Berlin on Pluralism and Liberalism: A Defence

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INTRODUCTION

During the last years of his life the British philosopher Isaiah Berlin (1909–1997) could witness a growing interest in his ideas. There are two factors which could offer an explanation for this. In the first place the flourishing of postmodernism has given Berlin's ethical pluralism an increasing topical value. The leitmotif in Berlin's work is a rejection of the widespread monistic conviction that there is a single correct answer to every question, including every ethical question, and that all correct answers can be harmoniously arranged into a single rational and, in addition, cognisable system. Opposed to this conviction he proposes that there is a great diversity of values worth pursuing and that these values are regularly in conflict and therefore need to be weighed against each other. In contrast to the postmodernists, however, Berlin is passionately opposed to relativism and subjectivism: In his view there is a universally shared, minimal morality and it is always possible to argue rationally about values.

A second possible factor is that Berlin's defence of liberalism does not suffer from a number of the shortcomings which are ascribed by critics to the defences which are generally formulated. Today it is mainly communitarian thinkers like Charles Taylor, Michael Walzer, Alisdair MacIntyre, and Michael Sandel who focus attention on these defects. Berlin's liberalism is neither abstract nor individualistic, nor ahistorical: His political convictions are saturated with the awareness that people have a deeply felt need to belong to a stable community with its own cultural identity, that they are profoundly influenced by their cultural environment, and that they can also be first understood in the context of this environment. Berlin has always held that the distaste which liberals usually show for notions of tradition, convention, and community is mistaken, and his liberalism is therefore less vulnerable to the communitarian objections to the liberal image of man and society.

Berlin's position is characterised by a careful balancing between liberalism and communitarianism, between universalism and relativism, and between empiricism and subjectivism. Patience, control, and a sense of proportion are indispensable for such a balancing act. Berlin belongs to no camp, but attempts are repeatedly made to annex him or absorb him into a particular tendency. For example, in the political field, market liberals, referring to his defence of negative freedom, see in Berlin an advocate of the minimal state, free enterprise, or *laissez-faire*. And in the ethical field he is often portrayed as an advocate

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or forerunner of relativism, subjectivism, or postmodernism. There are always a number of quotes which apparently justify this.

During the last couple of years several balance sheets of his thought have been drawn up, in which his ideas are summarised, evaluated, and placed (Kocis 1989; Margalit 1991; Galipeau 1994; Gray 1995; for an authorised biography of his life, see: Ignatieff 1998). These intellectual biographies and the biographies that are forthcoming can become decisive for the future interpretation of Berlin's work. People balk at studying the substantial original *oeuvre* or read the work through the eyes of an authoritative interpreter. The study by the leading English political philosopher John Gray is potentially authoritative. It is considerably more ambitious in intent than is the norm. In his study, already widely praised, Gray tries not just to give a systematic overview of Berlin's central ideas, he also tries to resolve the tensions and contradictions which according to him exist between these ideas, and to continue the argument where Berlin, in Gray's view, unjustifiably stopped. This applies above all, as shall be seen, to pluralism: According to Gray, this also has to be applied to liberalism. If as, according to Gray, Berlin says, values are historically and culturally determined and numerous values are not just incompatible, but often are also completely incommensurate, then in Gray's view it must be concluded that liberalism is as groundless as any other doctrine. Unlike what Berlin claims, it is therefore not possible to defend liberal society on the basis of pluralism. Gray, who has made this subject the central theme of his work (see Gray 1989, 1997), here joins such diverse thinkers as MacIntyre, Walzer, Rorty, and Crowder. However, he also states that this standpoint is shared by Berlin, or in any case, should be: It arises logically from his ideas about pluralism. It is chiefly this proposition which will be criticised in this essay.

Also open to criticism are some other interpretations and personal standpoints on Gray's, interpretations and standpoints, which are a reflection of what are perhaps the most central differences of opinion among contemporary political philosophers. In what follows, I will first be looking at Gray's interpretation of Berlin's thought. This will then be criticised. The focus will be on the question of to what extent a defence of liberalism can go beyond the cultural tradition in which this tendency has developed.

GRAY'S INTERPRETATION AND CRITIQUE OF BERLIN

Idea of Man

Voluntarism and historicism: According to Gray (1995: 10, 23–5), Berlin sees man as a being who defines his own identity and is continually recreating this. There is therefore no constant or universal human nature and there is no question of an essential identity, already present, which is 'discovered', by making choices, for example. People are in fact able to create an enormous plurality of identities. According to Gray's reading of Berlin, all they have in common, which also defines their being, is the capacity to make choices and to autonomously give shape to their lives. This capacity excludes a universality and continuity in identity, in desires, needs, instincts.

Individuals do create their own personality, but they do not do this in a vacuum: They build on what is offered them by their specific cultural and historical environment. Identity is a social product. Like that of his two great inspirations, Herder and Vico, Berlin's

image of man, writes Gray (1995: 84) is 'historicist': 'Most human goods (and evils) are conceived as historical creations, and human identities are seen as expressions of specific cultural forms, themselves historical creations'. The implication of this, says Gray (1995: 90), is that 'human identities are, and cannot be other than, local and particular in their natures.' ... Berlin thus rejects the conviction of thinkers of the Enlightenment and Marx, that in the course of time cultural diversity will decrease and that the various cultures, on the cutting edge formed by human essence, will converge. If such an essence does exist in any way, then this is formed by cultural diversity (Gray 1995: 95).

Liberal communitarianism: As has been mentioned already, the average communitarian critique of liberalism is not applicable to Berlin's work (cf. Galipeau 1994: 149–58). In his view the individual's thought and actions are profoundly influenced by, and can only be understood in, their cultural and historic context. In addition, people experience a profound need to belong to a cultural community. Their happiness and development therefore have an indissoluble public or communal dimension: As MacIntyre, Sandel, and Taylor also emphasise, people cannot be seen as separate from their social bonds and projects; these are not instrumental to, but constitutive of, their individuality.

Although Berlin shares much of the communitarians' criticisms of the liberal idea of man, there are also important differences. Gray notes that Berlin's 'communitarian liberalism' deviates in its principle that the communitarian needs and values will always have to be weighed against needs and values which are no less important for human welfare. In particular, the easily recognisable need of negative freedom, of a private domain in which one can do or be what one is capable of, without the intervention of others, is important here. In addition, Berlin guards against too strong a linkage between individual identity and a single cultural community: People, especially in modern times, always belong to different communities at the same time and they have different, often contradictory, affinities and loyalties. Plurality and conflicts are an integral element of our personalities (Gray 1995: 103).

Anti-perfectionism: According to Gray (1995: 32–4), Berlin's view of man is in its nature not just voluntaristic and historicist, but also antiperfectionist: No qualitative distinctions can be made between different life fulfilments. For example, in Gray's view, Berlin does consider an autonomous life characterised by self-realisation and self-determination to be valuable, but according to him there are many alternative, no less valuable ways of life. The lives of a nun, a professional soldier, a passionate and intent artist, a mystic, a traditionalist who arranges his life according to ideas and values which have been handed down, or a whimsical hedonist who experiences a durable identity as a straitjacket and the thoughtfulness and distance required for autonomy as an exhausting burden, can be far from autonomous and yet just as significant. In Gray's view (1995: 33) it is for Berlin primarily a matter of making choices, of independently creating a personal identity. It is not at all regrettable if this creation does not ultimately produce an autonomous personality.

The realisation of the ideal of autonomy, the increase of knowledge and self-knowledge and the development of as many capacities as possible, can even be to the detriment of capacities which cannot be combined with such an emancipation. According to Gray, Berlin raised the latter question in his essay 'From Hope and Fear Set Free' (1964). The artistic talents of Van Gogh and Dostoevsky could have been dependent on a lack of self-knowledge. If this lack was remedied, these talents could have been lost. 'A successful psychologist', writes Gray (1995: 34), 'might have turned Van Gogh into a contented bour-

geois; it is unlikely that it would have left him with the power to paint as he did'. From this Gray deduces that the quest for autonomy 'may deplete in a person powers and capacities that are centrally constitutive of the self his choices has created, that are necessary for the pursuit of projects by which that self is defined, and which are recognised by others as essential for the accomplishment of intrinsically valuable activities' (1995: 34).

In short, there are many possible interpretations of the 'Good Life' and there is no criterion against which the quality of these lives can be measured. That, writes Gray, is the reason why Berlin's autonomy ideal cannot serve as the basis for a liberal order. The justification of this order does not lie in the fact that it promotes the development of autonomous personalities, but that it 'permits a far greater variety of forms of self-creation through choice-making' (Gray 1995: 36). According to Gray, for this reason Berlin prefers the negative conception of freedom (nonintervention) to its positive counterpart (self-determination). Negative freedom 'allows individuals to engage in forms of self-creation in which autonomy does not figure, which autonomy might undermine, or which develop some dimensions of autonomy at the expense of others' (Gray 1995: 36).[1]

Pluralism

Uncombinability and incommensurability of values: Gray (1995: 41–4) labels Berlin's ethical ideas as 'objective pluralism': It is indisputable that people adhere to a great diversity of significant values, that these values often clash, and that therefore they cannot be arranged in a single harmonious and hierarchical system. In addition, says Gray, we also know that values are often not just uncombinable but are also completely incommensurable. A rational deliberation or a compromise is impossible in such a case. There is not a single point of reference, not a single common name, and so what is left is only a nonrational, 'radical' choice, an expression of will. It is a matter, writes Gray, of values 'without a common currency for their measurements, between which we must nevertheless choose' (1995: 71). Here reason lets us down, what remains is an appeal to our authenticity and truthfulness: Like the Romantics Berlin presumes that 'when incommensurable values and countervalues must be reconciled in practice, it is human commitment and authenticity rather than reflective deliberation, or reason, that are called upon...' (1995: 135). What applies between values, also applies between cultures. Cultures produce divergent value systems which define incommensurable conceptions of the Good Life. Here too there exists no meta-criterion against which the value of these conceptions could be measured.

Gray emphasises that the incommensurability of values does not mean that the relevant values are equal. This is already to suggest a standard, a standard whose existence is actually being denied. Gray, who is here referring to Joseph Raz's arguments in *The Morality of Freedom* (1986), writes: 'Incommensurability among values discloses itself, instead, as a breakdown, or failure in transitivity' (1995: 50). Two values are incommensurable if it is possible for one of these values to be realised to a greater extent without it being possible to then say that in this way it has become more significant than the other. Gray mainly gives examples from aesthetics. In their style and beauty baroque and gothic cathedrals are completely unique in their own way and therefore impossible to cover with a single term. As there is no vocabulary which can apply to both, it is not possible to say that any random

gothic cathedral is more beautiful or better proportioned than a random baroque counterpart. At most comparisons can be made *within* a single style (Gray 1995: 51). In the same way there is a great diversity of valuable life fulfilments, and as we lack the criteria to assess these, we cannot say that one is better than the other. The lives of a professional soldier, a spy, a Buddhist monk, a courtesan, or a successful gambler are, writes Gray, 'not lesser, nor greater, forms of human flourishing than that of the research scientist, the devoted teacher, or the carer in the leprosarium' (1995: 53). That does not mean to say that there are no miserable lives in which nothing has been developed which makes life worthwhile. What matters is that 'human flourishing' can be given shape in many incommensurate ways. Once again, Berlin's vision of man is 'anti-perfectionist'.

The tragedy of life is greatest when, as according to Gray (1995: 54) is often the case, different values or life fulfilments are not just incommensurate but also uncombinable. Incommensurate and uncombinable, for example, are the lives of a nun and a courtesan, or of an autonomous personality and a naive, spontaneous, and uninhibited artist. It is not possible here to opt for both lives, a tragic choice must be made: It is impossible to get around it, there are no plausible, rational arguments to make the choice easier, and whatever is chosen, it is not possible to avoid damage or a loss of other significant values. According to Gray (1995: 47, 61, 145), it is this emphasis on uncombinability and incommensurability which distinguishes Berlin fundamentally from other pluralists and which are at the basis of his 'agnostic liberalism', steeped in tragedy.

It is a matter of course that the thesis of incommensurability makes every utilitarian calculation, as advocated by Jeremy Bentham, James and John Stuart Mill, and their present day successors, impossible (Gray 1995: 58–61). According to Gray, however, Berlin can be distinguished not just from the utilitarians, but also from those liberals in the Kantian tradition—here Gray mentions Hillel Steiner, Rawls, Dworkin, Hayek, Gauthier, and Nozick—who ultimately assume the possibility of formulating a coherent political ethic which is expressed in a single principle or a system of principles. According to Gray (1995: 9, 145), all these conventional liberal theoreticians are ultimately rationalistically inspired: They presume that problems and dilemmas are the consequence of a shortcoming, eventually solvable, in our knowledge or understanding.[2] Berlin, on the other hand, takes as his starting point our practical experiences in the moral and political sphere, experiences which are characterised by radical choices between incompatible and incommensurate values. It is not possible to debate these choices, they can only be clarified (1995: 62). In Gray's view, with these ideas about the limitations of reason Berlin strikes at the roots of the main trend of Western philosophy. This also explains, according to Gray (1995: 9), his comparatively small influence.

Universal moral concepts and categories: By now the question of what distinguishes Berlin's pluralism from skepticism or relativism has become insistent. According to Gray (1995: 62), the answer is that Berlin's starting point is our actual, phenomenological experience of conflicting values; his pluralism is, as has already been said, 'objective'. Now it could be objected that insofar as a value is constituted by a specific cultural and historical constellation, an apparently unmediatable conflict with another value could be resolved if this constellation were to change. However, according to Berlin, there are values or moral categories which are always and at all times experienced by people, whatever the social con-

text, and which are immutably incompatible and incommensurate. It is therefore an anthropological *fact* that there is a universal framework of moral thought and it is an anthropological and phenomenological *fact* that this thought inevitably generates insoluble dilemmas. Nevertheless, in Gray's opinion (1955: 66) that which people have in common goes no further than this framework of categories of thought and the capacity to choose. Berlin's vision of man also excludes every notion of a universal human nature: The nature of man is always being defined in a specific cultural context and due to its capacity for creativity is subject to constant transformation.

However, Gray cannot get around the perception that when Berlin writes about universal categories of thought he gives the impression of interpreting these not just formally, but also substantially. This implies a core of a universal human nature and with it the core of a universal morality. In his famous essay 'Does Political Theory Still Exist?' (1961) for example, Berlin first states that we can only comprehend the concept 'man' in terms of categories like good and evil, right and wrong, freedom and coercion, happiness and misfortune, and that it would therefore be rather eccentric and also incomprehensible to dub someone as a human being but to simultaneously add that notions such as justice, truth, freedom, hope, and fear have no significance for him. However, Berlin then states that accordingly some values are inextricably entwined with the concept of 'man'. He writes:

> ... if I find a man to whom it literally makes no difference whether he kicks a pebble or kills his family, since either would be an antidote to ennui or inactivity, I shall not be disposed, like consistent relativists, to attribute to him merely a different code of morality from my own or that of most men, but shall begin to speak of insanity and inhumanity; I shall be inclined to consider him mad, as a man who thinks he is Napoleon is mad; which is a way of saying that I do not regard such a being as being fully a man at all. It is cases of this kind, which seem to make clear that ability to recognise universal—or almost universal—values enters into our analysis of such fundamental concepts as 'man', 'rational', 'sane', 'natural', etc. ... that lie at the basis of modern translations into empirical terms of the kernel of truth in the old a priori natural law tradition (Berlin 1961: 166; Gray 1995: 68).

Berlin then states that such considerations thus undermine the presumed logical gap between descriptive and valuative statements: It is not possible to make a purely descriptive statement about the being 'man'.

The question now is what is the basis and range of the universal moral categories ('truth', 'justice') which Berlin is talking about. Gray (1995: 69-70) assumes that in Berlin's view these are neither immutable Kantian *a priori* nor empirical generalisations. They are more in between: They are not fixed for all time, they can be given different contents per cultural context, and we discover them through a philosophical introspection which is not completely separated from developments in our empirical knowledge. However, in Gray's opinion Berlin does not provide any total clarity on the answer to the question of how solid, how immutable and universal this basis is (cf. Galipeau 1994: 178). The same applies to the range of the relevant categories of thought: Is the structure of thought universal (everyone thinks in terms of good and evil, beautiful and ugly) or is there also a core of universal truth (someone who with equal ease kills his family and kicks a pebble is regarded in all eras and places as inhuman)? Repeatedly, but not consistently (see 8ff), Gray himself rejects the latter possibility.

Liberalism as the Product of a Random Civilisation

If values are indeed historically and culturally determined and are mutually incommensurate, then it is problematic why liberal philosophy with its emphasis on choice and self-contemplation should be rationally preferred to all other stances. In other words, to what extent does Berlin accept the total voluntarism of his admired counter-Enlightenment thinkers? Are, as Hamman and Herder suggest, all our traits, values, and goals solely the product of an individual or collective creation, or even of a groundless expression of the will or of a radical choice, or are boundaries drawn up by some greater force, for example, by a human 'nature'? Are the longing for freedom and the tendency to make choices, which, according to Berlin, are the ultimate justification of liberalism, universal or merely a random product of a culture bound to a particular place and time? This problem, which plays a crucial role in the present-day political–philosophical debate, is also the leitmotif of Gray's book (1995: 2, 97, 120–1, 136, 146, 149; cf. Gray 1997).

In Gray's reading of Berlin, people create their own identity by making choices. They can do this because their personality is not fixed, nor will it ever be completed or 'finished'. Furthermore, it cannot be said about any identity or life fulfilment that it is the 'best' for us. There are many significant values from which we nevertheless have to constantly and inexorably choose. People are therefore also forced to choose between different options and in doing so define themselves. In Gray's interpretation of Berlin, the justification of liberalism is now formed by the objective fact that choosing is the essential characteristic of our existence. Gray (1995: 143–5), however, wonders whether the link between pluralism and liberalism is so strong. The arguments he identifies with which Berlin supports this connection (this will be examined more specifically in 'The Relation Between Pluralism and Liberalism' below) are all deficient. The most important reason for this is the same pluralism which, according to Berlin, shores up liberalism: When there is indeed a great diversity of significant yet usually incompatible and incommensurate values, then there is always a possibility of choosing the opposites of the values which are considered important within liberalism. For example, Gray writes (1995: 159), people can create an identity for which negative freedom and 'choosing', which are made possible by this freedom, have no value. Equally, a nonliberal regime which allows no freedom of choice can always claim to be protecting a significant form of life which would be undermined if the citizens were to have unlimited freedom of choice. The diversity of values esteemed and guaranteed by a liberal order is, in other words, actually a reason for allowing nonliberal orders to continue to exist (Gray 1995: 152). In Gray's view, all that can be deduced about the truth of pluralism is 'that liberal institutions can have no universal authority. Where liberal values come into conflict with others which depend for their existence on non-liberal social or political structures and forms of life, and where these values are truly incommensurables, there can—if pluralism is true—be no argument according universal priority to liberal values. To deny this is to deny the thesis of the incommensurability of values' (1995: 155). Of course, that is not to say that liberal society cannot be defended in any way. However, according to Gray (1995: 155), that can only be within a specific historical and cultural context. Therefore—although Gray admits that this is a conclusion which Berlin would possibly not subscribe to—only a liberal cultural tradition, a random tradition in which the making of choices has been ascribed a central role in the Good Life, can be a justification of a liberal social order (1995: 160).

In this view there is neither a place nor a need for a universal justification of liberalism. Liberalism has no 'ground'. Our relation to liberal practices 'is in the nature of a groundless commitment' (Gray 1995: 165). If people must choose, as is sometimes the case (imagine marrying someone from a different cultural tradition), between a culture in which value is ascribed to freedom of choice, and one in which it is not, then this choice can only be 'radical'. In short, Berlin's pluralism is ultimately stronger than his liberalism and the implications of this are that 'the commitment to the liberal form of life—like that of any form of life that meets the minimal standards of decency—is a groundless one, which nothing in reason compels us to make. If value-pluralism is true all the way down, then it follows inexorably that the identity of practitioners of a liberal form of life is a contingent matter, not a privileged expression of universal human nature' (1995: 168).

PLURALISM ACCORDING TO BERLIN

As has already been stated, both Gray's interpretation of Berlin's thinking and the conclusions he draws from it can be criticised. Central to this criticism is the question of how relativist Berlin's pluralism is. Does he believe, to begin with, that there exist a core of universal human nature and a universal pattern of value which accompanies this, or are there according to him only many different cultures, completely created by people, with an equal number of fundamentally incommensurate value patterns (cf. Wollheim 1991)? In the second place, is it possible to argue in a meaningful manner about values or is every preference for a value, in Berlin's view, ultimately the product of a radical choice? A final question, closely related to this, concerns the relation between pluralism and liberalism: Can liberal society be grounded in pluralism or is this society, as stated by Gray, Walzer, and MacIntyre, among others, as groundless as all other possible orders? I will deal successively with these subjects.

Universality Instead of Voluntarism and Particularism

Gray detects clear relativist and particularist tendencies in Berlin's work. Nevertheless, he keeps his options open. This is far less the case with others, including Bhikhu Parekh (1982), Robert Kocis (1983), Michael Sandel (1984), and George Crowder (1994). For example, Parekh accuses Berlin of 'radical pluralism' and 'pluralistic absolutism': according to Berlin, all values, including those of Hitler and Stalin, should be raised above criticism and are of equal value (Parekh 1982: 44). Kocis also ascribes to Berlin the conviction '... that there are no rational grounds for preferring one value (not even liberty) over any other' (Kocis 1983: 375). As in Kocis' interpretation, all objectives are equally valuable to Berlin; he could not give any reason why some people should not impose their values on others.

In a reply to Kocis, Berlin refers to what he calls the empirical fact that people ascribe great importance to specific values, including negative freedom, and that the values held by people turn out to be rather stable and generalised. For this reason, communication between individuals from different cultures and ages proceeds in a far more successful manner than would be possible in the case of real particularism. We are capable, in a way advocated by Vico, of empathising, of immersing ourselves in other cultures. Equally, it is always possible to give excellent reasons why one acts in a particular way, why for example

one does not choose safety, but prefers to offer resistance to those who aim to destroy one's family, friends, country. And Berlin continues:

> What rationality means here is that my choices are not arbitrary, incapable of rational defence, but can be explained in terms of my scale of values—my plan or way of life, an entire outlook which cannot but be to a high degree connected with that of others who form the society, nation, party, church, class, species to which I belong. ... Men, because they are men, have enough in common biologically, psychologically, socially, however this comes about, to make social life and social morality possible (Berlin 1983: 390–1; cf. 1953: 96–103; 1969: xxxi, xxxii, lii; 1988: 14–8).

Berlin, in various interviews with Ramin Jahanbegloo later expanded into a book (a publication not mentioned by Gray), states that the singularity of the differences between peoples and cultures, rightly emphasised by Herder, can also be exaggerated: 'There are universal values. This is an empirical fact about mankind, what Leibniz called *verites du fait*, not *verites de la raison*. There are values that a great many human beings in the vast majority of places and situations, at almost all times, do in fact hold in common, whether consciously and explicitly or as expressed in their behaviour, gestures, actions' (Jahanbegloo 1992: 37). 'Relativists, Spenglerians, Positivists, deconstructivists are wrong: communication is possible between individuals, groups, cultures, because the values of men are not infinitely many: they belong to a common horizon—the objective, often incompatible values of mankind—between [which] it is necessary, often painfully, to choose' (Jahanbegloo 1992: 108). In a certain sense Berlin therefore also believes in universal human values. For example, he is of the opinion that it has been assumed in all cultures which have existed up to now that there was a minimum of 'human rights': 'There may be disagreements about how far to expand this minimum ... but that such rights exist and that they are an empirical pre-condition of the leading of full human lives—that has been recognised by every culture' (Jahanbegloo 1992: 39).

But all this does not mean that Berlin also believes in absolute values: He does not know how he could find an unambiguous basis or proof for this. Berlin therefore does not understand philosophers who see reason, for example, as 'a magical eye, which sees non-empirical universal truths' (Jahanbegloo 1992: 113). Fundamental values are not rationally justified: 'The norms don't need justification, it is they which justify the rest, because they are basic'. From the empirical observation that people live or wish to live according to certain values, one can therefore work on a normative theory which will also justify these fundamental values (Jahanbegloo 1992: 113). Therefore, according to Berlin, we believe in human rights because in practice we experience that people live together in a 'decent' manner thanks to the recognition of these rights. 'Don't ask me what I mean by decent', says Berlin finally to Jahanbegloo. 'By decent I mean decent—we all know what that is. But if you tell me that one day we will have a different culture, I can't prove the contrary'. (Jahanbegloo 1992: 114).

In 'Does Political Theory Still Exist'? (1961), among other places, Berlin argued that not all political theories are consequently equally plausible. These theories are ultimately based on visions of man and society and these can to a greater or lesser extent do justice to the concepts and categories in which we think about man and society. The more they conflict with this, the greater is the chance that they will disappear in the dust heap of the

history of thought. It is therefore not the case that 'anything goes' (Berlin 1961; cf. Galipeau 1994: 39–42).

Because Berlin draws a distinction between more or less valid political theories, and more or less adequate research methods, as Bernard Williams has remarked (1978: xv) he seems not to rule out progress in our knowledge. This is indeed the case. In personal correspondence with Galipeau (1994: 45) Berlin gives the example of the notion that some people are born as slaves. In contrast to classical thinkers like Aristotle, we know that slavery is a *social* and not a natural category. Slaves have no innate biological traits, these traits are ascribed to them. We know this because of the psychological, sociological, and historical knowledge we have acquired in the meantime. In this way our vision of man is closer to the truth than that of the classics and that is why Berlin believes that, in his words, 'progress' exists with regard to 'the objective knowledge of what men are' (Galipeau 1994: 45). Accordingly, claims Berlin, in contrast to Gray's interpretation,[3] moral progress also exists. In an organic view of society, such as that of the classics, people are ascribed no individual rights of freedom. We have gone beyond this view and this has enabled the formulation of individual rights to freedom, which, declares Berlin in an interview with Galipeau (1994: 46; cf. 81), means moral progress (naturally, there can also be decay in another area).

Furthermore, that certain values are first explicitly formulated in a specific historic constellation does not at all prove that these values only have significance for people in this constellation (Galipeau 1994: 46; Blokland 1997: 37). In some cultures certain values are probably so obvious and generally accepted that no one considers it necessary to make them explicit and justify them. Likewise, little is proved by the existence of exceptions to the rule that someone is regarded as inhuman if he kills his family with the same ease as he kicks a pebble. There are always qualifiers: For example, the definition of who belongs to the family can vary from one culture to another and the tendency can always be intertwined with other significant tendencies. However, such qualifiers do not undermine the rule.

Rational Argument Instead of Radical Choices

As we saw earlier, according to Gray, the essential characteristic of Berlin's pluralism is the assumption that values are often completely incommensurate and that often therefore we cannot do more than make 'radical' choices. Gray considers it unnecessary to examine the possible pluralistic standpoint that values are constantly conflicting but that it is always possible to weigh these against each other in a rational manner. According to him this standpoint presumes a criterion which transcends everything. In consequence he is absolutely convinced that this is not Berlin's position (Gray 1995: 156). However, both this interpretation of Berlin and Gray's own position seem untenable.

A recent article by George Crowder (1994) can help shed light on Berlin's standpoint. Just like Gray, Crowder disputes the idea that there is a close relation between pluralism and liberalism. In his case too, Berlin's position is the thesis to be overcome. 'The Relation Between Pluralism and Liberalism' (below) will go into the relevant arguments by Crowder. First, the focus will be on his argument about incommensurability, which, just as with Gray, forms the basis of his conclusions.

Crowder (1994: 294) states that pluralism necessarily must mean more than the uncombinability of values. If there was only the latter, monism would not be ruled out: It

would still be possible to weigh up conflicting values against each other with the help of a higher criterion. The idea of incommensurability does rule this out and it is therefore this idea which, according to Crowder (1994: 295), forms the core of pluralism. He then ascribes the same significance to 'incommensurability' as Gray (for these both refer to Raz 1986: chapter 13): 'Incommensurability (and therefore pluralism) implies that there is no *summum bonum* or super-value in terms of which all other values can be quantified and weighed against one another. ... Conflicts among such goods [happiness, justice, knowledge, security and so on] will consequently not be resolvable by reasoned ranking or trade-off. Such conflicts will be clashes of absolutes. ... Since there is no common measure or ranking to refer to, it follows that such choices must be, at least in some degree, non-rational' (1994: 295). In brief, when two incommensurate values conflict, such as the reading of a book or doing physical exercises, then I will simply have to rely 'on my own preferences and desires to settle the issue' (1994: 296).[4]

Berlin, together with Bernard Williams, wrote a reaction to Crowder's article. In doing so he also implicitly wrote a review of Gray's study. Gray does mention it (1995: 176), but goes no further into the matter. Berlin and Williams write that within the pluralistic vision it is assumed that many significant yet conflicting values exist and that the way they are weighed against each other depends on the situation, a situation in which specific values apply. For example, a greater importance will generally be ascribed to justice than to loyalty. But the proportion can be the other way around under certain circumstances. Berlin and Williams therefore consider it completely in line with this 'that the answer in any particular case could be the subject of discussion and potential agreement by reasonable people' (1994: 307). They do not understand why Crowder thinks that when someone is of the opinion that in a particular situation loyalty should count more than justice, this opinion is an arbitrary, nonrational preference, which cannot be debated in a reasonable manner with others. The fact that there is no value which in all cases weighs heavier than other values does not at all rule out that it is possible to weigh values against each other in a rational way. There is no reason at all to assume this weighing is less reasonable or rational than ascribing priority under all circumstances to a value assumed to be superior.[5]

In addition, one can wonder whether Gray and Crowder do not allow themselves to be seduced into a form of philosophical reductionism. They search exclusively for values which can be placed higher in a hierarchy, values thanks to which secondary values can be placed and weighed up against each other. If they cannot find this superior criterion, they then conclude that values are often incommensurate and form arbitrary preferences which can only be chosen radically. It seems rather more sensible to direct the gaze 'downward' or 'sideways' instead of exclusively 'upward'. If two values within a certain constellation are conflicting and must be weighed against each other then one should not look for a value which is higher in a presumed hierarchy; the deliberations should in fact involve other values, values with which the aforementioned values are inevitably bound up in a specific manner. No individual values should be compared to each other, but the entire cultural matrix within which they occupy a specific place. This is also what Berlin does, what Rawls and Rorty advocate (see Rorty 1989: ch. 3), and also the majority of political philosophers, consciously or unconsciously, do in practice. As a rule, theoreticians turn out to simultaneously use different types of methods and arguments to picture the plausibility of a particular position. For example, Galipeau rightly notes that Berlin's defence of freedom is

based on conceptual, historical, sociological, and politicological arguments. Even though his critics often have suggested this impression, there is no question of him looking for a single, all-decisive insight, argument, or standpoint from which the rest can be derived in a logical, consistent manner. Attempts by critics to summarise Berlin's ideas in a single core concept, and then to falsify it, and therefore fail to do justice to Berlin and political theory.

For this reason it is not surprising that in their reaction, Berlin and Williams complain about 'the immensely abstract level of argument which Crowder has chosen'. If one wants to regard the pros and cons of liberalism and pluralism, as well as the relation between them, then, according to Berlin and Williams, the strictly formal method followed by Crowder (and Gray) is not exactly 'the most illuminating way'. It is, on the contrary, 'from social and historical reality that we are likely to be instructed in liberalism's strengths, and to be reminded of the brutal and fraudulent simplifications which, as a matter of fact, are the usual offerings of its actual enemies' (1994: 309).

As, according to Gray and Crowder, the thesis of incommensurability of values is the centre of pluralism, they also have little faith in the possibilities of the philosophy. Crowder simply declares it bankrupt (1994: 304), something which Gray claims Berlin had already actually done, which would explain his relatively small influence.[6] In Gray's reading, as emerged earlier, Berlin's view of philosophy is supposed to deviate fundamentally from that of the main tendency of Western thought, as Berlin is supposed to assume that philosophers are only capable of clarifying the inevitable conflicts between values like freedom, equality, and utility, which can be deduced from nothing and are completely incommensurate. They cannot make any reasonable considerations or recommend these, as these are radical choices: 'For Berlin no theory or principle can govern these choices, precisely because they are radical choices among incommensurables' (1995: 62).

This reading of Berlin is incorrect too. In reality, Berlin does not see the task of philosophy as being only to explicate and clarify the concepts and conceptions, the models which define our thinking, but also to critically evaluate them and if necessary to replace them with more adequate models, models which do more justice to our insights into man and society (Berlin 1961: 159; 1962: 9; 1979: 27–31). As already turned out to be the case, according to Berlin, it is possible to criticise on rational grounds models of thought and deliberations between values as they do not do justice to our knowledge, contained in concepts and categories, among other things, of man and society (cf. Taylor 1989, 1992).

Individual Autonomy Instead of Antiperfectionism

A result of Gray's conviction that values are often completely incommensurate is that no qualitative distinctions can be made between lifestyles. Individuals create, properly regarded in a quite arbitrary fashion, the identity of a professional soldier, a nun, a courtesan, a mystic, a traditionalist, a hedonist, or a doctor and there is absolutely no criterion or argument on the basis of which it could be said that one identity is preferable to another. Equally, it cannot be argued that an autonomous existence is preferable to a heteronomous life. The realisation of autonomy can even be at the expense of other valuable life fulfilments, as is illustrated by Van Gogh's life, according to Gray.

This standpoint cannot be deduced from Berlin's work, nor made plausible. In the first place, as could be seen from the preceding paragraph, it is possible to argue about the

way in which individuals weigh against each other the great diversity of significant values with which they are inevitably confronted in life. The lives Gray mentions stand for as many values which are realised in the respective lives to a notably higher degree than usual: the soldier probably for loyalty and courage, the nun for devotion, the hedonist for pleasure, the scientist for truth and reflection, the development worker for altruism, et cetera. These values arise from needs and capacities which are fundamental to people. The value of negative freedom is, for example, a translation of our need of and capacity for self-reflection, self-expression, and self-determination, among other things. Unlike Gray's suggestion, however, people do not possess just one, but a large number of these often conflicting needs and capacities: need for love, security, safety, assurance, privacy, self-expression, self-command, self-reflection. In their lives, people are constantly and inevitably confronted by these needs and they have to weigh these against each other in a balanced manner.[7] What is balanced here is partly determined by the circumstances (courage is more important in wartime than in times of peace) and by the qualities and talents which the individual has from birth and has developed in interaction with his environment.[8] These deliberations cannot be avoided: The irreducible plurality of needs, capacities, and values is part of the human condition. Someone who would only fulfil a single need in his life would lead a limited, amputated existence, and have a strained and frustrated personality. That is why the life of someone who tries to realise merely one value at the cost of all else is not much to be emulated. This is true of the life of a nun who only prays, a courtesan who only makes love, or a soldier who is only brave (such a life will probably also be quite short).

Likewise, there are, in the words of Edgenton (1992), 'sick societies', societies in which the prevailing pattern of values forces individuals into an existence in which needs which are important to the individual are not met, or insufficiently, or less than is possible. Consequently, there are societies in which people are less content with their life than in other societies, according to *their own* definition of well-being and according to *their own* judgement. For example, it emerges from empirical research by Veenhoven (1997), among others, that well-being, as people define this themselves, is *grosso modo* greater in societies which are characterised more than average by social equality (especially between men and women), material prosperity (up to a certain level, after this the law of diminishing returns sets in), rule of law and physical security, political and personal freedom (expressed in more freedom of association, among other things, and in acceptance of divorce and homosexuality), and a culture in which individual self-disposal is highly regarded and authority and obedience are not much esteemed.

Cultures and identities can therefore be compared to each other to the extent that they do justice to people's fundamental needs and experiences. The experience of the existence of a large diversity of significant values, values from which choices must nevertheless regularly be made, is only an example of this. As a consequence, cultures are not automatically equivalent and raised above criticism. It is the capacity of people to create their own culture or identity which perhaps should be respected at all times, but this certainly does not apply to the products which are formed by this capacity. In this sense, Charles Taylor (1992) has proposed accepting the equivalence of cultures as a point of departure in order to make a serious study of other cultures possible. After all, 'It is reasonable to suppose that cultures that have provided the horizon of meaning for large numbers of human beings, of diverse characters and temperaments, over a long period of time ... are almost

certain to have something that deserves our admiration and respect, even if it is accompanied by much that we have to abhor and reject' (1992: 73). However, Taylor emphasises that this principle can be falsified: 'The validity of the claim has to be demonstrated concretely in the actual study of the culture' (1992: 67). In this study it is necessary to acquire a broader range of values so that one will realise that one's own culture is just one among many. Moreover, it is necessary to create a new vocabulary with which the various cultures can be compared and be evaluated with regard to each other. However, to assume in advance that all the products of a particular culture are valuable, is, according to Taylor, a form of condescension which the parties involved can do without: 'Objectively, such an act involves contempt for the latter's intelligence. To be an object of such an act of respect demeans' (1992: 70). People want authentic, true respect on the basis of their achievements, not on an *a priori* basis.

Cultures and identities can thus be compared and evaluated. This is also true of a heteronomous and autonomous life, about which Berlin claims, according to Gray, that they are equivalent and incommensurate (which is contradictory). However, in the article referred to by Gray, 'From Hope and Fear Set Free', Berlin is considerably less unambiguous about this than Gray suggests. Freedom, writes Berlin here, is generally experienced by us and esteemed as the essential characteristic of man. We also 'know' that our degree of freedom is determined 'by the absence of obstacles to the exercise of choice' (1964: 190). These obstacles can be inner ('fears and "complexes", ignorance, error, prejudice, illusions, fantasies, compulsions, neuroses, psychoses, irrational factors of many kinds') or come from outside (physical threat, prison walls, lack of food, et cetera). People who are guided in their lives by ignorance, prejudices, superstition, irrational fears, are therefore less free than is possible, are heteronomous and—this is already indicated by the connotations linked to the relevant concepts—this is regrettable. If it were correct that Berlin makes no ranking between autonomy and heteronomy, how can he then declare to Jahanbegloo that he regards the thinkers of the Enlightenment as 'great liberators'? People like Voltaire and Condorcet, he says, 'liberated people from horrors, obscurantism, fanaticism, monstrous views. They were against cruelty, they were against oppression, they fought the good fight against superstition and ignorance and a great many other things which ruined people's lives. So I am on their side' (Jahanbegloo 1992: 70). If Berlin were to consider an autonomous and heteronomous existence to be equally valuable, then concepts like 'superstition', 'ignorance', 'obscurantism', and 'irrational fears', not to mention the quest to 'liberate' people from these, would have absolutely no significance. But they do have significance for Berlin and for the vast majority of mankind. Berlin is no subjectivist. He assumes that people prefer to live in truth and that some ideas of reality contain more truth, are more rational, than other ideas (compare here the related view of Taylor (1982) on rationality).

The only question which Berlin sets at the end of his article (1964: 194–6),[9] and on the basis of which Gray then denies a basis for liberal society, is whether knowledge, although this is thus inherently to be acclaimed, cannot reduce someone's freedom under some circumstances and in certain respects. For example, can the creative capacity of a poet not be partly dependent on illusions and myths, and can this capacity not be restricted if an 'honourable rationalist' was to deflate these illusions and myths? 'It may be said', replies Berlin, 'that an increase in knowledge cannot (this would, I think, be claimed as an analytical truth) diminish my freedom; for to know the roots of my activity is to be

rescued from servitude to the unknown—from stumbling in a darkness populated with figments which breed fears and irrational conduct. Moreover, it will be said that as a result of the destruction of my idols I have clearly gained in freedom of self-determination; for I can now give a rational justification of my beliefs, and the motives of my actions are clearer to me' (1964: 194–5). But, Berlin goes on to say, what if I am now less free to write the poetry which I used to produce? Has not then one door been closed as a consequence of opening another one? He says: 'The question I wish to ask—*and one to which I do not know the answer*—is whether such absence of knowledge may not be a necessary condition for certain states of mind or emotion in which alone certain impediments to some forms of creative labour are absent. This is an empirical question, but on the answer to it the answer to a larger question depends: whether knowledge never impedes, always increases, the sum total of human freedom' (1964: 195; italics HB). Berlin suspects that the idea that an increase of knowledge always implies without fail an increase in our freedom arises from the optimistic, metaphysical idea that all good things go together. However, as we know, this seems to him to be not a very plausible hope (1964: 198).

The only thing which confirms all this is that the human condition is characterised by a plurality of values and that even these values have many dimensions, consist of subvalues, which conflict and have to be weighed against each other. Every unambiguous, one-dimensional preference for, or definition of, freedom—for example: someone's freedom increases in proportion to the number of possible choices—is thus deficient as it does not do justice to this plurality (Blokland 1997: 131–5; 185–9). Bruno Bettelheim (1960: 78*ff*; cf. Dworkin 1982: 47–58) can therefore emphasise, for example, that having more and more options does not necessarily cause the experience of freedom to increase as absorbing a constantly growing number of possible choices demands an increasingly integrated personality, a demand which is not always met, so that it leads to disorientation. New possibilities can also devalue the old ones. For example, Titmuss refers to the fact that the freedom to give blood to other people disappears when the possibility of selling that blood appears. In the latter case the freedom to give away something which is not regarded as merchandise is destroyed. In short, unlike what Gray would have us believe, it is not proven here that autonomy is as significant, and is subject to as many restrictions, as heteronomy. It is only demonstrated that autonomy, freedom of choice and ability to choose, must also be weighed against other values. A value is not negated by adding nuances to its range.

The Relation Between Pluralism and Liberalism

The main theme of Gray's later work (1989, 1997) and thus also of his study of Berlin, is, as stated, his denial of a relation between pluralism and liberalism. Gray does indeed recognise the 'truth' of pluralism, but states that no single argument in favour of liberal society can be derived from it. Crowder too sees no logical connection between pluralism and liberalism. On the basis of Berlin's 'Two Concepts of Liberty' and Bernard Williams' introduction to Berlin's collection *Concepts and Categories*, he identifies six possible arguments for such a connection. These all have the same form: 'To recognise the plurality of values is to have a reason to value X, which is a good best advanced by the institutions of liberalism' (1994: 296). He sees six candidates for the value X: tolerance, freedom of choice, humaneness and humanity, diversity, truth and truthfulness, and personal autonomy.

Crowder is prepared to accept that the relevant values are indeed best advanced by liberal institutions and therefore concentrates on the relations between pluralism and the value X. According to him none of these relations is valid.

Essential to Crowder's argument, just as in the case of Gray, is the idea of incommensurability of values. Also because he has no desire to distinguish in any way given human needs and strivings, for him there are seldom reasons to be formulated for why one value is supposedly more significant than another. In consequence, Crowder can declare that pluralism does require us to choose, but that it does not prescribe any content to the choice and therefore no choice for a liberal society. Properly regarded, liberalism is even undermined by pluralism: 'Not only does pluralism provide no support for liberalism, it positively undermines the liberal case, since it is always open to the pluralist to ask, why not the illiberal option?' (1994: 304).

An example of a possible defence of liberalism thus rejected is the thesis that accepting the truth of pluralism implies a recognition of the value of the freedom of choice, a freedom which is best guaranteed by liberal institutions. Precisely because people are constantly being confronted by conflicting values which have to be weighed against each other, claims Berlin, do they ascribe enormous importance to the freedom of choice. This value expresses in addition the self-transforming capacity of people. Individuals create their own identity and it would be in conflict with this essential characteristic if people were to have a fixed pattern of life imposed on them by others. Crowder considers this to be an untenable argument. First, because the fact that people must inevitably make choices says nothing about the value of choosing. Choices are often painful, so why should we regard the activity of 'choosing' as something valuable? Because, asks Crowder (1994: 298), this means a recognition of the human condition and therefore respect for human dignity? Nonsense, he continues: 'the human condition is as consistent with the rejection of free choice and liberalism as with its promotion' (1994: 299). Pluralists do emphasise the need to make difficult choices between incommensurate, ultimate values, 'but the plurality of values implies nothing about the content of those hard choices' (1994: 299). The emphasis which Berlin lays on the self-transforming essence of human beings and on choosing is rather arbitrary, according to Crowder. One could equally characterise people as imitators and conformists, and as fans of habit and routine. 'The fact is', he writes, 'that "human nature" is broad and rich enough to embrace all these tendencies; appeals to such a wide notion rule out hardly anything at all' (1994: 300).

In their reaction, Berlin and Williams oppose both Crowder's interpretation of pluralism and the conclusions he draws from pluralism. Crucial here is their rejection—already discussed—of Crowder's (and Gray's) central thesis of the incommensurability of values. Even if there is no *summum bonum*, then it always remains possible to weigh values against each other in a reasonable fashion. In addition, Berlin, as has already been seen, presumes the existence of a minimal universal horizon of human values. He does not know where these come from, he simply observes empirically that they exist. The constantly repeated thesis of Crowder's that the 'notion of human nature is far too wide to provide any useful criterion for any particular choices' (1994: 302) is categorised by Berlin as untenable (and dangerous) on biological, psychological, sociological, and historical grounds. For these reasons, Berlin and William's response to Crowder's thesis that pluralism fundamentally undermines liberalism, as the pluralist always retains the possibility of asking 'Why not the illiberal option?', is one of surprise. Of course this question can always be asked, but what is really important 'is whether pluralism must find the question peculiarly difficult to

answer' (1994: 308). Only because Crowder is impeded by the misunderstanding that values are 'radically' chosen quantities can he think that no answer can be formulated to this.

Another specific justification of the relation between pluralism and liberalism, also identified by both Gray and Crowder, states that nonliberal systems negate the truth of pluralism. There is, writes Williams (1980: xviii), 'value in knowledge and true understanding themselves' and the liberal society 'expresses more than any other does a true understanding of the pluralistic nature of values'. In reaction, Gray states (1995: 152) that this argument only applies when these nonliberal systems are based on universalistic principles. However, Gray continues, this does not have to be the case: The leaders of an authoritarian system can recognise pluralism and nevertheless justify themselves by stating that the order concerned contains a valuable way of life, which would be undermined if the exercise of free choice was permitted. If value pluralism is indeed correct, why then would the value of freedom of choice always have priority above lifestyles which are damaged by the exercise of this freedom? Likewise, the parties involved, says Crowder (1994: 301), can recognise the truth of pluralism, but then choose to reject liberalism. There is nothing in pluralism which lays down that individuals rather than leaders should make such choices.

The core of this argument of Gray and Crowder is once again the principle that we can only make radical choices between incommensurate values and lifestyles. As already argued, this principle is false. A specific problem here is *who* decides on the presence of freedom of choice. If these are the leaders of the relevant nonliberal regime then it is being defined for others that the local lifestyle must be preferred to freedom of choice and to the alternative lifestyles which this freedom could possibly produce. By approving such a constellation—they have no arguments to refute it with—Gray and Crowder justify the Grand Inquisitor from Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*, who relieves people of the unbearable burden God had imposed on them: the individual freedom to choose their own values (cf. Blokland 1997: 193*ff*). However, the problem with the Grand Inquisitor's argument is that only a few of those who know that the choices/nonchoices they make in life are guided completely by an authority other than themselves would want this situation to continue. The empirical fact that certain cultural groups or sects continue to exist because the leaders involved successfully keep their subjects away from freedom of choice, and the knowledge of alternative viewpoints and lifestyles, does nothing to weaken this, it merely proves the repressive quality of the leaders. As soon as people have become familiar with the possibility of being able to choose between alternatives, they no longer want to lose this possibility—even if they then choose to continue their old lifestyle. People, rightly states Robert Nozick (1974: 42*ff*), are unhappy about a reality which is completely constructed and confined by others, like the world of those who are attached to an 'experience machine'. People want to live their own lives. This cannot be done for them by machines or cultures cut off from other realities by those in power.

In an analogous fashion the anthropologist Ernest Gellner (1992) disputes the widespread anthropological principle that cultures cannot be compared and that no civilisation can be assessed, not to mention condemned, in terms of another one. Gellner argues that an important problem of this sympathetic principle is that it offers no accurate description of reality. That which is generally regarded as Western civilisation has spread over the world like an oil slick from Europe. It has more or less devoured all the cultures which it encountered on the way. According to Gellner that was not just the consequence of exercise of power and of the apparent superiority of Western knowledge, but also of the attrac-

tion which is apparently exerted by its values or its formulations of possible universal values. In his view, these are the Western formulations of human rights, mainly based on the idea of freedom: As soon as people have experienced and acquired these freedoms, they no longer want to return to the old situation.

Certainly, as Max Weber, Karl Mannheim, Erich Fromm, and John Schaar have noticed, the rationalisation of culture can bring distress because as a consequence of rationalisation we have to define our values and objectives ourselves. And a society can change too fast because change can cause people to lose their old social, economic, and cultural certainties without having the time to replace these with new certainties. We need traditions, rituals, habits, because we need points of reference and because we feel a need to belong. Because of this we can yearn for old days when a transcendental, cultural, social, or economic order was still unshattered—it is possible that a part of the explanation of the public support of authoritarian regimes lies in this yearning. In the same way we can yearn for the days we were still young, naïve, and our dreams and hopes were unbroken. But this does not prove that we prefer not to be wiser and sadder. 'It is better', Mill rightly wrote, 'to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool, or the pig, is of a different opinion, it is because they only know their side of the question' (1861: 281).[10]

In the end only the individual citizens involved are able and are entitled to decide whether their society, characterised by the absence of freedom of choice, should continue to exist. What is in their interest is then defined in the manner promoted by William Connolly, among others: 'Policy X is more in A's interest than policy Y if A, were he to experience the *results* of both X and Y, would *choose* X as the result he would rather have for himself' (Connolly 1972: 472; cf. Mill 1861: 282; Elster 1982: 220–2; Lukes 1974: 34; Blokland 1997: ch. 5). Naturally, a problem with this definition is that the presence of freedom of choice, the presence of knowledge about the alternatives, as well as the possibility of here choosing freely, without intervention by others, change the individual in such a way that he can no longer choose 'objectively' between the situation in which he does *not* have freedom of choice, and one in which he does. People change by participating in various cultures. As a consequence of this, the alternatives are assessed from the perspective of the *last* culture experienced, while this culture should actually be a subject for discussion. For this reason Connolly concludes: 'Even under ideal conditions of choice, then, elements of conjecture and speculation will enter into our assessment of the extent to which alternative models of social life are more or less in our interests' (1972: 477). This dilemma is insoluble. However, the option of never enabling people to choose themselves, of making people prisoners of the cultural group into which they happened to be born, conflicts, once again, with the experience that people are not satisfied with a reality which they know is consciously restricted by others. The inevitable conclusion is that we are doomed to be free.

The Minimal Horizon of Universal Values and Liberalism

Berlin assumes a minimal shared horizon of substantial values. If this horizon is passed, then the relevant action and thought will become no longer comprehensible in human terms. Gray turns out to be not entirely sure what to do with this notion. In Berlin's view, the relevant values must be investigated via a form of philosophical research which

remains sensitive to anthropological and historical insights.[11] This view of philosophy, however, says Gray (1995: 163), has a tense relationship with Berlin's historicism. According to him, this tension can only be resolved by also regarding the practice of philosophy in a historical context. Philosophers are then concerned with the study of the principles of specific forms of life: Philosophy will become a reflection, bound to a specific place and time, on empirical anthropology. Related to this, we should stop looking for universal justifications of liberalism. Liberalism is no more than 'one form of life among many that may flourish *within the common human horizon of the minimal values that are universal*' (1995: 163; my italics). Choices between freedom and other values, or between a culture in which significance is ascribed to freedom and one in which it is not, cannot but be radical. This also applies to liberalism: 'the relation we have to liberal practices is in the nature of a groundless commitment' (1995: 165). However, to his thesis that 'the commitment to the liberal form of life is a groundless one, which nothing in reason compels us to make', Gray adds the coda: 'like that of any form of life that meets the minimal standards of decency' (1995: 168).

The question then is when, according to Gray, 'the minimal standards of decency are met'. And, how big is 'the common human horizon of the minimal values that are universal' which he mentions above? Perhaps the liberal society is then already defined and Gray therefore has in this respect won no more than a Pyrrhic victory over Berlin's ideas. His thesis that lifestyles and cultures are completely incommensurate must then also be qualified: It will always be possible to research whether other lifestyles and cultures do justice to the shared horizon of minimal human values. If this is not the case, the culture in which this horizon is recognised is therefore superior.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that the pluralism of values as formulated by Berlin lacks an immovable ground and offers room for doubt, change, diversity of and conflicts between values, this pluralism turns out to be for the present an impregnable fortress against attacks like those of Gray and Crowder. It is no more possible to press Berlin into an historicist, voluntarist, relativist, or present day post-modern camp than it is for the advocates of a *laissez-faire* economy, a minimal state, or private enterprise to claim him as an intellectual mentor, as they do (cf. Blokland 1997; Galipeau 1994: 129, 135, 160–2). Berlin occupies an individual position and shows that permanent readiness to doubt can indeed be accompanied by steadfastness and rationality. Constantly balancing between rationalism and relativism he never loses his footing. The 'improvements' to Berlin's pluralism applied by Gray, among others, only disturb this. They are based on an incorrect interpretation of Berlin's pluralism and on false, unnecessarily historicist, principles on the possibility of arguing in the normative field and on the 'essence' of man. For an adequate defence of the Western, open society, it is therefore still best to consult Berlin's own work.

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NOTES

1. Gray claims (1995: 21–3) that, according to Berlin, positive freedom and rationalism or monism are indissolubly bound up with each other. Gray too (1995: 30) assumes this relation. However, as argued by MacPherson (1967) and Parekh (1982), among others, there is no logical or natural relation between the idea that self-determination and self-development are significant (complementary) values and the idea that people first realise these when they direct and develop their lives according to one, rational, universal, monistic plan (cf. Blokland 1997). Berlin never claimed this. Where positive freedom and value cognitivism, monism, and ultimately despotism come together, there is, according to Berlin, a perversion of the positive conception of freedom, a degeneration which must be understood psychologically and historically (Berlin 1958: 132, 152, 134; 1969: x, xliv, xlvi, xlvii; see also: Jahanbegloo 1992: 41 and 147; Galipeau 1994: 147; Blokland 1997: 40–2). Also untenable is Gray's thesis that 'choosing' is the foundation of both the positive and negative conception of freedom. This would imply that people who do not engage in this activity are unfree in the negative sense. However, in the words of Taylor (1979), negative freedom is an 'opportunity' and not an 'exercise' concept. It is about people being left alone. Nothing more. (See Blokland 1997: ch. 4.2.)
2. This thesis of Gray's seems untenable. Nevertheless, this presumed rationalistic basis of liberalism is for Gray one of the reasons for his shift in his thinking from neo-liberalism to conservatism. The profound conservative truth of 'the imperfectability of all human beings, and the ultimate vanity of all political projects' implies for him, it is understood, that the political debate and life can never produce unambiguous and immovable conclusions and is no more than 'a practical art of mutual accommodation', and that therefore, for example, state functions cannot be specified once and for all by a theory, but vary 'with the history, traditions, and circumstances that people and their governments inherit' (1993: xii).
3. According to Gray (1995: 83), Berlin's value pluralism implies a rejection of the idea that history can

be interpreted in terms of progress or regression. Such an idea is incoherent as we do not have a meta standard with which a benign or malign development can be measured.

4. It is striking that Crowder and Gray attach all possible quantities to the concept of 'value'—from fundamental principles of justice to doing gymnastics—and then in their argument think they can jump without difficulty from one level to the other. However, it is doubtful whether the existence of deviating personal preferences for a professional identity, for example, means that conclusions can be drawn about the principles which are supposed to underlie the design of society.
5. In his intellectual testament, 'The Pursuit of the Ideal' (1988) Berlin writes: 'How do we choose between possibilities? What and how much must we sacrifice to what? There is, it seems to me, no clear reply. But the collisions, even if they cannot be avoided, can be softened. Claims can be balanced, compromises can be reached: in concrete situations not every claim is of equal force—so much liberty and so much equality; so much for sharp moral condemnation, and so much for understanding a given human situation; so much for the full force of the law, and so much for the prerogative of mercy; for feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, healing the sick, sheltering the homeless. Priorities, never final and absolute, must be established'. The way in which this happens is ultimately 'not a matter of purely subjective judgement: it is dictated by the forms of life of the society to which one belongs, a society among other societies, with values held in common, whether or not they are in conflict, by the majority of mankind throughout recorded history. There are, if not universal values, at any rate a minimum without which societies could scarcely survive' (Berlin 1988: 17–8). Raz rightly points out that none of this alters the fact that there are situations in which the simple readiness to balance two values can irreparably damage one of these two values, which could be a motive for rejecting every deliberation. This could be, for example, a deliberation between, on the one hand, money or material well-being, and, on the other, friendship or having children. Money is of 'another order' than friendship: 'Only those who hold the view that friendship is neither better nor worse than money, but is simply not comparable to money or other commodities are capable of having friends' (1986: 346). People who choose for money are not irrational. However, in our view they lack the capacity to maintain friendship. The conclusions which Raz draws from this sort of case with regard to the incommensurability of values do not go nearly as far as those of Gray and Crowder.
6. This is in line with Rorty's views, which are partly based on Berlin. The question is, however, whether here too Rorty's interpretation is correct (cf. Blokland 1995: 45–7).
7. It is a deficiency that the philosophical discussion in question has hardly any sociological or psychological inspiration. The standpoints occupied are based on specific ideas about the essence and functioning of people, but these are seldom checked against insights from relevant disciplines (see, for examples to the contrary: Bay 1958; Schaar 1961; Doob 1987).
8. While it is true that Raz also states that we lack reasons 'for judging a career as graphic designer to be intrinsically better or worse for those engaged in it than a career as a livestock farmer or a gliding instructor', he adds: 'assuming that they are likely to be equally successful and content in them' (1986: 343). The degree to which one succeeds in one's efforts or enterprises is important for personal well-being. However, people can lack the necessary qualities to be successful in certain undertakings. It is thus better to be a capable, successful accountant than a bad dentist. Society also benefits when individuals pursue objectives which, considering their personal circumstances and qualities, can be realised.
9. Berlin's primary subject in the present article concerns the question of whether the existence of determinism can be justified. His central question is therefore: If our knowledge grows of that which must happen, of the laws which determine our reality, does our freedom then increase or decrease? The problem which Gray misguidedly seizes upon, to prove his thesis that Berlin assumes incommensurable values, is not more than an aside.
10. Besides, a choice for freedom is not a choice for chaos or emptiness. When we have lost old certainties and we are not content with the conformity to the ways of life, the values and aims, that our contemporary society provides, the answer is not a longing for a past or, as Erich Fromm thought, an ethic of spontaneity (Schaar 1961) or authenticity (Taylor 1991). Instead, as John Schaar wrote many years ago, the answer is 'the construction of and dedication to ... positive and compelling visions of the good to fill the emptiness of modern life' (1961: 308). The 'radical choices' Gray is talking about,

choices that resemble the ethic of spontaneity or authenticity so fashionable today, provide no help in this task; rather, they are a way of evading the task.

11. Compare here the plea by Arnold Brecht in the fourth part of his *Political Theory* (1959) for a large-scale empirical study of 'universal elements in human moral thinking'. This research must be guided by 'phenomenological introspection' and by a study of the working hypotheses obtained via the arts and letters. Among these hypotheses, which he feels can for the time being stand up to criticism, Brecht reckons, for example, the postulates that justice demands, that equal cases be treated equally, that people not be made responsible for matters they cannot influence, and that individual freedom not be arbitrarily restricted (1959: 396). Like Berlin and Taylor (1989), Brecht suspects that there are universal transcultural and transhistorical values, or 'inner voices', which can soften value relativism and serve as a guideline in politics and policy. However, the relativism and subjectivism which have become dominant in our time, certainly within anthropology, have made such research suspicious and impossible before it even begins.