

A REPLY TO PERRY ANDERSON

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*This reply was written and submitted to the London Review of Books shortly after the appearance in that journal of Perry Anderson's review of Berlin's *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*.¹ The author was required by the editors to shorten it radically for publication, but decided against that course. Apart from a few slight changes of phrase and one or two very minor additions, it appears here as it was originally written.*

In their recent tussle over Isaiah Berlin's *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, Lord Annan and Mr Anderson² seemed at ease with metaphors of the racecourse: in the present reader's mind the imagery stirred by Mr Anderson's review was more meteorological than hippic. For, like some ancient puffing weather-god, Mr Anderson, with much energy and some resource, exhales vast enveloping vapours; they billow and curl into wraiths and spectres; here, we descry an instant the fitful lineaments of an argument; there, some grave and swirling charge seems to be taking uncertain shape; of a sudden, what may be a sociological squall is brewing; now, showers of sharp-edged hailstones are beating down; and occasional stray thunderbolts penetrate the miasma, only to reveal themselves as squibs. And could it possibly be that we glimpse on the remote horizon, far beyond the moody landscape and the restless travail of the clouds, resolved at last, some incandescent vision of utopia, whispering her siren enchantments to us from a post-historical world? At all events, Anderson's intention is plain: to throw a noxious blanket of cloud across a smiling garden – the flowering liberal province of Isaiah Berlin – and to blast and blight it with foul weather. Countering Mr Anderson's vaporous opera-

¹ Perry Anderson, 'The Pluralism of Isaiah Berlin', *London Review of Books*, 20 December 1990, 230–50.

² Noel Annan, 'A Day at the Races' (letter), *ibid.*, 24 January 1991.

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tions, then, is rather like trying to dissipate a fog by flinging hand-grenades into it; but I will try.

First, to the hailstones. These come in varying sizes and shapes, all calculated to sting, but none to leave a permanent impression; most, indeed, vaporise before striking their random targets; others, more solid, survive just long enough for inspection. I offer a sample. We are told that a new kind of intellectual history, evolved at Cambridge by, among others, Quentin Skinner, forms ‘the appropriate background for assessing Berlin’s contribution’; but the reader’s eager expectations are disappointed: neither the background nor the assessment is forthcoming, only vague negative insinuations. Then, we learn that Berlin, unlike Hayek and Popper, has not made a ‘radically original and systematic’ contribution to his chosen field. Here, of course, Mr Anderson is entitled to his personal view, but that is all it is: others are no less persuaded that a powerful case can be made – and will in due course be made in detail – for claiming that Berlin is perhaps the most comprehensively rich and subtle liberal thinker of our time, the systematic coherence and sharp originality of whose statements in political theory and the history of ideas are probably second to none; and moreover, that it is precisely his complex vision which has saved him from that very ‘stridency and imbalance’ for which Anderson strongly reproves the other two liberal thinkers he mentions. But instead of looking for the grounds of Berlin’s differences from his eminent colleagues where they are really to be found, namely in the respective ideas and doctrines of these three thinkers, Anderson characteristically launches into a tortuous sociological ‘explanation’. ‘Differing backgrounds in East and Central Europe’ are darkly invoked; a rag-bag of historico-sociological chaff is feverishly dipped into; but at this point, very evidently, a violent *bourrasque* stirs the sociological sweepings of Mr Anderson’s atelier into the air, reducing visibility to nil: propositional content disappears altogether. Above all, he must lose no opportunity, however unfair, for slighting his prey. In the cause of Zionism, for example, ‘[...] Namier was the more active, but Berlin was no less eloquent.’ So Namier acted while Berlin talked and talked? Perhaps we had best wait to hear what the historians and biographers have to say before leaping to judgement. But that is not Mr Anderson’s way: impulsive conviction is so much more comforting than patient historical method. Still on Zionism, after

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quoting Berlin's statement that 'If the Jews of Russia had not existed, neither the case for, nor the possibility of realising, Zionism could have arisen in any serious form', Anderson tut-tuts absurdly: 'There is some shorthand here: there were Jews in Galicia and the Bukowina, outside Tsarist frontiers, who played a part too – Namier was one of them.' Now if Anderson seriously believes that Zionism could have triumphed without the Jews of Russia – which is all Berlin wishes to deny – then let him say so; otherwise this is a totally irrelevant flourish characteristically designed once again to accuse Berlin of a lapse of which he is guiltless – and, perhaps, like the abortive 'sociological' excursions, to impress us with his own erudition. Then again, in response to an unexceptionable statement made by Berlin in the course of a recent *Observer* interview, to the effect that his ideas are essentially very English, Anderson waxes almost xenophobic. Berlin's philosophy, he thunders patriotically, 'is less reassuringly English than it appears'. (Gad! when you look at it, not even the chap's naturalisation papers are in order! Memo: must get on to his clubs about this.) He never makes clear the grounds of his patriotic anxieties, beyond pointing out the obvious truth that Berlin's intimate experience of his Russian and Jewish backgrounds forms an essential part of his total outlook, a subject Berlin has himself treated very movingly and with great dignity in his speech accepting the Jerusalem Prize; but if anything it is precisely his response to this experience that has impelled Berlin so powerfully to develop and reinforce the central values of classical English liberalism, of which, mysteriously enough, Anderson does not seem to deny that he is one of the foremost living masters. It is all very odd. Matters grow odder still when we hear that 'Berlin has not had all that much to say about the politics or thought of his adopted country. Relieved of major duties at home, his imagination has essentially been drawn elsewhere.' Well, apart from breathing new life into the great liberal tradition of 'his adopted country', defending it against the most sustained and terrifying assaults ever made upon it by the Fascist and Communist tyrannies, developing it with imagination and genius to fit the needs of the twentieth century, and producing on the way in *Four Essays on Liberty* (now incorporated into *Liberty*), a monument which, like Mill's *On Liberty*, will stand for good as a liberal landmark in the history of British political thought – he has done

little indeed. As for his imagination being drawn elsewhere, surely, whatever the ills of Britain from the 1930s to the present – too depressingly familiar and too numerous to be rehearsed here – they pale into insignificance when set beside the evils of the totalitarian structures of left and right, whose nature and origins required urgent investigation and analysis, and which claimed many millions of innocent human victims in Berlin's time, finally threatening to poison and even permanently undermine what Berlin so values about the liberal society of Britain. Finally, Berlin is reprimanded for showing 'a certain indifference' towards 'the juridical framework for the safeguarding of negative liberty'. This might, of course, just conceivably be because juridical frameworks for the safeguard of individual rights can often enough be of far less value – viz. the Soviet Constitution, a superior formal document in this respect to any we have in Britain, and ideologically perhaps rather closer to home for Mr Anderson – than those accumulated cultural and traditional values, probably not fully formulable at all, which are all too easily infected by the bacillae of political dogma so effectively combated by Berlin. One could go on multiplying examples indefinitely; but these icy projectiles, designed to wound, simply melt at first contact with probing fingers. So much, then, for the hailstones.

Then there are the pathetic thunderbolts. These are hurled for the most part at Berlin's supposed method in the history of ideas, and would be damaging indeed if his method bore the remotest resemblance to the grotesque travesty so carefully and so maliciously constructed by Anderson. First, Berlin is supposed to believe 'that the specific arguments of a theorist are less important than their general outlook, and the origins of ideas less interesting than their echoes'. Grammar apart, this invites two comments. Echoing Russell, himself no mean respecter of arguments, Berlin has often said that at the heart of even the most complex philosophical system there is usually a very simple central vision, a general outlook, which it is essential to grasp and which can be stated in simple terms; and that much of the philosopher's elaborate and subtle argument is secondary to this *idée maitresse*, a kind of logical buttressing and fortification of it. But absolutely no cavalier implications for detailed argument follow from this. Indeed, it is as logically absurd to use their common insight to conclude of Berlin that he is not interested in the detailed

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arguments of thinkers as it would be to conclude the same of Russell. Besides, the facts themselves belie the conclusion: few philosophical writers have paid more close and painstaking attention than Berlin to detailed clarification and analysis of, for example, the ideas and arguments of Vico, or treated Herder with more respect as a possible source of illumination for philosophers today; and the same goes in varying degrees for the other thinkers Berlin has studied. And to say of Berlin, a large part of whose work has been dedicated to nothing else but pursuit of the origins of ideas – the unearthing of the remote roots of some of the cardinal notions that determine the modern outlook – that ‘he is more interested in their echoes than in their origins’ is too evidently false to merit attention.

Collateral thunderbolts come hissing down: the major imaginary failing deduced from the above putative defect is, apparently, the risk of ‘selective emphasis’, a risk to which, we are given to understand in passing, not even the scrupulous contemporary Cambridge scholars of Harrington and Locke, so much admired by Anderson, are immune. We must take Mr Anderson’s word for the failings of his Cambridge paragons, but how do matters stand with Berlin? Not one of the supposedly incriminating examples offered by Anderson succeeds in establishing the charge: Berlin is perfectly aware of the chauvinism in *War and Peace* and the mysticism in *Anna Karenina*; the agrarian socialism of Herzen’s *Bell*; and in his essay on Mill he goes out of his way to stress that his interpretation is intended precisely to bring out those elements in Mill, undeniably present, which have the least to do with utilitarianism, but which form perhaps what is most originally ‘modern’ and arresting about him. But even if Berlin had passed over all these things in silence, would he thereby have been guilty of so great a crime? If one writes an essay on one aspect or preoccupation of a thinker – say, Tolstoy’s conception of history – is one thereby bound to write about everything else as well, and pot a full-scale intellectual biography into 30 or 40 pages? Even Berlin’s most fervent admirers accept that there are limits to what can be expected of him; but not so – very flatteringly for Berlin – Mr Anderson.

The absurdity of Anderson’s allegations is even more apparent in the cases of Vico and Herder. The theme of ‘mental identity’ in Vico is mentioned and discussed fully by Berlin; and his essay on

Herder opens with a magisterial statement of the traditional views of Herder, and a virtually exhaustive list of the main themes that historians of ideas have catalogued in his works: he denies the existence of none of these and states quite explicitly that he will concentrate on those three which are undeniably the most startlingly original and which have had a revolutionary impact on subsequent thought and practice: expressivism, pluralism, populism.

But Thor's unsteady aim grows wilder still. For we are even invited to believe that Berlin sees Machiavelli as 'the stepping-stone to a tolerant liberalism' and that 'the only evidence for this claim [...] is the autobiographical illumination Berlin reports [...]'. Well, put baldly like that, Anderson makes it sound as though Berlin saw Machiavelli as a conscious exponent of liberal pluralism. But Berlin's contention is no more (but also no less) than that Machiavelli, quite unwittingly, was among the first – perhaps the very first? – to discover and state the upsetting truth that there were two equally coherent, equally objective and valid ethical systems or codes of conduct, which were utterly incompatible with each other, but to adjudicate between which no overarching criteria could be found. And so far from being guilty of one-sided emphasis, or of adducing no evidence other than subjective conviction, Berlin achieves a coruscating tour de force with his exposé of the twenty-odd interpretations of Machiavelli, to which – tentatively and almost apologetically – he adds his own, leaving it to the reader to judge its merits against the others. Its major merit is, of course, that it achieves effectively what none of the others can: namely, to explain why Machiavelli, whose cruel and unscrupulous doctrines had after all been commonplaces from the Bible and the Greeks down to his own time and beyond, should nevertheless have plagued and haunted the Western mind ever since. But enough of Anderson's sorry squibs.

At four major points, it must be admitted, the gaseous nebulae contract into cloud-forms of sufficient density and coherence to merit a degree of serious scrutiny. In however distorted a form, with no matter what unfair intent, issues of central importance are raised: they are the status and respective claims of negative and positive liberty; the nature and historical emergence of pluralism; the question as to whether absolute values are commensurable at all; and the problem of what safeguards in principle can protect

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pluralism from sliding into relativism. In each of these philosophically dark and difficult regions Mr Anderson lunges about blindly, misrepresenting Berlin almost totally, and doing little better when he touches on Max Weber.

First, then, to liberty. On ‘Two Concepts of Liberty’, the usual snide remarks are made about scant textual reference and rapid juxtapositions of thinkers, as though it were a question of a full-scale book rather than an inaugural lecture; but here Anderson does show a momentary glimmer of insight when he concedes that ‘substantiation of each case might in principle still be possible in some larger compass’. Precisely. Those who have followed up Berlin’s remarks in the case of individual thinkers, say Fichte, have found them to be more than borne out by the evidence. But no less important than this is the fact that, despite Anderson’s attempt to convict Berlin of tacking and trimming – he is falsely represented as denying in his original lecture of 1958 that positive liberty is a valid universal goal, and then, in the altered political climate of 1969, of admitting that it is – Berlin has from the start been absolutely and unswervingly consistent in asserting that positive liberty is an ultimate value universally pursued, like negative liberty, and that it may indeed possibly be older; but that where the need for positive liberty has been more generally recognised and met, the tendency of much modern theory and practice has been to overlook or diminish the claims of negative liberty; and, indeed, to the degree that political thought and action have assimilated all types of liberty to a form of positive liberty, to deny its existence altogether. Hence the need to distinguish negative liberty sharply, just as much from its competing sibling, as from other equally hostile values, such as equality, fraternity and national solidarity. That has been Berlin’s position from start to finish. It is only the dangers latent in positive liberty that Berlin wishes to warn against, and its bloated pathological perversions that he attacks. Thus, when Berlin claims that ‘Chaim Weizmann was the first totally free Jew of the modern world’, there is, *pave* Mr Anderson, nothing even faintly suspect about that, and no sinister ‘higher’ self is involved here. By the time Weizmann became politically active, Jews in many countries enjoyed a measure of negative liberty afforded by the individual rights enshrined in the constitutions of their respective countries; but no matter how far this process of liberation might go, to the degree that they felt

themselves to be *Jews*, and not Englishmen, Frenchmen, Germans or Russians, they were unfree: they possessed neither the soil, nor the State, nor the collective political institutions through which to organise and express themselves as a people; as *Jews*, they were ‘foreigners’ without a country of their own; that minimum of positive self-direction was denied them. Weizmann was the very first to create this, at first in his own immensely powerful but concrete and solid imagination – to the point, indeed, that he was able to create ‘the strange illusion among the statesmen of the world that he was himself a world statesman, representing a government in exile, behind which stood a large, coherent, powerful, articulate community’ – and then, triumphantly, in reality itself, by the creation of the State of Israel. Thereby he conferred upon his fellow Jews the good which he was the very first among them to enjoy in modern times, namely positive liberty; thus rendering to his people a full measure of liberty in both senses of the term. But where on earth in all this is that sinister metaphysical fission of the self into ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ elements which Anderson points to with such evident gloating satisfaction? The robust and healthy fulfilment of the normal universal need of a people for positive self-direction is far removed from the pathological distortions suffered by this ideal in totalitarian systems of the left and the right; evils from which it is impossible to imagine two figures more remote than Weizmann and Berlin. There is absolutely no buckling and bending of concepts here, or in the relevant sections of ‘Two Concepts of Liberty’ alluded to by Anderson, but only a delicacy of moral and intellectual discernment, and an emotional power of empathetic reconstruction of the facts, evidently beyond the coarser categories of Mr Anderson. Again, Anderson claims that the distinction between negative and positive liberty ‘is in the end resolved into the opposition of monism and pluralism’. Resolved? Without residue? True, one of the major arguments in favour of negative liberty as an ultimate end, and not just as a means to some other good, is that values by their nature inevitably conflict in such a way that absolute choices cannot be avoided, and that this requires the liberty we call negative; but while this is true, negative liberty is about a good deal more besides. Nor does positive liberty reduce to monism; extreme voluntarist forms of it are logically possible quite independently of philosophical monism, and have as a matter of

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historical fact existed in the case of some among the more extreme romantic irrationalists and anarchists. From the fact that positive liberty is implicit in the premises of monism, it by no means follows that all forms of positive liberty must be monist. The two are not on terms of mutual entailment.

So we come to pluralism. On the question of its historical emergence, Anderson commits two cardinal errors: one about the historical facts themselves; the other about Berlin's own attitude to them. Surely, Anderson asks, 'the possibility of alternative conceptions of a good life' must have been 'seriously entertained' long before the eighteenth century? But was it? Mr Anderson is clear that it was. Of course, from the earliest times, from the moment they broke out of the cocoon of the tribe, men became aware that there was a vast variety of different codes, creeds, forms of government and social organisation, patterns of life, etc., just as they knew that men spoke many languages, as a matter of simple brute fact; indeed, all this must form one of the oldest commonplaces known to mankind – or at any rate to travellers, exiles, merchants, mercenaries and peripatetic scholars from time immemorial. But the crucial consideration is – and has anyone seriously disputed this? – that it would have occurred to no one in 'Ancient, or Medieval, or Early Modern society' to accord them all equal status and dignity as codes and systems of objective values; rather, they would either all have been regarded as equally erroneous as measured against one single eternal set of objective standards – usually my own and those of my society or group; or else, at best, as more or less imperfect approximations to some timeless ideal pattern yet to be achieved, as with the French *philosophes*; or else, at worst, as so many fallings away from some remote Golden Age, some irrecoverable Eden for which men are filled with hopeless yearning.

His second error on this subject consists in saying that 'Berlin's accounts of pluralism involve a stark before and after'. This is far from being true. Berlin's historical dividing-line between monism and pluralism, says Anderson, 'falls roughly between Machiavelli and Fichte'. He then proceeds to make it sound as though Berlin claimed that everyone before this was a monist, and that after it pluralism prevailed. But Berlin's account is vastly more complex and full of nuance than that. Not to mention the marginal sceptical currents that he points to in antiquity, Berlin sees early glimmer-

ings of pluralism in the works of sixteenth-century French jurists such as Hotman; and it is the growing awareness of pluralism, at first dim and sporadic, then increasingly conscious and sophisticated, reaching heights of agonised self-awareness in Dilthey, Troeltsch, Meinecke and Max Weber, that Berlin has tried to describe with great learning, originality and skill, and above all with such an acute sense of fine distinctions. Nor does Berlin speak as though pluralism had triumphed. While I think that he does probably believe that pluralism (and related currents such as historicism) represents what is most distinctively ‘modern’ about our times, he is often careful to point out that much – if not the greater part – of contemporary thought and action rests upon the central pillars of the Western intellectual tradition, which may have been shaken by the currents of ideas he describes, but have by no means broken down. The quasi-scientistic, universalist assumptions upon which great multi-national companies like, say, ICI or General Motors operate – ‘the Wall Street Journal school of deterministic materialism’ of Fukuyama – or the ever-growing power of purported ‘specialists’ in every sphere of life, or the steady proliferation of quantitative techniques in government and administration, are some of the developments which bear this out and make defence of those values Berlin cherishes so terribly relevant. The radical and widespread revolt against the central tradition of Western thought, of which so much of modern liberal culture forms an important part, is very far from having achieved final victory. Mr Anderson’s own rationalistic hankering after the ‘incandescent’ utopian vision of Kant’s essay ‘Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht’, which advocates a universalist historical teleology, is one, admittedly rather minor, illustration of this truth.

The third major area of interest concerns the commensurability of values. Here Anderson commits a cardinal error with his claim that where Max Weber was insistent on the absolute incompatibility of some values with one another, with a consequent war to the death between them, ‘this Nietzschean note is wholly missing in Berlin’. Apart from the just observation that the overwrought and at times hysterical tones struck by Nietzsche are foreign to Berlin, so far, indeed, is this from being true, that it can probably be claimed that Berlin has discerned an even greater number of such types of absolute conflict, and formulated them in

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his writings with greater sharpness, than did Weber. Nor, incidentally, if Anderson practised that scrupulous scrutiny of texts he so impertinently urges on Berlin, would he find that Weber is any the less aware than Berlin of the possible (and indeed unavoidable) pragmatic combination of warring values within one and the same individual. Immediately following one of the most famous passages where Weber speaks of the unsettleable war to the death between values, a battle in which compromise is no more conceivable than it is between God and the Devil, he emphatically adds, 'But take careful note: conceptually not' – '[...] dem Sinn nach nicht' – i.e. logically not, as a matter of definition. For, he continues, as a matter of common everyday fact we do encounter at every turn such combinations of the uncombinable, since every man's life is a complex pattern of criss-crossing, mutually limiting, lethally hostile (*todfeindliche*) values, a 'mixture partly psychologically and partly pragmatically determined'. And he then goes on to derive from all this the insight, strongly reminiscent of some aspects of existentialism, and perhaps not too far removed from Berlin's own view, that the life of the self-consciously deliberative human being is constituted by a string of such ultimate choices whereby he, and he alone, decides the kind of person he will be – *è sacra la scelta*. So, on the grounds adduced by Anderson, there is just as much (or just as little) 'sting' in Berlin's pluralism as in Weber's: and it remains a matter for detailed comparison of the two thinkers' views on the subject to decide which is the more radical.

It is impossible to over-stress Berlin's belief in the logical incompatibility of values and their incommensurability in principle; and its corollary, namely that no possible arrangement of an individual life or of a society or of a civilisation could accommodate them all to their full extent; since this is one of the issues on which Anderson seems most seriously confused. He quotes Berlin's admiration for the manner in which Roosevelt and his administration succeeded in establishing a precarious pragmatic 'mix' of ultimate values in one and the same society, and then exclaims triumphantly that 'the major goods are commensurable after all: how else can claims between them be weighed?' And then goes on to assert that for Berlin, whether he likes it or not, such arbitration must be achieved by utilitarian calculation. But the words 'weighed' or 'measured', used in this context in any but a

metaphorical sense, implying as they do that entities so treated are reducible to one single unit of calculation, are highly misleading. For when, for example, the individual – to begin with the least complex case – is making ultimate choices for himself alone, involving uneasy combinations of conflicting values, and is spoken of as pondering and weighing these values and these decisions, there is no question of his applying a common scale of measurement to them, for the ‘super-value’ thereby implied, into which they could all ultimately be cashed, is just what is unavailable in principle: each value is looked at and appreciated – ‘intuited’ or ‘felt’ – for what it is, each possible decision or set of decisions embodying varying degrees of warring values is considered for what it is, by a species of direct contemplation or reflection, and passed in review; lived through in the imagination; churned and mulled over certainly; agonised over perhaps; but in the last analysis chosen just so, because that in the end is how the agent sees himself, how he freely and consciously wishes to be, what he wants in the society and circumstances of his day, something for which he must assume full responsibility, and for which nothing outside himself and his free acts of choice can be made accountable; and indeed, his dignity as a human agent consists precisely in such exercise of his capacity for free choice. And what is true of the individual agent applies by extension, with whatever increase of complexity, to groups of individuals and whole societies too. It is this which makes Anderson’s observations on Berlin’s view of Roosevelt’s New Deal so very wide of the mark. So very far from offering a rebuttal of Berlin’s central thesis, the example of the New Deal emphatically bears it out: Roosevelt and his adjutants were not experts in ethics and specialists in politics conducting their operations by some species of quasi-scientific calculation against a background of hidebound dogma, but were sensitive, intelligent, responsive, well-informed and imaginative men making the correct use of a universal moral faculty and a judicious application of common sense and practical judgement; constantly aware of what was possible and needed and of what was not possible or needed in the society of their day; and, above all, guided by a due sense of just the kind so admired by Berlin, namely that they must make absolute sacrifices and ‘trade-offs’ at every turn – sacrifices, because none of the values they believed in could enjoy full realisation in conjunction with the

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others; absolute ones, because, when all the relevant factors had been duly considered, they were based on not further analysable choices between incommensurable goods. This is a very far cry from the neat and tidy calculations of the utilitarians, which at any rate in principle can be carried out by experts using slide-rules to produce the sole correct solutions, with the consequence that, since there can be no appeal against demonstratively true answers, rational actors are left no scope for any sense of loss or regret.

Supposing himself to have disposed of Berlin's radical pluralism within individuals and societies by the device of a spurious utilitarianism, Anderson now seeks in the fourth area of interest, relativism, to undermine pluralism as it obtains between societies. Anderson points to two ways in which Berlin seeks to protect pluralism – i.e. the belief in the existence of a multiplicity of genuine, objective, conflicting values – against collapsing into subjectivist relativism and nihilism – i.e. the belief that in principle value judgements lack objective correlates and that there are therefore no limitations to subjective choice. First, he quotes Berlin as saying that no matter how diverse or incompatible cultures and the values they embody may be, 'their variety cannot be unlimited, for the nature of men, however various and subject to change, must possess some generic nature if it is to be called human at all'; and that the crucial touchstone of being morally (as opposed to physiologically) human is the capacity in principle of creatures that call themselves such to enter into and understand one another in terms of ultimate purposes: 'a minimum of common moral ground is intrinsic to human communication'. Now Anderson, so far from meeting this thesis head on and doing justice to it, thinks that he can dispose of it with the simple remark that 'the Allies and the Axis had no difficulty following each other's communiqués'. But this states a trivial truth, only to overlook the essential point. As references to the events and furniture of a common physical world inhabited by both, and as signals of dispositions made (or to be made) regarding these, of course there is a sense in which the terms of the Axis' communiqués might be correctly construed by the Allies; but there is a more fundamental sense in which I, the Allied statesman or commander, cannot be said to understand even these, at any rate truly and exhaustively, for it is a logical truth that means are indissolubly bound up with ends, which in this case – since they are the goals

of men of diminished and, indeed, in relevant respects non-existent, humanity – must remain, *ex hypothesi*, permanently and unyieldingly opaque to me. And means to totally impenetrable ends cannot be identified as means at all: they are explicable as a set of causal mechanisms, perhaps, but not intelligible from within in terms of truly human purposes, no matter how different from – or even hostile to – my own these may be. So communication in the sense required by Berlin’s thesis – i.e. human communication – breaks down indeed. Nothing Anderson says here invalidates Berlin’s fundamental criterion of humanity or, derivatively, of what can and what cannot count as genuine objective values.

Berlin’s second line of defence consists, Anderson says, in considering this universal generic core to be a version of natural law in modern empiricist dress, exemplified as it is over vast stretches of time and place but evinced most fully and effectively in the world of European culture. But, Anderson then complains, this notion ‘shrinks with every step back to the local’. How could he possibly have come to believe this? It seems perfectly clear from all the relevant passages that Berlin means the word ‘universal’ quite literally. The essential human nature he speaks of may indeed have attained to a degree of articulate self-awareness earliest and most fully in the countries of the West, but the implication surely is that it is there, and has always been there, even if in an as yet comparatively latent form, in every people. Hence, to quote, as Anderson does, the words, ‘I say “our” conduct; I mean by this the habits and outlook of the Western world’, without also quoting the very next sentences, ‘Asia and Africa are today boiling cauldrons of disruptive nationalism, as Germany and perhaps France still were after Britain and Holland and Scandinavia had attained relative equilibrium. Humanity does not seem to march with an equal step, the crises of national development are not synchronised’, is to be deliberately unfair. If modern European history, and particularly the holocausts of the twentieth century, have revealed to people living in the West more vividly and more explicitly than elsewhere that there are certain universal values constitutive of human beings as such, may we not hope (and even expect) that the analogous catastrophes and calamities, present and future, of other civilisations and peoples may likewise be not wholly negative, but a kind of collective learning process? After all, the history of ideas as Berlin

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understands and practises it suggests precisely this. Pluralism, with its belief in a vast variety of conflicting objective values and systems of value, and its related sense of an absolutely indispensable universal human core, may be the treasure for which we have had to pay the price of some of the wilder, more irrational, more violent and insane currents of modern experience. This interpretation, indeed, is virtually invited by the essay 'European Unity and Its Vicissitudes', where a kind of balance-sheet of Romanticism is drawn up, that vast transforming experience embracing the entire civilisation of the West through many generations, in the wake of which we may, possibly, at last be slowly settling down: 'But nothing ever goes back completely to its starting-point; the progress of humanity appears to be not cyclical, but a painful spiral, and even nations learn from experience.'

But let it be noted: none of this is the same as the 'evolutionary theories of cultural progress towards common standards' by which Anderson claims – falsely – that Hayek and Popper 'could square the facts of historical variety with the needs of moral unity'. 'This kind of route', Anderson goes on to say, 'Berlin has always declined.' Not only does Berlin not attempt this path; the whole thrust of all he has written has been to make as plain as can be that such a solution is impossible in principle. From no conceivable vantage-point, present, past or future, human, angelic or divine – not even that of Hayek, Popper or Mr Anderson – can all true objective values coexist simultaneously in a final harmonious pattern: that is the central message. But note once again: while Anderson makes it sound as though Berlin dogmatically denied that mankind is evolving a universal civilisation with common ethical standards, nothing Berlin has said, so far as I know, could justify that assumption. Humanity may or may not be advancing down the highway to a universal civilisation – common ethical standards, a world State, a universal language, even a common hybrid physical human type – all this may one day come about. No doubt a degree of scepticism is imposed upon us by the facts: for the moment things don't look too promising from the point of view of those for whom this is a consummation devoutly to be wished, what with militant Islam, a severe dose of nationalism in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Republics, Africa, Asia and – who knows? – despite what Berlin seems to suggest, sooner or later perhaps once again in Western Europe too. But who dares say

what the remoter future will hold? All these are contingent questions, and on these Berlin remains, though sceptical, essentially agnostic. But what Berlin does say, and that very crucially, is that there is absolutely no a priori reason for supposing that such an evolutionary process is taking place, and so far at least precious little empirical evidence either; that those dedicated and at times fanatical ideologues and political prophets who have sought to propel men towards goals they cannot see, for which there is no demonstrable proof and no historical – or any other empirical – evidence, ends which may not even exist outside the disordered imaginations of their authors, have more often than not been guilty of error in theory and indescribable suffering in practice; that, given a correct analysis of the nature of human values, the a priori impossibility of a utopia that realised them all becomes apparent, with a consequent awareness of the theoretical and practical necessity that men should resist the spurious exhortations of ideological zealots and political masters to simplify, unify and falsify them; and, finally, that if ever such a universal civilisation did one day emerge, then it might indeed achieve peace, harmony and unity, homogeneity and uniformity, but at the inconceivable price of denying and suppressing the almost endless variety and number of objectively valid ends and values upon which men can build their lives individually and collectively, and upon which they have in fact done so in historically recorded nations, cultures, civilisations. Humans would literally cease to be humans as we have known them, do know them, and cannot but know them – as absolute choosers between incompatible ends.

Before we take final leave of Mr Anderson, as he staggers on through what by now must be a blizzard, obedient to the ‘incandescent’ inner vision of a future utopian world order distilled from the rather dry pages of Kant’s treatise – a delusory expedition he upbraids Berlin for failing to join – let us ask ourselves how in the first place he came at so many points to grasp with such vigour what is so glaringly the wrong end of the stick. Here, I wish I could be as confident as Lord Annan about the degree of good faith with which Anderson holds the views on Berlin which he perpetrates in his review. For I suspect that they are deeply anchored less in a full, fair and dispassionate examination of the writings of his quarry than in an ancient personal animus against Berlin himself for what, in the article alluded to by Annan,

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Anderson sees as having been Berlin's role as one of the principal birth-stranglers of Marxism in Britain. But however that may be, the genesis of Anderson's false and distorted views is of far less relevance than their exposure and extirpation. Finally, I doubt whether anything I have said will make the faintest impression on Mr Anderson or cause him to rectify his views: banking on the weather is more hazardous than backing horses, and certainly less fun.

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