

The One and the Many: Reading Isaiah Berlin, George Crowder and Henry Hardy, eds. (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus, 2007), 335 pp., \$28 cloth.

The year 2007 marked the tenth anniversary of the death of Isaiah Berlin, the political philosopher and historian of ideas, legendary conversationalist and elegant essayist, and above all renowned defender of liberty. Somewhat paradoxically, interest in his ideas has increased in recent years—paradoxically, because these are the ideas of a man whose work certainly originated in the historical context of his time, a man who was often dubbed a “cold warrior.”

Perhaps the one-time warrior is now enjoying the fame of a victor. After all, he was on the winning side of history. Contributors to *The One and the Many*, however, suggest another reason for the rising interest in Berlin: it is the power of his ideas, they argue, that attracts a large contemporary audience.

The One and the Many is a collection of thirteen essays, all but two of which are newly commissioned, covering Berlin’s multifaceted oeuvre as much as a single book can. The thirteen authors are specialists in different fields who do not seem to have much in common except one belief: Berlin matters. What results is an admirably comprehensive survey of the main themes of this versatile philosopher: liberty, the Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment, history and the history of ideas, nationalism, liberalism, pluralism, Marx and Marxism, Russian thinkers, and Jewish identity.

The multiauthored nature of the collection creates a remarkable balance. Although the essays address different issues from different perspectives, to the extent that they all discuss the ideas of a

single philosopher, their treatments often overlap, allowing the reader to imagine dialogues between and among the authors and to hear their disagreement. What the book offers is not a definitive summary of Berlin’s ideas but a collection of sophisticated opinions, a rich source of insights, allowing the reader to make her or his own judgment.

Generous assistance to the reader is offered by the two editors, whose knowledge of Berlin’s writings is hardly paralleled. George Crowder is the author of *Isaiah Berlin: Liberty and Pluralism*, arguably the most systematic and fairest single-authored monograph on Berlin’s ideas. Henry Hardy is Berlin’s lifelong editor, thanks to whose assiduous work a great many of Berlin’s writings are available in their present form. The editors’ introduction to *The One and the Many* offers a sketch of Berlin’s life, his work and its impact, and an overview of the thirteen essays that follow. An appendix and the extensive and yet user-friendly bibliography offer general readers a helpful guide as they continue to explore Berlin’s mind, and provide advanced scholars a lead in pursuing the Berlinian issues of interest to them.

The first three essays address the three traditions that formed Berlin’s life and thought. Terrell Carver discusses Berlin’s first book, on Karl Marx, which reflects his dissatisfaction with the then emerging “logical positivism”—a radicalized form of the British tradition of philosophical empiricism, vigorously refined by its encounter with the latest developments in logic. Andrzej Walicki, sharply distinguishing between the Russian and Soviet aspects

of Soviet Russia, demonstrates Berlin's intellectual debt to Turgenev, Tolstoy, the Russian radical intelligentsia, and, less straightforwardly, Dostoevsky and Shestov. Shlomo Avineri addresses the complex issue of Berlin's Jewish heritage, discussing his articulate comments on Jewish assimilationism, on the State of Israel, and on Zionism, while drawing attention to his curious silence or inarticulacy on his own Jewish identity, on the Jewish intellectual tradition, and on the Holocaust.

Liberty is at the heart of Berlin's political philosophy. His analysis and defense of the idea of liberty is his primary contribution to political thought; and his renowned essay on this subject—"Two Concepts of Liberty," originally written and delivered in 1958 as his inaugural lecture as Chichele Professor of Social and Political Theory at Oxford—is not only one of the best-known of his numerous writings but arguably the most influential single essay in political philosophy written in English during the last century.

Joshua Cherniss sheds fresh light on Berlin's ideas on liberty. Carefully examining a range of evidence bearing on Berlin's intellectual development from the 1930s to the mid-1950s (the period in which Berlin's political ideas were largely formed), Cherniss sets out a well-grounded argument that challenges the conventional story. Although Berlin is often seen as a straightforward defender of negative liberty—liberty to do what one wants to do without being interfered with by others, Cherniss argues that the basic concept of liberty for Berlin was a combination of both the negative and the positive conceptions of liberty: liberty as the absence of interference and liberty as autonomy.

Mario Ricciardi's discussion focuses directly on "Two Concepts of Liberty,"

restoring the historical context in which the now classic essay was originally written. According to Ricciardi, what Berlin offers in this essay is not a straightforward conceptual analysis of liberty but an analysis of the idea from the distinctive viewpoint of political philosophy. That is, Berlin seeks to clarify the difference between liberty and neighboring ideas, to separate and examine two key interpretations of the basic category of liberty (the negative and positive concepts of liberty), and then to prioritize the former over the latter—not because of the latter's logical deficiency, but because of its vulnerability to political distortions. Berlin's "broader purpose," Ricciardi contends, "is to restate the importance and methods of political philosophy" (p. 122).

Ryan Patrick Hanley, Graeme Garrard, and David Miller address key aspects of Berlin's work as a historian of ideas. Hanley focuses on the often neglected issue of Berlin's historical method and its relevance to his substantive ideas, contrasting it with the methods of his leading rivals: Marxists, Leo Strauss, and Quentin Skinner. The dynamic between the Enlightenment and the Counter-Enlightenment and Berlin's ambivalent assessment of both movements are discussed by Garrard, who emphasizes Berlin's hostility to the Enlightenment and sympathy for the Counter-Enlightenment. Miller's masterly analysis of Berlin's apparently inarticulate ideas on nationalism reveals their internal tensions, considers their coherence with Berlin's liberalism, and assesses Berlin's contribution to contemporary discussions on liberal nationalism.

"I don't want the universe to be too tidy," Berlin would often remark. It was his defense of humanity, believing in and arguing for the untidiness and sometimes even messiness of the world of human beings. From this followed his aversion to

systematization and his pursuit of particularity in the study of human affairs, both well reflected in his humane and often rhetorical style of writing, which has, however, been a common target of criticism. Tidier philosophers often find Berlin's style confusing and see it as obscuring his otherwise perhaps interesting ideas.

George Crowder's essay is a response to this type of criticism. He makes a painstaking effort to distinguish what Berlin actually said from what he could have said or should have said, and to develop Berlin's ideas beyond his own words and yet in his spirit. In particular, in seeking to uncover a more robust link between value pluralism and liberalism than Berlin managed to identify, Crowder examines four conceptual strategies by which a link from pluralism to liberalism might be better established: strategies based on universal values, the diversity of goods, reasonable disagreement, and individual autonomy. Crowder's is a fine attempt to address a major tension in Berlin's writings, that between his pluralism and his liberalism.

"I am not a very political thinker" is another sort of remark that Berlin made time and again. Of course, we should not take such a playful statement literally or too seriously, but there is some truth in it, in the sense that Berlin's is not a political philosophy that directly tells us what to do, what political institutions to design, and what policies to implement. Indeed, Berlin often made a deliberate effort to hold himself aloof from real politics in order to avoid fanaticism and to retain his favored "enlightened skepticism."

Can we learn lessons from Berlin's political philosophy that apply to concrete political issues of our time? Jonathan Allen thinks we fruitfully can. He considers the

South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission from a Berlinian perspective, drawing on Berlin's value pluralism and liberalism in particular. Allen's attempt is a rewarding one, especially given Berlin's silence on policies and political institutions.

The last three essays, by William Galston, Michael Jenkins, and Henry Hardy, tackle the timely and timeless issue of pluralism and religion. Are value pluralism and monotheist religions, which appear to assert monistic cosmologies, mutually exclusive? Galston gives a negative answer, emphasizing the difference between the value pluralism of secular philosophy as a matter of reason and the monism of monotheist religions as a matter of faith. Jenkins, from a Christian theological perspective, also gives a negative answer on similar grounds, and addresses several issues he sees as common to Berlin's value pluralism and Christian faith. By contrast, Hardy thinks "that religious belief has a permanent inbuilt tendency to sponsor thick certitude beyond its proper boundaries" (p. 282), and that it is inherently antithetical to value pluralism. Taking pluralism seriously, Hardy contends, requires us to hope for the withering away of all monisms, including mainstream variants of monotheist religions.

The One and the Many is a welcome addition to the expanding literature on Isaiah Berlin—not only a first-class introduction to Berlin's ideas but also a collection of fine essays that attempt to consider keenly felt contemporary concerns. In its accessibility, balance, comprehensiveness, and timeliness, it testifies to the shelf life of Berlin's ideas and their power to illuminate political and philosophical issues of our time.

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