Review of George Crowder and Henry Hardy, eds.,
The One and the Many: Reading Isaiah Berlin
(Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2007)*

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Long ago, when the pre-Socratic atomist philosophers Leucippus and Democritus decided that reality was made up of atoms, they launched a small philosophical industry. Much hay was made by the thinkers of the day, who would pass their time arguing over whether those atoms were made up of air, fire, earth or water. Today, their heirs in political philosophy have shifted the debate somewhat: the issue is no longer atoms but atomic moral concepts. For having analysed or chopped up our moral world into separate values, the question now is whether these things may somehow be put together again. Can they be made into a one or must they remain many?

To Rawlsians and other monists, unity is indeed possible. Thin "primary goods" can be interlocked to make for a systematic theory of justice, a rulebook intended for application by a neutral referee (usually a country's Supreme Court). Politics, as a result, appears remarkably like a game or competitive sport. To Isaiah Berlin and his pluralist followers, by contrast, the fact that values are often incommensurable with each other means that no such rulebook is ever possible. So when people come into conflict, instead of pleading their cases before some referee they ought to negotiate with each other in good faith. Politics, in this view, is anything but a game; indeed it is the site of inescapable tragedy, of compromise and dirty hands.

As the author of a critique of pluralism, I have rejected this conception of politics as over-pessimistic. But I also eschew the opposite, monistic extreme as too optimistic. To me, the right path runs in between these two poles. Yet this is a path which appears to be inconceivable to the authors of the thirteen chapters of this book, all of whom, as its title indicates, seem unable to get beyond the dichotomy of the one and the many.

That said, their book, which is intended to serve as an introduction to the whole range of Berlin's thought, fulfils its task admirably. The first seven chapters cover Berlin on Marx, the Russian intelligentsia, Judaism, his early political thought, as well as his conceptions of liberty, the Enlightenment *vs* the Counter-Enlightenment, and history. Each expounds upon what Berlin has to say on its respective subject and, on occasion, gives an account of how he was received in the literature. The other chapters go further, however, offering critical interpretations or extensions of Berlin's thought on a number of themes, including nationalism, liberalism, truth commissions, and religion.

One topic which shows up quite often throughout is, as we might expect, the meaning of liberty. Yet none of those who deal with it manages to overcome a confusion that bedevils Berlin's famous lecture, "Two Concepts of Liberty." For there are times when the lecture seems to be about a single value, "liberty," with "positive" and "negative" presented as different ways of

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conceiving of this value, and other times when positive and negative appear as independent "ultimate values" in their own right. The best way I have found to clear up this confusion is, first, to accept that at least three distinct values have a legitimate claim on the term – the liberty of (i) the individual, (ii) the nation (which arises from its self-determination and recognition), and (iii) the civic or political community (wherein citizens participate in self-government) – and then to read Berlin's lecture as being essentially about the best way of conceiving of (i). There have been many candidates for this, of course, including self-ownership, non-domination, autonomy (in Kant's sense, which equates it with morality; in Humbolt's and Mill's, which conceives of it in terms of one's capacity to develop an original way of life; and in Joseph Raz and Will Kymlicka's, which stresses the ability to choose from among options), and authenticity. Of course Berlin favours a certain negative conception, and he does so because, being the good conceptual atomist he is, he believes that it is the best way of keeping (i) separate from (ii) and (iii). That said, there are occasions when he, as well as some of the authors of this book, undermines the cause by sloppily referring to (i) as "political liberty."

The confusion surrounding liberty is responsible for a problem with David Miller's otherwise excellent chapter on Berlin's views of nationalism. Miller suggests that Berlin is virtually the father of "liberal nationalism," but insofar as this doctrine affirms a version of liberalism which accepts the compromise of individual liberty only when it is in the interests of creating and sustaining a future liberal society, Berlin would find it too restrictive. Because if we recognise that national and political liberty are ultimate values just like individual liberty (as Berlin seems to do in the introduction to his *Four Essays on Liberty*) then there must be situations in which individual liberty should be to some extent outweighed by these other two, not to mention by other values as well. Berlin's liberalism ranks individual liberty very high, of course, but not so high that he is willing to countenance its compromise only when it conflicts with itself.

George Crowder uses his chapter to advance his case once again for a universal liberalism derived from pluralist tenets. At its close he admits that this would take us beyond Berlin, who was (rightly in my opinion) more sympathetic to a contextualist approach which would shun any attempt to impose a single political ideology upon every country in the world. Though clearly a disciple of value pluralism, Crowder fails to explain why we should ignore Berlin's Machiavelli-derived lesson that pluralism can also be cultural.

Jonathan Allen's chapter takes on the question of truth commissions by applying the blunt instrument of the monism-pluralism dichotomy. This forces him not only to shunt aside the important role of religion, in particular Desmond Tutu's Christianity, when accounting for the South African case, but also to make the error of assuming that truth and reparation are goals compatible with pluralist practical reasoning. Because as H.L.A. Hart's work makes evident, if we approach criminal justice from a pluralist standpoint then there will be room for no more than accommodation and punishment. This is because negotiation is an inherently adversarial, zero-sum way of responding to conflict. By contrast, truth and reparation require reconciliation instead, hence conversation as distinct from negotiation.

The final three chapters, by William A. Galston, Michael Jinkins, and Henry Hardy, are the ones that deal with the topic of pluralism and religion, in particular, monotheism. Galston argues that the two are consistent; Jinkins seems unsure; while Hardy contends strenuously that they are not

and expresses a hope for the disappearance of the latter. All three go astray, however. Galston fails to see that monotheism cannot do without some sense of unity since, as Moses proclaimed, "The Lord is One" (Deut. 6:4). As for Jinkins, he asserts that his version of Christianity is compatible with a pluralist approach to diversity and so with the negotiation of incommensurable values when they conflict. Yet one would think that his faith would bring with it a hope for something more, for the progress that only the reconciliations of conversation, not the accommodations of negotiation, may bring. Finally, Hardy makes the mistake of assuming that monotheism is a form of monism, even though one of the correlates of the belief that God is One is that treating anything of this world as if it were so unified is a form of idolatry. To monotheists, we might say, monism is a sin. Hardy's chapter is thus yet another reason why we should conclude that, though monism is wrong about one big thing, pluralism is wrong about many little ones.