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## The Problem of Nationalism

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# The Problem of Nationalism

*A dialogue with Stuart Hampshire, chaired by Bryan Magee*

This text is based on a transcript, supplied by Thames Television, from a recording that no longer exists. It has been lightly edited to eliminate obvious errors (so far as this is possible in the circumstances).

BRYAN MAGEE Is nationalist feeling – to put the question at its most simplistic – a good thing or a bad thing? Why did scarcely anyone foresee, even very recently, its almost overwhelming importance as a force in the modern world? Why does it persist in having this importance? Must we expect it to continue far into the future?

The founders of the United Nations a generation ago completely failed to foresee this. Since then, throughout Africa and the Middle East, the forms of government left behind by the colonial powers have been swept aside by revolutionary movements, but not the national frontiers which those same colonial powers laid down quite arbitrarily only a hundred years ago or less. On the contrary, most of the new governments are highly nationalistic.

For generations, socialists of every kind, and Communists, believed that nationalism was a form of false consciousness, exploited by the bourgeoisie in each of those countries to secure the allegiance of the workers, and to blind the workers to their true interests, which were class interests. Yet today the Communist world itself is irrevocably split along precisely nationalist boundary-lines, and some of the most divisive forces within individual Communist states – like Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, and above all the Soviet Union – are nationalist forces. And the West is little different. It is nationalist feeling more than anything else that persistently foils the aspirations of the Common Market, an organisation of capitalist States. This is something that almost everyone in politics, whether of the left, right or centre, has been proved wrong about.

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The first of our guests this evening, Sir Isaiah Berlin, President of Wolfson College, Oxford, is pretty sure there is going to be no diminution in the importance of nationalist feeling in the immediate future.

ISAIAH BERLIN Yes, my view really springs from the fact that I think that the desire to belong to a community or to some kind of unit, which is national, I suppose – it has been national in the last 400 years – is a basic human need or desire, and therefore socialist and, I suppose, liberal theories have gravely underestimated the force of this.

MAGEE Our other guest, Stuart Hampshire, Warden of Wadham College, Oxford, believes in the possibility at least of less nationalism in the future than there's been in the past.

STUART HAMPSHIRE Yes, I think that Sir Isaiah's quite right to say that attachment to some group is an absolute human need, but I don't see that it needs to be the nation-state, and I'm rather more optimistic than I suspect he is about the possibility of understanding nationalism and, by understanding it, controlling it.

MAGEE Well, between tonight's guests we have, not a head-on collision of viewpoints, but rather two overlapping, yet still different, approaches to a set of puzzling, important and above all urgent questions. Let's start as usual by giving each of them an opportunity to clarify his position.

Sir Isaiah, why do you think it is that, contrary to almost everybody's expectation, nationalism is still as powerful a force as any in the modern world?

BERLIN Well, I think – I'd like to distinguish between nationalism and national consciousness or national feeling. National feeling seems to me a perfectly normal phenomenon of human beings brought together by whatever it may be, unity of tradition, living on the same soil, possessing common memories, having gone

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through common experiences, and needn't take a particular aggressive form. But if it's in some way insulted or humiliated, or some kind of pressure is brought against it, then I think it becomes inflamed, and this is what is called nationalism. This, I think, has happened to a number of nations, one by one, in the modern world. I think that the first victims of it were the Germans; after that, to some degree, the Russians and the Balkan nations; then of course Asians, Africans and so on. And this seems to me not to have been taken account of, at least in the nineteenth century, when people feared that sort of thing – at least not sufficiently taken account of – simply because people thought that this was an irrational phenomenon, that reason would progress and march, and that as civilisation advanced these irrational forces would weaken, and with them nationalism too.

MAGEE But if nationalism is always, so to speak, a backlash, as you suggest, a reaction to humiliation of some kind, that should mean that Britain, for example, is not the home of nationalist feeling, because we haven't been occupied – invaded or occupied – for a thousand years; we haven't been humiliated in that sort of way.

BERLIN Well, nor *is* it the home of nationalist feeling, I should have thought – one of the least nationalist of all countries. There is some nationalism in England because there is some in almost every country, but it's infinitely weaker compared to the nationalism of the people you spoke about earlier – Asians, Africans or Eastern Europeans.

MAGEE But I think most English people are deeply convinced of the superiority of English people, and certainly dislike foreigners, and so on.

BERLIN That isn't nationalism. That's a sort of xenophobia, to some extent, or isolationism, or lack of imagination or something of that kind. I don't think that's nationalism.

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MAGEE Well, what is nationalism then, in your view?

BERLIN A state of wounded consciousness.

MAGEE A state of wounded consciousness.

BERLIN Some kind of sense of the fact that one is – a particular aggressiveness which comes from some kind of wound, which takes the form of asserting one's superiority in a rather – often offensive, sometimes highly aggressive fashion. That isn't characteristic of England in the least. One of the things that most annoys foreigners about England is the bland assumption of superiority on the part of the English, which is not the least aggressive – perhaps just all the more insulting, I don't know – but it's not aggressive.

MAGEE What are the most notable contemporary examples that you could give?

BERLIN Of nationalism?

MAGEE Yes.

BERLIN Oh goodness, I should have thought both – contemporary examples are, I suppose, the passionate feelings about themselves of all the developing nations, all of which seek to prove they're not what they've been taken to be for centuries and centuries. Certainly this is so in Asia; certainly this is so among the new African States. I regard General Amin as quite a good representative – somebody in whose breast obviously violent nationalist feelings have awoken.

MAGEE On the basis of what you've said it's not at all clear to me why you should regard nationalism as something that's unavoidable. It isn't unavoidable that nations should be humiliated

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and should acquire this wounded consciousness, and the nation-state itself has existed only for – what? – 400 years or something? We haven't always had nations; in fact they're recent.

BERLIN No, but the nation-state happens to be the form into which the desire to belong to a single community happened to evolve in the last 400 years, and that's therefore the structure which has somehow grown out of the past. Why, I can't tell you, because I'm not a historian, but taking it for granted that nation-states have in fact taken place and occurred, been born, somewhere – I don't know – in the sixteenth century or perhaps a little earlier, this became the focus of feeling. Now it is of course not necessary that people should humiliate one another, it's not necessary that any vices should exist at all in some things, but it is in fact the case that aggressive feelings do take the form of insulting one's neighbours, and it seems to me that nationalism was born historically as a result of the colossal superiority of the French, for example, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, particularly vis-à-vis the Germans, who I think had some growing sense of inferiority, of being provincials, of being on the edges of Europe. So it's a kind of accumulated resentment, which occurred particularly in Germany and German-speaking lands, and which then burst forth, particularly when they were re-invaded (after Louis XIV's aggression) by Napoleon; and that is the birthplace of modern nationalism. Then, one by one, each of the backward countries which have been in some way humiliated or actually attacked, such as Russia, the Balkans and so on, developed a typical backlash, which is what nationalism seems to me fundamentally to be.

MAGEE You say you're not a historian, but you are a historian of ideas. Now why do you think that people in the past have been so mistaken about the continuing importance of nationalism? Why is it that almost nobody foresaw, very recently, that it would still be ...

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BERLIN It is a very surprising phenomenon, I quite agree. It astonishes me too that here in the nineteenth century, full of prophets of every kind, people foresee capitalism, people foresee the military-industrial complex, people foresee the impact of technology, people foresee all kinds of things, but what they fail to predict is the fact that nationalism should, in the middle of the twentieth century, be one of the greatest forces dominating the world. So it seems to me that left-wing movements, for example, Communism, if it comes arm-in-arm with nationalism, wins; if it goes against it, it loses. You say: Why? I think because in the nineteenth century, which is of course the very century when English nationalism reared its head highest, it was simply assumed that this was the product of oppression – that oppression would cease under the benevolent influence of rational organisation, liberalism, freedom, and it would simply melt away. And I don't think anyone in Europe who formulated these theories thought much about Asia, thought much about Africa. In a way this was a kind of European chauvinism. Nobody ever thought that new nations would arise there, or would go through the same process as Europeans. In some way it was going to – I don't – implicit ignorance, so to speak, or lack of interest in, lack of attention to, an understanding of vast tracts of the world. And for this we're now paying.

MAGEE So you think that it's (at least in part) a part of a much wider phenomenon, namely an underestimation of the importance of the irrational in human life and in social life?

BERLIN Yes, and also in particular of the kind of reaction there is to being helped, to being patronised. I didn't merely mean imperialism in its ugly forms; even imperialism in its benevolent forms creates a certain self-consciousness on the part of the patronised, which takes the form of self-assertion.

MAGEE Do you entirely dislike, or at least regret, nationalist feelings, or do you have some at least partial sympathy for them?

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BERLIN I regret them, yes, and I have partial sympathy for them. Both. I think national consciousness is a perfectly normal state of affairs. I see no reason for being against it in particular, any more than any other perfectly normal human phenomenon which simply must be allowed for, understood. I think that – when Stuart Hampshire said that we have some hope of understanding nationalism, I entirely share this hope; what I believe is that understanding nationalism will of itself reduce it, but that's another point.

MAGEE Well, let's now turn to Stuart Hampshire. Stuart Hampshire, where do you most disagree with the attitude put forward by Sir Isaiah Berlin?

HAMPSHIRE Well, I don't disagree with the historical analysis. I think it's correct that European nationalism has been the 'bent twig' kind, that is, a backlash, and that the natural home of nationalism is Poland or Germany, countries which had a record, a conscious record, of oppression. But I would like to lay much more stress than he does on the fact that nationalism is just one form of attachment to a community, and that it's quite a recent form, and it by no means embraces the whole of human history. He didn't assert that it did, but I would like to drive a wider wedge between attachment to a community of some kind and this community being the nation-state, which seems to be a fairly recent thing. Now I absolutely agree that it's a basic human need that you should be attached to a community of some kind, that you should feel yourself belonging to an ancestry and that you should look forward to having descendants who belong to the same group and that you have a sense of identity which arises from that; but I don't think that that community needs to be the nation-state or even, taking human history as a whole, that it generally has been, as Isaiah admitted when he was speaking about Africa and other parts of the world. For example, in many parts of the world tribalism has been a problem in composing a nation because the attachments are not



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naturally towards the centre of power, but rather in kinship groups or something of this kind, working out from family connections, ultimately. And I think we ought not therefore to be, so to speak, defeatist and move from the proposition that people need to be attached to groups of some kind – to have a sense of identity derived from that – to the belief that these groups have to be nation-states, with all the power that goes with that, and thus a tendency towards war and exclusiveness and really dangerous forms of xenophobia. I would agree with Isaiah that there is – as another facet, so to speak, of attachment – there is a tendency towards treating strangers as strangers, and I don't think any of us are so made that we regard everybody as equal in respect of our natural attachment to them. If you live abroad for some years, then you have a feeling of being deprived to some degree, simply because you're among people who you naturally think of as strangers, and you imagine they think of you as strangers; but this is not national consciousness.

MAGEE Do you – do Western liberals in general – tend to be very hostile to tribalism, and now to nationalism, and to any exclusive group-feeling of that kind? Do you regard manifestations of nationalism as a bad thing?

HAMPSHIRE I'm not – well, I certainly wouldn't say all of them are, but I think that it's something that we have to develop a theory of. I agree we have no theory, and I don't think we will get a theory by consideration of recent European history. I mean I think that the answer to the question (and I know Isaiah – I suspect – doesn't agree with this), why the theorists were wrong in the nineteenth century, is that on the whole they studied their own history, the history of Western Europe, and I think that really, in order to understand the psychological roots of nationalism, one has to look at rather more than that. One needs, really, an adequate social anthropology and an adequate psychology, neither of which we have, except, in embryonic form, social anthropology. But if we just look at history we will regurgitate, as it were, our own

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immediate past. And this is the vice of nineteenth-century theorists, who after all were immensely successful in many of their – predicting a certain type of internationalism for example, predicting the internationalism of business, which is, I think, actually coming about.

MAGEE Now that we realise that nationalism is overwhelmingly important – even if we're still not quite sure why – do you think this means that all internationalist creeds have to be given up, or at least recast?

HAMPSHIRE Well, I think they have to be recast. I think that traditional socialists have to face the fact that it's the employers and the businessmen and the entrepreneurs who think internationally. I mean, so to speak, it's the directors of the big motor companies and not their workers; it's not at all the case that the workers in Detroit or wherever it is, or in Dagenham, feel solidarity through working for the same firm, while I suspect the directors to a very large extent do; and this is something which, I believe I am right in saying, was in part predicted by Saint-Simon – but he supposed that at the same time the workers would develop some international feeling. Now I think that this is plainly not the case and a fundamental analysis is needed to understand why this is.

MAGEE Isn't it probably because the ability to see and imagine things beyond one's own immediate experience is related to education, to some extent? The bosses are much better educated than the workers.

HAMPSHIRE That helps. And it's true, it has to be admitted, that when it comes to what isn't exactly the same as nationalism, namely chauvinism, or at any rate what I would call exaggerated patriotic feeling, it's just as likely that the leaders of the working class – the organised working class – will take, in many countries, not in all countries, but in many countries, a so-called nationalist

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chauvinistic attitude as it is that middle-class liberal opinion will. Ah yes, I think it's certainly true that national sentiment can be watered down, watered down by cross-currents, in a way which hasn't been achieved, I'm bound to say; but I think that this is something which I still hope – if you ask me to explain how this works, I'm not able to, because I will confess from the beginning that I do not think there's an adequate socialist theory of nationalism or even of national consciousness.

MAGEE Do you think that the acknowledgement of nationalism is in fact compatible with being a socialist?

HAMPSHIRE Yes I do, I do, because I think that socialism is perfectly compatible, for example, with even deeper allegiances of a religious kind which are just as intense. We mustn't get carried away by our subject and not suppose that, say, all Roman Catholics – and all Moslems – have a very strong sense of community, and when they meet they feel at ease. And there are after all many other cross-connections – for example, I think that – I like to believe, and I think there's some evidence for it, that scientists working in similar fields, when they're together, or philosophers when they're together, have something that's in common; all these things are cross-currents, or cross-lines, which if built upon may break down nationalism; and it's only in that way, of course, that one will do so. The attachment to a religion is just as deep, I think, and crosses frontiers.

MAGEE Thank you very much, Stuart Hampshire. Well, before we ask our two guests to discuss this question further face-to-face we're going to take a short break. We'll be back again in a couple of minutes.

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MAGEE Sir Isaiah, Stuart Hampshire agreed with you just now that people do have a need to belong to groups, but pointed out

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that there are an awful lot of groups besides nations that they can and do belong to. Now what would be your answer to that?

BERLIN Well – what groups are you thinking of?

HAMPSHIRE Well, the religious groups are one, but I would like really to stress another, namely groups that all do the same kind of work, functional groups. It would seem to me that all actors, all people working in the cinema, or in television, all scientists, physical scientists, have something in common when they meet, and they meet more often across boundaries, just as religions cross boundaries, and that one can build up on this. To a certain degree, of course, philosophy is rather an unfavourable case. When British philosophers met with French philosophers, they didn't get on very well, and each thought the other side was very nationalistic, but I think that is less true in crafts which are more exactly defined, and status isn't under dispute, for example historians when they're all together.

MAGEE Stuart Hampshire, these are very academic categories, and the overwhelming masses of the great populations of the world wouldn't come into any of these.

HAMPSHIRE Well, I thought I mentioned two that were not academic, namely film and television, and these are international arts.

BERLIN But you said – but you talked just now about common descent and all that. Well obviously historians don't have common descent, nor do television operators. It isn't that. What I mean is, if you are thinking of the nation-state, what are the groups that really do command people's loyalty in some deep sense? You see, guilded socialism, for example, in the old days was founded on the supposition that people doing common work have more loyalty to each other, whatever their nationalities might be, than they do to their nation. Some socialists thought that this is a noble ideal, and

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this worked. Now what has prevented it? Presumably the fact that national loyalties are deeper than the others, in fact.

HAMPSHIRE Well, the obvious case which we have to confront, I think, is the case of religion, which really does cross national boundaries.

BERLIN Yes it does, it certainly does, yes.

HAMPSHIRE It's the other deep – is it prejudice to say non-rational? – force that holds people together in the same way, appealing to deeper senses of ancestry and descent, as does the national State.

BERLIN Yes, I would agree that the religions are the other great force which commands profound loyalty, and when it coincides, of course, with nation-states it becomes stronger still.

MAGEE But where in the modern world do you see large numbers of people being held together by religion? Do you see many examples of that?

BERLIN A very large number of persons, not as – it used to be thought that Islam was such a religion, but of course we were also told by the other side – I'm not an authority on this – that in fact that is an illusion, that the national feelings of Iranians, of Arabs, of Malaysians and so on, all of whom are Muslims, are far stronger than what unites them. They may unite against a common enemy, but this is a temporary phenomenon. I should have thought that the nation-state is one of the strongest single organisations, in fact the strongest single organisation of the modern world, which can't be denied. Now the question is, can something else be made a substitute for it? And why would it be better to make something a substitute? You see, my theory is this – I don't want to be misunderstood – I think nationalism is a pathological condition, and bad not good. But I think it's a pathological condition of

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national consciousness, which seems to me a normal fact of human existence. Now if you suppose that by some sleight of hand you could substitute for that some other loyalty, say loyalty to craft, you see, say loyalty to the way one works, the way one lives, then that loyalty, if it's in some way wounded or offended by some counter-loyalty on the part of a lot of other people – supposing a lot of, I don't know, physical scientists are insulted by a lot of chemists – they will develop, yes, aggression too (I'm giving you a comical example).

HAMPSHIRE Yes, but this is exactly the doctrine of socialism, isn't it, what you're now explaining? It was assumed that, in virtue of a common living condition across the world, the working classes and the industrial State would be solid across boundaries, I mean across all boundaries, because they were oppressed relative to the rest of the population. And the only case that we have of this happening is when in the Communist world – and, as Bryan said at the very beginning, that is already cracking – I mean that the sense of 'We're all socialists', although it exists, is far less strong than it was believed to be even within the Communist world, where of course there might have been special reasons for that.

BERLIN Earlier even than Bryan suggested, I think, perhaps. I mean, I would say that in 1917 the Russian Revolution, the original Lenin revolution, was a genuinely anti-nationalist revolution, it really was, to such a degree, I mean, that they really – people were prepared to talk against the great figures of Russian literature in order not to be accused of chauvinism. But by the middle 1920s it was perfectly clear that Russia was a national power. The interests of the Russians and that national power clashed with the interests of the great international force, and it began to be felt by other Communist parties, and these cracks began; but the cracks began along national even more than ideological lines.

HAMPSHIRE You don't think that the link ...? – what I'm suspecting, and is on your side and not on mine, is that the links

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that I spoke of at the very beginning, in respect of ancestry and descent and the sense of belonging to a group, aren't transferable away from either a locality or a language. That's what I suspect. And of course if to keep its power – unless we speak a common language, in either a metaphorical or literal sense of common language, or unless we've been brought up in the same locality – I think locality is enormously important (I mean, attachment to a place isn't really my case), and I think most people one can think of have an attachment to an actual physical scene and familiar sounds and ways of talking, familiar ways of behaving – you have to have that, and that's why I suppose that these functional connections are so weak, because they have no links in childhood at all. It's not so much that they come, so to speak, at the upper end of the income scale, or the ones I happen to mention did, but rather that they have no childhood or early life or pre-sophisticated roots. I mean, what we're really talking about in a sense is what is sentimentally called roots, being *déraciné*, having no roots or being rooted, and the difference between these two, I say – and you in a way agree that it doesn't need to be the nation, because after all, I mean, nations that are scattered, such as the Armenians or the Jews, other nations that are scattered still have through a language very deep roots which are felt as roots even though they're also felt as deracination ...

BERLIN Well, I have a feeling, yes, this is perfectly true, but what I think is this, you see. Take the Armenians and the Jews. It is quite a good example. These people asserted their national existence not so much because, I don't know, there's some kind of inner aggressiveness on their part or some rather lunatic pathological irrationalism by which for years and centuries they've led one kind of life, then suddenly for no reason at all they some day began to train to be a nation and began to behave in a nationalistic manner; but because the other nations quite plainly didn't recognise them as equals – and this is what inflicted the wounds, and as a result of these wounds national feelings erupted – this is what happened to the Italians, because they were frightened and despised, and ruled

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by foreigners, by Austrians by others, this is what happened to the Germans, because they were scattered and looked down upon, and this was – therefore the solution, I should have thought, to the problem of national clashes, wars, aggression, national contempt – all these are very bad phenomena – is, I suppose one has to say, mutual recognition. Herder was the first person, I think, who said in very clear terms that one of the basic human needs was not only for food or drink or procreative activities, but for recognition on the part of others.

HAMPSHIRE Not being invisible.

BERLIN Not being invisible, not being taken for granted, not being despised ...

HAMPSHIRE But there is also a sense of ...

BERLIN ... not being ignored.

HAMPSHIRE ... sense of being at home, isn't there? I mean, if one lives abroad for any length of time, there are two things that happen. One is that, in a visceral and direct way, or an unconscious way, if you like, or a non-rational way, one misses a certain place, certain sounds, the look of certain things with which one is familiar and has been brought up. And that is absolutely just a feeling one has, it's not at all anything which can be expressed in propositions or beliefs, it's just something one – yes, that is very deep, and is certainly associated with nationalism. So – but there's another thing ...

BERLIN Nationalism, no, I would deny that it is associated with a sense of nationality. I do want to distinguish this again, you see ...

HAMPSHIRE All right, yes, I think you're right, yes.



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BERLIN Resenting not being recognised properly – there is still a pathological or inflamed condition ...

HAMPSHIRE Yes.

BERLIN This is the aggression we call nationalism. Being abroad among people not quite of your own thought, who speak another language with a different tradition, or who get up and sit down differently, or brush their hair differently, I don't know, they've different sorts of reading, they read different sorts of books, or eat in some different fashion – that makes you uncomfortable because you no longer feel at home. The desire to be at home with your own people is an ordinary craving for just being at home. This is a form of craving for being with your peers ...

HAMPSHIRE Yes.

BERLIN ... with your nation. Those are not the same – one is a pathological form of the other.

HAMPSHIRE Yes, but there's another thing which isn't, I think, at all pathological, which afflicts people when they're abroad – the desire to be a citizen, I mean to be on an equal basis as far as social and political – that is what you – and that is, I would say, a rational thing, in the sense that you can be entirely aware of it, and you can express your belief, you can act on it, you make it a political programme. But when Russell said whatever he did say, roughly that the strongest emotion that he feels is an attachment to England, to the country, he didn't mean anything to do with citizenship, he meant the first thing, the irrational feeling at home, so to speak, and these two things come together. I mean if you're a Scottish Nationalist presumably you feel both those things, but the second is the one that enters into a political programme.

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BERLIN I wonder if 'rational' or 'irrational' are the right terms to use at all – it suddenly strikes me. Why is it irrational to want to feel at home? Why is it irrational to object to being slighted?

HAMPSHIRE Because you can't produce an argument in any way about it, it's like a physical – it's almost like a physical feeling, it isn't a thing that you would want to argue about or be able to argue about. It's only irrational in the sense in which your response to a poem or something like that might be irrational, or attraction to a person might be irrational, but it isn't – it would be inappropriate for someone to challenge it with an argument. It would not be inappropriate in the other case.

BERLIN Would it be irrational – I don't wish to enter questions of philosophical arguments, of course, but supposing I say – irrational for me to want food if I'm hungry?

HAMPSHIRE It's not rational or irrational, no.

BERLIN You think that is a fact.

HAMPSHIRE It's just a fact, yes.

BERLIN Well this is what the desire to be at home with one's own family is.

HAMPSHIRE Exactly, exactly.

MAGEE Gentlemen, there's one point that I want to get clearly in focus and it's this: one of the central tenets of Western liberal thought is that what really matters about a man has nothing to do with whether he's a Frenchman or a Jew or Black or whatever it may be. Now I gather, Sir Isaiah, you think that this is simply wrong ...

BERLIN I think it's ...

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MAGEE ... whereas Stuart Hampshire is inclined to think there's a lot in it. Is that right?

BERLIN I think it's exaggerated. I think being a Frenchman or a Black is a significant, important factor – it's neither good nor bad. It doesn't mean that one of these groups is superior to the other, but it's simply – the fact that one man is six foot tall and the other is only five feet tall matters: it may not matter in some connections; it matters in others. If he wishes to become a sportsman of a certain sort, say a jockey or something, then his weight matters. If you're a Frenchman it matters frightfully whether you live in one part of the world or the other, as Stuart said, more or less; if you're a Frenchman it's a very significant fact that you would rather not live in Iceland – I mean, this is a very simple example. Certain nations have different gifts, some nations have one kind of taste, others another kind of taste. When you're employing people for certain professions, certain functions, you certainly take into account what are called national characteristics. It doesn't follow that you would need either to praise or to condemn any of them, but they are what they are. In fact the word 'race', which has now become a terribly disagreeable word, people absolutely hate it – that's because of the appalling use made of it in the sort of nonsense written about it, and the appalling brutalities exercised in its name. But there are races in some perhaps non-scientific sense that – anthropologists are always trying to prove that the concept of races is absurd, that because mixtures of – it has no scientific basis in genetics. Well, that may be so, but we all know what we mean when we say people belong to the Mongolian race, or belong to the white race, or people belong to certain coloured races – it need entail no kind of pejorative significance or laudatory significance either. But to say the word mustn't be used at all is itself, I think, a pathological symptom of our fear.

*[Talking together]*

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HAMPSHIRE And here we really do disagree, I think – I think we disagree on this ground, that the word ‘race’ ought not to be used in making programmes, or in any political context where action is to follow, or any politics devised, unless we really know what we mean, and I suspect we don’t. I’m not an expert on the subject, but I suspect that when you said we can’t give a scientific definition of it, this is absolutely the truth, and that we don’t know whether we mean something genetic, a gene pool or something of this kind. As it’s ordinarily used it’s a confused term and will lead to confused policies.

BERLIN That I will agree; I would agree – I mean it is used in very fearful ways. It’s perfectly true of people, on the whole, who use it – trying to deduce consequences from it which don’t follow and are on the whole as a rule directed against somebody, have some kind of exclusiveness or hostility about them, and of course this is very bad.

HAMPSHIRE And you agree with what Bryan just mentioned, in a sense, that there is the kind of Stoic or Christian or Stoic-Christian doctrine that people are equal across all boundaries for certain circumstances.

BERLIN Yes, people ...

HAMPSHIRE Well in general the conception of a dominant race or a master people has been quite widely spread, hasn’t it? Now this gives a reason for looking for countervailing forces, because after all we all slightly smile at the idea, in fact we did actually smile at the idea of scientists having a great deal of – they’re very unlikely to form a group which will regard all non-scientists as somehow barbarian, I mean the thing isn’t strong enough. So in proportion as it’s strong, this is the justification of the use of the word ‘irrational’. Well, I think again we differ a little. In proportion as it’s strong there will be hatred facing outwards; in proportion as we don’t make it conscious, and think, well, I – I speak from an

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English point of view and I'm affected by that – to that degree hatred will be stronger, and just that hatred is very dangerous.

BERLIN A whole lot of people will – I don't agree with any of this, and I must say, historically speaking, the word 'race' has accumulated round itself extremely dangerous and sinister associations, and therefore we have to be very careful when using it. But whenever people avoid using a certain term consciously one feels that they're circumnavigating something or other, or trying not to face something, and this itself is not very good.

HAMPSHIRE Yes, but then ...

BERLIN It ought to be inoculated, it ought somehow to be made neutral ...

HAMPSHIRE Yes, but there is the species – it is when you say 'A man's a man for all that' one's bound to smile slightly, because when it was said, on the whole – it was a little before the time when it really became a serious slogan, because in fact the religions remained exclusive and the nations remained exclusive. But now the situation is no longer so, since questions of the environment and so on really have to be handled internationally. So there is a sense of regarding the species that isn't entirely rhetorical. I mean that the notion of the future of the species – for two reasons, one is that the species may simply disappear, which is scientifically not only possible but some would say even probable, at any rate it's not absurd, through true war; or alternatively it may be gravely endangered in other ways – that is, things get poisoned and this crosses[?] them. So there is a reason for regarding this as not simply rhetoric, really.

BERLIN Yes, I agree, but I wouldn't disagree at all. Of course human beings are human beings and have their rights, and human rights come first and foremost before all other rights. But the only thing I complain about is – people who are honourably

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internationalistic in outlook, who really deserve to save the human race – and there really are sincere and genuine liberals who do not suffer from irrational prejudices or aggressive desires, or desires to do other nationalities down – sometimes discount the very existence of certain facts which will frustrate them in producing even – in fulfilling their objectives, trying to think of, for example, the existence of nations, of national feelings, as obstacles and nuisances which are in themselves somehow, I don't know – it's not unimportant, at any rate – something which ought to be cleared away for the purposes of creating one great united human race, seeking rational ideals such as justice or liberty or happiness.

HAMPSHIRE We ought to say something about language, oughtn't we? It occurs to me, when one immediately thinks of Esperanto, one thinks of something that's absurd, I mean it's added by dilution and you get something that's absolutely without flavour or colour or sense at all. Language is, I think, really, apart from locality, the second strongest thing ...

MAGEE Well, there's obviously an intimate relationship between nationalism and language, and, I would have thought, through language with literature; and some of the positive achievements of nationalism lie in the area of literature and the other arts. Wouldn't you agree?

BERLIN Oh yes, yes. Certainly a great amount of marvellous poetry and prose springs from profound national feeling. Of course. These are on the plus side. But you mentioned Esperanto, quite rightly. Now what makes us smile, what makes us feel that a language from which all national association, all genetic feelings, memories have been pumped out is a feeble affair? In the eighteenth century they really looked forward to it.

HAMPSHIRE Yes, but the important thing about language is that it's learnt in childhood, isn't it? That is, it – and I think that all these things have a hold and are important in proportion as they are

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things that are plugged in at the bottom in childhood, and that what you can't do is, at the age of eighteen, seventeen, start remodelling persons in respect of their deepest attachments. So you can't start remaking them. But what you can do is direct the education of earliest childhood away from certain exaggerated forms of national consciousness. I suspect that those who read philosophy in France get an absolutely different picture of what philosophy is, and its history, which is principally about French men, just as – it may be a rather bad example about childhood.

BERLIN For example, do you believe in the possibility, which I think must be discussed at Unesco and places like that, of creating a uniform history book for all nations in different languages, which tells us the story of humanity in each of these nationalities in identical language for everybody?

HAMPSHIRE No, No.

BERLIN No, neither do I, no. The question is, why don't we? It's quite a good question. Why do we not think that the truth is the truth? Or at least, as far as humanists can dehumanise everybody – reputable historians – that the history of the French and the history of the Germans ought to be exactly the same whether it's written in German, whether it's written in French? We don't think that. We don't think it, because there are certain values which are dear to the French, and some values that are dear to the Germans. We don't think they necessarily clash with each other and collide, but the idea of smoothing them out in order to prevent any kind of collision – we think it leaves the whole thing bloodlessly etiolated so that – no, the thing will no longer mean much to anybody. That's what we think, rightly or wrongly.

HAMPSHIRE Yes, but why should one smooth it out? I mean, suppose you make allowances – simply – I mean, you say, well, I – of course, when I read about the battle of Waterloo at school I read about it from an English point of view; if I were French then the

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story would be very different. Supposing this is an attitude which people are taught, it doesn't mean they've got to, so to speak, root out their childhood associations. I mean, Russell was an internationalist, I suppose, but was very clearly aware of ...

BERLIN ... the English being vastly superior to everyone else.

HAMPSHIRE Well, he didn't act on it.

BERLIN He didn't think anyone was half as good. He may have thought so in his rational moments.

HAMPSHIRE I mean, of course one realises one has all these attachments. It doesn't mean that you've got then to translate them into policies, as long as you're aware of them.

MAGEE Why shouldn't we aim, ultimately – very ultimately, no doubt – at a world which is rather like, say, Great Britain in the following respect? In Great Britain you have different countries – Scotland and England – with different legal systems and different education systems, very different histories, traditions, even different languages to some extent, but nevertheless the same central government, the same currency and so on. Now why shouldn't we have, so to speak, a non-divisive nationalism?

BERLIN In the entire world?

MAGEE Yes – I mean as a kind of ultimate aim, if you like.

BERLIN Well, I object to one world on other grounds. I don't know whether it's anything to do with nationalism or not – I think not, perhaps. My only objection to one world is that I think there are some people who want to escape from certain forms of life, who ought not to be prevented from doing so. If you didn't like the Church you could escape to the Emperor, and if you didn't like the Emperor you go to the Church. I have a feeling that even the



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Roman Empire – supposing you were in the Roman Empire and didn't happen to like the Roman way of life, but there's nowhere to go, it seems very suffocating to me – not much good – a lot of barbarians scrabbling about on the edges. You couldn't go to Africa – it was too different, too ...

MAGEE So you want a divided world?

BERLIN I want variety, to which one can escape. I want a non-aggressive divided world. I fully agree with you, I don't think that a sense of nationality presupposes nationalism. You could have a non-aggressive national feeling – you could have it, and it's something to work for. What I disagree with is the possibility of, as it were, smoothing out, objecting to national feeling as such because it leads in its pathological state to dreadful consequences.

MAGEE We all agree about the dreadful consequences of the pathological kind of nationalism.

BERLIN Yes.

MAGEE What can be done about it? What can be done to mitigate the effects of these in the future? Because they have after all wreaked havoc in the past.

HAMPSHIRE Yes, well, I have only – as I say, I've no theory, but I believe that it's one's duty, to put it portentously, to build up all cross-cutting, countervailing forces, such as the kind I mentioned, particularly the functional ones. And that's the respect in which I suppose – I think socialists always have thought, even though there are great limits there – I think that's one thing.

MAGEE So far, with respect, Stuart Hampshire, it all sounds a bit like a pious hope, I mean something you'd *like*.

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HAMPSHIRE No, I don't think it is quite a pious hope; I think there are many respects in which it isn't, and I think that socialism is not really as spent a force as we're now suggesting that it is. Now I also think functional connections may have bigger effects than we have thought. I don't think these are pious hopes. But anything is a pious hope unless we understand more psychology, more social science, and rely less on recent European history to draw our material from. I mean, I think that we're – I take very seriously the point that Sir Isaiah made at the beginning – we tend to think in a kind of Mazzini-like way of European nations, and actually life in Africa, and even Chinese nationalism, I suspect, is a very different kind from European nationalism.

BERLIN Well, I wish I shared your hope about the possibility in our lifetime of sufficient advance in social psychology or social anthropology really to be able to teach us how to cope with these phenomena. By all means – and of course one hopes that this will happen. But there's just one point I'd like to make. You see I entirely agree with you that breaking down walls of any kind is a good thing. All divisions in a sense carry with them potential dangers of collision of an irrational kind, and death, suffering for people. This is so. At the same time, variety, we think, is quite a good thing. Now this is quite a recent belief. I don't know when people started praising variety, but we all believe in it now. People are afraid of monotony, of uniformity, of huge technologically organised worlds in which everybody's fitted into slots. That's what the young are against: some awful nightmare of over-organisation in which all individual wrinkles are smoothed out in some sort of way. National consciousness, or even nationalism, is one of the protests against this. It's a dangerous one.

MAGEE You see it as part of the revolt against Enlightenment.

BERLIN I think so.

MAGEE Part of the so-called revolt against reason?

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BERLIN I think so – but certainly against organisation, certainly against being fitted like parts into some huge rational machine designed to produce some kind of uniform life. And I think in the old days, before industrialism and so on, nobody ever thought variety was a good thing at all, and the old view that we all know – and Plato’s – one good, one bad (roughly), one truth, one life, then one proper ideal existence – Spinoza certainly believed that uniformity was better than variety, I’m sure. We don’t believe this. And nationalism is part of this disbelief, a peculiarly dangerous and sometimes rather sinister form of it, but a form of it, and I think it has to be taken in that context.

MAGEE A lot of people are saying now that there’s a move, so to speak, in the opposite direction from the melting-pot, not only within the United States but all over the world – a recrudescence of the desire to identify with small groups.

BERLIN Yes.

MAGEE Or national sovereignty of nationalist origin.

BERLIN I think that is certainly true.

MAGEE Now if that is true, doesn’t that mean that we have to expect an increase in nationalist feeling rather than a decrease of it?

HAMPSHIRE We’re seeing it – one has to multiply the number of small groups which are alternatives.

BERLIN There’s no question ...

HAMPSHIRE I think Isaiah’s perfectly right, the reason is – it is the fear that industrialisation will produce a kind of homogenised man who is helpless in a large unit. I mean, that’s certainly a very

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common feeling, and if you're restored to Wales and the valleys of Wales you are among your own people, and nobody's among their own people in their great skyscraper, which looks like any other skyscraper.

MAGEE Well, one of the extraordinary things about nationalism as a force of the modern world – Stuart Hampshire, you referred to this earlier – is that there's no theory of it. I mean the other great forces of the world – economic forces, Communism, whatever it may be – are associated with large bodies of theory and philosophy. We have concepts for handling them, dealing with them, thinking about them, concepts that we can all cope with. But there is no theory of nationalism, and none of us quite knows how to deal with it, in what terms to think of it.

BERLIN And it's also quite interesting why there's no theory of nationalism. Why didn't the theorists in the nineteenth century in fact pay more attention to it? They lived in the heart of the nationalist century, in a sense – I mean nationalism was quite close to them. After all, German nationalism, Italian nationalism dominated the nineteenth century, yet all these Marxes and Spencers, and even Durkheims, and even Webers, all of whom are profound theorists in their way and have made very valuable discoveries and had many magnificent insights – I don't wish to denigrate their very genuine genius – didn't allow for this sufficiently. Weber was a nationalist, in fact, but it wasn't part of his official doctrine, so to speak. It isn't what he's known for; it isn't something on which he laid much stress. Marxism – once one is in the grip of a single explanation of the world one tries to fit everything else into that. That's why Marxism made such profound mistakes in supposing both that national consciousness and religion were in substance derivatives of, connected with – I don't know, 'by-product' is perhaps too feeble a word – but at any rate the consequences of a deeper thing, which is class struggle – the relation to the instruments of production – and that once this was put right by the triumph of human reason these things would

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wither of themselves. Well, the opposite has happened, at least in the short term.

HAMPSHIRE Yes – that is because political theory was never based on any individual psychology, or any psychology at all.

BERLIN But on what?

HAMPSHIRE On study of European institutions – on the history of European institutions.

BERLIN But European institutions are highly national in character in the nineteenth century, and yet apart from Mazzini's eloquence and some rather disreputable characters ...

MAGEE It's as if everybody was failing to see what was in front of their noses.

BERLIN Well, the people who did talk about nationalism were just regarded as a lot of irrational propagandists, and most of them were – so were all the followers of Fascism. But the point is that the phenomena to which they pointed were genuine – one didn't need to take up the attitude they took up. You could say that what they said about it was destructive, dangerous, wrong, but the fact that people tried not to think about this at all, that all these statements were regarded not merely as being dangerous, or slanted the wrong way, but as factually false, is I think something from which we're now suffering. Nobody took it seriously.

HAMPSHIRE Yes, and that's why Nazism was not understood.

BERLIN Indeed, indeed.

MAGEE Well, gentlemen, we're coming towards the end of the programme. I think I'd better give each, so to speak, a final word.

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You can either, if you wish, sum up your case, or introduce any important new points that you haven't ...

HAMPSHIRE Well, I think that perhaps the most fundamental disagreement between Isaiah and myself is that I still have more faith in the human sciences than he has, in particular in psychology and social anthropology. I say that we have to understand these as irrational or non-rational, let's say non-rational, forces in that way, and he doubts that we – (a) he doubts that we can, I think, and (b) doubts that, if we can, it will make all that difference. That, I think – it's a big difference between us.

BERLIN It's the second point which I think is true of me. I think that perhaps we will make great strides in understanding these things. I don't wish to be gratuitously obscure. I don't think we've done very well so far, but there's no reason – and no doubt if you'd lived in the fifteenth century you mightn't have thought that astronomy would make any strides, but it has. And I'm perfectly willing to believe that in the next century or two we shall make huge strides in psychology, and in social psychology in particular, and in social anthropology – even in sociology. But if we do acquire such knowledge, all right, we shall understand about the phenomena. Whether understanding them will of itself cure them – I think one can understand things extremely well and yet proceed along all kinds of unnecessary and rather dangerous paths – which does happen. The idea that knowledge cures all is an old rationalist fallacy. Upon this somewhat dismissing note I should like to end.

HAMPSHIRE I believe it is a familiar philosophical difference between us – familiar in the history of philosophy, I mean. But I believe that understanding the causes of things enables you, in part in virtue of understanding, to control them.

BERLIN I would agree, I think it enables us to control them. The question is whether you do – that one doesn't use – never mind: I think this starts a great new subject – whether knowledge is virtue.

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[*Talking together*]

But I don't think we'd better get on to that now.

MAGEE Well, thank you very much, Isaiah Berlin; thank you, Stuart Hampshire. Good night.

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