

Crooked Timber or Bent Twig? Isaiah Berlin's Nationalism

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Isaiah Berlin is often regarded as one of the sources of contemporary liberal nationalism. Yet his own attitude to nationalism, and its relation to his liberalism, remains unexplored. He gave conflicting definitions of nationalism in different places, and although he frequently contrasts more benign with more malign forms of nationalism, the terms in which he draws the contrast also vary. In Berlin's most explicit account, nationalist doctrine is presented as political, unitary, morally unrestricted and particularist, but these four dimensions are separate, and on each of them alternative nationalist positions are available. Berlin's account of the sources of nationalism is also ambiguous: his analysis of the Jewish condition in European societies and his support for Zionism contrasts with his diagnosis of the origins of German nationalism. Comparing Berlin with later liberal nationalists, we see that his liberalism prevented him from presenting a normative political theory in which liberal and nationalist commitments were successfully combined. Such a theory can indeed be developed, but the challenge that emerges from Berlin's writing is to explain how real-world nationalism can be kept within liberal limits.

There is a puzzle in understanding Isaiah Berlin's attitude to nationalism that no-one (to my knowledge) has yet been able to resolve. The nature of the puzzle can be indicated in various ways. Berlin, as everyone knows, was a stout defender of negative liberty – the idea that 'there ought to exist a certain minimum area of personal freedom which must on no account be violated' (Berlin, 2002c, p. 171) – and in that capacity he criticised those, including many nationalists, who interpreted liberty to mean the collective self-determination of the group as opposed to the absence of constraints on its individual members. Yet throughout his life he was a Zionist (Ignatieff, 1998; Jahanbegloo, 2000, p. 85), and this commitment to the national liberation of the Jews was not an idiosyncrasy, but extended to other nations struggling to free themselves from colonial or imperial rule. So how, if at all, did Berlin's liberalism and his apparent nationalism cohere?¹

Another way into the puzzle is through spelling out Berlin's two arboreal metaphors that I have used to head this essay. 'The Crooked Timber of Humanity' is the phrase used by Berlin to signal both the imperfection and the cultural diversity of the human species, and the resulting moral impossibility of laying down any single set of rules, any common framework of government, to encompass the very different ways human beings have chosen to live their lives together.² As he says when expounding his favourite philosopher, Herder, 'there is a plurality of incommensurable cultures. To belong to a given community, to be connected with its members by indissoluble and impalpable ties of common language, historical memory, habit, tradition and feeling, is a basic human need no less natural than that for food or drink or security or procreation. One nation can understand and

sympathise with the institutions of another only because it knows how much its own mean to itself. Cosmopolitanism is the shedding of all that makes one most human, most oneself' (Berlin, 1991c, p. 12). This, then, seems to indicate strong endorsement of the idea that not only individuals but also nations must be allowed to live in their own way and under their own institutions. But when he speaks of nationalism, Berlin often switches to the metaphor of the Bent Twig, attributed by him to Schiller³: nationalist movements, he suggests, must be understood as responses to wounds that are inflicted on peoples, which lead them to lash out blindly against their oppressors, like a twig that springs back and whips the face of the person who has touched it (Berlin, 1991g, 1992; Gardels, 1991). Notice how the metaphor works: the twig is deformed by an unnatural outside force, then when released it strikes uncontrollably against the source of the deformity. In this image nationalism is not only identified with its destructive consequences – insurrection, bloodshed and the like – but would not exist at all in a world where no people inflicted psychic wounds on another. If the Crooked Timber metaphor presents nationalism as a natural expression of human diversity, the Bent Twig metaphor presents it as a blind, irrational response to collective humiliation.

Matters are not made any easier if we look at Berlin's various accounts of what nationalism *is*. Here are some examples:

Nationalism is an inflamed condition of national consciousness which can be, and on occasion has been, tolerant and peaceful. (Berlin, 1991g, p. 245)

Nationalism is not consciousness of the reality of national character, nor pride in it. It is a belief in the unique mission of a nation, as being intrinsically superior to the goals or attributes of whatever is outside it ... (Berlin, 1991f, pp. 176–7)

Nationalism, even in its mildest version, the consciousness of national unity, is surely rooted in a sharp sense of the differences between one human society and another, the uniqueness of particular traditions, languages, customs – of occupation, over a long period, of a particular piece of soil on which intense collective feeling is concentrated. (Berlin, 1996a, p. 232)

Nationalism simply means that we say to ourselves that nobody is as good as we are, that we have a right to do certain things solely because we are Germans or Frenchmen. (Jahanbegloo, 2000, p. 102)

Nationalism – the elevation of the interests of the unity and self-determination of the nation to the status of the supreme value before which all other considerations must, if need be, yield ... (Berlin, 1991e, p. 338)

Each of these accounts of nationalism is significantly different from the others. One might be tempted to conclude that Berlin was simply a loose and sloppy thinker capable of defining 'nationalism' in whatever way suited the polemical purpose of the argument he was making at the time. But this, I think, underestimates him. This, after all, was a man who had spent hours in the company of precise

philosophers like Ayer and Austin, presumably wrestling over the details of what exactly it is that we mean when we say ... and who was perfectly capable of drawing careful distinctions between ideas that others had confused. That he failed, repeatedly, to give a clear and consistent definition of nationalism indicates more than mere sloppiness – it indicates, I believe, that there were deep internal tensions in Berlin's thought in this area that he never satisfactorily resolved. I shall try to unearth these tensions as I proceed. But first let me consider two 'quick-fix' solutions to the inconsistencies between the accounts of nationalism listed above.

The first is to say that two quite different things are going on in the accounts I have presented. On the one hand, Berlin is indicating what it means to be a nationalist – looking at nationalisms from the inside, and showing us what is distinctive about what nationalists believe. On the other hand, he is explaining the source of nationalism – indicating the conditions under which nationalist ideologies arise. Clearly these two enterprises are complementary rather than competing, and when Berlin says, for instance, that nationalism is a condition of wounded consciousness, he is engaged in the second, explanatory, task, whereas when he says that nationalism is a belief in the uniqueness and superiority of the national mission, he is engaged in the first.

This solution won't do, however, because on both fronts Berlin turns out to be inconsistent: he tells us different stories about what it means to be a nationalist, as I shall illustrate later, and he also gives different accounts of how nationalism arises: as the set of quotations above illustrates, he is capable of seeing it as an 'inflamed' condition of consciousness that arises only in certain quite specific circumstances, but he is also capable of seeing it as a natural response to human diversity that can be expected to prevail so long as human societies retain their distinctive languages, customs, cultures and so forth.

A second quick-fix solution is to say that (although he does not make this very explicit) Berlin is always in practice working with a distinction between 'benign' and 'malign' forms of nationalism, a distinction that runs roughly parallel to the more familiar distinctions between 'Western' and 'Eastern' or 'civic' and 'ethnic' nationalism.⁴ This is sometimes indicated by a contrast he draws between nationalism proper and 'the consciousness of national unity', the latter being the benign version, as in the third quotation above. Now it's clear that Berlin does discriminate quite sharply between different versions of nationalism – indeed one of his later interviews was headed 'Two Concepts of Nationalism' in recognition of this fact (Gardels, 1991). But what is much less clear is how the line is to be drawn – by virtue of what features a particular form of nationalism falls on one or other side of it. Are malign forms of nationalism essentially *political* and benign forms essentially *cultural*, for instance, as some of Berlin's remarks about Herder might suggest? We shall see that in place of a simple two-way distinction Berlin draws different contrasts between nationalisms on different occasions.

Finally, why does it matter to try to dispel the clouds of confusion surrounding Berlin's writings on nationalism? It matters, I believe, because Berlin has some claim to be considered the founding father of contemporary liberal nationalism, that strand of liberal thought that tries to reconcile liberal freedoms with the value

of national belonging and national self-determination.⁵ Many have thought that 'liberal nationalism' is an oxymoron, an attempt to combine incompatible political values (Vincent, 1997; Benner, 1997; Brighouse, 1998; Cocks, 2002, ch. 4). If Berlin's views turn out to be internally inconsistent at the deepest level, this may cast more general doubt on the idea of liberal nationalism. So there is more at stake here than just the analysis of one man's writings on nationalism. Having conducted that analysis, I shall come back in the last section of the paper to compare Berlin's ideas with those of later exponents of liberal nationalism.

What Do Nationalists Believe?

The best place to begin an analysis is perhaps with Berlin's most systematic account of nationalist doctrine, found in his essay 'Nationalism: Past Neglect and Present Power', in which he identifies four features of that doctrine (Berlin, 1991e, pp. 341–5). The first of these is 'the belief in the overriding need to belong to a nation'. This is the view that human beings are profoundly influenced by the particular cultural group they are born into, which gives them not only their language, but also their beliefs, customs, social practices and so forth, with the implication (presumably) that if the nation is destroyed, or an individual member is torn away from it, this is a very significant loss. The second feature is a belief 'in the organic relationships of all the elements that constitute a nation'. This organic conception of the nation entails that membership is not to be conceived on the model of a voluntary association, and also that relationships of other kinds must be subordinated to the demands of nationhood. The nation, in other words, has an overriding claim on its members' loyalty. The third feature is a belief 'in the value of our own simply because it is ours'. Nationalists, Berlin claims, subscribe to a form of moral relativism which refuses to recognize universal values, holding instead that we have no reasons for action beyond the principles and values inscribed in the particular national culture to which we belong. Finally, the fourth feature is the belief in the supremacy of national claims: nothing must be allowed to stand in the way of a nation fulfilling its mission, even if this brings it into conflict with other nations.

Notice first that this four-part definition identifies nationalism as a set of beliefs, a doctrine, indeed a doctrine of a fairly abstract and philosophical kind. In giving it, Berlin has in mind, as the text reveals, nationalist ideas as expounded by late eighteenth and early nineteenth century European philosophers – Herder, Burke, Fichte, Michelet, Hamann, Hegel, de Maistre and Bonald are among the thinkers mentioned. Would Berlin, if challenged, have maintained that holding these four beliefs is a necessary condition for being a nationalist? Almost certainly not: we have seen already that he recognizes a sense of nationalism in which it is equivalent to 'the consciousness of national unity' – the consciousness of belonging to a distinct people with whom one has special ties of culture and history – and he freely admits that nationalism in this sense is a far more pervasive phenomenon. And even if we add to this a political claim about the need to maintain and protect such special ties, this does not appear to commit us to any of the four beliefs that Berlin presents as constituting nationalism. So 'nationalism' as presented in this essay seems really to mean 'Romantic nationalism in post-

Enlightenment European philosophy', not nationalism in a broader sociological sense.

Notice second that even if we take Berlin's account on its own terms as an account of nationalist philosophical *doctrine*, the four elements do not stand or fall together in the way that he implicitly suggests. Not only that, but in the case of each element we can distinguish two alternative positions that someone might take, without in any obvious sense ceasing to be a nationalist. So we have sixteen possible 'varieties of nationalism', none of which can so far be ruled out as theoretically incoherent. Let me illustrate.

If we take the first element, the belief in the overriding need to belong to a nation, then while nationalists certainly agree about the significance to individual people of their membership in national communities, they disagree about whether this has direct political implications – especially about whether it entails a right of national self-determination in the political sense. So we might distinguish *cultural* forms of nationalism from *political* forms on this basis, as indeed Berlin himself does when he says of Herder that:

[his] nationalism was never political. If he denounces individualism, he equally detests the state, which coerces and mutilates the free human personality ... Even though he seems to have coined the word *Nationalismus*, his conception of a good society is closer to the anarchism of Thoreau or Proudhon or Kropotkin, and to the conception of a culture (*Bildung*) of which such liberals as Goethe and Humboldt were proponents, than to the ideals of Fichte or Hegel or political socialists. For him *die Nation* is not a political entity. (Berlin, 1976, p. 181)

In other words, the idea that human beings are deeply shaped by the particular culture of their nation can be interpreted in such a way that it implies that each nation should have a state of its own – the political version of nationalism – or alternatively as implying simply the right of each culture to develop autonomously – the cultural version.

Consider next the organic metaphor – the idea that nations are not merely aggregates of individuals but organic wholes in which each part is dependent upon the rest. Berlin takes it to follow from this that national values must be supreme – that the claims of lesser groupings, families, provinces, churches, and so forth, must always give way to the demands of the nation itself, which means that in one important sense nationalism must be illiberal: it must limit the freedom of individuals to form groups that might compete for supremacy with the nation as a whole. But does it follow? Nationalists must reject atomic individualism, let us agree, but they do not need to attribute to the nation itself the kind of supremacy over smaller groupings that Berlin supposes. Instead they can regard national communities as constituted, in part, by smaller communities of various kinds, so that preserving the 'social organism' (if that metaphor is used) involves sustaining a balance between the whole and the parts. Burke, for example, did precisely this when he attacked the centralizing tendencies of the French Revolution as entailing that:

The people should no longer be Gascons, Picards, Bretons, Normans; but Frenchmen, with one country, one heart, and one Assembly. But instead of all being Frenchmen, the greater likelihood is, that the inhabitants of that region will shortly have no country. ... Such divisions of our country as have been formed by habit, and not by a sudden jerk of authority, were so many little images of the great country in which the heart found something which it could fill. The love to the whole is not extinguished by this subordinate partiality. (Burke, 1967, p. 193)

The organic metaphor, then, is ambiguous between what we might call *unitary* and *pluralist* versions of nationalism, the former being for obvious reasons more illiberal in its implications than the latter.

The third element in Berlin's account of nationalist doctrine is the claim that national values are supreme – that there is no higher source of moral authority from which universal principles might be derived, setting limits to what might be done in the name of the nation. Once again, it is important to distinguish what is common ground among nationalists from what is held by only certain among them. All nationalists recognize that nations are ethical communities, in the sense that membership brings with it special obligations, the content of which varies somewhat from one nation to the next. But they disagree about whether these special obligations exhaust the ethical universe, so to speak, or whether there are not also universal obligations that a person has simply by virtue of being human. Thus many nationalists have subscribed to some version of natural law or natural rights, interpreted perhaps more narrowly than anti-nationalists would like, but nevertheless setting limits to the values that nations can legitimately pursue. This is true of both Rousseau and Burke, for example, and more recently of thinkers such as Michael Walzer, whose 'thick' local (effectively national) account of morality is complemented by a 'thin' moral minimalism that is universal in scope – 'a set of standards to which all societies can be held – negative injunctions, most likely, rules against murder, deceit, torture, oppression and tyranny' (Walzer, 1994, p. 10). So we can draw a contrast between *morally unrestricted* and *morally restricted* forms of nationalism.

Finally we come to Berlin's fourth element, the belief in national *supremacy*, which, as he points out, may or may not be accompanied by a belief in national *superiority* (though sometimes he combines the two ideas, as a glance at the five accounts of nationalism on p. 101 will reveal). National supremacy is the idea that the nation has a mission or a destiny that nothing must be allowed to impede, justifying not only the suppression of internal divisions, but also the sweeping aside of groups and people outside, through territorial conquest, for example. When national superiority is invoked, supremacy is justified by the claim that those who are suppressed or pushed aside are culturally inferior. So are nationalists by definition committed to such an idea? Here again we need to draw a distinction, this time between nationalists whose sole object of concern is the flourishing of their own nation, and nationalists who, while inevitably giving greater *weight* from a practical point of view to the interests of their own people, are also concerned to promote the well-being and autonomy of nations everywhere. Mazzini embodied this

second position, defending the rights of Italians first, but also the rights of all the other European peoples who lacked self-determination.⁶ More recently Walzer has introduced the concept of 'reiterative universalism' to capture the idea that in claiming a right to political autonomy for our own nation, we must recognize a parallel right in others: whatever justifies our claim must also justify theirs (Walzer, 1990). The relevant distinction in this case is between nationalisms that are *singular* and nationalisms that are *reiterative*, in that they attach ethical weight to the claims of all peoples who are recognized as forming potentially self-determining nations.

We have, then, four possible dimensions along which nationalist philosophies or ideologies might vary. Berlin, in presenting his account of Romantic nationalism, takes it for granted that nationalism must be political, unitary, morally unrestricted and singular, whereas it is not difficult to see how other combinations are possible. For instance, someone might hold a political and unitary view of nationalism, and yet concede that national self-determination was subject to moral limits, and that other nations had rights to political autonomy equivalent to those of one's own. Again, one might be a cultural nationalist and either believe or not believe that one had duties to protect cultures other than one's own, and so on. I don't suggest that every box in the matrix can plausibly be filled – for instance it would be hard to hold a reiterative view on the issue of national supremacy without also placing moral restrictions on the exercise of national autonomy – but many of them can, and Berlin's account in this essay conceals that fact. The effect is to make nationalism appear irredeemably hostile to liberal values, which is not, as we shall see, Berlin's considered view.

I mentioned earlier that Berlin often seems to work implicitly with a contrast between benign and malign forms of nationalism, and in the light of 'Nationalism: Past Neglect and Present Power' we might be tempted to think that he sees 'good' nationalism as cultural, plural, morally restricted and reiterative, and 'bad' nationalism as political, unitary, morally unrestricted and singular. But this is not so; instead he draws different contrasts on different occasions, highlighting sometimes one and sometimes another of the elements we have separated. In his later interviews, for instance, he counterposes 'aggressive' nationalism to 'nonaggressive' or what he sometimes calls 'sated' nationalism – the latter referring to the form of nationalism prevailing in long-established territorial states like Britain that no longer have expansionist aims (Berlin 1972, 1992; Gardels 1991). This contrast evidently picks up the fourth element in our analysis above: the issue is whether nationalism licenses acts of aggression against other states or peoples. Elsewhere, the line is drawn between cultural and political nationalism – when praising Herder, for instance (Berlin, 2001b, pp. 8–9), but also on other occasions, as when asked 'What political structure can possibly accommodate this new age of cultural self-determination?' he replies: 'Cultural self-determination without a political framework is precisely the issue now ...' (Gardels, 1991, p. 21). This is not Berlin's final word on the subject, as I shall show later, but it does indicate an inclination on his part to depoliticize nationality – to hope for a world in which rich cultural variety is not accompanied by deep political divisions. From this perspective, 'bad' nationalism arises when culture and politics become intertwined.

Given his general philosophical outlook, one might have expected that Berlin would have preferred pluralist to unitary forms of nationalism, but interestingly enough in those few places in which he touches upon the issue, he displays little sympathy for what we would now call multiculturalism. Nations matter to Berlin as inclusive forms of community. 'I believe', he says, 'that the common culture that all societies deeply need can only be disrupted by more than a moderate degree of self-assertion on the part of ethnic or other minorities conscious of a common identity' (Gardels, 1991, p. 21).⁷ And when discussing the possibilities open to Jews living in societies in which they form a small minority – a question, as we shall see shortly, that preoccupied Berlin – he forcefully rejected '*galut*' (that is to say, diaspora) nationalism, 'based on the notion of modern nations as a motley amalgam of highly diverse and quasi-autonomous communities, in which Yiddish-speaking Jewish groups, living lives full of picturesque native colour, with folk-song and ancient crafts, and quaint traditional customs, would form a rich, if exotic, ingredient' (Berlin, 2001d, p. 180). Such notions he calls 'sorry absurdities'. What this reveals is that Berlin's celebrated pluralism is a pluralism about moral ideals, values, personal ways of life, or what Rawlsians would call 'conceptions of the good'; it is not social pluralism of the kind that would welcome 'a motley amalgam of highly diverse and quasi-autonomous communities' as a richer kind of society than one based on a shared common culture. Or as he puts it elsewhere, 'we like variety, but we need sufficient assimilation not to create injustice, cruelty and misery' (Berlin, 1998a, p. 121).

Berlin's pluralism is also constrained by his recognition that there are universal values, that it is integral to our understanding of what human beings are that they share a minimum set of values in common, despite great moral diversity in other respects (Berlin, 2002b, pp. 21–6; Lukes, 1994; Galipeau, 1994, ch. 3). He thinks, in particular, that every culture has recognised a minimum set of human rights: 'The idea of human rights rests on the true belief that there are certain goods – freedom, justice, pursuit of happiness, honesty, love – that are in the interest of all human beings, as such, not as members of this or that nationality, religion, profession, character; and that it is right to meet these claims and to protect people against those who ignore or deny them' (Jahanbegloo, 2000, p. 39). It follows immediately from this that for Berlin any acceptable form of nationalism must be morally restricted, in the sense that it must regard human rights (or universal human values more generally) as setting limits to what can be done in the name of national self-determination.⁸ The problem here is not to understand the general shape of Berlin's nationalism, but to decide exactly how much moral diversity he would be prepared to tolerate before the bedrock is reached: he leaves few practical clues. But this raises a more general problem about Berlin's pluralism and its relation to his liberalism that I shall not attempt to address here.⁹

Let us take stock of what we have discovered so far about Berlin's attitude to nationalism. We know that it is equivocal – as he says at one point 'I do not wish to praise or attack nationalism. Nationalism is responsible for magnificent achievements and appalling crimes ...' (Berlin, 1996b, p. 251). We know that he wishes to distinguish between *varieties* of nationalism, a distinction that is sometimes, but by no means always, signalled by a contrast between nationalism proper and something else, for instance 'national consciousness'. We know that in his most detailed

account of the kind of nationalism that he fears, he combines four separate elements, but that on other occasions he focuses on just one of these, for instance the 'aggressive' character of certain nationalisms. But we do not yet have a clear picture of the kind of nationalism he is prepared to defend; in particular we do not yet know how far he thinks that 'benign' nationalism entails national self-determination in the political sense – having a state or some other form of political authority to protect and shape national culture. To throw further light on this question, I want next to examine Berlin's account of the sources of nationalism: if nationalism arises as a response to human needs, what more precisely are the needs to which it corresponds?

The Sources of Nationalism

At the most general level, Berlin's answer to this question is that nationalism stems from the human need to achieve dignity and avoid humiliation. But if we survey his writings on nationalism, we find these ideas being interpreted differently on different occasions, giving sometimes a more positive and sometimes a more negative gloss on nationalist aspirations. We are still caught between Crooked Timber and Bent Twig.

The most strongly positive gloss on nationalism occurs when Berlin is writing about Zionism, against the background of a remarkable analysis of the Jewish condition in European societies prior to the foundation of the state of Israel.¹⁰ His diagnosis is that Jews in these societies have been faced with a choice between three unpalatable options. The first is to attempt to assimilate completely to the national culture of whichever society they find themselves in, altogether denying the significance of their Jewish descent. But this attempt, Berlin argues, can never succeed. Assimilationist Jews try too hard to master and copy the social and cultural norms of their adopted nation, distorting their own lives in various ways, but without convincing the natives that they genuinely belong. Berlin likens them to people who are thrown among a tribe whose language and customs are unfamiliar. In order to survive they become expert students of the tribe's culture, but never cease to be strangers, since, as Berlin puts it:

... their whole existence and all their values depend on the assumption that they can by conscious effort live the life of the natives, and acquire complete security through pursuing, if need be by means of artificial techniques, those activities which the natives perform by nature and spontaneously. This must not be questioned, since, unless it is true, the presence of the strangers among the natives can never be wholly free from danger, and their enormous sustained effort, culminating in the acquisition of a special kind of intellectual and moral vision with which they have seen into the heart of the native system, might turn out to derive from a gigantic delusion: a delusion which has taken them in, perhaps, but has not taken in the natives whose instincts continue to tell them that the strangers, who by this time look like natives, speak like them, even react like them, nevertheless lack something, want of which prevents them from being natives. (Berlin, 2001d, p. 168)

Berlin uses this analogy to explain, on the one hand, the considerable success achieved by assimilationist Jews in certain cultural fields, often involving a romanticising of the national achievements of their adopted country, but on the other the sense of perpetual unease, of trying too hard to be like the natives while living in constant anxiety that they will be found out. Unlike other cultural minorities who have, over time, simply been absorbed into the larger societies they inhabited, and for reasons that Berlin does not make wholly explicit – whether the latent or overt anti-Semitism of the majority, or some special feature of Jewish identity – Jews can never feel fully at home in Gentile societies despite all their efforts to convince themselves that they have discarded their Jewishness and ‘gone native’.

If this form of assimilation cannot succeed, the second strategy open to Jews is to proclaim their Jewish identity and try to turn it into a badge of honour rather than a cause for shame. Berlin's most detailed discussion of this strategy can be found in his psychological portrait of Benjamin Disraeli (Berlin, 1991d). Disraeli, in love with the English aristocracy and desperate to find a way of including himself in their company, did so by way of inventing an ‘aristocratic’ Jewish identity. He saw himself as the descendant of an ancient great race of Jews whose triumphs he catalogues in his novels, and this self-image was in one way successful, both for Disraeli's own self-confidence and for his ability to impress others. But according to Berlin, Disraeli lived in a world of fantasy, his political successes notwithstanding. ‘Unable to function in his own proper person, as a man of dubious pedigree in a highly class-conscious society, Disraeli invented a splendid fairy tale, bound its spell upon the mind of England, and thereby influenced men and events to a considerable degree ... His entire life was a sustained attempt to live a fiction, and to cast its spell over the minds of others’ (Berlin, 1991d, pp. 273–5).

Why then, more generally, must the second strategy fail? In order to proclaim one's Jewish identity in a way that will gain one recognition from the surrounding society, one has, Berlin implies, to romanticise it, to exaggerate certain Jewish traits and become exotic. But this in turn must involve fantasy, and therefore an inability to live in a way that is true to one's own personality. We can connect this, I believe, to Berlin's dismissal of ‘galut’ nationalism, which he rejects in part because he thinks that a modern society cannot function as ‘a motley amalgam of highly diverse and quasi-autonomous communities’, as we saw earlier, but also because it prescribes a certain way of being Jewish, involving speaking Yiddish and so forth, which many Jews, left to their own devices, would choose not to embrace.

If neither outright assimilation nor exaggerated Jewishness are successful ways for Jews to live with freedom and dignity in Gentile societies, the third strategy sketched by Berlin is a kind of compromise whereby a person's Jewishness is not denied, but is suppressed – something to be treated as relatively unimportant, to be discussed only on occasion and in selected company. Using an analogy that some critics have found distasteful, Berlin suggests that Jews might be thought of as hunchbacks who had found different ways of coping with their deformity. The first group, the assimilationists, simply denied that their humps existed – they had long since vanished; the second group maintained that to have a hump was a privilege,

that those with humps were superior beings; the third group tried not to talk about humps, and hoped in that way that they would become less noticeable. 'They tended to wear voluminous cloaks which concealed their precise contours' (Berlin, 2001d, pp. 175–6). One senses that for Berlin this was the least bad of the three strategies. But evidently it involves a certain kind of self-deception and self-alienation, and in that sense is not compatible with a fully dignified human existence.

Behind Berlin's analysis lies his assumption that the Jewish identity is indeed a form of national identity, such that Jews can only live free and dignified lives under circumstances in which they have somewhere to be 'at home'; they have available to them a cultural milieu in which being Jewish becomes the normal state of affairs, so that each person can choose his own path in life without having to negotiate the issue of identity in one or other of the above three ways. What deeply impressed Berlin about Israel was precisely the 'normality' of everyday life there. Noting the relative absence of 'extreme' personalities, whether in the arts, the sciences or business – especially 'sophisticated, chess-playing café intellectuals' – he remarked that tourists are 'much disappointed by the relative placidity, relative coarseness; a kind of stubborn normality and a complacent soundness, wholesomeness, dullness which the Jews have surely richly deserved' (Berlin, 2001c, p. 156). And this also profoundly affected the position of those Jews who continued to live in the Diaspora, for it was now a matter for each individual to decide how to conduct his or her life. The strategic dilemma did not disappear, but it was no longer a 'matter of tragic and desperate concern to the Jews as a whole'. For 'if the Jews are to continue to suffer for failing to please their neighbours by behaving like apes and parrots, they will at least do so individually' (Berlin, 2001d, p. 184).

This last argument of Berlin's is in certain respects puzzling. He says that 'the creation of the State of Israel has rendered the greatest service that any human institution can perform for individuals – has restored to Jews not merely their personal dignity and status as human beings, but what is vastly more important, their right to choose as individuals how they shall live ...' (Berlin, 2001d, p. 182). One thing that Berlin is claiming here is that the existence of Israel as an independent state grants a kind of recognition to Jews everywhere, and he is surely right to say that this has greatly enhanced the self-confidence of Jews who have remained in the Diaspora as well as those who have emigrated to Israel. But Berlin also adds a claim about Jews having the right to choose *as individuals* how to live, and this is more mysterious. In general (though with notable exceptions) they have had the opportunity either to remain in their present country of citizenship or to migrate to Israel, but for those who elected to stay in the Diaspora – and Berlin vigorously defends their right to make such a choice – the social pressures they face do not seem to have changed as a result of Israel having come into existence. If Berlin's diagnosis of the Jewish condition in Gentile societies is correct – if none of the three strategies of assimilation he identifies as having been adopted by Jews in such circumstances is successful, and as a result Jews continue to suffer from what he calls 'social uneasiness', if not outright persecution – it is not clear why the existence of Israel as a sovereign state with a Jewish majority should change this.¹¹

This problem aside, we can extract a general account of the roots of nationalism from Berlin's reflections on Zionism.¹² He assumes, first, that Jewish identity and culture are distinct and deep-rooted, which, when taken together with the latent or overt hostility displayed by members of the dominant culture, shows that outright assimilation into existing European cultures could never be a successful path for Jews to follow. By extension this applies to many other national cultures, for instance those subject to outside colonial rule, where Berlin argues that abandoning one's own culture and trying to assimilate to that of the colonising power is always a mistake (Berlin, 1996b, pp. 249–66). For the culture to flourish, it needs a secure space in which it enjoys hegemonic status – it needs a cultural 'home', in other words. But does this also require political self-determination? Berlin sometimes implies that it does, but if we think about the question more closely, we can see that, from this perspective, the value of political self-determination can only be instrumental. Cultures are more likely to be secure in their 'homes' when they have states to protect them. If, on the other hand, we postulate an external power committed to protecting the culture in question, there is nothing in this account of the sources of nationalism to rule such an arrangement out (suppose, for instance, that the British had been willing to extend their mandate in Palestine forward in time to provide a secure national home for the Jews). The idea that in order to live a dignified life one must live among people who share one's cultural identity is not linked normatively to the idea of political self-determination. What I earlier called Berlin's 'strongly positive' gloss on nationalism does not give us much more than cultural nationalism plus the claim that, as things now are, cultures that do not enjoy political protection are liable to be crushed.

What now of the Bent Twig, Berlin's much less favourable account of the psychological roots of nationalism? Here the main exhibit is German nationalism of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, and although the account can once again be spelt out using the language of human dignity, what is doing the work is not the idea of being at home with people who respect you, but the idea of resentment at being treated as an inferior by outsiders. Nationalism, Berlin says in this vein, 'is in the first place a response to a patronising or disparaging attitude towards the traditional values of a society, the result of wounded pride and a sense of humiliation in its most socially conscious members, which in due course produces anger and self-assertion' (Berlin, 1991e, p. 346). Germans were liable to such a response because they were regarded as culturally and politically backward by comparison with the nations of western Europe – Spain, Italy, Britain and especially France. Resentful at being made to feel provincial, German intellectuals began to announce the superiority of their own cultural values, contrasting themselves with 'the rich, worldly, successful, superficial, smooth, heartless, morally empty French' (Berlin, 1991g, p. 246). What began as a movement for spiritual and cultural revival, however, turned in time to a political movement whose aim was to demonstrate German superiority by force. Other factors were also necessary for this transformation to occur, Berlin admits. But the basic idea here is that nationalism is driven, not just by the desire for recognition as such, but by the desire that one's own culture should be recognized as at least equal to, if not superior to, rival cultures. In other words, recognition here intrinsically involves comparison between forms of cultural belonging. It is not enough to be securely at home in a culture whose

other members treat you as an equal. If you feel that people from other cultures look down on yours, then you will find this humiliating and take steps to force them to recognize the value of your traditions.

Two points are worth emphasizing about this explanation of nationalism. First, it links cultural and political nationalism much more closely together. It is hard to see how cultural recognition can be achieved without political self-determination and the range of resources, which typically will include military resources, that go with it. Second, even if we think in terms of a world of culturally homogeneous units each of which possesses its own state, there is no guarantee that aggressive forms of nationalism will not arise. For it is still possible for some nations to resent the perceived cultural superiority of others, and to engage in aggressive actions accordingly.

When Berlin talks in general terms about the origins of nationalism, he often uses language that is ambiguous as between the two explanations I have distinguished. He speaks, for instance about the need for recognition, or the 'search for status', describing this as among the most powerful of human motives (Berlin, 2001e, pp. 195–9; 2002c, pp. 200–8). He seems here to have particularly in mind the nationalisms of colonised peoples, who prefer to be ruled autocratically by leaders drawn from among themselves than by 'some cautious, just, gentle, well-meaning administrator from outside' (Berlin, 2002c, p. 204). But in describing the motive involved, he conflates three separate elements: first, the need to belong, meaning the need to live among people who, because of their cultural and other characteristics, can recognize me for what I am; second the need not to be patronised or looked down upon by outsiders who inevitably *misrecognize* me; third, the need to be politically independent, to have a sense that I am in control of my life along with others who share my aims and values.¹³ These three elements are obviously connected, and perhaps in the case of colonised peoples they naturally combine to produce movements for national liberation, but in other cases they may come apart. In Berlin's analysis of the Jewish predicament, for instance, it is the first element that predominates. What Jews are said to need is not primarily recognition by others, nor indeed political independence, but simply an environment in which they can live together without 'social uneasiness' and achieve individual self-fulfilment. In the case of post-Enlightenment Germany, by contrast, the second element comes to the fore. The Germans already lived surrounded by other Germans; their problem was not a failure of recognition by 'the members of the society to which historically, morally, economically, and perhaps ethnically, I feel that I belong' (Berlin, 2002c, p. 202). Nor was it lack of political independence: although of course there was at this point no unified German state, the Germans were not a colonised or occupied people, and Berlin does not explain their nationalism in terms of the experience of political division. The problem, rather (according to Berlin), was a shared perception that German culture was regarded as inferior to the cultures of other European states, and that Germans, as a people, were therefore not being given adequate recognition by outsiders. Finally, although Berlin does not take this step, we might well envisage forms of nationalism in which the third element predominates: the nationalisms, that is, of established and confident peoples who simply wish to be politically independent – who already have a sense of collective belonging, and who do not regard themselves as being

treated as inferiors by outsiders, except insofar as they have up to now been denied rights of self-government. For such peoples, the 'search for status' is a search specifically for *political* status, not for cultural recognition.¹⁴

Perhaps because he does not distinguish clearly between the different forms that the demand for recognition can take, Berlin tends to treat what he calls 'this profound and universal craving for status and understanding' as a deep-rooted aspect of human nature, and therefore as not susceptible to ethical assessment. His concern is only to distinguish it from a desire for liberty in the proper sense. Normatively, however, it matters a great deal which form the need for recognition assumes. Indeed, as we have seen, Berlin himself wishes to applaud (moderate) Zionism and condemn (Romantic) German nationalism. Unfortunately, just as he fails to draw a clear line between 'good' and 'bad' versions of nationalist doctrine, so here he fails to separate different motivational sources of nationalism in a way that would allow relevant ethical distinctions to be drawn. In order to see how far a normative account of nationalism can be found in Berlin, I shall attempt in the final section of the paper to compare his thinking with later theories of liberal nationalism.

Berlin and Liberal Nationalism

Liberal nationalism, as I shall understand it, is more than just the claim that there is no outright opposition between the principles of liberty and nationality – that there can be versions of nationalism that do not require sacrificing the freedoms and other rights that liberals cherish. If that were all that was meant by liberal nationalism, then it is clear on the basis of what has been said already that Berlin was a liberal nationalist: he was liberal who recognized that at least some forms of nationalism could be reconciled with personal liberty, even if (as we have seen) he was less than clear about precisely of *which* forms this was true. I take the idea of liberal nationalism to involve more than this – to imply that the relationship between liberal and nationalist values is symbiotic. In particular, liberal nationalists hold that liberal goals cannot reliably be achieved except in societies whose members share a common national identity; they may also think that national self-determination cannot be achieved except in societies that enjoy liberal rights and freedoms. But do these claims conceal an inner tension between the two sets of values, manifested in practical divergences over questions of policy? Berlin, his value-pluralism notwithstanding, remained firmly committed to the protection of negative liberty as the first priority of liberals. How far did this commitment constrain his nationalism, and what can we learn as a result about the prospects for a coherent form of liberal nationalism?

The oldest and perhaps best-known of liberal nationalist claims is the one made by John Stuart Mill in the sixteenth chapter of *Considerations on Representative Government*, namely that 'free institutions are next to impossible in a country made up of different nationalities' (Mill, 1972, p. 361). Briefly stated, Mill's argument is that, in multinational societies, inter-group hostilities will mean that there is no united public opinion capable of forming an effective check on government; instead each group will attempt to use the powers of the state to exploit and suppress the others. Berlin never argues explicitly to this effect. Nevertheless, his comments, noted

above, about the need for a common culture, and his hostility towards certain kinds of multiculturalism, seem to have been inspired by a similar thought. Liberty requires social peace, and confidence among different groups that each will abide by a commonly-agreed set of rules, and these conditions are threatened by deep cultural divisions. As Berlin put it in the course of an interview, 'I think liberalism is essentially the belief of people who have lived on the same soil for a long time in comparative peace with each other' (Berlin, 1998a, p. 121).

The converse of this argument is that there is a liberal case for nation-building in societies whose populations are culturally divided, an argument endorsed by Mill in his notorious remarks about the benefits to the Bretons and the Basques of being absorbed into French nationality, and to the Welsh and the highland Scots of being converted into Britons (Mill, 1972, pp. 363–4). Perhaps because of changed circumstances, no such remarks are made by Berlin. This does not mean that he excluded all nation-building policies as a matter of principle. When he writes about Israel, for instance, he lavishes praise on the creation of (modern) Hebrew as a national language, arguing that this has served to bind together Jewish immigrants from different backgrounds, while at the same time connecting them to a noble past. 'Of all the factors at work in creating a democratic and liberal nation in Israel today, not even excluding the army, it is the most penetrating, the most influential, and the most successful ...' (Berlin, 2001c, p. 154). And in his tribute to the Indian nationalist Rabindranath Tagore, he praises the latter for wanting to reclaim distinctive aspects of Indian culture, including reviving the Bengali language, in the face of a 'shallow internationalism' whereby 'races, communities, nations were constantly urged to abolish their frontiers, destroy their distinctive attributes, cease from mutual strife, and combine into one great universal society' (Berlin, 1996b, p. 264). But it is important to observe that these policies are non-coercive and therefore do not involve any hard choices between liberty and the goal of nation-building. To put liberal nationalism to the test, we need to consider cases where nation-building policies involve limiting individual freedom in certain respects. Consider, for example, the laws governing the language of commercial signing in Quebec, or the enforcement of a national curriculum in education, limiting the autonomy of schools to tailor the content of what they teach to the religious or ethnic background of their pupils. Although we have no direct evidence of Berlin's views on these matters, in the light of what we know about his political philosophy in general and his attitude to nationalism in particular, it seems likely that he would have come down on the side of individual liberty. So although Berlin sees and accepts the argument connecting national unity to liberal democracy, he would have been reluctant to draw from it the practical conclusion that many liberal nationalists have wished to derive – namely that nation-building goals, justified in part by their contribution to liberty in the long run, may nonetheless in the short term justify restricting the freedom of some individuals and some groups to live as they wish.

A second claim made by liberal nationalists concerns the cultural preconditions for individual autonomy. The argument here is that in order for individuals to choose autonomously how to live, they must have access to an adequate range of social practices and other options, and these are provided by what Kymlicka calls a 'cul-

tural structure' (Kymlicka, 1989, ch. 8). In the absence of such a structure, individuals might still have choices to make, but they would not be able to make intelligent decisions about the comparative value of the different possibilities open to them, and so genuine autonomy, which involves choosing for good reasons, would be impossible. The most important cultural structures are those that Kymlicka later refers to as 'distinct and institutionally complete societal cultures', and these in practice must be national in scope (Kymlicka, 1995, ch. 5). Because of global pressures in the contemporary world that tend to erode these societal cultures, they are only secure when they are protected by institutions of political self-determination. In this way, national self-determination can be justified by appeal to the indisputably liberal value of autonomy.

What would Berlin have made of this argument? As is well known, he is suspicious of the idea of autonomy, which for him would count as a positive conception of freedom. He does not deny its validity outright, but he argues that choosing for oneself should not be conflated with having many options to choose between, an external condition distinct from the internal state of the chooser. And he seems more concerned that individuals should have as many options as possible when deciding how to live their lives than that these options should be coherently structured as a result of forming part of a single 'societal culture'. From this perspective, Berlin's position seems closer to that of Jeremy Waldron, who defends what he calls cultural 'mélange' – being able to combine options drawn from many different cultures in a single life – than to Kymlicka's defence of cultural integrity (Waldron, 1995). So again it seems unlikely that Berlin would have approved of policies designed to protect cultures from invasion by foreign elements – for instance attempts to safeguard minority languages in danger of being swamped by international languages by requiring children to learn them in schools, or measures designed to block the import of foreign films or television programmes – even though in general he celebrates cultural diversity and condemns cosmopolitanism as shallow. His liberalism is in this respect more classical than that of recent liberal nationalists: it is about protecting individuals from outside interference, especially state interference, rather than about using the state to protect the cultural conditions under which people can lead autonomous lives.¹⁵

As I suggested above, liberal nationalists typically connect cultural integrity to political self-determination.¹⁶ But it is important to distinguish a weaker and a stronger version of this argument. The weaker version sees political self-determination as a kind of protective shell within which a culture can remain secure and develop through its own internal processes. The evil to be avoided here is cultural suppression or distortion by outside agents – imperial emissaries, say, who either from animosity or misguided benevolence try to shape the culture in their own image, passing laws to prohibit traditional practices, for instance. By having institutions of self-rule, a space is created in which those who inhabit the culture can either preserve or develop it as they see fit. The stronger version sees political self-determination as integral to cultural development itself. Politics is the vehicle through which existing cultural values can be debated, priorities established, and policies enacted to implement the decisions reached – for instance language policies in schools and the media, state funding for cultural events, and so forth.

Insofar as Berlin subscribes to either of these arguments, it is clearly to the weaker version. This conclusion can be deduced from the way he expresses his support for Zionism. Nowhere does Berlin suggest that Jewish culture cannot flourish except through having a national state whose aim is to promote it. Instead, as we have seen, he argues that what Jews need is first and foremost a *society* of their own – a place where being Jewish is the normal, taken-for-granted state of affairs, and in which, therefore, Jews can feel at home, at ease with themselves. That this requires the creation of an independent Israeli state is contingent on the fact that such a society could only exist, securely, under its protection. Moreover he would probably have regarded the politicisation of cultural questions implied in the second argument with suspicion. He was drawn, evidently, to Herder's view of culture as a spontaneous growth in which the unique spirit of a particular people is expressed. From this perspective, setting cultural priorities by political decision, no matter how democratic the procedure, would appear too mechanical a process.

The upshot is that for Berlin, national self-determination was only of instrumental value. Unlike later liberal nationalists, he did not see collective autonomy – the experience of determining, along with others, the direction in which your society will develop – as intrinsically good. Self-determination mattered because, other things being equal, it was most likely to create the conditions under which individuals could develop freely, and avoid the discomfort of being governed by those who did not share or even perhaps understand their values. Again we see how Berlin's liberalism conditions and limits his nationalism.

A final argument that I want to consider links national self-determination with justice. To deny self-determination to nations capable of exercising it, some would argue, is an injustice in the same way as, say, denying voting rights to a competent adult citizen. This argument is usually put forward on behalf of minority nations such as the Catalans, the Québécois and the Scots, and the claim is not primarily about material injustice. These peoples might be doing perfectly well in material terms, but it is simply unfair that they should not be allowed to control their collective life – language policy, cultural matters, national symbols, etc. – in the way that people in established nation-states are able to. This can be interpreted as a demand for equal status, and as we have seen Berlin recognizes the force and to some extent the legitimacy of such demands as a general matter. But apparently he does not see the failure to grant national self-determination in cases such as this as an instance of injustice, nor does he appear particularly sympathetic to the demand itself, on those few occasions when he refers to contemporary nationalist conflicts (Berlin, 1991e, p. 350; Gardels, 1991, p. 21). Perhaps these cases remind him too much of the original Bent Twig: these are not the nationalisms of oppressed peoples, but of peoples who resent the fact that their nationhood is not being given equal recognition by their more powerful neighbours.

The Coherence of Liberal Nationalism

What, then, can we learn by examining Berlin about the possibility of developing a coherent version of liberal nationalism? As noted earlier, several critics have argued that this is at best an unstable compound: faced with real political choices, would-be liberal nationalists have to decide between their liberalism and nation-

alism. Consider issues such as these: restrictions on immigration, the rights of cultural minorities, the claims of (potentially illiberal) secessionist movements, and responsibilities to the global poor. In each case there appears to be a liberal position on the issue, and an opposing nationalist position (on the first issue, for instance, liberals will privilege individuals' rights to free movement, whereas nationalists will privilege the right of political communities to determine their own membership). Depending on which choices are made, liberal nationalism collapses either into unqualified liberalism or unqualified nationalism: there is no third way. And our analysis of Berlin's thought appears to confirm this diagnosis: the positions he adopts are wholly grounded in liberal principles. His partly sympathetic response to nationalism is to be explained, first, by the value he attaches to cultural diversity, to a world in which many different patterns of life are realised in different places, as opposed to cosmopolitan uniformity which he saw as 'a tremendous desiccation of everything that is human' (Gardels, 1991, p. 22); second, by his recognition of human beings' need for cultural belonging, of being at home in familiar surroundings, which in Berlin's case sprang from reflection on his own deep-rooted Judaism (Berlin, 1998b). But these values have no direct political entailments for Berlin. Indeed, as we have seen, he is strongly inclined to depoliticise cultural nationalism entirely, following his reading of the much-praised Herder. In the end this apolitical stance cannot be sustained: Berlin recognizes, above all in the case of Israel, that a cultural 'home' requires the protection of an independent state in order to be secure. But the value of political self-determination is always instrumental. As Stuart Hampshire has suggested, Berlin's nationalism, such as it is, has a broadly utilitarian character: people are happy only when living according to familiar customs and habits, and they need political independence to sustain that accepted way of life (Hampshire, 1991).

But although Berlin's own political thought exemplifies the final triumph of liberalism over nationalism, we can still learn much from him about the kind of liberalism and the kind of nationalism that can be successfully combined. For these are both loose and flexible ideologies, capable of being interpreted in very different ways. Take nationalism first. As our analysis of Berlin has revealed, nationalist *doctrines* can vary along at least four different dimensions, and there are also sharply contrasting stories to be told about the psychological motivations that underlie nationalism – the human needs to which nationalism responds. Is nationalism to be understood in terms of a universal human need to live in a cultural community in which one feels at home, or it is to be understood much more narrowly as a response to feelings of inferiority or humiliation provoked by comparisons with other communities? If the first story is true, we may expect nationalism, or some equivalent of it, to be a perennial feature of human society, and one that any plausible version of liberalism must come to terms with. If the second story is true, by contrast, then liberal cosmopolitanism, which aims to create a just world order in which all individuals, and all cultures, are equally respected, can plausibly claim that nationalism is no more than a passing phase of human history – as Einstein once said, it is an infantile disease, 'the measles of the human race'.

So how should a liberal nationalist understand nationalism? I suggest that the following six theses delineate a form of nationalism that can cohere with liberalism.

1. Although nationalism may make its appearance only in the transition from pre-modern to modern society, it nevertheless is a form of human community appropriate to large, anonymous and highly mobile societies. It creates a sense of shared identity, and allows people to see themselves as part of a trans-generational community with a distinctive character and culture.
2. National identities are not, however, primordial. A people's self-understanding develops over time, and adapts to new circumstances. In particular, criteria of memberships can change, and need not, for example, be understood in racial or ethnic terms.
3. Nationality is an important source of personal identity, but it need not and should not be exclusive. Belonging to a nation does not exclude, and may often be supported by, membership in sub-national groups of many kinds: local communities, religious and cultural groups, political associations and so forth.
4. By belonging to a nation, a person incurs special obligations to his or her compatriots, but this is consistent with having duties to outsiders that are universal in character (for example, the duty to respect human rights). In other words, what nationality requires is a *reasonable* partiality towards compatriots, not out-and-out moral parochialism (Miller, forthcoming).
5. All nations have valid claims to self-determination, so no nation is entitled to pursue policies in the name of self-determination that prevent others from doing the same. The political institutions that cater for self-determination must respond even-handedly to such claims, for instance through federal arrangements or forms of devolution for national minorities.
6. Political self-determination is important because, in general, cultures cannot flourish and develop without political support. But at least as much weight should be attached to the instrumental reasons for making political and national boundaries coincide – for instance that this may prove to be an essential precondition for democracy and social justice.

Embracing these six theses means adopting a form of nationalism that is pluralist, morally restricted, and reiterative, but still political – to use the terminology developed in the second section to analyse Berlin's nationalism. Nationalism of this kind seems at least potentially consistent with liberal principles, but before reaching this conclusion we need to turn the spotlight on to liberalism itself, and again draw some distinctions.

One relevant distinction is that between classical and modern liberalism – between a liberalism that centres on individual rights to life, liberty and property, the free market and the minimal state, and a liberalism that incorporates democratic citizenship, social justice and the welfare state. Liberals of the first type have often argued, with justification, that nationalism of whatever stripe poses a threat to classical liberal principles by virtue of its implicit collectivism. Nations are communities whose members can make claims on each other that go beyond non-interference, and that pursue collective projects of various kinds, all of which requires the state to play a more active role than classical liberalism permits. By the same token, however, nationalism and modern liberalism are natural allies – a shared nationality provides the motivational basis for democratic citizenship and the pursuit of social justice, as I have argued elsewhere (Miller, 1995, ch. 4).

Perhaps less familiar is a distinction that can be drawn between deontological and sociological versions of liberalism. Deontological liberals see liberal principles as mandatory guides to action that can be derived through abstract reflection on the circumstances of human life – for instance, by considering basic human interests, we can derive a set of rights that must be respected under all circumstances, such as rights to freedom of speech and movement. A liberal state is one that adheres to liberal principles so derived. Sociological liberals, by contrast, ask about the social and political circumstances in which liberal aims and values are most likely to be achieved, without assuming that it is possible to adhere to liberal principles in all cases. In particular, one such principle may have to be compromised now in order to improve the chances of creating or sustaining a liberal society in the future. An issue such as allowing free speech to racists illustrates this distinction. A deontological liberal will ask whether racist speech violates some condition such as Mill's harm principle, and if it does not, will defend the racist's right to air his views. A sociological liberal will ask about the consequences of permitting racist speech: will it create a climate of violence in which other liberal values are put at risk, or even threaten the stability of liberal democracy itself? If so, this may be sufficient reason to clamp down on it. The distinction I am drawing here is no doubt too crude, since many flesh-and-blood liberals will be sensitive to considerations of both kinds. Nevertheless, by seeing liberals as standing on a spectrum between these two poles, we can throw further light on the coherence of liberal nationalism.

In a number of areas, nationalists are likely to support policies that deontological liberals will find unacceptable. They may, for example, impose national curricula on schools, with the aim of encouraging national integration, thereby lessening educational freedom of choice. They may impose language requirements on business or the public services. They may pursue immigration policies that discriminate between applicants on cultural grounds, thereby infringing the equal rights of the unsuccessful applicants. But whereas deontological liberals are likely to dismiss such policies out of hand, the question for sociological liberals is whether over the longer term they will help to build a society in which liberal rights and values are more securely enjoyed. The liberal nationalist argument is that liberalism depends upon the solidarity and sense of common identity that nationhood provides, so policies such as those outlined above may be justified if indeed they are necessary to consolidate national identities in the face of the social fragmentation that is endemic in contemporary societies.

Where should we place Berlin on the liberal dimensions we have just been considering? As already noted, his liberalism is clearly modern rather than classical – so far, so good. But was his liberalism deontological or sociological? There is evidence in both directions. There are places in which he seems to treat the defence of an area of negative liberty as something close to a fundamental principle, not to be overridden in the name of other values. But, as we saw earlier, there are also places in which he recognizes that liberalism itself has social preconditions, and he makes the connection between cultural community, trust, and willingness to abide by liberal principles. Let us say that he stands somewhere towards the middle of this spectrum. His liberalism is such that a coherent liberal nationalism remains an open possibility for him. Why, then, was he reluctant to take that final step?

The reason, I believe, is that Berlin was convinced (along with many later critics of liberal nationalism) that nationalism, as a real political phenomenon, is always unstable. Theoretically we can delineate a benign form of nationalism, as I have done above, and as Berlin also, though with limited success, attempted to do. But there is no way to ensure that any really existing form of nationalism remains within the limits we have set, and every chance that circumstances will arise in which it becomes aggressive, intolerant, authoritarian, etc. National consciousness, in other words, is always liable to become 'inflamed'; the Bent Twig is an ever-present danger. And this, I think, is the deepest challenge that liberal nationalism faces. So long as we remain at the level of theory, we can interpret both liberalism and nationalism so as to make their relationship not only consistent but mutually supportive. But when we move from theory to practice, it becomes much harder to identify conditions under which our favoured form of nationalism will remain stable, or to find political mechanisms that will ensure this. This challenge represents Berlin's final legacy to the liberal nationalists who have succeeded him.

(Accepted: 1 October 2004)

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Notes

I am very grateful to Henry Hardy for his help in finding some of the sources on which this paper is based, and in particular for supplying transcripts of two broadcasts in which Berlin discusses nationalist ideas. I should also like to thank Erica Benner, Jerry Cohen, George Crowder, Henry Hardy and the referees for *Political Studies* for illuminating commentary on earlier drafts, and Zofia Stemplowska for her help in preparing the final manuscript.

- 1 Both Gray, 1995 and Galipeau, 1994 have chapters on Berlin's nationalism, but in neither case is this aspect of his thought critically probed in the way that I shall attempt here. A much less sympathetic treatment of Berlin, and of liberal nationalism generally, can be found in Cocks, 2002, chs. 3–4. Cocks' critique, however, misrepresents Berlin's position in several respects: see Miller, 2004.
- 2 The phrase comes from Kant, and Berlin's preferred rendering of the relevant quotation is 'Out of the crooked timber of humanity no straight thing was ever made'. It is used in many of his essays, including 'Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century', 'Two Concepts of Liberty' and 'John Stuart Mill and the Ends of Life' in Berlin, 2002a; 'Montesquieu' and 'Nationalism: Past Neglect and Present Power' in Berlin, 1991a; 'The Pursuit of the Ideal' and 'The Decline of Utopian Ideas in the West' in Berlin, 1991b; 'Jewish Slavery and Emancipation' in Berlin, 2001a.
- 3 The attribution is unconfirmed: see Henry Hardy's note in Berlin, 1999, p. 161. Joshua Cherniss has suggested that Berlin's source was actually Plekhanov's *Essays in the History of Materialism*.
- 4 The first distinction was drawn by Kohn, 1944, ch. 8 and by Plamenatz, 1976. For a more elaborate geographical classification of nationalisms, see Gellner, 1998, ch. 7. The second distinction has been drawn by Smith, 1991, ch. 1 and by Ignatieff, 1994, Introduction.
- 5 The term 'liberal nationalism' was first self-applied by Tamir, 1993, but it has been extended to include a number of other theorists, including MacCormick, 1982; Margalit and Raz, 1995; Kymlicka, 2001 and Miller, 1995.
- 6 'I am an Italian, but at the same time I am a European. I love my country because I love the concept of country, I believe in freedom for Italians because I believe in the concept of freedom. I want rights for Italians, because I believe in rights for all', he wrote (Silone, 1939, p. 99).
- 7 See also his comments on multiculturalism in Berlin, 1998a, p. 116.
- 8 'I don't believe in total self-determination. I believe that self-determination has its limits if it inflicts too much trampling on human rights, and it can' (Berlin, 1998a, p. 122).

- 9 On this issue, see Gray, 1995; Lukes, 1994; Crowder, 1994, 2002; Berlin and Williams, 1994; Gutmann, 1999.
- 10 I use Berlin's Zionism to throw light on his general understanding of, and attitude towards, nationalism, though some commentators suggest that it stands somewhat at odds with the rest of his thought – see for instance Margalit, 2001 and Wollheim, 2001.
- 11 It might be said – and Berlin himself appears to suggest this in places – that the very fact that Jews now have a choice whether to stay or to move to Israel guarantees their freedom: such disabilities as they suffer in Gentile societies are self-imposed. But this is surely implausible, neglecting as it does the very great costs that may be involved in uprooting oneself from one's country of origin and moving to a new society.
- 12 It is not my aim to assess Berlin's Zionism itself. For a critical appraisal, see Cocks, 2002, chs. 3–4.
- 13 Compare Avishai Margalit's analysis of the diverse emotional roots of nationalism, according to Berlin, in Margalit, 2001, pp. 151–4.
- 14 This analysis might apply to minority nationalist movements in liberal states, the nationalisms of the Scots, the Catalans or the Québécois, for instance.
- 15 It is not of course classical in the socio-economic sense: Berlin was always a firm supporter of the New Deal and the welfare state.
- 16 One exception is Yael Tamir, who explicitly defends a cultural interpretation of the right of national self-determination, which she contrasts with the political idea of self-rule. As we shall see, this may align her most closely with Berlin's position. Yet Tamir's distinction remains obscure to me. She says: 'In its communal aspect, national self-determination entails a process whereby individuals seek to give public expression to their national identity. Hence it is often described as the right of individuals to a public sphere, thus implying that individuals are entitled to establish institutions and manage their communal life in ways that reflect their communal values, traditions, and history – in short, their culture' (Tamir, 1993, p. 70). But if institutions in the public sphere are not political institutions, what are they? Tamir also makes the point that national self-determination need not imply to democratic political participation. This is true: nations can be self-determining so long as those who make political decisions on their behalf are recognized by the remainder of society as legitimate representatives of the national culture. But this shows that the right of national self-determination need not be implemented in a democratic form, not that it is a cultural rather than a political right.

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