconventional flights of thought (cf. e.g. Kocis 1983; West 1993; Crowder 1994; Berlin 1983; 1993; Berlin and Williams 1994).

But during the course of the last few years, one has also seen the publication of several articles, and a few books as well, focusing in the main on Berlin's life and thought (Hardy 2001a). Prominent among his apologists are of course his long-time editor and later his literary trustee Henry Hardy (cf. e.g. 2000; 2002a), along with another of his literary trustees, Alan Ryan (cf. e.g. 1996; 1999; 2001). Equally important from among Berlin's younger Oxonian colleagues are Bernard Williams (cf. especially 1979; 1999; 2003) and Steven Lukes, who has even written a novel with a strange, pluralistic moral to it (Lukes 1991; 1994; 1995). What these four and Claude Galipeau (1994) have in common is their belief that there is no fundamental or ineffaceable contradiction between an endorsement of ethical pluralism and a broad liberal perspective. All these writers tend to put pluralism centre stage when reviewing Berlin, but they also reject the thought put forward by others that his pluralism leads to cultural relativism or other positions detrimental to an endorsement of any kind of liberalism.

But before I move on to examine Gray's "post-liberal" and Kekes' conservative pluralism in the next chapter, I would like to take the opportunity to illustrate the girth of pluralistic liberalism by focusing for a while on two liberal theorists, Charles Larmore and Joseph Raz, who have very different understandings of what liberalism is, and yet they both end up supporting ethical pluralism. While Larmore views liberalism as a parsimonious political doctrine neutral among rival views of the good life, Raz' version of liberalism is centred on the belief that individual autonomy is intrinsically important, and that autonomy-supportive conceptions of the good life ought to be favoured over other possible value-systems. Consequently, where Larmore sets the stage for a state in which rival conceptions of the good are neither encouraged nor discouraged, Raz wants the government to put a damper on those cultural traits that are hostile to personal autonomy (cf. especially Raz 1986; 2003; Larmore 1987; 1990; 1996). On a scale ranging from "parsimonious" to "ambitious", few liberal theorists are further apart than Larmore and Raz, and yet they both end up favouring ethical pluralism of the Berlinian type.

Liberalism is by and large a product of religious and moral diversity and the political problems such diversity created in a Europe that had previously grown accustomed to uniformity in confessional matters. Understood as a political doctrine, it is the end-product of a long and painful learning process in which the merits of tolerance and pacific relations are finally and reluctantly appreciated as the best way to avoid the horrors of all-out conflicts on matters of doctrine. Value pluralism is the belief that human ideals are many and that there is not any one single ideal that absorbs or trumps all other considerations, and it seems likely that it has grown out of the same lessons from history that led to the establishment of liberal, political arrangements. It is perhaps not the only way of giving liberalism support in a wider view of morality, but it remains that it is one possible way of giving grounds for supporting liberal practices and policies.

When they are viewed in this manner as a combination, liberalism and pluralism becomes mutually supportive theories. But that need not always be the case. Instead, there have been more than a few an attempts at upholding one of them

and rejecting the other. Dworkin's explicitly monistic liberalism has already been mentioned, but those thinkers I will focus on in the next chapter are of the opposite kind as they endorse value pluralism and reject what they think of as liberalism.

4. Pluralism and Liberalism II: Non-liberal pluralism

It is commonly held that value-pluralism supports liberalism as a political ideal. The truth is nearer the opposite. If a pluralist account of the human good is true, the claims of fundamentalist liberalism are spurious. From the standpoint of value-pluralism, all conflicts between rival claims about the best life for humankind are collisions of illusions. Universal religions fall into this category. So do most Enlightenment political philosophies.

-- John Gray[4]

4.1 Gray: Abandoning liberalism for pluralism

It might very well have been no debates on Berlin, were it not for the recently made claims from John Gray (cf. 1996; 2000) and John Kekes (cf. 1993; 1997; 1998), that value pluralism does not lead to liberalism, and in fact leads away from it. Up until the time they began to let their voices be heard, the predominant belief was that value pluralism and liberalism were indeed combinable, with arguments to the contrary being both infrequent and left in obscurity (cf. though MacCallum 1967a).

But where Gray is driven by his growing acceptance of value pluralism, and indeed a highly personal variety of it at that, to what he eventually ends up calling "post-liberalism", Kekes is led, heavily indebted to Michael Oakeshott (cf. 1962; 1975; 2004), towards conservatism. Among Berlin's interpreters, also, none have received such a wide audience and so many provoked responses as John Gray's book *Isaiah Berlin,* which in spite of its highly contentious and provocative style has revitalised and changed the debates over Berlin's thought in general and particularly his, according to Gray failed, synthesis of liberalism and pluralism (Gray 1996; cf. Hardy 2001a). Today, anyone that wishes to discuss the moral and political theories of Isaiah Berlin is forced to comment to some degree on Gray's book and his subsequent work and to a lesser extent the works of Kekes.

As a political theorist, John Gray comes across to many commentators as a "singularly mobile" thinker (Lukes 1995, cf. also Ryan 2001). In the first half of the

[4] (2000:21)

1980's, he wrote learned volumes on the political thought of Mill and Hayek, and revealed himself there as mainly sympathetic to their versions of liberalism, gaining even the acclaim of the latter author (Gray 1983; 1984). Later, he gradually became more and more hostile towards liberalism in any variety, developing over time the theory he gave the name "post-liberalism" (Gray 1989; 1993; 1995; 1995a; 1997). "Post-liberalism" is indeed a syncretic political theory, but its body and soul is to be found in the upsurge of communitarianism and conservatism in the 1980's. The liberal tradition is, along with the rest of the Enlightenment impulse, viewed by Gray as "dead", all due to the alleged and sudden collapse of the "modern" era (cf. especially 1989, pp. 239-266 and 283-328).

During the same period, he also wrote books which caught the high tide of both environmentalism and the anti-globalisation movement, in which he attempted to mix these novelties with conservative and communitarian concerns, as well as with an all-out critique of what he, following MacIntyre (1981), with contempt calls "the Enlightenment project" (Gray 1993a; 1998a). Still more recently, his always antagonistic analysis of Enlightenment, "modernity" and liberalism has lead him to analyse the growth and violence of Al-Qaeda in his overall scheme of things, as warriors for an alternative "modernism" (Gray 2003). For the purposes of this study, however, what he has written on Berlin and more generally on liberalism and the prospects of combining it with value pluralism go right to the heart of the matter (Gray 1996; 1998; 2000).

On his own terms, Gray is an intriguing theorist of ethical pluralism, developing what may be described as a much more radical form of pluralism than what Berlin ever subscribed to. Already in one of his earlier pieces on the anatomy of value pluralism is this willingness to adopt a more radical and anti-Berlinian type of pluralism developed, incorporating his cultural relativism mentioned earlier: "Objective pluralism of the sort advanced here recognizes incommensurabilities among generic human goods and evils as well as incommensurabilities between (and within) specific cultures or forms of life" (Gray 1989:292). He also explicitly interprets value incommensurability in the radical mode rejected by Berlin and

Williams (1994) in their reply to Crowder's (1994) queries on the said topic (cf. sections 2.2.1 and 5.1): "Berlin's master-thesis of value-pluralism, which is the thesis of the incommensurability, *or incomparability by reason,* of rivalrous goods and evils and forms of life (…)" (Gray 1996:142, emphasis added).

This is, I believe, the crux of his Berlinian exegesis, in which he develops his belief that ethical pluralism is not companionable with a liberal outlook, and consequently that Berlin's thinking is marred by inner tensions and contradictions, or "haunted by uncertainties" (ibid, p. 156). To put it in his words, *"[w]hat does follow from the truth of pluralism is that liberal institutions can have no universal authority. Where liberal values come into conflict with others which depend for their existence on non-liberal social and political structures and forms of life, and where these values are truly incommensurables, there can – if pluralism is true – be no argument according universal priority to liberal values"* (Gray 1996:155). The problem with this sweeping indictment of Berlins liberal pluralism is, however, that the argument explicitly builds on notions of pluralism and liberalism it is doubtful anyone before him, Berlin included, have entertained. Neither the pluralism he exalts nor the liberalism he rejects is found anywhere in the preceding debates on Berlin's legacy.

Gray's theory on liberalism is quite tangibly marked by a profound sense of disillusion. This is at its most visible in his latest book on the subject, namely his *Two Faces of Liberalism*, in which his "post-liberal" theory alluded to earlier reach a state of maturity (Gray 2000). Post-liberalism could however hardly be described as a comprehensive critique of the standing, liberal order. Instead, the scorn he has for what he, not entirely without bias designates as "fundamentalist liberalism" (Gray 2000:21) is, in part at least balanced by a tentative admiration for "the liberalism of peaceful coexistence" (ibid, p. 2). What Gray rejects is the new liberal theory bent at devising an ultimate and globally applicable legal framework establishing detailed policies to ensure the realisation of some abstract ideal of justice, liberty or equality, with prominent representatives in Rawls and Hayek and with precursors in the thought of Locke and Kant (ibid.). In order to meet the demands of what Gray and many others often confused and always rather confusingly call "post-modernism", he wants liberal theorists to take their cues from what he views as less ambitious, pre-

Enlightenment “liberals” like Hobbes and Hume, and more recently Oakeshott and Berlin (cf. Gray 2000, especially pp. 1-33; cf. also Galston 1995). Liberals, he asserts, ought to stop searching for a rational consensus on the political aspects of matters pertaining to the good life, and settle for a less ambitious plan of formulating rules of thumb for a *modus vivendi* between peoples and communities that disagree in such matters (Gray 2000, especially pp. 1-33, 105-139).

Pluralism, that is, the radicalised variety he himself espouses, does not prescribe, according to Gray, which values or how many of them one ought to encourage (Gray 1996:38-75). But rather than adopting the moderate approach formulated by Bernard Williams (1999), and probably supported by Berlin, that one should forge a balance between as many objective values as possible, Gray seems to suggest that one instead should adopt the values of the community or culture one is born into and combine it with a wholesale admiration of variety and diversity. Culturally diverse societies should therefore not encourage minorities to integrate or foster acculturation between its various communities. Instead, Gray suggests, one should merely try to minimise friction between the constituent groups and communities that form a society (Gray 1998). In such an endeavour, one should not only let oneself be inspired by the “liberalism of peaceful coexistence”, but also by “soft” authoritarian regimes that emphasise domestic tranquillity, like those of the Ottoman empire in the *tanzimât* period in the nineteenth century and in more recent times the autocratic regime in Singapore under Lee Kuan Yew (Gray 1998; 2000).

According to Gray, Berlin’s case for liberalism under pluralism is flawed especially because Berlin supposedly fails to argue from value pluralism to liberalism, understood as a political theory in which negative liberty is prioritised in every case it conflicts with other values, be it non-liberal ones or other liberal ideals and goals. In fact, Berlin of course never made such an attempt, because he never thought negative liberty should be prioritised in every instance of value conflict to begin with (cf. especially Gray 1996:141-168; Berlin 2002:1-54). With his radicalised interpretation of what it means for values to be incommensurable as a fundamental premise together with his side order of cultural relativism mentioned

above (cf. section 2.2.1), he sets out to refute the arguments made by Berlin and others for any kind of synthesis between value pluralism and liberalism being even remotely possible. But while his arguments against moral pluralism leading to an endorsement of liberal policies must seem like a catastrophic blow to Berlin's perspective, they are based on a perfunctory reading of Berlin, as well as on a controversial understanding of what the claims of value pluralism are, and indeed what kind of theory liberalism is.

Instead of commenting on and interpreting Berlin's thought in general, he has it seems an entirely different agenda, namely to abandon his former political beliefs and at the same time attempt to enlist Berlin as a fellow-traveller in his flight from anything that reminds him of liberalism or Enlightenment-style rationalism, which to Gray is merely two aspects of the same phenomenon, equally obsolete after the supposed collapse of "modernity" and the dawn of the "post-modern" epoch. Liberalism is to Gray *the* political theory of the by now concluded "modern" era, and, we are led to believe, thoroughly outmanoeuvred by the collapse of "the Enlightenment" and its accompanying belief in the genuine possibility of progress (cf. Wheen 2004, especially pp. 187-190). His project is therefore, it seems, to "rescue" value pluralism, which he evidently believes in, albeit in his own personal rendering of it, from the supposedly dead hand of liberalism, which he repudiates in the strongest publishable vocabulary possible.

In his view, there is no room for pragmatic concerns in a thoroughly liberal position; it all has to be abstract principles and abstruse theory. Anyone that adheres to liberalism must be a fanatic, bent on saving everyone else from what liberals themselves classify as barbarism and ignorance. The only self-proclaimed liberal with which he finds some counteractive traits is in fact Berlin, with the other "liberals" of "peaceful coexistence" either predating the concept of liberalism altogether like Hobbes and Hume do, or describing themselves as conservatives in the manner of Oakeshott (cf. Gray 2000:2; Oakeshott 1962:168-196).

Gray (1996:152) asks, commenting on the last paragraphs of the *Two Concepts of Liberty*, "if diversity comes into conflict with liberty, and the diversity is that of

worthwhile forms of life expressive of genuine human needs and embodying authentic varieties of human flourishing, why should liberty always trump diversity – especially if one is a value-pluralist?" And indeed the fact that Gray even asks this question is in my view indicative of his less than indulgent reading of Berlin's works. What Berlin asserted was rather that pluralism would entail a "measure of 'negative' liberty" (Berlin 2002:216), and not that some values would always be more important than others. Negative liberty is an important concern for Berlin in the pages of *Two Concepts* (Berlin 2002:166-217), but nowhere is it found that he views it as an overriding value or as what Gray dubs as a "trump".

Instead, Berlin would probably be open to the suggestion that his concern for negative liberty could be outweighed by competing values and goals. It is not clear if Berlin thought of diversity as an intrinsic or fundamental value on par with justice, liberty or decency like Gray evidently does, but if he did I am hard pressed to find textual evidence for Gray's contention that it would always be outweighed by negative liberty under Berlin's theory. Berlin's liberal theory is clearly of a more pragmatic flavour than the "fundamentalist" attitudes Gray categorically assigns to the typical liberal, and it seems that Gray jumps the gun a bit in his presentation of Berlin's thought, supplementing his theories with subtle additions of his own that, as it turns out, has far-reaching consequences. But even if one assumed that some liberals deserved to be called "fundamentalist" in their liberalism as suggested by Gray (2000:21), it seems particularly inappropriate to use this adjective when referring to Berlin: The liberalism Gray rejects on the grounds of his radicalised pluralism is essentially not Berlin's: "[W]hen he [Gray] closes the trap, Berlin is not inside. The fox is still running" (Walzer 1995).

But Gray's question might also be turned around to his own version of value pluralism: Why should, one might ask, diversity matter so much that it trumps out our concerns over for instance truth or liberty? If all three are among the fundamental human values that under pluralism are thought of as objective, incommensurable and conflicting, why should we choose diversity over the other two? If an all-out concern for diversity forces a certain proportion of humanity to live in ignorance and

bondage, why should we not choose to be concerned instead on behalf of these other values? This highly natural question is not answered or even raised by Gray. In any way, his alternative vision of a world in which diversity is furthered by means of establishing a precarious co-existence between liberal and anti-liberal cultures and subcultures alike does not seem to be more closely matched to pluralism in any form anymore than the moderate and cautious liberalism Berlin and many others have preferred. If one assumes moral pluralism to be true, we live in a world in which objective human values and ends perpetually collide with each other. In such a situation, we are forced to choose in one way or another, but it remains thoroughly unclear, then, why we should not opt for those values that form the core of the liberal tradition, and instead enter yet another age of particularisms and divisions between peoples, nations and creeds.

4.2 Kekes: Pluralism and conservatism

Kekes too rejects the idea that pluralism is hospitable to liberalism, but in addition he asserts that it instead leads to a specific and highly idiosyncratic version of conservatism heavily indebted to the theoretical and political thought of Michael Oakeshott. In fact, I think, an argument corresponding to the one raised against Gray above could be made for an assertion that what Kekes has shown is not that liberalism broadly understood is incompatible with *Berlinian* value pluralism, but rather that *Oakeshott's* variety of pluralism has some conservative conclusions that are not easily combinable with a liberal perspective on politics. Kekes sweepingly criticises the more recent liberal theory for being both shallow and naïve, but fails to repudiate those aspects of the American constitution and form of government that non-Americans are likely to view as liberal, for instance the constraints on federal authorities codified in the Bill of Rights (cf. Kekes 1997; 1998).

Kekes is however, at least by virtue of self-description, a conservative (ibid.). He is also a value pluralist that acknowledges his debt to Berlin's theories (cf. Kekes 19993:xi). His enmities lies however not primarily with liberal values or practical arrangements *tout court*, but with certain aspects of more recent liberal theory, most

notably its supposed anti-traditionalism and its dogmatic adherence to abstract principles. His goal is, it seems, not to overturn the present, liberal order of things, but to expose the folly he finds in liberal, political theory, and its inherent conflict with pluralism as both concepts are understood by him (cf. e.g. Kekes 1993; 1997; 1998; cf. also Oakeshott 1962; 2004; Coats 1985; Franco 1990; 2003).

Oakeshott's conservative pluralism, on which Kekes builds his overall argument against the Berlinian synthesis of liberalism and pluralism, is part of a greater philosophical structure that begins with a rejection of what Oakeshott himself rather idiosyncratically calls Rationalism, which eventually engulfs the thought of almost every philosopher since the sixteenth century, beginning with Descartes and Bacon (cf. especially Oakeshott 1962). With such an outlook, he is certainly far removed from much of the political and ethical theorising of our times, which does make it difficult to separate his pluralism from the rest of his philosophical system-building. For this reason, Kekes' exposition of value pluralism deviates thoroughly from Crowder's and Galston's point of view (cf. chapter 5 below), which to a greater degree is focused on Berlin's perspective on morality (cf. e.g. Kekes 1993:17-37; Crowder 2002: 44-73; Galston 2002).

Kekes' style of reasoning is definitely more conventional than Oakeshott's, and his project is, it seems, to argue against the new liberal theory from the perspective of his own version of pluralism – a pluralism that definitely owes more to Oakeshott than it does to Berlin and Lamprecht. He then moves on to conclude that pluralism, as elaborated by himself, is at odds with liberalism, defined narrowly as the attitudes of some more recent liberal theorists (Kekes 1993:199-217; cf. also Kekes 1997; 1998; Lukes 1994a). In the end, however, little is lost because he turns pluralism into an integral part of his highly personal conservatism, in which liberalism is rejected in name, but where the ideals of the framers of the American constitution and the concerns of Tocqueville remain firmly embedded in his general perspective. As far as conservatives go, he is clearly of a broadly speaking liberal "persuasion" in spite of his attacks on liberal theory, echoing the uniquely American "neoconservative" syncretism in this respect. In the words of its most prominent

progenitor, Irving Kristol, neoconservatives are in part defined by their wish for "a return to the original sources of liberal vision and liberal energy so as to correct the warped version of liberalism that is today's orthodoxy" (Kristol 1983.75; cf. also Sen 1984; Wolfson 2004). Whatever one might say about the prudence of the recent foreign policy recommendations of these "neocons", it is clear that they, and probably Kekes with them, is hardly as thoroughly anti-liberal as they on occasion present themselves as.

Towards the end of his earliest book on the subject, *The Morality of Pluralism*, he states his overall perspective on the political consequences of value pluralism in the form of a question (Kekes 1993:199): *"[W]e may note that pluralism is committed to the view that there is no particular value that, in conflicts with other values, always takes justifiable precedence over them. By contrast, if liberalism is to avoid the charge of vacuity, it must be committed to holding that in cases of conflict the particular values liberals favour do take justifiable precedence over other values. How then, could liberalism and pluralism be compatible?"*

But even if it is the case that a genuinely pluralistic perspective on morality could not dictate that a "particular value" could "always" take "justifiable precedence" over "other values", it remains opaque why this will lead to a rejection of liberalism as such: It is only with Kekes' added, anti-Berlinian interpretation of what it means for two values to be incommensurable that this notion becomes even remotely intelligible (cf. especially Ryan 1999). For one, he assumes that there are fundamental human values that are always and unalterably inimical to a liberal ordering of society, but it is not at all clear why this must be so. Why can it not rather be the case that liberals and non-liberals alike share an internally incompatible set of incommensurable values, and that they only differ in their *interpretation* of these values and how they are best furthered and preserved?

This seems also to be the perspective adopted by Berlin, at least in the *Two Concepts of Liberty* (Berlin 2002:166-217). Unlike Kekes and Gray, Berlin does not seem to propound the view that there indeed are uniquely liberal values that non-liberals do not share: Liberty, for instance, is not a liberal innovation, and it was, both in its negative and its positive variant, valued long before anybody started using the

concepts “liberal” and “liberalism” as we do today in the nineteenth century. The same goes, also, for equality, justice, truth and fraternity and all the other values liberals have taken up from their past and made into their own.

In conclusion, I am tempted to say that none of these theorists offer conclusive or even remotely convincing arguments to support a claim that pluralism leads away from liberalism. Gray and Kekes are clearer in this belief than their predecessor Oakeshott ever was, but they tend to understand both pluralism and liberalism in a rather creative way, and so, one could suspect, reach the conclusions they set out to find at the beginning. For this reason, their attacks on liberalism from a pluralistic perspective on morality miss its Berlinian target. It might very well be true that some versions of pluralism is indeed detrimental to some kinds of liberal, political thinking, but no argument is made to support the view that value pluralism in general is always incompatible with *any* brand of liberalism.

As mentioned earlier, Berlin claimed to be a liberal, but of a sceptical and gradualist persuasion, invoking nineteenth century liberal authors and theorists with similar tastes to his support. The point Gray and Kekes is making is in effect not that pluralism is incompatible with liberalism of this moderate and tentative hue, but rather the less disturbing claim that pluralism as they have elaborated it is not companionable with certain kinds of more recent liberal theory – a liberal theory Berlin certainly could not have anticipated in his earlier works, and did not take seriously enough to write about later in his life. Ultimately, it is only their *pars pro toto* view of liberalism and liberal thinking, along with the creativity with which they expound pluralism, that makes them feel compelled as pluralists to entertain an all out rejection of liberalism.

5. Pluralism and Liberalism III: Reconciliation

A liberal polity guided (as I believe it should be) by a commitment to moral and political pluralism will be parsimonious in specifying binding public principles and cautious about employing such principles to intervene in the internal affairs of civil associations. It rather will pursue a policy of maximum feasible accommodation, limited only by the core requirements of individual security and civic unity.

-- William Galston[5]

5.1 Crowder: Pluralism and liberalism reconciled

The claim that there are either conservative or "post-liberal" conclusions awaiting the pluralist as he descends from metaethics into politics have in recent times been disputed by, most notably, George Crowder and William Galston. Instead, they argue, there is no reason to suspect that value pluralism would be detrimental to liberal commitments. Quite the contrary, they make it seem as if the combination of liberalism and pluralism is almost a perfect match, meaning that pluralists should embrace liberalism, and that liberals, and everyone else, should acknowledge the validity of pluralism. Their arguments for this is, however, quite different as they seem to emphasise different aspects of the liberal tradition.

Crowder, for one, sets out to refute the contentions of Gray and Kekes on a purely theoretical level, producing an elaborate argument depicting a state of harmony between liberalism and pluralism (Crowder 2002). His project is summed up as an attempt "to steer a course between the inadequacy of past attempts to argue from pluralism to liberalism and the precipitancy of recent claims that deny the possibility of such an argument altogether" (ibid, p. 258). This echoes the argument he made in his first article on the subject, in which he claimed that the elaborations of a pluralistic liberalism that had surfaced so far from the pages of Berlin and others were insufficient for making a compelling case for pluralism leading to liberal conclusions (Crowder 1994). In this article he concurs with Gray (1991; 1996) and

[5] (1999:875)

Kekes (1993), claiming in effect that value conflict and incommensurability entails that choices between alternative courses of conduct embodying different values must be “underdetermined by reason” and hence of an arbitrary nature (Crowder 1994:295). The outcome of decisions involving liberal and illiberal options is for this reason not given to the committed pluralist. Instead, he concludes that pluralism does not lead to any concrete political attitudes, and that those who want to argue from pluralism to liberalism must do so by way of historical, pragmatic or cultural inferences, a situation he finds “less than ideal” (Crowder 1994:305).

This article provoked an unusually concise response from Berlin and Bernard Williams (1994), and one in which they endeavour to defend their common contention that pluralism will lead to an endorsement of traditional, liberal commitments in political matters. In it, they move the question of the reasonableness of choices under value pluralism to the forefront, a question that quickly divides theorists of pluralism into two groups, one having a moderate interpretation of pluralism and liberal conclusions, the other entertaining a more radical pluralism and not-so-liberal political views. The divisive issue centres on the question of what it means that two values are incommensurable with each other – Whether it only means that there cannot exist a general rule of priority between them in which one is always deemed more important than the other, or whether it is the more radical idea “that in each particular case, reason has nothing to say (i.e. there is nothing reasonable to be said) about which should prevail over the other” (Berlin and Williams 1994:307). Berlin and Williams goes on to proclaim that the latter view of incommensurability is “obviously false”, and one that leads to the barren lands of moral scepticism and anti-rationalism, if anywhere at all (ibid.).

Instead, they say, there are a lot of other conflict-resolving resources available to the decision-maker faced with a choice between actions representing conflicting and equally fundamental values. Only in the abstract are such choices always problematic or irresolvable. In concrete situations other considerations will, at least in most cases, make decision-making a less daunting task. Especially important to them in the debate over liberalism under pluralism are the historical and practical

considerations Crowder in his article finds so unsatisfying: “[I]t is from social and historical reality that we are likely to be instructed in liberalism’s strengths, and to be reminded of the brutal and fraudulent simplifications which, as a matter of fact, are the usual offerings of its actual enemies” (Berlin and Williams 1994:309). *Their* argument for liberalism (cf. e.g. Berlin 2002:208-217; Williams 1999) is therefore not to be understood as made up of solid, logical pathways between pluralism and liberalism, but rather of a more tentative and historically informed kind.

The rationale behind Crowder’s subsequent efforts on this topic is based on an acceptance of the first of Berlin and Williams’ counter-arguments and a rejection of the second. He abandons his earlier stance that choices between alternative actions embodying conflicting values must be “underdetermined by reason” in each case, but remains committed to the view that any satisfying version of pluralistic liberalism must be supplied with a firm *theoretical* link between its constituent components (cf. especially Crowder 1996; 1999). Pluralists should not merely be persuaded by the apparent successes of liberal, political regimes and policies or be equally discouraged by the cruelties and atrociousness one usually finds in thoroughly anti-liberal arrangements, but must seek further than that in order to arrive at a relationship of logical entailment between liberalism and pluralism.

This is what he claims to have achieved in his book *Liberalism and Value Pluralism* (Crowder 2002). His argument for there being such a logical connection unfolds in four steps: In the first, liberalism is described as adherence to “four main values or principles”, namely “the equal moral worth of individuals”, “individual liberties and rights, limited government and private property” (ibid, p. 22). These, I gather, are not all that controversial assumptions to make, even if liberal theorists disagree with each other on the relative importance of such liberal values and on how one should set out defending or realising them. Interestingly enough, at least in the context of the argument for a liberal pluralism submitted by Galston (1995; 1999; 2002) and described below, Crowder aligns himself with the view that liberalism is based in “Enlightenment values” of personal autonomy and political rationality,

rather than it being a less ambitious “post-Reformation”-style programme for limited government (cf. Crowder 2003; Waldron 1987; Shklar 1989).

Crowder (2002, especially pp. 26-42, 218-226) assumes the view that liberalism is best understood in a way that accords global authority to liberal values, what he and others have called “universalism”, and which is contrasted to the opposite or “particularistic” perspective in which liberal values are thought of as made in and to the benefit of only some societies or cultures. He also believes that it is a legitimate goal for governments to install a sense of conscious adherence to liberal principles or a liberal conception of the good life in its citizenry, and thus perfecting the ‘liberality’ of liberal society. This position, usually dubbed “perfectionism” is at odds with a position based on “neutrality” between competing conceptions of the good life. On the question of economic policies, also, he favours egalitarian or redistributive liberalism over the classical or libertarian strand of the liberal tradition (cf. especially Crowder 2002:226-236). In essence, the liberalism he tends to show as being congenial to pluralism will prioritise the first and second of the “four main values” at the expense, potentially, of the third and fourth.

The second step in his argument consists of defining value pluralism in a way that accommodates the objections raised by Berlin and Williams to his first attempt at doing so. He identifies four components or principles inherent to the pluralistic outlook (cf. Crowder 2002:44-73 and section 2.2.1 above). The crucial move he makes is undoubtedly his reinterpretation of the notion of incommensurability in which he abandons the belief he formerly held, in concert with Gray and Kekes, that choices between actions embodying conflicting values are always “underdetermined by reason”. Instead, he now concludes that the context in which the choice between such values arises will in most cases be sufficient to arrive at a reasonably rational decision. Incommensurable values are thus no longer seen as strictly *incomparable* in each instance of decision, inducing a situation in which “reason has nothing to say” to what is the better option, but rather as being merely *unrankable in the abstract* (Crowder 2002:49-54). With this, much of the “subversiveness” of value pluralism is removed. It becomes possible, or so we are led to believe, to choose rationally

between alternative modes of conduct, policies or actions that personify different moral values in a given context or situation, even if comparisons between abstract values and ideals are still thought of as less than compelling.

As he moves from the second to the third and fourth stages in his argument, he also descends from the level of concept analysis and into a more practical brand of political theory. The third step amounts, basically, to an affirmation of Berlin's anti-Utopianism and anti-authoritarianism as being direct consequences of a pluralist outlook. According to Crowder, and it is difficult to see any possible counter-arguments to his view, anti-Utopianism flows naturally from pluralism: If pluralism is true, then visions of societal perfection become incoherent notions at the outset. For Crowder, however, "there remains a considerable gap between the dismissal of utopian politics and the endorsement of liberalism" (Crowder 2002:97).

But he also rejects the various attempts at devising non-liberal conclusions from a manifestly pluralistic starting-point. When reviewing the works of Gray and Kekes, he hardly has room for any words of approval at all. As mentioned earlier, however, their differences are theoretical as well as political, and the reasons they have for nominally repudiating liberalism stems to a large degree from perspectives on both pluralism and liberalism that deviates from Crowder's own. Particularly important is perhaps their conflicting views on what it means to be liberal. While Kekes and Gray rather rhetorically wish to equate liberalism not with broad commitments to for instance liberty and limited government, but more narrowly with some recent instances of ambitious theorising, Crowder seems more willing to build on a less controversial understanding of it.

Pluralism is also understood in different ways by the various authors: Kekes and Gray maintains their more radical view of what it means for values to be incommensurable, while Crowder turns toward the more moderate perspective formulated by Berlin and Williams (1994). This "technical" and rather abstruse conflict, it seems, is quite momentous as they all move from the ethical to the political sphere. It is their idiosyncratic views on these matters that lead Kekes and Gray away from the liberal conclusions Berlin made, and also the principal objection

Crowder brings to the forefront against their non-liberal conclusions (cf. Crowder 2002:78-131).

The fourth and final level in Crowder's argument is his attempt to construct a positive case for liberalism from pluralistic assertions, and also, it seems, from theoretical premises alone. This he does from three separate angles. The first argument he makes, the "argument from diversity", is based on the contention that diversity and coherence, both counted among the fundamental values and frequently at odds with each other, are best realised in a society that strikes a balance between the two, specifically a liberal society (Crowder 2002:135-157; cf. also Williams 1999). Conversely, Crowder deems it unsound to sacrifice too much "coherence" in order to achieve greater overall variety, a view he not without justice attributes to Gray in his most "post-modern" moments.

The second argument, what one might call an "argument from reasonable disagreement", is heavily indebted to the works of Charles Larmore and John Rawls, and focuses on their common concept of reasonable disagreement. Value pluralism comes into this, according to Crowder, as a way of making the supposed reasonableness of disagreement into an intelligible notion. But even if both Larmore (1996:152-174) and Rawls (1996:54-58) seem to build on pluralistic premises, Crowder believes they could have made this connection more explicitly. The question is, it seems, what kind of disagreements could be deemed "reasonable" under a monistic theory of morality. If there really is one and only one true answer to every moral question, then how can reasonable disagreements arise at all? Would not rather every kind of disagreements in moral matters be strictly speaking unreasonable from the monistic perspective? Larmore's contention is basically that the concept of reasonable disagreement and the corresponding ideal of tolerance do not make sense under a "monistic view of the good life" (Larmore 1987:23). If we want a political theory that takes into consideration that some clashes of ideals and values are of a sort where more than one of the parties have claims to reason and reasonableness, then we must, so the argument goes, base it in value pluralism.

The third argument intended to forge a link between pluralism and liberalism, the "virtue argument", is the last piece in Crowder's puzzle, and is based in what he views as similarities between liberal and pluralist virtues. The "pluralist virtues" he emphasises – generosity, realism, attentiveness and flexibility – overlaps to a considerable degree with "liberal virtues" like broad-mindedness, moderation, personal autonomy and attention to values, situations and places (cf. Walzer 1995 (on pluralist virtues) and Macedo 1990; Galston 1991 (on liberal virtues).

Everywhere we turn, Crowder leads us to believe, we find either that insights central to the liberal outlook tacitly presupposes value pluralism, as in the argument from reasonable disagreement or the virtue argument, or that pluralist concerns are best taken care of in broadly liberal political arrangements, as in the argument from diversity. But does Crowder succeed in making a definitive argument in favour liberalism from pluralistic premises? The answer must be one marked with a measure of ambivalence. On one side, he does supply the pluralistic liberal with three rather compelling arguments in his favour. On the other side, however, he does seem to underestimate the potential for combining liberalism with monistic, ethical theories, most notably the more stringent varieties of Kantianism and utilitarianism. It must also be said that he, like all the other theorists of pluralism mentioned here, leaves the more technical sides of their arguments, in part at least, unfinished.

5.2 Galston: Pluralism and practical politics

Even if their basic conclusion is the same, namely that liberal policies go together quite well with a belief in value pluralism, Galston takes a different route to reaching this conclusion than Crowder does. While Crowder assumes a position in which personal autonomy is made into an important concern, Galston rejects this priority, and instead views *expressive* (or negative) liberty as what ought to be the main concern for liberals (cf. Crowder 2002; 2003; Galston 1995; 2002, especially pp. 9. 15-27). With considerable brevity, it could be said that where one focuses on the elements of liberal theory derived from Enlightenment thought and philosophical anthropology, the other eschews this view and instead sees the post-Reformation

project of finding a way of achieving peaceful co-existence in the face of stubborn diversity as the core of liberal theory and traditions.

In his book *Liberal Pluralism*, published almost simultaneously with Crowder's study, Galston (2002) follows up on several articles in which liberalism is to an ever increasing degree thought of in pluralistic terms. Like Crowder, he starts off with defining the basic concepts to his theory, namely pluralism and liberalism. But unlike Crowder he chooses a slightly more provocative stance on the question of what it means to be liberal, at least from the standpoint given by more recent liberal theory. The closest thing we come to an essence of liberalism is, according to Galston, what he calls *"the principle of expressive liberty"*, understood as a *"robust though rebuttable presumption in favour of individuals and groups leading their lives as they see fit, within a broad range of legitimate variation in accordance with their own understanding of what gives life meaning and value"* (Galston 2002:3). Protecting and enhancing a state of expressive liberty for the groups and individuals that a society comprises of are in other words an important, but not an overriding concern for liberals. And, he goes on to claim, *"I suggest that liberalism derives much of its power from its consistency with the account of the moral world offered by Isaiah Berlin and known as value pluralism"* (Galston 2002:4).

The main argument of his book proceeds in three distinct stages. In the first, he presents his own understanding of liberalism, downplaying the partisan tinge the concept has received in the United States and the frequent references to Enlightenment progressivism that abounds in much recent theorising. Instead, he wishes to focus on the parts of the liberal tradition that constitute a shared inheritance in American politics and elsewhere (Galston 1995; 2002:15-27). The second stage is an unravelling of the various political and theoretical consequences he sees as stemming from an acceptance of his liberal pluralism (cf. Galston 1999; 2002:28-78). The third and final stage is his thoughts on the practical consequences of adopting such a perspective, concentrated around those policy areas in which the demands for expressive liberty is in conflict with concerns over civic and political unity in the liberal state (cf. especially Galston 1991; 2002:81-132).

In defining liberalism, his quarrel lies primarily with those who assert that personal autonomy is the main ideal or value of liberalism, most notably perhaps Joseph Raz (1986; cf. Galston 2002:9). Instead, he suggests, a concern for diversity ought to be deemed just as important or perhaps even more so: *"Any liberal argument that invokes autonomy as a general rule of public action in effect takes sides in the ongoing struggle between reason and faith, reflection and tradition. Autonomy-based arguments are bound to marginalize those individuals and groups who cannot conscientiously embrace the Enlightenment impulse. To the extent that many liberals identify liberalism with the Enlightenment, they limit support for their cause and drive many citizens of goodwill – indeed many potential allies – into opposition"* (Galston 2002:25-26; cf. also Waldron 1987).

The next step in Galston's study is to devise, in a more detailed manner, a theory of liberal pluralism. In this, he attempts to wage what could be described as a three-front war. On one hand, he rejects those liberal theories that build on monism. On the other hand, however, he also shies away from the autonomy-centred and yet also pluralistic liberal theory of Joseph Raz, wishing to substitute it with a policy of "maximum feasible accommodation" of disagreement, inhibited only by the requirements of civic unity needed to uphold a democratic polity and political culture (cf. Galston 1999; 2002). The third conflict he engages himself in is with those theorists who contend that pluralism in fact leads away from liberalism, most notably the already mentioned authors Gray and Kekes.

There are "three sources" to his liberal theory, namely the valuing of expressive liberty, the support of value pluralism and finally the acknowledgement of what he calls political pluralism (cf. Galston 1999; 2002:28-38). The first of these he takes to be the starting-point of his liberal commitment – not justice, rationality or equality, but rather the basic freedom of individuals and groups to seek and find meaning to their existence, to pursue happiness as they see it without intrusion by the state, is the cornerstone of Galston's liberalism. From this principle, however, he does develop a characteristically pluralist interpretation of it: "Although expressive liberty is a good, it is not the only good, and it is certainly not unlimited" (Galston 2002:29).

This conditional commitment to expressive liberty that he deems to be at the roots of his liberalism fits, we are led to believe, rather snugly with the larger, theoretical framework of value pluralism he presents to his readers. He has nevertheless some way to go before one could be entirely convinced that he has managed to harmonise the degree of importance he accords to expressive liberty with the demands of pluralism. For Galston, however, it is "concrete experience", rather than elaborate theoretical conjecturing that provides him with "the most compelling reasons for accepting some form of value pluralism" (Galston 2002:33). Most importantly, he rejects value monism for being dependent on the metaphysical dogma that the appearance of moral conflict will simply go away if we try hard enough. Rather, it is thought, we must substitute these monistic theories, whose persuading force often lie in their elegance, with the more complicated but also the more truthful theory of moral pluralism.

The third basic ingredient in Galston's liberal pluralism is to be found in what he and others have called *political pluralism*. The perspective adopted is one indebted to several writers all sharing the belief that the state ought not to be conceived as a plenipotentiary power whose authority encompasses potentially every aspect of its citizens' life (cf. especially Hirst 1989). Instead, it is said, there ought to be multiple sources of authority over persons beyond the state such as ties of loyalty, kinship, civil associations and so forth. For this reason, the well-ordered state should not try to envelope all other sources of authority or bring them under its own control. The bare existence of non-governmental authority combined with the high costs at which political control of civil society and smaller, social groups come in all fairly complex societies is for Galston in itself an argument for insisting on broadly liberal policies.

These three building-blocks that form the basis of Galston's liberal pluralism is, moreover, neatly fitted together. Value pluralism, it is said, will lead to an acknowledgement of there being a wide variety of worthwhile personal objectives and lifestyles, which in turn leads to a heightened valuation of individual and group liberty (Galston 2002:37-38; cf. also Berlin 2002:212-217). Value pluralism is also said to support political pluralism: At the heart of the argument, it is the truth of value

pluralism that makes distinctly liberal values such as liberty and diversity into something valuable. If there really is one and only one true answer to every moral problem, then why should we value the freedom to stray from what is deemed to be the correct answers? Similarly, why should we want to value diversity, if it really is the case that there is only one type of good life? Without the support of value pluralism – without the acceptance of there being several roads to happiness and a meaningful existence or different types of good lives to be lived – Galston suggests that the reasons for valuing liberty and political pluralism vanishes.

The third and final part of Galston's book is concentrated around various discussions on issues of public policy. The three areas he focuses on are, in due order, the structure and limits of democratic institutions, the conflict between parents' rights and state regulation in the upbringing and education of children, and finally the role and boundaries of expressive liberty in the context of civil associations. While these discussions do not constitute a complete guideline to which policies the liberal pluralist should endorse, they do point in the direction of the kind of regimes that best suit Galston's overall theoretical framework.

On the issue of democracy, Galston argues on pluralist grounds against those who give it an "unquestioned normative priority": *"As a logical matter, the broad implication of value pluralism is clear. If there are no overriding values, then democracy cannot be such a value"* (Galston 2002:81). This does not mean, however, that he in any way rejects the kinds of limited and constitutionally restrained democracies we see in the world today. Rather it is the more radical varieties of democratic theory that receives his rebuff, especially those that view broad participation and thorough deliberation as a guarantee for arriving at the best possible solution to any given political problem (Galston 2002:81-92).

The kind of democratic constitution Galston envisions is one where numerous conflicting considerations are weighted against each other and power is spread out over several branches of government, making it possible to rely on something more robust that the whims of the electorate to uphold a liberal order. But the most important conclusion he reaches is that liberal pluralism will dictate that all forms of government, including democratic ones, must be limited by constitutional guarantees

that certain areas of life are not subject to political authority and public scrutiny, but rather remains the exclusive domain of individuals and those associations they freely choose to participate in.

The two other areas of public policy he mentions in his study, namely parents' rights in the education of their children and the scope of expressive liberty in civil associations and elsewhere are closely knit together. On the issue of parent's rights, Galston is one of the few that from an explicitly liberal position comes out in support of the claim made by some religious parents to have a greater say in their children's education. Most controversial is probably his siding with the majority of the United States Supreme Court (1972) in their decision to grant Amish and Mennonite parents the right to remove their children from school after the age of sixteen (cf. e.g. Arneson and Shapiro 1996; Burtt 1996; Galston 1995; 2002:93-109). This position is in turn based on his views about civil associations in general and specifically communities of faith (Galston 2002:110-123). Such associations, and their specific needs and demands, should be accommodated to the greatest degree possible, provided that such an accommodation is not detrimental to minimal requirements for public order and civic unity made on behalf of the state. "Within broad limits", he concludes, "civil associations may order their internal affairs as they see fit", given that "these associations may not coerce individuals to remain as members against their will, or create conditions that in practical terms make departure impossible" (Galston 2002:122). The liberty of individuals and groups are, as well as the health of the state, important concerns, but nonetheless not *overriding* concerns.

5.3 Preliminary remarks on pluralistic liberalism

At least, there seems to be no shortages of creativity and strife in the debates following Berlin's political theorising. Not only is there theorists who argue for or against what they perceive as liberalism from the starting-point of value pluralism, but also some disagreement among the liberal pluralists as to what kind of liberal perspective that is best suited to match the premises set up by pluralism. Reading

these authors put together, one could easily be led to the conclusion that almost anything could be inferred from basic, pluralist assumptions.

In certain respects, pluralism is a less elegant theory of morality than its monistic counterparts, making justification of given political arrangements into a more complex undertaking. For the pluralist side, what is lost in elegance and gained in complexity must be made up for in a more acute sensitivity towards the often crooked way of the world. It is in its ability to accommodate our considered judgements in immediate ethical and political problems one can find pluralism's strengths – strengths that compensate for its lack of simplicity and simple answers to hard questions. Its cumbersome nature might, I contend, actually become an advantage as it leaves more room for flexibility in practical considerations – a virtue that often determines whether a given policy initiative will be a success or a failure.

I want to argue in favour of two general propositions. In the first place, I submit the view that the arguments made so far in support of the assertion that an endorsement of moral pluralism leads away from *any* type of liberalism are insufficient. Secondly, I wish to propose that support of pluralism will nevertheless have quite distinct consequences when it comes to the question of how one best ought to justify liberal policies, and ultimately what kind of theory liberalism is to be construed as under a pluralistic description of morality.

The claim, made by for instance John Gray (e.g. 2000) and John Kekes (e.g. 1993), that pluralism has non-liberal or even anti-liberal consequences, is, I believe, founded on highly personal interpretations of what it means to be liberal and also what the claims of pluralism are. Instead, I think that they could stand to benefit from a more careful reading of Berlin and from there arrive at more productive understandings of what it means to support both pluralism and liberalism. They both build, it seems, on an understanding of liberalism that is well described as myopic, focusing almost exclusively on some instances of contemporary liberal theory (cf. especially Kekes 1993:199-217; Gray 1995a:85-96). Even Berlin, whose thought they both use as a starting-point for their own theorising, is left in the shadow of more radical strands of liberal theory. It is not Constant, Mill or Tocqueville, Berlin's

heroes of the liberal tradition, but the more formal theorising of the past few decades that is presented as the mainstream of liberal thought and theory.

They also construct their arguments directly on their highly disputable reinterpretations of value pluralism. In Gray's case, it is his inference of cultural relativism from his own radicalised version of pluralism that eventually entangles him in his "post-liberal" perspectives (cf. e.g. Gray 1996; 2000). Kekes also adopts a radical perception of pluralism, presenting the theories of Berlin in an entirely new and often unrecognisable setting (Kekes 1993, especially pp. 17-37). They are both, in effect, trying to make the transition from pluralism in moral theory to liberal politics as difficult as they could possibly render it. But the fact that *their own* versions of value pluralism is inimical to some recent specimens of liberal theory, sometimes overtly built on ethical monism, is not at all as unsettling as the more sweeping claims they conclude their respective studies with, namely that pluralism and liberalism *simpliciter* are incompatible doctrines. For this general contention they offer no solid arguments, least of all that the moderate brand of pluralism expounded by Berlin is in any way incompatible with his own cautious and gradualist liberalism.

I wish to suggest that there are two broad consequences for political theory that flow from an acceptance of Berlinian value pluralism. First, any type of political theory, be it liberalism, conservatism or something entirely novel and different, must be made attentive to the fundamental supposition that fundamental human values are objective, irreducibly plural and on occasion in direct conflict with each other. Pluralism will therefore dictate a thorough scepticism towards those theories that claim to have arrived at general and unshakably solid principles for political action and organisation. Rather, pluralistic political theories will give considerable weight to practical reasoning, reflecting that productive political theorising does not take place in an intellectual vacuum or without considering material obstacles or resistance towards attempts at achieving certain goals men may otherwise properly seek.

As far as liberal theory is concerned, it must, in order to be conformed to a pluralistic perspective on morality, set its goals a bit lower than some liberal theorists have suggested it should. There are indeed many and highly different political

theories around that are liberal in intention and whose policy recommendations are recognisably liberal according to the uninitiated usage of this term. These theories are also to a variable degree congenial to pluralism of the Berlinian kind, even if only a few instances of liberal theorising are actually in direct conflict with pluralism as such. But there are of course some varieties of liberal theory that in the end becomes a better match for pluralism than others. It is fairly evident, for instance, that those liberalisms whose temperament is incremental, accommodating and politically realistic rather than radical, demanding and theoretically abstract are better suited to meet the demands of a pluralistic moral universe.

The kind of liberalism Berlin adhered to could certainly not in any way be described as particularly radical or otherwise demanding. The conclusions he reached strived always to cope with the immense complexity of the world and its history, but also retaining a characteristically liberal impatience towards oppression and ignorance. The recent attempts at combining liberalism and pluralism, prominently represented by Crowder and Galston, are written in a more theoretical and ahistorical language than Berlin did when he wrote about politics and political ideas, and so they gain much in concision and accuracy. For this reason, they supplement Berlin quite astutely – they both attempt to "tidy him up", but not to the degree that it becomes "an instructive failure" (cf. Ryan 1996, quoted in full on p. 9 above).

There are basically two ways of justifying liberal policies. One approach, and one that has been dominating for some time now, involves a search for a set of general principles that, if found to be valid, could be used to infer a detailed set of political evaluations and recommendations for concrete reform, with all of them being justified by referring to a "higher" principle. The other approach is the one employed by Berlin and also, I think, closely connected to his description of morality and ultimately to his broad awareness of the convolutions of worldly affairs and its often crookedly winding history. Justifying liberal democracy in the manner after Berlin amounts to saying that it is, all things considered, not an optimal or perfect state of affairs, but rather the best we have come with so far, and vastly superior to its

real existing alternatives (cf. Berlin and Williams 1994, especially p. 309 and as quoted here on p. 59).

Berlin's way is, I think, not necessarily superior to the more theoretical route to justification of liberalism, but it is at least likely that it will resonate more easily in certain segments of contemporary society, especially those that are not prone to value individual liberty and personal autonomy quite as easily as more seasoned liberals. It is also, I contend, the best option if one chooses to work within the framework of value pluralism. Most importantly so because of the nagging doubts that follow it in moral and political problems, but also because of its inherent scepticism of elaborate systems of thought that lack the attentiveness and flexibility necessary to solve immediate problems in an acceptable manner. Even if this kind of liberalism is less orderly and much less confident on behalf of its own capacity to arrive at final solutions and ultimate answers than other modes of political theory, it probably makes up for these defects with an increased level of sensitivity towards local variation and other complicating features of existence (cf. e.g. Ryan 1999).

5.4 Conclusion

I have found myself driven to several conclusions as I have surveyed the works of Berlin and the debates following their publication. First, and perhaps most importantly, I have not been able to find any arguments that cogently support the claim that value pluralism and liberalism, as Berlin understood these concepts, are in fact incompatible doctrines. The attempts to drive a wedge between a pluralistic description of morality and liberal conclusions in politics that have surfaced so far fail in the main because they from the start build on highly contentious understandings of pluralism and liberalism few theorists agree to. Second, there seems to be the case that many different types and styles of recognisably liberal ways of thinking about politics are congenial to pluralism, or in fact tacitly or explicitly founded on an acceptance of pluralism. Finally, it seems also likely that an acceptance of pluralism leads to, if not to any one detailed kind of liberal theory, then at least to a liberal temperament conforming to the political order of most

contemporary Western societies, making it into a less than subversive perspective on morality and politics. More ‘specific’ liberal theories are of course only to a variable degree companionable with pluralism, but it remains that those instances of liberal theorising that build on pluralism is neither particularly exotic nor dependent upon taking extreme positions in ongoing debates internal to liberal, political theory.

I stop short of consenting to the arguments put forward by a Gray or a Kekes for several reasons, but most importantly because they seem to manipulate the definitions of the basic concepts in the debate, viz. pluralism and liberalism, in ways that turn out to be highly contestable, at least from the perspective adopted by Berlin and most other theorists of pluralism. For this reason, their interpretations of Berlin come across as less than ideally charitable, making their arguments less disturbing for those who may wish to build on his political theorising. Their attempts to present pluralism and liberalism as fundamentally conflicting systems of thought founder also because of this – They make no argument whatsoever for extrapolating from the fact that their own radicalised versions of ethical pluralism is incompatible with some instances of contemporary liberal theory, to the contention that these larger bodies of thought are always at odds with each other.

On the side of the last two conclusions, Crowder and Galston have indeed made rather persuasive arguments in favour of the belief that ethical pluralism is after all compatible with some forms of liberal political thinking. But their more ambitious contentions, that pluralism generates a positive case for one specific kind of liberalism, are slightly more dubitable, at least since the types of liberalism they claim to have deduced from their acceptance of Berlinian pluralism differ quite considerably from one another. Where one views liberalism primarily as the political continuation of the Enlightenment, the other leans towards a less demanding form of liberalism that strives to accommodate disagreements and diversity in general perspectives on the nature of the good life. There is however, in spite of their differing justificatory strategies, quite substantial overlap in their basic political outlook and in the values they wish to prioritise. Likewise, they also concede to the fact that there are different routes to liberal conclusions in immediate political

matters, and in the spirit of Berlin's thought they do not commit themselves to only one perspective on the nature of liberalism, even if they make clear enough which they personally prefer.

I believe that the most prominent feature of Berlin's political thought is his interest in and attentiveness to real world politics and particularly the historical and intellectual aspects of it. This attention serves not only to set him apart from most contemporary, political theorising, but also, I think, as an inspiration for his pluralism of values and his more moderate and cautious brand of liberalism. It might very well be true, as Crowder and Galston claims, that there is within the boundaries of 'pure theory' some sustainable inference to be made from ethical pluralism to liberalism in politics. I believe however that pluralists should – if they are not adequately persuaded by either of them – take up the historical lessons that Berlin himself based his liberalism on. Berlin (1991:v; 2001:181) quoted one particular sentence of Kant's (1922:158) on so many occasions that he eventually made into his own, supplying it with new meaning, and it might very well stand as an epigraph for his thought: *"[A]us so krummem Holze, als woraus der Mensch gemacht ist, kann nichts ganz Gerades gezimmert werden." – "Out of the crooked timber of humanity, no straight thing was ever made."* From the perspective given by his pluralism, it becomes clear that any political theory must not only be reconciled with the supposed fact that there indeed are plural and conflicting values, but also that such theories must be adapted to the world and the multitudes of individuals, cultures and experiences that give it its richness rather than the other way around. In this, the liberal insights concerning the real superiority of limited government, extensive liberty and legal equity over their alternatives are found to be true, relevant and important – and will most probably and hopefully continue to be so in the future.

6. Pluralistic Liberalism

'You are unable to see more than one thing at a time and you find the greatest difficulty in seeing the interconnections between things. You fail to see that nature has linked human ideals together in an indissoluble chain.'

'How do you mean?' Nicholas asked the owl.

'Consider the countries you have visited, all of which you have left behind. Each was devoted to the pursuit of a worthy objective: one to ensuring order and security, another to maximizing welfare and happiness, another to securing stable identities where people feel at home with others of their kind, another to the delirious vision of real individual freedom in harmony with all others, another to the protecting of individuals and their property from interference to live as they choose. Yet each pursued its favoured goal to the exclusion of the others and in the process sacrificed countless individual humans at the altar of its abstract ideal. How many human lives have been ruined and destroyed in the name of such ideals? What human folly!'

'What,' Nicholas asked, 'is the alternative?'

'Only connect!' replied the owl. 'The alternative is to see that none of these ideals is worth anything without the others. Only then will you create a world fit for humans, and also,' he added as if as an afterthought, 'for owls.'

-- Steven Lukes[6]

6.1 Introduction: The present state of liberalism

The contrast between the heated debates over the nature and desirability of liberalism within the community of political theorists, and the naturalness with which many people in the Western world today interact with ideas and principles that have been refined and in part developed by previous generations of liberal theorists and movements could hardly be any more striking. In other parts of the world also, these ideas are in the ascendancy: The last few years have witnessed an unparalleled spread of democracy and the rule of law that could scarcely be described as anything other than astonishing. One need only remind one's readers of the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe or of the ongoing 'wave' of democratisation in Africa, Asia and Latin America to put these developments into the right perspective. Of course, there are notable exceptions and even some instances of reaction against this movement, with sustainable change often only coming at an excruciatingly slow pace, but I think

[6] An excerpt from the exchange between Professor Caritat and the Owl of Minerva in the ultimate chapter of *The Curious Enlightenment of Professor Caritat* (Lukes 1995:257). The name of the character Nicholas Caritat is an allusion to the birthname of the marquis de Condorcet (cf. Calhoun, ed. 2002).

it is fairly safe to say that, seen from a liberal point of view, the world is better off now than it was fifty, twenty or even ten years ago.

Yet another surprising feature is the almost total annihilation of credible, ideological alternatives to liberalism in well-ordered polities. It seems, for now at least, that those horrible days of fascism, or the equally dreadful plague of a socialism that dared to speak its name, are long gone. Gone are also the days of 'respectable' despotism – the phraseology of liberal democracy now holds sway over political debates and rhetoric to the degree that even the most unyielding tyrants must nominally pay their respects to it. In the Western world also, what we are left with is mostly a debate between what Alasdair MacIntyre (1988, quoted by Kekes at 1997:1) not entirely without disdain has described as "conservative liberals, liberal liberals and radical liberals". But even if MacIntyre and a smaller number of similar-minded theorists lament this development, a development which leaves little room for "putting liberalism in question" (ibid.), I think it is plain that the compounded merits of liberal democracy and the demerits of its real existing alternatives are sufficient to make such an all-out critique of liberalism an uphill struggle to say the least.

The critique of liberalism found in political theory today is also of a kind where at most a few details of liberal policy are attacked rather than the standing liberal ordering of society being undermined (cf. e.g. Larmore 1987:22-39; Walzer 1990). Human rights, constitutional guarantees of privacy and individual freedom, and even democracy itself as we know it today are among the things liberals of previous generations have successfully fought for. This, they have driven to the point where liberal political arrangements have gained an aura of naturalness and unquestionable authority. Instead of liberal values and policies being themselves bones of contention, they are taken for granted, as something given rather than something that needs to be subject to serious debate.

This does not mean, however, that everything but minor adjustments and details are already settled for the political theorist working within the liberal tradition. While a plurality of political theorists have gathered behind liberal principles, they have always done so for differing reasons, and grounded their endorsement of

liberalism in mutually incompatible perspectives on morality at large. Moderate utilitarian and deontological theorists, for instance, while they diverge on questions pertaining to the elementary nature of morality, have mostly come together in an agreement on the basic ordering of society. Irrespective of their theoretical affinities, they tend to view for example democracy or legal regimes that respect human and civil rights as something to be desired. The radical nature of their disagreements on loftier issues in political and moral theory is not at all matched by an equally heightened level of discord in constitutional matters.

So also with value pluralists, at least those who take their cues from Berlin or Lamprecht. Their perspectives on morality is vastly different from their monistic counterparts, and yet most of them come out in favour of liberalism and liberal policy arrangements just as easily as these kinds of monists generally are apt to do. But the appearance of a broad consensus on more constitutional issues might easily hide the possibility that differing views on morality might lead to diverging brands of liberalism. But even if they might on occasion reach opposable conclusions in matters of contemporary importance, there is nothing that *prima facie* supports a claim that one school of thought is necessarily any more or less liberal than the others.

Liberals persuaded by ethical pluralism will undoubtedly convey their particular theory of morality into politics, often ending up with more pragmatic solutions to immediate problems, and on occasion failing to reach a clear and final answer at all. Given that all pluralists acknowledge the permanence and prevalence of moral and political conflict, the liberals among them will probably tend towards the moderate side of the liberal tradition. They will probably also be more easily persuaded by historical and circumstantial arguments than by impressive theorising, without, hopefully, losing sight of important matters of principle.

In a world of conflicting ideals and goals, as the pluralist will claim our world is, the ability to compromise between clashing values “might indeed be hailed as the social virtue *par excellence*” (Lamprecht 1921:232). As it is made clear by several theorists claiming to be both liberals and pluralists, there are several distinct kinds of liberalism that could be shown to be congenial with pluralism (cf. section 3.3. and

chapter 5 below). I contend, on the other hand, that it is the cautious, and indeed compromising, liberalism of Berlin and Lamprecht that is best suited to work within a pluralistic description of morality.

6.2 Pluralism, liberty and equality

Liberty and equality are, no doubt, key liberal values. Throughout the history of liberalism, they have both functioned as rallying-cries and been perceived as natural ideals and goals for political development. Although both words, used as designators for something valuable, predates the beginnings of liberal ideology by several centuries, they have today a content which is well described as being heavily indebted to the western, liberal tradition. And even if most liberal theorists have attempted to combine them in some way or to forge a balance between them, some have rejected the importance of one or the other. Raz (1986, especially pp.217-244; cf. also Frankfurt 1987), for instance, develops a critique of "egalitarianism" from liberal premises while Dworkin (cf. e.g. 2000; 2001; 2001a; cf. also Wollheim 1956; Crowder 2002), equally liberal in intention, attempts to subsume other liberal ideals – liberty included – under the paramount value of "equality of concern and respect".

Berlin (cf. e.g. 1956; 2002, especially pp. 30-54, 168-217), taken as the model representative of pluralistic liberalism, belonged to the former category in the sense that he viewed both equality and liberty as intrinsic values, and consequently as natural goals. In a rather famous sentence, he also rejected the notion of the two being in effect only one value: "Everything is what it is: liberty is liberty, not equality or fairness or justice or culture or human happiness or a quiet conscience" (Berlin 2002:172, for an argument to the contrary, cf. Norman 1987). Both are, even if a definitive account of basic human values are nowhere to be found in Berlin's *oeuvre* (cf. section 2.2.1), among the goals he perceives as valuable and objectively so.

In *Equality*, Berlin (1956) sets out to argue against the concluding sentence of the companion essay by Richard Wollheim (1956:300), which represents a significant egalitarian undercurrent in liberal thought (cf. e.g. Kymlicka 2002:53-101; Ryan 1993): *"My own opinion is that the principle of Equality can be regarded as the*

fundamental principle of Liberalism. We have seen already how the principle of Democracy can be interpreted as a special instance of it. And the principle of Liberty is made superfluous by it. For the substance of every claim that men should be free in a certain matter could be rendered by claiming that in this matter they have equal rights." To this, Berlin (1956:319) answers by a adopting a characteristically pluralistic perspective: *"[W]hen the pursuit of equality comes into conflict with other human aims, be they what they may – such as the desire for happiness or pleasure, or for justice or virtue, or colour and variety in a society for their own sake or for liberty of choice as an end in itself, or for the fuller development of all human faculties, it is only the most fanatical egalitarian that will demand that such conflicts invariably be decided in favour of equality alone, with relative disregard of the other 'values' concerned."*

It seems to me to be an illustration of sophistry to claim that liberty, regardless of how one might define such a concept, turns out on inspection to be the same thing or perhaps a distorted variant of equality. Clearly, the common sense approach would be to perceive these concepts in the manner of everyday language as two fairly distinct and distinguishable states, attitudes or ideals. At the very least, a more cogent argument needs to be made before one could entertain a belief in which two notions of such centrality might plausibly be merged into one. The pluralistic approach to morality might accommodate conflicting intuitions in this area. Given that one wants to be extremely careful when it comes to changing and manipulating ordinary concepts in order to fit them into a theoretical framework, no matter how elegant it may be, pluralism might easily explain why both liberty and equality seem valuable and desirable, without being the same or even overlapping ideas, as well as potentially at odds with each other.

On the question of what its most basic values are, pluralistic liberalism might therefore readily admit to there being several key values at its core, of which both liberty and equality most probably would be thought of as part of a list of such values. It will also concede that these values need not be synthesised into a *summum bonum* or a rigid hierarchy of values with one paramount ideal on top. Indeed, pluralistic liberalism must, in order to be in tune with ethical pluralism of the

Berlinian persuasion, claim that there in fact are objective human values that are irreducibly plural and potentially incommensurable and conflicting.

Pluralistic liberalism might be a realistic description of political morality if two conditions are met. For one, there must be a set of values that meet Crowder's four criteria of being objective, irreducibly plural, incommensurable and conflicting, i.e. pluralism must be true. Second, there must, amongst these values be some values that are describable as being liberal, or at least being capable of receiving a liberal interpretation. These liberal values must then – and this is where the liberal part of pluralistic liberalism comes into play – somehow be accorded a privileged status without rendering it impossible to choose other values as a guide for conduct if the situation calls for it. A pluralistic liberal is, as it turns out, a person that thinks of pluralism as being an approximately true description and theory of morality, but which nevertheless prefers and indeed are apt to choose the liberal values in situations where a conflict arises between liberal and other values.

Again, it cannot be stressed enough that 'choice' between values need not be arbitrary, "underdetermined by reason" (Crowder 1994) or that incommensurability between values in the abstract entails incomparability in particular cases (cf. Kekes 1993; Gray 1996; Crowder 2002). Rather, the pluralistic liberal will contend that there in fact are a plethora of pragmatic, cultural, historical or otherwise 'extra-theoretical' arguments that encourages a person to prefer broadly liberal arrangements over their feasible alternatives (cf. Berlin and Williams 1994). It might even be the case, as Crowder (2002) and Galston (2002) have claimed, that an acceptance of pluralism in fact generates a positive, theoretical case for liberalism, even if they disagree as to what type of liberalism it actually gives credence to.

In other situations, the conflict will however be between different liberal values rather than between liberal and non-liberal considerations. This kind of situation cannot either be ruled out, at least not prematurely, under a pluralistic description of morality, and it raises a set of slightly more unsettling questions for anyone that at once accepts pluralism and liberalism. If a conflict arises for instance between our key liberal values of liberty and equality, as in the complex and

contentious issues of taxation and government welfare programmes, it is not given what party, viz. libertarians or egalitarians, pluralists might end up siding with. It is indeed highly unlikely that pluralists will side with one of the camps *en bloc* at all. Rather, the likeliest outcome of such a conflict will be that most pluralistic liberals will adopt moderate attitudes, some of them leaning towards the egalitarian side, some supporting libertarian sentiments and some also finding it hard to make their minds up at all. Whatever may be their ultimate decision, they will probably share Berlin's sceptical and gradualist attitudes, especially when they are confronted by rivalrous groups that claim to have found conflicting and purportedly ultimate solutions to the ills of one's society or indeed the whole world.

6.3 Democracy

A very long time have passed, it seems, since the days when democracy was thought of as a perilous idea and one that could potentially be detrimental to liberty and prosperity (cf. e.g. Madison et al. 1987; Tocqueville 2000). Today, democracy has instead become a natural and at times even unquestioned and unquestionable goal for political development. Radical theories of democracy have even suggested that broad participation and thorough deliberation are overridingly important concerns that potentially outweigh what are equally natural goals, such as individual liberty, privacy and limited government (for a friendly survey of these theories cf. Held 1987). But even if there is much truth in Winston Churchill's dictum ("Democracy is the worst form of Government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time." (Knowles, ed. 2003)), I can easily understand those who find these radical theories of democracy unfathomable in spite of their allegiance to more moderate and constitutional forms of government by popular representation.

Pluralistic liberalism is inherently antithetical to those theories which claim that one value is always overridingly important, even if it is an ideal as pleasing to contemporary audiences as democracy must be. Instead, liberals that are also pluralists must become concerned over the possibility that plenipotentiary political institutions, no matter how representative they are, might imperil individual liberty

and the pursuit of knowledge (cf. Galston 2002, especially pp. 82-84). When the ends of democracy and liberalism clash, as it is conceivable that they may, some might choose to defend democracy even if it results in despotism by the people. Others, more moderately inclined, might instead open up for the possibility of insisting on liberal arrangements that protects individual rights and liberties despite, or perhaps because of the fact that they are unpopular at times.

Clearly, and I am hard pressed to find any evidence at all to the contrary, the prudent approach to politics goes through effectively enforced constitutional guarantees. Such guarantees must ensure among other things limited government with its powers divided by several bodies, extensive civil liberties and basic human rights. This, however, is only one of the most fortunate outcomes, and probably also an unlikely one (cf. e.g. Olson 1993, especially pp. 573-574). And even if the spread of democratic values and institutions have rushed by at a previously unparalleled speed over the last few years, much is left until these new democracies develop into the kind of regime in which its citizens might be fairly confident that their rights and liberties are well secured today and into the foreseeable future. Popularly elected legislatures and executives are more often than not instituted long before respect for human rights and civil liberties take up root in the political culture of a given society, and become second nature to its citizenry. In essence, it takes time for a democracy to become a mature or indeed a "liberal" democracy (cf. Diamond 1999).

While pluralistic liberals will welcome, along with other liberal-minded people, the growth of democracy and what seems to be a civilising impulse in parts of the world today, they will also remind us of other things of value that could conflict with more radical interpretations of what it means for a society to be democratic. Also, when democratisation no longer is the *only* goal, they will have no trouble accepting the fact that concern for democracy might be overridden in given, extreme circumstances. In the words of Berlin (2002:176): *"Just as a democracy may, in fact, deprive the individual citizen of a great many liberties which he might have in some other form of society, so it is perfectly conceivable that a liberal-minded despot would allow his subjects a large measure of personal freedom."* Galston's conclusion is in effect a development of Berlin's perspective: *"I have suggested that three broad*

political conclusions flow from the acceptance of value pluralism: first, that the legitimate scope of all politics, democratic politics included, is limited; second, that within the political sphere, there are alternatives to democracy that enjoy legitimacy, at least for some purposes in some situations; and third that democratic deliberation and decision should be guided by mutual acceptance and the quest for inclusive, rather than exclusive policies" (Galston 2002:91-92).

In regions of the world with few liberal and democratic traditions, one cannot possibly expect more rapid movements towards mature democracy as in those countries of the world in which such a status is already achieved, considering that it took them several centuries to get there. In the meantime, it is imperative that we realise that small but sustainable steps are more preferable than insisting on rapid democratisation, and still manage to be surprised when corruption and decay, rather than consolidation and liberalisation, becomes the order of the day. In conclusion, while consolidated democracy is indeed something valuable, and definitely not a "subjective fancy", it is difficult to obtain, requiring sacrifice during and vigilance after its acquisition, and easily perverted if it is not moderated by a concern for individual rights and liberties.

6.4 Multiculturalism and international relations

What should a liberal and democratic polity do with those individuals, communities and societies that insist on being illiberal, intolerant or authoritarian in their ideas and conduct? A larger proportion of the problems in contemporary political theory could be said to revolve around this basic question. Should the liberal state accommodate or confront individuals, subcultures or societies that do not share its most fundamental goals and values? Should it tolerate the intolerant and the outright bigoted?

The through and through principled approach on the liberal side to these problems would probably consist of tolerating only those that are tolerant or liberal themselves (cf. e.g. Popper 1966:I:235n6). Among self-declared pluralistic liberals also, there are those that have suggested that only pluralists should be objects of toleration, but I suspect such an analysis is based on a groundless downplaying of the

liberal and tolerant potential in many monistic theories of morality (cf. Hardy 2002a). The practically oriented observer would probably on the other hand be less confident of there being general answers to such questions – what the prudent answer to illiberal challenges are depends always on what the broader circumstances of a society. Whether an individual, a collection of individuals or a foreign power is to become an object of toleration is just as much a question of what kind of threat they pose as a question of what attitudes they are espousing.

On the domestic level, the question of how much disagreement the state ought to tolerate is basically a question of how active a government one actually wants. There should of course be limits to toleration, excessive permissiveness being probably a vice just as threatening as unwarranted repression, but only to tolerate the tolerant or those you yourself agree with in the most basic questions of morality would indeed be a hollow form of tolerance in a world so much marked by variety and disagreement as ours is. Instead, I submit that one should also extend toleration to persons and groups one happens to think are flatly wrong in most questions in which they take a stand, as long as they do not actually pose a threat to the peace and to the opportunity for others to form and uphold contrary beliefs.

This, however, does not amount to saying that pluralistic liberals should always strive to tolerate and accommodate those who uphold ethnic, political and religiously motivated bigotry and violence disguised as high-minded ideals. Rather, it is a principle of limited government, in which the state's potential for using force is reserved for those instances in which the use of repression and even violence is deemed to be the only possible way in which the liberal polity could conceivably preserve itself. In the words of Galston (2002:119): *"A liberal pluralist society will organize itself around the principle of maximum feasible accommodation of diverse legitimate ways of life, limited only by the minimum requirements of civic unity. This principle expresses (and requires) the practice of tolerance – the conscientious reluctance to act in ways that impede others from living in accordance with their various conceptions of what gives life meaning and worth. Tolerance is the virtue sustaining the social practices and political institutions that make expressive liberty possible."*

In our day, most societies are what may be described as culturally diverse, forcing a number of moral and political questions to the forefront. Should for instance a liberal state prioritise its concern for its citizens' personal autonomy over its equally legitimate concern for mutual toleration and trust between its constituent subcultures? Should it use its powers to promote the values of its majority culture and encourage persons belonging to minority groups to adopt its values and aspirations, or should it rather foster mutual acquiescence, inspired by what has been called a multicultural ordering of society? Should the state regulate the school system or manipulate the economy in order to enforce its goals of either assimilation or diversification?

The answers to such questions are, I contend, open-ended for the pluralistic liberal, depending very much on the particular circumstances of the society in question. If a liberal polity is confronted with fiercely anti-liberal and militant subcultures, it would probably do best if it tried to discourage its citizens from becoming a part of such groupings. In most cases of cultural diversity today, however, minority cultures are far away from becoming an apparent threat to liberal democracy. Whatever may be the case in each particular instance, it seems at least prudent to reserve the use of force to those cases in which an anti-liberal subculture actually becomes a hazard to the order and balance of society itself.

In the matter of what liberal polities ought to do when confronted with other polities that do not share its most basic goals and commitments, definite answers are, I contend, even harder to come by. The most problematic question is not however, if liberal states ought to further liberal values even outside its own territory. If one really thinks that the answers one has come up with are better than the alternatives, then it is difficult to see how one could avoid the conclusion that one's own answers should supersede these alternative theories. The difficult question is rather how one best could go about to spread liberal democracy. It is certainly not given that a confrontational policy towards non-liberal states is always the best available option, even if the practices of such states involve widespread violent repression and other abuses of power. More often than not, it seems that the best way to spread liberal institutions and values does not go through confrontation and isolation, which often

only increases the resolve of non-liberal states and their ruling cliques, but rather through interaction, trade and the exchange of ideas.

Theorising about politics will necessarily involve simplification in some form or another, but that does not mean that political theory can not make valuable contributions to debates surrounding matters of contemporary importance. Pluralistic liberalism as it is propounded by Berlin and others is a thoroughly ‘worldly’ form of political theory, and one that ultimately strives to matter in real existing political affairs. The nature of value pluralism, which dictates uncertainty in what the best answers to many moral and political questions may be, will also, I assert, lead to more unassuming attitudes in practical politics. One of the central features of pluralistic liberalism, or so it is at least claimed by Crowder (2002, especially pp. 191, 196-198), is its attentiveness to local variation and other complicating matters. For this reason, the political conclusions many value pluralists reach will be more cautious, tentative and limited in scope than what some may wish for.

6.5 Conclusion

As mentioned earlier, the claim that value pluralism leads away from liberalism, made most vocally by John Gray and John Kekes, is in this present study found to be little else than just that, namely a claim, and an unsubstantiated one at that. The arguments from both authors depend heavily, it seems, on subtle, but in the end far-reaching, deviations in the theory behind value pluralism, when compared to the perspective on morality first suggested by Lamprecht and later developed by Berlin. When it comes to their nominal rejection of liberalism, they depend extensively on the things they add to value pluralism rather than the assertions that were there to begin with.

On the other hand, the assertions made by Crowder and Galston, to whom an acceptance of ethical pluralism leads directly to a fairly detailed sort of liberal theory, are also found to be incomplete, even if they are not entirely uncorroborated. Galston’s and Crowder’s arguments from Berlinian pluralism to their own brands of liberal theory do not fail because they are left unsupported, but are rather left

incomplete because they seem to underestimate the possibilities of pluralists reaching other political conclusions than the ones they make themselves. This is perhaps most evident when one keeps in mind that the liberal theories they reach are highly different when compared to one another, a fact which puts the precipitancy of their claims in an unflattering light. Where Crowder (cf. especially 2002; 2003) for instance aligns himself with those liberals that prioritise the fostering of personal autonomy and other "Enlightenment" values over a concern for cultural diversity and negative, or expressive, liberty, Galston (cf. e.g. 1995; 2002) turns this priority upside down. If pluralism leads them directly to *differing* sorts of liberal theory, they highlight instead the question whether an endorsement of value pluralism has any straight forward political consequences at all, or if it is rather the case that a wider variety of political views and beliefs could consistently be entertained by the pluralist.

What Crowder and Galston have in common seem however to be more important than the things that separate them. As self-conscious liberals, they are, along with Berlin and Lamprecht, committed to the view that states should afford their citizens quite extensive rights and liberties, and not attempt to reduce the unhampered exercise of these privileges without compelling reasons to do so. What constitutes a 'compelling' reason for curbing liberty or what rights and liberties should be conceded to the population in the first place may be matters of debate among liberals, but it seems that at the heart of any type of liberalism lies the conviction that 'equality of liberty' should be the guiding ideal for the state (cf. Berlin 2002:172; Hobhouse 1994, especially pp. 56-66).

In this respect, pluralistic liberals are not that much different from other liberals, both the ones that hold differing metaethical views and those that may be described as metaethically indifferent. Nevertheless, I contend that their endorsement of pluralism has quite distinct consequences for the quality of their liberalism. If not pluralism leads directly to conclusions in ongoing debates internal to liberalism as Crowder and Galston claim, then it does at least give the pluralistic liberal the

intellectual tools necessary to admit that we are dealing with difficult questions, adding a flavour of uncertainty and tentativeness to the conclusions reached.

Pluralism does not demand that liberalism must be given a particularistic interpretation, in which liberal principles are thought of as being applicable only in a quite limited range of circumstances, or in other ways be made into what may rightly be viewed as a less than ideally ambitious set of ideals for political development (cf. Crowder 2002; especially pp. 22-42). What is demanded by pluralism of liberalism is instead only that it recognises that values are many and irreducibly so, and that they are often incommensurable and in conflict.

What *is* likely is that pluralistic liberals will come across as more moderate and less certain of the eternal validity of their own conclusions than those liberals who base their liberalism in monistic theories of morality. The world, and in particular the moral problems in it, become very much different when viewed from a pluralistic perspective, than if they are perceived by way of a moral theory in which all possible problems and genuine questions have one and only one true answer. Nevertheless, liberalism has a proven record when it comes to its ability to provide individuals with an extensive set of rights and liberties – opportunities to define their own existence – while at the same time not giving up on other important goals, be it decency, security or equality. And it is in liberalism's capability to balance and pursue many disparate interests, goals and values in societies of ever increasing complexity that one can find its strengths, as well as the particular appeal liberal solutions have for those that embrace pluralism (Berlin 1991; 2002; Berlin and Williams 1994).

7. Conclusions

Isaiah Berlin propounded with great force two perspectives that were to become the chief focus of this present study. In ethical theory, He rebelled against the perspective perhaps first submitted by Plato and later woven into the fabric of Christian theology, namely that all good things in the end is a reflection of one unified phenomenon that is The Good or in the Scholastic terminology the *summum bonum.* What were to become the two dominant secular ethical theories, viz. Utilitarianism and deontology, have also – surprisingly enough – predominantly kept the belief intact that there indeed is a common measure for all things of value. The most extreme, and in the end most devastating, expression of monism, as Berlin came to call this outlook, were however found in more recent political ideologies such as Marxism and Fascism, which relied greatly on beliefs in a future perfect society in which all the problems and humiliations of the present would simply wither away. It is, I contend, mainly these latest versions of monism, rather than the more venerable and potentially benevolent, but according to Berlin ultimately false, varieties of monism that he has in mind when he attacks monism in general.

Against these highly different monistic perspectives, he set up a moral theory in which the belief in a perfect state of affairs was explicitly rejected, while he at the same retained the belief that some actions and choices are beneficial, right and good while others are injurious, wrong and evil, no matter what attitudes people might entertain. His value pluralism, indebted to the American philosopher Sterling Lamprecht, in which the central tenet is that the things we ought to and in fact do find valuable in life are irreducibly plural or many, is his alternative to both monism and relativism. This theory, however, leaves us with hard choices in many matters of moral and political significance as the recognised values or ends collide and conflict with each other. It is therefore also a theory of morality that installs a profound sense of uncertainty, and consequently of humility, in the people that choose to accept it as a realistic description of morality.

In political theory, Berlin's views are perhaps less world-shatteringly radical as he identifies himself with liberalism, and a fairly moderate and pragmatic variety of it at that. He nevertheless ranks prominently among the authors and theorists that have managed to present liberal goals and ideas more eloquently than what most others have achieved. He was a defender of extensive liberty and a steadfast critic of liberalism's real existing alternatives at a time when such alternatives and their brutality were more conspicuously present than they are today, and this put its mark on his writing in a profound way.

The thing that most sets him apart from other liberal theorists is however his preference for arguing *against* some other view – the observation that true liberty is the same as the self-mastery of disciplined masses, or the perspective that avoidable hardships and cruelty now could be justified because they would contribute to bringing about total and perpetual bliss in a future Utopia – rather than formulating a political theory from the beginning. Despite of this, or perhaps because of this, many of Berlin's essays form points of reference in contemporaneous political theory.

His historically informed and worldly approach to political theory stands today however in stark contrast to what has become the predominant approaches in our day, which in many instances have become a purely academic exercise, general and abstract in character, touching only fleetingly with the outside world. Today, normative political theory is a discipline in which many of its practitioners are more willing, it seems, to compartmentalise themselves entirely from the world of practical politics, intellectual and political history and especially from the vast advances made in the empirical social sciences. While much is gained in stringency and concision of thought, a lot is lost during this retreat into the Ivory Tower. It seems to me that the most important challenge for political theory as a field of inquiry in the coming years will be to become *relevant* again, as it was, to a certain degree at least, in its 'penultimate' generation of which Berlin is a prominent representative. What I wish to suggest is that we need a continuation of Berlin's approach to political philosophy and intellectual history, a continuation adapted to the post-totalitarian age we live in. It is also evident that there is a manifest need to connect political theory and the

empirical social sciences, both in order to install greater realism and sensitivity in the former, and to add an ethical and philosophical dimension to the latter. Political theory must, in essence, once again dare to invoke its alternate names of ‘public’ and ‘practical’ philosophy.

Berlin’s efforts to combine value pluralism with liberalism could on one interpretation of his *oeuvre* be thought of as his most important project in political theory. For his most notable critics, John Gray and John Kekes, this project is ultimately a failure. Even if it at times can seem as if they have a need to shout out loud and to shock their audiences in order to be heard, they have changed the debates over Berlin’s theorising, making it impossible to ignore them completely. Instead of pluralism leading to liberal conclusions in political matters, they contend – rather than arguing systematically and cogently in favour of their views – that “post-liberal” or conservative political conclusions are more easily suitable for those who accept a value pluralist description of morality.

Against this outlook, I have suggested two counterarguments. First, it seems to me that it is primarily their own additions and revisions of pluralism, rather than any inherent conflict between liberalism and the moral pluralism put together by Lamprecht and Berlin, which compel them to reach this conclusion. Second, I would like to suggest that their political theories are not altogether that inhospitable to most liberal arrangements and principles of government: While they, it would seem, reject liberalism in name, their alternatives are only minutely different from it, with their chief differences residing mainly in a theoretical, rather than a practical quarter.

Other theorists, most prominently George Crowder and William Galston, have however suggested that the critique levelled against Berlin’s liberal pluralism is itself a failure. Instead, they insist on compatibility between pluralism in ethical theory and liberalism in political questions. Their combined analyses leave however their audiences with a few questions, even if they both succeed in presenting the claims of Gray and Kekes with a devastating blow. Most importantly among these, the liberalisms they claim to have deduced from pluralistic – and thoroughly Berlinian – premises are quite different both in temperament and emphasis, in which Crowder

comes out more similar to contemporary, liberal egalitarianism and with Galston presenting himself as more of a 'classical' liberal, more concerned with individual liberty and freedom of association than with fiscal equality.

The basic fact that they infer such different kinds of liberalism from pluralistic premises suggest that value pluralism may be companionable with many different liberal theories, and perhaps even some 'mildly non-liberal' political theories, especially at times and places where a fully developed liberal political order is practically unattainable. Pluralism and liberalism are perhaps not doctrines that logically necessitate each other, but an argument could be made, I think, for an acceptance of pluralism – at least *Berlinian* pluralism – leading to an endorsement of a larger number of recognisably liberal policies and arrangements. Most importantly, it seems to be the case that pluralists could, and should, be persuaded by pragmatic and practical arguments in favour of the view that liberal arrangements are better than their real existing alternatives, and that liberal arrangements give people a chance to have, in part at least, freedom of choice when they are confronted by values and ends that conflict in life-defining decisions.

Moreover, it is the more moderate strands of liberalism that are most companionable with value pluralism, most of all because practicality, prudence, humility and attentiveness to complexity become even more important virtues if it turns out that morality actually is best described in pluralistic terms. I can however think of nothing more appropriate than to end this concluding section with the words of Berlin (1991:19): *"Of course social and political collisions will take place; the mere conflict of positive values alone makes this unavoidable. Yet they can, I believe, be minimised by promoting and preserving an uneasy equilibrium, which is constantly threatened and in constant need of repair – that alone, I repeat, is the precondition for decent societies and morally acceptable behaviour, otherwise we are bound to lose our way. A little dull as a solution, you will say? Not the stuff of which calls to heroic action by inspired leaders are made? Yet if there is some truth in this view, perhaps it is sufficient."*

Abstract

Isaiah Berlin (1909-1997) has contributed greatly to the fields of ethical and political theory, as well as in the study of the history of ideas, with probably his lectures on the intellectual history of freedom – *Four Essays on Liberty* – and his critique of Utopian political theory – *The Crooked Timber of Humanity* – being the most widely read and discussed. In this study, however, it is mainly his combination of value pluralism in ethical theory – the belief that there are several objective values or ends and that these on occasion collide, leaving us with hard choices – and a cautious and moderate liberalism in political affairs that is drawn to the readers' attention.

It has been said in recent times, most prominently by John Gray and John Kekes that Berlin's attempt at combining value pluralism and liberalism was and will always be a failure, as an endorsement of ethical pluralism actually leads away from liberal conclusions in politics. Against this view, I have pointed to the fact that both these authors base their rejection of any possibility of liberal pluralism on their own subtle, but in the end far-reaching, changes to Berlin's ethical theory, as well as in an unhelpfully restrictive view of what kind of theory liberalism is. What they have found, I argue, is not that liberalism and value pluralism *simpliciter* are perpetually locked in metaphysical combat – a finding which would indeed be devastating to Berlin's political theories – but the far less disturbing discovery that their own rather eccentric versions of ethical pluralism and some more ambitious forms of liberal theory are incompatible.

During the last years, also, several defences of liberal pluralism have been published, most notably by George Crowder and William Galston. While both of them rather astutely point to several compelling arguments against there being any fundamental and unbridgeable conflicts between liberalism and value pluralism, I find the fact that they believe that pluralism leads directly to quite different types of liberal theory to raise a few questions of their own. I have therefore attempted to argue that pluralism instead has few direct, political consequences outside of a commitment to moderation and prudence, and that pluralists, and anyone else for that matter, should instead be persuaded by the apparent successes of liberalism and liberal ways of organising societies, and equally discouraged by the demerits of its alternatives.

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