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Reply to Galston and Crowder

Alex Zakaras

I am grateful to both William Galston and George Crowder for their thoughtful responses. In writing the original essay, I had two goals in mind. First, I wanted to give an accurate reading of Isaiah Berlin's philosophy and to challenge certain misconceptions about it. Second, I hoped to use some of Berlin's insights to contribute to the contemporary discussion of value pluralism and its relationship to liberalism. Neither Galston nor Crowder disputes my reading of Berlin. Galston writes that he "never set out to write as an interpreter of Berlin"; Crowder, too, simply brackets the question of interpretation (see his footnote 1). So I will focus these comments strictly on the problem of value pluralism's relationship to political liberalism.

My first reaction, after reading both responses, is that they help clarify the recent debate a great deal. Both Crowder and Galston reject the view that liberalism follows, as a matter of logical entailment, from value pluralism. Both acknowledge, instead, that the path from value pluralism to liberalism is more tortuous: it requires a number of additional (and contestable) normative or empirical premises—premises that cannot be derived from value pluralism itself. While Crowder's response seems, initially, to endorse the view that value pluralism entails liberalism, his later analysis makes it clear that, strictly speaking, he rejects this view. This is, in itself, an important clarification: the claim that value pluralism *entails* liberalism has bedeviled this debate since the mid-1990s, and since it now seems to have few if any defenders, it can safely be put to rest.

I regret to say, moreover, that my own definition of the "entailment claim" was ambiguous. I defined the entailment claim as follows: "*if* value pluralism is true, then none but liberal political institutions can be justified" (69). There are two ways of reading this definition's implications for the justification of *illiberal* regimes. It can be taken to mean (a) that if value pluralism is true, then, in light of other normative and empirical premises we believe to be correct, no *true* justification of illiberal regimes can be given. Crowder accepts this version (as does Galston, albeit with two specific exceptions). Or it can be taken to mean (b) that value pluralism alone—without the help of any additional normative or empirical premises—is enough to falsify all any and all justifications of illiberal regimes. This second version is the one

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I reject in the original paper. [1] And in their responses, Crowder and Galston reject this version too and so, strictly speaking, both reject the claim that liberalism follows, as a matter of logical entailment, from liberalism.

With this confusion cleared up, it is worth briefly examining the additional premises that both Galston and Crowder use to justify liberalism. Galston's justification rests, he notes, on the idea of expressive liberty. "Simply put," he writes (in an earlier piece), "this is a presumption in favor of individuals and groups leading their lives as they see fit, within the broad range of legitimate variation defined by value pluralism, in accordance with their own understandings of what gives life meaning and value."[2] His defense of expressive liberty contains two separate claims: first, that expressive liberty is a real, objective human value; second, that whenever state coercion is involved, there ought to be a strong presumption in favor of expressive liberty, even when it conflicts with other objective values. Galston then supplements these claims with another principle—"political pluralism"—which requires that the state honor "robust spheres of communal autonomy" (99, above).

Crowder's main strategy is different: Like John Stuart Mill, Crowder argues that individual human beings are diverse and unique, and that they suffer if they are forced to conform to a narrow slate of values; they need access to a broad range of ethical possibilities. He maintains, furthermore, that diverse human goods and values are worthwhile principally because they "contribute to the well-being of actual people" (106). He seems to argue, in other words, that political conflicts between values should be resolved in liberal ways because liberal political solutions tend to promote human well-being.

It may seem, at first glance, that both of these additional sets of premises conflict with value pluralism. After all, both seem to prioritize a certain value (expressive liberty or well-being) consistently over other rivals. But as I argue at the end of my original essay, I think this problem can be avoided. It is possible to hold that value pluralism is true *and* that we have good reason to prioritize liberty over other values in certain circumstances (when designing political constitutions, for example, or simply when weighing the use of state coercion).

What strikes me, instead, about both Galston's and Crowder's arguments as they now stand is that value pluralism does much less work, morally speaking, than their other premises. It is difficult to imagine anyone strongly committed to both expressive liberty and political pluralism who is not a liberal, regardless of his or her view of the nature of the human good. Likewise, it is difficult to imagine embracing Crowder's assumptions about

[1]The example of illiberal pluralism that I outlined there is meant to show that there is nothing *incoherent* about a value pluralist defense of illiberal institutions.

[2]William Galston, "Liberal Pluralism: A Reply to Talisse," *Contemporary Political Theory* 3, no. 2 (2004): 141.

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individuality and well-being—which he draws, after all, from Mill's *On Liberty*—without endorsing some version of liberalism. In both cases, their additional premises can yield liberal conclusions even without value pluralism.

What distinctive contribution, then, does value pluralism make to the defense of liberal institutions? Both Galston and Crowder emphasize the *negative* role that value pluralism can play in "ruling out" many of the most common justifications of illiberal coercion. While I agree that value pluralism can serve this negative function, I think that both overestimate its significance. Consider Galston's example of the haredim. Galston argues that value pluralism "does real work" in ruling out the haredi claim that their way of life should be enforced by the Israeli state because it is "the one path of fidelity to God's word" (99). Do we really need value pluralism to do this work? It seems to me that we already have a host of more conventional liberal resources to help us see why such claims are specious.

Moreover, even if value pluralism were widely accepted as a shared norm governing public justification, savvy illiberals could simply shift their arguments to make them consistent with it. The haredim need only argue, for instance, that their way of life is *more valuable* than any alternative available in contemporary Israel.[3] To this, value pluralism alone has no reply. Until we establish *which* values are in fact objective (and therefore incommensurable), we cannot be sure that any particular ethical conflict pits "good" against "good" (to use Galston's terms), rather than "good" against "bad." The haredim could, in principle, be correct in believing that, of the ways of life on offer, theirs is the only objectively good one.

I wrote my original essay partly because I was dissatisfied with these ways of framing the relationship between value pluralism and liberalism. If the entailment claim (properly understood) overvalues value pluralism's contribution to liberalism, the strategies that Galston and Crowder outline in their responses undervalue it. My essay argues that value pluralism lends support to liberalism in a distinctive, psychological sense: that embracing value pluralism, along with a sensible fallibilism about ethical belief, can dispose us to *feel the force* of certain liberal values—such as expressive liberty and diversity. Berlin thought that people who approached other ways of life with curiosity, empathy, and imagination were much more likely to see and accept the importance of toleration and freedom. And he felt that many forms of monism—on the political left and right alike—worked subtly to disable these tendencies. In my view, this is why Berlin cared as much as he did about value pluralism, and why he thought it was vital to the success of the liberal political project. And as I tried to make

[3]They could also offer the kind of illiberal, pluralist justification that I outlined in the original paper.

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clear, I find his view, which is best understood as a moral psychology of liberal toleration, persuasive.

Crowder is unimpressed with this moral psychology for two reasons: because there are exceptions to it and because it supplies no adequate justification of liberalism. I'm afraid that I can only concede these two points. It would be strange indeed if value pluralism *caused* its adherents, without fail, to convert to liberalism. Psychological affinities are not causal regularities.[4] Second, Berlin's argument is not intended as a justification of liberalism. Value pluralism can help weaken some of the strongest psychological sources of resistance to liberal principles. But as I have just argued, I doubt that it makes any distinctive justificatory contribution.

[4]I am unsure, furthermore, why Crowder thinks that my view leaves us with "very little to say" to illiberal pluralists (see 109, above). In fact, in the final section ("Justifying Liberalism") of my original essay, I explore some of the reasons that Berlin might have given to an illiberal pluralist to try to justify liberal institutions.

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