

## CHAPTER I

*The Problem of Pluralism(s)***1.1 Introduction**

The past several decades bear witness to the emergence of a cause that has become tremendously, even wildly popular in contemporary scholarship. The cause in question is pluralism. We use the term “cause” rather than “concept” for two reasons. First, pluralism itself is a *set* of concepts; among our tasks is to explore the extent to which the varying concepts cohere, and in what ways. Second, we say “cause” because our focus is principally pluralism in psychology, within which pluralism is frequently encouraged or endorsed rather than merely analyzed in a distanced way on a conceptual level. We find that since the 1990s there have been many references to pluralism in psychology and explicit calls for psychology to embrace a pluralistic framework for reasons that are sometimes cast as moral in nature, suggestive of a cause and, perhaps, a therapy for the discipline (e.g., Goertzen & Smythe, 2010; Kirschner, 2006; Slife & Wendt, 2009; Teo, 2010a; Ussher, 1999; Viney, 2004; Wertz, 2011). As we will make evident in Chapter 2, promotion of pluralism or a pluralistic approach to psychology comes in many forms and appears in an array of diverse contexts.

Not surprisingly, with great variation in context comes multiplicity in meaning, and with this, differing implications. We can see this as problematic if considered against the assumption that pluralism is a necessary cure-all for psychology. At stake is more than an unfortunate conceptual cloud to further embarrass psychological science. For if there is little agreement about the nature of the cure, its implementation can hardly be straightforward. Every level of the production of psychological knowledge is impacted: what projects count as acceptable research questions and methods to address them, the standards by which they are evaluated, what is published, what is applied, and what is funded. If a pluralistic psychology is to be viable and do the redeeming work for which it is intended, it is vital to be as clear as possible what we mean by pluralism in the first place.

This book provides a detailed study of pluralism, or rather *pluralisms*, for it seems to us clear that a plurality of concepts is in play. Before outlining the contours of our project, we first illustrate the diversity of contexts with a few examples, preceded by a search for relevant historical background.

### 1.2 Origins of Pluralism: Term and Concept

It happens that the term “pluralism” is not restricted to contemporary debates in psychology. It appears in disparate scholarly contexts, associated with an array of meanings and purposes. Moreover, like other concepts (and causes), it has a history. Predating talk of pluralism in psychological science are various references to pluralism in philosophical and theological disputes. This is in itself an important point. As we shall see in Chapter 2, references to pluralism in psychology appear in some contexts without reference to philosophical concepts. The origin of pluralism in philosophy and theology creates some challenges for importing “pluralism” cleanly and efficiently into psychological science.

Works other than this volume offer comprehensive treatment of the philosophical history of pluralism.<sup>1</sup> Here, we just intend to offer a broad historical sketch – a kind of historical tableau – that casts some light on the development of pluralism as a philosophical concept, and which in turn has become an important resource for psychology. We begin by locating the concern with “the one and the many” in Greek philosophy before turning to a discussion of the appearance of “pluralism” in various philosophical writings. Our historical sample, however, should not be taken to imply that the development of pluralism is either simple or linear.

The ontological question about “the one and the many” is one of the oldest philosophical problems, and as such can be dated back to the beginnings of Greek philosophy. The question concerns the ultimate nature of reality. Although some pre-Socratic philosophers such as Thales sought a single originative and unifying principle of the cosmos, others such as Anaxagoras and Empedocles rejected the idea that the world can be reduced to a single element or principle. They posited, instead,

<sup>1</sup> Existing historical accounts have emphasized some facets of pluralism, while leaving others aside (e.g., Bevir, 2012; Laborde, 2000; Runciman, 2005; Wahl, 1925). A comprehensive history of pluralism, however, including all its philosophical dimensions, remains to be done.

multiplicity in its basic furniture, without using the term “pluralism” or anything equivalent to it (Curd, 2020; Graham, 2010; Kirk et al., 2013).<sup>2</sup>

As for the specific vocabulary, we can trace back the philosophical use of the terms “pluralism” and “pluralist” at least to eighteenth-century German philosophy (Kerber, 1989). As we also note in distinguishing meanings of pluralism in relation to psychology in Chapter 2, we can best understand the meaning of pluralism in each case by examining what pluralism is assumed to contrast with. As early as 1721, Christian Wolff (1679–1754) wrote in the preface to the second edition of his *German Metaphysics*: “The idealists either admit more than one being or hold themselves to be the one real being. The former are called *pluralists*; the latter, *egoists*” (Wolff, 1722, p. 69).<sup>3</sup> This is precisely the same definition we find in the famous Zedler’s *Universal-Lexikon* by the middle of the century: “Pluralists, *pluralistae*, are a certain sect of philosophers, and especially of idealists, who admit more than one spiritual being” (Zedler, 1741, p. 879).<sup>4</sup> However, by the end of that century, Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) adopted the same opposition between pluralists and egoists, referring to “pluralism” in his *Anthropology*. Yet in this case, the context is a moral one, and pluralism for Kant appears as a *way of thinking* rather than as an absolute number of spiritual entities: “The opposite of egoism can only be *pluralism*, that is, the way of thinking in which one is not concerned with oneself as the whole world, but rather regards and conducts oneself as a mere citizen of the world” (Kant, 2009/1798, pp. 241–242).<sup>5</sup> As such, pluralism seems here to be more of an attitude, stance, or purview rather than a specific epistemic or ontological position.

In the nineteenth century, opposition between pluralism and egoism seems to have disappeared. Simultaneously, the meanings associated with pluralism began to expand. For example, in his popular philosophical dictionary, Wilhelm Krug (1770–1842) distinguishes three types of pluralism: “*Psychological pluralism* assumes that apart from one’s own spirit (the I) there are still more spiritual beings or souls as independent

<sup>2</sup> Robert Wardy speaks of an “Eleatic pluralism” to include also pre-Socratic atomism (Wardy, 1988). As Lauren Apfel claims, “[t]he terms ‘monism’ and ‘pluralism’ may be the products of contemporary academia, but the rivalry between the one and the many is one of philosophy’s most ancient questions” (Apfel, 2011, p. 5). Thus, we can say that a certain conception of pluralism is older than the corresponding word. In her book, Apfel is more concerned with the moral dimension of Greek pluralism, but her argument is equally valid for the metaphysical realm.

<sup>3</sup> The corresponding German words are *Pluralisten* and *Egoisten*, respectively.

<sup>4</sup> Published between 1731 and 1754 by Johann Heinrich Zedler (1706–1751), this was the most extensive and important German-language encyclopedia of the eighteenth century.

<sup>5</sup> *Pluralismus* in German. We use here the translation by Robert Loudon in Kant (2009).

beings. . . . *Cosmological pluralism* assumes that there is more than one world (other than Earth). . . . Finally, *theological pluralism* is nothing but *polytheism*" (Krug, 1833, III, p. 278). Here, we can see pluralism already denoting very different things depending on the context of use.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, pluralism took center stage of an intellectual battle, especially in Britain and the United States. This time the contrast of pluralism assumed was not egoism but rather "monism" and "absolutism."<sup>6</sup> Reflecting the opposition of pluralism with monism, Jean Wahl's *The Pluralist Philosophies in England and America* begins by locating the origins of *monism*, to which pluralism emerged as a counter (Wahl, 1925). For the English-speaking world, the year 1870 is a kind of marker after which "German metaphysics" came to exert a powerful influence on British philosophy as taught in its major universities. Yet Wahl notes that these same metaphysical speculations had seeped into British literature since the start of the nineteenth century. The seepage accompanied what we now identify as Romanticism and the idealization of German poets who had promoted monistic ideas, most famously on the part of Coleridge and Wordsworth. A short passage illustrates this trend expressively in its own right, and provides a kind of primer on the meaning of monism:

Coleridge, following Schelling sang of the "miraculous all," the "omnific" spirit, the unity apprehended by reason and imagination, the human soul annihilated in God. De Quincey had studied Kant and Herder. Later on, Carlyle advised British youths to "open their Goethe" and offered for their silent admiration the indivisible nature of German philosophy. (Wahl, 1925, p. 1)

We will not attempt here to track the roots of German thought that led to the metaphysical position so appealing to British poets and eventually philosophers, but it is important to recognize that monism – a metaphysics in which everything is united at core, with a corresponding epistemology founded on the notion that this mystical all could be grasped by the intellect – was heavily favored during the period within which modern psychology was emerging. Also important is the function that monism served theologically, and by extension politically, given the close relation between governance and the established church in Britain during this

<sup>6</sup> As James Ward (1843–1925) – one of the participants in those debates – testified, "[t]he most striking characteristic of the nineteenth century, so far as philosophical speculation is concerned, was . . . what we may call Absolutism or Singularism as presented by such different thinkers as Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Schopenhauer, and others less distinguished" (Ward, 1911, p. 49).

period. Wahl highlights the writing of James Hutchison Stirling (1820–1909), whose *The Secret of Hegel* (1865) influenced, in turn, a host of prominent philosophers in the United Kingdom and the United States, including T. H. Green (1836–1882), and was discussed in authoritative sources, even *The Journal of Mental Science*. The proviso that through rational channels finite and infinite realms are united meant that, in Wahl’s words, “Reason alone could restore the English to Christianity,” not only as a poetic option but also as a “sole necessity, an eternal must-be” (Wahl, 1925, pp. 1–2). The idea that the British needed saving was obviously a response to a perceived threat. The “necessity” in question established grounding for right and proper conduct, increasingly threatened by growing secularization. “Metaphysical, moral, and religious needs all seemed to acknowledge that Neo-Kantian and Neo-Hegelian philosophy was bringing salvation in its train” (p. 3).

By the 1870s, the connection of Hegelian idealism and absolutism was apparent in a “constructive absolutism which, if not entirely Hegelian, was very much in that mould” (Mander, 2011, p. 356). Of note, too, in this context is the idea that unity properly understood includes diversity (i.e., the many in the one):

The power of the Hegelian insight was to reconcile difference and to overcome opposition, and therefore its most fundamental drift was in the direction of monism. Diversity is not denied but in the last analysis always falls within a greater unity. (Mander, 2011, p. 44)

The widespread appeal of Hegelianism lies in its ability to reconcile problematic differences seen as threatening to the social order. One version of nineteenth-century monism and idealism has important implications for understanding the relation of individual persons to society at large: “In metaphysical terms, Bradley, Green, and Caird had all argued that the individual is in a sense incomplete and cannot be understood in abstraction from its social context, implying that the real whole is society itself (Mander, 2011, p. 248).

But Hegelianism was not without its theological critics. Some came to realize that monism posed a threat to piety and propriety: it was interpreted as implying that religion is merely a stage of thought that would and should be eventually transcended. What Wahl terms “the pragmatist, pluralist doctrine,” eventually “in the name of religious thought – the thought of naturally and simply believing souls – took up arms against absolutist ideas” and exposed the implication that these ideas eventuated the negation of faith and religious conviction (Wahl, 1925, p. 4). Wahl

identifies Fechner, especially, as one who demonstrated philosophical distrust of monist abstraction and who offered instead a picture of an animated, dynamic, diverse world “full of souls” (p. 43). Moreover, the ideal of social unity (a form of social idealism or monism) raises questions about the ethical realm – that is, individual responsibility and societal ends and restrictions. The monistic social state leaves little room for variation in ways of living, which can be seen or experienced as oppressive, even if conceptualized as a good. Not surprisingly, as recent historians of pluralism have noted (e.g., Bevir, 2012; Laborde, 2000), it was in the same period that “political pluralism” emerged as a response to the problem of the nature of state, also as more and more people, including those from different backgrounds, began living in closer proximity.<sup>7</sup>

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the metaphysical concept of pluralism was already disseminated both in Europe and America, as reflected in various book titles (e.g., Boex-Borel, 1909; Laner, 1905; Ward, 1911).<sup>8</sup> John Dewey (1859–1952) defined it for Baldwin’s *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology* as “the theory that reality consists in a plurality or multiplicity of beings” (Dewey, 1902, p. 306). Rudolf Eisler (1873–1926) explained in his famous dictionary that pluralism is “the metaphysical conception of reality as a multiplicity of separate, independent beings” (Eisler, 1910, p. 1035). And James Ward summed up the future path of pluralism: “the twentieth century opens with the attempt to work out the idealistic interpretation not in the old way as essentially a devolution of the One, but rather – as far as possible – to represent it as an evolution of the Many” (Ward, 1911, p. 49).

We do not, with this narrative, mean to imply that the path to current pluralism was a simple one. Varieties of monism and pluralism, doctrinal and secular versions of both, along with occasional hybrid positions attracted various devotees. Yet if we use this broad backdrop to aid our understanding of pluralism as it was emerging against, or rather, attacking monist thought in this context, we can see that *temporality* is a key factor in distinguishing various forms of monism from pluralism. By this, we mean that the idea that all things naturally change over time introduces multiplicity to metaphysics. Monism, with its close relative absolutism, relies upon a world with eternal, unchanging realities at its core, by means of

<sup>7</sup> As Bevir explains, “[i]n politics, pluralism usually contrasts, more particularly, with an empirical belief in or normative commitment to a homogenous nation and a unified sovereign state” (Bevir, 2012, p. 2).

<sup>8</sup> As James Ward noted: “In England, in America, in France, even in Germany – once the stronghold of Absolutism – systems of pluralism, more or less pronounced, are rife” (Ward, 1911, p. 49).

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which all things apparently dissimilar are united. But pluralism recognizes the primacy and dynamism of eternal transformation, making even one thing *many* over time. As developed philosophically, pluralism came also to be associated with imperfection, the idea of an incomplete world in need of saving, yet also the notion of boundless possibility, including the assumption that this flawed world can be to some degree reformed or redeemed. Possibility requires freedom to act. Wahl claims the idea of imperfection and that of endless possibility to be two of the “deepest feelings of the future metaphysics” (Wahl, 1925, p. 28). Note that we begin here to see pluralism as a cause, of sorts, not merely a matter of metaphysical speculation for its own sake but one intimately tied to the possibility of right action in and on the world in which we find ourselves.<sup>9</sup> We can see this as a foreshadowing of the emergence of pluralism as a cause in psychology.

What remains puzzling to us, however, is why pluralism as a concept or set of concepts lay dormant during the decades between the beginning and end of the twentieth century, when it once again began to be taken up as a cause, as we have noted, and which we will demonstrate in the remainder of this chapter and the next. We could speculate that logical positivism and its prospects for unified science played a major role philosophically. For whatever reason, pluralism did recede as a topic of interest, but it has reemerged, and this time across a much wider array of intellectual disciplines, including that with which we are principally concerned – psychology.

With our brief historical review, we wish primarily to emphasize that the roots of pluralism are historically deep, multi-tethered, and difficult to track with precision. Two points are worth restating, however: (1) we cannot analyze the emergence or the meaning(s) of pluralism without considering what it was intended to challenge or defeat (its assumed contrast), and (2) concepts always evolve over time in relation to new contrasts and as new associative links are forged.<sup>10</sup> It seems clear that pluralism (term and concept) developed in many different ways – always depending on how “the one” and “the many” are understood – which makes impossible any attempt to trace a single historical line of progression. Accordingly, there are many contexts in contemporary scholarship in which the cause of pluralism is advanced in various ways. In Section 1.3, we will turn to some examples of scholarly contexts in which we find notable attention to pluralism and will suggest some differences in its meanings.

<sup>9</sup> We will provide more historical context for pluralism as we explore the specific senses in which James understood it.

<sup>10</sup> As Araujo et al. (2021) claim, “[t]his is the force of an idea: it develops a life of its own” (p. vi).

### 1.3 Current Landscape: Varieties of Pluralism

There is currently talk of legal pluralism, moral pluralism, value pluralism, epistemic pluralism, scientific pluralism, logical pluralism, cognitive pluralism, religious pluralism, cultural pluralism, and so on. Many of these pluralistic causes overlap with each other, making it challenging to draw meaningful distinctions and a system of classification. As one example, Elinor Mason proposes that value pluralism be distinguished from political pluralism (Mason, 2018), whereas elsewhere value pluralism is considered part of ethical or political pluralism (e.g., Berlin, 2013; Yumatle, 2015).

In this section, we will sample from several interesting works on pluralism with the aim of illustrating their differences, the diversity of which further complicates the task of analyzing the meanings of pluralism in psychology. With the aim of illustration, we will focus on presenting representative examples in the various contexts rather than providing a comprehensive review.

#### 1.3.1 *Pluralism in Religious/Theological Contexts*

In keeping with theological motivations driving some early articulations of pluralism, one can find a terrain of contemporary discussions on religious or theological pluralism (e.g., Claman, 2013; Hick, 1985, 2010; Jaiswal, 2021; McGraw & Formicola, 2005). The conceptions in this context overlap with philosophical pluralism, especially as they concern moral life and conduct. A recent example is Bindu Puri and Abhishek Kumar's *Rethinking Religious Pluralism* (2021), depicted – positioned – as “the first book to systematically put together philosophical challenges to the idea of tolerance as the only basis for an argument for the plausibility of plurality” (Puri, 2021, p. viii). Within this work, Reetu Jaiswal depicts religious pluralism as acceptance of the limitation of imperfection in all systems, and with this an acceptance of tolerance for all religious paths and an end (in principle) to religious conflicts. Jaiswal, however, argues that tolerance is not sufficient. Other feelings are necessary, such as mutual respect, love, and dependence toward others. It is only through the cultivation of these feelings, she believes, that we would be able to stop religious conflicts.

Sonia Sikka argues that the conception of religion as grounded in *belief* is inadequate. “In South Asia,” she claims, “‘religious’ identity is not defined by personal belief but is like ethnicity in the sense that it is largely established by birth and constituted by relations of kin” (Sikka, 2021,

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p. 10). Such distinction would have important consequences for the maintenance of religious pluralism in the author's view:

What justice, respect and friendship require across the boundaries of group identity, however, is different from what they require across conflicting worldviews involving truth claims. And, crucially, *assertions* of identity claims and assertions of truth claims are categorically different, stemming from distinct motivations and needing to be addressed by distinct considerations of justice, including the possible remedy of social and political pluralism. (Sikka, 2021, p. 13)

Kumar rethinks religious pluralism through exploration of ethical differences derived from monotheistic and polytheistic religions:

Religions which believe in this kind of a supreme being, let's call it God, are designated monotheistic. As opposed to this, there are religions which believe in multiple powerful beings who are not bound by the spacio-temporal limitations of the human world, and who wield power over human destiny. Such religions are called polytheistic. Hinduism, in some of its varieties, is polytheistic. (Kumar, 2021, p. 56)

The crux of his argument is that polytheism naturally invites religious pluralism, and with it, a better way to contemplate morality. Whereas in monotheistic religions the only and eternal God is the guardian of morality, the polytheistic ones regard morality as produced by humans. In the first case, we have an *a priori* morality; in the second, an *a posteriori* one. For Kumar, we do not need “either a transcendent ‘Reason’ or a transcendent ‘God’ to explain why we feel that the ethical motive must have a sort of necessity attached to it” (Kumar, 2021, p. 59). Thus, he defends the Indian polytheism as a counterpart of the moral tradition of Western culture, as it leads to a happier life.

#### 1.3.2 Pluralism in Political Context

“Political pluralism” is another label we find in the literature, usually associated with “value pluralism,” especially as it developed in the twentieth century into specific forms present in contemporary political theory (Bevir, 2012; Laborde, 2000; Runciman, 2005). An example in this category is John Inazu's *Confident Pluralism* (2016), which similarly targets deepening difference – in his case principally ideological and political difference – as a problem challenging not only our ethical stance but also our very survival. Deep clefs between conservative and liberal citizens (and voters) on issues involving race, religion, sexual freedom, immigration,

taxation, and gun control were never more in evidence. In our day, we might note that the divisions impact even attitudes toward public health concerns and related behavior. The lines of division are especially sharply drawn in the United States, and this context is Inazu's principal focus. Yet Inazu references John Rawls for acknowledging "the fact of pluralism," tied to the idea that our lives take place in "a plurality of conflicting, and indeed incommensurable, conceptions of the meaning, value, and purpose of human life" (Rawls, 1987, p. 4). Our shared existence creates inevitable moral conflict. With a set of convincing contemporary examples, Inazu analyzes the concrete impact of value clashes on public speech, education, healthcare, infrastructure, and the very possibility of improvement through collective action. Throughout, Inazu problematizes difference while simultaneously celebrating its creative, enlivening power. Difference and disagreement, he notes, can sharpen thinking and stimulate innovative problem-solving. It can be enriching, though frustrating and uncomfortable. Moreover, he notes that some differences seem irreconcilable, non-negotiable. For example, it cannot be the case on even logical grounds that abortion is both morally permissible and not so. Yet we need laws and policy that pertain to all. We might see pluralism, too, as encouraging respect and the importance of listening to others with even radically divergent views, and encouraging pragmatic, compromising solutions that minimize losses for both sides of a dispute.

Thus, in Inazu's analysis, there is a mandate of sorts to be extracted. Inazu calls for an approach to living grounded in a search for commonalities across difference. Such an approach requires specific values, namely "tolerance, humility, and patience in our civic practices," further necessitating "tolerance for dissent, a skepticism of government orthodoxy, and a willingness to endure strange and even offensive ways of life" (Inazu, 2016, p. 125). These values are implanted in the Constitution of the United States, yet their cultivation requires long-range commitment to development of shared trust – at the level of sustained constitutional protections, civic engagement, and our everyday relationships with those in our vicinity. In turn, cultivation of shared trust requires reflection and discipline, habitual practice, and demonstration of the ideals to which we aspire, underscoring the necessary amalgamation of personal and collective responsibility.

Though framed as a contribution to political science, the primary focus of Inazu's analysis is thus ethical in nature, directed at the moral principles and values particular to our contemporary social conditions – *The Way We Live Now*, as Trollope (1875) put it. Yet it is rooted in an implicit conviction that these very values are timeless conditions of human