

The Spectacles of Isaiah Berlin

Honest liberals know that they are not pluralists. They know that the liberal worldview does not recognize the validity of other worldviews, and that it aspires—using all the economic, media, and military means at its disposal—to make itself dominant. Liberalism is not tolerance, liberalism is not pluralism, and admitting this is not a mark against it; it is simply to recognize the difference between the perception of a liberal agenda as the just, indispensable agenda, and “let a thousand flowers bloom.”

But not all liberals are willing to admit this. The greatest teacher of those liberals who are convinced that they are pluralists was Isaiah Berlin. Berlin’s thought, more than any other liberal doctrine formulated in the twentieth century, reveals a conceptual confusion between pluralism and liberalism. At the end of the twentieth century, this confusion did not appear to be critical or potentially dangerous. In the 1990s, with the fall of the Eastern Bloc, with the euphoric rise of capital markets, and with the fashionable post-modernist discourse that flourished in academia, the West celebrated what seemed to be its final victory. For ten years it had no enemies, and when you have no enemies, it is possible to babble on about pluralism, denigrate the “oppressive” culture of the West, and demand that the “voice of the other should also be heard.” The multicultural discourse that flourished at the time did not stand up to scrutiny, because the “other” did not speak. On September 11, 2001, four years after the death of Berlin, we heard the clear voice of the “other.”

Since Osama Bin Laden made his voice heard, every liberal has had to figure out for himself if he really is a pluralist, as he imagined himself to be. This is no longer an academic or theoretical issue. To counter the clear voices of the enemies of the West, the West must speak out clearly, or else it will be defeated. This year, Europe has incurred Muslim riots in France and Muslim unrest in England and Germany; it has enabled the “others” to build mosques in its capitals that nurture hatred of the West. The repercussions of this foolishness in the name of pluralism were foreseeable but are still being denied. French intellectuals were quick to interpret—and justify—the riots in Paris by portraying them as acts of protest by the poor and the downtrodden. They presented the issue as a social struggle, and in so doing exempted themselves from the question of pluralism. When the Muslim “other” is portrayed as oppressed, his true and declared identity as a jihadist soldier is denied, and so the test facing multicultural pluralism in our time is rejected. Understanding Berlin’s philosophical doctrine, therefore, has become a pressing matter for our time.

II

In three respects, Berlin deserves our profound esteem.

The first relates to his contribution to the discipline known as “the history of ideas.” Hegel had already been as much a historian of philosophy as he was a philosopher of history. But unlike Hegel, Berlin wrote in a fluent and communicative style that could hold readers spellbound. He gave us guided tours of the mid-nineteenth-century Russian scene;¹ he rescued from oblivion thinkers such as Joseph de Maistre and Johann Georg Hamann, and he shed new light on others, like Machiavelli, Vico, Herder, and Montesquieu. As distinct from classical political history or economic-sociological history, he wrote spiritual-cultural history. Departing from the ahistorical teaching method practiced in philosophy departments, he rooted every philosophical doctrine in the historical context that gave rise to it. Today, this approach seems obvious, but it became so thanks to him.

Second, Berlin revived the debate on the great moral and political questions in a period when logic was all the rage. Oxford, where he studied and taught, was then the capital of analytic philosophy. A serious philosopher was thought to be a kind of linguistic surgeon, prohibited from stepping outside the operating room. That was the philosophical climate when Berlin was taking his first steps, and at the beginning of his journey he tried to be accepted by the club. He wrote several papers on logic, but lost interest in it towards the middle of the century. In 1950 he was still publishing technical articles with titles like “Empirical Propositions and Hypothetical Statements” and “Logical Translation,” but in the same year he also published “Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century” and “Socialism and Socialist Theories,” essays that marked his assault on the great questions and the wider educated public.² In his rebellion against Oxford thinking, he became an oasis in the analytic desert.

Third, Berlin was a gifted writer. It is a pleasure to read him. He dictated most of his essays, endowing them with a narrative, flowing quality. As Michael Ignatieff said, with Berlin “the way he writes and the way he talks are identical: Ornate, elaborate, old-fashioned, yet incisive and clear.... Words come at his bidding and they form into sentences and paragraphs as quickly as he can bring them on.”³ That is why Berlin’s sentences are syntactically long and complex—ready to burst, replete with attributive clauses that modify every argument. “He outlines a proposition and anticipates objections and qualifications as he speaks, so that both proposition and qualification are spun out in one.”⁴ His style of presenting his thoughts in flight is a virtuosic improvisation—a lively voice, not a stiff one. Few are the writers who have achieved this quality. Deep scholarship and charismatic writing hardly ever meet; they meet in his essays.

Yet these achievements, great as they may be, are irrelevant to an appreciation of Berlin’s philosophical doctrine. As one who was widely considered one of the most important political

philosophers of the twentieth century, he demands we discuss him on his own terms. A philosopher is not judged by his eloquence; Hegel, as we know, wrote dreadfully, and no one would say that Leibniz, or Kant or Husserl, for instance, excelled at writing. It is the greatness of Berlin as a philosopher, not as a writer, that needs to be assessed.

Romanticism, nationalism, pluralism: These are Berlin's three great subjects. He established his fame as a commentator on Romanticism, as a liberal who recognized the importance of nationalism, and as a philosopher who raised the banner of pluralism. These are the three basic principles of his doctrine, and they are intertwined and together form a triangle at the apex of which is pluralism. Pluralism was *The Topic*, the epicenter of his thinking; the other two served only as a means of presenting his pluralistic arguments. Of course he also wrote on other subjects,⁵ but our interest is not in a review of all his writings but in an understanding of the essence of his doctrine.

Berlin divided the intellectuals who molded Western culture into monists, whom he nicknamed "hedgehogs," and pluralists, whom he dubbed "foxes." The hedgehogs are the bad guys, and the foxes the good guys. Plato, Hegel, and Nietzsche are hedgehogs, whereas Aristotle, Montaigne, and Goethe are foxes.⁶ It is irrelevant what each of them professed, or the theoretical or literary genre in which each expressed himself—only the general mentality, the hedgehoginess or the foxiness, so to speak, is important. From this ethereal perspective, Berlin dealt with Europe's ideological history. The Enlightenment philosophers interested him as hedgehogs, whereas Machiavelli, the Romanticists, and the nineteenth-century Russian thinkers interested him only as foxes. There was no philosophical, ideological, or cultural stream that Berlin did not assign to one of the two cages. He did not acknowledge the existence of other animals.⁷

The reason for his fixation was in large part biographical. He grew up in the shadow of the rise of the totalitarian regimes—a Jew born in Latvia, he fled the Bolsheviks at the age of eleven, and thirty years later those of his relatives who had remained there were murdered by the Nazis. He belonged, therefore, to the same generation of refugees (Jews and others) as Karl Popper, Friedrich Hayek, Vladimir Nabokov, Hannah Arendt, Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and Jacob Talmon, who had first-hand experience of the totalitarian trauma, and liberals such as Albert Camus and George Orwell, who watched in horror from the wings. World War II led to a philosophical and literary mobilization to expose and uproot totalitarianism, and Berlin was one of the first to enlist.

The question that troubled Berlin, Popper, Talmon, and their like was this: What is it about the Western way of thinking that gives rise to totalitarian regimes? Their working assumption was that these regimes arose not just as a result of the economic, social, and political problems that had been created at the beginning of the twentieth century, but also, and for the main part, because they encompassed a totalitarian way of thinking that had been a part

of Western culture for hundreds of years. Talmon identified the beginning of totalitarianism with the French Revolution, Horkheimer and Adorno saw its roots in the Enlightenment, and Popper and Berlin found its origins as far back as Plato.⁸ Popper drew a straight line from Plato to Hegel and from him to Marx—the three greatest enemies of “the open society”⁹—and Berlin filled in this line with many other names that he felt represented the monistic, dogmatic, “hedgehog” way of thinking that we must rid ourselves of lest the totalitarian regimes rise again from within us.

Even though Berlin, like Popper, applied his thesis concerning the roots of totalitarianism to the entire history of European thought, he focused on one specific period, which in his opinion was the most important in the history of the West. Berlin returns to this period, which rocked Europe around 1800, from different angles in almost all his essays. From 1960 on, he identified that historical upheaval with “the Romantic Revolution,” and from 1972 on, he claimed that the rise of nationalism was also a part of it. Once his thesis included references to both Romanticism and nationalism, he gained renown as an intellectual who demonstrated his pluralism by describing illiberal ideological movements candidly, without arrogance or tendentiousness.

But this is a misimpression, one which stems mainly from Berlin’s easy-going style. He did not disparage illiberal writers and currents of thought the way Popper and Hayek did, but reviewed them with a scholarly, “objective” detachment. In all his essays, there is not even one outburst of anger or venom; an Olympian tone is maintained throughout. In every one of his essays one has to extract his point of view from the opinions and cultural associations he pulls out of his pocket in handfuls, like a kindly old man feeding pigeons in the city square. Thanks to the breadth of his horizons, Berlin succeeded in being portrayed as a fox. In fact, he was a hedgehog par excellence, a soft-spoken dogmatist.

III

Berlin blamed the Enlightenment for sowing the seeds of totalitarian thinking. The arrogance of the Enlightenment’s enlistment of reason in creating a perfect, utterly rational world, spawned the tyranny of Robespierre, and in the twentieth century, the KGB state. Berlin maintains that the Romantic movement was born as a justified counter-reaction to the dogmatic optimism of the Enlightenment. The Romantics were, in his view, the first pluralists. To be a Romanticist was to be a pluralist.

All the values and motifs normally attributed to the Romantic movement seemed to him erroneous or inessential:

Turbulence, violence, conflict, chaos... the strange, the exotic, the grotesque, the mysterious, the supernatural, ruins, moonlight, enchanted castles... darkness and the powers of darkness, phantoms, vampires, nameless terror, the irrational... Gothic cathedrals, mists of antiquity... the impalpable, the imponderable... it is nostalgia, it is reverie, it is intoxicating dreams, it is sweet melancholy and bitter melancholy, solitude, the sufferings of exile, the sense of alienation, roaming in remote places, especially the East, and in remote times, especially the Middle Ages... energy, force, will, life... wild exhibitionism, eccentricity... the damned soul, the Corsairs, Manfreds, Giaours, Laras, Cains... Satanic revels, cynical irony, diabolical laughter, black heroes....

And so forth.¹⁰ In Berlin's opinion, the essence of Romanticism is not to be found in this nocturnal world. The essence of Romanticism is for him the revolutionary discovery that it is impossible to reconcile conflicting values. "The belief... that somewhere there exists a solution for every problem... is the major assumption that is presupposed in the whole of Western thought up to the point of which I speak," ruled Berlin.¹¹ He thought that all the thinkers who preceded the Romanticists believed that "goals... cannot possibly conflict with one another." This is because even if human values are many and varied, in the end "they must form a harmonious whole."¹²

According to Berlin, the Romanticists were the first to deny this, and their revolutionary rejection of harmonious monism which everyone in Western culture had believed in and championed until then, was not only *the* turning point in Western history, but also—from the point of view of an advocate of pluralism—the most *welcome* philosophical discovery in history: "Even the relativists and the sceptics [from the Greek Sophists to Montesquieu] said no more than that individuals and societies had different needs in accordance with different geographical or climatic conditions, or different systems of law and education, or general outlooks and patterns of life."¹³ That is to say, until the coming of the Romanticists, no adequate account was taken of possible conflicts between absolute values.

Was this indeed Romanticism's innovation? Had there not been recognition of the insoluble conflict between absolute values as far back as the fifth century B.C.E. in the tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides? A man's loyalty to his family was perceived in Greece as an absolute value, as was his loyalty to his city-state, and therefore there was no ultimate solution, only a solution of might, to a situation in which these two values conflicted, as in Sophocles' *Antigone*.¹⁴ Creon can destroy Antigone, but he cannot destroy the validity of her argument. They are both right, and there is no higher value that can, as with Hegel, provide a "synthesis." This is not moral relativism; the Athenian tragedies were not concerned with demonstrating the local relativity of human values (i.e., values are mere customs), but with the irresolvable conflict between absolute values.¹⁵ "Aeschylus," writes Nathan Spiegel, "infused tragedy with a dimension of moral and spiritual complexity—a complexity that a man encounters whenever his soul is torn between opposing values each of which is just and

valid.”¹⁶ This recognition was passed on from the Athenian tragedians to Shakespeare, Racine, Milton, and Dostoevsky.¹⁷

Berlin did not agree. In his view, all the philosophers and writers who preceded Romanticism thought that “there is nothing in the nature of men or the world which makes tragedy unavoidable,” because they all believed that “sin, crime, suffering are forms of maladjustment due to blindness.”¹⁸ This is a strange claim to say the least, for what is the tragic worldview if not the perception of tragedy as inevitable? And what is Greek tragedy if it does not show us that “sin, crime, suffering” are the lot of every man, wise and moral as he may be, since we are all pawns in the hands of blind fate, and since even in the small domain in which we have control over our lives, we cannot apply one absolute moral value without impinging on another? “For the Greeks,” answered Berlin, “tragedy was error which the gods sent upon you, which no man subject to them could perhaps have avoided; but, in principle, if these men had been omniscient, they would not have committed those grave errors which they did commit, and therefore would not have brought misfortunes upon themselves.”¹⁹ Another strange claim, for according to the Greek view fate rules not just human beings but also the gods. Not the gods but fate brings down disasters on human beings, and these disasters are not “errors” that man *or god* can prevent.

Alongside the Greek culture that believed in a mysterious, incomprehensible, invisible, and omnipotent fate, a culture developed in ancient Israel that believed in a mysterious, incomprehensible, invisible, and omnipotent God. The Bible endowed Western civilization with the notion that, to use Berlin’s words, “your very action expresses—is one with—your convictions. Morality and politics are not a set of propositions: They are action, self-dedication to goals made concrete. To be a man is not to understand or reason but to act; to act, to make, to create, to be free are identical: this is the difference between the animals and man.”²⁰ But Berlin did *not* write this about the biblical point of view. He wrote it about the Romantic point of view.

Did Berlin not know that the history of his people is the history of a human collective that said “we will do and obey,” because it did not make the observance of the commandments conditional on understanding them? “Self-dedication to goals made concrete,” action and not theory, a doctrine that is all imperatives (without any philosophical statement)—a revolutionary discovery indeed, but an ancient one. Did he not know that the Jewish faith does not perceive reality as the embodiment of cosmic intelligence (as the Egyptians, Chinese and Indians, and Aristotle and Spinoza knew it to be), but as the embodiment of God’s will? Or that it therefore demands that its believers (as Christianity and Islam later demanded) voluntarily control their impulses and needs, and live accordingly in God’s image? And did he not know, when he defined the Romantic community as a community that “insulates itself against outside interference in order to be independent and express its own inner personality,”²¹ that introverted isolation was his own people’s policy—“a people

that shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations”—from biblical times until the present day?

It was not the Romantics but the Athenian tragedians who taught us that conflicting values cannot be reconciled; not the Romantics but the Bible that taught that will is more important than reason. With the Greek legacy on the one hand and the Judeo-Christian on the other, Western culture evolved into one for which non-rationalism was as natural as oxygen. At no time, at least until the French Revolution, was the influence of rationalist philosophers greater than the influence of popes or local preachers, kings, despots, troubadours, and groups of traveling actors, architects of cathedrals and the artists who painted their murals, witch burners, and persecutors of Jews—all those rulers, spiritual shepherds, artists, and other creators of consciousness who made Europe what it is.

Anyone looking for a harmonious, rationalist culture will be more likely to find it in China or India.²² The Chinese and the Indians, not the Europeans, would agree with Berlin that “sin, crime, suffering are forms of maladjustment due to blindness,” and that “there is nothing in the nature of men or the world which makes tragedy unavoidable.” The concept of “tragedy” is foreign to the Chinese and the Indians; the world is perfect and each person can be just as perfect if he undertakes the necessary study of Taoism, Confucianism, Hinduism, or Buddhism. Berlin presented Western culture—restless, tormented, turbulent, from an Eastern point of view—as a culture characterized from the very dawn of its creation and almost throughout its existence by all-resolving rationalism, until the Romantics came and introduced Europe to the possibility of restlessness, torment, and turbulence.

According to Berlin, the Romantic ethos is “something altogether new in the European consciousness,” because “what matters now is motive, integrity, sincerity, fidelity in principle, purity of heart, spontaneity; not happiness or strength or wisdom or success, or natural beauty, or other natural values, which are outside the realm of moral freedom.” A Romanticist does not care “whether, in a worldly sense, he succeeds or does not succeed”; thus he acknowledges that grief, not necessarily happiness, will descend on him the more he knows about the world; thus he acknowledges that “justice may preclude mercy”; and thus he acknowledges that “if man were not free to choose evil, he would not be truly free.”²³ Yet again, there is not a word here that is not compatible with either the biblical ethos or Athenian tragedy.

“The very concept of idealism as a noble attribute is novel,” Berlin says, continuing to burst through doors that were opened 2,500 years ago. “To praise someone as an idealist is to say that he is prepared to lay down his life for ends in which he believes for their own sake [and not for the sake of success or happiness or any kind of reward].”²⁴ And in order to explain to us why this is not precisely what the first Christians did (another Jew in his place would also have recalled all those Jews who died as martyrs in the last two thousand years), Berlin says:

“It had always been right for a Christian to die for his faith; but that was because it was the true faith, and only by it could a man be saved, and therefore it constituted the highest value in his scale, and not in his alone, but in that of all mankind.”²⁵ But when a Romanticist gave up his life he did it for his personal values, his and only his.²⁶

This is the crucial error in Berlin’s definition of Romanticism. Until now he was wrong only in defining the Romantic ethos as *innovative*; now he is mistaken in defining its *essence*. When he talks about “idealism” (whatever that implies) and about “goals” that the Romanticist sets for himself (whatever they may be), he empties the Romantic ethos of its content. It is of no importance, according to Berlin, what the Romanticists stood for; all that is important is that each of them had his own private ideal and lived for it. “We can give [our values] no reason save that that is what we aim at, that these are the goals that are ours because we have chosen them.”²⁷ This is what he calls Romantic “idealism.” It is possible that this arbitrary “idealism” was typical of Sartrean existentialism,²⁸ but Romanticism held to a *specific* ethos. It sanctified the night. That was its message.

By day, man is a social animal. By night, man does not remember that he is a citizen, has no recollection of his duty, of his colleagues, not even of his family; at night he dreams. Savagery, violence, scenes of lechery and horror, voyages into the magical and descents into the despicable—it happens to us all, night after night, and no one thought it worth glorifying until the advent of the Romantics. We do not have space to list here all the Romantic poems, from Novalis’ “Hymns to the Night” (1797) to Bialik’s “Secrets of the Night” (1899), in which the subject of night appears in their titles.²⁹ All of E.T.A. Hoffmann’s tales are nightmares, and more indirectly, so are Kleist’s. The demonic, Gothic, nocturnal darkness cloaks the entire Romantic world of images. The Romanticists glorified Cain, Kublai Khan, Don Juan, Napoleon, the genius sociopath who appears in the world as one of nature’s terrible forces. The metaphysical idealism of Fichte and Schopenhauer is profoundly dark and utterly opposed to Spinoza’s tranquil pantheism and the Arcadian nature that Rousseau so longed for.³⁰ In every poem by Coleridge, in every painting by Turner, in every note by Wagner, speaks the Lord of the Night.

It was not nihilism but a new ethos. It was not the lack of a scale of values but the overturning of a scale of values that denied night and glistened from too much Enlightenment sunlight. “Enlightenment,” declared Kant, “is man’s emergence from his self-incurred immaturity”—and this emergence to maturity is an emergence from slavery to freedom, to independence.³¹ Enlightened man is not a slave of superstition or of impulse, emotion, or other rubbish. His rationality is his freedom. There is no night in his soul. On the other hand, the Romanticists maintained that this “freedom” was slavery; that “reason” was the trampling of true freedom—the nocturnal freedom to live and express the deeper, fascinating, exciting, vital, energetic side of the human soul. What makes man different from the animals is not that he has intelligence (what creature does not have some form of

intelligence?) but that man and only man has imagination. It follows that the artist, the knight of imagination, and not the philosopher, the knight of reason, is the exemplary human being, the Romantic “genius.” Art is the most important human activity, and of all forms of art, music and poetry are the most important, because the nocturnal, ecstatic-demonic potential of music and poetry is greater than that of any other art form.³² That was the essence of the Romantic revolution: The idea that art was more important than anything else, not for expressing shapely “beauty,” but for expressing the “sublime,” the terrifying, the nocturnal.³³

Berlin attributed a pluralism to Romanticism that was not there, and did not see what was there. He was night-blind. It is important to differentiate between an error derived from a specific shortcoming in an intellectual’s way of thinking and an error arising from his agenda. Berlin’s night blindness derived from his agenda, from which also derived his error in understanding the second major object of his attention: National consciousness.

IV

Inasmuch as Berlin made his name as an interpreter of Romanticism, he was revered as a liberal who recognized the significance of nationalism. True, he recognized its significance as a historical phenomenon—but who does not recognize it as such? Serious recognition of nationalism is admission not just of its historical importance, but of its ideological importance.

Berlin was indeed a Zionist, but as Avishai Margalit remarks, “Berlin’s Zionism was not an ideology which derives from primary principles such as nationalism or liberalism. His Zionism was for him more akin to a family business than to a doctrine.”³⁴ In other words, Berlin was a Zionist without having clarified what his philosophical attitude was towards the question of nationalism. Moreover, his support for Zionism in fact diverged from his political philosophy, since this support was not compatible with his hostility towards other nationalist movements, as Richard Wollheim notes.³⁵ If he hadn’t been Jewish, he likely would have opposed Zionism in the same way he had opposed the other nationalisms.

Nationalism, as Berlin understood it, is essentially a modern European phenomenon. The self-esteem of the Germans, the Italians, the Poles, and the Russians was badly damaged around 1800 both as a result of the efforts of rulers like Frederick the Great and Peter the Great to impose the values and manners of the French Enlightenment, and to an even greater extent as a consequence of Napoleon’s military and cultural conquest. In other words, not only is nationalism essentially European, but it is merely an *emotional reaction* to humiliation and indignity. It is not a reasoned political philosophy or worldview—in fact, it is doubtful if it is at all worthy of the description “worldview,” since it is purely emotional. It is

a collective convulsion, a reflex, a response to some excruciating irritation, as one scratches one's psoriasis.

Berlin is duly aware of the difference between chauvinist nationalism and tolerant national consciousness. "Nationalism is an inflamed condition of national consciousness which can be, and has on occasion been, tolerant and peaceful. It usually seems to be caused by wounds, some form of collective humiliation."³⁶ The reader may well get the impression, therefore, that Berlin is referring only to chauvinist nationalism—not peaceful national consciousness—as an "emotional fever," and this impression raises the expectation of a *non-volatile* discussion of national consciousness. For if "national consciousness" does not mean chauvinism, what kind of ideological position is it? Our expectation goes unfulfilled. Berlin has nothing to say about nationalist ideology; he says only what everyone already knows: Chauvinism and national consciousness are not the same thing. One does not know, therefore, what he means when he writes that "what we are seeing, it seems to me, is a world reaction against the central doctrines of nineteenth-century liberal rationalism itself, a confused effort to return to an older morality."³⁷ Chauvinism or national consciousness? The difference is of no importance, for after all, one way or the other, he considered them to be nothing more than a reaction to liberal rationalism—and Berlin, being a liberal, cannot therefore recognize it as a political philosophy. It is not a form of reason, merely a reaction.³⁸

Is nationalism indeed essentially a modern European (and reactionary) phenomenon? Is it not actually even more ancient than the Greek recognition of the incompatibility of absolute values, which Berlin portrayed as a discovery of Romanticism?

Nationalism was born three thousand years ago in ancient Israel.³⁹ For the last two thousand years, by their own irritating existence as a nation, the Jews acted as a constant reminder of the national idea for the people among whom they lived. In fact, the Jews presented the challenge of nationality to their hosts as far back as the fourth century B.C.E., if the book of Esther is to be believed. Mordechai refuses to bow down in front of Haman, the representative of the Persian Empire, not because he holds him in personal contempt, but because Mordechai's self-definition is national rather than civic. Haman complains about him to Ahasverus in these words: "There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws are different from all people; nor do they keep the king's laws."⁴⁰ Haman realized, as all subsequent hosts of the Jews realized, that the national self-definition of the Jews does not depend on territorial possessions, political sovereignty, or a state constitution. The people of Israel obviously yearned for territory, sovereignty, and statehood, but it demonstrated to the European and Arab nations what it demonstrated to Ahasverus and Haman: That nationhood is a category in itself and is not derived from other categories.⁴¹

The nationalist idea is not racist. If we understand the Bible as the autobiography of the people of Israel, then it emphasizes at all its key junctures the independence of the definition of nationhood from the ethnic origin of the fathers of the nation or the ethnic background of those who joined it. There is no Hebrew “race,” and according to the division of biblical humanity into races (Shem, Ham, and Japhet), the people of Israel cannot even be said to belong pure and simple to the Semitic race. Osnat the Egyptian, Joseph’s wife, Zipporah the Midianite-Ethiopian, Moses’ wife, Jezebel the Phoenician, Ahab’s wife, and the many Canaanite women taken for wives during the Kingdom of Israel, mixed Semitic blood with the blood of Ham,⁴² and Solomon’s harem probably included women from the race of Japhet. Moreover, even if we consider only the Semitic elements of the people of Israel, the Bible underscores their heterogeneity: The four “mothers” were Aramaic; the house of David was the offspring of Ruth the Moabite.

This ethnic mix is at the root of the difference between the people of Israel and other ancient peoples. The biblical authors created a *nation* that is explicitly an artificial collective identity. Belonging to a people is a biological fact; belonging to a nation is a conscious belonging to an “imagined community,” as Benedict Anderson put it.⁴³ “Imagined”—that is to say, essentially fictional. According to Ernest Gellner, “Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness; it invents nations where they do not exist.”⁴⁴ On an ethno-biological level, the land of Canaan included a mixture of indigenous peoples and nomads, Semites, Mesopotamians, and Indo-Europeans; on the conscious level, a nation was invented in it.

This imagined community became more and more imagined during two thousand years of Jewish exile. In every Jewish dispersal there were mixed marriages and conversions as a result of which the ethnic identity of those who were dispersed became irrelevant. It was precisely because of this that Jewish identity coalesced into national identity, dependent on common traditions and destinies, not on common blood.⁴⁵ And the concept of nationhood, freed from its dependence on ethnic traits, was also freed during two thousand years of exile from any dependence on territory, and even from dependence on a common language. Contrary to Marx’s famous dictum, consciousness determines being.⁴⁶

Thus, the State of Israel is defined as a Jewish state, not as an Israeli state. There is no Israeli nation; there is a Jewish nation, dispersed throughout the world.⁴⁷ You are no less Jewish if you are not Israeli, and the Jews living in Israel are not a “people” in the ethnic sense. The modern Jewish nation-state is therefore the realization of the concept of nationality invented in the Bible and refined in the Diaspora. Races, peoples, tribes, civilizations, languages, kingdoms—they have all existed, as Genesis tells us, since the dawn of history; but not a nation. Belonging to the imagined community called “nation” is a revolutionary possibility proposed by the Bible, and this proposal is what in time shaped Europe.

Supra-national powers shaped Europe until the end of the eighteenth century,⁴⁸ in the same way as superpowers, alliances, and supra-national dynamics have shaped and continue to shape the world today.⁴⁹ But we must not conclude from this that the upsurge of European nationalism in the nineteenth century was what gave rise to the concept of nationalism. Until the nineteenth century, Europe had *preferred* to define itself according to supra-national categories (as citizens of an empire, as Catholics or as Protestants), or sub-national (as vassals of a principality or as inhabitants of regions), and they preferred this for a thousand and one good and not-so-good reasons. But as hosts of the Jews and as students of the Bible—since Europe’s adoption of Christianity, and all the more so since the Reformation—they were aware of the concept of nationalism and its physical embodiment, and always reacted to it with words and persecution.

Napoleon’s conquests at the beginning of the nineteenth century provoked a nationalistic reaction from Spain to Russia, and this is clearly the starting point for the spread of modern European nationalism. But to tell the story of the spread of European nationalism in the nineteenth century as a story of the *birth* of the concept of nationalism is to fudge the truth not only as a historian but also as a philosopher. A philosophical discussion of the idea of nationalism demands recognition that it is indeed an idea—not merely a reactionary emotional symptom.

Why did Berlin have the reputation of being a liberal who recognized the significance of nationalism? Perhaps because of the rhetoric he employed when he referred to nationalism: The rhetoric of astonishment at its very existence, and astonishment that all the leading philosophers of the nineteenth century did not recognize as he did the significance of the phenomenon. “No significant thinkers known to me,” he wrote, “predicted for it [nationalism] a future in which it would play an even more dominant role.”⁵⁰ To be sure, “no social or political thinker in the nineteenth century was unaware of nationalism as a dominant movement of his age,” but, “in the second half of the [nineteenth] century, indeed up to the First World War, it was thought to be waning.”⁵¹ So all these philosophers proved to be remarkably short-sighted, because “the rise of nationalism is today a world-wide phenomenon, probably the strongest single factor in the newly established states, and in some cases among the minority populations of the older nations.”⁵²

This is a case of the pot calling the kettle black. The short-sightedness among nineteenth-century philosophers concerning the flourishing of nationalism in the twentieth century was no more astonishing than Berlin’s short-sightedness concerning the post-nationalist dynamic that began at the end of World War II. The flooding of the United States and Europe with millions of immigrants (Muslims and others), and the demands from the radical Left for a “multi-cultural” definition of citizenship; the renewed delight in Marxism (the negation of nationalism) after the student riots of 1968; the globalization of market forces that developed at the expense of national economies; and the media globalization of the age of

television and pop music that developed at the expense of national culture—all these processes together created the post-nationalist order in front of Berlin's very eyes. When he wrote about nationalism in the seventies, he did not predict and could not have predicted the world's entry into the Internet age and the unification of Europe at the turn of the century. But the period in which he wrote about nationalism was enough of a post-nationalistic period even without the Internet and the euro. If he had taken serious account of nationalism, he would have dealt with the post-nationalist arguments that became the intellectual *bon ton* of his generation.

There are two reasons for this short-sightedness. The first is that Berlin was firmly planted in the first half of the twentieth century and did not clean off his spectacles in the second half. The totalitarian setting that shaped his youth continued to condition his thinking in later years. From his perspective, eighteenth-century enlightenment and nineteenth-century nationalism were two opposite but complementary trends that gave rise to Bolshevism, Fascism, and Nazism. Volatile enlightenment ends in Bolshevism, volatile nationalism ends in Fascism and Nazism. There is truth in this, but a truth that became irrelevant in the middle of the twentieth century. The debate on nationalism in our liberal-democratic age, appearing more and more to be a post-nationalist age, is a debate that Berlin was unprepared for.

The second reason: He was not a pluralist. If he had been, he would have understood that nationalism (as long as it does not descend into chauvinism) is essentially pluralistic, since it advances particular identities. Giuseppe Mazzini—the shining example of nineteenth-century European nationalism—wanted to help all nationalist movements, not only the Italian national movement. And that is the nationalist attitude at its best. The English nationalist does not want the Japanese to be more English. He wants a world in which there is Zen Buddhism and Haiku, martial arts, and Noh theater—and he wants to have something to give to the Japanese. He will have nothing to offer if he is not English.

The close link between nationalism and pluralism is the philosophy of Herder in a nutshell. Berlin admired Herder, but not for the right reasons. Herder, who coined the expression “spirit of the people” (*volksgeist*), was a *national* pluralist, and Berlin invented a Herder who was not a nationalist: Ostensibly a pluralist but in fact a liberal.⁵³ Just as he created the Romanticists in his own image, Berlin created Herder in his own image; Romanticism and nationalism did not appear to him as opinions but as reflections of his opinion. Worse, according to his own doctrine, it was actually up to him to preserve the link between nationalism and pluralism, because nationalism, in his conception, was born from Romanticism, and Romanticism, in his conception, championed pluralism. In other words, precisely because of his two basic premises (nationalism is Romantic, and Romanticism is pluralistic) he should have reached the conclusion that nationalism and pluralism are closely linked. This is what he would have concluded, had he been a pluralist.

V

A thinker who writes about other thinkers rather than expressing his own worldview explicitly is likely to be considered a pluralist. Berlin's writings evoked, as mentioned, a sense of roaming widely among currents of ideas, and so the hedgehog passed himself off as a fox. How successful the illusion was can be ascertained by reading the praise typically heaped on Berlin and the criticism typically leveled against him. First, the praise. "Isaiah Berlin's essays in the history of ideas are not written from a point of view," Roger Hausheer wrote in the introduction to one of the anthologies of Berlin's essays. "They are not intended directly to illustrate or support (or for that matter attack or undermine) any single historical or political theory, doctrine or ideology... they are wholly exploratory and undogmatic.... Less, perhaps, than any other thinker does Berlin suppose himself in possession of some simple truth, and then proceed to interpret and rearrange the world in the light of it."⁵⁴ As for the criticism: "I cannot perceive any solid logical or philosophical ground in his work for exonerating him from the charge of relativism," Norman Podhoretz wrote two years after Berlin's death.⁵⁵

This is the conventional image that is attached to Berlin by adherents and critics alike. The man lectured and wrote, so it would seem, not "from a point of view" but with a bird's-eye view, and therefore you won't find any tendentious interpretation in him of the history of Western thought. This absence of tendentiousness is sometimes attributed to him as a virtue (as Hausheer would have it) and at other times as a vice (as Podhoretz claims). Yet his objective, Olympian view that admirers and detractors of Berlin ascribed to him was only an affect.

Let us ignore the affect and deal with the content. Was Berlin's philosophical argument, as is normally thought, a pluralistic one? In an interview he gave in 1988, Berlin summarized what he regarded as a pluralistic outlook: "One can choose one life or the other, but not both; and there is no over-arching criterion to determine the right choice; one chooses as one chooses, neither life can objectively be called superior to the other."⁵⁶ This leads to the practical, political conclusion: "Room must be made for a life in which some values may turn out to be incompatible, so that if destructive conflict is to be avoided compromises have to be effected, and a minimum degree of toleration, however reluctant, becomes indispensable."⁵⁷

We would appear to be faced with a multicultural argument concerning the pluralistic recognition of the validity of different ways of life. But when Berlin elaborates his argument, it turns out that he means something different: "I believe, in other words, that some of the ultimate values by which men live cannot be reconciled or combined.... You cannot combine full liberty with full equality... Justice and mercy, knowledge and happiness can collide," and therefore "the idea of a perfect solution of human problems—of how to live,

cannot be coherently conceived.... Utopian solutions are in principle incoherent and unimaginable... so there have to be choices. Choices can be very painful. If you choose A, you are distressed to lose B. There is no avoiding choices between ultimate human values.... All fanatical belief in the possibility of a final solution, no matter how reached, cannot but lead to suffering, misery, blood, terrible oppression.”⁵⁸

In other words, Berlin is not speaking about a clash of *systems* of values (or cultures), but about a clash of values *within* each system, *within* each culture. All normative systems contain, according to him, absolute values that are mutually exclusive—values such that the choice of one of them is an unavoidable impingement on another. The choice between absolute and incompatible values must be made, but it is not a choice that can be *explained* according to any system of values. In fact, every choice of one value at the expense of another value in the same system makes the system irrelevant. For, according to Berlin, one is not likely—indeed one is not able—to apply any particular value system but only to apply a few values that do not constitute a system and are not derived from any one system.

If you choose, for example, the value of equality at the expense of liberty, this does not mean that you have chosen a socialistic value system; you have chosen only one socialist value, not other socialist values, like the sanctification of technological progress or of productive labor. And if you choose, let’s suppose, the value of mercy at the expense of justice, this does not mean that you have chosen Christianity; the value you chose is *incidentally* Christian; you did not choose it because it is a Christian value, but because you also, *like* the Christians, subscribe to it. As a value system, Christianity is foreign to us. You may not believe in Christ, and Christian value terms such as “grace,” “guilt,” “absolution,” and the heavenly or hellish “hereafter” may mean nothing to you. So you are for equality, but not socialism, and you are for mercy, but not Christianity. You have made for yourself, as Tolstoy did, a private, homemade ethos. Tolstoy was a Christian who did not go to church, a socialist who opposed technological progress, and a Buddhist who did not practice Buddhist meditation. He chose values, not value systems—and so, in Berlin’s opinion, should you.

Therefore, Berlin does not accept the validity of any particular value system. He only recognizes individual moral decisions based on a private voice of conscience. This is an *eclectic* ethos, not a *pluralistic* ethos, since pluralism demands recognition of the validity of competing value *systems*.

Had he been a pluralist, Berlin would have said something like this: Christianity offers us a religious ethic, whereas Buddhism and socialism offer us an atheistic ethic. Christianity and Buddhism offer us redemption of the individual soul, whereas socialism offers us social redemption. Christianity and socialism developed in the West, whereas Buddhism developed in the East. Well, even though I am an atheist, I recognize the independent validity of

religions, therefore I recognize the independent validity of the Christian ethic; even though I am an individualist, I recognize the independent validity of collective theories of redemption, and therefore recognize the independent validity of the socialist ethic; and even though I am a Westerner, I recognize the independent validity of eastern cultures, therefore I recognize the independent validity of the Buddhist ethic. I do not agree with any of these three value systems, but I will defend their right to exist because cultural, religious, and political diversity—the diversity itself—is my ethos.

But Berlin does not accept the independent validity of value systems. He accepts, as noted, only the validity of values that float in a moral space, devoid of context, and subject to the choice of private conscience. The ethical man, in Berlin's doctrine, is a man *exempt* from cultural, religious, and political pluralism, since he is not required to accept the independent value and justification of value systems.

A consequence of this is Berlin's famous distinction between "positive liberty" and "negative liberty." Positive liberty is the consummation of one value system or another, whereas negative liberty is emancipation from oppression.⁵⁹ Berlin favored negative liberty and condemned every form of positive liberty on the grounds that every consummation of a value system involves aggressive intolerance by those who consummate it against those who have no interest in doing the same.

An ethos that allows only negative freedom, however, is not pluralism but liberalism. Let us return to the practical conclusion that Berlin drew from his ethic: "If destructive conflict is to be avoided compromises have to be effected, and a minimum degree of toleration, however reluctant, becomes indispensable." That is to say, the only acceptable regime is a regime of conflict-neutralizing arrangements. Such a regime makes the rules of the game to which every value system of every group or community in the country must be subject. It is a "tolerant" regime only towards those who obey it; it is intolerant of any other alternative. Only liberal democracy is legitimate; only the world of negative liberty is justifiable.

Berlin's reputation as a political philosopher may derive from the fact that he said the right thing at the right time. He addressed himself to an audience that had been traumatized by Nazism, Bolshevism, and Fascism, and that found in his anti-totalitarian message a declaration that there was no need to delve into its meaning in order to adopt it enthusiastically. But what sounded like the very voice of moral reason to ears that were still ringing from World War II sounds evasive to our ears.

Not all liberal philosophers or liberal regimes of the last few generations are afflicted with lack of clarity. The present global struggle between the United States and Islamic extremists is not a struggle between pluralists (foxes) and dogmatists (hedgehogs), but between

hedgehogs and hedgehogs—between two irreconcilable ideologies. Not for a moment has the current American government persuaded itself or its voters or the rest of the world that it is fighting its enemies under the banner of pluralism. The liberal superpower employs a non-pluralistic ambition to impose the liberal-democratic worldview on the entire world, a dogmatic faith in its rightness, a missionary sense of saving the world, a messianic ambition.

This ideological candor that typifies the non-hypocritical policy of the United States in its struggles against the enemies of liberalism—this direct admission that liberalism is as aggressive as any other ethos that purports to represent truth and justice—is absent from Berlin’s “pluralistic” writings. The philosophical challenge of justifying liberalism arises when the liberal is no longer a victim of despotic regimes complaining about the wrong done to him and persuading himself that his complaint is moral philosophy; it arises when he becomes a member of the ruling camp who bears moral responsibility. Only then does the contradiction between slogans about “pluralism” and the sincere ambition for ideological and political hegemony become clear to a liberal.

We would look in vain for Berlin to tackle the question of a liberal’s responsibility that arises when liberalism rules. Berlin’s consciousness was shaped by the biography of a victim; the Bolsheviks who persecuted well-to-do families like his, and the Nazis who persecuted Jews like him, accustomed him to see the political from the simple and conceptually comfortable viewpoint of being helpless—that is, not responsible. The category that encompasses “totalitarianism” excused Berlin from a discerning discussion of the anti-liberal ideologies in Russia, Germany, Italy, and Spain. Is there no difference between the totalitarian ideology that was influenced by the rationalist utopianism of the Enlightenment (Bolshevism) and the totalitarian ideology that championed the values of the counter-Enlightenment (Fascism)?

According to Berlin, apparently not. We therefore have no way of knowing if the opposite of pluralism, in Berlin’s doctrine, is rationalist universalism or irrationalist chauvinism. There is nothing in common between the enemies of pluralism against whom Berlin spoke, except radicalism. But radicalism is a temperament receptive to any content—not only to a rationalist-utopian “hedgehogish” content. Hitler and Mussolini were not hedgehogs but foxes, if being a fox means being opposed to the rationalist-utopian vision of the Enlightenment. “There are indeed dangers in the hedgehog, but we must not forget that there are dangers in the fox as well,” Ronald Dworkin reminds us. “Moral crimes have been justified by appeal to the opposite idea, that important political values necessarily conflict, that no choice among these can be defended as the only right choice.”⁶⁰

Thus the dichotomies proposed by Berlin—hedgehog/fox, monism/pluralism, positive liberty/negative liberty—are charming in the harmful sense of the word. Their charm is ostensibly the charm of generalities that muddy the conceptual waters. When you free Berlin’s “pluralistic” argument from the spellbinding, rhetorical flow of his essays and

attempt to summarize it, you discover his moral and political pallor. He does not equip us properly for the war we are in, but precisely for this reason it is important to remember him. He reminds us of what the West ignored in the second half of the twentieth century, when it was complacent and fell asleep at its post.

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Notes

1. Isaiah Berlin, *Russian Thinkers*, ed. Henry Hardy and Aileen Kelly (London: Penguin, 1994).
2. Isaiah Berlin, "Empirical Propositions and Hypothetical Statements," *Mind* 59, pp. 289-312; "Logical Translation," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 50 (1949-1950), pp. 157-188; Isaiah Berlin, "Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century," *Foreign Affairs* 28 (1950), pp. 351-385; "Socialism and Socialist Theories," *Chambers's Encyclopedia*, vol. 12 (London: Newnes, 1950), pp. 638-650.
3. Michael Ignatieff, *Isaiah Berlin: A Life* (New York: Henry Holt, 1998), p. 4.
4. Ignatieff, *Isaiah Berlin: A Life*, p. 4.
5. Among Berlin's occasional forays into side issues, it is worth noting his essays "The 'Naïveté' of Verdi," in *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas*, ed. Henry Hardy (Princeton: Princeton, 2001), pp. 287-295; "Artistic Commitment: A Russian Legacy," in *The Sense of Reality: Studies in Ideas and Their History*, ed. Henry Hardy (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997), pp. 194-231, and also the cameo essay that he wrote about Einstein, Churchill, Roosevelt, Weizmann, Ben-Gurion, Aldous Huxley, J.L. Austin, and others, most of which were incorporated in an anthology, *Personal Impressions*, ed. Henry Hardy (London: Hogarth, 1980).
6. Isaiah Berlin, *The Hedgehog and the Fox: An Essay on Tolstoy's View of History* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1993), pp. 3-4. Berlin took the graphic contrast between "foxes" and "hedgehogs," as he himself states in the opening sentence of the essay, from the ancient Greek poet, Archilochus, who wrote: "The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing." See Berlin, *The Hedgehog and the Fox*, p. 3.
7. In fact, there is no need for any more metaphorical animals in order to understand the superficiality of the distinction between "hedgehogs" and "foxes," for there are many types of "hedgehogs" and many types of "foxes"; the differences between "hedgehog" and "hedgehog" and

the differences between “fox” and “fox” are not great and are of less importance than the differences between each “hedgehog” and each “fox.” Steven Lukes, for instance, pointed out that it is possible to divide Berlin’s hedgehog into at least four separate divisions: “positivists,” “universalists,” “rationalists,” and “monists”; Steven Lukes, “An Unfashionable Fox,” in *The Legacy of Isaiah Berlin*, eds. Mark Lilla, Ronald Dworkin, and Robert Silvers (New York: New York Review of Books, 2001), pp. 43-57.

8. Jacob L. Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (London: Sphere Books, 1970). According to Talmon’s introduction, he came up with the idea for the book ten years previously. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Seabury, 1972).

9. Karl R. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (Princeton: Princeton, 1966).

10. Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism* (Princeton: Princeton, 1999), pp. 17-18.

11. Isaiah Berlin, “The Romantic Revolution: A Crisis in the History of Modern Thought,” in *The Sense of Reality*, p. 170.

12. Berlin, “The Romantic Revolution,” p. 171.

13. Berlin, “The Romantic Revolution,” p. 172.

14. Moreover, Antigone in fact depicts a conflict between three absolute values, because the burial of the brother (Polinyces) is mandatory not merely because of the absolute value of family loyalty, but also because of the absolute value of honoring a decree of the gods. We are therefore faced with a double conflict: (a) between the familial duty and the civic duty; and (b) between the religious duty and the civil duty. This double conflict between two opposing values is presented not only in the dramatic confrontation between Antigone and Creon but also in the internal dilemma of each of the two, for both belong to the same family, the same city, and the same religion. In other words, the three conflicting values are perceived as absolute values, each in its own right, in the eyes of both Antigone and Creon.

15. “A grievous ill it is not to consent [to slaughter his daughter Iphigenia],” shouts Aeschylus’s Agamemnon, “and grievous too if I must slay my child, the jewel of my home, defiling at the altar-side a father’s hands in streaming blood from a stricken virgin’s throat! Is either course not full of misery?” “Agamemnon,” *The Plays of Aeschylus*, trans. Walter Headlam and C.E.S. Headlam (London: George Bell and Sons, 1909), p. 160. “Is either course not full of misery?” Morally it is impossible. The absolute values are not compatible.

16. Nathan Spiegel, *The History of Ancient Ethics* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1985), p. 43. [Hebrew]

17. See, for example, the anthology *Tragic Themes in Western Literature*, ed. Cleanth Brooks (New Haven: Yale, 1955), which includes articles on the tragic elements in Shakespeare, Racine, Dostoevsky, Ibsen, George Bernard Shaw, and T.S. Eliot.

18. Berlin, "The Romantic Revolution," p. 175.

19. Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, p. 12.

20. Berlin, "The Romantic Revolution," p. 183.

21. Berlin, "The Romantic Revolution," p. 182.

22. The Chinese and the Indians possess, according to their doctrine, complete and perfect eternal knowledge. Taoist law on the "Five Principles" of nature and on the two opposite and complementary powers—yin and yang—that operate universally, and Confucian law that regulates all familial and social relationships were integrated by the Chinese into a general philosophy that is all-knowing and all-resolving. Shankara, Patanjali, and other Hindu philosophers based the Brahmin rituals in an omniscient metaphysics (at the center of which was the transcendental "Absolute," the Brahmin, of which the entire "relative" world of phenomena is an offshoot) and on an all-resolving meditation that brings anyone who practices it correctly and assiduously to perfect "enlightenment" that is perfect wisdom and perfect happiness. Every aspect of life, even sex, is a subject of technical exercise on the path to perfect accomplishment.

23. Berlin, "The Romantic Revolution," pp. 185-186.

24. Berlin, "The Romantic Revolution," p. 187.

25. Berlin, "The Romantic Revolution," p. 187.

26. Berlin, "The Romantic Revolution," p. 190.

27. Berlin, "The Romantic Revolution," p. 191.

28. Berlin himself noted this, but instead of insisting on the difference between existentialism and Romanticism, he argued that existentialism was no more than the modern continuation of Romanticism, see Berlin, "The Romantic Revolution," p. 190.

29. A few examples from English poetry: Coleridge's poem "Frost at Midnight" (1798), Byron's poem "Darkness" (1816), Shelley's poem "To Night" (1821) and Keats's poems "Sleep and Poetry" (1816), "In Drear-Nighted December" (1817), "Bright Star" (1819), "Why Did I Laugh Tonight?" (1819), and "To Sleep" (1819).

30. Existence is not cosmic intelligence (as claimed by philosophers from Plato to Hegel), but a cosmic ego as claimed by Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *The Vocation of Man*, trans. Roderick Chisholm (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956), or cosmic will as Arthur Schopenhauer contends; see Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E.F.J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1958). In Schopenhauer, this concept of cosmic will took on a monstrous character; a crushing force, irrational and immoral, that can only be submitted to or avoided by spiritual self-castration, as the Buddhists do.

31. Immanuel Kant, “An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?” in *Kant’s Political Writings*, ed. Hans Reiss, trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1991), p. 54.

32. This is why, for the Romanticists, poetry became a paradigm of all literary writing. Fiction had to become poetic, and in the hands of Friedrich Schlegel even philosophy became a form of fragmentary, poetical expression, reflective poetry.

33. The word “sublime” got its terrifying meaning which became central in the Romantic period, from Edmund Burke. See Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful: And Other Pre-revolutionary Writings*, ed. David Womersley (London: Penguin, 1998), and Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987).

34. Avishai Margalit, “The Crooked Timber of Nationalism,” in *The Legacy of Isaiah Berlin*, p. 150.

35. Richard Wollheim, “Berlin and Zionism,” in *The Legacy of Isaiah Berlin*, p. 168.

36. Isaiah Berlin, “The Bent Twig: On the Rise of Nationalism,” in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, ed. Henry Hardy (Princeton: Princeton, 1990), p. 245.

37. Berlin, “The Bent Twig: On the Rise of Nationalism,” p. 254.

38. As Avishai Margalit says: “For Berlin the emotional underpinnings of nationalism are the most important element in nationalism, more important than the set of beliefs that nourishes it.” In other words, for Berlin, nationalism is emotion, not a worldview; see Margalit, “The Crooked Timber,” p. 150.

39. Three thousand years ago—if our reference point is the establishment of David’s kingdom. It is possible to choose an earlier reference point (the period of the judges or even the period of the fathers, if the period of the fathers is not a biblical myth), or a later reference point (the period of Isaiah ben Amotz, or the period of the return to Zion under the leadership of Ezra and Nechemia), and we might well ask, who created whom—the people of Israel the Bible or the Bible the people of Israel. One way or the other, the self-definition of the biblical people of Israel (and Jews down the generations) was and remains a national definition—not tribal, not racial, not political citizenship, not communal, and not religious in the non-national sense of other religions.

40. Esther 3:8.

41. In this context, attention should be paid to the arguments of Anthony D. Smith, who remarked that the Hebrews of the biblical period, together with the Armenians and perhaps even the Japanese and the Koreans of the Middle Ages represented pre-modern “social formations” that closely approximated the standard modern definition of “nation.” See Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism: A Critical Survey of Recent Theories of Nations and Nationalism* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 190.

42. Ethiopia, Egypt, and Canaan sprang from the loins of Ham, according to Genesis 10:6-14.

43. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), pp. 5-6.

44. Ernest Gellner, *Thought and Change* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1964), p. 168.

45. Berlin himself stressed this point in a letter he wrote on January 23, 1959 in response to Ben-Gurion’s question, “Who is a Jew?” “We should make a man to be a Jew, if he were in most respects identified with a Jewish community, despite the fact that his mother may be an unconverted non-Jewess,” wrote Berlin to Ben-Gurion; see *Who is a Jew? An Anthology of Responses of the Sages of Israel* (Tel Aviv: Ben-Gurion House), p. 80. Berlin was one of five Jewish intellectuals to whom Ben-Gurion sent a letter in which he asked them to give their opinion concerning the national status of a man born to a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother (a question that in hindsight acquired the title “Who is a Jew?”), after the resignation from his government of religious ministers in the summer of 1958 in protest over the interior minister’s decision to register those seeking citizenship as “Jews” on the basis of a simple declaration, without requiring them to submit proof, as they had previously been required to do. Berlin’s reply is instructive for our purposes, since it shows that he considered Jewish identity to be dependent on a conscious belonging and not a factual-biological one.

46. Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. N. I. Stone (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1904), pp. 11-12.

47. Of the 13 million Jews alive today, 5.7 million live in the United States, 5 million in Israel, and the remainder (2.3 million) are dispersed in other countries. English is the language of 6.5 million Jews (Americans, Canadians, English, Australians, New Zealanders, and South Africans), which is to say that 50 percent of Jews living today are English speakers, 38.5 percent of them are Hebrew speakers, and the remainder (11.5 percent) speak other languages (the most prominent of these being Russian, French, and Spanish).

48. The Hellenist Empire, the Roman Empire, the Catholic Church, the Carolingian Empire, and the supra-national royal dynasties.

49. The USSR, the Eastern Bloc, the UN, NATO, the EEC, and globalization.
50. Isaiah Berlin, "Nationalism: Past Neglect and Present Power," in *Against the Current*, p. 337.
51. Berlin, "The Bent Twig: On the Rise of Nationalism," p. 243.
52. Berlin, "The Bent Twig: On the Rise of Nationalism," p. 251.
53. As Aileen Kelly points out: "His reaction against the despotic consequences of historical teleologies rooted in Enlightenment thought led him to identify too closely with the Counter-Enlightenment in the form of Vico, Herder, and Hamann; his sympathy for these irregulars having blinded him to irreconcilable differences between their irrationalism and his own liberal pluralism." Aileen Kelly, "A Revolutionary Without Fanaticism," in *The Legacy of Isaiah Berlin*, p. 4. And as Mark Lilla puts it: "The fundamental core of the Counter-Enlightenment actually was its hostility to enlightenment—as such. And therefore it was hostile to the basic moral and political values which Berlin himself defended." Mark Lilla, "Wolves and Lambs," in *The Legacy of Isaiah Berlin*, p. 38. That is to say: Berlin was a liberal, and as such he was the successor of the Enlightenment (which he deprecated), and not the successor of the counter-Enlightenment (which he lauded).
54. Roger Hausheer, Introduction to *Against the Current*, p. xiii.
55. Norman Podhoretz, "A Dissent on Isaiah Berlin," *Commentary* (February 1999), p. 34.
56. Ramin Jahanbegloo, *Conversations with Isaiah Berlin* (London: P. Halban, 1992), p. 45.
57. Jahanbegloo, *Conversations with Isaiah Berlin*, p. 44.
58. Jahanbegloo, *Conversations with Isaiah Berlin*, pp. 142-143.
59. Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," in *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford, 1969), pp. 118-172.
60. Ronald Dworkin, "Do Liberal Values Conflict?" in *The Legacy of Isaiah Berlin*, p. 75.