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Value pluralism as a support to liberalism: rebuilding Berlin's bridge

MASTER'S THESIS

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ABSTRACT

Isaiah Berlin's notion of value pluralism has traditionally been seen as supportive to liberal political theory. In recent years, however, the idea of an implicit link between pluralism and liberalism has come into question, with some commentators arguing that pluralism in fact presents obstacles to liberalism. In the wake of such criticisms, this thesis proposes a new version of value pluralism, and argues that it is supportive of liberalism. In chapter one, the different strands of pluralism in Berlin's thought are discussed. In chapter two the case is made for "internal pluralism," (the notion that values can come into incommensurable conflict within the self, but not, as Berlin and others believed, on a social level), and how it can support liberalism. Chapter three engages Berlin's critics and arguing that internal pluralism does not suffer from the failings that the traditional notion of value pluralism does.

Acknowledgements

"An Episode in the life of Professor Brooke" is a short story by the American writer Tobias Wolff. In it, the English professor of the title attends a MLA conference, where he appears on a panel with the author of a misguided book on Samuel Johnson. After the other panelist rehashes his thesis and the panel disbands, Brooke winds up at the refreshment table:

> By this time there were several people standing in line for sandwiches. Brooke moved to make room and soon found himself in a corner with a graduate student from his university who had just completed a dreary thesis on Ruskin. "Well," said the student, a tall boy with a stoop, "I guess the good doctor is turning over in his grave today."
>
> "What good doctor?" Brooke asked, uncomfortable with this person who had spent four years of his life reading *The Stones of Venice*.
>
> "Doctor Johnson."

It would be difficult to put into words just how often I identified with this tedious graduate student while writing my thesis. Not merely because I too am tall with a stoop. No, it is the description "this person who had spent four years of his life reading *The Stones of Venice*" that stopped me cold. I haven't read that book, but you get the impression here that it is pretty bad. What caused me to cringe was the thought that with only a little reworking, the sentence could equally apply to me—*this person who spent a year of his life reading Isaiah Berlin*.

There are reasons why Berlin has been left behind in contemporary political philosophy. I showed an awareness of precisely none of them when I first proposed doing a thesis in which he was one of three thinkers examined. In an act of almost super-human tolerance, Will Kymlicka agreed to supervise such a project. He was similarly patient when I proposed an entirely different version at

my thesis proposal, and handed in early chapters that treated a still different version.

Therefore, to Professor Will Kymlicka I say: thank you. Very much.

My good friend John Haffner read over the final project and discussed it with me before my defense. I thank him also.

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—Andy Lamey

Master of philosophy

April 98

Table of Contents

THESIS INTRODUCTION 1
Historical background 1
Outline of the argument 5

CHAPTER ONE: BERLIN'S VARIETY OF PLURALISM
Introduction 10
Irreconcilable value systems 12
Cultural pluralism 14
Intra-social value conflict 17
Value pluralism within the self 18
Value pluralism as a precondition of political philosophy 19
The nature of political philosophy 21
Pluralism external and internal to the self 26
The schools example of intra-social value pluralism 27
Cultural pluralism and the self 31
Incommensurability: property or experience? 34
The social dimension of value pluralism 36
Value pluralism and its history 37
Antigone 39

CHAPTER TWO: FROM PLURALISM TO LIBERALISM
Introduction 42
A theory of the self 45
An example of incommensurable choice as an experience 47
Conceptions of the good life as values 49
What agonizing choices presuppose 51
Step one: from pluralism to revisability 55
Incommensurable value conflict and self-consciousness 59
Step-two: from revisability to civil liberties 62
Incompatible views of values in Taylor and Berlin 66
Incommensurable vs. commensurable choices 68
Incommensurability as non-final 70
Points of contact with Berlin 72
Similarities between Taylor and Berlin 74
Discriminating liberties 76
The need for recognition 79
The clash of goods 80
An important difference 81

CHAPTER THREE: BERLIN AND HIS CRITICS
Introduction 83
Relativism 85
Freedom as an incommensurable value 87
Berlin as anti-foundationalist 89
Pluralism as an obstacle to liberalism 96
Tolerance 97
Choice 101
Humaneness 106
Diversity 108
Radical choice 113
Particularist regimes 119
Illiberal regimes as instances of diversity 123
Coercion not justified by superiority claims 124
Conclusion 125

Bibliography 129

THESIS INTRODUCTION

Historical background

This is a thesis about value pluralism. It tries to argue that one distinct version of value pluralism (or, more simply, "pluralism") is true, and that this gives us reason to prefer liberalism to its rivals. And while the argument which follows is neither an exercise in the history of philosophy nor an elucidation of John Rawls, it may nevertheless be worth starting with a distinction that is commonly made, between liberal theory before and after Rawls's 1971 book, *A Theory of Justice*. This is because many of the concerns which the present argument engages straddle both the pre- and post-Rawlsian eras of liberal theory, and can only benefit from being introduced in that context.

Those of us who were first exposed to *A Theory of Justice* in survey courses are sometimes left with the impression that Rawls's articulation of a

rejuvenated contract theory of liberalism took place against a backdrop of the failings of classical utilitarianism alone. The signal instance of utilitarianism's drawbacks is of course its inability to preclude the sacrifice of the individual in the name of collective happiness. And certainly, this theoretical exhaustion did cast a large shadow across the historical backdrop of Rawls's influential work. But there was another school of thought also hovering offstage, one which Rawls was equally conscious of writing in the wake of. Rawls called this second position "intuitionism," and he described theories of it in this way:

> first, they consist of a plurality of first principles which may conflict to give contrary directives in particular types of cases; and second, they include no explicit method, no priority rules, for weighing these principles against one another: we are simply to strike a balance by intuition, by what seems to us most nearly right. Or if there are priority rules, these are thought to be more or less trivial and of no substantial assistance in reaching a judgment (Rawls 1971: 34).

Rawls was dissatisfied with intuitionism; this was due to its inability to provide us with any guide as to what political path to follow in those instances when our diverse intuitions came into conflict; something which political philosophy has traditionally aimed to provide.

I believe that this impatience with intuitionism is the only proper response. It ultimately amounts to "an incoherent jumble of ideas and principles . . . which is little more than a series of anecdotes based on particular intuitions about particular issues" (Kymlicka 1990: 50). From the view afforded by later breakthroughs in political philosophy, including

Rawls's, intuitionism seems a ruined theoretical castle, if indeed it was ever built upon stable intellectual foundations at all.

And yet, I also believe there was a survivor amid the ruble. And this was Isaiah Berlin.

Berlin's 1958 essay "Two Concepts of Liberty," like Rawls's book, is also popular in survey courses on liberalism. And in section VI of that essay, "The one and the many," Berlin introduced another idea that would spawn a philosophical literature. This was the idea of value pluralism: that values may be plural, genuine, and incommensurable, thereby forcing us to choose among them. And this idea is at the centre of the argument for liberalism advanced herein.

To be sure, there are elements of Berlin's account that cannot be borne. Much of it is rejected here. In particular, I would argue, Berlin's theory of pluralism, while not commonly referred to as a variant of intuitionism, suffers all of intuitionism's failings. It cannot furnish us with the overall framework within which to decide political questions that Rawls's theory, despite those parts each of us will inevitably disagree with, brings us considerably closer toward.

Yet in spite of this, I do not believe we are faced with an absolute, black-or-white choice between Berlinian pluralism and more systematic accounts of liberalism. This is in part because of an unremarkable method this essay employs—the use of clarifying distinctions concerning longstanding, even abandoned, philosophical arguments. Rawls himself built upon previous social contract thinkers, just as Robert Nozick looked back to and developed upon classical liberal John Locke's understanding of property. Such efforts to

breath new life into old ideas are common to philosophical beginners also, and my argument attempts to do this to the old Berlin; to rejuvenate; to recuperate; salvaging ideas he introduced but which now seem discredited, defeated, lost.

The phrase "the old Berlin," implies a new one. This is intentional. For just as Berlin is commonly located within a tradition that is judged to have reached an intellectual eddy by the time of Rawls, he is also the subject of new and increasing attention within pressing, post-Rawlsian debates concerning whether liberalism really can, as *A Theory of Justice* argued, be said to have ahistorical and universal foundations.

Unlike during the 1950s and 1960s, when he originally wrote about value pluralism, Berlin today is the subject of full-length books and *festschriften*.[1] The two most important entries in this re-examinations are no doubt George Crowder's influential paper "Pluralism and Liberalism," which raised powerful objections to Berlin's attempts to link pluralism and liberalism, and John Gray's *Berlin*, which, while advancing (for the first time) a view of Berlin as an exponent of an overarching and genuinely "philosophical" theory, also ultimately saw the two ideas as unjoinable. Both Crowder and Gray, importantly, conclude that "it is hard to see how liberal thought can avoid admitting some significant element of historicism if meta-ethical

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1 These include, for example, Robert Kocis's *A Critical Appraisal of Sir Isaiah Berlin's Political Philosophy* (Lewiston, NY etc. Edwin Mellon Press, 1989); Claude J. Galipeau's helpfully summary *Isaiah Berlin's Liberalism* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1994); Alan Ryan, ed., *The Idea of Freedom: Essays in Honour of Isaiah Berlin* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1979) and Edna and Avishai Margalit, eds., *Isaiah Berlin: A Celebration* (London, Hogarth Press, 1991.) In addition,there is also Ramin Jahanbegloo's book-length interview, *Conversations with Isaiah Berlin: Recollections of an Historian of Ideas* (London, Peter Halban, 1992) and over 50 entries in *The Philosopher's Index* mentioning Berlin.

pluralism is to be taken seriously" (Crowder 1994: 305). This "conventionalist" theory of liberalism follows that of Michael Walzer, Richard Rorty and other influential contemporary philosophers, who challenge the traditional view of liberalism as having non-contingent universal foundations. This is an important debate in 1990s liberalism, and one within which Berlin and his ideas are increasingly invoked.

This essay attempts to go back to Berlin's original articulation of value pluralism in order to reinterpret it in a manner that is relevant to the issues facing liberalism today. In this it treats Berlin as something close to what Charles Taylor, writing in reference to Herder, termed a "hinge figure"; a thinker who, while perhaps more innovative than rigorous, nevertheless introduced an idea which is worth re-examining due to the possibility that "we have still something important to learn from the original statement of certain foundational ideas that has yet to be captured" (Taylor 1991: 40) in later, more systematic expressions.

Outline of the argument

The thesis contains three chapters. The first summarizes Berlin's diverse statements on value pluralism, scattered throughout his many writings, and divides them into five categories. These are: value pluralism as a pre-condition for political philosophy; plural value systems; cultural pluralism; intra-social pluralism and internal pluralism (i.e. within the self). I argue that these should be reconceived as falling into one of two categories: pluralism inside and outside the self. Furthermore, as the notion of incommensurability is central to a genuine theory of value "pluralism," only internal pluralism is true. For two values to be found to be

incommensurable, some individual person must experience them as such. I argue that pluralism outside the self falsely equates disagreement between people over values as instances of incommensurability, which is not the same thing.

This reconception of pluralism as possible exclusively within the self is the central distinction of chapter one and reappears throughout the thesis as a whole. Related to it is the distinction between incommensurability as something close to an inherent property, vs. something which we can, in certain circumstances, experience. Berlin himself seems to subscribe to the first view, but in fact the second is truer to our actual experiences concerning value. Chapter one then closes with a brief alternative account of the historical origin of value pluralism, arguing, *contra* Berlin, that it is possible to find an expression of it in antiquity.

Chapter two tries to outline what must be true of the self if internal pluralism is true. Beginning with Charles Taylor's theory of human agency, it briefly argues that the Sartrean notion of radical choice is incompatible with value pluralism. Anticipating the view of John Gray criticized in chapter three, I argue here that the kind of choices we make between incommensurable values cannot be resolved simply through a groundless irrational decision to act. This is because the fact that such choices between incommensurables are "agonizing" presupposes we regard the choices involved as higher-order desires (i.e. genuine "values"), which, while they are something the self is ultimately antecedent to, exert enough of a claim on us to prevent us from throwing them off in the too-quick manner radical choice avers.

Chapter two then goes on to outline the link between pluralism and liberalism. This begins with an attempt to distinguish what precisely a "value" is. Berlin uses it in reference to general political values (such as liberty and equality), moral obligations, and conceptions of the good life. The last of these is singled out here as the type of value most likely to involve a choice involving incommensurability, and I try to illustrate this with an example of a young woman choosing between two incommensurable conceptions of the good. As internal pluralism presupposes we can experience such choices between incommensurable values (in the form of conceptions of the good), it then has been shown to presupposes that the self is prior to its ends. That is to say, *internal pluralism presupposes the liberal view of the self.* Our ends or values do not go "all the way down," but are something we are capable of revising. On this foundational view of the person, internal pluralism and liberal theory are shown to overlap. And the liberal move from this view of the self to the need for political and civil liberties is one which pluralism is not only consistent with, but supportive of.

After moving on to defend this link between internal pluralism and liberalism from some possible objections, chapter two closes with a list of some interesting similarities between Taylor and Berlin.

Chapter three attempts to locate this argument from pluralism to liberalism within the context of contemporary debates about pluralism and whether it can indeed provide support to liberalism. This discussion is engaged with two concerns in mind. The first is whether any of the arguments in the literature to date hold force in severing the link between liberalism and pluralism offered here. It is argued that this is not the case,

because critics of value pluralism can be shown to be operating with the old incommensurability-as-property view in mind.

The second concern of chapter three is whether any of value pluralism's critics are successful in showing that it can support *ill*iberalism. If so, this would mean that the bridge between internal pluralism and liberalism offered here had failed to demonstrate that this link was an exclusive one, thereby rendering it moot in arguments for liberalism's superiority to other options. Once again arguing that this objection does not succeed, this chapter tries to make further distinctions between varieties of value pluralism, introducing the following four conceptions:

a) the nowhere view (pluralism is true neither inside nor outside the self).

b) the everywhere view (true both outside and inside the self).

c) the inside-only view (true only inside the self).

d) the outside-only view (true only outside the self).

Once these distinctions are brought to the fore, it becomes clear that the version of pluralism defended here is c), the inside-only view; and that proponents of value pluralism as a support to illiberalism unconsciously employ b), the everywhere view. And as the everywhere view incorporates all the problems of pluralism external to the self and the "property" conception of incommensurability, this provides powerful new reasons to reject those accounts of pluralism which claim it provides no exclusive support to liberalism.

The argument now over, the thesis concludes with a brief discussion of what the link between internal pluralism and liberalism may mean for liberalism's historicist critics, and tries to identify those conceptual

distinctions which the thesis has employed which may have value independent of the argument overall.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Berlin is famous for an aversion to philosophical systems, preferring instead to work out his views on such issues as negative and positive liberty, deterministic history, nationalism and a host of other concepts on a case-by-case basis. While recent sympathetic critics of Berlin such as Claude Galipeau and John Gray have attempted to catalogue Berlin's diverse interests in order to defend their overall coherence and internal consistency, I can happily disavow any such ambition here. Instead, this chapter is concerned with Berlin's writing about value pluralism alone, dealing with any other notions only insofar as they spread light on the topic at hand. If there are special challenges posed by engaging the work of a non-systematic thinker, this at least is one advantage, in that one can hive off a given area of concern from the rest of the corpus without the feeling that one is committing philosophical vandalism.

The aim of the beginning part of the chapter is simply to describe: How does Berlin characterize value pluralism? In the first of the chapter's two central distinctions, I summarize Berlin's extensive writings on value pluralism as being divisible into five categories. These are irreconcilable value systems, cultural pluralism, intra-social value pluralism, values clashing within the self, and the clash of values as a precondition of the practice of political philosophy. Doubtless there are areas where the items in this taxonomy overlap, but the dividing lines are no fuzzier that most, and, in any event, these really are the five ways in which Berlin articulates his understanding of value pluralism, which is all a descriptive account attempts to capture.

The chapter's second important distinction moves beyond description into analysis with the collapse of the five accounts into a prior two-part division: pluralism inside and outside of the self. This distinction, easily the most important in the chapter, if not the thesis overall, is one we will have repeated occasion to return to. It first occurs here in a critical discussion of Berlin's five variants of pluralism, as each is taken up and examined in turn. I contend that, because incommensurability is central to the idea of pluralism, value pluralism within the self alone is true. This position is referred to as "internal pluralism." I argue that Berlin's other understandings, particularly intra-social value pluralism, cannot be borne as areas where incommensurability, and therefore pluralism, genuinely occurs.

That this distinguishes the understanding of pluralism offered here from that of Berlin's will be obvious. But it is also perhaps worth noting that as Berlin's notion of pluralism has been influential in the literature, including

upon those critics who reject the idea outright or see it as providing no support to liberalism, that this makes the notion of internal pluralism, so far as I am aware, a new one. Toward the end of the chapter I therefore attempt to refine the distinction between it and the dominant conception of value pluralism, arguing that the difference is rooted in two different concepts of incommensurability. The dominant view most often treats incommensurability as a property, something inherent in the make-up of values themselves. I argue in contrast that it is better thought of as something we can experience, in those instances where equally ultimate values come into conflict.

The chapter will achieve its primary aims then, if by the end three ideas have been communicated to the reader: Berlin discusses value pluralism in five different ways; only one of these however, is an area where incommensurability, and therefore pluralism, really holds; the variant of pluralism which remains, internal pluralism, treats incommensurability as an experience, not a property.

These important distinctions will reappear in later chapters. But before moving on, the chapter closes with a brief outline of what potential remains for any social dimension of pluralism, and presents a rival account to Berlin's concerning pluralism's historical introduction, wherein Machiavelli is rejected as its originator in favour of Sophocles. But first, the five varieties.

VARIETIES OF VALUE PLURALISM

Irreconcilable value systems

What all of Berlin's articulations of pluralism have in common is their sharp contrast with monism, the belief in "a single, unchanging, objective

code of universal precepts—the simple harmonious ideal way of life to which, whether they know it or not, all men aspire" (Berlin 1976: xxiii). Value pluralism , by contrast, holds that values can be equally ultimate, and come into conflict. A frequent example of Berlin's is the incompatibility of *laissez-faire* individual liberty and the welfare state ideal of material equality (Berlin 1969: 167; Jahanbegloo 1992, 142.). Both are genuine values, yet are incompatible or incommensurable, as Berlin variously puts it. Monism, he argues, overlooks this fact of life. In Berlin's simplest summary of value pluralism, "[n]ot all ultimate values are compatible with one another" (Berlin 1980: 71).

Berlin illustrates this through an iconoclastic reading of Machiavelli. Importantly, he does not characterize Machiavelli himself as a pluralist, but rather argues that its truth can be found "implicit" in his political writing, insofar as it causes a conflict of values "in the minds of his readers" (Berlin 1980: 70). Berlin characterizes this clash in a number of ways, but the characterization most relevant for present purposes is his description of it as a discordance between "two conflicting systems of values" (Berlin 1980: 58). The two value-systems at odds are Christian and Pagan ethics. The values of the former are "charity, mercy, sacrifice, love of God, forgiveness of enemies, contempt for the goods of this world, faith in the life hereafter, belief in the salvation of the individual soul as being of incomparable value—higher than, indeed wholly incommensurable with, any social or political or other terrestrial goal" (Berlin 1980: 45). The opposing system lauds "courage, vigour, fortitude in adversity, public achievement, order, discipline,

happiness, strength, justice, above all assertion of one's proper claims and the knowledge and power needed to secure their satisfaction" (Berlin 1980: 45).

These two systems are irreconcilable. Yet this is not a dilemma for Machiavelli: "He is indeed rejecting Christian ethics, but in favour of [the] other system" (Berlin 1980: 54). "There was no problem and no agony for him . . . he chose his side, and took little interest in the values that this choice ignored or flouted" (Berlin 1980: 70). Nor is it agonizing for Berlin. The person it poses a problem for is "[a]nyone who believes in Christian morality, and regards the Christian commonwealth as its embodiment, but at the same time largely accepts the validity of Machiavelli's political and psychological analysis and does not reject the secular heritage of Rome—a man in this predicament is faced with a dilemma which, if Machiavelli is right, is not merely unsolved but insoluble" (Berlin 1980: 77).

According to Berlin, this is the first appearance of value pluralism. "It is the uncovering of the possibility of more than one system of values, with no criterion common to the systems whereby a rational choice can be made between them" (Berlin 1980: 71). In this way does Machiavelli leave his Christian reader with an "implicit invitation" (Berlin 1980: 71) to choose between the two hierarchies of values, as they cannot be fused, or part taken from each. A deep incompatibility is at work, on the level of the foundational assumptions of both. The depth extends down past the ability of reason to decide. "Rationality and calculation can be applied only to means and subordinate ends, but never to ultimate ends" (Berlin 1980: 78).

Cultural pluralism

A second conception of value pluralism in Berlin is cultural pluralism. In response to a critic who interpreted his as being hostile to the central beliefs of Herder, Berlin has stated that "[s]o far from 'deep distrust' of Herder's pluralism and expressivism, I accept it fully" (Berlin 1983: 292). Berlin's characterization of Herder's expressivism and pluralism then, will also articulate a belief of his own. Berlin's summary of Herder's and his own cultural pluralism is as follows:

> *Pluralism:* the belief not merely in the multiplicity, but in the incommensurability, of the values of different cultures and societies and, in addition, in the incompatibility of equally valid ideals, together with the implied revolutionary corollary that the classical notions of an ideal man and of an ideal society are intrinsically incoherent and meaningless (Berlin 1976: 153).

Berlin is here opposing the idea that there is a single schema according to which all cultures may be ranked, an objective, intercultural standard, which overarches their many different values. Yet his counter-description is made less than clear by his choice of words. Strictly speaking, values can not be both incommensurable and equally valid: equality is a measured relation. Neither of the definitions of incommensurability—a) not having a common standard of measurement or, very differently, b) of different measure, as in different size or amount—is compatible with equality as Berlin uses it here. Moreover, incompatibility and incommensurability are not the same thing, as we will see in the criticism below.

In the meantime, it is necessary to note the other notion cultural pluralism is here described as being bound up with: expressivism. A key element of Expressivism is the claim that "self-expression is part of the

essence of human-beings as such" (Berlin, 1976: 253). Just as our view of the universe shifted from being geocentric to heliocentric, the eighteenth century expressivism Berlin endorses marked a similar recentreing of the source of human communication. It was now no longer seen as traceable back to other-worldly causes such as the mind of God, but rather as a manifestation of "the entire personality of the individual or the group," (Berlin 1976: 153) in particular the cultural group.

'Culture' can of course refer to many things, from Western civilization itself to highly specific networks of belonging, such as the Wall Street stockbrokers referred to in the title of the book *The Money Culture*. Berlin's usage here refers to cultures bound together by territory and language: "Human groups, large and small, are products of climate, geography, physical and biological needs, and similar features; they are made one by common traditions and common memories, of which the principle links and vehicle—indeed, more than which, the very incarnation—is language" (Berlin, 1976: 165). On this account, for a German to imitate a French person, aping foreign habits and patterns of living, is an inauthentic way of living. Her very identity is bound up with her status as German speaker, as her language emerses her in an "entire network of belief and behaviour than binds" her with her fellow Germans (Berlin 1976: 165). Both pluralism and expressivism then, are founded on a bedrock conviction that cultures, defined roughly in terms of national language communities (what Berlin elsewhere calls "national cultures" [Berlin 1992: 10])[2] should be judged by internal

2 This is of course a kind of nationalism; "but it is important to realize that Herder's nationalism was never political. If he denounces individualism, he equally detests the state, which coerces and mutilates the free human personality" (Berlin, 1976, 181). Berlin thinks the ramifications of the

standards, not those of a different society, some supposedly neutral cosmopolitan standard, (which really means by the cultural standards of the adjudicator), nor by standards endorsed by the culture under examination in a previous era and since thrown off, that is, by standards so ancient as to now constitute those of a foreign culture (Berlin, 1976: 153; 165-180). Different cultures will aspire to different ideals, result in different patterns of life. And while Berlin has repeatedly insisted that we can imaginatively place ourselves in a culture not our own, to see how alien values and systems can animate whole societies (Berlin 1983: 390; 1992, 557), there is no perfect, single cultural ideal toward which all cultures are marching, or which can be used to grade the shortcomings of existing societies. Heterogeneity and variety of cultures, with their correspondingly plural, incommensurate values, are a fact of the human condition.

Intra-social value conflict

According to Berlin's third articulation of value pluralism, societies will frequently be riven by intra-social conflicts over values; whole systems will clash with one another, and individual values will themselves come into conflict. Disputes over incompatible ends "can never wholly be eliminated from human life, either personal or social" (Berlin 1969: 169). An example Berlin provides involves his belief in the desirability of a uniform education system, one that does away with the privileges of status and opportunity that are the result of "a social hierarchy of schools" (Berlin 1969: liii). We can frame this as a debate over the value of private schools: doing away with them would prevent the wealthy from buying a superior education for their

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expressivist view of culture demand only an endorsement of "cultural self-determination" (182), rather than a theory of how to structure the state.

children, a privilege denied the poor. This is desirable, Berlin argues, because now the education system would be animated by a concern with the needs of students, not wealth; social solidarity would be improved, and other gains would be achieved. Parents of private school children will of course object; they argue that their liberty will be limited by this change, particularly their liberty to "determine the intellectual, religious, social conditions in which the child is to be brought up" (Berlin 1969: liv). Berlin does not dismiss these concerns: "but I should maintain that when (as in this case) values genuinely clash, choices must be made" (Berlin 1969: liv). This example is significant and will be returned to. What is important to note here is that the clash involves parties who share a society yet nevertheless differ on some crucial values.

Value pluralism within the self

At its simplest, Berlin's fourth understanding of value pluralism, that which occurs within the self, is articulated in his straightforward remark, "one cannot have everything" (Berlin 1969: li). To be a human being is to risk being enthralled by diverse goods. Sometimes we can order them into a harmonious whole, but often we cannot, and are left with the "agony of choice" (Berlin 1969: 168). This need to choose, "to sacrifice some ultimate values to others, turns out to be a permanent characteristic of the human predicament" (Berlin: 1969, li). This is very different from intra-social value pluralism. Here, within the self, the result of the plurality of values can be painful, pull us in different directions at once. Again and again, Berlin has stressed the non-existence of an "algorithmic" formula for value adjudication (Berlin and Williams 1994: 307). At the core of Berlin's position is the belief

that not all of the values which have a claim on us can always be reconciled, that they can and will be incommensurable. The potential for strife between them is part of their very nature.

Value pluralism as a precondition of political philosophy

Berlin sees value pluralism as a precondition for the existence of political theory itself. The latter, he argues, is concerned with questions answerable neither by observation and empirical data, as the natural sciences are, nor with questions of a formal nature, answerable through the use of accepted axioms and rules of deduction, in the manner of mathematics and formal logic (Berlin 1978: 144). In both the realm of the empirical and the formal, even if one does not know the answer to a question, the means by which it is to be determined is not in dispute: I know how to determine the square root of 1008, or find out when Sweden elected its first prime minister. Philosophical questions, according to Berlin, fall outside either of these categories. "When I am asked 'Where is the image in the mirror?' or 'Can time stand still?' I am not sure what kind of question it is that is being asked, or whether indeed it makes any sense at all" (Berlin 1978: 146). Such questions are puzzling because they do not automatically suggest a single technique or universally recognized method of answering. The central questions of political theory are questions of this type: 'Why should anyone obey anyone else?' or 'What is justice?'. According to Berlin they cannot be answered through collecting data or the application of an algorithm. "What makes such questions prima facie philosophical is the fact that no wide agreement on the meaning of some of the concepts involved" (Berlin 1978: 149). The sharp divisions on the very nature of the concepts which the questions of political

philosophy presuppose—notions such as authority, sovereignty, liberty—precludes investigations into such questions ever achieving the status of a science. One cause of this is that Atheists, Christians, Marxists, and empiricists, to use some of Berlin's examples, will come to the analysis of value concepts against a background of prior, deeper—i.e. "philosophical" (Berlin 1978: 149)—disagreement.[3]

Berlin argues that this means the kind of argument and discussion in which philosophy consists is only possible in a world where ends collide. "In a society dominated by a single goal there could in principle only be arguments about the best means to attain this end—and arguments about means are technical, that is, scientific and empirical in character." (Berlin 1978: 149) In a society of this kind, no genuinely philosophical questions about political goals or values could arise, as they have already been decisively answered. "Political philosophy in the traditional sense" (Berlin 1978, 149) however, is about challenging and disputing assumptions and first principles. Hence its incompatibility with any society other than one in which no single value has been universally taken as final.

CRITICISM

Plural value systems, cultural pluralism, intra-social value conflict, values clashing within the self, and value pluralism as a ground for the very

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3 Berlin seems to be defining 'philosophical' in broad terms: "Among the topics that remain obstinately philosophical, and have, despite repeated efforts, failed to transform themselves into sciences, are some that in their very essence involve value judgements. Ethics, aesthetics, criticism explicitly concerned with general ideas, all but the most technical types of history and scholarship, still live at various points of this limbo, unable or unwilling to emerge by either the empirical or the formal door" (Berlin 1979: 149). He concedes that the "mere fact value judgements are relevant to an intellectual pursuit is clearly not sufficient to disqualify it from being a recognized science." (Berlin 1979: 148). The value of 'normal health' for example, does not affect foundational aspects of the study of anatomy, physiology, pathology etc.

possibility of political philosophy. These five varieties of value pluralism do not all amount to the same thing, and some are more compelling than others. Showing why this is so first involves recalling the distinction that was briefly noted in the discussion of cultural pluralism, that between incommensurability and incompatibility.

Even though Berlin often uses these two terms interchangeably, they denote very different concepts. As George Crowder points out, incompatibility rules out monism only "in the narrow sense of universal harmony." (Crowder 1994: 295). But it does not preclude monism in a wider sense, because "even if values were incompatible—even if they did conflict—they could still be ranked or traded off according to some overarching principle and thus fitted into an all-things-considered order." (Crowder 1994: 295). A Christian for example may value both the community esteem that comes with worldly success and the anti-materialistic teachings of her church; putting her all into her career is incompatible with the more contemplative spiritual life she also strives after. But this incompatibility does not prevent her from deciding that she ranks the second option higher.

Mere incompatibility then, is not enough for genuine value pluralism to occur. For that, incommensurability is needed. But does incommensurability hold in all five varieties of Berlin's pluralism? In fact, it seems only to hold in one instance, that of value pluralism within the self. Seeing this involves examining each in turn, taking up the least compelling variant first.

The nature of political philosophy

Characterizing political philosophy itself as impossible without value pluralism being true is a large, impressive-sounding claim, but like many

such claims, it loses force when examined more closely. "What makes such questions prima facie philosophical," Berlin writes in his characterization of philosophy, "is the fact that no wide agreement exists on the meaning of some of the concepts involved." (Berlin 1978: 149) He then goes on to spell out the link with value pluralism:

> [D]isagreements about the analysis of value concepts, as often as not, spring from profounder differences, since the notion of, say, rights or justice or liberty will be radically dissimilar for theists and atheists, mechanistic determinists and Christians, Hegelians and empiricists, romantic irrationalists and Marxists, and so forth. It seems no less clear that these differences are not, at least prima facie, either logical or empirical, and have usually and rightly been classified as irreducibly philosophical.
>
> This carries at least one important implication. If we ask the Kantian question 'In what kind of world is political philosophy—the kind of discussion and argument in which it consists—in principle possible?' the answer must be 'Only in a world where ends collide' (Berlin 1978: 149).

This passage seems terribly confused: it amounts to the assertion that disagreements about the definition of concepts such as rights often stem from prior worldview disagreements such as those between Hegelians and empiricists, which are—by definition—philosophical disagreements. As disagreements, they make philosophy possible. Berlin is either making a logically dubious claim—because disagreements of value are frequently grounded in deeper philosophical disagreements the reverse must also be true: philosophical disagreements necessarily presuppose disagreements over values. (Marriage frequently leads to children. Therefore children are a necessary condition for marriage.) Or "philosophical disagreement" and "disagreement over values" are simply synonyms. Either way, Berlin

assumes what he sets out to prove. He further assumes that philosophy is ineliminably bound up with disagreement, and equates disagreement with "ends colliding." Both assumptions are questionable.

First, the very idea of philosophical *agreement* is near-impossible on Berlin's understanding of the discipline. Rare as it may be, we sometimes do bring people around to our way of looking at things. Indeed, Berlin's own list of discordant perspectives presupposes this: 'Marxists' denotes a group in clear agreement, as do all the other names of philosophical schools he lists. Berlin clearly has intra-social value pluralism in mind when discussing clashes of values between such groups, as he does throughout his discussion of value pluralism and philosophy. But whole societies have been animated by a common belief in Christianity, to choose an example that typified social reality for centuries of political thought. Yet on Berlin's account, giving theoretical expression—no matter how penetrating or nuanced—to beliefs which command consensus throughout a society or culture is, by definition, non-philosophical.[4] Berlin's problem is that his view equates philosophical status with a certain ceiling on the level of consensus. But ideas do not become more or less philosophical depending on how many people subscribe to them.

Second, is disagreement really synonymous with the slippery term "ends colliding"? Even though Berlin seems to be using 'ends' as a catch-all phrase

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4 Among the many negative consequences of subscribing to such an odd view is the impossibility of fully endorsing Herder's idea of cultural value pluralism, which includes philosophers among the vehicles of the expression of a culture's identity: "Leibniz is ours; Plato is not" (Berlin 1979, 190). Although to be fair, despite his statement that he fully accepts Herder's pluralism, Berlin himself most frequently treats philosophical ideas as not rooted in a single culture (Berlin 1969, 118-172; 1978 1-12; 1992, 20-48).

to include not only plural values but rival definitions of the same value and incompatible philosophical worldviews, we are surely meant to read this as "incommensurate values colliding"—otherwise the idea has little force. Berlin's position is not that pluralism means the collision of full-blooded values with trivial pursuits. But is even this consistent with his example of squabbling Marxists, empiricists and the rest? From each of their perspectives, insofar as they disagree about the definition of a philosophical idea, the subject of discussion is not two correct or incommensurate views but their own correct one and the plainly inferior one of their misguided interlocutors. Indeed, Berlin himself is well-known for assaulting a vulgar Marxist definition of freedom in "Two Concepts of Liberty." Competing definitions of philosophical concepts or rival schools can travel under the pluralist banner only within radically circumscribed limits, if at all. It seems a truism to point out that philosophical disagreement conventionally involves argument—a non-subjective criteria of outright adjudication among rival claims. Indeed, a willingness to engage in philosophy depends upon the assumption that rival theories are *not unrankable.*

At this point, Berlin might respond that his link between value pluralism and philosophy was merely to make a negative point, highlighting the incompatibility of monism and free inquiry. And yet, on a strictly philosophical level this is not true: the fetishized value could be the inviolability of conscience, intellectual self-development, or some other aim fully compatible with vigourous philosophical activity. Berlin might reply that, historically, the reigning value of monist societies have not been so

humane. At this point however, he is undone by his own account of actually existing monism:

> In practice, the kind of goal that can command the allegiance of a society—happiness, power, obedience to the divine will, national glory, individual self-realization, or some other ultimate pattern of life, is so general that it leaves open the question of what kinds of lives or conduct incarnate it. No society can be so 'monolithic' that there is no gap between its culminating purpose and the means towards it—a gap filled with secondary ends, penultimate values
> . . . what is to be done is a question which can occur at any level (Berlin 1978: 151).

In other words, full-fledged social monism is impossible. The sub-social groups and individual which constitute societies will always pursue diverse ends, whatever the privilege paid to any single value in official discourse. This is a bracing picture of all societies as permanently teeming with different conceptions of the good. Liberals should take heart; simplifiers beware. But we are also left to wonder what exactly monism is. Berlin's answer here would seem to be that it exists not in reality but in theory—a philosopher's conceit. If so, Berlin's Herderian view of national cultures as simple networks of agreement and common cause would seem to need serious reformulation. More importantly however, this portrait of society holds severe implications for a critique of monism Berlin wants to simultaneously advance.

This incompatibility is clearest in Berlin's final articulation of the link between political philosophy and value pluralism, where he calls monism a "useful abstraction" (Berlin 1978: 151). Contrasting it with the way things really are, we find that "to acknowledge the reality of political questions

presupposes a pluralism of values. . . . recognition of which is incompatible with a technocratic or authoritarian everything-is-either-an-indisputable-end-or-a-means, monistic structure of values" (Berlin 1978: 252). But the logic short-circuits here: intra-social disagreements such as that between Marxists, theists and other rival groups (disagreements which constitute "the reality of political questions") do not presuppose pluralism—they presuppose disagreement among rival camps of monism. The problem here again is that we need to read ' incommensurate' into the phrase 'pluralism of values.' Hence Berlin's argument against monism as such must assume monism is true on either a sub-social or individual level. But this is also where he wants to attack it—in the mind of rival thinkers, the only place it can exist. Berlin assumes the truth of views which emphasize a single value above others in order to attack the very possibility of their being true.

Overall, Berlin's attempt to link value pluralism and political philosophy itself is unsuccessful. This is because it attempts to move from intra-social philosophical disagreement to a claim about the existence of incommensurate values; disagreement is silently equated with what it is not. But because it lacks any occurrence of genuine incommensurability, this variant of value pluralism has to be rejected.

Pluralism external and internal to the self

The incommensurability test is similarly revealing when applied to Berlin's four other conceptions of value pluralism. These can be classified according to where pluralism is said to occur: inside or outside the self. For example, the clashing systems of values discussed in Berlin's examination of Machiavelli met within an individual mind, that of Machiavelli's reader. It

was then an instance of pluralism within the self.[5] It is important to note the obvious difference between such pluralism within the self and intra-social and cultural value pluralism. The latter two are phenomena of the social world, where values differ between individuals or groups.

A crucial question is how conflicts of clashing value which take place outside of the self are resolved according to Berlin. Central to this is determining in what way, if any, incommensurability is involved. Berlin sometimes writes that we are "simply left to choose." But between what? Suppose two citizens clash in a dispute over abortion. One values a woman's right to choice; the other the life of the fetus. These two can be in conflict without ever considering the opponent's animating concern a 'value' at all. To go out and argue with one's neighbours about an issue such as this would seem to presuppose that one is not internally divided, but rather of an opinion which stresses a value one's opponents do not. The same can be said for many of the disputes over values which currently divide public opinion. Homosexuality, censorship, capital punishment: a lot of the time, perhaps most, we don't see our opponents embodying something good, but rather as simply wrong. For the participants in such disputes, the values involved are decidedly commensurable, decidedly unequal.

The schools example of intra-social value pluralism

Such is the case in Berlin's own example of values clashing over the structure of the education system. As we will see throughout the thesis,

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5 Of course, the distinction between value systems and individual values is logically distinct from pluralism inside and outside the self: one refers to where the clash takes place, the other to its content. One possible combination that is not addressed here is the clash of systems on an intra-social level. But this is because of the rejection of intra-social pluralism of any kind which is argued for below.

examples are crucially important to determining whether incommensurability occurs. And as Berlin's school scenario is an extremely rare instance of him describing the circumstance wherein plural values are said to clash, it is worth examining in detail.

Berlin favours a "uniform system of general primary and secondary education in every country," (Berlin 1969: liii) to do away with the inegalitarian social status resulting from allowing the rich to send their children to different schools than the poor. Here is how Berlin outlines such a scenario:

> If I were told that this [reform] must severely curtail the liberty of parents who claim the right not to be interfered with in this matter—that it was an elementary right to be allowed to choose the type of educational to be given to one's child, to determine the intellectual, religious, social, economic conditions in which the child is to be brought up
> —I should not be ready to dismiss this outright. But I should maintain that when (as in this case) values genuinely clash, choices must be made. In this case the clash arises between the need to preserve the existing liberty of some parents to determine the type of education they seek for their children [and] the need to promote other social purposes . . . (Berlin 1969: liv).

Berlin is clearly ranking values here. Those advocated by the rich parents do not carry the day against the reformers'. The difference between a monist and a pluralist on this matter thus seems to amount to little more than that the monist thinks his values should trump his opponents worthless ones, while the pluralist pauses to acknowledge that yes, his opponents' views are indeed values, but his own must triumph nonetheless. Perhaps this is still a

significant difference between the pluralist and the monist, although I am sceptical. What is most important to note however, is that at no time has incommensurability entered the scenario; and three claims seem to follow from this.

The first is that here, as in Berlin's other discussions of intra-social value pluralism, it is possible to redescribe the clash as one between rival monists. For example, the parents in the school scenario could be fundamentalist Christians or Muslims, the anti-private education forces Marxists. Second, Berlin is advocating a global norm: his "uniform system" reform is aimed at "every country." Whatever the reasons which may justify such a move, surely a robust commitment to pluralism of any kind is not one of them. Different cultures and sub-cultures frequently make different claims on educational institutions.[6] And finally, Berlin's implication that such conflicts involve a decisive moment of choice seems misleading. The disputants involved could have made their "choice" long before coming into conflict with their opponents, and nothing in the nature of such clashes demands that either party even see the rival concerns as values at all. In short, it is quite possible to be thoroughly close-minded in situations such as this. Some third party observing the two groups may feel a on-the-one-hand-on-the-other ambivalence, finding a good on either side, but that switches the locus

6 Berlin has frequently stated that he thinks that some minimum floor of common values is shared by all cultures: perhaps his uniform education plan is bound up with this. Alternatively, Berlin discusses the school scheme within the context of ensuring the availability of genuine opportunities to exercise liberty (Berlin 1968: l-li), a value which he sometimes characterizes as more important than others (Berlin 1968,: 170-71): perhaps then, his school reform stems from this. Either motive however is incompatible with an unqualified commitment to cultural diversity, which is the point at hand.

of the drama to within the self, which is not the kind of pluralism Berlin has in mind.[7]

This last point is of central importance. It amounts to the claim that in order for pluralism to be real, it is a necessary precondition that some single individual feel plural values come into conflict. The parties in the school dispute need not necessarily feel so divided. Likewise, an observer does not have to feel torn: he could simply take a side, seeing a conflict between a genuine value and something else. For values to be genuinely equal or incommensurate, some one person, at least, must first find them so. Otherwise, how do we distinguish between the many varieties of human conflict we observe and participate in? That is, how would we distinguish the schools conflict from a case where we see one side as clearly animated not by a "value" at all but rather a trivial concern, or worse, a goal which is blatantly reprehensible? We've all been in arguments where one party has been trying to get across something important, the other simply selfish or inconsiderate. And when we read of the viciously anti-Semitic motives of German authorities in the thirties, we do not see them as involved in a "conflict of incommensurable values" with their Jewish citizens, but something radically distinct.

This means that in order for Berlin's school example to have any force as an example of values coming into conflict on a societal level, it must silently depend on the observer—whether Berlin or we his readers—first finding

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7 "What is clear is that values can clash—that is why civilizations are incompatible. They can be incompatible between cultures, or groups in the same culture, or between you and me. . . .Values may clash within the breast of a single individual" (Berlin 1992: 12). Clearly, Berlin's view is that intra-social value pluralism is distinct from the clash of values within the self.

something of value on either side. And this is true of Berlin's understanding of intra-social value pluralism as such. For suppose he tried to illustrate his point with a discussion of curriculum changes in the early stages of some authoritarian regime. The authorities want to introduce materials which advocate racism, creationism, phrenology or some other dark discipline of the past. A group of parents resist. This would not resonate with us as an example of a clash of equal or incommensurate values, unless we had some inner sympathy with the aims of the authorities. Lacking this, we see instead a clash of reason and ignorance or hate. And this, of course, is a long way from incommensurability; and so intra-social pluralism must be rejected.

Cultural pluralism and the self

Berlin's endorsement of Herder's cultural pluralism faces problems similar to those involved in his understanding of intra-social pluralism. Once again, the issue revolves around incommensurability. Berlin's sweeping claim is that all cultures are incommensurable, period. But this is simply not true: we are quite capable of judging one cultural practice superior to another and frequently do. For example, many cultures at one point had their own number systems. Eventually they all gave way to Arabic numerals, the spread of which constituted a series of people in different cultures ranking Arabic numerals as superior to the systems they had used previously. (Roman numerals, for instance, are unwieldy and, worse, have no zero concept.) Just as was the case with intra-social value pluralism, in order for cultural values to clash in a manner which illustrates genuine pluralism, an individual mind must first be enthralled by rival "values," which he or she finds unrankable. In this case, by values with origins in different cultures.

Is this possible? The experience of immigrants would certainly seem to indicate so. A young Indian-Canadian may want to marry a spouse of his choosing, yet also want to honour his parents who demand an arranged marriage. The internal debate within such a young man can be dramatic and agonizing indeed. But this is very different from what Berlin has in mind in his discussion of cultural pluralism. He has in mind situations where we judge cultures of which we are in no way a part. As much as I may find the conformism of contemporary Japan unappealing, I should not be too quick to rank it as inferior to my own culture's values of self-expression and individualism. Equally, according to Berlin, I should not slavishly imitate Japanese customs, but remain true to my own cultural patterns of behaviour. The first stricture however operates within the strict limits that the cultural practice at hand not fall too far afield from my own values: were the cultural practice at issue slavery, I would find no "value" at all. And the second stricture may amount to pluralism in the mind of some observing God who, looking down, finds equal or incommensurate cultures, but from the point of view of the individual involved, one value is being prioritized more than some others—being true to my cultural origin. The consequence of Berlin's view of one's own culture here seems an imprisoning one, rather than a commitment to pluralistic openness: on his Herderian account choosing to immigrate to and join another culture—if possible at all—can only be described as an act of cultural self-betrayal.

Might there be room for a softer version of incommensurability regarding one's view of foreign cultures? One question that comes immediately to mind is whether this does not separate one from the great majority of

cultures past and present, which took a decidedly commensurate view of their practices compared to others', even going so far as to war over them. In fact, the incommensurable view may be particular to our contemporary Western Post-Herderian culture, and therefore not truly equally open to all of the cultures it claims to be receptive to.

However, there do seem to be occasions when we think about aspects of other cultures in a way involving genuine incommensurability. 'Which is better, French or Russian literature?' for example, would seem to be a silly question to those of to whom it is clear that France and Russia's national literatures aren't measurable and contrastable the same way their respective Gross Domestic Products are. Of course, there may well be (and probably are) snobs in both countries who do claim one is clearly better then the other. The point is that large sweeping generalizations such as the one Berlin wants to make seem out of place when we contrast cultural values. Some, such as rival number systems, have shown themselves to be subject to rational comparison and ranking, others have not. And there is no apparent consensus on what cultural values are more likely to seem incommensurable.

Cultural difference alone therefore, is not enough to show incommensurability. For cultural values to be incommensurable, some individual must first find them so. Perhaps an unbiased exposure to cultural pluralism on a social level can be a cause of this, although this seems less than automatic. Even so, it would not change the fact that for values to be incommensurable, as is required by pluralism, they must be so within an individual self. Cultural pluralism, in the social form Berlin understands it,

therefore cannot hold. And this leaves pluralism within the self as the only genuine version of value pluralism as such.

Incommensurability: property or experience?

Why would Berlin (and others) find values to be incommensurable in so many areas which, upon examination, can be shown not to involve incommensurability at all? One possible explanation can be found in his repeated description of incommensurability as something close to a property, something which adheres in the make-up of values themselves. This would seem to be the case when he elliptically remarks that "collisions of values are of the essence of what they are" (Berlin 1990: 13). Reading Berlin, one is sometimes reminded of the way the empiricists would describe an object's colour, mass or "force" as being an isolatable property within it, incommensurability being something which adheres within values in a similar manner. And yet, even a moment's reflection shows that incommensurability is far from given in all clashes of values.

Consider Berlin's paradigm example of liberty clashing with equality.[8] To say the two are incommensurable would seem to imply that we will be without a means of rationally deciding between them in *every* instance of their coming into conflict. But this is simply not true to our experience in these matters, are there could be a case where some tiny increase in equality came at such a brutal reduction of liberty that no one who valued liberty at all could support it. It is therefore seriously misleading to imply that values are incommensurable as such—which, regretfully, Berlin often does.

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8 Here I am following Bernard Williams, "Conflicts of Values," in A. Ryan (ed.) *The Idea of Freedom: Essays in Honour of Isaiah Berlin*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, p. 227.

This is a severe criticism of Berlin, and should be recognized as such. Nevertheless, it does not close the door on incommensurability—and therefore pluralism—itself. There is another way of conceiving of incommensurability, and that is as something we can experience. Rather than being latent in values themselves, incommensurability has to do with how we think and feel in certain instances where we are enthralled by rival claims of value. I may find myself torn by the conflicting claims of values *x* and *y* while you find *x* plainly superior: incommensurability therefore occurs in me and not the values themselves. This then can be termed "internal pluralism," the belief that pluralism holds only inside our very selves.[9]

This more circumscribed account of incommensurability seems truer to how we actually experience values than Berlin's incommensurability-as-property view. Or so, at least, it will be argued. If this is the case, it would not be the first time an innovative claim, such as Berlin's idea of pluralism certainly was, turned out upon examination to have been originally applied to areas where it did not truly belong. Perhaps Berlin's view of pluralism went unchallenged for so long because his accounts of general values such as liberty and equality coming into conflict caused his readers to think only of those instances where such values conflicted incommensurably for them on a personal level: the discussions of intra-social pluralism and the rest in Berlin's writing were thus silently dependent on the reader conceiving the values at hand in a way that he himself would find incommensurable, i.e. within his own self. This would only add to the need to make explicit the

9 As we will see in chapter three, it is logically possible to conceive of pluralism holding only inside the self, only outside, in both places or neither: Berlin's property view argues for both.

manner in which we can, on an individual level, find two values incommensurable; a need which the present argument seeks to make plain.

To summarize this argument, it claims that, of Berlin's five original conceptions of value pluralism, only pluralism within the self avoids disqualification as a form of value pluralism, as none of the others involve incommensurability—something which must be involved for a form of pluralism to genuinely obtain. This argument further holds that incommensurability is to be conceived of as something which we experience, not something latent in values themselves. Making the case for this type of pluralism will be one of the primary aims of chapter two. Before moving on to that task however, two ancillary points remain to be made. These concern what possibility remains for any social dimension of value pluralism, and secondly, when it was first articulated historically.

The social dimension of value pluralism

Arguing against the possibility of value pluralism existing external to the self, whether on an intra-social or cultural level, does not mean than value pluralism can have no social dimension at all. It does mean that any social dimension to value pluralism can only result from two people feeling simultaneously (or near-simultaneously) torn by the same two values. After a performance of *Antigone* for example (see below), another audience member and myself may find that we were both drawn up into the action of a crucial scene, where characters representing different values come into dramatic conflict. "I felt pulled in two directions at once there," I might say to my friend, who tells me that she also felt an identical internal division. But a third party may say that he felt no dilemma here: the scene presented him

with an easy choice, the value Creon represented (say) was obviously superior.

The social dimension of genuine value pluralism depends on something like the experience my first friend and I share being true; it occurs during those instances when we say to someone "I've been going back and forth about issue x," and they reply "me too." So we can have common or simultaneous inner experiences. But of course, this does not obviate the fact that they are internal to the self to begin with: the social nature of value pluralism depends on, rather than cancels out, its interior nature.

Value pluralism and its history

Berlin argues that Machiavelli's first made possible (however unintentionally) the realization that diverse values may clash, due to his "*de facto* recognition that ends equally ultimate, equally sacred, may contradict each other " (Berlin 1980: 74) in the normal course of life, and not merely in extreme or accidental circumstances. "[T]his was surely new." (Berlin 1980: 75). But is this really true?

One reason to be doubtful is that 'recognition' is used a little loosely here: Berlin's thesis more explicitly stated is that it is Machiavelli's "juxtaposition of the two outlooks [Christian and Pagan] . . . *in the minds of his readers*, and the collision and acute moral discomfort which follows, that, over the years, has been responsible for the desperate efforts to interpret his doctrines away"[10] (Berlin 1980: 70 italics added). To Berlin then, Machiavelli's significance is not in the simple content of his argument—he was

10 Berlin quotes at length dozens of competing, incompatible interpretations of Machiavelli.

unambiguously "a monist"[11] (Berlin 1980: 70)—but rather in the interpretive response of his many subsequent critics. And that there did occur the acute moral discomfort of deciding between values is evident to Berlin, not in any of these critics describing themselves as feeling forced to do so, but rather in the sheer variety of their responses. When a thinker of a previous era "still stirs passion, enthusiasm, or indignation, or any kind of intense debate, it is generally the case that he has propounded a thesis which upsets some deeply established *idée reçue*" (Berlin 1980: 70). In this case, the overturned idea is the unnamed one of monism.

Clearly, in his effort to portray Machiavelli as the inadvertent parent of value pluralism, Berlin is widening his focus beyond the argumentative claims of Machiavelli's writing itself (which come out unambiguously for "the superiority of Roman *antigua virtues*" [Berlin 1980: 77]), to include its historical, interpretive reception. And yet, Berlin shrinks his focus when pre-Machiavellian works are mentioned as possible first sources of the value pluralist idea: these are judged simply as texts, without histories of interpretation. This is a double standard, as is evident when Berlin writes that values clash in previous writings "merely in exceptional circumstances, as a result of abnormality or accident or error—the clash of Antigone and Creon or in the story of Tristan" (Berlin 1980: 75). Leaving aside the ease with which Berlin neatly bundles "accidental"[12] clashes of values apart from other

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11 Berlin recollects elsewhere that "I regard Machiavelli as a dualist thinker" (Jahanbegloo 1992: 54), but this is not how he puts it when examining the text directly.

12 If anything, this label applies to Machiavelli's version before the others. Berlin characterizes Machiavelli as believing that the clash between Christian and Princely virtues is a matter of historical contingency, (1979: 47-48) due to the historical development of the church. According to Machiavelli, an older version of Christianity "in the form in which its giver founded it" (Berlin 1979: 47) is perfectly compatible with his political prescriptions.

(logically necessary?) instances, it is worth spelling out how value pluralism can be shown to have an older intellectual genealogy when Berlin's standards are applied consistently.

Antigone

Berlin's standards emphasize the role of interpretation. Surely a play such as *Antigone* is an eminently appropriate subject for this approach; it is inherent in the nature of a script to be interpreted anew with each production, certainly more so than the argumentative, polemical writings of Machiavelli. Berlin further places much emphasis on the fact that Machiavelli was subject to numerous wildly different interpretations and stirred "intense debate." Sophocles's play meets this standard as well: George Steiner's *Antigones* opens with a discussion of the extensive interest European writers took in the play between 1790 and 1905. For Kierkegaard, the character Antigone "is to be understood as a counterpart to Christ" (Steiner 1986: 19). Goethe saw in her actions a signal demonstration of how "the ethical and the aesthetic combine" (Steiner 1986: 50). Hölderlin thought the play described "a moment of 'national reversal and revelation . . . the coming of republican institutions is foreshadowed'" (Steiner 1986: 81). And in addition to all of this, there is Hegel's view. Importantly, Steiner quotes him as saying the play is an account of "the collision between the two highest moral powers . . . Both are recognized as valid" (Quoted in Steiner 1986: 37). "It is from this passage," Steiner writes, "that derives the notion of tragedy as a conflict between two equal 'rights' or 'truths'" (Steiner 1986: 37). (What Hegel characterized as "[t]he law of the inward life . . . opposed to public law, to the law of the land" [Hegel 1952, 115].)

Unlike Machiavelli then, Sophocles has a pre-Berlinian interpreter who explicitly finds in his work a clash of genuine values. To be sure, Hegel and Berlin see value conflict as resolvable in very different ways:[13] Hegel is an emblematic monist, even more so than Machiavelli, and thinks reason dictates a systemic, *a priori* resolution. But Hegel's interpretation of *Antigone* characterizes the clash between Antigone's desire to bury her brother and Creon's order (to her) not to do so as the clash of two genuine goods. Importantly, support for this or other value pluralist readings of the play can be found in the text itself: Antigone does not demand that her sister join her in honouring their brother Polyneicas with burial, telling her "be what you want to" instead (Sophocles 1954: 161), thereby legitimizing her sister's separate path. The character Haemen, furthermore, loves both his bride-to-be Antigone and his father Creon. Caught between competing claims, he counsel's the single-minded Creon with the revealing words, "do not have one mind, and one alone/ that only your opinion can be right" (Sophocles 1954: 187). Finally, the wise seer Teiresias says Creon has "confused the lower and upper worlds," (Sophocles 1954: 195) each one a distinct realm of value. Each of these dramatic moments is compatible with an interpretation of the play as highlighting the clash of genuine goods, either between members of the same family, within an individual (Haemen), or between the realms of the upper- and underworld. And in the end three characters are murdered or

13 But see Roger Hausheer's introduction to *Against the Current* for similarities between Berlin and Hegel, including Berlin's "quasi-Hegelian view of history as an intelligible process of intellectual growth and self-correction," and the related notion that there is a "specific faculty of imaginative historical judgement," different from inductive or deductive reasoning, which makes possible such historical notions as anachronism (Berlin 1979: l-li).

commit suicide, an outcome consistent with the view that such clashes of values are not easily schematized into neat resolutions.

In contrast to all of this, Berlin has to exert heavy interpretive footwork to get around the problems posed by Machiavelli's description of Christian and princely action as compatible, not in conflict incommensurably or any other way: "the greatest good to be done and the most pleasing to God is that which one does to one's native city" (quoted in Berlin 1979: 75). In the end, Berlin's effort to characterize value pluralism as the patrimony of Machiavelli is simply unpersuasive, and Sophocles has a stronger claim according to the very standards Berlin himself brings to his argument on behalf of Machiavelli.

While this view of the first articulation of value pluralism is a challenge to Berlin in his capacity as a historian of ideas, on a philosophical level, if anything, it seems only to strengthen the case for pluralism as such. Arguments do not gain validity simply by being old of course, but if Berlin is correct that the clash of rival values is an ahistorical aspect of the human condition, it is only consistent with such a truth that it should have found ancient, early articulation. By arguing that *Antigone* contains such an articulation (or at least some variant of it), I have tried to strengthen Berlin's case against monism by characterizing it as more permanent that he himself allows. Making the positive case for internal pluralism stronger still will be a primary goal of chapter two.

CHAPTER TWO: INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter identified five different varieties of value pluralism in Berlin's writing and singled out one, internal pluralism, as defendable. This view of pluralism, it will be recalled, sees incommensurability between values as something that is possible only within an individual self. But put this way, things are still left at a very general level; we need to spell out what, according to this view, a choice between incommensurables would involve. Likewise, it remains to be seen what, if any, support internal pluralism lends to liberalism. Fortunately however, the key to both these goals lies in the same area: developing internal pluralism's theory of the self.

Emphasizing the crucial role of the self in incommensurable value conflict marks a switch from chapter one and much of the literature on value pluralism as a whole; quite often, a discussion of value pluralism treats values as, if not something "out there," i.e., capable as existing external to a

single individual, then at least as the font of incommensurability: opening up a value, like cracking open a nut, will allow us to find the cause of incommensurability, as it is "in" values themselves. But as we saw in chapter one, this just leads to insupportable claims, such as intra-social value pluralism's misleading equation of disagreements with others as proof of the plurality of unrankable values. More profitable, this chapter tries to illustrate, is to travel in the other direction, and attempt to make explicit what internal value pluralism assumes to be true of the self.

This is particularly important in any attempt to link pluralism with liberalism. Liberal theory, like all political theory, posits a view of human identity which it takes as a guide in distinguishing between just and unjust political institutions. Remove or falsify its view of the self and most (if not all) of the claims made by any political philosophy lose their moral force. But if we discover that another subject of philosophical inquiry is both true to life and posits the same view of the self as a theory like liberalism, then we have added to the reasons why that political theory is worthy of support. This, I argue, is the relationship between internal value pluralism and liberalism; pluralism is true to life and posits the same view of the self as does liberalism.

I try to show this within the context of a discussion of someone re-evaluating her conception of the good life. While Berlin most often treats political values such as liberty and equality as candidates for incommensurability, he also sees the term "values" as including moral obligations and, importantly, conceptions of the good. By focusing on someone experiencing incommensurability while struggling with two rival conceptions of the good, we are led to see internal pluralism as presupposing

two claims. The first is that the self is prior to its ends; if we have a capacity to experience incommensurability between clashing values, then neither one can be said to go "all the way down" to the centre of the self; we have a capacity to stand outside our ends and look at them from a distance. The second claim is that the incommensurable value conflicts the self is capable of experiencing make the individual self-conscious of his capacity to revise his ends, perhaps more so than any other experience in life. Taken together, these two tightly related claims—we have the capacity to revise our values, and we are self-consciousness about this capacity—amount to the claim that the view of the self presupposed by internal pluralism is the liberal view. Moving on from these claims, I further try to show how liberal arguments from a view of the self as capable of revising its values to liberty-maximizing political institutions are only buttressed by internal pluralism, thereby heading off objection which seek to work from the self's capacity for revisability to illiberal politics.

Following Charles Taylor, the argument starts by outlining our capacity for second-order desires, i.e. our capacity to evaluate those desires, goods and values we find ourselves attracted to on a primary level. Along the way, I foreshadow some of the concerns of chapter three, most notably by attempting to gainsay the misleading argument by those critics of Berlin who argue that his view endorses Sartrean "radical choice." But at the theoretical centre of the chapter is the discussion of incommensurability in re-evaluations of conceptions of the good. After trying to show how this presupposes the liberal view of the self, I attempt to defend this linkage of pluralism and liberalism

from some possible objections, and conclude, as a matter of scholarly interest, with an interesting list of the many similarities between Taylor and Berlin.

FROM PLURALISM TO LIBERALISM

A theory of the self

An important part of our make-up is our capacity for second-order desires. What we want or value does not simply press upon us, with no room to evaluate the worth of the want at hand. Consider, for example, what is involved in a refusal to commit a cowardly act. "I value courageous action as part of a mode of life ; I aspire to be a certain kind of person. This would be compromised by my giving in to this craven impulse" (Taylor 1985: 19). Rejecting the strong urge we feel to cave into fear is an example of what Charles Taylor calls strong evaluation. A desire—to run away—is ranked or contrasted alongside others, and we evaluate them using normative terms such as heroic or craven, good and bad, etc.

This contrastive element is important: we can't know what courage is, unless we have a notion of cowardice with which to compare it. Taylor sees a resemblance here to colour terms, where we are unable to conceive of red without one or more not-red colours. In strong evaluation, this 'distinguishing from' aspect is essential, as it marks such an evaluation as conceptually distinct from what Taylor calls weak evaluation. The latter occurs when we choose between two or more alternatives which can be identified non-contrastively. A choice between a muffin and a donut would be an example of this. I can imagine the pleasure of eating either independently of any conception of the alternative. But in a world without

cowardice, there would be no conception of bravery, as it is by definition the overcoming of our fears.

The point here is to bring into relief the unarticulated backdrop of "strong evaluation" which frames many of our choices, such as those where one or more options are "defined by a qualitative characterization of desires as higher and lower, noble and base, and so on" (Taylor 1985: 23). The person deciding between cowardice and bravery who settles on the latter is making a judgment about the value of courage as superior or worthier than cowardice, more integrated into her overall self-conception, better in terms of the mode of life it sustains or expresses. Someone who does this is making a deeper evaluation than the person who chooses between muffins and donuts—the former stands in an evaluative relation to her desires, judging them according to the very person she would be in carrying them through (or, sometimes, in simply having such desires).

With this recourse to the language of quality and compatibility with an overall pattern of life, the strong evaluator clearly has an "articulacy and depth" (Taylor 1985: 26) which the person choosing between a donut and a muffin lacks. Taylor sees a significant consequence of this aspect of strong evaluation: "[W]here there is articulacy there is the possibility of a plurality of visions which there was not before," he writes. "With strong evaluation . . . there can be and often is a plurality of ways of envisioning my predicament, and the choice may be not just between what is clearly the higher and the lower, but between incommensurable ways of looking at the choice" (Taylor 1985: 26).

Plural visions. Incommensurability. Choices between what we value. The concerns here are similar to those found in Berlin's writing and the literature on value pluralism. I believe the choices involving strong evaluation Taylor is concerned with can in fact be framed as choices between incommensurable values. Moreover, they are consistent with the view of incommensurability that was defended in chapter one—as something that is experienced—and truer to our actual experiences involving values than the traditional view of incommensurability as a property. It is important therefore, to examine what a choice between incommensurable values would involve according to this view. I believe that by doing so we can reconceive value pluralism in a manner that avoids the problems of the traditional view and, importantly, can be used to argue for the justice of liberal political institutions.

An example of incommensurable choice as an experience

A young lawyer excels at her work, in part because of her single-minded nature.[14] She has always found that she takes an all-or-nothing attitude toward her projects, and has thrown herself into her career, working long hours without complaint. When she steps back and asks herself what she likes about her life, she answers that she values being a respected and well-paid professional, one whose work is intellectually stimulating. In addition, the law is a vehicle through which she works for social change, devoting part of her time to work in a law clinic. This too, she considers important.

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14 Taylor's example concerns a scenario where "at the age of 44 I am tempted to pack up, abandon my job and go to some other quite different job in Nepal. One needs to renew the sources of creativity, I tell myself . . ." (Taylor 1985: 26). He goes back and forth between wanting to leave for Nepal and wanting to continue teaching university courses.

But there's another choice that also pulls her. She's always dreamed of being a playwright; yet she has no time to write during her demanding legal work. This part of her, increasingly conscious of how old she is becoming in comparison to the age of her favourite authors when their first plays were produced, is inclined to quit her job in exchange for the uncertainty of an artistic career. There is only so long she can go on following the routine of being a lawyer before she wakes up to discover that that is what she has become, she tells herself, to the exclusion of her artistic ambitions. That point, she feels, is getting awfully close.

Staying at her firm has a mix of attributes going for it, particularly a sense of security: she is respected and financially comfortable. And her clinic work has direct, positive impact on the lives of others. In a certain mood then, the writing choice seems like silly romantic nonsense. The notion of the artist who starves for Art is an adolescent cliché, she tells herself at times like these; and an artist, unlike an attorney, cannot make the same tangible and positive impact in the lives of others the way she does in her clinic work. But at other times, this seems like a rationalization, a refusal to take the now-or-never leap into the writing life and discover whether she has what it takes, slowly creating a body of work which may, in its own way, be valuable. In these moments she tells herself to hell with the law, it's the artistic life for me.

The lesson to be drawn from this is that the two courses of action "can only be characterized through the qualities of life they represent, and characterized contrastively. It is part of the desirability characterization of each that it has an undesirability story to tell about the other" (Taylor 1985: 27). Part of Taylor's point is that there is no neutral ground upon which the young

woman may stand to examine the two paths. When she leans toward her legal career, writing takes on a certain negative light. When she's inclined to try and make it as a playwright, the security of going on in her legal career seems less admirable.

The young woman then, faces a choice between two conceptions of the good life which she experiences as incommensurable. We can characterize the two options in a variety of ways: responsibility vs. self-discovery, direct social activism vs. artistic creation etc., but accepting the bourgeois world vs. removal from it seems to capture the contrastive element most forcefully. (In variations of the scenario different descriptions become possible: perhaps her parents have always pressured her to be a lawyer, and she must choose between pleasing them and learning to put her own desires first.)

Conceptions of the good life as 'values'

Is the young lawyer's dilemma one which could be characterized as a clash between values in Berlinian terms? I believe so. Berlin, it is true, usually refers to political goods (such as liberty and equality) or moral obligations such as feeding the hungry when discussing clashing "values."[15] But he also

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15 Typical of Berlin's understanding of "values"as denoting political values and moral obligations is the following passage: "Justice, rigorous justice, is for some people an absolute value, but it is not compatible with what may be no less ultimate values for them—mercy, compassion—as arises in concrete cases.

Both liberty and equality are among the primary goals pursued by human beings through many centuries; but total liberty for wolves is death to the lambs, total liberty of the powerful, the gifted, is not compatible with the rights to a decent existence of the weak and the less gifted. . . . Equality may demand the restraint of those who wish to dominate; liberty—without some modicum of which there is no choice and therefore no possibility of remaining human as we understand the word—may have to be curtailed in order to make room for social welfare, to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to shelter the homeless, to leave room for the liberty of others, to allow justice or fairness to be exercised.

. . . . Spontaneity, a marvellous human quality, is not compatible with a capacity for organized planning . . . on which the welfare of society may largely depend. We are all aware of the agonizing alternatives in the recent past. Should a man resist a monstrous tyranny at all costs, at the expense of

seems to include conceptions of the good life as well. Consider the passage where he writes that "[a]n artist, in order to create a masterpiece, may lead a life which plunges his family into misery and squalor to which he is indifferent. We may condemn him and declare that the masterpiece should be sacrificed to human needs, or we may take his side—but both attitudes embody values" (Berlin 1990: 12).

The life of the artist which is described here as "embodying values" is neither a political value nor a moral obligation but a view of the good life. And while Berlin's example involves a contrast with a direct moral obligation to others, it seems consistent with this passage to say that two conceptions of the good life can themselves be the subjects of a choice between incommensurables, as the example of the young lawyer tried to show. It is certainly unremarkable, both in everyday parlance and the philosophical literature, to refer to a conception of the good life as being composed of its own values, and drawing a sharp line between the two notions seems arbitrary, even if moral obligations are sometimes distinguished from the more general notion of "values" (Lukes 1989). The "vagueness" of the term 'values' is better thought of as a strength, is that it is loose enough to include all the ends which we consider important enough to be constitutive of who we are.

I believe it is consistent with Berlin's position to treat conceptions of the good life, along with political values and moral obligations, as "values." This at any rate, is the kind of choice I am most interested in defending as an

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the lives of his parents or his children? Should children be tortured to extract information about dangerous traitors or criminals?" (Berlin 1990: 12-13). Of the values Berlin lists here, only spontaneity is neither an obvious political value of moral obligation. But perhaps there will be times when it could seem part of some conception of the good life.

example of choice involving incommensurability as an experience. Certainly many lawyers will cherish one of the two paths described above and be tempted by the second hardly at all, just as many playwrights will make the opposite ranking. So it is not an inherent aspect (i.e. a property) of either path that it will seem incommensurable with the other to everyone who compares the two. That depends on circumstances and the person at hand. But everyone, I believe, can find themselves in such circumstances, as we all have the capacity to value two incompatible paths, and to see in each an undesirability story about the other.

This view has much in common with Berlin's account of choices between incommensurables. Both the young woman's options are genuinely valued yet, in spite of this, they cannot be obtained at the same time. The scenario involves what Berlin frequently characterizes as the "agony of choice." What lends it the agonizing aspect is that the two paths are both deeply cherished by the woman in question; both cut to the core of her conception of what kind of life is worth living, what kind of person she wants to be. And when we bring the "agony of choice" into closer view we see that it presupposes a content to such choices which gives us further reason to endorse the inclusion of conceptions of the good life under the heading of "values."

What agonizing choices presuppose

Tough choices such as the one faced by the young woman are made so precisely because of our practice of ascribing deep significance to paths such as the ones open before her. There would be no agony in a choice between pursuing a legal career and, say, working on one's suntan for a few years. The first choice has a significance the second obviously lacks. At the centre of the

theory of the self being endorsed here is the link between the role such strong evaluation plays in making such choices so difficult.

This is clearest in Taylor's re-working of a famous example from Sartre: a young man divided over whether to remain with his sick mother, or leave her side to join the anti-fascist resistance. Sartre's goal is to frame the alternatives in terms of a radical choice—an ultimately groundless, arbitrary decision to pursue one of the two options. According to Sartre, reason will have nothing to contribute in adjudicating between these two incompatible calls on the young man's allegiance. Thus is morality, Sartre believes, revealed to be fundamentally irrational, the will shown to be primary.

Taylor turns this example on its head, and shows how it substantiates the very opposite of Sartre's thesis. "Sartre's portrayal of the dilemma is very powerful," he allows,

> But what makes it plausible is precisely what undermines his position. We see a grievous moral dilemma because the young man is faced here with two powerful moral *claims* . . . . A cruel dilemma indeed. But it is a dilemma only because the claims themselves are not created by radical choice. If they were, the grievous nature of the predicament would dissolve, for that would mean that the young man could do away with the dilemma at any moment by simply declaring one of the rival claims as dead and inoperative. Indeed, if serious moral claims were created by radical choice, the young man could have a grievous dilemma about whether to go and get an ice cream cone, and then again he could decide not to (Taylor 1985: 29-30, Italics in original).

In other words, Sartre's example silently piggybacks on our intuitions about the value of the two moral claims. What gives his illustration on behalf of

radical choice the drama it has is the crucial offstage assumption that we cannot dismiss such moral claims with whim or caprice alone. To be sure, in Sartre's example the young man may ultimately have to throw himself into one of the alternatives. But when we bring the backdrop of strong evaluation to the fore, we see that not all of our moral choices can be framed in this way. A choice between fighting Fascist invaders and getting a tan would be an easy call, the moral superiority of the former glaringly obvious (regardless of whether we can bring ourselves to follow through with the right actions or not). Here there would be choice, but no agonizing moral dilemma. Indeed, the very notion of a genuine moral "dilemma" becomes incoherent on radical choice theory. Why agonize over something if we can simply choose not to?

What Taylor has revealed about Sartre's example is also true of Berlin: to say that a choice is agonizing presupposes that one cannot simply dismiss one or either of the options as trivial. One feels that one is somehow claimed by them.[16] To say this does not mean one can never reject them under any circumstances, or endorse communitarianism. The language of being "claimed," I would argue, simply shows that we treat such options as categorically different from trivial desires such as that to get a tan or have an ice cream cone. These could never be the stuff of agonizing dilemmas. Those

16 Berlin sometimes uses the term "claims" himself. He thought it important to inject a clarifying sub-clause containing it into the 1969 version of his lecture, where in had been absent in 1958. "The world that we encounter in ordinary experience is one in which we are faced with choices between ends equally ultimate, claims equally absolute, the realization of some of which must inevitably involve the sacrifice of others" (Berlin 1969: 168, italics added). Elsewhere: value pluralism means we are "compelled to adjust claims, compromise, establish priorities" (Berlin 1969: lxi). "Claims can be balanced, compromises can be reached: in concrete situations not every claim is of equal force" (Berlin 1990: 17). The individual is "subject to conflicting claims of incombinable, yet equally ultimate and objective, ends" (Berlin 1990: 80).

higher-order desires or values which we do feel pulled toward (albeit not so strongly pulled that we can never shake off their tug no matter how hard we try) cannot be rejected with the ease which radical choice presupposes. So one way of gaining clarity on what Berlin considers a value then, is to say that it is the kind of thing that can be the subject of an agonizing dilemma. And conceptions of the good life fall into this category; we consider them deeply important, self-defining. A person can go through a crisis of faith concerning their view of the good life, and, as in the case of the young lawyer, feel pulled in two different directions at once, seeing two options which are incommensurable; hence the difficult nature of the choice.

The agony of choices involving incommensurability also tells us that such choices cannot be considered instances of radical choice in the Sartrean sense, where one makes a groundless, irrational decision. The importance of this incompatibility will be evident in chapter three, where as we will see, more than one of Berlin's critics will interpret him has an advocate of radical choice. That discussion is best left off for now. More important is to draw attention to one final aspect of Taylor's description of the self, and then show how the resulting conception of pluralism supports liberalism.

The last idea that needs to be taken from Taylor is his characterization of a realm of inarticulacy surrounding some of our values. Our attempts to articulate what we value must, "like descriptions, strive to be faithful to something. But what they strive to be faithful to is not an independent object with a fixed degree and manner of evidence, but rather a largely inarticulate sense of what is of decisive importance" (Taylor 1985: 38). The depth the self contains means that when we articulate our evaluations we are frequently

giving voice to something deep within, often "frequently partial and uncertain" (Taylor 1985: 38). The further down we go, the closer we come to our very conception of who we are, right down to "our deepest unstructured sense of what is important, which is yet inchoate" (Taylor 1985: 41). For Taylor, the inchoate nature of what we deem important means that by articulating it we are in a way discovering it; we gain clarity on what matters to us when we are forced to give voice to the goods we hold dear. Importantly, their coming into conflict frequently forces such an articulation. In such situations we cultivate an openness to "any gestalt shift in our view of the situation, any quite innovative set of categories in which to see our predicament . . . . We are striving for conceptual innovation which would allow us to illuminate [that] . . . which would otherwise remain dark and confused" (Taylor 1985: 41). The clash of incommensurables then, can make us self-conscious concerning what we value, and why.

The question now is, does any of the above give us reason to prefer liberalism to its rivals?

Step one: from pluralism to revisability

One way to characterize the difference between discussions of pluralism which seem to treat incommensurability as a property and the present view of it as an experience is to say that, in the latter, the role of the self is highlighted as that which makes incommensurability possible, rather than something inherent in values themselves. Hence the importance of distinguishing between internal pluralism and intra-social pluralism. As we saw in chapter one, the former holds that incommensurability between values is something that occurs within the individual, rather than between

individuals or groups: for incommensurability to be real, some single person must find two values so. And this idea of pluralism, internal pluralism, was the one involved in the example of the young lawyer above.

What is the political import of this? All political theories contain within them a theory of the self, and I believe the theory of the self internal pluralism presupposes is the liberal theory of the self. That is because the experiential understanding of incommensurable value conflict involved in internal pluralism posits the following liberal claim: the self is prior to its ends.

Most of the principles liberalism stands for can have little worth if the self has no independent status prior to its ends. "[F]reedom of choice is needed precisely to find out what is valuable in life—to form, examine, and revise our beliefs about value." (Kymlicka 1989: 204.) If we can revise our values we can stand back from them and pass judgment on them. Internal pluralism similarly presupposes that we have this capacity. That we can choose between values in those circumstances where we experience them as incommensurable presupposes that we can choose between them *at all*. No matter how deeply committed we may currently be to our current conception of the good life, it is part of our make-up that we still have the capacity to detach ourselves and stand apart from it. This same capacity for detachment is what makes possible the feeling that one could go either way during moments of incommensurability. It would be impossible to torn up about whether we should uphold, say, some community-imposed value vs. a self-discovered rival if our community-assigned roles went "all the way down" to the centre of who we are. But community-assigned roles, like our other

values, are themselves subject to come into conflict with each other, including incommensurable conflict, and we have the capacity to choose between them.

But if some value(s) were inevitably and always our preferred option, then their coming into incommensurable conflict with other would be impossible as there would be no difference between this immobile value and our very self. Yet in instances of incommensurable choice, even though the values at hand may pull at us very strongly, we nevertheless stand outside both values and look at them from the exterior, in that we alternatively look at each through the prism of its rival. The language of "claims" used above is only consistent with this; it articulates the sense that the pull comes from something outside of our deepest, inner self. (We never say, for example, "I have a claim on myself," as "claim" describes a relationship between discrete entities.) It may seem paradoxical that we can be both be strongly pulled to something and stand outside of it, but all this amounts to saying is that the pull is not *so* strong that we can never reject it. And this in fact is in keeping with the liberal understanding of the idea of the good life.[17] It is something we can both be powerfully committed to, but not something it is impossible to ever step back from and examine or revise.

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17 Communitarian critics of liberalism have argued that the liberal view of the self is false in that, by arguing for a view of the self as "prior to its ends," liberals posit an "unencumbered" self, free of *any* ends whatsoever. This ghost-like view of human identity, communitarians argue, violates our self-conceptions as beings who are, in Michael Sandel's phrase, "thick with particular traits." Liberals respond that this misstates what they really affirm: "I can always envision my self without its *present* ends. But this does not require that I can ever perceive a self unencumbered by any ends—the process of practical reasoning is always one of comparing one 'encumbered' potential self with another 'encumbered' potential self" (Kymlicka 1990: 212). This liberal argument is independent of any claims concerning pluralism; yet it also seems to describe what is going on in instances of incommensurable value conflict involving rival conceptions of the good; here also the agent compares 'two encumbered potential selves.'

On this view then, moments of incommensurability are something we experience during re-evaluations of our conceptions of the good life.[18] We go through a long agonizing process of trying to decide between two deeply felt options, and come through the process finding ourself either still dedicated to the value we have been following up until now, or embarked on a new path. In how we finally decide between the two there is something "vague" (Berlin 1969: lv) and mysterious, a realm of the "inarticulate" (Taylor 1985: 38) and perhaps inarticulable. But I believe that acknowledging this mysterious aspect of how people sometimes do decide between deeply cherished goods is only to be true to how they experience such incommensurable choices in "real life." In Michael Walzer's words, people embarked on one life path "don't have to believe, and often in fact don't believe, (ask them!), that it would have been definitively wrong, wrong in the eyes of God, to have settled anywhere else" (Walzer 1995: 29). We can pursue one good and see it as one among a plurality of valuable paths. This may seem paradoxical; but this nevertheless seems inherent in the matter at hand, where the self is both subject and object, and somehow finds a motive for deciding between two values which are experienced as incommensurable.

If incommensurability is then something we can experience when revising our conception of the good life, then this gives force to our moral intuitions when we read thoroughly liberal passages such as the following by Rawls:

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18 This is not to claim that all re-evaluations of the good life will involve incommensurability. See below.

> As free persons, citizens recognize one another as having the moral power to have a conception of the good. This means that they do not view themselves as inevitably tied to the pursuit of the particular conception of the good and its final ends which they espouse at any given time. Instead, as citizens, they are regarded as in general, capable of revising and changing this conception . . . . Thus it is held to be permissible for citizens to stand apart from conceptions of the good and to survey and assess their various final ends (Quoted in Kymlicka 1989: 202).

Such an argument for liberalism is bound up with our belief that we do indeed have the capacity[19] to stand apart from our ends; what we do finally as citizens we do first as human beings. It is this capacity which incommensurable value conflict inside the self throws into relief.

Incommensurable value conflict and self-consciousness

Closely related to the claim that incommensurable value conflict posits the liberal view that the self is independent of its ends is the further claim that such incommensurability experiences make us *self-conscious* of this aspect of our selves. During such moments, perhaps even more so than when we are actually pursuing some cherished value, we are made acutely aware of the fact that it is something we can stand back from and adjudicate, however difficult this adjudication may sometimes be, as it is in the case on incommensurability experiences. That very difficulty is in keeping with the importance we place on such ends. "We do not just make such judgments, we worry, sometimes agonize, over them—it is important to us that we do

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19 A distinction between ontological theses and advocacy theses may be helpful here. Ontological factors are those we accept as ultimate in explaining individual or social life. Advocacy issues concern the moral, political or policy positions we adopt (Taylor 1989*b*). Liberals hold our capacity to detach ourselves from our values and revise them as an ontological thesis: it is part of the human condition. (This is very different from advocating that one frequently revise ones conception of the good life.) Internal value pluralism presuppose the same ontological thesis about the self.

not lead our lives on the basis of false beliefs about the value of our activities" (Kymlicka 1989: 203). One reason we may agonizingly suspect our current end is false is that another attractive value has an undesirability story to tell about it, as in the case of the lawyer, haunted by the desire to write plays. Clearly, when values come into incommensurable conflict, it makes us aware of the fact that they do not extend down to the centre of and commingle with our very being, but are something we can stand apart from. We have to choose between them.

Berlin himself mentions this self-consciousness concerning our values. It comes in the second of two neglected passages,[20] where he outlines how conflicts between incommensurable values should be resolved. "To decide rationally in such situations is to decide in the light of general ideals, the over-all pattern of life pursued by a man or a group or a society" (Berlin 1969: l). He returns to this notion of an "overall pattern of life" shortly thereafter:

> [T]o be rational is to follow the course of conduct which least obstructs the general pattern of life in which we believe . . . those who are aware of the complex texture of experience, of what is not reducible to generalization or capable of computation, can, in the end, justify their decisions only by their coherence with some over-all pattern of a desirable form of a personal or social life, of which they may become fully conscious only, it may be, when faced with the need to resolve conflicts of this kind. If this seems vague, it is so of necessity (Berlin 1969: lv).

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20 The second is mentioned in Gutmann 1996, but in the context of a discussion of education, not resolving value conflicts. Similarly, Cohen 1979 footnotes it in a discussion of a definition of liberty, not pluralism. These references to an overall pattern of life, while rejected as incompatible with the present view of value pluralism are, as we shall see in chapter three, simply not acknowledged by Berlin's critics.

To be sure, this is a problematic passage, seeming to involve an unsuccessful attempt to avoid the very issues incommensurability raises. The dilemma is merely moved up a floor, to some "overall pattern of life" of which our values are component parts. We are accustomed to thinking of conceptions of the good life as something very close to "overall patterns of life," and so to say that in instances where we are choosing between them that we must go with one we "desire" does not help very much. Berlin himself frequently describes values as "equally ultimate," but here the "overall pattern" seems to be even more ultimate than our values, and so their place within it becomes the litmus test of which value is finally to be chosen. This is in obvious tension with Berlin's numerous writings about values and incommensurability.

But also in this passage, Berlin seems to be groping toward incommensurable value conflict as having a kind of clarifying power, in that it contributes to one's self-understanding. This seems a plausible idea. We pursue a variety of tasks and projects in life, sometimes in an un-selfconscious fashion. That they would come into conflict, including incommensurable conflict, can make us aware, perhaps for the first time, that none can be taken as inevitably final, forever beyond the reach of re-evaluation. On this view then, internal value pluralism posits not only our capacity to stand at a distance from our values, but also an acute self-consciousness about this capacity.

There are then, two closely related reasons why internal value pluralism can be said to overlap with the liberal view of the self. Incommensurability, as something we can experience when considering two rival conceptions of the good life, shows the priority of the self to its ends. And it makes us self-

conscious of our capacity to decide between such goods. As we can have second-order desires or evaluations about our desires ends and goods, no one end goes "all the way down" to the centre of our very self.[21] Value pluralism, in short, presupposes the liberal idea of "revisability" concerning conceptions of the good. Pluralism and liberalism are thus united in their conceptions of the human condition.

Step two: from revisability to civil liberties

A commitment to the self's capacity for revisability is a necessary condition of liberal political institutions. But is it a sufficient condition? Is it not a credible position to a) acknowledge our capacity for revisability while b) simultaneously rejecting the move from revisability (an ontological claim) to civil liberties (an advocacy claim)? If so, then merely showing how a notion such as value pluralism entails revisability falls short of offering any support to liberalism, as endorsing revisability is something illiberals can do also.

In fact, there is a widespread view which makes this very argument. it can be called the "quasi-communitarian" position.[22] Rather than positing that any of our values "go all the way down," it holds instead that people are best served when their ends fuse with the self as much as possible, and that illiberal arrangements can be of aid in retrenching such values within the individual. Unlike liberal orders, a quasi-communitarian regime would shield people from the "lamentable" practice of standing back and questioning their life projects; this would be done by protecting them from

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21 This of course is a partisan claim: Aristotle and Aquinas considered clashes of values, (particularly moral obligations), respectively, a sign of moral ignorance or simply impossible.

22 I am grateful to professor Kymlicka for pointing out the importance of explicitly engaging this view.

exposure to (or temptation by) other ways of life which they might find more valuable than their current ones. So long as the citizenry's conception of the good has *some* value, then the role of the state on this view is to encourage its citizens to immerse themselves in it. And such illiberal measures are not invoked alongside a rejection of revisability, but rather out of a belief that it is an all too real, all too unfortunate, human capacity.

Liberals, it should be noted, have access to two arguments against this view. The first starts from the belief that we may change our mind about what we value; what up until now had seemed an edifying and rewarding course of action, after deliberation or a change in circumstance, may appear empty and hollow in comparison to another option. All my life I've been devoted to composing haikus, yet now I've come to see writing screenplays as far superior. In hindsight, the years spent toiling over five-seven-five verse structures seem a complete waste. "Self-determination is, to a large extent, the task of making these difficult, and potentially fallible judgements" (Kymlicka 1990: 202) about value. As we ascribe tremendous importance to this process of deliberating over whether we are leading a valuable life (as distinct from that which we currently hold to be valuable) we must "be free to question those beliefs, to examine them in the light of whatever information, examples, and arguments our culture can provide" (Kymlicka 1990: 204). Liberalism, with its devotion to freedom of expression and similar liberties, allows us the greatest exposure to different conceptions of the good, in order that we may make informed decisions about our own.

The second liberal argument is that our lives go best when they are led "from the inside" (Kymlicka 1990: 204), according to our own conceptions of

what is valuable. The classical example in support of this is being coerced into going to church: such an activity may have a lot going for it, but it will be of no value at all to someone forced to act out the motions of something they inwardly regard as worthless. We may be able to coerce people into doing things we find valuable, but in such cases the activity is pointless to the person involved. And once we see the importance of the individual living his life from the inside, he must be allowed the liberty to follow his own conception of the good, which entails the liberal commitment to civil, political and religious liberties.

I believe these mainstream liberal arguments are persuasive rebuttals to the quasi-communitarian view. And while they are independent of any claims concerning value pluralism, the view of pluralism advanced above seems only compatible with them. Pluralism, it was argued, illustrated our capacity for revisability as such; liberals, in turn, work from revisability to liberties, and nothing in pluralism seems to deny them the ability to take this second step. If anything, internal pluralism seems only to add to the reasons why the quasi-communitarian view should be rejected. Incommensurable value conflicts, it was argued, make us highly self-conscious of our ability to revise our ends. This comes not from any inherent quality in particular values themselves, but is simply due to the way we are. As a quasi-communitarian regime tries to suppress this very self-awareness, in that it discourages us from standing apart from our ends and examining them, such a political arrangement would only be urging upon its citizens false self-understandings, self-understandings which their own inner experiences

would reveal as untrue.[23] No situation is *a priori* immune from someone coming to doubt and agonize over whether it is truly right for them.[24] On the internal pluralism view then, the quasi-communitarian state is near-impossible, as it demands a denial of our own nature.

This argument can be pressed further. More than merely making us aware of the *capacity* to revise our ends, the agonizing dimension of incommensurable value conflict can be seen as highlighting our *need* to pursue ends we genuinely experience as higher—whether or not those ends are our current ones. The agony on this view comes from our sense of something truly important being at stake, namely, whether we are indeed living a life that is good. This is what gives the undesirability stories each value tells of the other their cruel power: we could, from one point of view, simply be deluding ourselves. Importantly, the spur to such searing self-inventories and searching after meaning comes not in *response to* exposure to diverse conceptions of the good, as the quasi-communitarian would have it, but is antecedent to such exposure, something that has its origin in the self. On this account, wondering if our current conception of the good is genuinely valuable can take place even when we are exposed to very few rival conceptions. And while the liberty to engage such rivals helps us ultimately

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23 This is not to say that every citizen will experience incommensurable value conflict, just as liberals do not claim that every citizen exercises their capacity to revise their ends. Rather, incommensurable value conflicts will be common enough, not only in life but perhaps also in art, to highlight the human capacity for revisability.

24 Perhaps quasi-communitarians would wish to refine their argument in regards to this point, and argue that precisely because deliberations involving incommensurability are so "agonizing," it is better for the people involved if they can avoid them: hence the importance of limiting their exposure to rival values which may trigger such re-evaluations. But on the view of pluralism argued for above, different people will experience incommensurability in different situations, involving different values. Therefore, no sub-set of values can be single out as triggers in this way.

decide among the many values we encounter, removing such liberties does nothing to obviate a process which has its genesis in the human interior. Instead, withholding liberties merely condemns people to deciding in the dark, denied the fullest range of values which may benefit them in their process of self-determination, including any chance to experiment with some conception of the good they are inwardly drawn to or simply discover on their own.

To sum up: internal pluralism overlaps with liberalism in its conception of the self. In turn, this view of the self as capable of revising its conception of the good can be invoked in arguments for liberal political structures. The second half of this two-step argument, from revisability to liberty, can be made with or without reference to pluralism, and we have already dealt with one objection to it, the quasi-communitarian complaint examined above. What remains now therefore, is to defend the prior step from some possible objections. I will start with those to which relatively straightforward responses seem available, moving on to a more difficult objection.

POSSIBLE OBJECTIONS

Incompatible views of 'value' in Taylor and Berlin

At one point in outlining his view of the self Taylor identifies a philosophical target he has in mind, and this may at first seem to rule out trying invoke his theory in service of a reinvigoration of Berlin's value-pluralism. Taylor takes issue with the "Nietzschean term 'value' suggested by our 'evaluation,' [which] carries [the] idea that our 'values' are our creations, that they ultimately repose on our espousing them. . . . [T]hey issue ultimately

from a radical choice, that is a choice which is not grounded in any reasons" (Taylor 1985: 29).

It would doubtless be easy to take this as critical of Berlin. Perhaps Taylor's further remark that the idea of radical choice "is also defended by an influential Anglo-Saxon school of moral philosophers" (Taylor 1985: 29) even applies to a tradition Berlin is working within or alongside. There is an obvious disagreement here between Berlin and Taylor over what the loaded term 'values' connotes. Yet it seems just as obvious that such terminological difference does not automatically entail philosophical incompatibility between Taylor and Berlin. If I say "There are such things as universal values, which we cannot help but subscribing to, and this proves Nietzsche wrong about the scope of what we can will," I've used "values" in an obviously anti-Nietzschean context. Likewise do contemporary traditionalists vaguely refer to "family values" in an effort to describe a world-view that opposes "moral subjectivity." Berlin's use of the word 'values' does not automatically make him a Nietzschean or a believer in radical choice. Indeed, it was argued above that the agonizing dimension he sees in value clashes is incompatible with such a view. So while Taylor's rejection of the term 'values' is important, it is clearly not enough to preclude finding common ground between his discussion of Sartre and Berlin.

It might further be argued that Taylor is a "communitarian," Berlin a "liberal" and therefore the two must be philosophically incompatible. But at the general level such terms force us to work on, the particular points of agreement and disagreement between any two thinkers are obscured from

view.[25] In fact, there are so many similarities between the two thinkers that portraying them as incompatible in their conceptions of the self seems forced. Indeed, these similarities are so extensive that it may be of scholarly interest to document them; but as they are not central to the argument, I would like to leave them until the end of the chapter.

Incommensurable vs. non-incommensurable choices

Liberals frequently describe conceptions of the good life as things we can be mistaken about. And when we discover that we have made such a mistake, we revise our conception of the good life. But this seems a long way from the account of revisions of the good life offered above, filled as it was with agony and incommensurability. If we have simply made an error and detected it, surely one option has been ranked as obviously and unambiguously superior to another. The above account has therefore distorted the liberal view of what actually goes on in revisions of the good life.

This objection misreads what was claimed above: nowhere was it claimed that the clash of incommensurables is the *only* sort of choice we ever make between ultimate ends. It is common to instances of good-life revision, but not to the exclusion of those other instances where we have simply been mistaken. Indeed, it seems to risk simplification to say that we only ever revise our conceptions of who we are due to discovering objective "mistakes" or new data becoming available. And if we have two methods of choosing between conceptions of the good life, one where we go through a long agonizing dilemma involving incommensurability, the other where we do

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25 Taylor has described himself as espousing a "variant" of liberalism (Taylor 1994*a*: 70), and I can recall a review of one of his books in *The Times Literary Supplement* where the reviewer remarked that he is "in a very straightforward sense, a liberal."

not, then we simply have two reasons to prefer liberalism's view of the self (or two variants of the same reason), not a cause to reject one as no reason at all.

The present argument is that internal pluralism is a reason to endorse revisability, not the only reason. So even if the liberal view of the self is like a table with more than one leg, it does not change the fact internal pluralism is one of those legs. I think that many instances of people revising their conception of the good life will involve incommensurability, going back and forth between two conceptions, agonizing etc.; but the experiential view leaves open the possibility that someone could also change such a belief about values without incommensurability, as in those instances where they really have made a mistake.

As we will see in chapter three, some critics of Berlinian value pluralism characterize it as positing that *every* choice we make in life is between incommensurables, whether they are choices between views of the good life or anything else. That dubious position is certainly not the one being advanced here. Nor, importantly, is it Berlin's. We will have seen the force of his and the present account if we acknowledge that this type of choice occurs at all, even rarely. The young woman agonizing between a legal career and artistic pursuits can still make many other kinds of decisions. Some will be based on mere caprice, as when she decides whether to have a donut for desert as opposed to ice cream. Hardly an agonizing dilemma here—"Because I felt like it" would be her unremarkable explanation.

She can also make many other choices based on some rational utility criteria, as would be the case when she is deciding whether to go out for

dinner or not. She checks her wallet and sees that she is low on money. Paying the rent easily trumps the desire to go out, and so she stay in. Berlin never demands that we pretend that these sorts of choices are impossible, or that incommensurable choice is the only kind of choice we face. Indeed, it would be a kind of reductive monism to relegate all choices to a single category. It is the discrete nature of some choices which makes them eligible for the incommensurable-values basket, choices of a very particular kind, such as (some) choices between conceptions of the good life.

Incommensurability as non-final

There is a theoretical objection that seems more difficult than those mentioned above. It cuts to the core of the position advanced here, and questions whether incommensurability has been treated as final. If people really do experience rival values as incommensurable in revising their conception of the good life, how then do they ultimately decide between the two? Is it not attempting to have it both ways by arguing that a) incommensurability is significant for liberalism in that it is present in re-evaluations of the good life, and b) such situations *are* genuine re-evaluations in that they presuppose that the agent, at the end of it all, somehow does manage to decide between the two; to somehow go beyond incommensurability and live a conception of the good life? On this view, the incommensurability moment can at most be considered a stage in some of our re-evaluations, even a long-lasting one in some instances, but not a final view of the values themselves.

Two responses are possible here. The first is to concede that incommensurability is not final, and yet still maintain that

incommensurability is significant, in that it really does illuminate all the things about the self that have been claimed, that values, after the agonizing dilemma, really are distinguishable from the self. Focusing on the incommensurability experience is still valuable in that it will be an important, albeit temporary, part of many of our re-evaluations, and so it sketches out in greater detail exactly what goes on in a process that is central to liberalism. Re-evaluating our ends "is the stuff of great novels—the crisis in faith" (Kymlicka 1990: 202). Experiences of incommensurability are frequently a part of such dramatic reconceptions of the self and, even if ultimately overcomable, still tell us something important about what it is to be human, to choose between ends.

But there is a second response: it is to maintain that people sometimes really do stop at incommensurability. They take up one path without ranking it above the other. Perhaps they wait for some external resolution to their dilemma; perhaps they simply stop thinking about it, hoping to cultivating some kind of unconscious allegiance to one of the options: if moments of incommensurability are part of living an examined life, some may resolve such crises by settling for an unexamined one. Perhaps at times our intuitions will be our only guide.[26] Perhaps sometimes we simply act yet live in doubt.

The line between these two responses, it should be noted, is a blurry one. Would it be merely a "stage" if the young lawyer privately agonized over her decision for a decade? Twenty years? A lifetime? Perhaps she stays with the

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26 This seems a particularly hard option to rule out, given that our moral intuitions play such an important role in judging arguments in political philosophy. One of the ways we test such arguments is by asking whether they are consistent with our considered intuitions. If intuitions are relevant at this high level of systematic philosophical judgement, it seems quite probable that they can be our guide in other areas as well.

law for a few years, then takes up playwrighting for a few more, then returns to law, and spends her entire adulthood going back and forth, never finally deciding in her own mind which is better, always hearing the call of the other path when she tries to follow just one.

If forced to choose (!) between these two possible responses, my own position would be to stress the gray zone in between, that of the "stage" stretched out into a lifetime. If pressed further still, the second seems truer to life on my understanding. I think people really can both subscribe to a conception of the good life and simultaneously doubt its worth for long stretches of time. And this doubt seems bound up with our capacity to revise our ends. But, as noted above, there is a realm of inarticulacy within the topic at hand. And so, to sigh along with Berlin that "If this seems vague, it is so of necessity," (Berlin 1969: lv) is not an evasion, but rather an acknowledgment of an area of mystery within the human self.

Points of contact with Berlin

A final objection might be not to challenge the theoretical coherence of the present account, but to question whether it can really be said to be Berlinian: with a critical, carping friend like this, it might be said, Berlin needs no enemies. The present account is obviously different from Berlin's on many points, the rearticulation of value pluralism as true only within the self, as seen in re-evaluations of the good life, being only the most obvious area. (Although this does not seem to rule out, *a priori*, the possibility of a similar re-articulation concerning incommensurable moral obligations.) But as real as the differences are, it is also the case that on many of the central concepts, the two theories overlap. Both stress clashing values. Both emphasize the

agony of choice. Both have a notion of incommensurability at their centre. Both involve a choice shot through with tragedy. Both are, in short, theories of value pluralism. The realm of such pluralism is more constricted in the present account, but this is because that smaller scope, it has been argued, is truer to what we experience in life and in our intuitions.

And it is also possible, on the present account, to reconceive some of the elements of Berlin's theory that have been left behind. His articulation stressed incompatible political values, such as, most famously, liberty and equality. My argument does not attempt to include these within the realm of incommensurability. Yet even Berlin's most famous instance of clashing political values can be reconceived to stress their continuity with the present view, in that they can be taken as someone's understanding of two conceptions of the good life.

What would my own "liberty" coming into conflict with another value involve on this interpretation? One instance might involve a desire to join some liberty-restricting social arrangement, such as a commune or kibbutz. Once I join, my freedom will be severely curtailed. I may have to sleep and eat at certain times, and perform hard work at others. On the day of decision I may go back and forth about whether to join or not, contrasting my desire to manage my own affairs with the commitment to equality with my fellow commune members. Here, I dwell on which path is ultimately truer to my up-until-now unarticulated, deeper self-understandings, and the two incommensurables tell their undesirability stories about each other. One could, to a limited yet still valuable degree, describe such a choice as one between liberty and equality on a personal level.

Perhaps similar re-readings of other Berlinian clashes of political values are also possible. Regardless, important to note here is how this scenario does not deny me my very ability to choose. As we will see in chapter three, many of Berlin's critics treat liberty *qua* liberty as something like a conception of the good or way of life in itself; they do this in order to portray it as clashing with some other value, arguing that there will be times when we must, paradoxically, choose against our capacity for choice itself. Arguing against such a possibility will be a major concern of the following chapter. But first, as mentioned above, it may be worth making a pause in the argument and concluding chapter two with a matter of scholarly interest; the many striking similarities between Taylor and Berlin.

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN TAYLOR AND BERLIN

I have been unable to find a discussion in the literature of the many points upon which the liberal Berlin and "communitarian" Taylor agree, so listing eight of them here may be of interest on historical grounds. To summarize: both Berlin and Taylor ascribe signal importance to Herder; and both identify his expressivism as having put down deep roots in modernity. Both are sharp critics of any attempts to pattern the study of human beings on the natural sciences. Both believe in universal values, and the overall validity of the distinction between positive and negative liberty. Both highlight the background discriminations we use to distinguish some negative liberties as more important than others. Both share a complex view of recognition as something "profoundly needed by and passionately fought for by human beings"(Berlin 1969: 158), and as a demand which both individuals and groups—nations in particular—frequently make. Their mutual

understanding of recognition, moreover, sees it as a constitutive aspect of our identity, even though the need for recognition is often couched in demands for something quite different, such as liberty. Finally, both believe genuine values can come into conflict.

Endorsing or criticizing the substance of what follows is beyond the scope of the present account, and, in any event, does not seem significant to the overall argument.[27] My intention is simply to show how the two thinkers seem to be overlapping links in a chain of tradition: Taylor considers Berlin "an inspiring teacher and friend [of] many decades" (Taylor 1994*b*: 213). In turn, Berlin finds in Taylor "a genuine source of continuous inspiration" (Berlin 1994: 1).

Both Taylor and Berlin are deeply sympathetic to Herder (Berlin 1976: 145-216; 1983: 392; Taylor 1991, 40-63; 1994*a*: 30-32). In particular, both Berlin and Taylor ascribe signal importance to Herder's expressivism, which they consider one of the constitutive elements of the modern identity (as we saw in chapter one, expressivism is the belief that "self-expression is part of the essence of human-beings as such" [Berlin, 1976: 253]) ; the very term expressivism itself is the result of their collaboration (Berlin 1983: 392; Taylor 1975: 13). It was an early and lasting concern of both Berlin and Taylor to oppose attempts "to model the study of man on the natural sciences" (Taylor 1985: 1; 1989*a*: 5; Berlin 1996: 50; 1978, passim.), as seen in attempts to construct a "scientific history" or a science of morality.

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27 While a belief in the possibility of values coming into conflict is mentioned in this list of similarities, I have already outlined my view of the matter in some detail, and do not insist that it must overlap with Berlin and Taylor on every point.

Both Berlin and Taylor believe morality, while influenced by culture, ultimately transcends it. "Perhaps the most urgent and powerful cluster of demands that we regard as moral," writes Taylor, "concern the respect for the life, integrity and well-being, even flourishing of others. These are the ones we infringe when we kill or maim . . . . We are dealing here with moral intuitions which are uncommonly deep, powerful, and universal" (Taylor 1989*a*: 4). Berlin: "If I find a man to whom it literally makes no difference whether he kicks a pebble or kills his family . . . . I shall be inclined to consider him mad . . . I do not regard such a being as a being fully a man at all." This presupposes the "ability to recognize universal—or almost universal—values" (Berlin 1978: 166). This mutual endorsement of universal values may strike some as unremarkable, even platitudinous. But there are varieties of existentialism and cultural relativism which deny it; Berlin and Taylor's position therefore is a partisan one.

Discriminating liberties

The similarities between the two thinkers extend to the political ideas most closely associated with their names. Berlin's famous distinction between two concepts of liberty in his canonical lecture of that name is endorsed by Taylor: "Although one can discuss almost endlessly the detailed formulation of the distinction, I believe it is undeniable that there are two such families of conceptions of political freedom abroad in our civilization" (Taylor 1979: 175). Berlin characterizes negative liberty, the first of the two concepts, as a zone of non-interference around the individual (Berlin 1969: 122), contrasting it with positive liberty, which derives from "the wish of the individual to be his own master" (Berlin 1969: 131). Taylor takes up this distinction and refines it as

one between an opportunity-concept and an exercise-concept. "Negative theories can rely simply on an opportunity-concept, where being free is a matter of what we can do, of what is open to us to do, whether or not we do anything to exercise these options." (Taylor 1979: 177). Positive doctrines involve exercising control over one's actions and identity. On this view, we are free only to the extent that we effectively determine ourselves, are in control of our affairs and our life. "This concept of freedom is an exercise concept." (Taylor 1979: 177). This reformulation is one with which Berlin is highly amenable (Jahanbegloo 1992: 150).

Taylor's reformulation is made in an effort to show the limitations of a simplistic view of negative liberty, one Taylor associates with Hobbes. On this account liberty is simply the absence of external obstacles to action, with no distinction made concerning the significance we ascribe to the action performed. Taylor however, has a forceful example which nicely brings into relief our practice of evaluating some freedoms as more important than others:

> Consider the following diabolical defense of Albania as a free country. We recognise that religion has been abolished in Albania, whereas it hasn't been in Britain. But on the other hand there are probably far fewer traffic lights per head in Tirana than in London. (I haven't checked for myself, but this is a very plausible assumption.) Suppose an apologist for Albanian Socialism were nevertheless to claim that this country was freer than Britain, because the number of acts restricted was far smaller. After all, only a minority of Londoners practise some religion in public places, but all have to negotiate their way through traffic. Those who do practise a religion generally do so one day of the week, while they are held up at traffic lights every day. In sheer quantitative terms,

> the number of acts restricted by traffic lights must be greater than that restricted by a ban on public religious practice. So if Britain is considered a free society, why not Albania? (Taylor 1979: 183).

The upshot of this is to show that "some discrimination among motives seems essential to our concept of freedom" (Taylor 1979: 183).

Despite the still widespread view of Berlin as ultimately most sympathetic to "purely negative" notions of freedom than their positive counterparts, or as a theorist who brings no evaluation to bear on the liberties under consideration (McBride 1990; Renick 1990), Taylor's argument for the poverty of notions of negative liberty which do not highlight our background understandings of some actions as more significant than others is one with which Berlin is in thorough and long-standing agreement. He argues in "Two Concepts of Liberty" that negative liberty increases and decreases according to five variables (including how many choices are open to the actor, how easy to implement they are, and to what degree deliberate human acts impede or make them possible). Importantly, Taylor's emphasis on qualitative distinction among liberties is matched by Berlin's emphasis on "how important in my plan of life, given my character and circumstances, the possibilities are when compared with each other," and "what value not merely the agent, but the general sentiment of the society in which he lives puts on the various possibilities" (Berlin 1969: 130). All five variables must be integrated into our judgment about the degree of negative liberty involved in any given circumstance. Degrees of negative liberty, while hard to measure, are nevertheless distinct. In making this point, Berlin even uses the same example as Taylor: "the average subject of the king of Sweden is, on the

whole, a good deal freer today than the average citizen of Spain or Albania" (Berlin 1969: 130).[28]

The need for recognition

Taylor is associated with an influential lecture of his own, "The Politics of Recognition." There, Taylor argues that nationalism and other political phenomena can be explained in terms of a demand for recognition on the part of the actors. Moreover, this recognition is fundamentally bound up with a person's self-conception. "The thesis is that our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others" (Taylor 1994*a*: 25). Such recognition is sought by individuals and, importantly, groups (Taylor 1994*a*: 38). Berlin makes an identical argument for the importance of recognition in section VI of "Two Concepts of Liberty," "The Search for Status":

> When I ask myself what I am, and answer: an Englishman, a Chinese, a merchant, a man of no importance, a millionaire, a convict—I find upon analysis that to possess these attributes entails being recognized as belonging to a particular group or class by other persons in my society, and that this recognition is part of the meaning of most of the terms that denote some of my most personal and permanent characteristics . . . . some, perhaps all, of my ideas about myself, in particular my sense of my own moral and social identity, are intelligible only in terms of the social network in which I am (the metaphor must not be pressed too far) an element. The lack of freedom about which men or groups complain amounts, as often as not, to the lack of proper recognition (Berlin 1969: 155).

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28 In the 1958 text of "Two Concepts of Liberty," Berlin's example of the less free person was "the average citizen of the Republic of Rumania" (Berlin 1958: 15). McBride speculates he changed it in order to appear less a partisan of cold war politics (McBride 1990: 304).

Clearly, Berlin also endorses a link between recognition and identity, like Taylor seeing it demanded not only by individuals but groups as well, "nations" (Berlin 1969: 157) explicitly among them. And Berlin's belief that complaints about a lack of liberty may really be demands for recognition is matched by Taylor's remark that "[t]he actors themselves are often the first to deny that they are moved by such considerations [the demand for recognition], and plead other factors, like inequality, exploitation, and injustice, as their motives" (Taylor 1994*b*: 64). Both Berlin and Taylor then ultimately believe "[m]y individual self is not something which I can detach from my relationship with others, or from those attributes of myself which consist in their attitude toward me." As Berlin puts it, in language that just as easily could have come from Taylor, "I am not an isolable atom" (Berlin 1969: 156-157).

The clash of goods

A final and important point of agreement with Berlin is Taylor's belief that values can come into conflict. His view of modern moral life is that it includes "a diversity of goods for which a valid claim can be made" (Taylor, 1989, 502).[29] Even though Taylor opposes "the relatively colourless subjectivist talk of 'values'" (Taylor 1989*a*: 507), he simultaneously argues for "an undistorted recognition of conflicts between goods" (Taylor 1989*a*: 506).[30] Not only does he incorporate a concern for clashing goods into his own work, identical to Berlin's, in commenting on the original value-pluralist Taylor

29 See also Taylor's "The Diversity of Goods," in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers II*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge UK, 1989.

30 It is probably helpful to point out here that Taylor's rejection of value-talk takes place in the context of discussing its occurrence in things like New Age self-help books.

states unambiguously, "Berlin has tirelessly pointed out the irreconcilable conflict that we frequently face between different goods which we cannot help subscribing to . . . . I very much agree with him on this" (Taylor 1994*b*: 213).

An important difference

And yet, Berlin would never utter Taylor's critical comment about subjective value-talk, and this is a helpful reminder that despite the many similarities, the two thinkers also disagree. According to Berlin, the chief difference is that Taylor "is basically a teleologist—both as a Christian and as a Hegelian" (Berlin 1994: 1). He goes on:

> Taylor and I share our evaluation of Herder's central idea that to belong to society is an intrinsic human need, like the need for food or security or shelter or freedom, and indeed, that self-realization cannot be obtained in isolation from social life, but only in the framework of, for Taylor much more that for me, the organic structure of the culture or society into which they are born and to which therefore they cannot help belonging.
>
> At this point, we part ways, I think. I do not believe in teleology . . . . [P]urposes are imposed by human beings upon nature and the world, rather than pursued by them as part of their own central nature or essences. I think that Taylor believes in essences, whereas I do not (Berlin 1994: 2).

Berlin clearly wants to distance himself from Taylor on an important matter concerning human nature, the question of essences. But this is in obvious tension with his simultaneous endorsement of an essential need to belong to society. Further, two meanings can be ascribed to Berlin's remark that we impose our purposes upon the world. It could conceivably amount to the existentialist claim that the very notion of having a purpose at all is

something we make up, an inauthentic act of self-deception. Or it could be the softer, thoroughly liberal claim that any particular purpose is revisable, yet we are nonetheless meaning-seeking animals. Overall, the force of Berlin's argument would seem to favour the second interpretation. He simply wants to make explicit that human development "is not part of a deterministic structure, it does not march inexorably toward some *single* predestined goal" (Berlin 1994: 2, italics added). This in turn causes Berlin to distinguish his view from what he identifies as the slightly Marxist strand of Taylor's thought, Taylor's vision of the possibility of a society united in the harmonious, collective and effective pursuit of a single end.

For his part, Taylor is skeptical about how far apart they really are. To his mind the differences run very deep metaphysically and theologically, "but they narrow somewhat in the practical judgments about our situation in society and history" (Taylor 1994*b*: 213). This is most evident in Taylor's belief in the possibility of values—goods in Taylor's terminology—coming into conflict. The real difference on Taylor's account is that he acknowledges this as a genuine possibility, yet nonetheless maintains that we can still aspire to a transvaluation or resolution of value conflicts, can aspire to a way of life "both individual and social, in which these demands could be reconciled" (Taylor 1994*b*: 214).

CHAPTER THREE: INTRODUCTION

The resurgence of interest in Berlin in the 1990s has taken place alongside, and frequently intersected with, debates about whether value pluralism exclusively supports liberal theory. Any attempt to portray pluralism as a support to liberalism then, must defend itself within the context of that discussion. Such is the intention of this final chapter, where, while Berlin does not disappear completely from view, the overall engagement is with critics of his and other attempts to join pluralism to liberalism, as well as, in passing, critics of pluralism as such (Michael Sandel and Leo Strauss).

The primary goal of this engagement is to close off two possibilities that chapter two left unaddressed; they are, first, that one may find in the current debate about pluralism a direct challenge to the primary link to liberalism that was made in chapter two, where a version of pluralism was characterized as positing the liberal view of the self. Second, it remains to be seen if an account can be given which shows that pluralism can *also* lead to an

endorsement of illiberalism. On this second view, the challenge to the present account is the indirect one that any support pluralism lends to liberalism is non-exclusive, thereby rendering it moot in attempts to privilege liberalism over its illiberal rivals.

I believe that an examination of the criticisms of pluralistic liberalism will in fact show that neither of these two challenges obtain. The first is obviated, as we shall see, because the conceptions of value pluralism animating the current debate are different from the internal conception of pluralism defended here. Once the criticisms of pluralistic liberalism are engaged, we will see that, in addition to those distinctions between different varieties of pluralism that were employed in chapters one and two (e.g. inside and outside the self, etc.), still further clarifying distinctions can and should be made. These are, briefly:

a) the nowhere view (pluralism is true neither inside nor outside the self).

b) the everywhere view (true both outside and inside the self).

c) the inside only view (true only inside the self).

d) the outside only view (true only outside the self).

Once these distinctions are noted, it becomes clear that the variant of pluralism defended here has been c), the inside only view, while critics of any link to liberalism, such as George Crowder and John Gray, are seen to employ a version of b), the everywhere view. I argue that once these distinctions are brought to light, new and powerful responses to the second concern mentioned above become possible; that attempts to work from pluralism to illiberalism are shown to rest on insupportable notions of pluralism.

The discussion opens with a brief engagement with the objection that pluralism amounts to nothing more than relativism. This debate seems largely settled in the literature, and so it is quickly left behind to engage other objections, including Richard Rorty's (and other critics') historicist arguments against the possibility of any philosophical foundation for liberalism at all. I try to show here how Rorty himself, in fact, endorses an ontological, liberal, and, notably, ahistorical claim about the self. Later, in the discussion of John Gray's views, I attempt to counter his interpretation of Berlin as an adherent of Sartrean radical choice by drawing on the incompatibility of radical choice and internal pluralism that was argued for in chapter two.

Of perhaps signal import is a recurring counter-claim to the liberalism-pluralism link that liberty itself is a "value," and can therefore come into incommensurable conflict with rival goods. I argue that this frequent criticism relies upon a mistaken understanding of the importance ascribed to liberty in both pluralism and liberalism. Overall however, the primary concerns are, again, to determine whether a) any direct challenge to the link between internal or "inside only" pluralism and liberalism offered here currently exists, and b) whether any variety of value pluralism whatsoever can be successfully shown to entail illiberalism. Concluding that neither is in fact the case, I close with a brief discussion of what this means for contemporary examinations of pluralism and liberalism.

CRITICISMS OF VALUE PLURALISM

Relativism

Critics such as Michael Sandel have charged that Berlinian value pluralism amounts to little more than relativism.[31] Sandel points to the quotation by Joseph Schumpeter with which Berlin closes "Two Concepts of Liberty": "to realize the relative validity of one's convictions yet stand for them unflinchingly is what distinguishes a civilized man from a barbarian" (Sandel 1984: 8). Sandel asks why one should stand for one's convictions unflinchingly if they are only relatively valid. Similarly, Leo Strauss seizes on the Schumpeter quotation and applies it to Berlin's own conviction that there must exist a minimum private sphere for each individual, one bordered by "frontiers of freedom which nobody should ever be permitted to cross" (quoted in Strauss 1989:15). This conviction, along with every other of Berlin's, must itself be only relatively valid if Schumpeter is right, so Berlin's entire project collapses into contradiction.

It was sloppy of Berlin to close his essay with Schumpeter's dramatic-sounding but ultimately indefensible remark. Yet conceding this does not call the truth or coherence of value pluralism into question. As we saw in chapter two, the tragic dimension of value pluralism is predicated on precisely the conviction that values are more than merely relative. Were this not the case, the young man torn between serving family and serving country would be in no dilemma at all, as he could simply shrug off one or both of his obligations.

Michael Walzer has further distinguished pluralism from relativism. They are different in that pluralism

31 According to Richard Rorty "These comments represent Sandel's account of the standard objection rather than his own attitude." *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 46.

> can indeed be born, and indeed be celebrated as the necessary outcome of human freedom and creativity. But this celebration does not entail relativism, for two reasons: first, because the discovery of a pluralist universe is a real discovery; there really are many visions and many ways, self-validating and uncombinable; and second, because the freedom that gives rise to these visions and ways is genuinely valuable (Walzer 1986: x).

In other words, pluralism rules out some accounts as right and others as wrong. Monism, for example, is condemned as untrue, a condemnation relativism forbids. And that values themselves can be both genuine and come in conflict is itself an objective claim. Furthermore, to live in accordance with one or some values requires some minimal amount of freedom in order to do so. Value pluralism then, like any coherent philosophical doctrine, is incompatible with the belief that such distinctions and preference are all relative.

Freedom as an incommensurable 'value'

Sandel has a second objection. In the "tragically-configured moral universe" pluralism posits, "is the ideal of freedom any *less* subject than competing ideals to the ultimate incommensurability of values? If so, in what can its privileged status consist? And if freedom has no morally privileged status, if it is just one value among many, then what can be said for liberalism?" (Sandel 1984: 8). This is a common objection in the literature (Crowder 1994; Gray 1995; Kocis 1989; Ryan 1996; Walzer 1995), and for many commentators it serves as the decisive reason for rejecting any supportive link between pluralism and liberalism. As it will be worth revisiting variations of this view later on, we can give it its own name: the freedom-as-value-in-conflict objection. If freedom is itself a value—as Berlin says it

is—then presumably it, too, will at times have to give way to some other good. Hence, pluralism will at times cause us to choose against liberty and liberalism.

In regards to value pluralism within the self however, this view is false. Chapter two argued that internal pluralism presupposed a view of the self as an arena where values can come into incommensurable conflict, and the choice of the agent was the means by which such conflicts are resolved. This, it was argued, amounts to the liberalism-supporting claim that the self is prior to its ends. Furthermore, so far as value conflicts within a single individual are concerned, the degree to which such conflicts can involve liberty itself as one of the two options will be severely limited, on the same small scale as in the case of the person considering joining a commune through his own free choice. Liberty *qua* liberty can not be in incommensurable conflict with some completely opposed value because to be drawn to the second value in this way is to also wish for the liberty required to actualize it. "Community," "equality," "tradition," and the many other rival goods frequently contrasted with liberty are not really in conflict with liberty if they are freely chosen. Indeed, for there to be a genuine conflict here, the agent would have to be coerced in some way in the name of such goods. This is impossible in cases of incommensurable value conflict within the self: the agent would have to be pulled to, feel some strong desire to be, coerced into something. But coercion, of course, only happens when we are forced to do something we do not want to.

It is misleading therefore, so far as internal pluralism is concerned, to speak of liberty *qua* liberty coming in conflict with some other "value." Of

course, Berlin himself shares responsible for this confusion, as he has repeatedly referred to liberty and freedom as "values" of this type. Later on, we will see that his critics add to the confusion by, among other things, arguing that liberalism ascribes value to freedom *qua* freedom, rather than seeing freedom as valuable because of the tasks, projects and conceptions of the good life it allow the individual to pursue. Likewise, from the point of view of internal pluralism, freedom is better thought of as a precondition for engaging values in a way that allows people to live their lives from the inside, in cases of value conflict and other times, rather than as a value in itself.

Berlin as anti-foundationalist

Richard Rorty discusses Sandel's second objection to Berlin in the context of an argument against the idea of philosophical foundations. We should give up on attempts to rationally support our convictions, Rorty argues, and justify liberalism and other beliefs "simply as matter of historical comparison" with past, present and utopian alternatives (Rorty 1989: 53). This is because the underlying beliefs of enlightenment rationalism and other schools of thought which hold that reason can provide some foundation for what we believe depend on insupportable claims about objectivity, capital-T "Truth," and ahistorical "Reason." Rorty's discussion of Berlin is not so much a rebuttal of pluralism then, as an attempt to rope Berlin into Rorty's postmodern corner.[32]

32 See Gray, chapter six and McKinney 1992 for other attempts to draw parallels between Berlin and some version of post-modernism.

This begins with Rorty's distinguishing the "relatively valid" beliefs mentioned by Schumpeter from absolutely valid ones, in order to defend the idea of relatively valid beliefs. Absolute validity, Rorty says, would only hold with "everyday platitudes, elementary mathematical truths and the like: the sort of beliefs nobody wants to argue about because they are ... not central to anyone's sense of who she is." (Rorty 1989: 47). So Rorty is limiting the discussion to convictions of a certain kind: self-defining ones, such as those which make up a conviction of the good life.

But to say that there is no single over-arching standard by which all such conceptions can be ranked according to some "absolute" standard is uncontroversial. I can want to be a doctor and be perfectly happy to see my wife become a lawyer. Allowing some subjectivity here is not enough to overthrow the idea of philosophical foundations. To do that would require admitting into the discussion the full court of "beliefs"—about the external world, other people, etc.—which critics like Sandel and Strauss have in mind when they make the relativism charge. Rorty's response is thus not so much to deal with the relativist charge head on (he says it "should not be answered, but rather evaded" [Rorty 1989: 54]) but to discuss its application in one particular area—those beliefs which people have about themselves.

Importantly, the terrain this brings Rorty into is that of second-order desires, the same concept that was used in chapter two to illuminate incommensurable value conflict, an idea which was in turn portrayed as overlapping with a foundation of liberalism, its view of the self. Rorty seeks to use the notion of second-order desires to challenge the idea of rationalism and foundations altogether. For once we acknowledge them, Rorty says, then

we see that to adhere to the traditional view of rational/good, irrational/bad is to be "forced to call 'irrational' many things we wish to praise. In particular . . . 'a form of self-criticism and reform which . . . has even been thought to be the very essence of rationality and the source of freedom'" (Rorty 1989: 49).

Rorty quotes Donald Davidson to illustrate why this is so:

> What I have in mind is a special kind of second-order desire or value, and the actions it can touch off. This happens when a person forms a positive or negative judgment of some of his own desires, and he acts to change these desires. From the point of view of the changed desire, there is no reason for the change—the reason comes from an independent source, and is based on further, and partly contrary, considerations. The agent has reasons for changing his own habits and character, but those reasons come from a domain of values necessarily extrinsic to the contents of the views or values to undergo change. The cause of the change, if it comes, can therefore not be a reason for what it causes. A theory that could explain irrationality would also be one that also could not explain our salutary efforts, and occasional successes, at self-criticism and self-improvement (quoted in Rorty 1989: 49).

Rorty here is endorsing an ontological thesis about the self. A process can take place within the individual where one is both committed to valuing something yet also to ultimately rejecting it in the name of some wholly external, incompatible—even incommensurable—rival. This is the theory of the self which was endorsed in chapter two. Yet the upshot Rorty sees here is the opposite of the one that finds in this a support to liberalism.

"If Davidson is right," Rorty writes, "then the assumptions usually invoked against Berlin and Schumpeter [e.g. Sandel's] are wrong." (Rorty

1989: p. 49). The ground the anti-relativist critic is standing on, Rorty and Davidson are saying, is quicksand, as the anti-relativist is bringing to bear the wrong standards. As Rorty puts it:

> We shall not be able to assume that there is a largest-possible framework within which one can ask, for example, "If freedom has no morally privileged status, if it is just one value among many, then what can be said for liberalism?" we cannot assume that liberals ought to be able to rise above the contingencies of history and see the kind of individual freedom which the modern liberal state offers its citizens as just one more value. Nor can we assume that the rational thing to do is to place such freedom alongside other candidates (e.g. the sense of national purpose which the Nazis briefly offered Germans, or the sense of conformity to the will of God which inspired the Wars of Religion) and then use "reason" to scrutinize these various candidates and discover which, if any, are "morally privileged." Only the assumption that there is some such standpoint to which we might rise gives rise to the question, "If one's convictions are only relatively valid, why stand for them unflinchingly?" (Rorty 1989: 50).

Rorty's reasoning here is strange, complex and unpersuasive. It may be helpful to divide the argument into its component stages and deal with them individually.

We shall not be able to assume there is a largest possible framework. The framework of our beliefs is . . . the framework of our beliefs. We cannot find independent ground on which to stand and objectively rank or revise them. Yet the quotation from Davidson which Rorty bases this on applied only to instances where the self was both the subject and the object of belief. Now however, Rorty wants to move to overthrow all "subject-object ... models of inquiry" (Rorty 1989: 51). But Davidson's claim about the self gives us no

reason to doubt, say, that one account of the external world cannot be superior to another.

Indeed, Davidson and Rorty are themselves making a very robust claim about that world—they are giving a description of the human self, in the form of an ontological thesis. And they are positing this as something independent of their own subjective take on things. Were someone to deny the second-order corrective process Davidson outlines ever occurs, she would not be offering some subjective, equally worthy view but, according to Davidson and Rorty account, inaccurate. Either that or relativity applies here as well, in which case Rorty and Davidson's account is no better or worse than any other—including Sandel's, the one which Rorty is seeking to rule out.

We cannot assume that liberals ought to be able to rise above the contingencies of history and see the kind of individual freedom which the modern liberal state offers its citizens as just one more value. Rorty seems to be using "liberals" here as a synonym for "modern people." (Or he is claiming liberals cannot be non-liberals, which is strange.) Because they live when they do, they will regard freedom as a kind of trump value, superior to all rivals. But this is demonstrably false. There is much disagreement today, both within philosophy and beyond, about the value of individual freedom; were Rorty right there would be, for example, no contemporary Marxists critics of liberalism. Similarly, there is also much disagreement today concerning in what realms individual freedom should and should not apply, as is evident in contemporary debates about legalized gun ownership, prostitution and the rest.

Furthermore, liberals predate the modern state; Locke, among others, was not bound by the beliefs of his day, and ushered in a new era of beliefs about freedom. Modern individuals are likewise more than mere slates upon which their age writes everything they believe. So Rorty is exaggerating the degree to which our convictions are determined by the era in which we live. Indeed, Rorty's own view of the self as a site of self-correction rules out all our values as being simply given (by, for example, our day and age). They are, crucially, revisable.

National purpose which the Nazis offered . . . conformity to the will of God. The view of the self value pluralism presupposes, and which Rorty himself endorses, highlights its capacity for revisability. This would seem to severely undercuts the degree to which goals such as national purpose and religious conformity can be taken as fixed values in the minds of the populaces Rorty is concerned with. Many Germans, not just Jews and communists, saw little good in Nazis goals, no doubt some arriving at this view after initially supporting them. Moreover, national purpose and religious aims can be advanced in liberal states also; so Rorty would appear to be falsely characterizing freedom as a rival value-in-itself, something always incompatible with religious and national aims.

Liberalism however, does not require that we treat liberty as a "value" in this way, burdening ourselves with the task of demonstrating that it is a kind of trump, superior to all competing ends. It rather begins with the very idea Rorty has himself endorsed: that the self is prior to its ends. Liberalism works from this claim about who we are to argue (as we saw in chapter two) that the deep importance we ascribe to determining whether we are living a good

life—not merely one we currently consider to be good—must be respected on a political level, and that we therefore need the liberties liberalism upholds to aid in our ongoing process of self-determination, judging our current ends in light of exposure to the many others our society also contains. The pluralist view of the self moreover, emphasize the frequently quite dramatic re-orientations and revisions that can go on within a person. And what lends such evaluations and re-evaluations of the good life their dramatic and frequently agonizing character is that they are, as we saw in chapter two, higher order evaluations through which a person defines himself. We do damage to someone then, when we needlessly deny them the liberty to "be themselves" in this way, living in accord with their own values.

Fascists and religious murderers did not always endorse this view of the self; Jewishness for example, was considered to be unovercomable by the Nazis; their racial essentialism saw it as going "all the way down." Likewise, neither Fascism or theocracy distinguishes between endorsing a value and pointlessly going through the motions of endorsing it; they thereby overlook the crucial distinction liberals make in arguing that our lives must be led "from the inside." Forcing people to go to church, among other things, becomes legitimate once this is ignored. But as we saw in chapter two, "conformity to the will of god" or any other value isn't really increased when the person illiberally coerced into it is inwardly opposed to it.

Fascists and inquisitors moreover, deny not merely that the self is the ultimate arena of determining what convictions the agent will embrace, but that the self has even enough moral status to prevent the killing of dissenters. But if the view of the self Rorty himself endorses is true, then our

intuitions compel us to view the self is a seat of autonomy and self-legislation. Thus, for individual A to murder individual B in the name of some value such as fascistic "national purpose" is unjust. If agent B disagrees with his fascist counterpart, according to Rorty himself, there can be no external and genuine authority to trump the claims of B's sovereignty.

For the Nazi, there is no room for Davidsonian self-correction beyond the boundaries of rational calculation. But if we admit Davidson and Rorty's view of the self, we see that someone working out questions of value for themselves is simply being human. To bring coercion to bear against those who hold a minority view is to deny the very capacity for self-determination which Rorty makes appeal to. Liberalism however, does not demand such a violation.

Pluralism as an obstacle to liberalism

In his influential paper "Pluralism and Liberalism," George Crowder argues that "not only does pluralism provide no positive assistance to the liberal case, it also sets certain obstacles in the way of that case" (Crowder 1994: 293). What's more, according to Crowder, "My analysis raises the question of whether pluralism is even compatible with liberalism or with traditional, reason-giving political philosophy as a whole" (Crowder 1994: 293). I think neither of these claims succeed. Showing why involves retracing the steps of Crowder's argument in some detail.

Crowder distinguishes early on between values being simply incompatible and being genuinely incommensurable. Values that were merely incompatible could still be arranged in some overall schema or hierarchy. (I value both my high standing in the community and my proficiency in a

language that is unpopular with my peers. Not being able to combine the two, I opt for social station and stop speaking the language in public.) Therefore, "incommensurability is the key to the idea of pluralism" (Crowder 1994: 295). On this point Crowder is quite correct; the present account has also portrayed incommensurability as the key to pluralism. So the disagreement is over the role Crowder ascribes to incommensurability in attempts to link pluralism and liberalism.

Crowder reviews six attempts to link the two, all in the following argumentative structure: "to recognize the plurality of values [in the incommensurable sense] is to have a reason to value *x*, which is a good best advanced by the institution of liberalism" (Crowder 1994: 296). The six candidates for *x* are tolerance, freedom of choice, humaneness and humanity, diversity, truth and truthfulness and personal autonomy. Crowder sees several problems as common to more than one of these moves, so it will be necessary only to review his first four examples to see the full extent of his objections.

Tolerance

Crowder articulates the move from pluralism to tolerance to liberalism in the following way:

> As Steven Lukes puts it, once we allow that there are no 'uniquely determinate solutions rationally compelling upon all', we must conclude that 'for the state to impose any single solution on some of its citizens is thus (not only from their standpoint) unreasonable.' Lukes apparently assumes that if several conceptions of the good life are, so to speak, on a moral par, we should respect them all equally (Crowder 1994: 296-297).

From this it follows quickly that equal respect leads to tolerance, a thoroughly liberal commitment.

Crowder says this argument should be rejected for two reasons. The first is because incommensurable goods, by definition, cannot have equal value, as equality entails that they are measurable by a common standard. They are more accurately characterized as "equally ultimate." And if this move to equal respect fails, then tolerance can gain no purchase.

But Crowder is arguing against a liberal straw man. Appearing to have the intra-social view of value pluralism in mind (as perhaps Lukes does also), he moves from plural conceptions of the good life, to their equal value, to equal respect for such conceptions, to tolerance of them. But this flawed chain of reasoning is not one liberals have to defend. No one "equally respects" every different conceptions of the good life a society contains; we discriminate between them, prefer the one we settle upon (albeit transiently in some instances) over many alternatives, and hold still others in contempt. Liberals do not ask anyone to do differently. What they do ask is that *the state* not coerce people into or discriminate in favour of any particular version of the good life. And this, importantly, is not necessarily the same as asking the state to "respect" them all equally; it can also be characterized as simply removing the state from the realm of making judgments of any kind concerning such projects: it simply has no position one way or the other.

This liberal commitment is perfectly consistent with discriminating between conceptions of the good life. Were my brother to be considering a career as a tabloid reporter, my devotion to journalism (say) may cause me to try to talk him out of taking up work I regard with contempt. But I can also

maintain that the state should not simply ban him from signing on with *The Enquirer*, as his life would not then be lived in accord with his own values. Liberal tolerance demands only a rejection of such coercion, not equal respect.

Similarly, Crowder's prior move, from the plurality of conceptions of the good life to their equality, is dubious—and one Lukes himself never makes; Crowder instead "assumes" that he does. But Lukes is really objecting to state coercion, which, as we just saw, is not the same as abdicating ones capacity for judgment and discrimination. So Crowder appears to have just substituted equality for incommensurability, sliding the former into the role properly occupied by the latter, in order that he may then go on to hunt down his own paper tiger.

Things appear differently if we keep the focus on incommensurability. To what degree does it license coercion? This is what critics of the link between pluralism and liberalism really have to show for their objections to gain purchase. But if we recall the argument of chapter two, we see that there are powerful reasons for doubting such license is possible when the pluralism at hand is the internal variety.

Briefly, those reasons start with the claim that internal pluralism shows that we can revise our ends, and that we are self-conscious of this capacity. One way of expanding on this is to say that internal, incommensurable value conflict gives us good reason to suspect the choices we settle on may not be permanent. It is in the nature of incommensurable value conflicts that we really could go one way or the other. So even if we settle on choice *a*, we can still conceive of ourselves pursuing *b* somewhere down the road, or going through the whole process again with different sets of values and different

outcomes. Civil and political liberties aid us in the ongoing process of self-determination which incommensurable value conflict makes us self-conscious of, and within which such conflicts can and do occur, because such liberties provide us with the widest possible sphere in which to experiment with and adjudicate different values. Hence we benefit from living in a society which allows conceptions of the good life not currently our own to flourish, as we may someday reject our current beliefs about value in favour of another view. Such tolerance for plural conceptions of the good life, of course, is one of liberalism's central commitments. Yet this particular move from pluralism to tolerance to liberalism is one Crowder never discusses.[33]

Instead, he goes on to state his second reason for rejecting any such claim:

> [E]ven if it did make sense to regard plural goods as somehow equal in value, it would not follow that those who have to choose among such goods ought not to discriminate in favour of any one good to the exclusion of others. In fact, the implication of pluralism is the very opposite. We must make such discriminations, since we must expect that some plural goods will conflict with one another and that in those cases we shall have to make hard choices. (Crowder 1994: 297).

This argument is very similar to Crowder's first, and fails for similar reasons. Again, no liberal is committed to saying people should not discriminate between goods. Liberalism gains force, rather, from the belief that people

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33 As an ancillary to this, it may be worth recalling that internal incommensurable value conflicts may be resolved by the agent attempting to determine which option is more in keeping with her deepest sense of self. This requires considerable self-knowledge. Thus, for the state to trump the wishes of the individual, it must make the dubious claim that it knows the agent better than she knows herself. But insofar as there is any disagreement between the individual and the state about what she is "really like," the individual will probably win. In most instances, we will know our own interiors better than the state does.

inescapably discriminate and disagree over goods and ends. Because they discriminate, they require liberties that enable them to do so in an informed manner. Because they disagree, the state should not favour or suppress partisan life-plans, condemning some citizens to live lives out of step with their own beliefs. To be directed at liberalism then, Crowder's argument would have to show how pluralism justifies state coercion in this area. His attack on the less-than-coherent claim that people must never discriminate is no substitute for this.

To sum up, Crowder's discussion of the move from pluralism to tolerance to liberalism depends on a caricature view of liberalism as a theory of non-discrimination. He never deals with the link between our ongoing desire to live a life that is genuinely good, and the positive role freedom to act on values currently not our own plays in advancing this end. He also never shows how pluralism justifies the state illiberally coercing its citizens. The links between pluralism, tolerance and liberalism therefore, remain unsevered.

Choice

Crowder quotes Berlin as saying that when people realize they will sometimes have to decide between incommensurable values, this will lead them to place much value on freedom of choice; "for if they had the assurance that . . . no ends pursued by them would ever be in conflict, the necessity and agony of choice would disappear, and with it the central importance of the freedom to choose." (Quoted in Crowder 1994: 297). Crowder points out the indirect nature of this claim; it is concerned with

what would be the case were pluralism *not* true. It amounts to saying that value pluralism alone can give choice its value.

Crowder's rebuttal begins with a distinction between two kinds of choosing, "the special kind of rationally underdetermined choice involved in choosing among incommensurable values and choice in general" (Crowder 1994: 298). In a monist universe of course, we would have no cause to value the first kind of choice, as it would be impossible. But utilitarianism is a kind of monism, and it places much value on choice in general. As this is (according to Crowder) the kind of choice liberalism places a premium on, pluralism then, *contra* Berlin, is not the only reason choice can have any value.

Up to this point, Crowder's rebuttal simply amounts to saying that liberal choice can have more than one foundation (utilitarian and others), like a table with more than one leg. He soon moves however, to cut the cord between pluralism and liberal choice:

> there is an obvious gap to be bridged between the *necessity* of choosing implied by pluralism and the *valuing* of choice required by the case for liberalism. Pluralism tells us that choices between genuinely plural values are inescapable where those values clash. This point does not give us any reason to value choice, since the fact that choice, or anything else, is inescapable does not make it valuable. If we have to choose between liberty and community, for example, in either case sacrificing something of great value, why should that painful choice be regarded as cause for celebration? (Crowder 1994: 298)

In other words, there is a gap between the ontological claim (that values can come into incommensurable conflict) and the advocacy claim that choice is to be valued, as is required by liberalism.

But Crowder has mischaracterized both the advocacy claims of liberalism and the role the ontological claim of internal value pluralism plays in supporting liberalism. The ontological claim of value pluralism is that our values do not go all the way down and, moreover, those moments when we adhere to two incompatible values are made possible by our capacity to stand outside of any single end, even the conception of the good which currently animates our life. This highlights our capacity for good life re-evaluation and self-determination concerning what we value, a capacity we consider tremendously important and one which is best served by a sphere of liberty in which we can experiment with, observe, change and act upon other conceptions.

Furthermore, internal pluralism gives us good reason to reject political arrangements which *deny* our capacity for choice among rival values, as such regimes deny an important, real part of our make-up—our capacity for revisability as such, which contains within it those moments where revisability occurs within the context of incommensurability. The case for liberalism here merely demands that we note that liberalism does not violate us in a similar manner. In no way does it demand that we invoke our ability to choose between incommensurable values as a reason to do a little jig in the name of choice itself.

Likewise, liberalism does not "celebrate" choice *qua* choice. Indeed, Crowder's claim that it does has frequently been made by communitarian critics of liberalism. Will Kymlicka has rebutted it this way:

> Liberals do not say that we should have the freedom to select our projects for its own sake, because freedom is the most valuable thing in the world. Rather, our projects and tasks are the most important things in our lives, and it is because they are so important that we should be free to revise them, should we come to believe that they are not worthwhile . . . since our lives have to be lived from the inside, in accordance with our beliefs about value, we should be free to form, revise and act on our plans of life . . . we do not suppose that someone who makes twenty marriage choices is in any way leading a more valuable life than someone who has no reason to question her original choice (Kymlicka 1990: 209).

It is no wonder then, that pluralism gives us no reason to celebrate choice as an end in itself: such a position is without good reason at all. Rather, value pluralism within the self posits our ability to revise our values, and highlights the importance we place on this process of self-determination and striving after the life that is genuinely good. Internal pluralism is likewise only compatible with the liberal claim that "our lives have to be lived from the inside" in that pluralism posits that "inside" is the final forum of decision concerning what values we genuinely uphold. The kind of incommensurable choices we face between rival values is one important way (albeit not the only way)[34] in which we come to revise our conception of

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34 To reiterate one of the claims of chapter two, there is more than one way to change our conception of the good life. I thank many will involve some kind of choice between incommensurables, the new conception invoking radically different standards and frameworks than the old. But it is too sweeping to say that this defines every revision of value, and re-evaluations that do not involve

the good life. That such conceptions themselves, along with our efforts to ensure that they are genuinely valuable, are so important to us gives us reason to prefer those political arrangements which allow us to choose our ends in the most informed manner possible—in other words, to prefer liberalism.[35]

Crowder concludes[36] his discussion of choice with his own articulation of the freedom-as-a-value-in-conflict argument. "It follows from pluralism only that freedom of choice is one value among others, liable to be sacrificed to other goods. The fact that we must choose *some* value does not give us reason to opt for freedom of choice" (Crowder 1994: 299). But as we have seen, so far as value pluralism within the self is concerned, "choice" is not a value in itself, capable of coming into incommensurable conflict with others. This reflected in the fact that Crowder's own argument here repeatedly uses synonyms for decision making: "sacrifice," "choose," "opt," showing choice to

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incommensurability are probably more common.

35 Crowder goes on to raise the celebration-of-choice bar even higher, ascribing to liberalism a robust devotion to choice indeed: "That hard choices among incommensurables are to be valued as part of the human condition tells us nothing about why we should value more mundane instances of choice, which is required by the case for liberalism" (Crowder 1994: 299). A variant of liberalism, or any other political theory, founded on a commitment to truly mundane choices would be an interesting philosophical doctrine indeed.

36 Crowder makes a strange remark in his discussion of choice. According to him, the pluralist holds that "[p]luralistic choice is part of, its value owed to, the human condition." But, "the human condition is as consistent with the rejection of free choice and liberalism as with its promotion" (Crowder 1994: 299). There are three things to say about this statement:

1) On a very basic level, Crowder is simply mistaken. It is difficult to imagine a human being incapable of making choices, particularly the "more mundane" ones Crowder is so oddly preoccupied with.

2) The "rejection" of free choice is paradoxical—choosing not to choose is a choice (as is, for that matter, rejecting liberalism).

3) The force of the claim that pluralism is significant because it is part of the human condition is not based on the obviously untrue belief that people spend every waking moment choosing between incommensurable values. It is rather based on the claim that such choice is *possible*—as Crowder himself admits by calling pluralism "consistent with" the human condition. Disputing that pluralism is part of our condition would involve showing that people *never* make these kinds of choices, not merely, as Crowder does, implying that they often don't.

be present on whatever path we take. So long as any value that we come to rest upon is one we truly want and acquire ourselves, we will have exercised, not rejected, our capacity to choose.

Humaneness

Crowder employs a similar argumentative strategy in taking issue with Berlin's remark that pluralism is a "more humane ideal" than monistic coercion and its "great, disciplined, authoritarian structures" (Berlin 1969: 171). According to Crowder, humaneness, like choice, is "no more than one value among others. We have as much reason to be humane as, say, efficient, but by the same token we may equally choose efficiency" (Crowder 1994: 299).

Does pluralism really commit us to conceding that we will be torn, in the incommensurable sense, between efficiency and our very humaneness? I think not. In order for that to be true pluralism would have to hold that *all* our thinking about value was made up of incommensurable choosing, rather than that we *sometimes* must make such choices between incommensurable values. This point was made in chapter one, following Bernard Williams. It may be valuable here however, to give his original articulation of it:

> When it is said that values are incommensurable, it is usually some general values such as liberty and equality which are said to be incommensurable. But this seems to imply that there is no way of comparing or rationally adjudicating the claims of these values *wherever* they conflict. But no one could believe this, since obviously there are possible changes by which (say) such a trivial gain in equality was bought by such an enormous sacrifice of liberty that no one who believed in liberty at all could rationally favour it (Williams 1979: 227).

In other words, incommensurability is a potential, not automatic characteristic of value conflict. It is this much more plausible claim that the experiential view of pluralism and incommensurability makes. A lot will depend on circumstance in determining whether incommensurability occurs or not. This places crucial importance on fleshing out one's examples when making claims such as Crowder's concerning efficiency and humaneness. That they are both values, in itself, does not commit us to acknowledging incommensurability in their conflict. Indeed, the choice here seems a particularly easy one to make.

Crowder continues against "the argument from humaneness" by examining Berlin's claim that people have found the liberty that pluralist thinking counsels "indispensable to their life as unpredictably self-transforming human beings" (Berlin 1969: 171). Crowder takes issue with this by saying that there is "more to human nature than 'unpredictable self-transformation' . . . Berlin's emphasis on these features is quite arbitrary. One could just as plausibly build up a picture of human beings as essentially imitative and conformist, as lovers of habit and routine" (Crowder 1994: 300).

But Crowder is missing something: Berlin's claim was not that human life is composed entirely of repeated, dramatic overthrows of one's worldview. It was rather that such self-transformations are possible and can happen at all. If I have only a single dramatic conversion in my life, from Christianity to Marxism, say, that would still cause me to value the freedom to follow whatever path seems right to me, whether or not I undergo a profound revision of value again in the future. Likewise, someone who never had such a conversion, so long as he knew it was a common occurrence, would also

have reason to value such freedom. This is the point Berlin was making. For Crowder's objection to hold, it would have to be demonstrated that people never underwent such profound conversions. But of course, that is not true.

Diversity

According to Bernard Williams, if it true that there is a plurality of competing values, then "the greater 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" (quoted in Crowder 1994: 300). Williams doubtless has intra-social value pluralism in mind, as does Crowder when he responds that pluralism "in itself gives us no reason to strive to accommodate, within a single society, as many of those values as possible. Indeed, a central message of pluralism . . . is that the potential for diversity is limited" (Crowder 1994: 300).

I do not wish to defend the move Crowder is challenging here, namely, the move from pluralism to social diversity to liberalism. I argued in chapter one that intra-social pluralism was not really a form of value pluralism at all, as it did not involve value-incommensurability the way internal pluralism does. So the diversity argument begins with a false foundation according to the present account.

What is worth taking issue with however, is a remark Crowder makes in his discussion of diversity, a claim which cuts to the heart of the dispute over whether value pluralism can support liberalism. Referring to choices between values, Crowder writes that

> pluralism has nothing to say about *who* should make the choice. One typical difference between liberal and non-

> liberal societies is that the former permit individuals to choose, within limits, which goods to pursue, whereas in non-liberal societies such choices are made by society as a whole or by some recognized authority. The fact that there are plural ultimate values has no bearing on the question of which of these arrangements should be preferred. It endorses neither but permits both. (Crowder 1994: 301).

Like the liberty-as-clashing-value argument, this one has repeatedly been taken as a powerful reason why pluralism can lend no foundational support to liberalism (see, for example, Gray 1995; Ryan 1996; Walzer 1995). But note that what Crowder is saying here involves a silent refinement of the claim made at the beginning of his paper, where he said that pluralism sets "obstacles in the way of [liberalism's] case." He now sees liberalism and pluralism as "compatible"; pluralism "permits" liberalism, but in a non-exclusive sense, in that it also opens the door to illiberal regimes. But does it?

What is at issue here is perhaps brought into sharper focus when we recall that what Crowder somewhat artfully refers to as the "recognized" authorities of illiberal societies are frequently agents of terrible cruelty and bullying. Debates about who should make the choice derive much of their import from this fact. The question is, can such state-coercion really be justified by any variety of value pluralism?

I think Crowder's argument that it can involves a questionable understanding of pluralism. This can be made clear by distinguishing between four combinations of intra-social and internal pluralism:

a) Neither value pluralism within the self nor intra-social value pluralism is true (the nowhere view).

b) Value pluralism within the self and intra-social value pluralism are both true (the everywhere view).

c) Value pluralism is true within the self, but intra-social value pluralism is false (the inside only view).

d) Intra-social value pluralism is true, but value pluralism within the self is false. (the outside only view).

Which of these conceptions a critic has in mind will have important ramifications for where she stands on the question of pluralism's relationship to liberalism. Yet even though the four views are all very different, distinctions between them are never explicitly made. But this very much needs to be done: it is surely important to the discussion of the link between pluralism and liberalism that the two critics who have done the most to criticize efforts to join the two, Crowder and John Gray (examined below), both seem to adopt the everywhere view. But the "incompatibility" of liberalism and pluralism seems to silently depend on this being the only conception of pluralism allowed into the discussion. Things change however, when we distinguish between the four versions mentioned here.

Of course, the nowhere view simply rejects pluralism, removing it from the list of candidates for supporting liberalism or anything else. But what about the inside only-view? This is version that has been defended here. If it is true, then the individual is prior to his values, and, I have tried to argue, this plays an important role in arguing for political arrangements which maximize liberty, due to the very real possibility (among other reasons) that we may in the future endorse values other than our current ones.

Could a case be made that the inside-only view itself can support illiberalism? I am at a loss to see how that could be done; once one concedes the antecedence of the individual to his values as the inside-only view does, it seems the only way to work from it to a political position which negates that importance is via the quasi-communitarian position examined in chapter two, a position that I tried to show as being effectively countered by liberal rebuttals. Regardless, none of the critics of the link between pluralism and liberalism show evidence of having the inside-only view in mind when they make their arguments.

This leaves the outside-only view and the everywhere view. But as we saw in chapter one, the former cannot be borne. For values to be genuinely incommensurable, at least one person must find them so; two people disagreeing is not an instance of incommensurability. And it only adds to the difficulty of the outside-only view that it must argue for socially incommensurable values while simultaneously *denying* the possibility that they may be incommensurable within the self. Such a position would seem vulnerable on its own account, let alone when used as a bridge to any political arrangement.[37]

This leaves the everywhere view. But as it incorporates intra-social value pluralism, it too is hobbled by all the difficulties of that notion. Moreover, it would seem that in order to advance the cause of illiberalism, the everywhere view would also have to show that the "incommensurability" which is somehow experienced on a social level trumps that which is possible within

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37 Rawls endorses this very view in *Political Liberalism*, "The Basic Liberties and their priority."

the self, so that the state or "recognized authority" can decide what values the individual will uphold.

But how is this possible? The everywhere view concedes that the self is an arena of incommensurable value conflict, yet, to support illiberalism, it must argue that the self is not the ultimate authority in deciding between values, *because* values may *also* clash incommensurably on a societal level. But even if this dubious claim could be supported, it would still provide no reason to justify reserving the right to choose for the state while denying it to the individual.

Consider what would be involved in disputes between the individual and the state were the everywhere view true, and external pluralism to take precedence over internal pluralism. A society finds values x and y incommensurable and imposes x on one (or more) of its citizens. The citizen also finds them incommensurable (as must be the case under the everywhere view).[38] The claim of the agent of the state then, must be something like, "x and y are incommensurable, so we have decided you must adopt x." But insofar as x and y really are *incommensurable*, how can this move be justified? The citizen simply responds that x has no inherent superiority over y: she could just as easily go the other way. And this is precisely what is *not* in dispute between her and the state, as incommensurability has been conceded from the outset. For the state to justifiably coerce a citizen into adopting any

38 The incommensurability involved in such a scenario would be very different from that which is recognized by the inside-only view. There, incommensurability is bound up with important life decisions, and determined in large part by circumstance. On the everywhere view however, incommensurability is simply assumed to be inherent in all values. How else could a society and an individual simultaneously find them so? This unrealistic idea is the one Williams rightly objected to above.

value, it seems that the one thing the value cannot be is genuinely incommensurable with some rival(s). For if it is incommensurable, then the citizen who does not wish to adopt it can invoke that fact as reason enough to choose a rival.

To sum up, the move from pluralism to illiberalism depends on using pluralism as a justification for coercion: but incommensurability cannot justifiably be invoked to support such coercion. Even more crucially, attempts to justify pluralist illiberalism are based on an view of pluralism either being true inside *and* outside the self, or outside the self alone, neither of which is a credible account of pluralism. These observations have perhaps not been employed by liberals and pluralists to their advantage as much as they could be.

Radical choice

Crowder writes that "as Berlin taught, pluralism imposes on us the necessity of radical choice" (Crowder 1994: 303). He asks why a person choosing between incommensurables should not just toss a coin to decide. This view of Berlin as a counsellor of radical choice is developed in greater detail by John Gray in his book *Berlin*. He repeatedly refers to "radical choice" between incommensurable values (Gray 1995: 1, 8, 23, 33, 41, 62, 71, 73 etc.), which he variously refers to as "a groundless decision as to how to act" (Gray 1995: 49) and as containing an "existential element" (Gray 1995: 71).

It would be difficult to overstate the role Gray sees such radical choice as playing in Berlin's thought: "Berlin's pluralism is not the claim that there are pockets of incommensurability . . . it is the more radical claim—but also the more defensible claim if human experience is to be our guide—that

incommensurability is pretty pervasive in human life" (Gray 1995: 59). This is obviously a very different view of Berlin than the one that has been advanced here. According to Gray, Berlin's liberalism is "the most profoundly deliberated, and most powerfully defended, in our time, or perhaps, any time" because

> its acknowledgment of an irreducible diversity of rivalrous goods, including *negative and positive liberties,* distinguishes it from all those recent liberalisms that engage themselves in 'theories of justice' or of 'fundamental rights'. *These* liberalisms are destroyed by Berlin's insight that, not only is any sort of liberty only one among many incommensurable values,[39] but the different liberties, negative and positive, are themselves rivalrous and uncombinable and sometimes incommensurable (Gray 1995: 145).

In other words, Berlin's liberalism has the value of irrational radical choice at its centre, and such choice will apply to instances where different types of liberty will themselves come into conflict. But there are many problems with Gray's interpretation, both concerning how much of it Berlin himself has

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39 Gray also believes that choosing among diverse options has significance beyond the realm of value: " the pluralism that negative freedom licenses is not a pluralism of goods alone: It accommodates a pluralism of the bad and the worthless, in that it affirms the freedom to choose that which is not, in the end, choiceworthy. For Berlin, negative freedom has intrinsic value . . . because it is a condition of self-creation" (Gray 1995: 31-32). Gray, by arguing that "choice-making" creates the self and "self-creation . . . gives value to negative freedom" (Gray 1995: 31) affords Berlin an ultimately existentialist view of the value of freedom, seeing it as an end in itself. Liberalism of course sees it as a "means to the satisfaction of human desires," (Gray 1995: 28), but Gray explicitly disavows this possibility. In fairness, Berlin provides much reason to suppose that he too takes the view that freedom is a value in itself. "The necessity of choosing between absolute claims is then an inescapable characteristic of the human condition. This gives its value to freedom as Acton had conceived of it—as an end in itself" (Berlin 1969: 169). Berlin is wrong on this point.

endorsed, but also, and more importantly, to what degree it is a coherent position.[40]

The first problem is textual: Gray never cites an instance where Berlin himself uses the existentialist phrase "radical choice." Not being able to find any such instance myself in Berlin's writings, I believe this is because Berlin has never used such a phrase.[41] This would only be in keeping with Berlin's (albeit ultimately unendorsable) method of resolving incommensurable value conflict, which is to choose the value which is most compatible with one's overall pattern of life. But this method, too, goes unmentioned by Gray.[42]

More importantly however, the idea of a radical choice between incommensurable values, were it offered by Berlin or anyone else, would not be a persuasive one. As we saw in Charles Taylor's redescription of Sartre's account of the dilemma facing the young man choosing between his country and his sick mother, there is a tragic dimension to such choices. This tragic dimension—which Berlin repeatedly stresses—is based on the fact that the *claims* of the options at hand are so powerful as to rule out cavalierly

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40 Gray's claim about Berlin's liberalism "destroying" Rawlsian (and other) conceptions seems unfounded. It depends on the claim that choices between incommensurables being the *only* sorts of choices we make. But as we saw in chapter two, this is not the case. The young woman agonizing between lawyering and playwrighting could, even in the throws of that dilemma, make a calculation concerning whether to go out for dinner or not based entirely on rational utility: i.e. it may cost too much. Clearly, incommensurability is not inherent in every choice we make in life, or, importantly, in those that are discussed by Rawls and other liberals.

41 Berlin did once tell an interviewer "In a sense I am an existentialist—that's to say I commit myself, or find that I am in fact committed, to constellations of certain values" (Quoted in Gray 1995: 159). But this is an autobiographical remark, not a description of his philosophical theory.

42 In fairness, Gray does state that Berlin's supposed endorsement of radical choice must be qualified by the fact that many such choices will turn out "not to express 'decisions' we have made, but to be summations or precipitates of our experiences and of the forms of life to which we belong" (Gray 1995: 73). His overall emphasis however, is on the radical, groundless choice description of the choice between incommensurables.

deciding between them, in addition to demanding profound self-examination. Crowder's flipping of a coin or Gray's existentialist leap into the future overlook this element of choice between incommensurables. Were such resolutions really possible, there would be no "tragic" dimension at all, as what was at stake would be trivial.

Gray however, thinks that radical choice is ultimately the centrepiece of Berlin's thought and value pluralism. In a passage comparing Berlin to Rawls and other conventional liberals, Gray writes that "Berlin's liberalism is by far the most formidable and plausible so far advanced, inasmuch as it acknowledges the limits of rational choice and affirms the reality of radical choice" (Gray 1995: 145). But Gray never shows why we should accept that the domain of radical choice is so wide as to justify such a claim. That we are sometimes faced with choices between incommensurables is no reason to concede, for example, that we are incapable of rationally comparing which job offer to accept, which groceries to buy in order to stay within our budget, which political party most represents our views and therefore deserves our vote, etc. That incommensurability is *possible* is not the same as its being applicable to every choice we make in life, as even a moment's recollection of the kinds of choices we make every day reveals.

Further difficulties adhere in Gray's account when he moves on from his conception of pluralism to argue that it can afford no foundational support for liberalism. A chief reason, quoted above, is that liberties may come into conflict. Gray's sole example of such a scenario, however, and the problem it poses for liberalism, is revealing:

> if . . . the freedom of sexual minorities to be open about their sexual orientation conflicts with the exercise by others of freedom of association, of hiring in schools or similar institutions, there is no way these conflicts can be settled without appeal to the impact the various freedoms will have on human well-being; and any assessment of this impact is bound to invoke judgments of the relative weight of human interests that involve intractably disputed conceptions of the good life and incommensurabilities within even those aspects of such conceptions that are not contested but are held in common. . . . value-pluralism is not restricted to conceptions of the good. It goes all the way down, right down into principles of justice and rights (Gray 1995: 148-149).

In other words, there will be no way to stay neutral in cases such as that of the sexual minority who is discriminated against in hiring. The attempt to draw up truly neutral rules is therefore something of a sham. Inevitably, we will play favourites, in that one conception of the good life will be promoted over another.

Gray's example however, is a remarkably weak one to advance the point he is trying to make: no challenge to liberalism seems to follow from it at all. First, Gray seems to imply that "judgments . . . that involve intractably disputed conceptions of the good life" are excluded by liberalism, much like Crowder's account of liberalism as a theory of non-discrimination. But of course, what liberalism really prohibits is the state advancing once partisan conception over another.

More to the point however, Gray's example does not illustrate that the state will inevitably have to choose one good life over the other. Crowder seems to have confused liberal theory with liberal societies. The latter do

have anti-discrimination laws[43] that are increasingly being brought to bear on situations involving gays and lesbians, but Gray's argument is with liberal *theory*, and *its* commitment to such legislation is far from automatic. Libertarian for example, are opposed to such laws, and do so out of a thoroughly liberal conviction that the state should not discriminate in the private realm. Perhaps they are wrong to do so: but whether one agrees with them or not, the essentially liberal nature of the libertarian position here cannot be gainsaid.

And such a position, importantly, is one which can afford the state neutral ground to stand on concerning the two good lives. So long as there are other businesses which can provide the discriminated-against employee with what she sought from the one run by the homophobe (a high salary, work in her chosen field, etc.) then both lives may be advanced: there is no zero-sum game.[44] So Gray has not given us an example which forces us or the state to choose between two conceptions of the good life. We can choose the libertarian view and judge against neither.

It also is worth noting that Gray's example does not seem to involve incommensurability in any way. Two parties strongly disagree, but that is not the same thing.

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43 But these seem a step away from traditional liberal ideas about the role of the state, rather than uncontroversially liberal. This makes them a strange basis upon which to mount an argument about liberalism's conceptual centre.

44 Not everyone is a libertarian on this matter of course, but that is most often because of a belief that the number of other opportunities open to the rejected employee are severely limited. But this is an empirical claim, not an inevitable aspect of liberalism itself; a job market with many hiring opportunities is quite compatible with a liberal political order.

Finally, Gray never substantiates his claim that value-pluralism "goes all the way down" to conceptions of the right. Certainly there is nothing in his example to demonstrate how this is so.

Particularist regimes

In the final chapter of *Berlin*, Gray reviews three arguments for pluralism as a support to liberalism, as well as three respective counter-claims, ultimately concluding that while value pluralism does not discredit liberalism *per se*, it does show that "liberal institutions can have no universal authority" (Gray 1995: 155). That is, where "liberal values[45] come into conflict with others which depend for their existence on non-liberal social or political structures and forms of life, and where these values are truly incommensurable, there can—if pluralism is true—be no argument according universal priority to liberal values" (Gray 1995: 155). He concludes, like Rorty and Crowder, that liberalism must be justified on historicist and communitarian grounds, as appropriate only for those societies where it is already well established. Like Crowder then, Gray's conclusion of the relationship between liberalism and pluralism is not that pluralism is a threat to liberalism, but rather that pluralism is also compatible with illiberal regimes.

The first argument linking pluralism and liberalism Gray counters is the claim that "authoritarian or illiberal societies or regimes are bound to deny the truth of value-pluralism" (Gray 1995: 151). Suppressing ways of life

45 Gray, like Crowder and other writers, frequently use phrases such as "liberal values" or "liberal forms of life," seeming to imply that liberalism is itself is a conception of the good life, or something close to it. This assumption strikes me as dubious.

suppresses the values they embody, thereby reducing the plurality of values a society incorporates. Only liberalism avoids this monistic negation.

Gray responds that pluralism will only be denied in this way by illiberal regimes that are universalistic, such as Christian, Marxist, Muslim or Platonist schools of authoritarianism. But authoritarian regimes which are particularistic, e.g. those that are "Hindu, Shinto or Orthodox Jewish, or which seek simply to preserve a local way of life" (Gray 1995: 151) make no universalistic claims. "All that needs to be claimed on behalf of such illiberal societies is that they harbour worthwhile forms of life [i.e. values] which will be compromised, or destroyed, by the exercise of freedom of choice" (Gray 1995: 151). Gray refers to "the value of unimpeded choice" and asks why it should "always trump that of the forms of life that are undone by such choice" (Gray 1995: 151). So an illiberal regime could endorse pluralism on a global level, but also be committed to upholding one way of life in a particular country.

But there are problems with this view. For one, Gray seems misinformed about the degree to which Hindu, Shinto or Orthodox Jewish regimes could genuinely affirm any kind of theoretical pluralism, even on the abstract global level he has in mind. All three would obviously consider their own theological stances not only commensurate but superior to Christianity, atheism and all the other rivals. Gray must have in mind therefore the *non-missionary* character of these religions. But that of course is not the same as granting that one's own religious beliefs are incommensurate with all others, as Gray claims.

This can be seen by asking where Gray's illiberal and particularist yet genuinely pluralist regime would stand on immigration. Suppose a convert to atheism wanted to leave her Orthodox Jewish state, and move to the neighbouring liberal state. It is of course a hallmark of illiberal states that they impose severe internal restrictions on their citizens. But were such a regime genuinely pluralist, as Gray avers, why would they prevent her from going? Atheism and Judaism, on his account are incommensurable. Gray it seems, has confused the fact that the religions he has in mind do not try to convert outsiders with the belief that they do not privilege their own theology above others. But of course such religious communities regard it as a loss when their own members become atheists or convert to another religion. So it is misleading then, to call them unqualified value pluralists.

Also misleading is Gray's characterization of these religions as somehow incompatible with liberalism or being "destroyed" by it. There are Orthodox Jews, Hindus and Shinto believers in Canada and other liberal states, and one can be a committed religious believer, to either a universalistic or particularistic creed, and also be a liberal. Gray's contrast however, derives what force it has precisely from its juxtaposition of liberalism with ways of life that really would be obliterated by free choice. But this is based on two notions which will not command instantaneous agreement.

First, Gray refers to "the value of unimpeded choice" and contrasts it with the value the illiberal regime seeks to preserve. But insofar as that second value is freely chosen there is no conflict. As we've seen elsewhere, it is wrong to refer to choice itself as a value. So there really is no clash of incommensurables here. That Gray understands liberalism as the view that

"choice-making is central to the good life" (Gray 1995: 161) perhaps explains why he characterizes choice as a value in itself.

The second area in need of scrutiny concerns the degree to which a regime which genuinely upheld pluralism could justify coercing its citizens. Gray seems to have a variant of the outside-only view of pluralism in mind: values are incommensurable between societies but not between individuals. But this seemed the least defensible version of all. As we saw in our discussion of Crowder, the state would defend its values on the grounds that they were incommensurable with those of other societies, but then turn around and deny the citizen the same appeal to incommensurability to those of their oppressed citizens. This seems hypocritical rather than a variant of value pluralism.

Finally, Gray's argument here casually endorses the idea of a way of life that can both be "worthwhile" and yet not freely chosen. But if a way of life really is worthwhile, won't people adopt it because of that quality, without needing to be bullied into doing so? To be sure, there are instances in which coercion is required within liberal societies: children must go to school, and we do not allow a free-market in weapons of mass destruction. But Gray is not making reference to uncontroversial and limited measures such as these, but rather to whole "ways of life" that can survive exclusively in situations involving coercion. But the more people need to be coerced into adopting such a way of life, the greater the chance that it is not worthwhile at all. At the very least, his argument here leaves us with no way of distinguishing between ways of life that hold appeal to no one and genuinely deserve to die out, and more complex scenarios. What's more, the illiberal regimes Gray has

in mind don't necessarily "preserve" a conception of the good through coercion; all that can be said for sure is that they preserve rather the outward appearance of people subscribing to that way of life. For if they need to be coerced, then they probably do not really value it.

Finally, one way of describing the coercive regimes Gray has in mind is to say that they preserve liberalism for the rulers but not the ruled: the leaders may choose the values to be imposed. So Gray's contrast between a regime that allows choice and one that does not is overdrawn. It is rather between one where everyone is allowed to choose and only some are. But of course, if the merit of the value the illiberal regime attempts to advance is plain to its leaders, who do not need to be coerced, this raises questions concerning the degree to which one can justify coercion in that value's name.

Illiberal regimes as instances of diversity

Gray's second counter-claim against the pluralism-liberalism link fairs no better than his first. If, according to the view Gray is arguing against, "liberal societies are to be commended on the pluralist ground that they harbour more genuine values than some illiberal societies," then Gray's question is, "does it not follow that the human world will be still richer in value if it contains not only liberal regimes but illiberal regimes that shelter worthwhile forms of life that would otherwise perish" (Gray 1995: 152)?

This would seem to be based on an intra-societal view of value pluralism. The more ways of life there are in world contributing to its diversity, the better it is so far as pluralism is concerned. But, aside from all the problems entailed in intra-social value pluralism itself, this claim faces two additional problems.

Firstly, Gray has not made reference to incommensurability, as would have to hold for value pluralism to be involved here. The pluralist need not be committed to deeming every way of life equally valuable, or to taking the crude "more is better" line Gray is describing here. She rather can hold that there are circumstances in which values will be incommensurable; this is very different from an inability to ever see the superiority of one value over another.

Secondly, the same problem adheres here as did in Gray's first counter-claim: exactly what "value" could be incommensurable with freely chosen ones but not able to survive *except* where people are coerced into it? This is tantamount to the claim that people will never freely choose it. Any such way of life (slavery comes to mind) would not be a "value" at all let alone incommensurable with other values. It would be obviously inferior to the ways of life available in liberal societies, if not to every chosen way life there is.

Coercion not justified by superiority claims

Gray's final counter-claim concerns what he considers "the most powerful of the three arguments" in favour of the pluralism-liberalism link. It states that "if values are truly incommensurable, then there can never be good reason to justify imposing any particular ranking of them on anyone" (Gray 1995: 153). But according to Gray,

> a particularistic illiberal regime need not claim, when it imposes a particular ranking of incommensurable values on its subjects, that this is a better ranking than others that are currently found in the world. It need only claim that it is a ranking embedded in, and necessary for the survival of, a particular way of life that is itself worthwhile, and

> that this ranking, and the way of life it supports, would be imperilled by . . . choice (Gray 1995: 153).[46]

Again taking the intra-social view of pluralism, Gray's argument is that if all values are incommensurable, then one that requires illiberalism to survive is equally entitled to perpetuate itself, through coercive means. The coercers will not say that the value they are acting in the name of is superior to those they suppress, but rather that it deserves to survive.

But this argument is based on an impoverished understanding of why we care about "ways of life." It is not simply because liberals or pluralists must take the more is better view Gray is again concerned with. It is rather because the people who live them ascribe importance to and derive meaning from them: simply increasing the number of outward manifestations of ways of life is not the same thing. A life made up of unwilled tasks and projects would be an empty pantomime or rituals and gestures the actor himself did not deem significant, hardly a good life at all. Surely no credible school of pluralism, let alone any theory of value, could ever cause us to endorse such an inhumane state of affairs.

CONCLUSION

Several points seem to follow from the above summary of current debates about the relationship between value pluralism, liberalism and illiberalism. The first is that one is unable to find a direct challenge to the link between

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46 Gray writes that this is "a claim often, and not unreasonably, made in liberal societies, when they seek to justify the legal non-recognition of polygamous marriage, say not by any claim about the particular value of monogamous marriage, but by the role monogamous marriage has in a particular way of life that is worth renewing. If such an argument has force in its application in liberal societies, why should it not also have force in regard to whole ways of life that are non-liberal?" (Gray 1995: 153). But of course, it is common to appose practices in liberal societies on the basis of liberal theory, and monogamy laws are an obvious example.

pluralism and liberalism that was offered in chapter two. That view, we may recall, worked from an internal conception of value pluralism, holding that incommensurable value conflict is possible exclusively within an individual self. This variant of pluralism, furthermore, was portrayed as positing an essentially liberal view of the self, and did not undercut liberal arguments for political liberties which work from this view of the self. Yet the arguments between both supporters of the liberalism-pluralism link and its opponents seem to operate on a different understanding of pluralism, one which does not make any distinction between pluralism inside and outside the self; what was called the "property view" above. To be sure, it may be premature to conclude that after this distinction between incommensurability as a property vs. incommensurability as an experience has been brought to the fore, we will forever be supplied with good reason to see pluralism as exclusively supporting liberalism; as of yet, there has been no sustained attempt to link internal pluralism and illiberalism. But it does seem safe to declare that, as things currently stand, no critic of pluralistic liberalism has offered good reason to reject this version of the link. And this may be, one hopes, because there are in fact no good reasons to reject such a conception of the relationship between pluralism and liberalism. That, at any rate, has been the position defended here.

Secondly, the above engagement with the literature has also been animated by an attempt to show that, no matter the view of pluralism one subscribes to, the discussion to date has suffered from a lack of clarity concerning competing notions of pluralism. The critics of pluralistic liberalism, I have tried to argue, operate on understandings of value

pluralism that cannot be borne, e.g. the everywhere view (if not, at other times, the outside only view). Once these are distinguished from the position that pluralism is true exclusively within the self, very different responses become available to any attempt to link pluralism and illiberalism. And such clarifying distinctions between different versions of pluralism, inside and outside the self, exclusively internal or applicable to both etc., can only be of aid in further discussions of pluralism, as part of or distinct from attempts to link it with liberalism. Such distinctions between different understanding of value pluralism, I believe, have a value independent of whether the attempt to link pluralism and liberalism offered here is ultimately taken as final.

But there is something else. When Berlin originally proposed his theory of value pluralism, and argued that it entailed a liberal political order, it was done in the context of the Cold War, when the menace liberalism aligned itself against was totalitarian communism. The debate about traditional, foundational liberal theory has undergone profound changes since 1958, and its most vociferous critics today are not authoritarians, but rather liberal historicists. Writers such as Rorty, Crowder and Gray have given up on the once common view that liberalism may capture something ahistorical about human beings. They argue that it can, at best, be justified in those places and times where it is no longer the kind of thing that needs to be justified. And such historicism of course, is widespread among contemporary intellectuals.

But if the account of pluralism offered here is correct, then pluralism has proved to be an idea of enduring, perhaps even urgent, value. Just as it was invoked against mid-century liberalism's undemocratic opponents, so too may it be of value as a check against today's (and tomorrow's) increasing

number of historicist critics. On this view, pluralism is denied to them as yet another easily-shattered foundation, and becomes instead an ahistorical claim about the human condition that historicists must not only respond to but, in some cases, grapple with as one of the assumptions which their own accounts can on examination be shown to rely upon.

This permanence, too, seems something to be valued.

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