



Does Value Pluralism Entail Liberalism?

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Abstract

Isaiah Berlin repeatedly attempted to derive liberalism from value pluralism. It is generally agreed that Berlin's arguments fail; however, neo-Berlinians have taken up the project of securing the entailment. This paper begins with an account of why the Berlinian project seems attractive to contemporary theorists. I then examine Berlin's argument. With this background in place, I argue that recent attempts by William Galston and George Crowder to rescue the Berlinian project do not succeed.

Keywords

Isaiah Berlin, George Crowder, William Galston, liberalism, John Rawls, value pluralism

Isaiah Berlin thought that his two master ideas – value pluralism and negative liberty – fit together in a particular way. Specifically, he thought that one could derive liberal political commitments from value pluralism. His corpus contains repeated attempts to establish the entailment from value pluralism to liberalism.¹ It is generally agreed that Berlin's arguments fail; however, neo-Berlinians have taken up the project of securing the entailment. This paper begins with an account of why the Berlinian project seems attractive to contemporary theorists. I then show how Berlin's argument fails. With this background in place, I examine two recent attempts to repair the argument and establish the entailment, one from William Galston and another from George Crowder. I argue that neither attempt fares better than Berlin's.

¹ I here understand liberalism in a very general way as that political order which prioritizes negative liberty over positive liberty, community membership, solidarity, perfection, and the like, and acknowledges some scheme of distributive justice. There are of course many different forms of liberalism, and their differences are not unimportant; however, my analysis here does not require me to venture into these issues. See Robert B. Talisse, *Democracy After Liberalism* (New York: Routledge, 2005) for further discussion.

The Attractiveness of the Berlinian Project

It is easy to see why contemporary theorists should be attracted to the idea that value pluralism entails liberalism: against the backdrop of the grand historical tradition of liberal political philosophy, the present state of liberal theory seems altogether uninspired. For roughly two decades political theory has been in the grip of the later Rawlsian program, known as *political liberalism*. Political liberalism is a self-avowedly modest philosophical program.

To explain: Rawls's political liberalism proceeds in two stages, one critical and the other constructive. The critical stage argues that 'the question the dominant tradition [in liberal theory] has tried to answer has no answer'.² Traditional, or *comprehensive*, liberal theories have aspired to discover some philosophical, moral, or religious theory (what Rawls calls a 'comprehensive doctrine') which could provide a justification of the liberal political order that could be acceptable to all citizens. Rawls contends that this project is rendered futile by the fact of reasonable pluralism, the fact that under conditions of 'enduring free institutions' human reason does not converge on a single comprehensive doctrine.³ According to Rawls, there are many comprehensive doctrines which are consistent with the free exercise of human reason yet inconsistent with each other; more importantly, there is a plurality of comprehensive doctrines that are 'reasonable', that is, consistent with the core liberal idea that society is a 'system of fair cooperation' among equals.⁴ Given this, the project of basing a conception of liberal politics explicitly upon the tenets of some or other comprehensive doctrine – even one that is decidedly liberal – is doomed. Any such doctrine would be rejected by a citizen holding an opposing, yet reasonable, comprehensive doctrine. As a liberal society is one which aspires to be justifiable 'to every last individual',⁵ the very idea of a comprehensive liberal theory is self-undermining.

Consequently, Rawls proposed that liberal theory needed to 'apply the principle of toleration' to itself,⁶ and resolve to '[stay] on the surface, philosophically speaking'⁷ by developing a strictly political conception of liberalism

² John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* [hereafter *PL*] (New York: Columbia University Press, expanded edn, 2005), p. 135.

³ *PL*, p. 129.

⁴ *PL*, p. 50.

⁵ Jeremy Waldron, 'The Moral Foundations of Liberalism', in J. Waldron, *Liberal Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 37.

⁶ *PL*, p. 12.

⁷ John Rawls, 'Justice as Fairness: Political Not Metaphysical', in Samuel Freeman (ed.), *John Rawls: Collected Papers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 395.

which presupposed no reasonably contestable philosophical, moral, or religious principles. The constructive stage of political liberalism, then, attempts to identify a conception of liberal justice which could be accepted from within all reasonable comprehensive doctrines.

This much is old news. I cannot here rehearse the debates surrounding political liberalism, many of which are ongoing and unresolved. Suffice it to say that even though Rawls's constructive proposal – his *political* articulation of liberal justice – has been subjected to serious criticism on multiple fronts, his critical insight about the impact of reasonable pluralism on comprehensive liberal theory has proven difficult to resist.⁸ Consequently, a conundrum: Although Rawls's criticism of comprehensive liberalism seems correct, it is not clear that there is an acceptable alternative theory. Perhaps we should simply give up on the very idea of political *theory*, as some have proposed,⁹ and simply get on with the business of *politics*?¹⁰ In any case, one gets the sense that something philosophically important has been lost in the turn to political liberalism.¹¹

Given the state of play in liberal philosophy, the appeal of Berlin's project is evident. A liberalism based on value pluralism would retain the philosophical robustness of traditional theories while accommodating Rawls's insight that conflict over fundamental value commitments can have 'absolute depth'.¹²

⁸ To be sure, some find political liberalism as a whole unacceptable; see especially Brian Barry, *Culture and Equality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 331, n. 27 and Ronald Dworkin, *Is Democracy Possible Here?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), pp. 63ff. Those in the Rawlsian camp who argue that Rawls's own positive position needs to be revised tend to retain the insight about the fact of reasonable pluralism; see, for example, David Estlund, 'The Insularity of the Reasonable: Why Political Liberalism Must Admit the Truth', *Ethics* 108 (1998): 252-75; Gerald Gaus, *Contemporary Theories of Liberalism* (London: Sage, 2003), chs. 7–8; and Martha Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006). For value pluralist objections to political liberalism, see John Gray, *Two Faces of Liberalism* (New York: The New Press, 2000), pp. 16-17; William Galston, *Liberal Pluralism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), ch. 4; and George Crowder, *Liberalism and Value Pluralism* (London: Continuum, 2002), ch. 7.

⁹ Richard Posner, *The Problematics of Moral and Legal Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

¹⁰ It is plausible to read Gray's *Two Faces of Liberalism* as promoting an anti-theory program very similar to Posner's. I cannot pursue this connection here. The thought that political theory is insufficiently attentive to politics is developed in the agonism literature; see especially Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993); and Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (New York: Verso, 2000).

¹¹ Many of the early reactions to political liberalism press this point. See especially Ronald Dworkin, 'Foundations of Liberal Equality', in Steven Darwall (ed.), *Equal Freedom* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1988); and Jean Hampton, 'Should Political Philosophy be Done without Metaphysics?', *Ethics* 99 (1989): 791-814.

¹² *PL*, p. xxviii.

A value-pluralist liberalism promises to ‘connect what one believes to be the best account of public life with comparably persuasive accounts of morality, human psychology, and the natural world’.¹³ In proposing a comprehensive liberal theory rooted in a pluralist theory of value, value-pluralist liberalism breaks the Rawlsian conundrum and ‘sketches a new geography of the liberal space’.¹⁴

The inference from value pluralism to liberalism seems simple. Value pluralism is the view that there are many distinct kinds of goods, and thus an irreducible plurality of valuable ways of life. Liberalism is a political order that aims to provide the widest possible freedom for individuals to ‘pursue [their] own good in [their] own way’.¹⁵ Unlike other liberal theories which, like utilitarianism, see the diversity of ways of life as at best an instrumental good, or, like some rights-based views, see diversity as something it would be wrong to interfere with, the value pluralist, it seems, can see the plurality of ways of living as intrinsically good; that is, on the value-pluralist view, the diversity of ways of life which flourish in a free society is *itself* a good because the diverse ways of life manifest their own distinctive goods. Hence it seems that liberalism and value pluralism make a lovely couple.

And perhaps they do. Value pluralists could, indeed, be quite enthusiastic in their support for liberal politics. However, the claim we are concerned to investigate is that value pluralism *entails* a commitment to liberal politics. Here things are not so clear.

The *prima facie* enthusiasm for the thought that value pluralism entails liberalism seems difficult to sustain once we further clarify what value pluralism is. Consider Galston’s recent summation:

According to value pluralism, objective goods cannot be fully rank-ordered. There is no common measure of value for all goods, which are qualitatively heterogeneous. There is no *summum bonum* that is the chief good for all individuals. There are no ‘lexical orderings’ among types of goods. And there is no ‘first virtue of social institutions’, but, rather, a range of public values the relative importance of which will depend on particular circumstances.¹⁶

¹³ William Galston, ‘Must Value Pluralism and Religious Belief Collide?’, in George Crowder and Henry Hardy (eds.), *The One and the Many* (Amherst, MA: Prometheus Books, 2007), p. 252.

¹⁴ Carmen Pavel, ‘Pluralism and the Moral Grounds of Liberal Theory’, *Social Theory and Practice* 33.2 (2007), pp. 199–221.

¹⁵ John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, in *On Liberty and Other Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 17.

¹⁶ William Galston, *The Practice of Liberal Pluralism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, <year?>), p. 12. See also Henry Hardy, ‘Taking Pluralism Seriously’, in George Crowder and Henry Hardy (eds.), *The One and the Many* (Amherst, MA: Prometheus Books, 2007), pp. 283ff.

Galston's description of value pluralism will likely raise liberal suspicions.¹⁷ The forms of liberalism most common today hold that there is indeed a 'first virtue of social institutions' – namely, justice.¹⁸ Further, liberals tend to think that there is a 'lexical order' among goods.¹⁹ In fact, one can categorize different liberal theories according to what is placed at the top of the order; most common forms of liberalism place equality,²⁰ autonomy,²¹ or dignity²² at the top of the list, though there are many candidates for this role. But this is simply to note that most contemporary liberal theorists are not value pluralists. It should come as no surprise that value pluralism is not allied with anti-pluralist forms of liberalism. According to the value pluralist, value pluralism entails a distinctive kind of liberalism.

Yet there is reason to think that value pluralism is not particularly friendly to liberalism of any recognizable variety. One thing that the different forms of liberalism hold in common is the claim that the liberal political order is, if not *uniquely* legitimate, the *most legitimate* form of political organization.²³ Yet it is not clear that value pluralists can hold this. Consider John Gray's claim that value pluralism involves the idea that 'there are many kinds of human flourishing, some of which cannot be compared in value'²⁴ and John Kekes's assertion that 'there is an irreducible plurality of reasonable values and reasonable conceptions of the good'.²⁵ If, indeed, there are many kinds of human flourishing, then maybe certain kinds of good lives *cannot* be realized within a liberal state, and those who aim to live a life of that sort would be justified in supporting an illiberal political order.²⁶

¹⁷ For liberal criticisms of value pluralism, see especially Ronald Dworkin, 'Do Liberal Values Conflict?', and Thomas Nagel, 'Pluralism and Coherence', in Ronald Dworkin, Mark Lila and Robert B. Silvers (eds.), *The Legacy of Isaiah Berlin* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2001); Stephen Macedo, 'The Perils of Diversity', *The American Prospect* 30 (2002): 36–39; and Gaus, *Contemporary Theories of Liberalism*, ch. 2.

¹⁸ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, rev. edn, 1999), p. 3.

¹⁹ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p. 40.

²⁰ Brian Barry, *Why Social Justice Matters* (London: Polity Press, 2006); Ronald Dworkin, *Sovereign Virtue* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

²¹ Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

²² Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice*.

²³ Rawls recognizes the legitimacy of 'decent' non-liberal regimes; but still he affirms the superiority of liberal regimes with respect to justice; see *Law of Peoples* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 62.

²⁴ Gray, *Two Faces of Liberalism*, p. 6.

²⁵ John Kekes, *Against Liberalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 6.

²⁶ Galston writes, 'If there are good reasons to take value pluralism seriously, then it becomes more difficult to accord democracy the unquestioned normative propriety it typically enjoys in both ordinary and philosophical discourse' (*Liberal Pluralism*, p. 81).

Consider further that most liberal views in currency employ a strong conception of individual rights and envision a tight connection between individual liberty and a form of democratic self-government rooted in collective rationality or public deliberation.²⁷ Yet Richard Flathman argues compellingly that value pluralism cannot countenance rights ‘in the strict sense’.²⁸ Flathman further contends that value pluralists must reject the idea that liberal democratic politics should emphasize ‘rationality, reasonableness, deliberation, and related notions’.²⁹ He concedes that this will cause many to conclude that value pluralism is ‘antiliberal’.³⁰

It seems, then, that value pluralism might be a false friend to liberalism. At the very least, the simple linkage with which we began must be supplemented by an argument that makes explicit the nature of the supposed entailment. We turn now to Berlin’s argument from value pluralism to liberalism.

Berlin’s Argument

Berlin’s argument seems straightforward enough. He begins by noting that value pluralism means that ‘the ends of men are many, and not all of them are in principle compatible with each other’; this entails that ‘choosing between absolute claims’ is ‘an inescapable characteristic of the human condition’.³¹ From this he infers that we place ‘immense value on the freedom to choose’,³² insisting that ‘to be free to choose, and not to be chosen for, is an inalienable ingredient in what makes human beings human’.³³ That is, Berlin reasons that because ‘ends collide’³⁴ and actual goods stand in relations of intrinsic conflict,

²⁷ The connection between liberalism and deliberativism is explicit in Rawls (*PL*, p. 448). See also Bruce Ackerman, *Social Justice in the Liberal State* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981); Joshua Cohen, ‘Procedure and Substance in Deliberative Democracy’, in James Bohman and William Rehg (eds.), *Deliberative Democracy* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997); Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, *Democracy and Disagreement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); and Charles Larmore, ‘The Moral Basis of Political Liberalism’, *Journal of Philosophy* 96 (1999): 599–625.

²⁸ Richard Flathman, *Pluralism and Liberal Democracy* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), p. 176.

²⁹ Flathman, *Pluralism and Liberal Democracy*, p. 177.

³⁰ Flathman, *Pluralism and Liberal Democracy*, p. 177.

³¹ Isaiah Berlin, ‘Two Concepts of Liberty’ [hereafter, *TCL*] in Henry Hardy (ed.), *Liberty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 214.

³² *TCL*, p. 214.

³³ *TCL*, p. 52. Cf. ‘The need to choose, to sacrifice some ultimate values to others, turns out to be a permanent characteristic of the human predicament’ (*TCL*, p. 43).

³⁴ *TCL*, p. 43.

we realize that we *must* choose; consequently we *value* the freedom to choose. Therefore we value a political order that *acknowledges* and *protects* this freedom. Berlin concludes that the liberal state, fixed as it is upon upholding negative liberty, is the most legitimate kind of state; value pluralism hence entails liberalism.

Berlin's argument is now regarded as unsuccessful, even among his devoted followers.³⁵ The inference from the *inescapability* of choosing among incommensurable goods to the *value* of the freedom to choose is weak; at best it is a psychological rather than a logical entailment.³⁶ And it is a questionable psychological entailment. Why should the realization that choice among incommensurable goods is inescapable lead us to value the freedom to choose? Arguably, when faced with such a choice, one may as well be indifferent to who does the choosing, since, *ex hypothesi*, one is guaranteed to get an outcome that is good. But perhaps Berlin could respond that he need not defend the *rationality* of the inference, because he is simply claiming that *as a matter of fact* the realization that we must choose leads us to value the freedom to do so. But, again, this seems dubious as a psychological generalization; it certainly requires empirical support.

We need not get too bogged down in the details of this inference. The argument suffers from a more important defect in that it commits a flagrant is-ought error. Let us grant that the realization of the inevitability of choice leads us to value immensely the freedom to choose. How does it follow from the *fact* that individuals value the freedom to choose that the state *ought* to provide or protect such freedom?

To be sure, there are several ways in which one could attempt to fill this gap between what we value and what the state must do. For example, one could argue that the legitimacy of the state depends on its ability to win and sustain the consent of its citizens, and thus that the state must respect their preferences or respond to their demands. Though it may close the gap, this kind of response is not open to Berlin. Recall that Berlin is supposed to be offering an argument *for* liberalism *from* value pluralism. But the envisioned response presupposes a characteristically liberal conception of state legitimacy, and thus would render Berlin's argument circular.

³⁵ See especially Gray, *Two Faces of Liberalism*; and Crowder, *Liberalism and Value Pluralism*, both of which acknowledge the incompleteness of Berlin's argument.

³⁶ In an interview late in his life, Berlin declares that the connection between liberalism and value pluralism is 'psychological' rather than logical (I. Berlin and Polanowska-Sygułska, *Unfinished Dialogue* [Amherst, MA: Prometheus Books, 2006], pp. 290-91). He is not clear what this means; in the sentences that follow, I'm merely guessing.

A stronger conclusion is warranted. Berlin has no resources for closing the is–ought gap. Any attempt to explain why the state must respect the desire for free choice will invoke some *value* that the state must recognize as overriding, and any account of why the state must recognize *this* value rather than others will presuppose a rank-ordering of values, thereby violating value pluralism. If this is correct, then value pluralism cannot provide a justification of liberalism of the sort that comprehensive liberalism seeks; as John Gray has argued, value pluralism is consistent with a range of political orders, not only liberal ones.³⁷ To be sure, a Berlinian might find that the goods he favors and aspires to realize in his life are most easily achieved or most securely enjoyed in a liberal society. But such a realization does not constitute a *derivation* of liberal commitments from value pluralism; it at best shows how an individual who happens to endorse certain values has a prudential reason to support a liberal political order.

Galston's Argument

Galston has suggested an intriguing revision of Berlin. Rather than claiming that value pluralism directly entails liberalism, Galston argues that value pluralism *defeats* all non-liberal options. He agrees with Steven Lukes who claims that value pluralism entails that it would be 'unreasonable' for the state to 'impose a single [way of life]' on its citizens.³⁸ The argument runs that the inevitability of choice creates a 'presumption' in favor of 'expressive liberty', the liberty 'of individuals and groups leading their lives as they see fit'.³⁹ It is the mark of an illiberal regime to severely restrict or reject expressive liberty; however, if value pluralism is true there could be no legitimate reason for such restriction.⁴⁰ Hence 'the value pluralist argument for negative liberty rests on the insufficiency of the reasons typically invoked in favor of restricting it'.⁴¹

Galston's revised Berlinian argument does not fare much better than the original. First, consider the *form* of the argument. Galston argues by way of *elimination*; he thus proceeds on the assumption that if value pluralism *defeats* all alternatives to liberalism, it thereby *supports* liberalism. But elimination arguments can succeed only when they proceed from an *exhaustive* set of the

³⁷ Gray, *Two Faces of Liberalism*, passim.

³⁸ Steven Lukes, *Moral Conflict and Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 20; cf. Galston, *Liberal Pluralism*, p. 58.

³⁹ Galston, *The Practice of Liberal Pluralism*, p. 2.

⁴⁰ Galston, *Liberal Pluralism*, p. 57.

⁴¹ Galston, *Liberal Pluralism*, p. 58.

options. At best Galston's argument shows that value pluralism defeats those views that seek to restrict severely negative liberty. Let us call such views *illiberal*. However, not all alternatives to liberalism are *illiberal*; some alternatives to liberalism are better characterized as simply *non-liberal*. Non-liberal views endorse a wider range of negative liberty than liberals recognize. Anarchism and libertarianism are clear examples of non-liberal political views that are nonetheless not *illiberal*; for, if either is flawed at all, the flaw lies in countenancing *too broad* a scope for individual liberty. Thus even if we concede that Galston's argument shows that value pluralism defeats any regime which attempts to impose a single way of life on its people, the argument does not succeed. We're still owed an argument against non-liberal options such as anarchism and libertarianism.⁴²

Surely there are distinctive goods realizable only under anarchistic conditions or within a libertarian regime, especially if one agrees with Galston (and libertarians and anarchists) that there is 'a presumption against [coercion]' due to the 'pervasive human desire to go our own way in accordance with our own desires and beliefs'.⁴³ Galston might argue that libertarianism and anarchism are not viable political options. But this will not do. Even if we concede *ad arguendo* that anarchy is not viable, libertarianism surely *is*.⁴⁴ Importantly, the empirical question of which regimes are viable is beside the point. Galston needs to demonstrate a *conceptual* link from value pluralism to liberalism; he has to show that non-liberal regimes are *inconsistent* with value pluralism. Yet certain non-liberal alternatives are consistent with value pluralism.

So there is a formal problem with the argument – it does not eliminate all of the alternatives to liberalism. Yet there is a deeper difficulty: it is not clear that Galston is correct to think that value pluralism renders *illiberal* arrangements unreasonable. Galston contends that since there is a multiplicity of good ways of life, there could be no good reason for a government to impose or promote any one of them over the others; from this he concludes that all flowers must be permitted to bloom. But this inference fails. Let us stipulate that *X* is a good way of life. There is of course a reason to impose or promote *X*, namely, *X is good*. The value pluralist will reply that *X* is not *uniquely* good, and that there are other ways of life – say, *P*, *Q*, and *R* – that are also good. From this he will argue that the state has *no more* reason for promoting or

⁴² In *The Liberal Archipelago* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), Chandran Kukathas argues from the diversity of conceptions of the good to a libertarian – in fact, almost anarchist – politics.

⁴³ Galston, *Liberal Pluralism*, p. 58.

⁴⁴ I do not mean to assert that we *should* accept the claim that anarchy is not viable. I simply cannot examine this issue here.

imposing X over the others. So what? The point is that, even if value pluralism is true, the goodness of a way of life is a reason to promote it.

There is nothing in value pluralism *as such* that prohibits a government from promoting a single conception of the good among its citizens. One could argue that such a state denies the fundamental moral truth of value pluralism because it – at least implicitly – endorses the view that its preferred way of life is uniquely good. But I see nothing inconsistent with a state adopting the position of promoting a single way of life without making *any* claims – implicit or otherwise – about the value of other ways of life. This is especially easy to imagine in the case of religious communities organized around ways of life that employ a concept of *chosenness*. In such communities, a specific ordering of values is imposed on members, and outsiders are seen not as living unworthy lives, but only as not having been *chosen* to live in the way that the community lives. Or consider the further case of a polity that recognizes the truth of value pluralism, and hence selects some appropriately broad, but consistent, subset of the valuable ways of life and forces each citizen to live according to one of these ways. Think of such a society as a kind of Platonic republic, only with far more than three kinds of life available to citizens. How could a value pluralist object to this arrangement? Bad news: Platonic republicanism is consistent with value pluralism.

Galston must provide an argument that shows that value pluralism entails that the state must seek to *maximize* or at least *not severely restrict* the range of good options available to individuals. Galston attempts such an argument, claiming that his case for liberalism ‘draws its force from the underlying assumption that coercion always stands exposed to a potential demand for justification’.⁴⁵ According to Galston, any regime that attempts to restrict the number of good options available to citizens must *justify* the restriction to those who may prefer good options that are forbidden; such a regime is ‘obligated’ to ‘offer a sufficiently compelling reason’ to citizens who wish to pursue good options beyond the regime’s constraints.⁴⁶ Galston holds that any attempt to meet this obligation will fail; he contends that ‘no illiberal regime can justify its practices in a manner consistent with value pluralism’.⁴⁷

This invites the charge brought earlier against Berlin. Galston asserts a presumption against coercion which, in turn, generates a norm according to which government action must be *justifiable* to citizens. This is a distinctively *liberal* commitment; in fact, it is arguably the *core* commitment of

⁴⁵ Galston, *Liberal Pluralism*, p. 58.

⁴⁶ Galston, *The Practice of Liberal Pluralism*, p. 192.

⁴⁷ Galston, *The Practice of Liberal Pluralism*, p. 191.

contemporary liberalism.⁴⁸ Galston's argument hence embeds in its premises a liberal conception of legitimacy; therefore it is circular.

We need a *value-pluralist* argument that coercion requires justification. Perhaps Galston would appeal again to the 'pervasive human desire to go our own way in accordance with our own desires and beliefs'.⁴⁹ This commits the is–ought error found in Berlin. Galston must argue that this 'pervasive human desire' ought to be accommodated by the state. One could launch an argument about autonomy or the value of living life 'from the inside'.⁵⁰ Yet such an argument would introduce a particular rank-ordering of values.

Here Galston proposes an argument from integrity:

To prefer, for oneself, a particular way of life is not (only) to embrace some conception of what is good or true; it is to have the desire to live in accordance with that conception. Assuming that one's conception crosses the threshold of pluralist acceptability, social arrangements that needlessly restrict my ability to translate my conviction into the structure of my life deprive me of a great human good. A life lived with the requisite symmetry between the inner and the outer is a life of integrity.⁵¹

It is difficult to disagree with this vision of integrity; in fact, it is difficult to distinguish Galston's view from common non-pluralist views of autonomy and dignity.⁵² But the question is not whether one should endorse Galston's

⁴⁸ It is surely the core of a dominant strain of contemporary liberalism fittingly characterized as *justificatory liberalism*. See especially Rawls's discussion of the 'liberal principle of legitimacy' (*PL*, p. 137). See also Stephen Macedo, 'Liberal Civic Education and Religious Fundamentalism: The Case of God vs. John Rawls?' *Ethics* 105 (1995): 468-96; Macedo, 'In Defense of Liberal Public Reason: Are Abortion and Slavery Hard Cases?' *American Journal of Jurisprudence* 42 (1998): 1-29; Larmore, 'Moral Basis of Political Liberalism'; Gerald Gaus, *Justificatory Liberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); and Christopher Eberle, *Religious Conviction in Liberal Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁴⁹ Galston, *Liberal Pluralism*, p. 58.

⁵⁰ Will Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community, and Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 12. Kymlicka continues, 'You can coerce someone into going to church and making the right physical movements, but you won't make someone's life better that way. It won't work, even if the coerced person is mistaken in her belief that praying to God is a waste of time. It won't work because a like only goes better if led from the inside (and some values can only be pursued from the inside)' (*Liberalism, Community, and Culture*, p. 12).

⁵¹ Galston, *The Practice of Liberal Pluralism*, p. 192. Galston seems to be drawing here from Bernard Williams's influential discussion of integrity (Williams, 'A Critique of Utilitarianism', in J.J.C. Smart and Bernard Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and Against* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963], pp. 108ff.).

⁵² See especially Dworkin, *Is Democracy Possible Here?*, pp. 9ff. Galston recognizes the similarity, but holds that autonomy 'is at most one way in which the value of integrity may be made real' (*The Practice of Liberal Pluralism*, p. 192).

view of integrity; rather, it is whether his appeal to integrity secures the inference from the alleged ‘pervasive human desire to go our own way’ to what the state must do (i.e., never coerce without justification).

The appeal to integrity does not secure the inference. Value pluralists cannot maintain that moral integrity is *overriding*; they must assert, with Galston, that it is a ‘great human good’. Yet the ‘great’ here should not be taken to imply a rank-order. Integrity is, for the Galstonian, but one good among other incommensurable goods with which it inevitably clashes. Since there are no ‘lexical orderings’ among goods, there is no uniquely rational way to resolve conflicts among integrity and other great human goods. So what, then, is the justification for fixing on integrity as the linchpin when trying to make the case for the view that the state must justify coercion? Galston must concede that there are other ‘great human goods’, such as liberty, community, and solidarity, which are arguably most fully realized under conditions that are not liberal. Why should integrity trump these other goods?

The key for Galston seems to be our strong *desire* to live in accordance with our moral convictions; he claims that unless we achieve the requisite ‘symmetry between the inner and the outer’, we ‘live a lie’.⁵³ But recall that Galston was supposed to be giving an argument for the claim that the political order must respect or respond to our desires. His integrity argument does not do this; it simply calls our attention to the great value we place on integrity. Again, one could argue that we place such great value on integrity precisely because living in accordance with our deepest convictions is not merely something we *prefer*, but is essential to the very concept of a moral agent. The argument could continue that all other human goods *are good for us* only insofar as we take them up in a way that is consistent with individual integrity. But, for reasons we have already seen, no value pluralist could argue this way.

Hence Galston’s argument collapses into the Berlinian version: If one is a value pluralist who happens to favor a characteristically liberal way of life, one may endorse wholeheartedly a liberal regime. Hardly the demonstration we were hoping for.

Crowder’s Argument

George Crowder proposes a different kind of argument. In fact, Crowder holds that value pluralism provides a total of three arguments for liberalism:

⁵³ Galston, *The Practice of Liberal Pluralism*, p. 192.

an argument from diversity, an argument from reasonable disagreement, and an argument from the virtue of autonomy.⁵⁴

It is hard to know what to make of the strategy of proposing three arguments for the same conclusion. Crowder is not clear about whether they are meant to be three *independent* arguments for the same conclusion or three arguments which *jointly* constitute the value-pluralist argument for liberalism. Crowder sometimes proceeds as if each argument were sufficient for the liberal conclusion, and that three arguments are necessary only to specify the *kind* of liberalism that value pluralism entails.⁵⁵ Elsewhere, however, Crowder suggests that there is but one argument from value pluralism to liberalism, but it is comprised of ‘three main routes’.⁵⁶ More recently, he claims that the three arguments ‘add up to’ a case for liberalism.⁵⁷ In any case, it seems to me that the soundness of the first argument is presupposed by the other two arguments, so I will focus here on Crowder’s first argument, the argument from diversity.⁵⁸

Crowder’s diversity argument proceeds in two stages. First, Crowder argues that value pluralism entails an ‘ethic of diversity’.⁵⁹ Then he argues that the ethic of diversity entails liberalism. Before turning to the argument, however, we should consider a remark about Berlin made by Bernard Williams that provides the springboard for the first stage of Crowder’s argument and is often cited approvingly in the pluralist literature.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ Crowder, *Liberalism and Value Pluralism*, p. 135.

⁵⁵ Crowder, *Liberalism and Value Pluralism*, p. 185.

⁵⁶ Crowder, *Liberalism and Value Pluralism*, p. 217.

⁵⁷ Crowder, ‘Value Pluralism and Liberalism’, in George Crowder and Henry Hardy (eds.), *The One and the Many: Reading Isaiah Berlin* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2007), p. 227.

⁵⁸ Crowder’s diversity argument purports to show that value pluralism entails an obligation to respect the diversity of legitimate human values. This respect for the diversity of human values lies at the heart of Crowder’s remaining two arguments: It is because we must respect diversity that we must allow for reasonable disagreement and promote autonomy. So it seems to me that, in the end, Crowder is proposing one argument from value pluralism to liberalism: the diversity argument. He deploys the other two arguments in order to specify the *kind* of liberalism that value pluralism entails.

⁵⁹ Crowder, *Liberalism and Value Pluralism*, p. 135.

⁶⁰ Crowder, *Liberalism and Value Pluralism*, p. 136; Crowder, *Isaiah Berlin* (London: Polity, 2004), p. 156; Crowder, ‘Value Pluralism and Liberalism’, p. 220; Crowder, ‘Two Concepts of Liberal Pluralism’, *Political Theory* 35 (2007): 121–46. Williams’s remark is cited approvingly also by Galston (*Liberal Pluralism*, p. 58); John Gray (*Isaiah Berlin* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996], p. 144); Beata Polanowska-Sygulska, ‘Value Pluralism and Liberalism’, in Berlin and Polanowska-Sygulska, *Unfinished Dialogue* [Amherst, MA: Prometheus Books, 2006], p. 288); and Pavel, ‘Pluralism and the Moral Grounds of Liberal Theory’, p. 204.

In his introduction to Berlin's *Concepts and Categories*, Williams writes:

If there are many and competing values, then the greater the extent to which a society tends to be single-valued, the more genuine values it neglects or suppresses. More, to this extent, must mean better.⁶¹

As I mentioned, this remark is popular among value pluralists; indeed, it is often presented as containing the core of a winning argument from pluralism to liberalism. However, I must confess that I am unable to see in this an argument, winning or otherwise. The problem, of course, is Williams's use of the word 'better' in the final sentence. In what sense is a many-value society better than less-than-many-value society? Here is an intuitive answer: A society with a greater number of (morally permissible) options available to citizens is a society with more liberty than a society with fewer such options, and a society with more liberty is better than a society with less.⁶² But this answer is not open to the value pluralist, because such an answer implicitly identifies liberty as a 'first virtue of social institutions'.

Perhaps Williams means to suggest that a many-value society is better than a less-than-many-value society in the sense that the former society contains, not more (of what is) *good*, but simply more *goods*. But this is clearly not true. Compare two museums, both containing only great paintings. The first, however, is devoted solely to Impressionism; it houses a small but well-selected collection of the most important Impressionist paintings. The other museum, let us say, is home to a vast collection of great paintings from the history of Western art, spanning from Renaissance portraits to Hudson River School landscapes. Now, we could say that the latter museum houses more *goods* in that it contains more great paintings from a greater variety of genres, but is there any sense in which we should say that the latter is the better *museum*? It seems to me that the claim that the latter is better in virtue of its housing more and a greater variety of paintings necessarily presupposes some view of what the 'first virtue' of a museum is. That is, it is only in light of the claim that, say, a museum should provide its visitors a sense of the history of art, or should make available to its visitors exemplars of many different artistic genres, that it makes sense to say that the latter museum is better than the former. And this sense of 'better' is not available to the value pluralist.

The key, perhaps, is the implicit claim that a society that is not hospitable to the widest range of goods is therefore involved in 'neglecting' or 'suppressing'

⁶¹ Bernard Williams, 'Introduction', to Isaiah Berlin, *Concepts and Categories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. xix.

⁶² One could run this same argument replacing liberty with any other favored liberal value, such as autonomy, freedom, or equality.

values. But this is incorrect for reasons brought earlier against Galston's claim that when a state chooses some narrow range of values to promote, it implicitly denies that the goods outside that range are good. The Impressionist museum does not 'neglect' or 'suppress' other genres when it restricts itself to a single genre; its singular focus need not imply any attitude whatsoever towards work in other genres.

Williams's remark seems to me to contain no definite argument, and the considerations it most naturally suggests seem incompatible with value pluralism. Nonetheless, Crowder takes Williams to have struck upon considerations that amount to a 'stronger' argument from value pluralism to liberalism than Berlin offered.⁶³ Let us then turn directly to Crowder's argument.

Crowder begins from a clear and non-controversial statement of the core thesis of value pluralism: 'To accept value pluralism is to accept that there are universal goods and that these are many and incommensurable'.⁶⁴ Things get murky from here. Crowder next claims that, 'To accept that there are plural and incommensurable goods is not merely to allow that there are such goods, but to endorse them, and to endorse them on an equal basis with one another'.⁶⁵ From this, he derives the conclusion that 'the pluralist outlook commits us to valuing the full range of human goods'.⁶⁶ Elaborating his conclusion further, Crowder writes:

To acknowledge the truth of value pluralism is to acknowledge a multiplicity of genuine goods, of diverse natures, not merely ethical mistakes with which it is nevertheless best not to interfere. It is to acknowledge a duty to promote those goods so far as possible: a duty to promote diversity.⁶⁷

Something has gone awry. Crowder has moved, without argument, from *accepting* the plurality of incommensurable goods to a *duty to endorse*, and so *promote*, all goods *equally*. Elsewhere, he makes the further and stronger claim that value pluralism entails a 'principle of maximum diversity' according to which one must promote 'as many goods as possible in a given situation'.⁶⁸

Several questions arise. For one thing, one wonders what it could mean to endorse incommensurable values *equally*. Would this involve judging them to

⁶³ Crowder, *Liberalism and Value Pluralism*, p. 136. Crowder goes on to claim that Williams has provided a 'hint' about how to secure the entailment that is 'underdeveloped' (Crowder, *Liberalism and Value Pluralism*, p. 136).

⁶⁴ Crowder, *Liberalism and Value Pluralism*, p. 137.

⁶⁵ Crowder, *Liberalism and Value Pluralism*, p. 137.

⁶⁶ Crowder, *Liberalism and Value Pluralism*, p. 137.

⁶⁷ Crowder, *Liberalism and Value Pluralism*, p. 137.

⁶⁸ Crowder, 'Two Concepts of Liberal Pluralism', p. 132.

be *equally* valuable, which would imply commensurability? Further, how is it possible on a value-pluralist view to endorse *all* the genuine goods? Recall that value pluralism involves the claim that some values are not only incommensurable with other values, but essentially *in conflict* with other values.⁶⁹ To embrace Millian individualism is not only to fail to realize Arnoldian traditionalism, it is to *reject* or *oppose* the Arnoldian values; similarly, to adopt Arnold's traditionalism is to see Millian individualism as barbaric. If we presume a value-pluralist conception of value, the injunction to value all goods equally violates the *ought implies can* rule. Moreover, does the fact that I endorse something as an objective ingredient of human well-being entail that I have a duty to *promote* it rather than, say, merely to *commend* or *allow* or *approve of* it? By acknowledging the objective goodness of, say, broccoli eating, do I thereby place myself under an *obligation* of any kind? And how exactly does one promote diversity, anyway? Finally, Crowder writes as if the duty to maximize diversity applies only *within* a given liberal society. Why should this be? Why should we not apply the duty globally? Why should state boundaries, and sovereignty, matter?

These are tricky questions, and although Crowder does not offer much help in trying to work through them, perhaps compelling answers can be worked out. But there's a more troubling problem with Crowder's argument. Like Berlin and Galston, Crowder has committed an is–ought error: he begins with a premise about the nature of values (viz., there are universal, plural, incommensurable values), and derives a moral obligation to 'promote diversity'.⁷⁰

Crowder has responded by claiming that since he takes 'the universal values presupposed by pluralism' to contribute 'objectively' to human well-being, his argument 'does not move from fact to value but from value to value'.⁷¹ Explaining, he writes:

The starting point is not a claim of fact about what people happen to value, but a value judgment to the effect that certain generic goods (and more specific local expressions of these) contribute to human well-being.⁷²

⁶⁹ Compare Nagel's distinction between value *incompatibility* and value *opposition* ('Pluralism and Coherence', p. 106).

⁷⁰ Polanowska-Sygułska brings this charge against Crowder ('Value Pluralism and Liberalism', pp. 295–96) but later – mistakenly, in my view – withdraws the objection in light of Crowder's response ('Value Pluralism and Liberalism', p. 298). I discuss Crowder's response in the next paragraph.

⁷¹ Crowder, 'Value Pluralism and Liberalism', p. 221. Cf. Crowder, *Isaiah Berlin*, pp. 164–65 and Crowder, 'Two Concepts of Liberal Pluralism', p. 131.

⁷² Crowder, 'Value Pluralism and Liberalism', p. 221.

The response mischaracterizes the objection. The error is not evaded by claiming that the values are objective and non-empirical;⁷³ for the objection is not that he has derived a conclusion regarding non-empirical, objective values from premises about empirical, contingent facts. Rather the problem is that he has argued from premises stating a purported *fact* – a purported *fact about value* – to a conclusion stating a moral obligation. That there are plural and incommensurable values which objectively contribute to human flourishing *cannot* by itself entail a moral obligation to promote or maximize diversity. The charge of deriving ought from is stands.

The difficulties deepen as Crowder segues from the first to the second stage of his argument. In his attempt to make explicit the argument he takes to be implicit in Williams's remark, Crowder contends that:

From the point of view of value pluralism, which by definition involves a genuine appreciation of the fact that a wide range of values contributes to the good life for human beings, a society or way of life that focuses on only one or a few of those values to the exclusion of others cannot be a satisfactory society or way of life.⁷⁴

Here Crowder commits a kind of scope error. It does not follow from the fact that there is a wide variety of values that make for a flourishing life that in order for a life to be flourishing it must manifest a wide variety of values. Similarly, it does not follow from the fact that there is a wide variety of values that contribute to, or even are constitutive of, human flourishing that humans cannot flourish except under conditions which make available to them a wide variety of values. Put otherwise, that many distinctive goods each are individually sufficient for a flourishing life does not entail that they are collectively necessary for a flourishing life. Hence Crowder's attempt to secure the inference from the thesis that there are irreducibly many ways of flourishing to Williams's claim that a many-value society is better than a less-than-many-value society does not succeed.

Recall that Crowder's argument from value pluralism to liberalism was to proceed in two stages: first, from value pluralism to the ethic of diversity, and second from the ethic of diversity to liberal politics. It has been shown that the first stage fails. Crowder has not established that value pluralism entails an ethic of diversity. So Crowder's argument from value pluralism to liberalism fails. The most Crowder has shown is that value pluralists, who happen to have a certain kind of appreciation for a society in which many different ways of life flourish and which presents to each individual many options among goods,

⁷³ Crowder, 'Value Pluralism and Liberalism', p. 221.

⁷⁴ Crowder, *Liberalism and Value Pluralism*, p. 140.

should prefer a liberal political order. Again, this at best shows that value pluralism is *consistent* with liberalism; it does not constitute ‘a powerful case for liberalism’.⁷⁵ The *entailment* from value pluralism to liberalism has yet to be established.

Conclusion

I have examined the two most fully-developed attempts to derive liberal political commitments from value-pluralist premises. Neither attempt is successful. In fact, it is difficult to imagine how any such attempt could succeed: in order to derive liberal political commitments from moral premises, one must produce a moral argument specifying something like a ‘first virtue of social institutions’, and then argue that the liberal political order best realizes or manifests that virtue. Value pluralism officially rejects this *form* of argument, since it officially rejects the very idea of a first virtue of social institutions. The aspiration of reviving the Berlinian project is doomed from the start. Perhaps more importantly, it seems we are left with the Rawlsian conundrum.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Crowder, *Liberalism and Value Pluralism*, p. 11.

⁷⁶ The author would like to thank Scott Aikin, James Bednar, William James Booth, John Goldberg, Jonathan Neufeld, David Reidy, Danny Scoccia, Jeffrey Tlumak, and the students in his spring 2008 seminar on value pluralism for helpful discussion.