Introduction

DAVID ARCHARD

As befits a volume devoted to the topic of pluralism the contributing pieces collected here are varied. Their concern is with very different kinds of difference, and their conclusions range from an insistence that pluralism is both inevitable and desirable to a belief that it is unsustainable and perhaps remediable. The starting point for any discussion of pluralism is a recognition that we inhabit a world of differences. These differences are exhibited in moral outlooks, cultural identities, ways of life, religious beliefs, and even modes of philosophy. The mere fact of such differences is salient but unremarkable. What preoccupies philosophers is the question of the conclusions that are to be drawn from a proper recognition of this fact. And the central issue at dispute for philosophers is whether the fact of difference—plurality—licences a view—pluralism—that it is legitimate, rather than just inevitable, that such difference should persist.

It simplifies but does not necessarily exaggerate matters to suggest that philosophers are torn between two impulses. On the one hand, there is the conviction that the goal of philosophical argumentation is convergence upon a single agreed answer. Truth is one, and so too, it has been felt, is the good. Difference is a sign of failure, evidence that mistakes have been made somewhere by someone. To maintain otherwise is inconsistent with how one must understand the nature of truth or morality. On the other hand, the claims of philosophical modesty press a contrary view, and the dangers which attend insistence upon the correctness of only one answer underline the value of remaining modest. That different conclusions are reached by equally sincere, conscientious reasoners is discomfiting to the assumption that difference is attributable to palpable error; that conflict and intolerance can result from a refusal to moderate or modify one's own claims in the face of disagreement is enough to expose the high price of monism.

These impulses are strongly felt and they are likely to exert a pull at whatever level the discussion of pluralism is conducted. For instance, someone who defends principles which might regulate the satisfactory negotiation of difference is likely to be asked what status these principles have and what assurance their author can have that there is only one such set of principles. Or again, some-

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246100005816 Published online by Cambridge University Press

one who argues that, in the final analysis, equally rational inquirers will come up with different answers to the question of how things are is likely to be asked what continued confidence she can have in the rational warrant for her own particular view.

Those unsympathetic to monism are also anxious to distinguish pluralism from relativism. That no single correct answer can be agreed upon does not mean that each and every answer is true. Nevertheless, those unsympathetic to pluralism will continue to demand that it be clearly distinguished from relativism without any confidence that this can be achieved. That it is agreed there can be no agreement would suggest that in the final analysis any answer is as good as any other. Both sides to the dispute may nevertheless agree that the question is not whether agreement *can* be secured, but rather whether there is any reason to think that one *should* seek to secure it. The contributions collected here take up these matters in the areas of philosophy, religion, morality, and politics.

The opening papers in this volume consider whether philosophy itself is or is not plural. This is understood to be more than simply a matter of variations in style or emphasis or subject matter. Alan Montefiore examines the question of whether there are different, culturally specific philosophies and suggests that, insofar as philosophy is a discursive subject, there are forces peculiar to each contextualised unit of philosophical discourse which are resistant to translation across different units. Dermot Moran takes the concept of intentionality as a case study in philosophical difference. Central to both of what have been called the 'Continental' and 'Analytic' traditions of philosophy, intentionality has nevertheless been given a different significance in each. For continental philosophy intentionality is a defining feature of consciousness or the mental; for analytic philosophy it is an important property of sentences. Despite their divergent starting points, Moran detects a present convergence of viewpoints and willingness sympathetically to explore the differences.

The two papers by Anthony Skillen and David Evans look to the work of past philosophers for insights into pluralism. Skillen offers a sustained exegesis of William James's essay 'On a Certain Blindness'. The blindness of which James speaks is that of practically engrossed human beings to the richness of other lives. Nevertheless Skillen detects a certain ambiguity in James concerning the source of that richness, between the individuality of another's meaningful existence or the cultural values that underpin occupations which may otherwise be strange to us. David Evans

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246100005816 Published online by Cambridge University Press

argues that Aristotle is no simple pluralist, as is often maintained, but rather a realist who recognises that the differences between cultural contexts are essential elements in the construal of objective value. In this way Aristotle offers an alternative to the normative monism of Plato without slipping into relativism.

Terry O'Keeffe examines the question of religion and pluralism. Inasmuch as any one religion lays claim to have possession of a single truth, and single path to human salvation, it is disposed to intolerance of other religions which make similar claims. Yet any moderation of that claim in the name of tolerance seems inconsistent with the very nature of religious truth. O'Keeffe considers the various ways in which this problem has been treated, paying particular attention to the difficulties of definitive interpretation of any canonical text which lies at the source of religious claims to truth.

The next three contributions address the central issue of moral pluralism, one that preoccupies philosophers more than any other instance of pluralism and one that has also received a great deal of attention in recent years. Moral pluralism is interesting not only in its own right, but for the relation it bears to political liberalism. Harry Bunting offers a critique of various twentieth century defences of moral relativism, from the comparatively neglected work of Westermark to the influential internalism of Gilbert Harman and Bernard Williams. Bunting considers what merit there might be in relativism, and concludes that the position is ultimately an unsatisfactory one. Christopher McKnight scrutinises the claim of Isaiah Berlin, perhaps the most influential defender of pluralism, to offer a non-relativist account of how values can conflict and yet in some sense be objective. He finds that this is possible only insofar as ethics is not conceived as a search for the correct description of moral reality. John Skorupski also attempts to make clear what pluralism claims. That a moral theory needs to be relative to situation and circumstance does not establish the truth of pluralism. Inasmuch as normative judgements are genuine judgements a person's making one entails her commitment to the convergence of others upon that judgement. The idea that there are, as the value-pluralist claims, genuine moral dilemmas ultimately conflicts with our understanding of morality as a single, sovereign source of law.

The remaining contributions are in different ways concerned with how we should respond at the social or political level to the facts of plurality and the claims of the pluralist. Bhikhu Parekh detects a deep anti-pluralist bias in Western thought, from the Greeks through Christianity to contemporary liberalism. This bias

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246100005816 Published online by Cambridge University Press

reveals itself in an implausible moral monism which asserts that the good is single and human nature uniform. Such a monism is not only indefensible but has shown itself intolerant of, and missionary in its zeal to eliminate difference. Keith Graham argues that the scope of the plurality, which is central to much contemporary political philosophy, is narrower than is assumed or alleged. This is because there are constraints on all human deliberation about the best way to live. These constraints are of necessity, having to do with who and what each of us is, and of precondition, having to do with what is presupposed of any choice of life. Graham further argues that the materiality of our nature and condition falls under both constraints.

Attracta Ingram and Catherine Audard both inspect the credentials of what is currently the most influential and distinguished response within Western political philosophy to the problem of plurality, that is the existence within liberal democratic societies of permanent disagreement on fundamental religious, philosophical and moral matters. This response is due to John Rawls in his 1993 *Political Liberalism*. Rawls believes that an overlapping consensus on the principles of a well-ordered, fair society is possible between defenders of reasonable, if conflicting and incompatible, comprehensive doctrines of the good. Ingram seeks to elucidate the senses in which reasonable must be understood if such a consensus is to be possible, and finds merit in Rawls's hope that liberalism can be defended on grounds that are not philosophically liberal all the way down, as it were. Nevertheless this is so only if a moral cosmopolitanism which affirms the equal rationality of all is accepted. Catherine Audard contrasts Rawls's political liberalism with the republicanism which has defined the French political project. In offering a 'thicker' notion of citizenship, and one which seeks to constitute a community in a substantive notion of civic membership, republicanism is distinct from political liberalism. Nevertheless, the implementation of such secularist ideals is not without its problems, and Audard considers the French responses to ethnic and religious diversity.

Tariq Modood insists that any theory of ethnic diversity should be sensitive to the specific national context and shows how, for Britain at least, racial discrimination is not a unitary form of disadvantage. Racism may be compounded by particular cultural stereotypings of different ethnic groups. He examines the implications for an ideal of multiculturalism in also challenging the assumption that the public order can be neutral and blind to ethnic or cultural divisions.

Finally Susan Mendus examines the paradox whereby liberal-

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246100005816 Published online by Cambridge University Press

ism, born out of a recognition of conflicting values and apparently sensitive to the tragedy of loss which must attend such a conflict of values, has tamed that conflict. It has done so by sharply distinguishing the public from the private, and the sphere of justice from that of mere misfortune. In further prioritising the political so understood it has restricted the space within which individuals can understand the successes and failures of their own lives. Ironically then, in eliminating the tragic in its previous form liberalism has reinstated a new form of tragedy whereby one's personal fate can only be construed in a limited and obfuscating manner.

These papers were first given at a conference of the Royal Institute of Philosophy organised by the University of Ulster and the Belfast Branch of the Royal Institute of Philosophy and held at the Causeway Coast Hotel, Portrush, from 20 to 23 April 1995. Thanks are due to all those who assisted in the organisation and conduct of this conference, especially colleagues in the Department of Philosophy and Politics, the University of Ulster. Thanks too are due to the Northern Ireland Tourist Board who made possible a lunch and coach trip around the North Antrim Coast for the speakers.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246100005816 Published online by Cambridge University Press