Sir Isaiah Berlin, OM, who died in 1997, was born in Riga, capital of Latvia, in 1909. When he was six, his family moved to Russia; there in 1917, in Petrograd, he witnessed both the Social-Democratic and the Bolshevik Revolutions.

In 1921 his family came to England, and he was educated at St Paul’s School and Corpus Christi College, Oxford. At Oxford he was a Fellow of All Souls, a Fellow of New College, Professor of Social and Political Theory, and founding President of Wolfson College. He also held the Presidency of the British Academy. His published work includes *Karl Marx, Four Essays on Liberty, Vico and Herder, Russian Thinkers, Concepts and Categories, Against the Current, Personal Impressions, The Crooked Timber of Humanity, The Sense of Reality* and *The Proper Study of Mankind*. As an exponent of the history of ideas he was awarded the Erasmus, Lippincott and Agnelli Prizes; he also received the Jerusalem Prize for his lifelong defence of civil liberties.

Dr Henry Hardy, a Supernumerary Fellow of Wolfson College, Oxford, has edited several other collections of Isaiah Berlin’s work, and is currently preparing his letters and his unpublished writings for publication. Roger Hausheer, who is writing an intellectual life of Isaiah Berlin, is Lecturer in German Studies at the University of Bradford.
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Essays in the History of Ideas

ISAIAH BERLIN

Edited and with a Bibliography by Henry Hardy

With an Introduction by Roger Hausheer

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Author's Note

I have nothing of my own to add to the essays on the history of ideas contained in this book, but I should be exceedingly remiss if I did not take this opportunity of offering my thanks to Mr Roger Hausheer for providing so sympathetic and luminous an account of my views on the topics discussed in these essays. No author could wish for a more understanding, scrupulous or civilised critic. I should like to express my sincere thanks to this most promising young scholar.

ISAIAH BERLIN

September 1978
Editor's Preface

This volume is one of five in which I have brought together, and prepared for reissue, most of the published essays by Isaiah Berlin which had not hitherto been made available in a collected form.1 His many writings were scattered, often in obscure places; most were out of print; and only half a dozen essays had previously been collected and reissued.2 These five volumes, together with the complete list of his publications which this one contains, and subsequent volumes in which I have published much of his previously unpublished work,3 have made much more of his oeuvre readily accessible than before.

The essays in the present volume are contributions to the history of ideas. For various reasons, I omitted nine essays in this field which, other things being equal, would have belonged here. These are 'Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century' and 'John Stuart Mill and the Ends of Life', which had already been reissued in Four Essays on Liberty; 'The Philosophical Ideas of Giambattista Vico' and 'Herder and the Enlightenment', which had been revised and published as a separate book, Vico and Herder; 'Socialism and Socialist Theories', which has now been reprinted in The Sense of Reality; 'The Decline of Utopian Ideas in the West', 'European Unity and its Vicissitudes',

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'The Apotheosis of the Romantic Will: The Revolt Against the Myth of an Ideal World' and 'The Bent Twig: A Note on Nationalism', which appear in The Crooked Timber of Humanity (in effect a companion volume to this one), together with three essays that appeared after the present volume was first published, and a previously unpublished study of Joseph de Maistre. Details of these additional pieces can be found in the bibliography already mentioned.¹

The details of the original publication of the essays that are included here are as follows. 'The Counter-Enlightenment' appeared in the Dictionary of the History of Ideas (New York, 1968-73: Scribner's);² 'The Originality of Machiavelli' was published in Myron P. Gilmore (ed.), Studies on Machiavelli (Florence, 1972: Sansoni); 'The Divorce between the Sciences and the Humanities' was the second Tykociner Memorial Lecture, published by the University of Illinois in 1974; 'Vico's Concept of Knowledge' appeared as 'A Note on Vico's Concept of Knowledge' in Giorgio Tagliacozzo and Hayden V. White (eds), Giambattista Vico: An International Symposium (Baltimore, [1969]: Johns Hopkins Press); 'Vico and the Ideal of the Enlightenment' was published in Social Research 43 (1976);³ 'Montesquieu' appeared in the Proceedings of the British Academy 41 (1955); 'Hume and the Sources of German Anti-Rationalism' was a contribution to G. P. Morice (ed.), David Hume: Bicentennial Papers (Edinburgh, 1977: Edinburgh University Press);⁴ 'Herzen and his Memoirs' is the introduction to Alexander Herzen, My Past and Thoughts, translated by Constance Garnett (London, 1968: Chatto and Windus; New York, 1968: Knopf); 'The Life and Opinions of Moses Hess' was the Lucien Wolf Memorial Lecture (Cambridge, 1950: Heffer, for the Jewish Historical Society of England); 'Benjamin Disraeli, Karl Marx and the Search for Identity' appeared in Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England 22 (1968-9) (London, 1970: Jewish Historical Society of England); 'The

¹ They are, respectively, items 37, 74, 98, 38, 159, 73, 143, 128, 170, 181, 196 and 200. The bibliography should also be consulted for the many smaller pieces in this area, including book reviews.
² With a bibliography not here reproduced.
³ Its last (free-standing) section, 'The Workings of Providence', is not reprinted here.
⁴ The 'Additional Bibliographical Material' appended to this article has not been reproduced here.
EDITOR'S PREFACE

'Naïveté' of Verdi' was published in Atti del I congresso internazionale di studi verdiani, 1966 (Parma, 1969: Istituto di Studi Verdiani); 'Georges Sorel' was a Creighton Lecture published first in The Times Literary Supplement, 31 December 1971, and then in an expanded form in Chimen Abramsky (ed.), Essays in Honour of E. H. Carr (London, 1974: Macmillan); and 'Nationalism: Past Neglect and Present Power' appeared in Partisan Review 46 (1979). I am grateful to the publishers concerned for allowing me to reprint these essays.

'The Counter Enlightenment', 'The Divorce between the Sciences and the Humanities' and 'Nationalism: Past Neglect and Present Power' have been left without references (with the exception of passages quoted in footnotes and one long passage), as they originally appeared. A few passages – chiefly translations – were rewritten by the author for this volume. Otherwise, apart from necessary corrections, and the addition of missing references, the essays are reprinted essentially in their original form.

I received very generous help from a number of people in editing this volume. Roger Hausheer not only wrote the introduction, but helped extensively with German sources, especially Hamann and Hess. David Robey helped with Machiavelli, Edward Larrissy with Blake, the late Robert Shackleton with Montesquieu, Robert Wokler with Rousseau, Barry Stroud with Hume, Aileen Kelly with Herzen, Lord Blake and Vernon Bogdanor with Disraeli, Terrell Carver with Marx and Jeremy Jennings with Sorel. I could not have managed without the assistance of these scholars, and I record my gratitude to them. Isaiah Berlin himself, with unwavering courtesy, did his best to answer my virtually endless queries, and Pat Utechin, his secretary, provided invaluable help and support. Finally I should like to thank Sir Keith Thomas for pointing out a number of errors in the original edition.

HENRY HARDY

June 1997
Wolfson College, Oxford

1 References have been added in The Proper Study of Mankind (see p. ix above, note 1).
Introduction

Roger Hausheer

Two extravagances: to exclude Reason, to admit only Reason.

Blaise Pascal

A man of clear ideas errs grievously if he imagines that whatever is seen confusedly does not exist: it belongs to him, when he meets with such a thing, to dispel the mist, and fix the outlines of the vague form which is looming through it.

J. S. Mill

In our time, what is at issue is the very nature of man, the image we have of his limits and possibilities as man. History is not yet done with its exploration of the limits and meanings of 'human nature'.

C. Wright Mills

Isaiah Berlin’s essays in the history of ideas are not written from a point of view. They are not intended directly to illustrate or support (or for that matter attack or undermine) any single historical or political theory, doctrine or ideology; they range from such wholly diverse figures as Marx, Disraeli and Sorel to topics as apparently remote from one another as nationalism and the theory of knowledge; they are wholly exploratory and undogmatic, raising more tentative but often deeply unsettling questions than they claim to answer; and above all, they represent an utterly independent, scrupulously open-minded, but deeply passionate search for truth. Less, perhaps, than any other thinker does Berlin suppose himself in possession of some simple truth, and then proceed to interpret and rearrange the world in the light of it. Yet his essays are not scattered leaves, blown by the
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four winds. Nor are they mere occasional pieces, standing in isolation from one another, significant only in the context of their original publication. For in so far as they proceed from a central vision of man and his capacities, and their transformation through historical time – a vision which is richly ramified, complex, and incapable of completion – they are bound lightly and naturally together at many hidden and unexpected levels. Time and again, Berlin raises and illuminates, in the light of vividly concrete historical examples, major issues with which he has dealt in a more abstract manner in his philosophical essays; issues which are not only at the core of his lifelong preoccupation with ideas, but of great intrinsic interest and importance in themselves, and at the forefront of attention today.

His essays sail manfully against the current in at least two ways. Many of them are devoted to intellectual figures of great originality who have either been largely ignored or else regarded with patronising disdain, both by their contemporaries and by later generations of scholars. Indeed, to help rescue from oblivion or neglect, and render historical justice to, thinkers who have been ignored, misrepresented or misunderstood, partly at least because they have dared to oppose the ruling intellectual orthodoxies of their time, is not the least of Berlin's services to scholarship. His essays on Vico, Hess and Sorel, to take but three examples, would be memorable for this alone. But what makes these essays so strikingly original and exciting is the sense we are given of the gradual birth of seminal new ideas, of the emergence since the mid-eighteenth century of some of the great cardinal notions of the modern world. For in examining the ideas of philosophers, thinkers, and men of vision like Vico, Hamann and Herder, Herzen and Sorel, Berlin displays a uniquely perceptive sensitivity to the deeper stirrings and movements, the dark, uneasy, brooding seasons of the human spirit beneath the bland rationalistic surface of the thought of an age, when a small but at times passionate voice of opposition, overlooked, misinterpreted or ridiculed by its contemporaries, utters in an often fragmentary or semi-articulate form novel ideas about man and his nature which are destined to grow into a world-transforming movement in a later day. From the doctrines of many of these thinkers some of their most powerful inspiration is drawn, directly or indirectly, by the many and various movements of protest which have grown up against some of the monolithic orthodoxies of our own time. And while Berlin is only too keenly aware of the insane excesses to which the views of some of these antinomian thinkers – in particular, per-
INTRODUCTION

haps, Hamann, Herder and Sorel — may contribute, and have as a matter of fact contributed, yet the penetrating and painful insights they afford us cannot just be brushed aside. At every step forward in our collective development, Berlin seems to say, we must pause to listen sympathetically to the voices crying out in tortured dissent, or just raised to utter criticism, whether cautiously reasoned or wildly inchoate: we ignore them at our peril, for they may tell us something vital about ourselves; and, in so doing, point towards a larger and more generous (and perhaps more truthful) conception of what men are and can be.

Many of the subjects of his essays, therefore, are agonised men in the grips of a vision so novel and complex that they themselves are unable fully to comprehend and formulate it; they search and grope instinctively, not wholly aware of what it is that they are doing, searching for, attempting to express. This gives rise to the reflection that there may be many levels of intentional action, and that some of the insights of a man of original intellectual vision, and the full implications and consequences of these, may never become transparently clear, either to himself or to others, in his own lifetime; for if he has left some record of what he has thought or felt, the full significance and impact of what he was searching for — what, in effect, his underlying, evolving, still fully to be clarified aims were — may emerge only centuries after his death, when a sophisticated vocabulary and appropriate methods have grown up around the constellation of problems which he was among the very first to touch upon. The classic and most striking case of this is Vico. But in some degree it is surely true of most great writers and thinkers of richly suggestive vision, in so far as they have opened new and permanent doors of insight, perception and understanding.

II

At the heart of all Berlin's writings there is a cluster of perennial philosophical problems. The nature of self, will, freedom, human identity, personality and dignity; the manner and degree in which these can be abused, offended against, insulted, and their proper boundaries (whatever these may be) transgressed; the consequences, both probable and actual, of failing to understand them for what they are, and above all of torturing them into conformity with conceptual
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systems and models which deny too much of their essential nature; the distinction between 'inner' human nature as opposed to 'external' physical nature, and between the basic categories and methods proper to their investigation — all these problems are touched upon, and our understanding of them enlarged and deepened, by the essays in this volume. Again, the burning issue of philosophical monism, the doctrine that all reality, and all the branches of our knowledge of it, form a rational, harmonious whole, and that there is ultimate unity or harmony between human ends, is discussed and criticised from many angles by close scrutiny of the cardinal doctrines of some of those thinkers who did most to undermine it. Berlin's preoccupation with the emergence of pluralism, both in the realms of ethical, political and aesthetic values, and in the sphere of human knowledge, so central to his writings in political theory, philosophy of history, and, to a lesser but still important degree, epistemology, is apparent in his choice and treatment of individual thinkers and currents of thought in his essays in the history of ideas. His major excavations in this field have helped bring to light ruined monuments and fragments, strange chunks of intellectual masonry, which seem at times to hint at the shadowy outlines of a phenomenology of European consciousness since the mid-eighteenth century — namely the emergence of novel types of transforming insight and general outlook, with their associated concepts and categories, at certain times and places and in certain thinkers or groups of thinkers — and thereby to throw light upon some of the questions that have troubled him most deeply, not just as an academic philosopher or as a professional scholar, but as a human being.

The history of ideas is a comparatively new field of study: it still craves recognition in a largely hostile world, though there are encouraging signs of a gradual change of heart even in the English-speaking world. There is a growing feeling that investigation of what men have thought and felt, and of the basic ideas in terms of which they have seen themselves and framed their aspirations, may provide a more luminous source of light in the study of man than the established social, political and psychological sciences, for all that many of these have developed an apparatus of specialised terminology and the use of empirical, quantitative methods. For in so far as they tend to
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view men, both as individuals and groups, as the proper objects of the
generalising empirical sciences, as so much passive, inexpressive
material moulded by impersonal forces obedient to statistical or causal
laws, these sciences tend to leave out, or at least play down, something
of central importance: namely that men are defined precisely by their
possession of an inner life, of purposes and ideals, and of a vision or
conception, however hazy or implicit, of who they are, where they
have come from, and what they are at. And indeed, it is just their
possession of an inner life in this sense that distinguishes them from
animals and natural objects. The history of ideas, because it attempts
(among other things) to trace the birth and development of some of
the ruling concepts of a civilisation or culture through long periods of
mental change, and to reconstruct the image men have of themselves
and their activities, in a given age and culture, probably makes a wider
variety of demands upon its practitioners than almost any other disci-
pline; or, at least, demands which are special, and often painful. The
sharp logical skills of conceptual analysis required in the criticism of
ideas, the rich stores of assimilated learning, the vast powers of sympa-
thetic, reconstructive imagination akin to those of the creative artist —
the capacity to 'enter into' and understand from 'inside' forms of life
wholly different from his own — and the almost magical power of
intuitive divination — these capacities, all ideally possessed by the his-
torian of ideas, rarely come together in one man. This doubtless
explains in part why there has never been more than a handful of
genuine historians of ideas, and why the history of ideas itself, as a
reputable discipline with universally accepted credentials of its own,
should still have to battle for recognition.

Yet the great difficulties posed by the cultivation of a field of know-
ledge, and the consequent rarity of high achievement, are not in them-
selves alone sufficient to explain its comparative neglect. Are there,
perhaps, deeper and less obvious reasons for its ambiguous status? Is it
that by burrowing away in the foundations of some of our deepest
assumptions it may excavate things long and conveniently forgotten,
or taken to be more solid, more fixed and final, than they are? Or
reopen painful questions about turnings taken in the course of our
collective development, questions some of which may take on a new
and disturbing significance today? Before our eyes, the granite bedrock
of some of our most familiar and cherished beliefs may dissolve into
shifting sand. At all events, many of Berlin's essays have called into
question, implicitly or explicitly, some of the most ancient and most
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depthly held assumptions of men, at any rate in the western world. And though the analogy is far from perfect, the history of ideas at its best may be able to do for a culture what psychoanalysis claims to be able to do for the individual: to analyse and lay bare the origins and nature not, it is true, of motivation and hidden springs of behaviour, but of the often implicit, deeply embedded, formative ideas, concepts and categories — some of which are more provisional and open to historical change than could have seemed possible before the last half of the eighteenth century — by means of which we order and interpret a major part of our experience, above all in the peculiarly human spheres of moral, aesthetic and political activity; and in so doing enlarge both our self-knowledge and our sense of the scope of our creative liberty.

Berlin's life has been spent in the study of philosophy and the examination, criticism and exposition of general ideas. If we are to understand the peculiar status the history of ideas holds for him, as well as the unique nature of his own contribution to it, we must know something of the philosophical background out of which his interests grew. Berlin has himself often repeated the sharp-eyed insight that, in the western tradition at least, from Plato to our own day, the overwhelming majority of systematic thinkers of all schools, whether rationalists, idealists, phenomenalists, positivists or empiricists, have, despite their many radical differences, proceeded on one central unargued assumption: that reality, whatever mere appearances may indicate to the contrary, is in essence a rational whole where all things ultimately cohere. They suppose that there exists (at least in principle) a body of discoverable truths touching all conceivable questions, both theoretical and practical; that there is, and can be, only one correct method or set of methods for gaining access to these truths; and that these truths, as well as the methods used in their discovery, are universally valid. Their procedure usually takes the following form: they first identify a privileged class of indubitable entities or incorrigible propositions, claiming an exclusive logical or ontological status for these, and assigning appropriate methods for their discovery; and finally, with a gusto that has deep psychological roots in the instinct for both order and destruction, reject as 'not real', confused or, at times, 'nonsense' what cannot be translated into the type of entity or proposition which they have chosen as the impregnable model. Descartes with his doctrine of clear and distinct ideas, or Leibniz with his notion of a *mathesis universalis*, or latter-day positivists with
their atomic propositions and protocol sentences, or phenomenalists and sense-data theorists with their sense-qualities, all exemplify this reductionist tendency. Thinkers of this kind are prone, on the basis of their doctrines, to seek to carry out a radical revision of reality, in theory or in practice, relegating much that seems prima facie meaningful or important to their philosophical bonfire; often enough, things of priceless value have been consumed by the flames, and much of what remains has been fearfully mutilated or distorted.

It is against this background that we must view, on the one hand, Berlin's attitude to one of the most influential philosophical currents of his time, that associated with the neo-positivism of Russell and his disciples, and, on the other, his absorbed preoccupation with humane studies and, above all, with the history of ideas. In a number of essays - 'Logical Translation', 'Verification', 'Empirical Propositions and Hypothetical Statements' - written when he was still teaching and working in the field of general philosophy, Berlin set out to square accounts with logical positivism by offering a critique of some of the central doctrines upon which it rests. These essays, while they represent a kind of valedictory to a particular way of doing philosophy, contain at the same time the seeds of a covert manifesto. Berlin's keen sense of the irreducibly wide variety of kinds of experience and types of proposition, and of the impossibility of expressing them in or translating them out into one type of proposition, or of analysing all the contents of the universe in terms of one basic kind of entity or 'stuff', is here given free expression in the spheres of logic and epistemology. Things are as they are, and we do well not to analyse away what makes them uniquely themselves.

What makes these essays so particularly fascinating and important is twofold: they are written from within the ranks of the philosophical tendency which he criticises, and, in so far as they reveal certain very deep-rooted attitudes and convictions on his own part, they point towards, and help enlarge our understanding of, both his intense interest in the history of ideas and his conception of philosophy's role. While these essays constitute a fundamental critique of one of the major schools of modern philosophy, and a radical break with it, they are above all the expression of the deep and unsilenceable misgivings of a sympathetic insider, of someone who has fully grasped — perhaps too fully — the aims and methods of the intellectual movement he criticises,

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and who, try as he will, cannot accept them. Indeed, it is tempting to see an analogy between Berlin's reaction to the philosophy of Hume, Russell, Ayer, the early Wittgenstein, Carnap, the Vienna Circle and the main strains of neo-positivism, with their reductionist methods of ironing and flattening out, and the rejection by philosophers like Vico of Descartes and the rationalists of his time, or the attitude of visionaries and thinkers like Hamann and Herder to the doctrines of the French Enlightenment. For these, too, were thinkers who understood perfectly the goals and methods of their opponents, and to whom Berlin has subsequently turned and devoted a deep and sympathetic understanding. Yet he is entirely free of their partisan vehemence, remote from their at times alarmingly obscurantist tendencies, and far from blind to the great cardinal merits of the opposition: he acknowledges the great achievements of logical positivism in clearing the ground of much metaphysical nonsense, and time and again in his writings he pays passing tribute to the great triumphs of the natural sciences, which he sees as the most successful single endeavour of the human intellect in modern times; and just as often he reiterates the conviction that all phenomena that are properly tractable by the quantitative methods of the empirical sciences, without violence to or denial of their innermost natures, should be brought under the umbrella of causal or statistical laws.

The inadequacy of simple reductionist frameworks is most keenly felt in that vast, amorphous, volatile area which comprises spiritual, moral, aesthetic and political experience. Here, more than anywhere else, it is deeply misleading and often injurious to apply simple reductionist concepts; and under one aspect, Berlin's entire philosophical oeuvre may be seen as a long battle, now overt, now covert, but always subtle, resourceful and determined, against the facile application of inadequate models and concepts in the field of human studies. Men should never be blinded by the distorting spectacles of theory to what they know immediately to be true of themselves. Many of his essays offer a sensitive and subtle investigation of the impingement, for example, of our increasingly exact and sophisticated knowledge of the natural, external world upon the inner, moral and spiritual worlds of human experience. The pieces on Vico's theory of knowledge, the essays on Hamann and Hume, and Sorel, and the essay on nationalism, may be seen to connect in this regard with some of the major concerns of 'Historical Inevitability'.1 For again and again Berlin warns

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against two fatal dangers: that of subscribing to all-embracing systems which, while they may afford novel and genuine insight, are yet one-sided and over-simple, incapable of doing justice to enough of the facts while turning all or most attention to those they have brought to light, and seeing all else in terms of them; and that of transferring methods and procedures from one discipline, where they have been enormously successful, to another where they are not at home, in which their application distorts or even destroys the facts.

There is perhaps no more illuminating flash of self-disclosure in Berlin's writings than the passage in his essay on his friend John Austin where, after depicting the originality and power of Austin's intellect, his boldness and philosophical fertility, his astonishing capacity for breaking up problems into tiny pieces, he tells us that Austin commanded his affection and respect above all for this passing comment: 'They all talk about determinism and say they believe in it. I've never met a determinist in my life, I mean a man who really did believe in it as you and I believe that men are mortal. Have you?'

Philosophers ruminating in their studies, or natural scientists conducting experiments in their laboratories, might claim to be determinists in theory, but their moral conduct and their practical lives, the words they utter and the judgements they make, belie their surface professions.

For Berlin, philosophy cannot yield a priori knowledge of man's nature or of the universe; nor by logical translation can it afford us certain and incorrigible empirical knowledge. Thus where Ayer persisted in the path of logical positivism, buttressing, developing and refining his central doctrines, and Austin, like the later Wittgenstein, turned to a close and detailed analysis of the concepts of ordinary language, Berlin was drawn increasingly, in his search for answers to some of the central questions of philosophy, to a concrete historical study of some of the major intellectual developments in western culture since the eighteenth century. This led him to explore and deepen the notion that a large part of the thought and experience of a period is organised by what Collingwood termed 'constellations of absolute presuppositions'.

What exactly is the role of philosophy for Berlin? He has himself answered this question in a series of important and penetrating essays. 'The Purpose of Philosophy', 'Does Political Theory Still Exist?', and 'The Concept of Scientific History', taken together, reveal (among many other things) his conception of the positive and vital place of philosophy in all mental activity, and above all of the history of ideas as a type of philosophical endeavour which may yield a genuine form of knowledge, or self-knowledge, which is entirely sui generis, illuminating and liberating, and discoverable only by the systematic study of the intellectual history of men - of cultures, civilisations, intellectual and political movements, and so forth. Berlin distinguishes a class of questions which are properly philosophical in the sense that there is no universally accredited, ready-made method or set of methods for discovering answers to them; they may differ greatly from one another, some appearing to be questions about matters of fact or value, others about methods of inquiry and the words and symbols which they use; yet what they all have in common is that they do not 'carry within their own structure clear indications of the techniques of their solution'. They are distinguishable from the two remaining (and to some extent overlapping) classes of questions - the empirical questions of common sense and the natural sciences on the one hand, and the formal ones of mathematics, logic and other deductive disciplines on the other - by being unanswerable by the systematic application of specialised skills or procedures. For Berlin the history of thought is largely the story of the sorting out of issues into one or another of these two classes of questions. But while one constellation of interrelated questions after another has torn itself away from the parent body of philosophy to become an independent, adult, empirical science or formal discipline, the number of irreducible, unanswerable philosophical questions - and here Berlin diverges very sharply from all those philosophers, perhaps the majority, who seek to make these questions vanish by a powerful philosophical solvent - has not diminished, nor do they grow less pressing.

The nature of some of these questions may be made more clear if we remember the crucial distinction, dwelt on by Kant, between the content of experience and the concepts and categories in terms of which we organise and interpret it. For Kant, as Berlin points out,

1 Reprinted in Concepts and Categories (see p. xix, note 1 above).
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the fundamental categories through which we perceive the external world were universal and immutable, common to all rational, sentient beings. Once they had been discovered and duly analysed, certain fundamental truths about men would be fixed for all time. The vital step taken by Kant was given a revolutionary turn by a succession of thinkers who were more preoccupied with historical and aesthetic questions than with those of epistemology and logic. They grasped, and made a very great deal of, something to which Kant paid little serious systematic attention, namely that, while some of the basic categories and 'spectacles' through which we see the world did indeed seem unchanging, others did change, sometimes quite radically, from age to age and culture to culture. The basic empirical content of what a culture saw and heard, thought and felt, might change but little if at all, but some of the models in terms of which it was perceived and organised – the spectacles through which it was viewed – might be transformed. Many of these basic categories and models are as old as humanity itself, while others are more volatile and transient, so that the investigation of their emergence takes on a historical aspect. The study and systematic critical discussion of such models is of the first importance, for it is a question of nothing less than the entire framework of our experience itself; many of these models collide with one another; and some are rendered obsolete by their failure to account for a sufficient number of facets of experience, to be replaced by others which, while they may be more accommodating, often close some of the doors opened by the models they replace. The adequacy of our fundamental presuppositions – how much of our experience they include, how much they leave out, how much they illuminate and how much obscure – should be of central concern to both philosophers and historians of ideas.

The history of ideas, then, is a comparatively late-born and highly sophisticated child of advanced civilisation. At the earliest, it may be thought to have come into being during the last half of the eighteenth century, a close relative of historicism, pluralism and relativism, and of the various historically based comparative disciplines: anthropology, philology, linguistics, etymology, aesthetics, jurisprudence, sociology, ethnology. Its central preoccupation consists in a large-scale extension of the ancient injunction ‘know thyself’ to the collective historical whole, the civilisation or culture, in which the individual self is embedded, and of which it is in no small measure a product. It is above all else concerned to tell us who and what we are, and by what stages
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and often tortuous paths we have become what we are. It stresses the
continuity of ideas and emotions, of thought and practice, of philo-
sophy, politics, art and literature, rather than artificially prising them
apart, as usually happens with the more specialised branches of the
humane studies. The central objects of its inquiry are the all-pervas-
ing, ruling, formative concepts and categories peculiar to a culture or
period – or indeed a literary school or a political movement, an artistic
genius or a seminal thinker, in so far as these have been the first to
raise issues and advance ideas which have passed into the common
outlook of subsequent generations. For Berlin does not deal only with
great thinkers: the history of ideas is not the story of a succession of
great philosophers, where one system of ideas or theories begets an-
other, as if by a process of parthenogenesis; rather, he is interested in
the emergence of ideas, in many types of intellectual personality,
varied, original, eccentric, often dissident and outside the mainstream
of their time, in opposition to the orthodox dogmas and received
presuppositions which they help to overturn.

What the history of ideas is able to offer as a branch of philosophy,
and as a relatively new source of genuine knowledge and enlighten-
ment, is insight into the origins of, and literally world-transforming
shifts in, the basic conceptual patterns in terms of which we under-
stand ourselves and acquire our identity as human beings. These
underlying, ubiquitous presuppositions, precisely because they are of
a high degree of generality and themselves serve as the means whereby
we order a very large part – the human part – of our experience, have
usually remained submerged and unexamined: the task of the historian
of ideas is to try to get outside them, to make them the objects of reflec-
tion and systematic study, thereby bringing them out into the light
where they can be openly criticised and evaluated. Many of our values
and ideals, properly analysed and examined, their origins and evolution
properly traced and described, will be revealed for what they are: not
timeless, objective, unshakeable, self-evident truths derived from the
eternal and immutable essence of human nature, but the late and
fragile blossoms of a long, untidy, often painful and tragic, but ulti-
mately intelligible historical process of cultural change. The criteria
applied in such critical discussion must themselves in turn be subjected
to scrutiny, and what exactly they are for Berlin is a question to which
we will turn later.

In one sense, then, Berlin’s entire oeuvre is a long and sustained
rejection of a view of philosophy and truth, and of the methods of
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inquiry into man’s true capacities and condition, which, in the western
tradition at least, has been central for more than two thousand years;
a view the shortcomings of which struck him early on in life, and
which he has continued to expose with resourcefulness and vigour,
under a wide variety of aspects and with a wealth of concrete historical
detail, thereby shedding light from many unexpected angles upon
some of the most pressing problems of our own time.

Perhaps the profoundest and most far-reaching shift in general ideas
since the Reformation, and one still powerfully active in our world
today, is the revolt, which first became articulate in the second third
of the eighteenth century, at first in Italy and then with gathering
force in the German-speaking world, of a succession of antinomian
thinkers against the central rationalist and scientific traditions of the
west. To this literally world-transforming current of ideas, from
which so many modern movements of thought and feeling derive – in
particular European romanticism, nationalism, relativism, pluralism,
and the many currents of voluntarism of which existentialism is the
most recent expression in our own time – Berlin has devoted some of
his finest and most illuminating essays. In his article ‘The Counter-
Enlightenment’ Berlin examines the main ideas of some of these
thinkers. In the case of Vico, whose apparent isolation from this
group of thinkers in time and place makes his lonely anticipation of
most of their central doctrines all the more extraordinary, the arch-
enemies were, on the one hand, Descartes with his doctrine of clear
and distinct ideas, his contempt for historical and humane studies
generally, and his attempts to assimilate all forms of knowledge to that
of one kind, namely mathematics; and, on the other, the natural law
theorists with their cardinal assumption of a fixed, universal human
nature, identical in all places and times. For Hamann and Herder, and
the many later thinkers directly or indirectly influenced by their
radical innovations, the insidious enemies were the more fanatical and
dogmatic philosophs of the French Enlightenment, whose central
doctrines were held to be devitalising distortions of the truth, masking
more than they illuminated. Despite their many differences, the
thinkers of the French Enlightenment held in common a stock of
fundamental presuppositions which went almost wholly unchallenged:
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that human nature is the same in all times and places; that universal human goals, true ends and effective means, are at least in principle discoverable; that methods similar to those of Newtonian science, which had proved so successful in bringing to light the regularities of inanimate nature, should be discovered and applied in the field of morals, politics, economics, and in the sphere of human relationships in general, thus eradicating vice and suffering and what Helvétius termed 'interested error'. What all these rationalist thinkers shared was the belief that somewhere, by some means, a single, coherent, unified structure of knowledge concerning questions of both fact and value was in principle available. They sought all-embracing schemas, universal unifying frameworks, within which everything that exists could be shown to be systematically — i.e. logically or causally — interconnected, vast structures in which there should be no gaps left open for spontaneous, unattended developments, where everything that occurs should be, at least in principle, wholly explicable in terms of immutable general laws. It is this proud and shining column, which Berlin identifies as the central mainstay of the rational and scientific edifices of western thought, which some of the thinkers in this volume undermined and caused to totter.

As Berlin is careful to point out, there had indeed been dissent from this central assumption on the part of a sceptical and relativist tradition stretching back to antiquity; and in the modern era thinkers from Bodin to Montesquieu, by emphasising the vast variety of customs, mores, institutions, general outlooks and beliefs, had administered a series of gentle shocks to the supporting pillar. Yet none of these had sufficed to bring the structure crashing down. In this respect, Berlin's treatment of Montesquieu is particularly valuable. He does not deny that the great French thinker is quite rightly thought of as one of the true fathers of the French Enlightenment. Despite Montesquieu's use of metaphysical concepts such as natural law and natural purpose, his approach was essentially empirical and naturalistic; he believed, above all, in the direct evidence yielded by observation. His central doctrines were absorbed into the texture of nineteenth-century liberal thought and practice, what had once seemed novel and arresting became commonplace, and successive social and political thinkers looked back on him as a distinguished predecessor with nothing new to say to them. Yet looking back at him with the accumulated experience of the first half of the twentieth century, Berlin feels more disposed to emphasise the sceptical note running through all his writings, that lack of enthu-
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siasm for all sweeping and simplistic projects for large-scale change which upset and irritated a good many of his more optimistic contemporaries with their starker, simpler, more rationalistic vision. For while he himself claimed that he had founded a new science in the spirit of Descartes, he knew in his heart that the very nature of his material was resistant to such methods, and his practice belies his professions. Unlike so many of his contemporaries, he could never bring himself to regard concrete specific detail as mere material for illustrating general rules or laws. He respects, and indeed delights in, the irreducibly unique and particular for its own sake; and is deeply distrustful of the concept of man in general. For Montesquieu each type of society possesses an inner spirit or dynamic principle which informs all its most diverse ramifications. It is the duty of statesmen and lawmakers to understand this inner spirit or organising force, and to rule or legislate in conformity with it. Different societies have different needs and pursue different goals: what is good for one in one situation and at one stage of development is not necessarily equally good for others in different conditions; hence there are and can be no universal, final solutions to human problems, and no ultimate rational standards or criteria for adjudicating between human ends. There was something essentially subversive of Enlightenment dogma in this attitude, and his distrust of rapid, simple, sweeping solutions to complex problems, managed by rationalistic philosophers in the light of universalistic theories, brings Montesquieu closer to Vico and Herder than to Voltaire and the Encyclopédie. And indeed, as Berlin brings out so clearly, there is a contradiction at the heart of his social and political thought: although he is a pluralist rather than a monist and is not obsessed by some single ruling principle, and although he is indeed unique in his time for his inexhaustible awareness of the varieties of forms of life and society, he nevertheless believes that, no matter how much the means and secondary ends of men may vary, their ultimate, fundamental ends are the same: satisfaction of basic material needs, security, justice, peace and so forth. Berlin thus puts his finger on an irreconcilable tension in Montesquieu’s thought between the belief that to each society belong its own peculiar customs, moral outlooks, modes of life on the one hand, and the belief in justice as a universal, eternal standard and the passion for legality on the other. Berlin offers a convincing explanation by suggesting that both attitudes spring from an intense fear of despotism and arbitrariness. At all events, the contradiction remains unresolved, and Montesquieu’s thought represents
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for Berlin a sharp divergence from the ideals at the core of the Enlightenment, though not a dramatic break with them.

The capacity of pluralist notions to upset is further explored in the learned and ingenious essay on Machiavelli. Here Berlin advances the thesis that for some four hundred years Machiavelli has caused sharp disagreement between scholars and civilised men, and deeply troubled Christian and liberal consciences, not because of his alleged immorality and Satanism, but because, by advancing an alternative system of morality to that prevalent in his own day and since, he was perhaps the very first thinker to cast doubts, at any rate by implication, upon the very validity of all monist constructions as such. In Berlin’s interpretation of him, Machiavelli is not, as most commentators have asserted, a mere political technician, interested only in operational means and indifferent to ultimate ends; nor is he a detached, objective political scientist, simply observing and offering a neutral description of the ways of men. Far from divorcing ethics from politics, as Croce and others have maintained, Machiavelli looks beyond the officially Christian ethics of his time (and, by implication, beyond other related moral outlooks, Stoic or Kantian or even utilitarian), which are essentially concerned with the individual, to a more ancient tradition, that of the Greek polis or of republican Rome — an essentially collective or communal morality according to which to be a human being and to have values and purposes is identical with being a member of a community. On this view, the ultimate ends of life for the individual are inseparable from the collective life of the polis. Men can attain to moral health and lead full, productive, public lives only in the service of a strong, united, successful community. Machiavelli does not, therefore, reject Christian morality in favour of some amoral science of means, but in the name of a realm of ends which are essentially social and collective rather than individual and personal. What matters to him before all else is the welfare and glory of his patria. His position implies that there are two equally ultimate, mutually exclusive ethical codes between which men must make an absolute choice. This suggestion that there may be a collision between ultimate values with no means of rational arbitration between them, and the consequent conclusion that there is no one single path to human fulfilment, individual or collective, has proved deeply disturbing. It entails that the need for choice between ultimate, conflicting values, far from being a rare and anomalous experience in the lives of men, is in fact an intrinsic element in the human condition itself. To have made men aware
of this, however vaguely, was one of Machiavelli's major achievements: he was, as Berlin remarks, 'in spite of himself, one of the makers of pluralism'.

The earliest sustained attack on universal, rationalist schemas came from Vico, Hamann and Herder. In his book Vico and Herder, Berlin has examined the major original ideas of two of these thinkers. Many of the essays in the present volume are a commentary and enlargement upon them. Vico, a thinker of tortured genius born before his time, struggled all his life to express a handful of revolutionary ideas about man, history and society. The significance of his doctrines has become apparent only in the centuries since his death, and, as Berlin suggests, some of the most important among them are coming into their own for the first time in the present day. He was probably the first thinker ever to formulate explicitly the thesis that there is no universal, immutable human nature; he revived the ancient doctrine that men truly understand only what they themselves have made, and gave it a revolutionary twist by applying it to history: we understand historical processes, which everywhere bear the stamp of human will, ideals and purposes, as it were from 'inside', by a species of sympathetic insight, in a way in which we cannot understand the 'senseless' 'external' operations of nature, which we did not ourselves make; building, perhaps, on the dim insights of French jurists and universal historians, he virtually created the concept of a culture, all the activities of which bear a distinctive mark and evince a common pattern; he developed the closely connected notion that a culture progresses through an intelligible succession of phases of development which are not connected with each other by mechanical causality, but are interrelated as expressions of the continuously evolving purposive activities of men; he saw human activities as being in the first place forms of self-expression, conveying a total vision of the world; and, perhaps most exciting of all, he created the notion of a new type of knowledge, the reconstructive imagination, or fantasia, the knowledge we acquire of other men at other times and places through entering into their general outlooks, their ways of seeing themselves and their goals - a form of knowledge which is neither wholly contingent nor deducible a priori.

In 'Vico and the Ideal of the Enlightenment', Berlin draws out
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some of the implications of Vico's views for the Utopian notion, which in one guise or another has played a prominent role in western political thought, of an ideal, static, rational society in which all human values and all conceivable paths to human fulfilment will exist side by side, not merely without loss to one another, but in a state of mutual enhancement. For Vico, the outlooks, activities and goals of men are necessarily those of a particular stage of social and cultural development. Each stage in what he calls the *storia ideale eterna* is linked to those before and after in an unaltering cyclical pattern. Since the earlier stages of the creative historical process are an essential part of our own origins, we are able to recreate and understand the past by discovering its potentialities in our own minds. But unlike idealist metaphysicians such as Hegel, who believe that nothing of value gets lost in the transition from one cultural phase to another, and unlike rationalist thinkers who believe that all values must by definition fit neatly into the completed jigsaw of the final perfect solution to all human problems, Vico's doctrine entails a less sanguine vision. Social development and cultural change bring absolute losses as well as gains. Some forms of valuable experience may vanish for ever, a unique, integral part of the sunken world that gave them birth, not to be replaced by similar forms of equal value. Inspired singers, of whom Homer is for Vico the most memorable example, in all their primitive vigour and concrete imaginative force, cannot – conceptually cannot – spring from the same stage of culture as the critical philosophers, with their intellectual analysis and bloodless abstractions. Thus for Vico the idea of perfection, of an order in which all true values will be fully realised, is excluded not for purely empirical reasons – ignorance, human weakness, lack of technical means – but because it is conceptually incoherent *a priori*.

In the other two essays on Vico, Berlin's concern with pluralism in the sphere of knowledge emerges very clearly. They turn upon Vico's seminal distinction between two very different types of human knowledge, which start from radically different presuppositions, and lead to profoundly divergent results. In Vico's view, the entire realm of 'external', non-human, physical nature is not continuous with the 'internal' human world of morality, art, language, forms of expression, thought and feeling. Corresponding to these two distinct provinces, there are two independent methods of inquiry: there is what Vico terms *scienza* or knowledge *per causas*, the only perfect knowledge of which we are capable, that, namely, of the products of human creation.
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- mathematics, music, poetry, law - which are intelligible through and through precisely because they are artefacts of the human mind; and there is coscienza, the knowledge of the external world acquired by the observer from 'outside', in terms of causal uniformities and compropesences, which, because it can only tell us how things are or happen, but never why or for what intelligible reason or in pursuit of what purpose, must for ever contain an area of impenetrable opacity. Vico's great originality consisted in applying the category of scienza to human history which men themselves 'make', and in instituting an 'anthropological historicism' which required a systematic science of mind which would be identical with the history of its development and growth. This could be traced only through investigation of the changing symbols - words, monuments, works of art, laws and customs, and the like - in which mind expressed itself. Memory and imagination, and the potential dispositions (most of which lie unacti-vated) of one's own mind, provide the basic tools of this type of understanding, upon which all humane studies ultimately rest: we know at first hand what it is to feel fear, love, hate, to belong to a family or a nation, to understand a facial expression or a human situation or a joke, to appreciate a work of art, to form and live by ideals, and to have an inexhaustible (and developing) variety of other kinds of immediate 'inner' experience besides.

This type of 'direct' knowledge is neither inductive nor deductive nor hypothetico-deductive. It is sui generis and can be described and analysed only in terms of itself. It cannot be yielded by nor translated into a Cartesian or a Newtonian or any similar system which correlates things and events from 'outside' in terms of causal regularities. This we know from our own experience: a familiar activity or an intimate aspect of our lives, which we have hitherto seen from inside in terms of human goals and aspirations, can be alienated from us by being, as it were, 'objectified': it is suddenly seen as alien and external to ourselves, a causal product of forces beyond our control - sociological, biological, physical. And the converse of this: an activity or a work of art or a person, a code of rules or an institution, can become an intimate part of ourselves because, by a process of imaginative penetration, we see it from 'inside' in the light of human ends and values. This is the ill-defined and shifting boundary where rational explanation in terms of human ideals and intentions comes into contact (and conflict) with causal explanation in terms of the 'senseless' non-human regularities of physical nature. It has been the scene of battles...
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in the past; it is likely to be the scene of even greater battles in the future; few modern writers have done more than Berlin to sharpen our awareness of its vital importance.

The species of knowing uncovered by Vico was the seed of the doctrines of *Einfühlung* and *Verstehen* later developed by Herder, and after him by the great German historicists, Troeltsch, Dilthey, Meinecke and Max Weber, and it had implications for epistemology and the philosophy of mind which were major preoccupations of a great deal of nineteenth-century thought. It is to a discussion of one of the most important of these that 'The Divorce between the Sciences and the Humanities' is devoted. An intrinsic part of the optimistic belief in steady general progress is the notion that all methods of investigation and research, all modes of knowing and understanding, are systematically interconnected; that the presuppositions and methods of all forms of intellectual discovery can be ultimately derived from a small handful of principles of the highest imaginable degree of abstraction; and that the entire sphere of human knowledge grows all of a piece, since each segment of it interlocks with and enlarges every other. Yet if Vico's distinction between 'inner' and 'outer' knowledge is valid, and if, as his cardinal doctrines imply, reality is not a unified, timeless, immutable structure of which a logically perfect language could give a direct transcription undistorted by the 'extraneous' influence of time and place – a model measured against which all natural languages could be shown to be more or less inadequate approximations; if, moreover, the forms of speech and the myths, poetry and religion of so-called primitive men are not, as Voltaire and the *Encyclopédistes* typically believed, the first childlike stammering of truths more clearly and more fully formulated by later rational thinkers, but rather the unique expression of their total vision of life, the embodiment of their response to the problems generated by their own peculiar world – a response which is just as authentic as and ultimately incommensurable with that of later more enlightened ages to their own problems; then it follows that all knowledge is not of one single unified kind, a great organic corpus which, despite periodical lapses into barbarism, grows steadily from age to age by irreversible increments, developing gradually towards an unchanging state of ultimate perfection. The unbridgeable gulf between the natural sciences and humane studies, and the breach blown in the ideal of steady progress

1 For so it seemed to Vico; but it may not be, for if Kuhn's account of scientific development is correct, that too is Vichian.
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in all branches of human knowledge, have very far-reaching consequences indeed.

In the essay on the sources of German anti-rationalism, Berlin examines the notions of perhaps the most radical antinomian thinker in this volume, J. G. Hamann. As a young man Hamann, a protégé of the leading figures of the Berlin Aufklärung, Mendelssohn and Nicolai, had been a successful publicist and apostle of enlightenment. But after undergoing a transforming inner experience, and returning to the pietist faith of his earlier years, he set out to attack the ideals and values at the core of the rationalist tradition, and transmuted them into something like their opposites. He represents the most uncompromising backlash of human dignity and the ideals of warmth, love and spontaneity against the spirit-crushing abstractions of the systematisers and ‘terribles simplificateurs’ of eighteenth-century France. In waging this terrible battle he and his comrade-in-arms, Jacobi, pressed into service two of the central doctrines (one of them in a much modified form) of the sober empiricist philosopher, David Hume. There can be few more paradoxical chapters in the history of modern European thought.

The doctrine that the sole path to knowledge was afforded by the natural, empirical sciences; that all statements with a claim to truth must be in principle publicly testable by any rational being; that there were and could be no other sources of genuine knowledge, transcendent or non-rational – these principal tenets of the French Enlightenment encountered increasing opposition from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, even in France itself. The reaction against dry rationalism, materialism and ethical naturalism expressed itself at first in a wave of sentiment and feeling in both literature and manners: Diderot accorded a large and important place to emotion in the life of men, and Rousseau, above all, was a major liberator of feeling and natural passion. Outside France, von Muralt, Bodmer and Breitinger in Switzerland, and Lowth, Blackwell and the Wartons in England, had all in their various ways rebelled against the desiccating spirit of excessive rationalism. Yet this rebellion was largely confined to the spheres of literature, manners and the arts: the foundations on which the major dogmas of the Enlightenment rested remained untouched.

The really violent and devastating attack, which shook these major assumptions once and for all, was launched by a band of dark, tortured and deeply disturbing thinkers from the remoter corners of the German-speaking world: the story of the far-reaching consequences and repercussions of what Berlin calls ‘this German backlash against the
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French cultural domination of the western world, both sinister and liberating, is very largely the history of modern thought.

Both by temperament and conviction Hamann was an enemy of tidy, all-embracing schemas: he believed that abstract networks of general laws, while they might help us (like tools or weapons) to dominate and exploit areas of reality, must blunt our sense of the vivid freshness of immediate experience, and blind us to the unique, bizarre, unpredictable and often wildly chaotic data of life as we live it. Scientific theories had at best an instrumental value: they could not yield unassailable knowledge of any kind. True knowledge is given to us immediately only by the senses, and by spontaneous imagination, instinct and insight. Direct perception, the immediate, incontrovertible sense of reality, Hamann calls Glaube or faith. He attributed this doctrine of faith or belief to Hume. For he rightly perceived that Hume's epistemology rests upon primitive belief in reality unsupported by a priori demonstration; but in a manner which would certainly have alarmed Hume, he modified the doctrine to apply to non-empirical spheres as well: without the fundamental human capacity for Glaube men cannot think or act, believe in an external world or history, or in the existence of other persons or of God. The faculty of faith is no more open to refutation by reason than is the evidence of the senses; though it may on occasion deceive, it is not shored up by an elaborate apparatus of proof. Above all, the artificial utilitarian contraptions of scientists, which do not express the inner nature of men or of God, have nothing to say to it. No man can love, or see his innermost nature expressed in, the web of lifeless categories spun by the rationalist Spinoza or the de-spiritualised play of cause and effect of the vast materialist machines constructed by Holbach or Helvétius. Poets, lovers and the devout alone are able to enter into and acquire full knowledge of the objects of their intense devotion. The data of immediate acquaintance are concrete and unique: any attempt to 'reorganise' them into artificial patterns distorts them, and transforms them into something other and poorer than themselves. Indeed, there is an almost uncannily modern ring about Hamann's views on the relationship between thought, experience and language. When he proclaims that he is less interested in the traditional philosophical question 'What is reason?' and more concerned with asking 'What is language?' because it is the latter which is the source 'of all the paralogisms and antinomies which are laid at the door of the former', and when he declares that 'by it [language] all things are made', he foreshadows the
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doctrines of Austin and the later Wittgenstein. And when, speaking of artificial conceptual systems, he asserts that 'our creatures are merciless mutilators of nature', and goes on to ask, more in irony than in earnest, whether there exist 'simple natural points to which everything can be reduced', or whether 'everything consists of mathematical lines', he is uttering criticisms remarkably similar to those made by ordinary language philosophers today against the neo-positivism of Russell and his followers. For Hamann, the words of common human speech are bearers of human meanings; as such, they do not distort direct perception to the same degree as abstract formulas, general propositions, rules and laws. They are either a form of expression, of communication between immortal souls, or else they are the artificial, oppressive instruments of the classifying sciences. Sooner or later, too great an enthusiasm for systems of idealised figments at the expense of direct vision mediated by ordinary language will lead to the construction of great bureaucratic machines. Men will come to be treated as mechanical objects of administration, emptied of inner life and meaning, mere external husks and shells. In this, Hamann is one of the earliest and most clairvoyant of those who darkly foresaw what Max Weber later called 'das Gehäuse der Hörigkeit', 'the House of Bondage', and what followers of the Frankfurt School today deplore as 'die verwaltete Welt' — the world, including men and nature, conceived of as a mechanical system to be manipulated for utilitarian ends by teams of rational experts.

In Herder, Berlin sees the originator of three major ideas which were not only highly novel in his own day, but which are still vitally alive in ours. All three break with the central western tradition which stretches back to antiquity and are wholly incompatible with the central values and cardinal doctrines, moral, historical and aesthetic, of the Enlightenment. They are populism, or the belief that men can realise themselves fully only when they belong to an identifiable group or culture with roots in tradition, language, custom, common historical memories; expressionism, or the notion that all men's works 'are above all voices speaking', forms of expression or communication which convey a total view or vision of life; and finally pluralism, the recognition of a potentially infinite variety of cultures and systems of values, all equally ultimate and incommensurable with one another, rendering logically incoherent the belief in a universally valid, ideal path to human fulfilment sought with varying degrees of success by all men at all places and times.

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Looking about him in the modern world, Berlin perceives how vital these formative ideas are, and how their importance is likely to increase. They are all ideas which can engage the whole man, head and heart, and they are likely to have consequences commensurate with their appeal. The deep need for roots and self-expression felt by all men needs no stressing in an age of disruption and nationalism. The article on nationalism deals with some of these cardinal themes. Again, the sense of suffocation, of a desiccation of the spirit, felt by so many young people in the technological civilisations of the west, stems at least in part from the inability to fulfil that craving for self-expression, individual or collective, which Herder was the first to point to as one of the deepest and most enduring needs of men. From the hippies and the flower children to Heidegger, Habermas and the School of Frankfurt, the fundamental message has been the same; and all could claim Herder as their patron saint. The essay on Sorel, too, enlarges upon some of these burning issues. And again, in an age of narrow dogmatic ideologies which claim absolute allegiance, the notion that the ends of life are many, changing, equally ultimate and therefore liable to come into mortal conflict, is guaranteed a long life. Many later thinkers, and perhaps none more than Herzen, took up and developed this idea. Indeed, in a sense he built his life around them, suffered and lived through them. Nothing would have horrified these two thinkers more than to see a robust class of men (of whatever social formation) with terribly simple purposes and needs, and equally simple conceptions of the ends of life, large in numbers, highly organised and wielding great powers, impose their impoverished outlook on a much more variegated, rich, fragile and creative group of human beings.

One of these three seminal ideas originated by Herder lies at the heart of Berlin's essays on Moses Hess and on Marx and Disraeli, and it illuminates the critical pages he has written on nationalism: the idea that one of the fundamental needs of men, as basic as those for food, shelter, procreation, security and communication, is to belong to identifiable communal groups, each possessing its own unique language, traditions, historical memories, style and outlook. Only if a man truly belongs to such a community, naturally and unselfconsciously, can he enter into the living stream and lead a full, creative,
spontaneous life, at home in the world and at one with himself and his fellow men; enjoying a recognised status within such a natural unit or group, which itself must command full unqualified recognition in the world at large; and thereby acquiring a vision of life, an image of himself and his condition in a community where concrete, immediate, spontaneous human relations may flower undistorted by neurotic self-questioning about one's true identity, and free from the crippling wounds inflicted by the real or imaginary superiority of others.

Frustration of the need to belong to such a community entails consequences of various disturbing kinds, and it is to a sensitive exploration of the main among them that Berlin turns in these two essays. For him the newly liberated Jews of the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries offer a kind of paradigm case. Escaping as many of them did from the narrow, familiar, self-enclosed world of the ghetto into the wider, freer, more exciting but stranger and more dangerous gentile world, their identity was suddenly called in question. Who were they? Some among them - the more pliable and easy-going - shed their past with no apparent trouble and merged unobtrusively into their new environment; others - those whose very sense of self, intimately bound up with their passionate desire to do and be something in the world, would not allow them to forget their origins - could not perform this act of facile self-transformation. Troubled, and more often agonised and wounded, by not being automatically accepted as members of the worlds they sought to enter, they hit upon various more or less conscious solutions to their problems of self-identity.

These solutions to the search for status, recognition, 'belonging', tended to take one of two main forms: conscious demands for equality of status (or at times superiority) on the part of members of a hitherto submerged or oppressed group, nationality, community; or their self-identification with some other group or movement untainted by the defects and weaknesses of their own original condition. The first of these stratagems entailed full, self-assertive and often aggressive acceptance of their own original identity; the second, the acquisition of a new personality, new values and habits, remote from the inferior status which had inflicted wounds upon their amour propre. And those who adopt the latter course, Berlin tells us, 'are liable to develop either exaggerated resentment of, or contempt for, the dominant majority, or else over-intense admiration or indeed worship for it; or, at times, a combination of the two, which leads both to original
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insights and — born of overwrought sensibilities — a neurotic distortion of the facts'.

Berlin's thesis is that the two masterful, creative personalities, Marx and Disraeli, with their passionate desire to dominate, lead or change the society of their day, fall into the latter class, while the mild and honest Hess, less capable of either self-deception or imaginative construction, but with his gift of simple direct perception, took the former course.

Disraeli, an outsider in British society, sought above all else power and recognition: in his perfervid imagination the British aristocracy was translated into the realms of mythology; he made himself its leader, basing his own claims to aristocracy upon the antiquity of his race, which he stressed again and again in his writings; he saw himself as leading it into a coalition with the exploited masses against the sworn enemies of all true distinction, the crude, utilitarian, materialistic middle classes; he detested equality and mediocrity, and believed that imagination, intuition and traditional values were superior to all forms of scientific calculation, reason and analysis. So powerful was the myth he thus created that by its spell he was able to bind together his heterogeneous followers, affecting British political thought and practice 'for many fateful decades'. Yet this act of comprehensive psychological self-transformation, which so many of Disraeli's biographers have seen as a piece of cynically skilful sleight-of-hand, could triumph against the odds and carry conviction only if it were wholly genuine. Berlin maintains that Disraeli really did see himself as a peer of the dukes and baronets whom he led against the Manchester manufacturers and Benthamites; he was himself largely taken in by his own fictions. By grasping the innermost impulse at the heart of Disraeli's vision, the search for a persona, for an identity which would enable him to stand somewhere and be someone in the world, Berlin has offered a deeper, more coherent, and much more sympathetically convincing understanding of Disraeli than most of his biographers. By penetrating to the deepest root of a man's being, to his sense of self — of who he is, where he comes from, and where he belongs — Berlin has helped render intelligible a specific, particularly bizarre and puzzling case. Still more, he has generalised it to yield fruitful insight into some of those very urgent problems which preoccupy social psychologists, theorists of education, sociologists and politicians today. For in Disraeli Berlin sees an early, highly gifted and articulate, and therefore paradigmatic, example of what was later to become increasingly common: the
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'alienated' man wholly out of his element — a victim of social disintegration and the dissolutions of traditional ties and bonds brought about by the scientific revolution and centralising industrialism — whose life is a long, and often bitter and unsuccessful, search for identity.

Unlike Disraeli, Marx makes scant reference to his Jewish origins, and is open to the suspicion of having to a large degree suppressed them. Indeed, there is evidence in his writings of a strong strain of anti-Semitism. Berlin’s thesis is that Marx, despite the depth and originality of his central ideas, failed to give a satisfactory account of nationalism, and systematically underestimated its importance as an independent force, not least because of his own not openly avowed, and probably not even wholly conscious, embarrassment at his own origins. He too, on this view, like Disraeli, sought to identify himself with a social group of which he was not by origin a member. He chose the universal class of exploited proletarians, who were wholly free of the stigma with which he was himself marked. The proletariat of whom he speaks, and with whom he had so little direct contact, is as much a figment, an abstract category or an imaginary ideal, as Disraeli’s aristocracy. They are not, as Berlin says, real workers, miners and factory operatives, men of flesh and blood, owing allegiance to their nation and bound by a thousand ties of tradition and local loyalty; rather they are made the vehicle for the wounded feelings of humanity in general, and at times of Marx himself. Hence the appeal so often made by Marx’s words to others like himself, the rootless, alienated, cosmopolitan intellectuals, whose revulsion at the cruelty and injustice of their world goes hand in hand with a sense of wounded dignity and a desperate search for identity. As Berlin is careful to point out, the fact that some at least of Marx’s doctrines may have sprung in part from a response to a deep psychological need does not itself invalidate them in any way. But it may help to explain why theories, which on other grounds may have been shown to be inadequate, fail to live up to the claims originally made for them. The doctrines and lives of both Marx and Disraeli were those of men who could not accept their origins, and hence themselves, for what they were. Many of their ideas evolved not in the first place as tools of objective analysis and description, but as comforting myths to rally oppressed and insulted spirits, not least those of the authors of the doctrines themselves.

When Berlin turns from these two masterful, myth-making figures, with their gift of piercing original insight coupled with self-inflicted
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blindness, to Moses Hess, he leaves the intense, dramatic, highly-coloured world of neurotic distortion for an altogether calmer and more relaxed element where things are seen with perhaps less depth and intensity, but with more sense of balance and proportion.

Marxist critics have portrayed Hess as a minor precursor of Marx whose importance was wholly eclipsed by the great master. In this essay Berlin establishes the claims of Hess to be taken seriously as a social thinker in his own right who possesses a gift of prophetic insight superior to that of his revolutionary contemporaries, Marx and Engels. Moses Hess, 'the father of German communism', as Berlin calls him, represents one of the most memorable examples of the triumph of direct moral insight and immediate, lived experience over doctrine and dogma. A morally sensitive and honest man, revolted by the spectacle of exploitation and injustice and attracted by abstract schemes for universal human improvement, Hess came to see that it is not only impossible, but highly undesirable, for a man to seek to root out and deny his true identity, bound up as it is with the historical memories, customs, language and traditions of his people, in the name of rationalistic universal principles which take no account of what is concrete and unique. There is a simple directness and humanity about Hess, an almost childlike freshness of perception and freedom from conceptual chains, which contrasts so strongly with the at times almost neurotic obsession with dogmatic abstractions, so remote from lived experience, that characterises the more depressing facets of Marx's intellectual make-up. It is as though both Marx and Disraeli feel compelled to bend and distort reality into conformity with their own creative wills, while Hess is pleased to see things simply, as they are. In an illuminating aside, Berlin wonders how deeply Marx's life and outlook might have been altered, had he received as a child a religious education similar to that accorded to Moses Hess by his grandfather, a pious Jew, rather than assimilating the rationalistic dogmas of Voltaire and the French Enlightenment. Unlike Marx, the later Hess did not underestimate the importance of nationalism as a basic, independent historical force. He came to reject cosmopolitanism as suppressing natural differences between groups of men, and, like Herder, believed that such natural differentiation of mankind into separate races and nations, far from being a lamentable error which must at all costs be eliminated, was an inexhaustible source of creative variety. With equal firmness, he condemned the Hegelian distinction between dominant 'historic' nations on the one hand, and submerged inactive
peoples on the other, whom the former, by dint of their 'superiority',
had a right to conquer and absorb. From a highly abstract, schematised
view of history as a process leading necessarily to a new, rational,
harmonious world order, where humane communist principles would
drive out greed and private property — a process in which the Jews,
after fulfilling their appointed historic mission as the ethical people,
would disappear as an identifiable group — Hess, impelled by an incor-
ruptible sense of reality, by an immediate, 'unfiltered' perception of
the facts, was driven to the essentially Herderian view that the Jews
were not merely held together by religious bonds but constituted a
nation like any other and that, in order to attain to a full sense of
settled identity, they needed a state of their own. He is thus one of the
founding fathers of Zionism.

He was convinced all his life that equality and justice were desirable
for their own sake, and his socialism rested upon essentially moral
premises: these goods could be secured only by the conscious purposive
action of men convinced of their intrinsic moral value. In his view,
certain very general human values were permanently and universally
valid: the free expression of natural human feeling and affection,
social justice, individual liberty, membership of and identification with
a historically continuous community. If men could be persuaded by
rational argument that this was so, they would change their practice
accordingly. It was this 'Utopian socialism' which Marx and Engels
mocked. For them, and others under the spell of Hegelian historicism,
the processes of history followed unchanging and objectively discover-
able patterns: a man whose eyes had been opened to these would
identify himself with, and support, that 'historical' value or group
which was destined to triumph at that particular stage; to act other-
wise, to fight against the innermost immutable nature of things, was
to be irrational and court inevitable destruction. Hess refused to
believe in the comforting doctrine that the universe itself was fighting
on the side of his cherished values. He did not believe in the inevita-
bility of class conflict, and transforming revolution, or in the dictator-
ship of the proletariat or the violent expropriation of property. And,
as Berlin points out, though the lives of entire nations have been trans-
formed by the revolution to which Marx and Engels dedicated their
lives, violent expropriation of the property-owning classes and insti-
tution of the dictatorship of the proletariat, or of its representative, the
Communist Party, have not of themselves automatically secured social
justice, individual liberty, economic equality, and social harmony.
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Wherever the achievement of these goods has been most closely approached, it has been, more often than not, the work of men consciously pursuing goals which seemed to them intrinsically valuable, the realisation of which depended solely upon their own dedicated individual effort and not upon the inexorable impersonal forces of history. Nor could Hess bring himself to believe that the central values of socialism must necessarily conflict with some of the most sacred values of tradition: love of place, a deep sense of one’s individual and collective past, national memories and symbols, and so on. As Berlin says, Hess retained a freshness of vision and an incapacity ‘to commit acts of violence against his own nature’. ‘He was saved by his moral insight which remained uncontaminated by personal vanity or dogma.’ In this essay Berlin offers an exceptionally sensitive account of a man who, in the name of abstract theory and rationalistic schemes of amelioration, represses and denies his deepest feelings about himself and his identity — until, little by little, the truth becomes too strong for the artificial bonds restraining it, and bursts forth in all its vigour, with a powerful attendant sense of liberation.

VIII

The central themes of human dignity and identity, and of the search for a sense of being at home in a familiar world, recur in the highly suggestive essay on nationalism. Here Berlin discusses the typical forms it takes and some of its major sources, and touches upon one of the most puzzling features of nineteenth-century political thought and prophecy, namely its failure to give a true estimate of the decisive role nationalism was to play in shaping the modern world.

As a coherent doctrine nationalism seems to emerge for the first time in the last third of the eighteenth century in the writings of Herder. For Herder and those German thinkers influenced by him, the arch-enemy was French universalism and materialism. Berlin sees Herder’s thought as representing on the one hand a comprehensive rejection of the doctrine that universal rational rules governing theory and practice could be discovered, and, on the other, a German reaction to the condescending, patronising attitude of the politically and culturally dominant French. This natural response of wounded pride is an early and typical case of a phenomenon which was to become increasingly common in the nineteenth century, growing into a
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world-wide movement in our own day, with consequences the full scope and nature of which are still being painfully revealed. To be made an object of contempt, amused condescension, or patronising tolerance by proud, successful and powerful neighbours, Berlin tells us, 'is one of the most traumatic experiences that individuals or societies can suffer'. The exaggerated and at times pathological response on the part of those whose dignity is insulted is to raise up their own real or imaginary virtues against those of their tormentors. The Germans, unable to look back on a long tradition of military, economic and political dominance, or to point to a succession of high achievements in art, literature and science, discovered in themselves superior moral and spiritual depth, a noble and selfless love of truth and the inner life of the spirit, which they contrasted with the hedonistic, worldly, superficial and morally empty French. In comparison with the polished and decadent French they felt themselves to be young, vigorous and untried, the true bearers of the future. This strong Messianic note was first sounded by the Germans, then by the Slavs, and today has become a common element in the rhetoric of the decolonised and emergent nations. Yet the great social and political thinkers of the nineteenth century did not foresee this development. This is particularly true of Marx and Engels, for whom nationalism, like religion, was one of the weapons wielded by the reactionary bourgeoisie against the exploited masses. It could not survive the demise of capitalism, and would disappear for ever once the revolution had established the dictatorship of the proletariat. As Berlin points out, the systematic failure on the part of Marxist theorists, particularly in Germany, to understand the true nature of Fascism and National Socialism, interpreting it as the last throes of capitalism, was due to an ideologically distorted view of the facts, and led in many cases to the loss of their own lives. Why a thinker of such originality, depth and power as Marx should have failed to pay due attention to a factor which subsequently transformed the world, Berlin does not here attempt to explain. But the answer to this question is implicit in the essay on Marx and Disraeli.

The fundamental issue of human dignity is further illuminated by the essay on Sorel. Despite the outwardly erratic course taken by his political allegiances, Sorel's principal ideas and his central vision of human nature are vitally relevant today. Indeed, as Berlin presents him, he seems more modern and to speak to us more directly than a good many of his more celebrated, solid and sober contemporaries. He
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was not a systematic thinker, purveying a political doctrine whose outlines were fixed and final. He loathed system and condemned it in others. Yet his ideas are of value not only for their intrinsic power but because what was once confined to small groups of intellectuals has become a world-wide set of attitudes today.

Sorel firmly rejected two of the central tenets of western social and political theory, namely the Greek doctrine of salvation by knowledge and the Judaeo-Christian doctrine of historical theodicy. In his view natural science is not an ontology, it cannot give us an account of the ultimate nature and structure of the world; rather it is an instrument or a weapon developed by man in his constant struggle against hostile natural forces. It cannot therefore solve the great questions of human life, whether metaphysical, moral or political. These fall outside its scope. Indeed, one of the greatest of modern evils arises when men and their spiritual and material needs are treated as objects exhaustively analysable by science. Then men are reduced by scientific experts and rational bureaucrats to functioning parts in a machine, robbed of their true human essence as free creative agents. Sorel's view of the nature of science, and of its misapplication to the lives of human beings, is strongly reminiscent of the darker apprehensions of Hamann, though unlike the German antinomian he regards science as a triumph of human intellect and effort and as an indispensable machine in the battle to resist blind nature. But it must be seen for what it is, and not overstep its proper boundaries. It does not itself contain the key to human perfection and fulfilment. To identify scientific and technical progress with spiritual and moral progress only betrays a hopeless blindness of the spirit.

Sorel was equally sceptical of the belief that history, despite all its apparent chaos and abrupt reversals, was moving by inevitable steps towards some universally desirable consummation. Like Hess, he believed in absolute and freely chosen moral values, ends pursued for their own intrinsic worth; and like Hess, he rejected the belief that history prescribed the goals to be pursued by rational men at any given stage, and guaranteed their ultimate achievement. Nothing could secure the values sacred to men save their own unremitting effort. The two absolutes Sorel most consistently believed in were morality and science in the sense discussed.

It is by going to the heart of Sorel's writings, and seizing their idée maîtresse, that Berlin is able to show how this enigmatic and confusing writer is not merely intelligible, but deeply original and important.
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For at the centre of Sorel's vision is the belief that man is first and foremost an active, creative being. Diverging from the classical tradition, Sorel sees men as seekers not in the first place of happiness, peace, salvation, security or knowledge, but of creative work. The free exercise of the will, the imposition of an inwardly conceived pattern upon the external recalcitrant material of nature, self-realisation and self-expression, both individual and collective, through free, spontaneous, creative work — these are the ends of life which correspond most closely to man's innermost essence. This view goes naturally with a hatred of hedonism and of materialist values generally. With great subtlety and penetration, Berlin uses this insight both to make sense of Sorel and his bewildering political voltes-face, and to point to a truth about human nature largely neglected by famous and influential moral and political thinkers in the mainstream of western thought, a truth which goes a very long way to explaining, and rendering intelligible, the wave of radical unrest experienced the world over during the past decade.

Indeed, surveying the modern world, Berlin detects at the heart of the most disparate movements, from the nationalist tide in the Third World to the radical unrest among the disaffected young in the industrial technocracies, what may be the early stirrings of a reaction destined to grow into a world-transforming movement. It is the reaction of some irreducible core of free, creative, spontaneous human nature, of some elementary sense of identity, dignity and worth, against all that patronises and diminishes men, and threatens to rob them of themselves. This is but a modern expression, taking novel but recognisable forms, of the great battle begun by Hamann and Herder against the central values of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century faith in liberal rationalism, cosmopolitanism, science, progress and rational organisation: a battle waged throughout the nineteenth century by the great unsettling rebels, Fourier, Proudhon, Stirner, Kierkegaard, Carlyle, Nietzsche, Tolstoy, Sorel; and continued in the twentieth by existentialists, anarchists and irrationalists, and all the varying strains of contemporary rebellion and revolt. For all their deep differences, these thinkers, groups and movements are brothers beneath the skin: they fight in the name of some direct inward knowledge of self and free causal agency, and an irreducible sense of specific concrete identity. Rational and benevolent colonial masters and technocratic specialists and experts, no matter how altruistic and honourable their intentions, precisely because they view men as in the first place hetero-
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nomous objects to be administered, regimented and controlled, not free and unpredictably self-transforming causal agents, must necessarily fail to respect and understand this fundamental human craving, and often enough ignore, crush or eradicate it. Rebellion against regimentation takes the form of a demand to do and be something in the world, to be one's own master, free of external interference - an independent self, whether individual or collective, not dictated to or organised by others. The long and heated contest, which stretches back at least to the middle of the eighteenth century, has never been more alive than it is today.

Unexpected light is thrown on some of these themes by the essay on Verdi. By applying to him the distinction first drawn by Schiller between naïve and sentimental artists, Berlin brings out something essential in Verdi which is easily overlooked. The 'naïve' artist is whole and undivided, at one with himself and his world; he is not self-conscious, and his art is a natural and undistorted expression of what he directly sees and feels, for its own sake and not in pursuit of any ulterior purpose. The 'sentimental' artist, on the other hand, has fallen from the primordial state of unity and harmony, which he seeks, often with a desperate sense of urgency, to restore through his works; but he pursues an ideal which is ultimately unattainable in any finite medium. In Verdi Berlin sees the last great 'naive' artist of genius, at least in the world of music. He is a most memorable and vivid example of the Herderian ideal of 'belonging' which haunts Berlin's pages. Verdi speaks directly and unselfconsciously in his works to all men as men, in terms of primal human passions and emotions. He is as an artist wholly free of neurosis, self-questioning and decadence. His works are not a symptom of reaction or rebellion, nor does he come armed with a manifesto or a programme or an ideology. Or rather, if he does have an ideology, Berlin tells us, 'it is that of vast numbers of mankind across large stretches of history: this is, indeed, one of the central meanings of the term "humanism"'. These are very revealing words. They remind us that Berlin has shown little interest in decadent writers, that he is not naturally drawn to figures like Dostoevsky, Kafka or Beckett. Those who depict marginal states of mind, rarefied, exotic or 'abnormal' types of experience, moods too far removed from the hard and timeless core of basic human passions and emotions, relationships and needs, are not of the first interest to him. A thinker like Hamann, for example, may seem to most a queer eccentric visionary; Sorel, erratic, unsteady, unhinged; yet there is nothing sick
or decadent about them. On the contrary, they are in pursuit of an ideal of wholeness, creative vigour and rounded humanity. Berlin is preoccupied above all with writers and thinkers who express, or are in search of, some human centre of gravity, some ideal of the rounded fullness of life in all its variety. Indeed, there are moments when one feels that one can hear at the back of many of these essays a disconsolate voice lamenting the irreparable loss of ‘normality’, of some ‘natural’ condition in which men feel easy and at home, surrounded by trusted and familiar things, divided neither within their own breasts, nor against one another, nor from nature.

With Herzen, we come to a thinker who most nearly anticipated the kind of radical pluralism which Berlin has himself expounded with such eloquence and persuasiveness in a steady stream of articles, essays and books. One of the chief influences on Herzen as a young man at the University of Moscow was that of Hegel. He did not, however, remain an orthodox Hegelian for long, but transformed Hegel's doctrines into something peculiarly his own. The chief result was scepticism of the capacity of any single doctrine or coherent conceptual schema to explain life and offer solutions to general human problems. Like Sorel, he seems to speak directly to us about our own predicament; and his complex sense of reality and of the critical moral and political issues of his time gives his utterances a concrete sharpness, freshness and durability which marks them off from those of the majority of professional social thinkers in the nineteenth century, who tended to offer general solutions derived by rational methods from highly abstract principles.

Herzen's powers of observation, analysis and exposition remained unblunted by the yearning for cut and dried systems of exact classification. Berlin points to a ‘curious combination of idealism and scepticism’ in Herzen. On the one hand, he was able to understand only too well what could turn men into fanatic revolutionaries; on the other, he displayed an almost clairvoyant awareness of the terrifying consequences of their doctrines. While he was filled with revulsion at the arbitrariness, cruelty and injustice of the systems they sought to overthrow, he saw that the worlds called into being in their place by a bitter desire for revenge and retribution would breed their own terrible
excesses. Above all, he feared for the fate of individual liberty, and upheld the claims of private life and art, human decency and dignity, against the fanatically egalitarian doctrines of the new liberators. He was terrified that individuals would be tamed, subdued and oppressed both by majorities and in the name of empty abstractions. He was deeply sceptical of all-embracing historical schemas which claimed to be able to guarantee an ideal order laid up for humanity in the future, the realisation of which justified the suffering and sacrifice of present generations. He believed, like Stirner, that individual human beings should not be sacrificed on the altar of abstractions whether in the name of progress, justice, humanity, the state, the nation, history itself, or any other fictitious metaphysical entity. He was above all a troubled rationalist who could not bring himself to believe in the existence of a fixed human nature obedient to invariant laws. The core of his outlook is the belief that the perennial, basic human problems are not soluble at all; that men can only do their best in the situation in which they find themselves, with no a priori guarantee of ultimate success; that men are themselves changed by the efforts they make to solve the problems of their age or culture, thereby creating new men and new problems; and that therefore the future problems and needs of men, and their solution and satisfaction, cannot in principle be anticipated, still less provided for in advance; finally, that an indissoluble part of the definition of human nature consists in a cluster of concepts like free-will, choice, purpose, effort, struggle, entailing as they do the opening up of new and unpredictable paths to human fulfilment.

For Herzen the agony of choice could not be avoided. In a universe which is not a rational cosmos but chaotic and open to unforeseeable change there could be no absolute values or universal ideals. The choice between values is an absolute choice. That is to say, there can be no empirical explanation of it of the kind offered by the generalising natural sciences in terms of inductive knowledge of the objective pattern of human needs and values; nor is it susceptible of deductive justification in the light of some a priori, intuitive or theological knowledge of the true nature of man and the ends of life; for either of these would empty it of its inherent significance: it is simply a choice. A man chooses as he does for his own reasons, which are his own property and for which in the end he alone is responsible. Herzen's position has become increasingly attractive with time, particularly to a generation of men who have grown sceptical of all attempts to find final solutions to human problems; and it has been defended and
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developed with great ingenuity and conviction by Berlin, and presented as one of the most sane, adult and mature philosophies of our times.

But does it lead to ethical relativism and subjectivism? Does the kind of radical pluralism preached by Herzen and advocated by Berlin dissolve the ancient notion of the moral unity of the human race? In the absence of a set of overarching, universal, objective standards, is mere anarchy of values the result? Is the door opened to the raising up of any and every conceivable form of human action or behaviour to the status of a moral end? What safeguards, if any, can this general attitude offer against the kind of systematic bestiality and madness of, for example, the Third Reich? To answer this question one must look more closely at Berlin's concept of human nature.

What is the basic idea of human nature which, according to Berlin, always underlies and determines moral, political and social, and perhaps epistemological theories as well? Pervading all the statements Berlin has made on this major topic there are a number of assumptions. The first is that, in the absence of any fixed, final, divinely revealed or deductively or empirically guaranteed knowledge of man's true nature, of its manifest and latent needs and capacities, its elasticity and scope for self-development, we do well to accept a minimal account of what man is in order not to foreclose the possible (and even likely) emergence of entirely novel and unforeseeable forms of life and self-fulfilment, in individuals and groups, whereby our conception of human nature will be enlarged. For if his essays in the history of ideas reveal anything, it is precisely that new, richer and deeper forms of collective self-knowledge, of what men are and can be, do in fact emerge from the historical interaction of men with men — collectively and individually, with their own past, with other nations and cultures, and with their physical environment. And as these essays show, this process does not occur according to some set of a priori principles or following discoverable empirical laws: it is a branching out in new directions, essentially untidy, hesitant, sometimes violent, unpredictable in advance, and guaranteed neither to stand still nor to proceed in any assignable direction.

Yet this process is not random, or haphazard, or chaotic, nor is it
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devoid of rational significance. For in so far as it expresses the intel-
ligible purposive response of sentient rational creatures in certain vital
respects identical with ourselves, confronted by and devising solutions
to the problems of their total environment, we can enter into and
understand the process in that special sense which Vico was the first
to grasp and articulate. Moreover, since our own image or conception
of man and his nature is in large measure a historical product of this
ceaseless exploration or search, of the slow and unpredictable growth
of new, more adequate, more sophisticated models of human nature,
these essays, which excavate and examine some of the major epoch-
making additions to our central concept of man, may be seen as signi-
ficant and remarkably sensitive contributions to an experimental,
open-ended, undogmatic phenomenology of modern western man.
Berlin will almost certainly dislike this term, with its strong Hegelian
overtones, but it does capture something of the peculiar nature of his
contribution to the search for self-understanding, and it establishes
a link with a thinker from whom he is nothing like as remote as many
suppose. He does indeed reject with both hands the Hegelian vision
of human history as a logically necessary process of development pass-
ing through preordained stages to an ultimate rational goal where all
human interests, capacities and values will coexist in frictionless har-
mony; nor is he any less hostile to Hegel's conception of moral ends
as that system of deductively discoverable principles and rules of action
prescribed by Reason to men at a specific stage of historical develop-
ment, to disregard which is a mark of irrationality or blindness or
immaturity on the part of the agent. Yet at the same time he makes
much of three essentially Hegelian views. He has often repeated in his
writings that Hegel showed with considerable imaginative genius that
the history of thought and culture is a changing pattern of liberating
ideas which form general attitudes and outlooks, which then event-
ually grow old and antiquated; their inadequacy to the texture of the
lived experience of self-conscious men becomes increasingly apparent
until finally they come to be felt as a constricting straitjacket which
must be broken at all costs; new, emancipating conceptions emerge,
which form new, more satisfying general outlooks, and these, in their
turn, gradually grow into prison-houses of the spirit. Again, Berlin's
work in the history of ideas derives much of its value from the fact that
he seems to hold a quasi-Hegelian view of history as an intelligible
process of intellectual growth and self-correction — a collective learn-
ing-process — in which the concepts of civilisation, society, develop-
ment, growth, barbarism, maturity and so forth are central to an understanding of human nature as it is revealed, not timelessly once and for all as some unchanging universal essence, but as it changes and grows through time. And finally, closely connected with this, and with much of what Vico wrote, Berlin makes much of the view that there is a specific faculty of imaginative historical judgement, different from the skills required by the methods of deduction and induction, whereby the gifted historian knows what does not go with what, what can and what cannot — conceptually cannot — belong to a specific epoch or stage of development of a culture or a civilisation; it is this which gives its meaning to such typically social-historical notions as the anachronistic, the normal, the typical and so forth.

Berlin is, therefore, not a cultural relativist in the manner of, for example, Spengler or Westermarck. Unlike such relativists, who maintained that one age or civilisation must be wholly opaque to another, Berlin believes that it is possible for men of learning and imagination to enter into and understand cultures and ages remote from their own. Nor is Berlin a subjectivist — he believes in the objective standards of judgement derived from understanding the life and activities of individual societies; these values form part of objective historical structures, and their discovery and understanding require imagination controlled by exact scholarship; provided they fit the circumstances and suit the instincts of a given society, and are not self-destructive or in conflict with some very small handful of fundamental values, failure to recognise which would entail denial that the relevant agents are human beings, then there is nothing to be said against them; above all, they cannot be appealed against from some single overarching standard of values. Nor, therefore, is Berlin a moral relativist. He has often asserted that too great a divergence in behaviour from at least a small handful of moral norms results in denial of humanity to the agent: it is, he says, 'clear that ability to recognise universal — or almost universal — values enters into our analysis of such fundamental concepts as “man”, “rational”, “sane”, “natural”.'

If Berlin has an ontology, it is the doctrine that that which most undeniably exists, and of which we have the most direct incorrigible knowledge, are human beings in specific historical circumstances — ourselves and others, concrete, individual, unique, self-directing, and in varying degrees responsible and free, possessed of inner lives made up of thoughts, feelings and emotions, consciously forming purposes and principles, and pursuing these in our outward lives; and that to
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attempt to reduce these to the less intelligible, because merely causal
or statistical, terms and laws of the natural sciences – or, for that
matter, to transform them into functional components of any abstract
system, metaphysical, teleological or mechanistic – however con-
venient this may be for practical purposes, diabolic, human or divine,
is ultimately to deny too much of what all men know immediately and
most vividly to be the truth about themselves, and often enough to
confine, stunt and mutilate them, with consequences some of which
these essays make all too plain.

Nowhere in his writings has Berlin claimed that the thesis of deter-
minism is demonstrably false; only that if it is true, and if its validity
becomes widely accepted by men, reflecting it: if not only in their
theoretical professions but in their daily thought and practice, then
this would entail a radical revision, or even the final demise, of some
of the most basic categories in terms of which men have conceived of
themselves as human; that words like freedom, choice, responsibility,
moral deserts, praise, blame, remorse, regret, and many more besides,
would either take on a wholly novel meaning, or else be emptied of
significance altogether. And Berlin's assertion that this is so, and his
evident belief that in certain vital respects – those, namely, in virtue
of which we identify a creature as human – men should not be treated
by science as purely natural objects, does not spring from the dogmatic
conviction that they cannot as a matter of fact be so treated. Rather
the reverse, for it is the very fear that the categories and methods of
the empirical, quantitative sciences can be, and have in fact been,
extended into the sphere of what had hitherto been supposed to be
properly and uniquely human forms of experience, often with a dis-
quieting degree of success and with results that are difficult to describe
and evaluate, that gives Berlin's monitory strictures their point. It
may well be, he seems to be saying, that we can go on applying quan-
titative causal methods in realm after realm of experience; but if we
find the quality and contents of much (or all) of human activity radi-
cally altered by such extension, and if in the process much (or all) of
what is human – what we understand most fully from within in the
Vichian sense – is either destroyed or transformed into something less
intelligible because purely causal, statistical, external, then in the
name of what, to what end, in pursuit of what value or ideal above and
beyond the kingdom of human concerns themselves, as we are directly
acquainted with these from personal experience and from knowledge
of others and of history, do we proceed to do this? In the name of
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truth? But no full account of the truth can exclude the data of direct experience, of our immediate knowledge of what it is to be a human being. In the name of efficiency or organisation? But these, too, are not autonomous ends; they stand and fall with the existence of identifiable human beings. This burning central issue, raised implicitly or explicitly by so much of what Berlin has said and written, clearly troubles him very deeply. It is an issue which lies at the heart of much contemporary disquiet.

Berlin's works may seem to many to offer a vision of life shot through with pessimism; and indeed, it cannot be denied that in his conception of man and the ends of life there is a powerful element of tragedy: avenues to human realisation may intersect and block one another; things of inestimable intrinsic value and beauty around which an individual or a civilisation may seek to build an entire way of life can come into mortal conflict; and the outcome is eradication of one of the protagonists and an absolute unredeemable loss. The overall tendency of Berlin's writings has been to enlarge and deepen our sense of such inevitable conflict and loss, and of the consequent necessity for absolute choices. He has blown breaches in all the harmonising, tranquillising visions which, while they diminish tension and agony, at the same time lower vitality and vigour and cause men to forget their essential humanity. He is constantly calling us back to our essential freedom and responsibility. His writings, scattered as so many of them have been through a variety of inaccessible journals and periodicals, when taken together, offer one of the most complete, cogent, formidable and satisfying accounts of the radical liberal humanist conception of man and his predicament that has ever been formulated, and as such should be made widely available to the age. Growing interest in them is, to use his own memorable words on the works of Verdi, 'a symptom of sanity in our time'.

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