

The Idea of Freedom

What Montesquieu means by liberty is not to be found in his formal—and commonplace—definition of this concept as consisting in the right to do what the laws do not forbid, but in his exposition of other social and political ideas which throw light on his general scale of values. Montesquieu is, above all, not a thinker obsessed by some single principle, seeking to order and explain everything in terms of some central moral or metaphysical category in terms of which all truths must be formulated. He is not a monist but a pluralist, his virtuosity reaches its highest peak, he is most himself, when he tries to convey a culture or an outlook or a system of values different from his own and from that of the majority of his readers.

Isaiah Berlin, 'Montesquieu'¹

THE IDEA OF FREEDOM that animates all of Berlin's work, like his system of ideas as a whole, is at once much more original, and far more subversive of received intellectual tradition in philosophy, than is commonly perceived. It is a commonplace that Berlin cautions against 'positive' conceptions of freedom which view it in terms of rational self-determination, or autonomy, and that he does so in favour of a 'negative' account of freedom in which it is conceived as the absence of constraints imposed by others. Less well understood are Berlin's reasons for preferring a negative conception of freedom. Few would accuse Berlin of denying that freedom may legitimately be conceived in terms of autonomy, since his acknowledgements that there have in the history of thought been such conceptions are too frequent, and too unequivocal, to

be ignored; but his grounds for thinking that positive views of freedom are inherently flawed, and so perennially liable to abuse, are little understood. Again, it is a truism of intellectual history that Berlin rejects determinism in the human world, and, in particular, the applications of it that have issued in doctrines of historical inevitability. And it is widely understood, though less clearly, that the cornerstone of his thought is his rejection of monism in ethics—his insistence that fundamental human values are many, that they are often in conflict and rarely, if ever, *necessarily* harmonious, and that some at least of these conflicts are among incommensurables—conflicts among values for which there is no single, common standard of measurement or arbitration. These elements in Berlin's thought are recognizable, and intelligible, readily enough, to most recent philosophers and moral and political theorists in the Anglo-American world.

It is the argument of this book, however, that these ideas of Berlin's, rightly interpreted and understood, cohere to form a conception of human life whose subversive originality is as yet very poorly apprehended, and whose applications in political philosophy—in yielding what I term an agonistic liberalism, a liberalism of conflict and unavoidable loss among rivalrous goods and evils—are hardly appreciated at all. If I am right that Berlin's work contains ideas of great profundity and subversive power, one may reasonably ask why this is not widely acknowledged in the world of professional philosophy, where the impact of his thought, though far from negligible, has hardly been decisive. In part, no doubt, the explanation is to be found in Berlin's professed abandonment, after the Second World War, of first-order philosophical work, in favour of intellectual history. But this can hardly be the whole explanation. It is true that much of Berlin's work, indeed the greater part of it, has been in the form of essays in the history of ideas, in which the thought of celebrated as well as obscure theorists is subject to imaginative reconstruction and analytical dissection. We think at once of his essays on Vico,

Herder, Hamann, Mill, Maistre, Herzen, and many others. Yet not all of Berlin's *oeuvre* has been in this mode; his famous lecture on liberty was a straightforward exercise in political philosophy, supported by many illuminating historical references and analogies, but standing on its own feet as a piece of philosophical reasoning.

The deeper explanation for the slight impact of Berlin's work on the mainstream tradition in philosophy in our time lies elsewhere—in its divergence from, and undermining of, the forms of rationalism that have dominated moral and political thought in the English-speaking world over the past century. By rationalism is here meant the view that philosophical inquiry can not merely illuminate, but also provide solutions for, the dilemmas we confront in moral and political practice. This rationalist view Berlin has always resolutely rejected. His reasons for rejecting it have little, if anything, in common with the critique of moral and political rationalism offered us by contemporary conservative philosophers such as Michael Oakeshott. Berlin rejects the view, found in Oakeshott,² that dilemmas insoluble by reason can be resolved by a return to tradition, so long as it has not been 'scribbled on' by rationalist philosophers, since he believes—surely correctly—that the idea of an uncorrupted text of common life, whether in Oakeshott or Maistre, is a mere illusion: we have no reason to suppose that practice or tradition is coherent. For Berlin, philosophy may illuminate the incoherences of practice, but it cannot resolve them. More radically yet, Berlin's work embodies a challenge to the foundational tenets of the Western intellectual tradition itself, the upshot of which is to limit the scope and authority of philosophy as an intellectual discipline. The implication of Berlin's thought for philosophical method is that the conception of the prescriptive authority of philosophy, and its pretensions to govern practice, which pervades the work of Aristotle, of Plato, of Hobbes, of Spinoza, of Kant, of J. S. Mill and (in a distinct but no less manifest way) of at least the earlier Rawls, say, cannot be accepted: philosophy's pretensions must be far humbler. Phi-

losophy remains for Berlin vitally important: he tells us that ‘The goal of philosophy is always the same, to assist men to understand themselves and thus operate in the open, and not wildly, in the dark.’³ Nevertheless, the hopes that inspire the philosopher cannot encompass, if Berlin is right, the prospect of a theory or a set of principles that will resolve the dilemmas of practical life, political or moral, since it is one of Berlin’s principal contentions that some of these dilemmas are *au fond* insoluble, radical and tragic, and undecidable by rational reflection. Philosophy can hope to illuminate these dilemmas and to straighten out crookednesses in our thought about them; it cannot hope to do more than that. Berlin’s thought demands a revision of the received conception of philosophy itself, as this has been exemplified throughout most of the Western tradition.

The species of liberalism which Berlin’s work embodies is a deeply distinctive and decidedly original one that is at odds both with the schools of liberal thought recently dominant in the Anglo-American world and with the older traditions of liberalism from which these newer developments spring. As it is expressed in the work of Rawls and Dworkin, Hayek, Nozick, and Gauthier, all of recent liberalism turns on a conception of rational choice, whether Kantian or Millian, Lockean or Hobbesian in content, from which liberal principles are supposedly derived. If, in J. S. Mill, liberal principles are adopted as rational strategies for the maximal promotion of general well-being—as devices for the maximization of utility—then in John Rawls, late as much as early, they are adopted as rational terms of cooperation among persons having no comprehensive conception of the good in common. In Berlin’s *agonistic liberalism*, by contrast, the value of freedom derives from the limits of rational choice. Berlin’s agonistic liberalism—his liberalism of conflict among inherently rivalrous goods—grounds itself on the radical choices we must make among incommensurables, not upon rational choice. Further, it denies that the structure of liberties appropriate to a

liberal society can be derived from any theory, or stated in any system of principles, since the choice among conflicting liberties is often a choice among incommensurables. In this respect, if I am not mistaken, Berlin's agonistic liberalism delivers a fatal blow to the varieties of liberal utilitarianism, of theories of fundamental rights and of contractarian theorizing, that are the stock in trade of recent liberal political philosophy, and which have a genuine pedigree in earlier traditions of liberal thought. His is an unfamiliar and challenging liberalism that is subversive of the rationalist foundations of all the traditional varieties of liberal thought. The only comparable liberalism in recent political philosophy, one to which we shall have occasion to refer repeatedly, is found in the work of Joseph Raz,⁴ which may be fruitfully compared with that of Berlin. It is the radical criticisms it contains of conceptions of rational choice, and of their uses as foundations of liberalism, that most deeply accounts for the comparatively shallow influence of Berlin's thought on recent moral and political philosophy, which persists in being animated by a species of rationalism that Berlin's work undermines.

It is not, to be sure, that Berlin is an irrationalist, an enemy of Enlightenment, for, like one of his patron saints, David Hume, he remains committed to a central element of the Enlightenment project, namely the illumination of the human world by rational inquiry. It is nonetheless the case that Berlin's rejection of the species of rationalism for which the dilemmas of practice are in the end illusory, that rationalism which goes back to Plato and perhaps to Socrates, and which animates many of the central thinkers of the Enlightenment, expresses a conception of human nature which is hard to square with that of the Enlightenment. It is a view of man as inherently unfinished and incomplete, as essentially self-transforming and only partly determinate, of man as at least partly the author of himself and not subject comprehensively to any natural order. It is also a view of man in which the idea of a common or constant human nature has little place, one

in which the capacity of man as a supremely inventive species to fashion for itself a plurality of divergent natures is central. Berlin's rejection of the view of man as a natural object in a natural order, subject to natural laws and intelligible in his behaviour and nature by reference to those laws, and his pluralist conception of man as a self-transforming species which invents a variety of natures for itself, puts him closer to the Romantics and to the thinkers of what he calls the Counter-Enlightenment than it does to the Enlightenment, whose values of intellectual emancipation and rational self-criticism he nevertheless steadfastly defends.

The conception of human nature to which I have referred, and which recurs throughout Berlin's work, presupposes a rejection of determinism as that view applies to human conduct. The aspiration of a science of human behaviour, which is 'nomological' or law-governed in structure in that it generates explanations and predictions of human events by reference to laws of the sort we find in the natural sciences, and which was a central project of the European Enlightenment in the work of such figures as Helvétius, Holbach, Diderot, and even (despite his attack on induction) David Hume, is rejected by Berlin. It must not be supposed that he advances, or seeks to advance, a demonstrative refutation of human determinism. His argument is instead against compatibilism—the philosophical theory that nothing of substance in our ordinary moral and political thought, discourse and practice need be affected by the truth of determinism. Berlin has always argued against this view—the dominant view in English-speaking empiricist philosophy. For Berlin, such practices as praise and blame, such sentiments as resentment and gratitude, presuppose that the agents who are their objects could have done otherwise than they did when they evoked our responses. He accordingly rejects the justification of punishment, advanced by utilitarians in this compatibilist tradition, as a sort of technology of deterrence: whatever it may be, it cannot be *only* that, since it incorporates judgements of deservingness and culpability which again presup-

pose that agents can act otherwise than they do, all conditions prior to the act in question remaining the same. Nor does Berlin accept the commonest empiricist version of compatibilism, which J. S. Mill espoused—the doctrine of self-determinism, which says that we are free in so far as we can deliberately alter our characters and dispositions if we so wish. For, as Berlin points out,⁵ if determinism is true, if we are links in a universal chain of natural causation, then our very desire to amend our character is itself causally necessitated: it could not be otherwise than it is, nor more efficacious than it proves to be. This doctrine of self-determinism, with which Mill in the *System of Logic*⁶ sought to dispel the nightmare of determinism, is an illusion: determinism *remains* a nightmare.

It remains a nightmare because its truth would entail the abandonment of a vast complex of practices and sentiments that form essential elements of our ordinary conception of ourselves, and of moral and political life as we know it. This transformation of our normal self-conception, which the truth of determinism would force upon us, is (according to Berlin) far more comprehensive and devastating than is usually believed by empiricist philosophers: in particular, it would encompass a mutation in our view of our own conduct that borders on the inconceivable. It is more than doubtful whether we have the capacity to throw off our phenomenological certainty of our own freedom as agents that are not wholly bound by natural causation and adopt the view of ourselves as natural objects or processes that is mandated by determinism. Internalizing the truth of determinism may well be a psychological impossibility—a point acknowledged in the most powerful recent statement of anti-compatibilist determinism.⁷ According to Berlin, we have no reason to attempt this impossible feat, since there are no compelling arguments for human determinism; and our own experience, which proves so resistant to reconstruction on determinist lines, tells against it. The very universality and depth of the subjective conviction of free agency is

an argument against human determinism, against which only the most powerful philosophical counter-argument could prevail. It is Berlin's view that no such compelling argument for determinism has yet been stated.

In this respect, Berlin, like Popper, holds that determinism is not even a necessary presupposition of the natural sciences.⁸ In any event its falsity in the human world entails—what Berlin thinks plausible on independent grounds—that the human sciences cannot be built on the model, supposedly deterministic, of the natural sciences. There can in particular be no science of history: the project of a scientific history is broken-backed.⁹ But there is in Berlin a deep difference from Popper, and from positivists of every variety, in that he rejects any form of methodological monism about inquiry, such as that which Popper advocates as the unity of the natural and social sciences,¹⁰ and opts instead for methodological pluralism—the view that the methods of inquiry appropriate to different subject matters may, and do, vary with differences in these subject matters. The positivist ideal of a unified science, embracing all natural and social phenomena, is one Berlin has always repudiated. He rejects it in part because he sees it as an example of 'the desire to translate many *prima facie* different types of proposition into a single type' which is a recurring temptation of philosophers, and which he subjects to a powerful criticism in his early essay on 'Logical Translation.' There he rejects the positivistic project of reducing all propositions to a single type, arguing:

To translate, reduce, deflate, is philosophically laudable so long as there is a real gain in clarity, simplicity, and the destruction of myths. But where it is obvious that types of proposition or sentence cannot be 'reduced' or 'translated' into one another without torturing the language until what was conveyed idiomatically before can no longer be conveyed so fully or clearly or, at times, at all in the artificial language constructed to conform to some

imaginary criterion of a 'logical perfection', such attempts should be exposed as stemming from a false theory of meaning, accompanied by its equally counterfeit metaphysical counterpart—a view of the universe as possessing an 'ultimate structure', as being constructed out of this or that collection or combination of bits and pieces of 'ultimate stuff' which the 'language' is constructed to reproduce.¹¹

Berlin's thought is instructive, for this reason, in a way that (despite Popper's professed distance from the positivists of the Vienna Circle) Popper's is not, regarding the defects and limitations of positivism in philosophy.

Berlin's repudiation of determinism and compatibilism may seem to be at a considerable distance from his views in moral and political philosophy. It might even be maintained that nothing *follows* prescriptively from these metaphysical positions of Berlin's; and such a claim would not be altogether mistaken. There is nevertheless a coherence, if not perhaps any relations of logical entailment or of strict implication, between Berlin's opposition to human determinism and his account of moral and political life. The locus of this coherence is in the centrality Berlin accords to the activity of *choice* in the constitution of human nature. It must be noted at once that Berlin does not subscribe to the idea of a common human nature as that is found in Hobbes and in Locke, in Rousseau and even in Hume, in which a constant stock of unaltering needs, and a small set of human passions, are discerned behind the miscellany of cultural diversity in manners and mores, in self-understandings and conceptions of the good, that human history discloses to us. This is, at least in Locke and Rousseau, the idea of the 'natural man', denuded of the deceptive raiment of convention, whose character and needs are everywhere the same, before they are complicated or corrupted by the artefacts of civilization. Berlin does not subscribe to this notion of a common human nature, which goes back perhaps to the Sophists and

underlies classical as well as Christian accounts of natural law, despite the fact that he is insistent that some conception of human nature is presupposed in every developed moral and political theory. He affirms the indispensability of a conception of man in our thought in his important paper 'Does Political Theory Still Exist?', where he observes: 'Our conscious idea of man—of how men differ from other entities, of what is human and what is not human or inhuman—involves the use of some among the basic categories in terms of which we perceive and order and interpret data. To analyse the concept of man is to recognize these categories for what they are. To do this is to realize that they are categories, that is, that they are not themselves subjects for scientific hypotheses about the data which they order.'¹² Here Berlin's argument follows those of philosophers such as Hampshire and Strawson,¹³ in setting as a task of philosophical inquiry the specification—via a sort of quasi-Kantian transcendental deduction—of the necessary 'categories' of human agency. It is these categories, and not any substantive claims about human motivations or interests, that give most of the content to the idea of human nature in Berlin's account of it.

Berlin does not by human nature mean us to understand any unvarying human passions or needs. Rather he takes the capacity for choice, and for a self-chosen form of life, to be itself constitutive of human beings, and to distinguish them from other animal species, by introducing an element of indeterminacy into their nature and conduct, which could only be eradicated with the elimination of the capacity for choice itself. If the capacity for choice introduces into human nature this partial indeterminacy, if human understandings of human needs alter over time and in so doing alter those very needs, then it will be in the capacity of choice, with all the uncertainty and potential for novelty that that carries with it, and not in any supposed range of fixed universal needs, that the most distinctive mark of man is to be found. It will indeed be the capacity of the human species to invent for itself

through the exercise of the powers of choice a diversity of natures, embodied in irreducibly distinct forms of life containing goods (and evils) that are sometimes incommensurable and so rationally incomparable, that constitutes the most distinctive mark of man. Berlin goes so far as to encapsulate this view by asserting that ‘the necessity of choosing between absolute claims is then an inescapable characteristic of the human condition.’¹⁴ It is clear that he believes that the capacity for choice he ascribes to the human species is originaive and creative in a way that could not but be compromised by the truth of determinism.

The human capacity for choice supports Berlin’s conception of freedom in that he designates as ‘basic freedom’ the capacity for choice itself—what Kant called *Willkür*—and affirms that this underpins both ‘negative’ and ‘positive’ liberty. Here Berlin seems to mean that even negative freedom—ordinarily understood, in the empiricist tradition, as non-interference by others when acting according to one’s actual or potential desires—presupposes the capacity for choice among alternatives. An animal may be frustrated in doing what it wants by natural, or deliberately imposed, constraints on its behaviour; but unless it can envisage alternatives and in some sense choose between them it cannot be said to possess, or to lack, negative freedom in Berlin’s sense. Negative freedom is not, then, the ‘unimpeded motion’ of Hobbes, nor the unobstructed pursuit of one’s desires in terms of which it was conceived by Bentham, with which it is often identified, by such critics of Berlin as Charles Taylor.¹⁵ It is rather *choice among alternatives or options that is unimpeded by others*. It cannot be ascribed to animals (at least on the conventional conception of their capacities), but nor could it have application to human beings who had been so conditioned that actions actually available to them could not be perceived by them as options—the majority of the inhabitants of *Brave New World*, for example. This is to say that Berlin’s conception of ‘basic freedom’ as the availability of options is *not* the standard empiricist notion of liberty as action,

unobstructed by others, according to actual or potential desires. An agent that never reflected on its desires, never evaluated them or deliberated about them, would on Berlin's account necessarily lack basic freedom. Lacking the capacity for choice among alternatives, such an agent could not possess negative freedom; such an agent could not even be denied negative freedom.

It will readily be seen that, if negative freedom as Berlin understands it presupposes the capacity for choice among alternatives, it shares a common root with positive freedom. Unlike negative freedom, which is the freedom from interference by others, positive freedom is the freedom of self-mastery, of rational control of one's life. It is plain that, as with negative freedom, positive freedom is impaired or diminished as the capacity or power of choice is impaired or diminished, but in different ways. An agent may be unobstructed in the choice of alternatives by other agents, and yet lack the ability or power to act. This may be because of negative factors, lacks or absences—of knowledge, money or other resources—or it may be because there are internal constraints, within the agent himself, preventing him from conceiving or perceiving alternatives as such, or else, even if they are so perceived, from acting on them. Such conditions as phobias or neurotic inhibitions may close off an agent's options, even to the point that they remain unknown to him, or else he may be constrained by irrational and invincible anxiety from acting so as to take advantage of them. In this case the power of choice has been sabotaged or compromised from within. An agent may possess very considerable negative freedom and yet, because he is incapacitated for choice among alternatives that others have not closed off from him, be positively unfree to an extreme degree. What both forms of unfreedom have in common is the restriction or incapacitation of the powers of choice.

Here several common misunderstandings of Berlin's account must be noted and discarded. Berlin is not advancing a linguistic, semantic or even conceptual analysis of the terms 'liberty' or

'freedom', after the fashion of Oxford ordinary-language philosophy in the 1950s. His conception of philosophical method is such that he would never suppose that philosophical puzzlement could be overcome by the analysis of the uses of words: his lifelong conviction that philosophical questions are *not* primarily linguistic in character is sufficient to show this. He states this view canonically when, in the course of arguing that there is a class of genuine philosophical questions that are neither empirical nor formal in character, he asserts: 'it seems clear that disagreements about the analysis of value concepts, as often as not, spring from profounder differences, since the notions of, say, rights or justice or liberty will be radically dissimilar for theists or atheists, mechanistic determinists and Christians, Hegelians and empiricists, romantic irrationalists and Marxists, and so forth. It seems no less clear that these differences are not, at least *prima facie*, either logical or empirical, and have usually and rightly been classified as irreducibly philosophical.' This statement, made in Berlin's seminal paper 'Does Political Theory Still Exist?',¹⁶ establishes the distance between Berlin's conception of philosophical method and that, not only of the positivists, but also of linguistic philosophers, such as J. L. Austin. Along with many similar statements, it shows that for Berlin nothing decisive in philosophy ever turns on the meanings of words.

His argument is not, then, that 'liberty' *means* what he terms 'negative freedom'—non-interference by others in one's actual and potential chosen activities. Nor is he, for that and other reasons, maintaining that only negative freedom is *bona fide* freedom, or that it alone is valuable freedom. His theme, after all, is two concepts of freedom—two conceptions, one may say, in Rawls's idiom,¹⁷ of the same thing. He is emphatic that 'positive and negative liberty are both perfectly valid concepts', that 'positive liberty . . . is essential to a decent existence'¹⁸ and, in his early explicit statement of his view, he had already affirmed that the two ideas 'seem concepts at no great logical distance from each

other—no more than negative or positive ways of saying much the same thing.’ Yet, he continues, ‘the “positive” and “negative” notions of freedom historically developed in divergent directions not always by logically reputable steps, until, in the end, they came into direct conflict with each other.’¹⁹ Berlin’s view, accordingly, is that negative and positive unfreedom have a common root in the denial or impairment of what Kant terms *Willkür*—the power of choice. Each embodies a valid conception of freedom, or even, it may be, a different aspect or dimension of the ‘basic freedom’ which *Willkür* designates. In historical terms, however, the two ideas of freedom have so developed that they now stand for distinct values, goods or conditions; so distinct are they, indeed, that they are often rivals or competitors in practice.

Berlin’s insistence that these are two distinct, and often conflicting, conceptions of liberty, gives the lie to those of his critics who hold to formal conceptual analyses of the discourse of liberty according to which the distinction between the negative and positive views is merely semantic. This is the claim of McCallum,²⁰ for whom freedom is a triadic relation, into which both positive and negative views can be fitted, and for Feinberg, for whom it appears to be a tetradic concept, specifying four kinds of constraint on actions: external, internal, positive and negative.²¹ Against McCallum, Berlin argues, soundly,²² that the basic sense of liberty is dyadic, not triadic, since an agent may wish to be without a constraint, and yet have no specific action he wishes then to perform: so that the formal schema McCallum proposes for the discourse of liberty—agent *a* is free from constraint *b* to perform action *c*—does not capture the most primitive root of the idea of freedom, which is simply the rejection of constraints imposed by others, merely as such. Against Feinberg, Berlin could argue forcefully that the tetradic schema is far too copious, allowing as constraints *on freedom* constraints and evils (such as headaches, disabilities) that are not unfreedoms at all. The trouble with this schema of Feinberg’s, in other words, is that it allows

virtually every good and evil that can constrain human conduct to be translatable into the discourse of liberty. This is far too permissive a schema, and one that violates Bishop Butler's dictum (often cited by Berlin) that 'Things and actions are what they are, and their consequences will be what they will be: why then should we seek to be deceived?' The effect of Feinberg's, and similar analyses, is to obliterate freedom as a distinct political value.

In a famous statement, Berlin has asserted that 'The fundamental sense of freedom is freedom from chains, from imprisonment, from enslavement by others. The rest is an extension of this sense, or else metaphor.'²³ Here Berlin is arguing, not that this sense of freedom alone conforms with ordinary usage or linguistic intuition, but rather that it is in the restriction of choice among alternatives by other human agents that the most fundamental unfreedom is to be found. In part his reason for holding this view is that he is concerned with freedom *inter homines*, with civil or social or political freedom, not with the 'freedom' men may find in submission to the will of God, to the Categorical Imperative or (if they are Stoics) in identification with the natural or rational order. More radically, he rejects the rationalist and monist presuppositions and doctrines with which ideas of positive freedom have become associated in the history of philosophy. For Berlin, freedom, even positive freedom, always connotes choice, never the recognition of necessity. It would be hard to find a view of freedom more alien to Berlin's than that adumbrated in Spinoza's *Ethics*. Yet even Spinoza's conception of freedom as the individual recognition of necessity has an advantage, from Berlin's standpoint, over later positive conceptions, such as Hegel's, in that it sees positive freedom as *individual* self-determination, not collective self-rule. The nemesis of positive freedom, the moment when it is transformed from a genuine—if, in the end, for reasons I try to specify below, for Berlin a philosophically indefensible—conception of freedom into a pseudo-conception, a version of another value that masquerades as freedom, comes when it desig-

nates the integration of a community in harmonious self-government. It is this nemesis which came to pass, according to Berlin, in such German Idealists as Fichte and Hegel.

It must be confessed that there seems to be a difficulty in Berlin's account here, since the conceptions of positive freedom as rational self-direction by the individual, and as harmonious collective self-determination, were themselves indissolubly conjoined in the positive conception of freedom attributed to the Greeks by Benjamin Constant in his 'Liberty Ancient and Modern', to which Berlin has acknowledged his indebtedness.²⁴ It seems that the most offensive feature of positive freedom, its conflation of individual self-direction with collective self-rule, was present from the start, in the ancient Greek view of it. It is difficult then for Berlin to maintain that later conceptions of positive freedom as collective self-rule are perversions of earlier, and more legitimate, conceptions of it as individual self-determination. Constant seems on firmer ground in holding that the ancient or positive sense of freedom *was* that of collective self-rule, and that the negative conception is distinctively modern.

There is a further difficulty in that, though the negative conception seems to be distinctively modern, it does not appear to be distinctively liberal. Two of its most uncompromising exponents—Hobbes and Bentham—were not liberals, and many liberals, such as Kant and J. S. Mill, have held to positive conceptions of liberty as autonomy. That Kant's conception of individual freedom was one of rational autonomy is recognized by Berlin himself;²⁵ and the fact that J. S. Mill's was a similar conception is shown in the fact that the subject of *On Liberty* is not the restraint of negative liberty by legal coercion but the curbing of individual autonomy by the 'moral coercion' of an invasive public opinion. As the examples of these two seminal liberal thinkers demonstrate, there is certainly no necessary connection between the negative view of liberty and liberalism. The connection is established, in Berlin's own liberalism, by an account of the value of negative liberty,

not—as in Hobbes and Bentham—primarily as a means to want-satisfaction, but as a condition of self-creation through choice-making. It is Berlin's explanation of the *value* of negative freedom, in other words, that is meant to assure to this distinctively modern conception a liberal content. It is not Berlin's view, however, that the negative view of liberty has any unique or constitutive place in the liberal tradition; such a view would not stand up to historical scrutiny. Berlin's view seems to be, rather, that the liberal tradition is itself complex and indeed pluralistic in character, and accommodates many conceptions of freedom; but that the negative one is most defensible, and most congenial to liberal concerns with diversity and toleration, in so far as it in no way rests upon the rationalist and monist doctrines associated with the positive view.

In other words, this apparent difficulty in Berlin's account of the historical development of the two ideas gives a clue to his most fundamental reason for *rejecting* positive freedom as the most adequate conception of freedom. This is in Berlin's attribution to the positive view of a rationalist and monist conception of the good. According to Berlin, in the positive view, whether it be Socratic or Stoic, Spinozistic or Kantian, Hegelian or Fichtean, freedom consists not in choice but in obedience to rational will. Whereas choice presupposes genuine rivalry among conflicting goods, rational will points to one, and only one course of action, one form of life, for the individual. Further, in Plato, as in Socrates and Aristotle, the rational will for each person is the same as that for every person: they have the same object, itself the same for all. So, just as there is for each agent a form of life that is uniquely rational for him, so every agent will converge on that very form of life, since it is the same for all. It may well be that the empirical selves of actual men and women are riddled with conflicting goals and desires, plagued by rivalries among cherished goods and values, and that these conflicts are only compounded in the relations between agents; but the rational will, once it is oriented towards the order of nature or the Form of the Good, cannot contain such

conflicts, since these betoken unreason and even unreality. Freedom for agents so conceived is not in choice among genuinely rivalrous alternatives, but in pursuing and adopting what is rational or right. It is in cleaving to the true and the good, which are one and the same, for each and all, that freedom is exercised.

It is in the implication for this view for political practice that Berlin finds the most objectionable and dangerous features of positive freedom. For if genuine freedom is the opportunity to pursue the good, if all true goods are compatible with one another and are indeed the same for all persons, then a community of truly free persons will be one without significant conflict of values, ideals or interests, a harmonious dovetailing of identical real or rational wills. This was, presumably, Rousseau's vision of the General Will. It is a perilously illiberal vision, since its implication is that all moral, social or political conflict is a symptom of immorality or unreason, or, at the very least, of error. The deepest monist presupposition of this view is that there must of necessity be an identity of wills among free men, such that they constitute—at least ideally—a conflictless community. This is the presupposition, with its diagnosis of conflict as inherently pathological, which, in Berlin's view, underpins all forms of totalitarianism from the Jacobins to our own day. Further, if—as he thinks—this monist view is itself inherent in positive conceptions of freedom, then they are inherently liable to abuse, on account of this flaw, and not, as with negative freedom and all genuine political ideals, contingently susceptible to misuse in practice.

It is Berlin's rejection of this monist vision, his pluralist insistence on the diversity and incommensurability of genuine human goods, that is his *idée maîtresse*. It is also the animating idea of his account of freedom. Negative freedom is to be commended and adopted as the fundamental species of freedom because it is most consistent with the rivalrous diversity of human purposes and goods. Positive freedom, though it designates an authentic species of freedom, that in which it concerns self-mastery, easily,

and according to Berlin inevitably, degenerates into the fantasy of ethical rationalism, which is fatal to choice. (It may even have begun in such a fantasy, in the Platonistic or Socratic doctrine of the Form of the Good, and the Aristotelian doctrine of the unity of the virtues.) For the self which is master of itself is rarely, in positive accounts of freedom, the actual empirical self, with all its idiosyncrasy, embarrassments and lacunae, it is typically an abstract self, an exemplar of rational humanity, indistinguishable from any other. In this view the root of freedom in the differences among agents, and in the conflicts among the goods they pursue, has vanished.

The nature and grounds of Berlin's pluralism are the subject of the next chapter. At this point a feature of his thought, to which I shall recur at the end of this book, is worthy of note. I have pointed out that there is in Berlin no account of a common human nature that is universal and the same for all, since the propensity to diversity, to difference, is itself implied by the human capacity for choice. It is not that commonality is natural, difference artificial or conventional; rather, diversity is the most evident expression of man's nature as a species whose life is characterized by choice. Such choice is, for Berlin, choice among goods that are not only distinct and rivalrous but sometimes incommensurable: it is radical choice, ungoverned by reason. It is, *in extremis*, the choice of a nature in the self-creation of an individual, or the collective creation of a form of life. Human nature is not, for Berlin, something within us all that awaits discovery and realization. It is something invented, and perpetually reinvented, through choice, and it is inherently plural and diverse, not common or universal.

A question arises at this point about the status of this conception of man as a self-transforming being and its relations with Berlin's moral and political theory. What are the epistemological credentials of this conception of man, and how is it to be assessed? How, if at all, is it related to the celebration of choice-making which is a distinctive feature of Berlin's liberalism? In answer to

the first question, it would seem that the conception of man as a species that transforms itself through choice-making is grounded partly in the evidences of cultural difference afforded by history. What history discloses is not a stable human nature subject to minor variations, but an extraordinarily inventive species with a plethora of cultural identities. To affirm, as Berlin does, that the self-transformation of human nature occurs through the human exercise of the powers of choice is not to say that its changes are the results of premeditated intentions; it is to say that they are expressions of the human capacity for choice, which cannot be captured in any deterministic schema of explanation. This latter claim trades on Berlin's arguments against human determinism, and testifies to the presence of an *a priori* element in his conception of man—one, that is to say, that is supported by philosophical reasonings rather than by historical or other empirical evidences. The epistemological basis of Berlin's conception of man as a being in whose nature choice-making is central is, then, partly philosophical and partly historical. It should be clear—if only because to think otherwise would be to commit a fallacy of ethical naturalism—that the truth of this conception of man would not guarantee the acceptability of a form of liberalism in which the exercise of the powers of choice is accorded a central place in the human good. The conception of the good life as the chosen life is a highly culturally specific one, which must be supported, if it can be supported, by considerations other than those Berlin invokes in support of his general conception of man. Indeed it could be objected against Berlin's account that what it shows is *not* the centrality of choice-making in human nature but simply its variability and its propensity to cultural difference—very different things. I will maintain in the final chapter of this book that this criticism is not altogether warranted, since at least some forms of cultural difference arise from choices among incommensurable values. It is, however, worth remarking here on an insight suggested by such a line of criticism—that the conception of human nature as only partly determinate

and accordingly culturally variable to a significant degree, which is true universally if it is true at all, is a very different animal from the conception of man as a species whose most distinctive activity, and the activity which is the precondition of all that is most valuable in human life, is the making of choices. This conception of man accords with the self-understanding of practitioners of certain modern, Western cultural traditions, but it in no way follows from the idea of man as a self-transforming being.

The forms of life in which human beings constitute for themselves a diversity of natures are many and variable, and they embody values that are irreducibly different and on occasion incommensurable. They are also often conflicting and uncombinable. One conclusion drawn from this deep conflict of values between and among divergent forms of life in what I have called Berlin's agonistic liberalism is that there can be no overarching principle of liberty, and no structure of fundamental rights or set of basic liberties, fixed or determinate in their content and harmonious or dovetailing in their scope. Rather conflict and rivalry enter into the ideal of liberty itself, as our liberties disclose themselves to be rivalrous and incommensurable values between which we must choose, without the benefit of any overarching rational standard.

It follows from Berlin's view of negative liberty as being itself composed of a diversity of often conflicting and sometimes incommensurable liberties that there can be no *theory* or *principle* which determines how these conflicts are to be resolved. Indeed, because negative liberties may be incommensurably valuable, there can be no theory, or libertarian calculus, which tells us when negative liberty is maximized. As Berlin has put this latter point, in an important and often neglected passage:

'Negative liberty' is something the extent of which, in a given case, it is difficult to estimate The extent of my freedom seems to depend on a) how many possibilities are open to me (though the method of counting these can never be more than impressionistic.

Possibilities of action are not discrete entities like apples, which can be exhaustively enumerated; b) how easy or difficult each of these possibilities is to actualize; c) how important in my plan of life, given my character and circumstances, these possibilities are when compared with each other; d) how far they are closed and opened by deliberate human acts; e) what value not merely the agent, but the general sentiment of the society in which he lives, puts on the various possibilities. All these magnitudes must be 'integrated', and a conclusion, necessarily never precise, or indisputable, drawn from this process. It may well be that there are many incommensurable kinds and degrees of freedom, and that they cannot be drawn up on any single scale of magnitude.²⁶

Here Berlin's argument is that judgements of comparative or on-balance freedom (in this case negative freedom) are themselves evaluative judgements; they are not value-free or value-neutral assessments of states of affairs in the human world upon which agreement can be reached even among those whose value-judgements are divergent. Indeed, his point is that even people who acknowledge the same goods or values will make different judgements of on-balance freedom, in so far as they attach different weightings to liberties that are incommensurable in their value.

Two further points, which may prove of considerable importance, flow from Berlin's recognition of incommensurabilities within negative liberty itself, and from his account of the variety of ways in which it may be restricted. The first is that he does not consider negative liberty to be an 'absolute' value which is not to be put in the balance with others. For this reason, he does not accept the unconditional priority of liberty over other political values that is affirmed in the Kantian liberalism of John Rawls, insisting instead that trade-offs between liberty and other values are often legitimate and indeed unavoidable. Berlin's view that there can be no *principle* which tells us how to make trade-offs between

negative liberty and other values when these are incommensurables raises questions as to the relations of his value-pluralism with his liberalism to which I will return repeatedly in the course of my interpretation of his thought.

The second point is that his account of the various dimensions in terms of which negative freedom may be curbed or restricted shows that he does not think it is limited only by force or coercion. The range of factors by which someone's negative freedom may in Berlin's account be restrained is considerably larger. Indeed in other places in his writings²⁷ he is explicit that negative unfreedom, the obstruction of agents' choices by others, need not presuppose the deliberate interference by others which occurs when force or coercion is deployed, but only the reasonable attribution of human responsibility for the unintended consequences of human action. Negative freedom may thus be diminished by acts of omission as well as by deliberate interventions: what is required for negative freedom to be at stake is not intention but instead the alterability of social states and human responsibility for them. Further, Berlin is explicit that a social theory is required, specifying the alterability of social arrangements and the causes for their being as they are, whenever we make judgements about negative freedom of this broader sort. As he puts it, programmatically: 'If my lack of material means is due to my lack of mental or physical capacity, then I begin to speak of being deprived of freedom (and not simply of poverty) only if I accept the theory (of its social causes and of human responsibility for their being as they are) The criterion of oppression is the part that I believe to be played by other human beings, directly or indirectly, with or without the intention of doing so, in frustrating my wishes.'²⁸ Judgements about negative freedom are not, then, either value-neutral or theory-neutral. On the contrary, in Berlin's account, they are value-judgements, often involving incommensurabilities, and they depend on theoretical claims, often, no doubt, intractably controversial claims. Negative freedom remains choice

among alternatives or options that is not impeded or obstructed by others; but what counts as an impediment or an obstruction will often be disputable, and is never a simple matter of fact. It is worth making these points, if only to mark the deep and sharp contrast between Berlin's conception of negative liberty and that of positivists such as Oppenheim,²⁹ who aspire to a language of freedom that is purged of evaluative connotations and of controversial theoretical claims. Nothing could be further from Berlin's account of freedom than such a positivistic conception.

We have not, as yet, considered in any extended way Berlin's account of the value or worth of freedom, negative or positive. It should be clear, from what has been said thus far about his views, that he cannot conceive the value of freedom in standard Anglo-American fashion, empiricist or utilitarian, as a means to want-satisfaction. Statements abound in his writings to the effect that freedom is an intrinsic good, an ultimate value, not merely a means to the satisfaction of human desires.³⁰ But in what does the good of freedom, particularly negative freedom, consist, if not in its facilitating the satisfaction of wants, or, at any rate, in avoiding the frustration of want-satisfaction by other agents? Joseph Raz, in the most profound consideration of these issues in recent philosophy since Berlin's,³¹ proposes that the chief value of negative freedom is in its contribution to the positive freedom of autonomy. Here Raz does not mean that the negative freedom of non-interference is a necessary precondition of autonomy, in the sense of being a useful means to it; rather it is a constitutive ingredient of autonomous agency that one not be subject to the will of others. For Raz, however, non-interference is only one aspect of autonomy, which comprehends much else, including capacities for rational deliberation, the possession of adequate resources for meaningful action, and an array of worthwhile options from which to choose. It is autonomy, and not negative freedom, which has for Raz the status of an intrinsic good, and all, or most of, the value of negative freedom is in its enhancement of autonomy.

Raz's argument is of great subtlety and profundity, yet it is clear that it is not acceptable to Berlin. For one thing, the intrinsic value of freedom, especially of negative freedom, is in its embodiment of the 'basic freedom' of choice itself—not the rational choice among genuine goods and worthwhile options that is designated by autonomy, but choice *simpliciter*. Such choice may be capricious or whimsical, perverse or unreasonable, quixotic or self-destructive: it remains choice, and, as such, the source of the value of negative freedom (as well as of positive freedom in its genuine conceptions). The danger of Raz's account, from Berlin's viewpoint, is that it confines the value of freedom to the rational adoption of worthwhile ends. This aspect of Raz's liberalism flows almost inexorably from its 'perfectionist' character—that is to say, from the fact that its constitutive morality is one in which an ideal of human character and a conception of the good life are central. For Raz's liberalism, freedom is valuable only in so far as it makes a contribution to the good life, conceived in terms of the rational pursuit of choiceworthy options. Raz's liberalism thereby comes perilously close to the assimilation of freedom with reason or with virtue that Berlin finds to be a fatal flaw in most positive conceptions of freedom.

It may be that conceptions of autonomy may be more or less open or closed, in so far as they allow of more or less genuine choice among goods and forms of life; but it seems that all must link autonomous choice with the rational pursuit of the good. It is the restriction of individual freedom to this form of life that Berlin rejects. Berlin's view cuts against that of Raz in another way. It seems that in Raz the ground of freedom and toleration is in competitive moral pluralism—in the irreducible diversity of incommensurable goods. Some of these goods are constitutively uncombinable;³² they cannot be conjoined in a single person or a single life. A regime of freedom and toleration is mandated, accordingly, since it allows for a diversity of human flourishings wider than any that could be accommodated within one human

life, or within a society governed by a single conception of the good. It is clear that this argument of Raz's touches Berlin's at many points.

It diverges from Berlin's, nevertheless, at the most crucial points. For the pluralism sheltered under a regime of liberty, in Raz's account of it, is a pluralism of *goods*, of valuable forms of life and worthwhile options. It does not—except as a concession to human fallibility—encompass evils, or forms of life of little or no intrinsic worth. In Raz's account, indeed, the value of autonomy appears to be itself problematical. In his view, autonomy is a necessary ingredient of the good forms of life accessible to agents who live in cultural and historical milieux such as our own—milieux that are highly mobile and discursive, which demand skills in deliberative reasoning and reflective choice-making, that are highly changeable, and so on. On Raz's account, then, the value of autonomy is contextual, as an ingredient in the forms of human flourishing that are feasible in certain definite historical and cultural contexts, such as our own. It is not autonomous choice, still less choice itself, that is valuable on Raz's account, but instead the life that is chosen. The autonomous choice of a worthless life, if such there can be, is valueless even though it *is* autonomous. Raz's view of the relations of autonomous choice with the good life seems to be genuinely Aristotelian in that autonomous choice, though it enters into many forms of human flourishing and excellence as a necessary ingredient, has value only when it is a component of a form of life or activity that has itself intrinsic value. To this extent, the value of autonomy, for Raz as for Aristotle, is more instrumental than it is intrinsic.

Berlin does not deny that autonomy is a good, even perhaps an intrinsic good, if a far more problematical one than is dreamt of in Kantian philosophy; but he denies that the goodness of negative freedom is derivative from that of autonomy. This does not mean that the goodness of negative freedom derives from its contribution to want-satisfaction, as I myself supposed when

I endorsed Raz's alternative account of its value as a constituent of autonomy;³³ for Berlin's is the very different view that negative freedom is valuable primarily as a condition of self-creation through choice-making. Berlin's insight here is the profound one that, since an autonomous subject is only one of the sorts of selves that can be created through choice-making, it is self-creation and not autonomy that gives value to negative freedom. Nor is there in Berlin's thought anything akin to the Aristotelian view, to which Raz seems to hold, that the value of choice-making is as a means to human flourishing. The goodness of negative freedom is for Berlin in the fact that it is expressive of choice, and the goodness of choice is in the fact that we are creatures who are part creators of themselves, and part authors of their lives, through the choices they make. Whether this account of the value of negative freedom really grounds a liberal political morality in which the promotion of negative liberty has pre-eminence is an issue to which I shall have to recur again and again. At this stage in my exposition and argument, it is worth observing that the difference between the view of the role of choice in Berlin's account of the value of negative freedom and in Raz's conception of autonomy may seem a fine one, but it remains of crucial importance. For the pluralism that negative freedom licenses is not a pluralism of goods alone: it accommodates a pluralism of the bad and the worthless, in that it affirms the freedom to choose that which is not, in the end, choiceworthy. For Berlin, accordingly, negative freedom has intrinsic value, even when it does not issue in autonomy, or the choice of the good. It has value, even in this case, because it is a condition of self-creation.

Here Berlin's view reveals its affinities with that of the Romantics, along with the idea of *Bildung* deployed by German classical liberals such as von Humboldt, and later adopted by J. S. Mill. It differs from the liberalism of Humboldt and J. S. Mill in that the latter are perfectionist: the value of choice in Humboldt and in Mill derives from its essential role in 'unfolding' the unique

potentialities, or nature, of the individual self. Berlin, however, rejects any 'essentialist' conception of the self in which it has an individual nature, or quiddity,³⁴ which choice discloses. For Berlin, selfhood is a matter of invention rather than of the discovery of an individual nature, and the self-creation that occurs in choice-making is not the embodiment of an essential identity. Berlin's rejection of the idea of an essential individual self that is discovered through choice-making makes his conception of self-creation more radically voluntaristic than that of liberals, such as J. S. Mill, who were influenced by Romanticism. It also makes Berlin's liberalism anti-perfectionist, but without the apparatus of moral neutrality and of Kantian subjecthood that supports anti-perfectionism in the liberalism of Rawls or Dworkin. This is a point to which I will return, but it is worth remarking on here as an area of deep divergence between Berlin and Raz.

Unlike Raz's, Berlin's liberalism is not grounded in the ideal of autonomy, even if he is ready to grant that autonomy is a good. Such autonomy-based liberalism, from Berlin's standpoint, elevates a controversial and questionable ideal of life uncritically and unduly. There are many excellent lives that are not especially autonomous, and which liberal societies can shelter: the life of the nun, of the professional soldier, or the artist passionately devoted to his work, may be lives in which rare and precious goods are embodied, and yet lives that are, in very different ways, far from autonomous. The idea which the 'basic freedom' of choice-making supports is not that of autonomy, but of self-creation, where the self that is created may very well *not* be that of an autonomous agent. To demand of self-creation that it conform with an ideal of rational autonomy is, for Berlin as for other liberals, such as Lomasky,³⁵ an unacceptably and unnecessarily restrictive requirement. It excludes the life of the traditionalist, whose choices confirm a self-identity that has been inherited, as much as those of the mystic, or the playful hedonist, for whom a fixed identity may be a useless encumbrance, and the reflective deliberation that is

involved in autonomous agency a burdensome distraction. Berlin's liberalism is here radically different from the *autonomist liberalism* of which Raz's is the best exemplar. His claim that it is negative liberty, not autonomy, that is the primordial or fundamental sense of freedom, expresses, as much as anything else, his belief that the pluralism it allows of forms of self-creation is more copious and populous than that which is circumscribed by the ideal of rational autonomy. It is at this fundamental point, among others, that Berlin's and Raz's variants of ethical pluralism diverge in their implications for liberty.

There is a further argument against rational autonomy in Berlin which is worth mentioning here, and to which I shall recur. This is his argument that, for a single individual, valued goods and projects may not be reconcilable in a harmonious individuality: the individual may be compelled, in virtue of the constitutive uncombinability of distinct goods, virtues, excellences and projects, to renounce some for the sake of others, in the full knowledge that this renunciation entails an irreparable loss of value, and that no principle can be invoked which could settle the conflict within his life by practical reasoning. The individual agent may be compelled to choose between uncombinable goods and virtues, where the choice is a radical choice between incommensurables. The situation is yet harder than this. The pursuit of the ideal of autonomy, if that involves the increase of self-knowledge, may issue in a weakening or destruction of personal powers that depend for their vitality or existence on repression, on blockages in self-knowledge. This is Berlin's argument in his important and neglected paper, 'From Hope and Fear Set Free',³⁶ in which he conjectures that great artistic gifts—the gifts of Van Gogh or Dostoyevsky, say—may be dependent on flaws in self-knowledge and may be destroyed, or impaired, by an enhancement of self-knowledge. A successful psychoanalyst might have turned Van Gogh into a contented bourgeois; it is unlikely that it would have left him with the power to paint as he did. It is not only that the

ideal of autonomy crowds out other ideals of life, then, but that it may be self-limiting in the individual case as well. The pursuit of autonomy through enhanced self-knowledge may deplete in a person powers and capacities that are centrally constitutive of the self his choices have created, that are necessary for the pursuit of projects by which that self is defined, and which are recognized by others as essential for the accomplishment of intrinsically valuable activities. This must be so, indeed, if our individual natures may contain conflicts and contradictions, such that our personal powers cannot be augmented across the board. It may well be, for example, that profound self-knowledge is in many people an impediment to the vitality required in successful practical action, or to the intensity of vision needed in artistic creativity; it may even be true of many people that the examined life is not worth living. For many people, perhaps for all, the all-round development of the powers of autonomous agency may be an impossibility. It is just this possibility—or, as I would myself say, this commonplace fact—that the ideal of autonomy, like the Millian ideal of rounded or harmonious individuality, neglects, and which Berlin seeks to recall to our attention.

Both Berlin and Raz are value-pluralists in that they assert an irreducible diversity of incommensurable goods. Both affirm that the goods of human life are rivalrous and uncombinable, in many cases, and that not all can be achieved harmoniously, if at all, in a single human life. Berlin's value-pluralism may diverge from Raz's, however, in holding that goods may depend upon, or presuppose, evils, and right actions contain, or entail, wrongs. It is this darker version of value-pluralism that gives Berlin's liberalism its agonistic character and that motivates his ambivalence towards, indeed his resistance to, ideals of rational autonomy. If many forms of life and conceptions of the good are not combinable with autonomous agency, but are nevertheless ways in which human beings may freely engage in self-creation through choice-making, if the pursuit of autonomy even in the individual case may result in an

impoverishment of personal powers when these are undermined by the critical reflexivity and self-knowledge that autonomy presupposes, then autonomy—though it may be an ideal that some find compelling, and which a liberal society should shelter—cannot be the foundation of a liberal political morality. Berlin's liberalism diverges radically from J. S. Mill's, accordingly, in that ideals of autonomy and individuality are neither central nor fundamental in it.

In this respect, though in very few others, Berlin's liberalism is akin to the 'political liberalism'³⁷ of the later Rawls in refusing to ground liberal practice in a comprehensive ideal such as that of autonomy, and diverges from any strongly perfectionist liberalism such as Raz's. It repudiates perfectionism, however, not by reference to a questionable, and (as Raz has shown)³⁸ dubiously coherent ideal of neutrality, of the sort that is found in the liberalism of Rawls and Dworkin, but by pointing to the diversity of worthwhile lives that are not autonomous (but which may yet be self-chosen). Berlin's liberalism is significant in that its anti-perfectionism is *not* grounded in any Kantian idea of the priority of the right over the good of the sort that is found in the work of Rawls and Dworkin. In this connection Berlin is at one with Raz in rejecting any such Kantian view in which deontic considerations are foundational in morality. In particular, he is at one with Raz in the view that political morality is not, and cannot be, rights-based.³⁹ It cannot be rights-based, for Berlin as for Raz, inasmuch as both the grounds and the contents of human rights can only be spelt out in terms of their contribution to the human good. His position differs radically from that of Raz, however, in that it is not founded on any Aristotelian view of flourishing as the bottom line in ethics, and it attaches no central importance to autonomy. Berlin's anti-perfectionism derives instead from his value-pluralism, with its explicit recognition of the diversity of worthwhile lives that goes well beyond those that can be lived by the autonomous subject of liberal theory. Or, to put the same

point in other words, if Berlin's ethical theory is to be cashed out in terms of a conception of human flourishing, it is one that is radically unAristotelian in its assertion of the irreducible plurality and incommensurability of the forms of human flourishing, arising from a thoroughly unAristotelian account of the irreducible plurality of human natures that are constituted through choice-making.⁴⁰

One may say that, for Berlin, the justification of a liberal society cannot be primarily that it harbours liberal individuals (in Gauthier's sense),⁴¹ that is to say, autonomous subjects having all the powers and capacities that autonomy implies, but rather that it permits a far greater variety of forms of self-creation through choice-making. Berlin's preference for negative liberty over autonomy is motivated by this latter fact, together with the fact that negative liberty allows for individual choice among incommensurable evils as well as among incommensurable goods. It allows, more particularly, for choices in which particular combinations of incommensurable goods presuppose, or contain among their preconditions, particular combinations of incommensurable evils. Most especially, the negative conception of liberty 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 other, uncombinable and perhaps incommensurable dimensions of it.⁴² A question arises for Berlin as to why, if he attaches no central importance to autonomy or to the liberal individual, he should seek to privilege negative freedom among ultimate values. If ultimate values are incommensurable, and no ranking among them is uniquely rational, or more rational than any other, what could warrant giving special weight to negative freedom? This is an especially hard question for Berlin, when we consider that self-creation through choice-making occurs in his account of it at the collective as well as the individual level—and when it is noted that the creation of collective identities, even more than

self-creation through individual choice, often involves imposing restraints on negative freedom. It is harder yet for Berlin when we consider that the self that is created and renewed through choice-making may not only not be the autonomous subject or liberal individual; it may be a self whose identity is constituted by participation in a form of life that is not liberal.⁴³ It is accordingly to the value-pluralism that Berlin's conception of negative freedom invokes, and to its complex relations with liberalism in any of the latter's varieties, that I now turn.