The Limits of Diversity:
The New Counter-Enlightenment and Isaiah Berlin’s Liberal Pluralism

Eric Mack

I. Introduction

My purpose in this essay is to examine critically the limits and dangers of the ideology of diversity which has played so prominent a role in recent debates about the character and future of education in American universities. However, my method is to proceed indirectly. In particular, I shall proceed by investigating the structure and development of the thought of the great historian of political ideas, Isaiah Berlin. My contention is that to a large measure the structure and development of Berlin’s thought can be understood as an attempt by Berlin to articulate a conception of moral and cultural diversity and to address conscientiously the pitfalls of diversity—pitfalls which he himself discovers in the course of his articulation. More specifically, Berlin begins with a conception of moral and cultural diversity which is very much akin to the conception at the core of today’s friends of diversity and multiculturalism. This is a conception which, according to both Berlin and today’s friends of diversity, radically challenges central tenets of Western thought. At least in its unalloyed form, this doctrine of diversity rejects belief in universal epistemological and moral norms; it rejects belief in objectivity about facts and about values; it rejects the possibility of genuinely rational dialogue among representatives of diverse forms of life; it insists upon the fundamental incommensurability of different cultures, different ways of thought, feeling, and evaluation.
However, Berlin is very much aware of the profound limits and dangers of diversity. His awareness grows out of his understanding of the historical impulses which gave rise to earlier efforts to advocate diversity and of the historical consequences of those efforts; and it is informed by his understanding of the logical implications of unalloyed forms of the doctrine of diversity. It is vitally important that we recognize these shortcomings and perils. In this essay, the route to that recognition largely consists in an examination of central themes within Berlin's historical and philosophical studies. Through this examination, I shall summon a great champion of diversity to bear witness against the current ideology of diversity and multiculturalism.

Berlin's testimony goes beyond a rejection of unalloyed diversity. We shall see how Berlin's awareness of the limits and dangers of the ideology of diversity leads him to reintroduce and reemphasize crucial elements from within the Western intellectual and moral tradition. Among these elements are: objectivism about both factual and moral matters; the search for an underlying human nature as the foundation for universal (or near-universal) practical norms; and the attempt to identify a sphere of freedom for each individual into which neither other individuals nor the state may intrude. What concerns me in this essay is not the ultimate success of Berlin's positive case for objective values and human liberty, but rather Berlin's reasons for distancing himself from unalloyed diversity and the extent to which, to achieve this distance, he must return to the mainstream of the "dominant Western tradition." Berlin continues to believe, with good reason, that an appreciation of cultural and moral diversity is essential for a liberal and tolerant social order. Nevertheless, the primary lesson to be gleaned from Berlin's studies is that the sort of celebration of separatist and disintegrating diversity and multiculturalism which is common among today's friends of diversity, radically underrates liberalism and tolerance. These supreme social values must be defended—if they are to be defended at all—as elements or implications of the core Western intellectual tradition.

The structure of my indirect investigation of the limits of diversity is complex. For this reason, it may be helpful at the outset to indicate the themes of the various sections of this essay and certain of the interconnections among those themes. In Section II, "Diversity and Berlin's Rejection of Monism," I present Berlin as an advocate of diversity by describing his celebration of the rejection of the "monism" which he takes to be at the core of the dominant Western tradition. According to Berlin, this monism reached its apogee during the eighteenth-century French Enlightenment. For this reason, Berlin labels the historic reaction against monism, which occurred during the eighteenth and early

nineteenth centuries, the "Counter-Enlightenment." In Section III, "The New Counter-Enlightenment and the University," I highlight the parallels between the historical Counter-Enlightenment and what I shall call the "New Counter-Enlightenment" embodied in current multiculturalist doctrine. In addition, I sketch the multiculturalist program for restructuring the university.

In Section IV, "The Political Dangers of Diversity," I recount Berlin's recognition of the authoritarian and aggressively nationalistic (or tribalist) implications of the unalloyed revolt against monism's core commitments to universality, rationality, and objectivity. Given the parallels between the Old and the New Counter-Enlightenments, similar implications also issue from the current ideology of diversity. In the absence of common methodological norms and of a perception of objective constraints on the permissible treatment of individuals and societies, nothing remains but for the world to be ruled by faith and force. Just as the ideology of the Old Counter-Enlightenment was incapable of providing general norms in support of tolerance and peace among diverse nations and nationalities, so the New Counter-Enlightenment is bound to prove incapable of promoting tolerance and peaceful coexistence among the various racial, ethnic, and gender groups that make up the modern university.

In Section V, "Wounded Pride and the Retreat from Common Norms," I reinforce the parallels between the Old and New Counter-Enlightenments by showing how Berlin's account of the psychological impulses which drove the Old Counter-Enlightenment (and which drive contemporary irrationalist nationalism and tribalism) applies with equal plausibility to the New Counter-Enlightenment. In Section VI, "The Need for Common Norms," I provide a sketch of the sort of common norms without which the liberal society and the liberal university cannot survive. This vindicates Berlin's perception that a liberal pluralism, a liberal rejection of monism, must find a way to align itself with elements of the "dominant" Western tradition.

In Section VII, "Beyond Diversity: Objective Value Pluralism," I describe Berlin's arguments against normative relativism—the primary moral danger of unalloyed diversity—and on behalf of the objectivity of the incommensurable values which individuals and cultures discover. In Section VIII, "Beyond Diversity: Human Nature and Liberty," I provide a speculative sketch of Berlin's argument from objective pluralism, through a conception of our nature as beings who must choose among incommensurable objective values, to an endorsement of liberty and tolerance. In these two "Beyond Diversity" sections, my purpose is not to provide a definitive analysis of Berlin's positive argument. Rather, it
is to document the extent to which Berlin's recognition of the pitfalls of diversity and the need for common norms brings this opponent of monism back to the perennial project of Western political thought, the grounding of common norms on a conception of human nature. Finally, in Section IX, I summarize and conclude.

II. Diversity and Berlin's Rejection of Monism

Of all the terms which have been employed by those who demand the transformation of the university and of society at large from their currently oppressive forms to "liberated," "postmodern," "inclusive," "multicultural" forms, none has been employed more frequently or more thoughtlessly than the term "diversity." In light of this constant appeal to diversity, it is remarkable that advocates of radical multiculturalism have totally ignored or are simply ignorant of one of the greatest intellectual champions of diversity of our century, Isaiah Berlin. It is Berlin who declares that at the core of "the central tradition of western thought" is "the notion that One is good, Many—diversity—is bad. . . ." Berlin's insistence that the central error of Western thought has been to embrace the One and disdain the Many (i.e., disdain "diversity") is a theme which has been present from his earliest studies of political thought. And Berlin has devoted many of his essays to powerfully sympathetic accounts of thinkers, from Niccolò Machiavelli, to Giambattista Vico, Johann Georg Hamann, and Johann Gottfried Herder, to Alexander Herzen and Georges Sorel, who challenged and rejected this dominant tradition. According to Berlin, the dominant, Western, monist tradition has adhered to the notion of timeless objective truths, eternal models, by following which alone man attains to happiness or virtue or justice or any proper fulfillment of their natures . . . [This] dominant philosophia perennis consists in the belief in the generality, uniformity, universality, timeless validity of objective and eternal laws and rules that apply everywhere, at all times, to all men and things. . . .

Against the Enlightenment vision of "a single, scientifically organized world system governed by reason," Berlin offers with approval the vision of the Counter-Enlightenment, namely, a new view of men and society, which stressed . . . the charm and value of diversity, uniqueness, individuality, a view which conceived of the world as a garden where each tree, each flower, grows in its own peculiar fashion and incorporates those aspirations which circumstances and its own individual nature have generated, and is not, therefore, to be judged by the patterns and goals of other organisms.

This new view of men and society—first developed in reaction to the French Enlightenment and to French political and cultural hegemony over central and eastern Europe in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries—celebrates the diversity of incommensurable cultures, each making its own peculiar contribution to human civilisation, each pursuing its own values in its own way, not to be submerged in some general cosmopolitan ocean which robs all native cultures of their particular substance and colour.

Presenting and drawing out the implications of the views of Herder, Berlin writes:

If each culture expresses its own vision and is entitled to do so, and if the goals and values of different societies and ways of life are not commensurable, then it follows that there is no single set of principles, no universal truth for all men and times and places. . . . If authenticity and variety are not to be sacrificed to authority, organisation, centralisation . . . then the establishment of one world, organised on universally accepted rational principles—the ideal society—is not acceptable.

The subversion of monistic rationalism, as it was epitomized by the French Enlightenment and its cosmopolitan delusions and imperialist ambitions, validates the will to live one's own regional, local life, to develop one's own eigentümlich [characteristic] values, to sing one's own songs, to be governed by one's own laws in one's own home, not to be assimilated to a form of life that belongs to all and therefore to no one.

Moreover, according to Berlin, we owe our current ideals of tolerance and of liberty precisely to this relatively recent denial of monism. Among the "elements in [the] great mutation in western thought and feeling that took place in the eighteenth century" are "[t]he notion of toleration . . . as an intrinsic value" and "the concepts of liberty and human rights as they are discussed today." J. S. Mill was shocked when Auguste Comte infamously suggested that freedom of opinion was no more sacrosanct in morals and politics than in mathematics—and that, since it was not sacrosanct in the latter, it was not sacrosanct in the former either. According to Berlin, within this vignette, the authoritarian Comte represents "the central tradition of western thought," while
the libertarian Mill is part of a "deep and radical revolt" against this tradition.  

Let us pause for a moment to note how extraordinary this last claim is and how it reflects the recurring and fundamental flaw within Berlin's own, immensely learned, historical vision. Berlin's conception of the dominant Western tradition is of a rigid chain of monistic, confining rationalism which is anchored at one end by Plato and his philosophers and guards, and at the other end by Henri de Saint-Simon (of whom Comte was a disciple) and his Council of Newton and industriels.  

Berlin always assumes and perceives an ineluctable association between: (1) the belief that humanity is capable of rationally comprehending the universe, especially the social universe; and (2) the belief that, through this comprehension, humanity is capable of systematically constructing and reconstructing the social universe and is called upon by Reason, or Justice, or History to engage in this construction and reconstruction. In short, for Berlin, rationalism inevitably amounts to what F. A. Hayek calls "constructivist rationalism," that is, the conviction that reason reveals to society or to society's experts an authoritative goal toward which all members of society should be consciously directed, and for the sake of which all social relations and institutions should be constructed or reconstructed.  

In parallel fashion, for Berlin, the Enlightenment is always the French Enlightenment, never the predominantly nonconstructivist English or Scottish Enlightenements—branches of the Enlightenment which showed little or no propensity to conceive of individuals as malleable building-blocks to be rearranged by social engineers to best promote society's purportedly cohesive purposes. Thus, Locke's Letter on Toleration, a masterful defense of toleration, liberty, and individual rights—which preceded Mill's comparable, but more vacillating On Liberty by about 160 years and which could hardly have drawn upon the "deep and radical revolt" which Berlin ascribes to Vico, Hamann, and Herder—is, to my knowledge, never mentioned by Berlin. Hume, the centerpiece of the Scottish Enlightenment and an enemy of constructivist rationalism if ever there was one, primarily appears in Berlin's writings as a philosophical skeptic whose work was appropriated and interpreted to suit the eighteenth-century anti-rationalistic, Germanic pietism of Hamann. Nor does Adam Smith's systematic attack on the constructivist model play any role in Berlin's representation of the Enlightenment. It is Berlin's special reading of both rationalism and the Enlightenment which allows him to operate, as he often does, with the simple and ultimately misleading dichotomy of universalist-imperialist-anti-

pluralist-anti-individualist-intolerant rationalism versus particularist-egalitarian-pluralist-individualist-tolerant voluntarism.  

Berlin, then, has presented the central Western tradition as an extravagant and exaggerated rationalism which imposes, either directly or through the oppressive institutions it promotes, universal, eternal, and authoritative standards for thought and action—standards which take no account of (except to condemn and seek the destruction of) particular circumstances, purposes, and individualities. And this, of course, corresponds to the current representation of the central Western tradition—as a male, Eurocentric vision—by today's friends of diversity. No formulation could better capture the current disparaging characterizations of "masculinist" and "logocentric" thinking than Berlin's description of the philosophia perennis as "the belief in the generality, uniformity, universality, timeless validity of objective and eternal laws and rules." Moreover, the product of the "deep and radical revolt" against this inflexible and despotic world-view—the celebration of "the will to live one's own regional, local life, to develop one's own eigentümlich [characteristic] values, to sing one's own songs, to be governed by one's own laws in one's own home"—corresponds to the positive vision offered today in the name of multiculturalism.

III. The New Counter-Enlightenment and the University

All one need do to arrive at the core contentions of contemporary multiculturalism is substitute for the collective regional or national experiences depicted by Vico and Herder the communal forms of life and thought associated with racial, ethnic, or gender-defined subcultures or forms of life—subcultures which share, or (more and more frequently) struggle over, a common territory. Add to this anti-universalist and communalist multiculturalism, the conviction (also advanced by Berlin in his commendation of the anti-monist revolt) that universalist objectivism opposes, while particularist relativism befriends, tolerance and liberty, and one arrives at the self-understanding of today's advocate of diversity. For this reason, no one at all familiar with current controversies about the nature and mission of the liberal order and the liberal university can fail to see powerful intellectual support for the cause of diversity in Berlin's championing of these anti-monist themes of the Counter-Enlightenment. Let us pause here for a more extensive account of the current ideology of diversity as it is advocated on university campuses today, and
for an account of its implications for the values and structure of the university. The current ideology of diversity substitutes more parochially defined groups for Vico’s cultures and Herder’s nations. Each racially, ethnically, and sexually defined group has, if not through genetic determination, at least through powerful and pervasive cultural reproduction, its own form of life, its own ways of perceiving, thinking, and feeling, its own ways of choosing and valuing. There are feminist and masculinist ways of thinking and valuing. There are black, white, Hispanic, Native American, Indian, and East Asian ways of thinking and valuing. There are heterosexual and homosexual ways of thinking and valuing. Indeed, a thorough sensitivity to diversity would reveal more fine-tuned permutations—for example, white-male-homosexual forms of cognition and feeling versus East-Asian-feminist-heterosexual forms of cognition and feeling. The cluster of perceptions, conceptions, and norms of each biologically defined tribe—with one notable exception—are internally self-validating, incommensurable with other worldviews, and impervious to external criticism and refutation. The one exception is the Eurocentric world-view, that is, the Weltanschauung of the white male heterosexual. This mode of thought and evaluation invalidates itself in virtue of its pretension to universal validity—its insistence that its epistemic and pragmatic norms provide the ultimate, unchanging standards by which all world-views are to be judged, and by which all fundamental alternatives to it are found wanting.

A university which properly recognized diversity would make room for and welcome each diverse world-view or, at least, each world-view significantly present within the multicultural society which it serves. Since each world-view is fundamentally tied to a group which is identified in terms of gender, race, sexual orientation, or national origin, intellectual or cultural diversity within the university depends upon full representation within the student body and, especially, within the faculty, of each significant gender, race, sexual-orientation, or national-origin caucus. Each non-Eurocentric world-view and each of their respective witnesses is under constant, imperialist assault by the Eurocentric world-view and by the universalist standards by which it has maintained its hegemony. Thus, the first task of the bearers of each non-Eurocentric vision is to reveal the oppressive nature of uniformistic Eurocentrism, to deconstruct its anthems and rob them of their power to paralyze deviance from masculinist and logocentric thought. This requires that the increased representation of non-Eurocentric world-views take the form of special courses or, better yet, new and independent programs devoted to the consciousness-raising study of how the Eurocentric vision and the despotic institutions it has spawned have oppressed and exploited women, blacks, Hispanics, East Asians, gays, and so on. Among the crucial tasks of these programs in oppression studies is the critique or, at least, the denunciation of the traditional Eurocentric academic standards in terms of which the qualifications of the consciousness raisers, and/or the quality of their scholarship, might be challenged. Since each world-view is a world unto itself, with its own indigenous meanings and standards, neither it nor its representatives should be subject to external judgment on the illusory basis of measures that transcend particular tribal visions.

Thus, the university which duly recognizes diversity will move in the direction of cultural and biological apartheid—albeit not under that too straightforward description. Each biologically identified community will have its own reservation, its own fief within which it will sing its own songs of resentment and anxious self-glorification. There will, of course, be no room for biological/cultural traitors—for blacks who do not think like blacks, for women who do not think like women, and so on. There will, presumably, be room for a white male reserve, albeit a chastised and self-criticizing one—that is, for white males who somehow do not think like white males. Across these separate-but-equal domains there will be no common questions, no common controversies, no common projects. There will be no common discourse because it will be recognized that there are no common standards of evidence, of relevancy, of demonstration, or even of civility. The historically ensconced norms of rational discourse will be recognized simply as instruments of racial and sexual hegemony.

IV. The Political Dangers of Diversity

With both Berlin’s endorsement of the revolt against monism and the contemporary vision of diversity before us, we must ask why Berlin has not been inducted into the pantheon of divinities of diversity. Why has he not been enshrined along with such giants as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Paul de Man? Very probably the correct answer is that Berlin simply is not known to the friends of diversity or is known to them only as a defender of liberal individualism and even of the coldly capitalistic idea of “negative liberty.” However, there are far more profound reasons why Berlin could never qualify as an official hero of diversity. These reasons have to do with the genuinely critical character of Berlin’s investigation of the revolt against monism and with Berlin’s own commitment to measure ideological movements in terms of their
capacity to sustain rational dialogue and tolerant coexistence among diverse individuals and cultures.

In accordance with this critical approach, Berlin has been concerned to investigate the profound dangers which arise from the rejection of the dominant Western tradition as exemplified in the Enlightenment. In this section, I want to describe briefly Berlin's recognition of the Counter-Enlightenment's capacity to give rise to authoritarianism and aggressive nationalism.

To begin with, Berlin is well aware of features of the Counter-Enlightenment that have "strongly conservative and, indeed, reactionary implications."\(^{22}\)\(^{22}\) In its systematic rejection of faith and revelation and in its moral secularism, "[w]hat the entire Enlightenment has in common is denial of the central Christian doctrine of original sin. . . ." For this reason, "the sharpest single weapon in the root-and-branch attack on the entire Enlightenment by the French counter-revolutionary writers" was the reassertion of original sin. This weapon was most boldly employed in the decades following the French Revolution by the diplomat Joseph de Maistre. De Maistre rejected the liberal bourgeois conception of man "as naturally disposed to benevolence, cooperation and peace, or, at any rate, capable of being shaped in this direction by appropriate education or legislation. . . ."\(^{23}\)\(^{23}\) Rather, with postmodern clairvoyance, de Maistre perceived that men are by nature evil, self-destructive animals, full of conflicting drives, who do not know what they want, want what they do not want, do not want what they want, and it is only when they are kept under constant control and rigorous discipline by some authoritarian elite . . . that they can hope to survive and be saved. Reasoning, analysis, criticism shake the foundations and destroy the fabric of society.\(^{24}\)\(^{24}\)

Suppose, as de Maistre did, that we have only two alternatives. One is conscientious analysis and criticism which deconstructs the social order and its myths, which lays bare the insubstantiality and inconsistency of our being and sets us forever wandering through meaningless terrain. The other is bad-faith, yet life-preserving, acceptance of established norms and of established authority which is brutal and frightening enough to suppress corrosive criticism. If those are our choices, must not anyone not at war with life itself turn to the latter? Thus, de Maistre's reactionary authoritarianism is a logical consequence of a process which begins with the Counter-Enlightenment attack on reason and criticism in accord with universal norms.

As virulent and more dangerously seductive than reactionary authoritarianism is the modern populist nationalism which, according to Berlin, issues directly from the rejection of the Enlightenment—a nationalism which emerges as an attempt to protect meaning and coherence against their purported subversion by universalism and cosmopolitanism.\(^{25}\)\(^{25}\) It is the Counter-Enlightenment's contention that each culture, each people, each nation has its own collective form of life, its own values, myths, and aspirations. Moreover, it is only in terms of and within its own native communal values, myths, and aspirations that each individual finds his voice, his meaning, and his purpose. Thus,

if I am separated from it [i.e., from my nation's form of life] by circumstance or my own wilfulness, I shall become aimless, I shall wither away, being left, at best, with nostalgic memories of what it once was to have been truly alive and active, and performing that function in the pattern of national life, understanding of which alone gave meaning and value to all I was and did.\(^{26}\)\(^{26}\)

Furthermore, the Counter-Enlightenment's revolt against monism also contends that the values and aspirations of diverse cultures and nations do not form a harmonious whole, that the realization of some fundamental values can only emerge through the suppression of other fundamental values. In such a universe of diverse and incommensurable values, each bearer of a form of life must, it seems, promote its own meaningful ends and aspirations, whatever the dimly understood effects may be on other nations' values:

If the satisfaction of the needs of the organism to which I belong turns out to be incompatible with the fulfilment of the goals of other groups, I, or the society to which I indissolubly belong, have no choice but to force them to yield, if need be by force.\(^{27}\)\(^{27}\)

The rejection of value monism yields the understanding that some ultimate values will always, tragically, have to be sacrificed on the altar of other ultimate values. Must not each bearer of a set of values, of a way of life, reason that it is better (by our standards) that our ultimate understandings and values prevail over theirs, that the tragedy be theirs, not ours? As Berlin puts it, the denial of monism has led not only to "the conservatism of [Edmund] Burke and [Justus] Möser and [Hamann and de Maistre]" but also "to Fascism and brutal irrationalism and the oppression of minorities."\(^{28}\)\(^{28}\)

Are there no principles of constraint that issue from value diversity—principles that apply across variegated value communities and require that each bearer of values and meanings live at peace or in justice with the others? Such principles seem impossible if difference and particularity are truly and thoroughly more fundamental than uniformity and
universality. For if one genuinely rejects the dominant Western tradition, as today’s friends of diversity demand, it seems that one must agree with the relativistic nationalist that

[tr]here is no over-arching criterion or standard, in terms of which the various values of the lives, attributes, aspirations, of different national groups can be ordered, for such a standard would be super-national [that is, trans-cultural], not itself immanent in, part and parcel of, a given social organism, but derived from some source outside the life of a particular society—a universal standard, as natural law or natural justice are conceived by those who believe in them.²⁹

As we shall see shortly, for Berlin the first step back toward such a standard is his qualification of his anti-monism so as to distinguish it sharply from all forms of relativism. His second step is an attempt to ground a universal principle of liberty and tolerance upon a conception of human nature which is tied to this qualified pluralism.

V. Wounded Pride and the Retreat from Common Norms

Before turning to Berlin’s attempt to escape from relativism, it is interesting to examine Berlin’s account of the psychology that propels the nationalist rejection of universalism and cosmopolitanism. What, according to Berlin, drives this denial of

the reality of universal truths, the eternal forms which knowledge and creation, learning and art and life, must learn to embody if they are to justify their claims to represent the noblest flights of human reason and imagination?³⁰

The primary condition for the development of nationalism, as exemplified by the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century German Counter-Enlightenment, is “wounded pride and a sense of humiliation in its [the nation’s] most socially conscious members, which in due course produce anger and self-assertion.”³¹ This “wound to group consciousness” is the communal equivalent of the blow to self-esteem experienced by an individual newly exposed to enshrined and authoritative standards in terms of which his self-evaluation is poor or precarious. In particular, the wounded pride essential to the Counter-Enlightenment was the product of the encounter of German thought, culture, and institutions with “the eternal forms [of knowledge and creation] advanced by the French establishment, coupled with a felt inability or unwillingness among those newly exposed to these externally imposed standards to measure up to them. According to Berlin, there are two further conditions for the nationalist reaction to “the infliction of a wound on the collective feeling of a society, or at least of its spiritual leaders.” One of these is the existence, within that society, of “a group or class of persons who are in search of a focus for loyalty or self-identification, or perhaps a base for power.”³² The other further condition for a society’s chauvinist recalcitrance is the presence,

in the minds of at least some of its most sensitive members, of an image of itself as a nation, at least in embryo, in virtue of some general unifying factor or factors—language, ethnic origin, a common history (real or imaginary). . . .³³

In the case of the Germanic resistance to the French Enlightenment, this reaction centered on the contrast between

the depth and poetry of the German tradition, with its capacity for fitting but authentic insights into the inexhaustible, inexpressible variety of the life of the spirit, [and] the shallow materialism, the utilitarianism, and the thin, dehumanised shadow play of the worlds of the French thinkers.³⁴

Thus, the Germans’ denial of central themes within Western tradition aimed, consciously or unconsciously,

to create a new synthesis, a new ideology, both to explain and justify resistance to the forces working against their [pre-Enlightenment] convictions and ways of life, and to point in a new direction and offer them a new centre for self-identification.³⁵

What is extraordinary is how closely Berlin’s entire motivational analysis applies to particularist, group-defined modes of thought and feeling which today’s friends of diversity want to license and empower.³⁶ Almost all young people are anxious when they enter the university, either as students or as faculty. This anxiety, this felt encounter with standards and expectations, which one is uncertain one will be able to satisfy, will be all the greater for individuals with limited academic backgrounds. Such individuals will tend to be less familiar with these standards and with the entire form of life that universities at least pretend to represent; and they will, therefore, be less prepared to meet these criteria and to be successfully integrated into university life.

For anyone in such circumstances, there is a powerful attraction toward ideologies that will explain anticipated shortfalls, not in terms of one’s own deficiencies (however blameless one may be for those deficiencies), but rather in terms of the faults, indeed the damnability, of
those standards and expectations and of the institutions and individuals whose judgments press upon one. The most seductively attractive of such ideologies will vindicate one's withdrawal from the project of proving oneself in and integrating oneself into the alien world—and will characterize that withdrawal as being, in truth, the liberating rediscovery of the special, deeper modes of perceiving, thinking, and feeling that define the collective world-view of one's racial, ethnic, or gender group. The more the demanding external environment is depicted as foreign, hostile, oppressive, and exploitative, the greater will be one's felt vindication in rejecting it or in demanding its radical transformation into structures that affirm and celebrate the distinctive, albeit ineffable, meanings, insights, and songs of one's native Weltanschauung. And, of course, the more effectively one defies the imperialistic demands of the male, Eurocentric university establishment—the more one alienates oneself from it in order to be at home and in tune with, for example, one's black soul or one's feminine voice—the greater will be one's need continually to recompose reality into a tale of nefarious colonialist assault and heroic tribal resistance.37

This is not the occasion to recount the unhappy consequences of this social and intellectual self-ghettoization. Instead, I have another purpose in displaying the structural and motivational parallels between the emergence of modern nationalism and the balkanization of our universities in the name of diversity. This reinforces the insight that the current ideology of diversity is no more capable of validating a regime of peaceful coexistence and tolerance among the racial, ethnic, and gender-based cultures which it proposes to enshrine within the multicultural society and university than the Old Counter-Enlightenment was capable of yielding norms valid across competing nations (or alliances of nations), each of which embodied its own incommensurable ambitions and forms of well-being. This profound defect within the ideology of diversity is manifest for both the case of society at large and the case of the liberal university.

VI. The Need for Common Norms

Of course, one of the great virtues of liberal society is that it minimizes the need for a social consensus on substantive ends. In this way, it is the natural social structure for accommodating the incommensurability among value systems of diverse persons and subcultures. But liberal society accomplishes this by recognizing for each individual (and each freely formed association) a sovereign domain within the boundaries of which that person (or association) may determine for himself (or itself) how to act, and by recognizing rules for the mutually agreeable redrawing of those boundaries. Through the recognition of such domains, the liberal regime avoids the need to arrive at a legally enforceable consensus about how particular persons (or associations) should live their lives or employ their resources. But the rights constituted by these boundaries (e.g., rights over one's own body parts, talents, and justly acquired property) and by the restraints on how boundaries may be redrawn must themselves have validity across the individuals (and associations) comprising liberal society.

This morally authoritative framework is liberal society's alternative to the "monistic" enthronement of some single substantive value, for example, the glory of the race or the triumph of the revolutionary class, for the sake of which the lives, resources, and aspirations of different individuals and their subcultures are to be sacrificed. While the liberal rejects any such value monism, he insists upon an intersubjectively valid framework of rights which define and secure domains of choice for value-pursuing individuals (and associations). Furthermore, there must be sufficient convergence of motivational schemes, aspirations, and social understandings among the participants within liberal society for there to be general compliance with the rules of the liberal framework. However, no such universally binding constraints or supportive (partial) convergence of values and understandings will be possible if, paraphrasing Berlin's expression of Herder's views,38 each subculture of our society (as defined by race, ethnicity, and gender) expresses its own vision and is entitled to do so, and has goals, values, and ways of life that are fundamentally incommensurable, so that there is no single set of principles, no universal truth for all of these subcultures. If this is our multicultural condition, the optimist will hope for Hobbes's absolute sovereign, the pessimist for the executioner upon whose services, according to de Maistre, all social order rests.

To a considerable degree, the liberal university is an analogue of the liberal social order. It is a highly heterogeneous structure within which colleges, departments, special programs of study, and individual faculty are presumed to have their own distinctive missions and character, and are vested with considerable independent authority to advance their respective projects in the manner they judge best. There are aspirations of jurisprudential spheres and elaborate rules governing the establishment of new spheres and the redrawing of boundaries between existing ones. However, while the liberal society accommodates itself to value pluralism, the liberal university goes beyond this. It commits itself to encouraging intellectual pluralism. The independence granted to particular
colleges, departments, and especially to individual faculty members is intended, not merely to allow, but to foster, ongoing critical inquiry and debate and an understanding of the historical experiences and controversies that have conditioned, and that illuminate, current inquiry and debate. Such independence is intended to foster the difficult and uncertain processes of sustaining, conveying, and even advancing human knowledge and understanding. The commitment to intellectual pluralism, and to the institutional rules and forms that tend to foster it, requires of members of the university a form of the virtue of tolerance—it requires intellectual tolerance, the willingness to allow others to go their own scholarly way within their own sphere. It requires a willingness to accept, as equal members of the university community, individuals whose disciplinary assumptions, methodologies, interests, arguments, and/or conclusions one in no way shares. But, once again, this norm of tolerance has to be understood as not itself the creature of particular world-views that are incommensurable with other world-views represented within the university, but rather as having validity and, thus, binding force on all parties, whatever their indigenous world-views.

Unlike the liberal social order, the liberal university does have a goal, albeit the highly abstract and multifarious goal of sustaining, conveying, and advancing human knowledge. Having this goal, the university may make a demand upon its members beyond the liberal demand for tolerance of others’ choices. It may demand that its members contribute to (or show due promise of contributing to) the process of inquiry and debate by which its goal is advanced. It may—it must, to be true to its mission—establish mechanisms for the evaluation of how fully its members satisfy the diverse aspects of this complex demand. This means that participants within the liberal university must be subject to intellectual standards, to measures of scholarly and scientific integrity, responsibility, comprehensibility, clarity, ingenuity, explanatory illumination, and even truthfulness, and that these measures cannot themselves be thought of as world-view-specific. Of course, the conscientious application of these measures requires sensitivity to the particular character of the intellectual project being evaluated, to its specific methodology, and to the demands of its distinctive subject matter. Nevertheless, what duly conscientious evaluation is in search of—namely, intellectual worth—is a value which has validity across all racial, ethnic, or gender lines.

Suppose, to the contrary, there were many forms of intellectual worth—for example, black intellectual worth, Native-American intellectual worth, feminist intellectual worth—forms that were incommensurable all the way down. Clearly this would require the dissolution of anything like the evaluation process I have described. For no representa-

In Section IV, we took note of Berlin’s reasons for thinking that what I have been calling “unalloyed diversity,” namely, the systematic rejection of universal norms and objectivity, is politically ominous. But beyond this, and especially in his later essays, Berlin insists that the epistemological and normative relativism inherent in unalloyed diversity is also deeply intellectually flawed. Berlin’s disavowal of these forms of relativism and his own affirmation of epistemological and normative objectivism often take the form of representing his chief stalking-horses, Vico and Herder, as anti-relativist pluralists.

To begin with, Berlin distinguishes between relativism with regard to “judgements of facts” and with regard to “judgements of value,” and he immediately disavows the former, both on behalf of Vico and Herder and on behalf of himself. He insists that neither Vico nor Herder were relativists, or even pluralists, with regard to “judgements of facts.” This speaks well of them because, according to Berlin, the relativist denial of the possibility of objective knowledge of facts is not merely false; it is
“ultimately self-refuting.” The only live issue, then, is whether the great critics of monism should be understood as relativists with regard to “judgements of value.” Berlin contends that they should not, for he contends that the value pluralism which they and he endorse is a species of value objectivism and not of value relativism. Pluralism’s incommensurable values can be “equally genuine, equally ultimate, [and] equally objective.”

Berlin clears the way for objective pluralism by reasserting the central discovery of normative anti-monism, namely, that ultimate objective values need not all be reducible to a *sumnum bonum* or be otherwise commensurable. Hence, to affirm the incommensurability of values is not to be committed to their relativity. It is not to be committed to the relativist contention that the affirmation of any one of these values by a man or a group, since it is the expression or statement of a taste, or emotional attitude or outlook, is simply what it is, with no objective correlate which determines its truth or falsehood.

Nevertheless, even if incommensurability does not entail relativism, why not accept relativism as providing a plausible explanation of value incommensurability? At first blush, Berlin’s answer seems to be that, if relativism were true, we would not even be able to comprehend the values of other cultures. Since, with sufficient learning and effort, we can comprehend these values, relativism must be false. He argues that members of one culture can, by the force of imaginative insight, understand the... the values, the ideals, the forms of life of another culture or society, even those remote in time or space. They may find these values unacceptable, but if they open their minds sufficiently they can grasp how one might be a full human being, with whom one could communicate, and at the same time live in the light of values widely different from one’s own, but which nevertheless one can see to be values, ends of life, by the realisation of which men could be fulfilled.

Yet the possibility of imaginative insight into another’s alien values does not in itself testify to their objectivity or to the objectivity of one’s own values. Something further is needed, and at least part of this is supplied within Berlin’s account of what makes such trans-cultural (and trans-subcultural) comprehension possible:

Intercommunication between cultures in time and space is only possible because what makes men human is common to them, and acts as a bridge between them.

What makes others and their values intelligible is our capacity to understand them as modes of human self-realization, as “ends of life, by the realization of which men could be fulfilled.” The reason that objective values are many, but not infinitely many, is that to be understood as ultimate values, they must be understood as among those ends that promise human fulfillment; and not all ends hold out this promise:

Incompatible these ends may be; but their variety cannot be unlimited, for the nature of men, however various and subject to change, must possess some generic character if it is to be called human at all.

Indeed, despite his continued attempts to be pluralist all the way down, at times Berlin’s language suggests that there is an ultimate human good, albeit one that is concretized in different ways and forms, for different individuals and societies. It is by seeing how the specific ways and forms which have been adopted by particular individuals or communities are modes of this single ultimate good that we comprehend them:

There are many kinds of happiness (or beauty or goodness or visions of life) and they are, at times, incommensurable: but all respond to the real needs and aspirations of normal human beings; each fits its circumstances, its country, its people; the relation of fitting is the same in all these cases.

Perhaps most suggestive of a monistic bedrock beneath value’s local formations is this description of Herder’s anti-relativism:

When Herder says ‘each nation’ (and elsewhere ‘each age’) ‘has its centre of happiness within itself, just as every sphere has its centre of gravity’, he recognises a single principle of ‘gravitation’: the anthropology which Herder wishes to develop is one which would enable one to tell what creates the happiness of what social whole, or of what kinds of individuals.

However monistic Berlin’s ultimate re-commitments may be, the basic shape of his theory of value is reasonably clear. The fulfillment of the real needs and aspirations of normal human beings is the schema of value. These needs and aspirations have reality only as they are articulated within particular people by their judgments, their choices, and their context of social meanings. It is only in the fulfillment of those concrete needs and aspirations that value obtains, not in participation in the abstraction “the fulfillment of real needs and aspirations.” Since people’s judgments, choices, and contexts of social meanings vary enormously across both time and space (and, within modern pluralist
societies, from block to block), value has many incommensurable realities.

There are also, within Berlin's argument, the seeds of an important critique of radical multiculturalism. Most advocates of unalloyed diversity continue to insist that among their most treasured goals is the goal of increased understanding, if not agreement, across individuals and cultures with disparate modes of thought, feeling, and evaluation. However, Berlin argues that even comprehension across individuals and cultures is possible only in terms of a general framework which allows us to apprehend the values and aspirations of others as issuing from "the real needs and aspirations of normal human beings." Genuine intercommunication among individuals and cultures is possible only because "what makes men human is common to them, and acts as a bridge between them." This means that if genuine communication and understanding are possible, it is only because there are sound intellectual bridges by which people can escape the confines of ways of thought, feeling, and evaluation which reflect only their given race, gender, and nationality.

VIII. Beyond Diversity: Human Nature and Liberty

What sort of social-political doctrine emerges from this value pluralism? Even after we remind ourselves that Berlin never presents himself as a political theorist, it is striking how little he offers in the way of a self-critical response to this question. Nevertheless, we can identify two alternative lines of argument in Berlin. The first line of argument simply includes liberty, understood as freedom from coercion, among the many incommensurable objective values. The second, more structurally complex and interesting line of argument assigns a special status to this "negative" liberty.

The first approach naturally calls forth the questions: How do we choose between competing values, one of which may be liberty? Which values are to be sacrificed to which other values? When two values collide, to what extent should the lesser value be sacrificed to the greater? Berlin's response to these and like questions, which he describes as "no clear reply," is that

the collisions, even if they cannot be avoided, can be softened. Claims can be balanced, compromises can be reached. . . . Priorities, never final and absolute, must be established.51

Unfortunately, this seems to be no reply at all. For why should we believe that balance is, in general or in any particular case, better than wholehearted pursuit of certain values at the acknowledged cost of the total neglect or destruction of other values? Furthermore, how could the ranking of any particular balance among competing values above an alternative balance ever be shown to be more reasonable than the reverse ranking? Berlin's endorsement of balance, presupposing as it does the ranking of balanced over unbalanced resolutions and the existence of criteria for grading alternative balances, seems fundamentally at odds with belief in the deep incommensurability of values. Berlin does offer one rationale for balance and compromise. This is that they serve "the first requirement of a decent society," which is the prevention of "desperate situations, of intolerable choices."52 Unfortunately, the prevention of one person's desperate situation or intolerable choice will almost certainly diminish the fulfillment of the needs and aspirations of other people—even other "normal" people. How can it be reasonable—given the ultimate incommensurability of the values in conflict—to judge that this or that prevention is worth the cost? Nothing about the objectivism which Berlin attaches to his pluralism facilitates his answering these vital questions.53

Furthermore, even if some rationale for balance and compromise were available, we would be far from arriving at any principled doctrine of liberal tolerance. Negative liberty (and the tolerance mandated by it) would be only one of many conflicting values which would have to be balanced on the social scales. Of course, a value pluralism which includes an affirmation of negative liberty can provide some protection for that value by discrediting any monistic doctrine which denies this good in the name of some One True Good. Much of the force of Berlin's critique of doctrines of positive liberty in "Two Concepts of Liberty" derives from his display of the monistic impulse within such doctrines. This impulse leads to the falsehood that anything which must be sacrificed to advance True Rational Freedom—including negative liberty—can have no genuine worth. Still, this discrediting of monism is simply pluralism at work. It does not signify any special regard or place for the values of liberty and tolerance.

Berlin's second and more promising approach is carried out primarily within his "Two Concepts of Liberty." Even here Berlin reaffirms that

[the extent of a man's, or a people's, liberty to choose to live as they desire must be weighed against the claims of many other values, of which equality, or justice, or happiness, or security, or public order are perhaps the most obvious examples.]54

However, he also wants to insist that "there must be some frontiers of freedom which nobody should be permitted to cross," that belief in "the
The Limits of Diversity

Eric Mack

118

The inviolability of a minimum extent of individual liberty entails [an] absolute stand, and that this belief constitutes "the recognition of the moral validity—irrespective of the laws—of some absolute barriers to the imposition of one man's will on another."55

This defense of "absolute barriers"—boundaries which would define "a certain minimum area of personal freedom which must on no account be violated"56—puts into play the liberal strategy for dealing with the incommensurability of values. As previously described, this strategy disavows the search for authoritative substantive values whose service requires the sacrifice by individuals and groups of their own distinctive aspirations and projects. Instead, it seeks to identify general rules which define personal domains within which each is free to do as he chooses, that is, free to pursue his own chosen ends. The connections between this liberal strategy (on the one hand) and freedom and diversity (on the other) have recently been emphasized by F. A. Hayek:

Whereas enforced obedience to common concrete ends is tantamount to slavery, obedience to common abstract rules [which define spheres of free choice] provides scope for the most extraordinary freedom and diversity. Although it is sometimes supposed that such diversity brings chaos threatening the relative order that we also associate with civilization, it turns out that greater diversity brings greater order.57

Berlin's argument for some "absolute barriers" also assigns a special status to liberty. It is not merely a value among many other values. For, according to Berlin, the absolutist affirmation of some measure of negative liberty is not a component of pluralism, but rather is entailed by pluralism.58 It is the necessity of choice between incomparable ultimate values which, in turn, gives liberty its intrinsic importance. Liberty is not among the many first-order values, but rather has a higher-order value or importance in virtue of our need to choose among these incommensurable first-order values.

The necessity of choosing between absolute [i.e., ultimate] claims is then an inescapable characteristic of the human condition. This gives its value to freedom as Acton had conceived of it—as an end in itself. . . .59

Unfortunately, in itself, this argument hardly seems compelling. For one thing, even if choice is inescapable for each individual, we cannot infer that choice is valuable for, much less the birthright of, each and every individual. For another thing, what is inescapable may merely be that some individuals have to make choices—choices that may be imposed upon others. I conjecture, however, that Berlin's argument can be given a more generous reading—a reading which connects pluralism, a conception of human nature, and the fundamental norm that persons be treated in accordance with their nature.

Early in "Two Concepts of Liberty," Berlin approaches the question of the ground for a measure of negative liberty in terms of human nature and human essence:

We must preserve a minimum area of personal freedom if we are not to 'degrade or deny our nature' . . . . What then must the minimum be? That which a man cannot give up without offending against the essence of his human nature.60

Value pluralism turns out to be a key to, or a mirror of, this human essence or nature:

To assume that all values can be graded on one scale . . . seems to me to falsify our knowledge that men are free agents, to represent moral decision as an operation which a slide-rule could, in principle, perform.61

Thus, the "inescapable characteristic of the human condition" is not our actually being engaged in moral choice, but our possessing the status of beings capable of moral choice. Our recognition of this status is reciprocal with our recognition of the plurality of incommensurable values. "These collisions of values are of the essence of what they are and what we are."62 Thus, throughout "Two Concepts of Liberty," the fundamental consideration offered against coercion is that to coerce a person is to fail to acknowledge his or her status as a freely choosing being:

To threaten a man with persecution unless he submits to a life in which he exercises no choices of his goals . . . is to sin against the truth that he is a man, a being with a life of his own to live.63

In the course of what must be read as a highly sympathetic exposition of Kantian themes, Berlin is even more explicit in his linkage of human nature, choice, and the wrongfulness of coercion:64

[If the essence of men is that they are autonomous beings—authors of values, of ends in themselves, the ultimate authority of which consists precisely in the fact that they are willed freely—then nothing is worse than to treat them as if they were not autonomous, but natural objects . . . whose choices can be manipulated by their rulers whether by threats of force or offers of rewards. To treat men in this way is to treat them as if they are not self-determined. . . .

[To manipulate men, to propel them towards goals which you—the social reformer—see, but they may not, is to deny their human essence, to treat
them as objects without wills of their own, and therefore to degrade
them. . . .

In the name of what can I ever be justified in forcing men to do what they
have not willed or consented to? Only in the name of some value higher
than themselves. But if, as Kant held, all values are made so by the free
acts of men, and called values only so far as they are this, there is no value
higher than the individual. . . . [U]sing other men as means. . . . is a
contradiction of what I know men to be, namely ends in themselves.

In these passages Berlin speaks of men as “authors of values”; he
speaks of the authority of values consisting in their being “willed freely,”
and of values being “made so by the free acts of men.” The pluralism
invoked in these passages is voluntarist and, hence, relativist. As written,
these lines embody the view (present at least through Berlin’s “The
Apotheosis of the Romantic Will”) that “morality is moulded by the will
and that ends are created, not discovered.” Nevertheless, one can
easily substitute into these passages Berlin’s more recent objectivist pluralism.
Men are choosers among many objective values. The authority
of the values chosen (for the choosing agent) consists in their being
freely chosen from among incommensurable objective values. Particular
values are made the valuable ends of agents’ actions by being freely
chosen objective values. Berlin must favor the substitution of this
objectivist pluralism, given his disavowal of and concern about the
implications of relativist pluralism. With this substitution, we find Berlin
providing a pluralist defense of individual freedom which rests upon two
bulwarks of the Western intellectual tradition—a theory of objective
value and a theory of human nature.

IX. Conclusion

The critical assessment of Berlin’s attempt to ground the claims of
liberty upon the doctrines of objective pluralism and free agency is a
larger project than can be encompassed here. And this attempt, of
course, is only one of many in the not-so-monistic Western tradition. My
project has been the much more modest one of asking what the course
and structure of Berlin’s thought tells us about the limits of the ideology
of diversity. The most central and persistent element throughout Ber-
lín’s thought is his belief that a profound error lies at the base of the
Western intellectual tradition—the delusion of monism. Against this
error, Berlin celebrates the pluralist thought of the Counter-
Enlightenment, as exemplified by Vico and Herder, with its emphasis on
the irreducible particularity of communal forms of life. Berlin shares
with Vico, Herder, and Romanticism in general, a picture of the ration-
alist Enlightenment as inherently authoritarian, constructivist, and
oppressive precisely in virtue of its commitment to universal, trans-
cultural standards for thought and action. Furthermore, Berlin maintains that
tolerance and regard for personal liberty are the offspring, not of the
dominant Western tradition, but of the anti-monistic revolt against it. In
all these ways, and throughout the pattern and coloration of the fabric of
his sympathies, Berlin seems at one with, albeit infinitely deeper, more
learned, and more eloquent than, today’s friends of diversity.

Yet Berlin is not counted among, and will never be counted among,
the divinities of diversity. This is because Berlin’s writings are also
responsive to the limits of diversity. They are responsive to the dangers
attached to relativist diversity, to its epistemic and moral nihilism, to its
cultural (or subcultural) solipsism, and to its propensity to give rise
either to authoritarian reaction or to revolutionary populist nationalism.
Moreover, his writings are responsive to intellectual pressures felt by
any conscientious thinker (of any culture, race, or gender) who has
pursued a coherent grasp of human values and of principles protective of
those values in all their diversity. Thus, in pursuit of an account of
trans-cultural understanding and of the objectivity of the incommensurable
values affirmed by different people of different cultures, Berlin
rejects relativistic conceptions of knowledge and of value and seems to
advance a schema of the human good: namely, that which fulfills human
needs and aspirations. And in pursuit of an absolute stance in favor of
freedom from coercion for all value-pursuers, Berlin offers a conception
of the human essence as the capacity for free choice among ultimate
values.

In all of these ways, in response to both the significance and the limits
of diversity, Berlin returns to or remains within the great enterprise of
social and metaphysical theorizing that is central to the Western tra-
dition. If today’s friends of diversity were equally responsive to the
significance and limits of diversity, then two hallmarks of that tradition,
the liberal social order and the liberal university, would have more
auspicious futures. For, at its base, the current ideology of diversity, the
New Counter-Enlightenment, denigrates the possibility of common
epistemological norms and of rational dialogue among representatives
of differing racial, gender, or national groups. It denigrates the project
of elucidating and employing a common framework for comprehending
human values and aspirations, and the ambition of ordering relations-
ships within the university or within society at large in ways that are just
for all. This is not a formula for increased harmonious existence among
individuals or groups, either within the university or within the wider society. Rather, it is a formula for factional strife, irresolvable tribal conflict, and rule by interest-group manipulation and coercion.

NOTES

1. Sir Isaiah Berlin is a Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford University. He was a Fellow of New College from 1938 to 1950, Chichele Professor of Social and Political Theory at Oxford from 1957 to 1967, and first President of Wolfson College from 1966 to 1975. He was President of the British Academy from 1974 to 1978.

I am indebted to Mary Sirridge, Ronna Berger, and Ellen Paul for their helpful comments on early or intermediate drafts of this essay.

2. Of course, today’s friends of diversity are a diverse lot. They would not all be willing to affirm each of the views I identify with this syndrome. Neither at this point nor in Section III of this essay will I attempt to catalog all the variants on the diversity theme. I feel confident that anyone at all familiar with current campus controversies will recognize the elements that I cite as central to the underlying world-views of those who embrace diversity and multiculturalism as slogans in the battle against what they perceive to be the inherently racist, sexist, exploitative, hegemonic, brutal, and dehumanizing character of the existing order. Jerry L. Martin’s “The University as Agent of Social Transformation: The Postmodern Argument Considered” (in this volume) provides a further exposition of some aspects of the multiculturalist ideology.


Throughout this essay I refer to the views of various historical figures, such as Vico and Herder, as those views are presented by Berlin. My central concern is what we can infer about Berlin’s views. I have no authority whatsoever for joining a scholarly discourse on the validity of Berlin’s interpretation of figures such as Vico and Herder. Aside from the essays by Berlin cited throughout this essay, see his Vico and Herder (New York: Viking Press, 1976). For a concise treatment of some of the German Counter-Enlightenment figures, especially of Hamann and Herder, see the chapter on “The Counter-Enlightenment” in Lewis White Beck, Early German Philosophy (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), pp. 361–92.


6. Ibid., p. 353.

7. Ibid., p. 348
9. Ibid., p. 224.
10. Ibid., p. 225.
13. In his 1802 work, Letters from an Inhabitant of Geneva to his Contemporaries, the apostle of rational social engineering Henri de Saint-Simon (1760–1825) proposed the scientific reorganization of society under the guidance of a Council of Newton. In later works, for example, Catechisme Politique des Industriels, Saint-Simon placed more emphasis on the guiding role of the elite members of the productive class, the industriels.
14. See Berlin’s “Hume and the Sources of German Anti-Rationalism,” in Against the Current, pp. 162–87. Of course, it was with Jeremy Bentham (of whom Mill was an only somewhat wayward disciple) that constructivist rationalism became dominant in British thought.
15. Cf. Smith’s attack on the “man of system who is apt to be very wise in his own conceit” and who, therefore, imagines that “he can arrange the different members of a great society with as much ease as the hand arranges the different pieces upon the chess-board”; see Adam Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1976), VI.ii.2.17, pp. 233–34.
16. For a contrary view—namely, that in the course of the French Enlightenment rationalism was infected with, and thereby subverted by, the scientific misperception that human beings and society are subject to the same sort of understanding and the same sort of beneficial conscious control as inanimate nature—see F. A. Hayek, The Counter-Revolution of Science (New York: The Free Press, 1955).
17. Berlin is far from consistently clear about what the central error of the dominant tradition is. The problem arises from the fact that this tradition consists of several interconnected elements and Berlin is neither clear nor consistent about which element or elements he is challenging. Note, for example, the distinct components within the dominant conviction that there exist true, immutable, universal, timeless, objective values, valid for all men, everywhere, at all times; that these values are at least in principle realisable whether or not human beings are, or have been, or ever will be, capable of realising them on earth; that these values form a coherent system, a harmony which, conceived in social terms, constitutes the perfect state of society. (“Vico and the Ideal of the Enlightenment,” in Against the Current; p. 121)
20. For Vico, the bearers of diversity are cultures: “Each culture expresses its own collective experience.” Isaiah Berlin, “The Counter-Enlightenment,” in Against the Current, p. 5. Similarly, for Herder:

Art, morality, custom, religion, natural life . . . are created by entire societies living an integrated communal life. . . . Who are the authors of the songs, the epics, the myths, the temples, the mores of a people . . . ?
The people itself, the entire soul of which is poured out in all they are and do. (Ibid., p. 11)

21. For Berlin's most renowned essay, "Two Concepts of Liberty," is fundamentally a defense of negative liberty, i.e., the liberty of noninterference, against the substitution of positive liberty, the liberty of being guided by one's "true" self. For Berlin's own acute discomfort with the perception that this essay is, even in part, an apology for capitalism, see his introduction to *Four Essays on Liberty*, especially pp. xiv-xlvi.


23. Ibid., p. 21.

24. Ibid. See also Berlin, "Joseph de Maistre and the Origins of Fascism," in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity* (see n. 3 above), pp. 91-174.

25. De Maistre's position is akin to the nationalist's in that each seeks to protect ineffable personality against the purported disintegrating effects of reason and analysis.


27. Ibid.


[j]if each culture expresses its own vision and is entitled to do so, and if the goals and values of different societies and ways of life are not commensurable, then it follows that there is no single set of principles, no universal truth for all men and times and places." (The Apotheosis of the Romantic Will," p. 224)


32. Ibid.

33. Ibid., p. 347.

34. Ibid., p. 349.

35. Ibid.

36. Similarly, with the appropriate substitutions, the analysis illuminates today's most powerful anti-Western and intolerant nationalism, viz., Islamic fundamentalism.

37. The term "recomposition" is Shelby Steele's. Anyone familiar with his *Content of Our Character: A New Vision of Race in America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990) will recognize the extent to which the last couple of paragraphs generalize portions of the analysis offered by Steele. Steele emphasizes that the vulnerability felt by, for example, black students entering largely white universities is real—and is the heritage of past racial injustice. His objection is not to the feeling of the vulnerability but rather to the attempt to deal with it through self-deceiving recomposition rather than painful acknowledgment.


40. In reality, the friends of diversity are not as threatened with internecine warfare as their ideology would predict—precisely because the ideology is mistaken. The devotee of lesbian feminist thought and the partisan of male Afrocentrism in fact operate with a common anti-liberal ideology which is universal and unchanging across anti-liberals of all cultures and ages.


43. Ibid., p. 79.

44. Berlin never provides us with an explicit analysis of incommensurability. In addition, his frequent identification of incommensurability with incompatibility is unfortunate. Values—for instance, liberty and equality—may be incompatible without being incommensurable. That is, the increased realization of one value may require the decreased realization of the other without its being true that we cannot rank alternative baskets of these values.


47. Ibid., p. 11.


49. Ibid., p. 84. The yardstick of a "normal human being" is also crucial within Berlin's arguments for obedience to rules that

are accepted so widely, and are grounded so deeply in the actual nature of men as they have developed through history, as to be, by now, an essential part of what we mean by being a normal human being. ("Two Concepts of Liberty," p. 163)

Yet the attempt to avoid Platonic timelessness, by way of invoking "history" and "what we mean" leads to the obvious challenge to the generality of Berlin's result, namely, whose history, whose meaning?


52. Ibid., p. 18.

53. Berlin's pluralism surely excludes any serious hope that "a social structure" might "at most promote active solidarity in the pursuit of common objectives" ("The Apotheosis of the Romantic Will," p. 235).

54. Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," p. 170. This list radically oversimplifies the weighing problem by including only standard liberal-bourgeois values. For other values must also be weighed in the balance—for example, piety, obedience, defiance, honor, and the domination of others.

55. Ibid., p. 164; ibid., p. 165; ibid., p. 166.
Racial Preferences in Admission to Institutions of Higher Education

Lino A. Graglia

"Affirmative action," insofar as it is controversial, is a euphemism for racial discrimination, the advantaging of individuals assigned to certain racial groups and, therefore, the disadvantaging of individuals assigned to other racial groups.¹ Racial discrimination, we were long told—though much less frequently at present—is not only illegal and unconstitutional, but immoral and despicable, among the greatest of sins and never too severely condemned.² The result of this teaching was to reduce essentially to one the possible justifications for "affirmative action" by government institutions. Racial discrimination is so great and singular an evil that its practice can be justified only when necessary to combat or counteract other racial discrimination so that the net amount of existing racial discrimination may actually be reduced. Fire sometimes must be fought with fire.³ It is on this "remedy" rationale that the practice of racially discriminatory "affirmative action" was begun and is still primarily defended. The rationale bears little or no relation to "affirmative action" in practice, however, which has not been limited, or even directed, to providing appropriate remedies to individuals shown to have suffered an injury because of race.

I. From Prohibiting to Requiring Racial Discrimination

The Brown decision in 1954,⁴ applicable to state law, and a companion case, Bolling v. Sharpe,⁵ applicable to federal law, prohibited legally required school racial segregation and, it quickly appeared, all racial

56. Ibid., p. 124.
57. F. A. Hayek, The Fatal Conceit, ed. W. Bartley (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 63–64. Hayek continues: "Hence, the type of liberty made possible by adhering to abstract rules . . . is, as Proudhon once put it, 'the mother, not the daughter of order.'"
59. Ibid., p. 169. Similarly, it is because "we are faced with choices between ends equally ultimate . . . the realization of some of which must inevitably involve the sacrifice of others" that "men place such immense value upon their freedom to choose" (p. 168).
60. Ibid., p. 126.
64. The long paragraph from pp. 136–38 of "Two Concepts of Liberty," from which the following passages are extracted, is strikingly different in tone from the rest of this section, titled "The Retreat to the Inner Citadel," which treats the attempt to secure "freedom" through eliminating or resisting desire.