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The One, the Some and the Many

Belonging and Recognition in Isaiah Berlin's Conception of Pluralism

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Abstract

Diversity is not just the consequence of liberal societies. It has become a value that is pursued to the extent of justifying inclusive policies that prevent discrimination as well as protective policies that ensure that different cultural inheritances are preserved. These two divergent trends reflect a deeper problem to which the attention of several political thinkers has been drawn: how can one respect diversity while assuring there is enough common ground to enable coexistence within a plural society?

Among such thinkers is Isaiah Berlin, who is well known for setting forth a conception of pluralism whereby there are multiple equally valid ends to life that will inevitably conflict, therefore rendering choice an inescapable feature of human life. This description of the human moral makeup precludes the possibility of a universal hierarchy of values while reckoning that values are universal nonetheless. Moreover, it stresses the existence of a moral minimum that is itself universal. This is to say that there is a set of core values that pervades people of all times, places and ways of life. In other words, while seeking to legitimise moral diversity, Berlin also strives to find a moral common ground within kaleidoscopic humanity.

There are two other not so well known notions Berlin also advances: the 'need to belong' and the 'desire for recognition', which he regards as possibly the most powerful forces in the political domain. These notions are linked to what Berlin considered necessary conditions for human flourishing, although he clearly saw the danger of them becoming malignant forces that could lead to violent conflict between collective identities such as nation or class.

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the concept and relevance Isaiah Berlin attributes to collective identity — expressed in notions such as the "need to belong" or the "desire for recognition" — within his conception of pluralism, especially amid its universalising and diversifying tensions.

Key words: Isaiah Berlin; Identity; Recognition; Pluralism; Universalism.

The Missing Key

An Introduction

The tension between diversity and universality, one of the defining challenges of our time, pervades most of Isaiah Berlin's large body of work. He is mainly known for his views on liberalism and pluralism, enshrined in his most famous essay "Two Concepts of Liberty," with which he inaugurated his Chichele Professorship at All Souls College in Oxford in 1958. He would later remark that all that he wrote since was but a footnote to this essay. In an effort to clarify the meaning of liberty, Berlin devotes special attention to the interconnected needs for belonging and recognition with which that value is too often confused.[1] His considerations on the social and political significance of these needs are key to understand his overall thinking, despite remaining relatively overlooked compared to other aspects of his work. It is the purpose of this essay to appreciate the relevance of these needs in Isaiah Berlin's view of human nature as well as their implications for his wider perspective of humanity from a social, political and historic standpoint. Starting with an overview of Berlin's complex legacy, his specific views on the needs to belong and to be recognised will then be analysed in greater detail, leading up to a reflection on his important insights for contemporary challenges concerning the conflict of individual and collective identities within liberal political frameworks.

Untidy Universe

An Overview of Isaiah Berlin's Thought

Isaiah Berlin's conception of pluralism, widely regarded as his most original contribution to moral philosophy and political theory, is rooted in the belief that the inevitability of choice is an integral feature of human nature. He believes that there are many equally legitimate ends to life that will inevitably conflict within and between individuals, as well as between groups of individuals, rendering the necessity of choice among them "a permanent characteristic of the human predicament."[2] This claim entails the rejection of monism – a view that has long pervaded Western philosophy – whereby there is one, and only one, harmonious hierarchy of values that all of mankind should live by, regardless of time or place. Contrary to what Berlin believed was a "metaphysical chimera,"[3] he wrote,

> If, as I believe, the ends of men are many, and not all of them are in principle compatible with each other, then the possibility of conflict - and of tragedy - can never wholly be eliminated from human life, either personal or social. The necessity of choosing between absolute claims is then an inescapable characteristic of the human condition. [4]

The inexorability of conflict in human life is central to all of Berlin's convictions, namely the one he is most known for other than pluralism – liberalism. For without the political protection of the value of liberty, an essential aspect of the human condition is thwarted – choice. Just as integral to Berlin's conception of human nature are the needs for belonging and recognition, which he believes are as essential as physiological necessities like nourishment, rest or reproduction. So basic Berlin thought these needs to be that he consistently points out how leaving them untended may unleash the most destructive side of mankind – as can the deprivation of any physiological need. In many instances, in fact, he cautioned against the tendency to neglect these needs, even among those who shared his liberal convictions. In "Two Concepts of Liberty," he writes,

> It is the non-recognition of this psychological and political fact (which lurks behind the apparent ambiguity of the term 'liberty') that has, perhaps, blinded some contemporary liberals to the world in which they live. Their plea is clear, their cause is just. But they do not allow for the variety of basic human needs. Nor yet for the ingenuity with which men can prove to their own satisfaction that the road to one ideal also leads to its contrary.[5]

Belonging and recognition are deeply intertwined needs, yet distinct they remain. Their difference will soon merit specific attention, but for the time being one could roughly say that the former consists of a sense of membership to a group with which one naturally shares its defining characteristics; whereas the latter is the process through which one feels one's existence confirmed by having one's similarities or differences with others either merely acknowledged or rather regarded as equal or superior to one's recogniser. An individual can thus have his sense of belonging to a group perfectly satisfied while his desire for recognition remains unfulfilled, and vice versa.

When Berlin speaks of these needs as the force behind some of the most powerful political movements, he is mostly speaking of the desire for recognition. "This desire is surely one of the greatest forces that move human history," he writes. Furthermore, he believes "that the craving for recognition has grown to be more powerful than any force abroad today." But even though he warns this desire "may take hideous forms," he points out that it "is not in itself either unnatural or repulsive

as a feeling."[6] The needs in question are of course related to the social side of human life, and they reveal a great deal about how people relate to each other and define their personal identities with reference to collective identities. Moreover, the many combinations of ultimate and conflicting ends to life are expressed in the multiple identity layers that make up the individual self; as well as the collective identities in which many individuals recognise parts of themselves. In one of Berlin's most comprehensive passages about pluralism, he writes,

> There are many objective ends, ultimate values, some incompatible with others, pursued by different societies at various times, or by different groups in the same society, by entire classes or Churches or races, or by particular individuals within them, any of which may find itself subject to conflicting claims of uncombinable, yet equally ultimate and objective ends. Incompatible these ends may be; but their variety cannot be unlimited, for *the nature of men*, however various and subject to change, *must possess some generic character if it is to be called human at all*.[7]

This passage exemplifies the tension between diversity and universality that runs through Berlin's writings. He acknowledges the moral and identity diversity expressed in the uniqueness of each individual and embodied in a myriad of groups. On the other hand, he notes that there is a "generic character" to human nature for it "to be called human at all." If each group possesses a characteristic or set of characteristics that are shared by all its different members, then humanity is itself a group based on the elements that are common to all human beings. What is common is what is universal, and is made evident by the human ability to communicate with, or simply understand, other human beings. "Intercommunication between cultures in time and space is only possible because what makes men human is common to them, and acts as a bridge between them,"[8] observes Berlin. It is in this sense that he regards values as universal, even though there is no universal hierarchy of values. There can be no such harmonious ranking because values conflict and cannot be pursued by all people in all times and places.

> Justice has always been a human ideal, but it is not fully compatible with mercy. Creative imagination and spontaneity, splendid in themselves, cannot be fully reconciled with the need for planning, organization, careful and responsible calculation. Knowledge, the pursuit of truth—the noblest of aims—cannot be fully reconciled with the happiness or the freedom that men desire.[9]

However, the inability to pursue every value does not preclude the possibility of any human recognising it. Indeed, if people could know only the values they pursue, they could hardly have chosen to do so, since the very act of choice presupposes the awareness of unchosen alternatives. For Berlin, values are universal because they are universally intelligible, not universally pursued. But "a man to whom it literally makes no difference whether he kicks a pebble or kills his family"[10] is outside human understanding, beyond what Berlin called the "human horizon." This frontier of moral intelligibility merely encompasses all the conceptions of the good that are knowable to man. Berlin did, however, speak of universality in a more restrictive sense when referring to "a minimum of shared values" without which "no decent societies can survive."[11] The difference between these two dimensions of universality is marked by what is possibly valuable and what is necessarily valuable to each person for a society to function. Thus, Berlin consistently grounds human diversity and human universality within a range of several degrees, which extend from a common centre to a kaleidoscopic periphery of conceptions of the good.

As a historian of ideas, Berlin devotes a considerable part of his writings to the dominant ideas and thinkers of both the Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment movements, both of which he is equally indebted to. Indeed, the duality between universality and diversity, present in Berlin's work just as much as it is in contemporary awareness, is an inheritance from these movements. Enlightenment ideals arose out of an exhilarating faith in the powers of knowledge and reason to not just rid humanity of the obscurity of unquestioned beliefs, superstitions and ignorance but of its constant state of conflict as well. From it spawned harmonising and universalising ambitions aimed at neutralising inconsistencies and divergences in man's understanding of both nature and himself. It was in the face of this dry, mechanistic and homogenising tendency, however, that a set of antithetical values arose as "an inverted form of the same phenomenon."[12]

German Romanticism, the part of the Counter-Enlightenment Berlin is most interested in, represents a seismic shift in Western thought. "[T]he contribution of the wild German spirit," writes Berlin, "broke like a fresh wind into the airless prison of the French Enlightenment."[13] Values like reason, certainty, coherence, perfection, symmetry and harmony, were replaced by values such as authenticity, sincerity, uniqueness, passion, inspiration, diversity and even unconformity – all "original conceptions" that "transformed our world" and "speak to us still."[14] The scientist was replaced by the artistic creator, the professional sage by the Romantic hero, who was admired not for the accuracy of his ideals, but for his courage to see them through no matter what or who stood in his way. Conformity was the new sin. Rebelliousness, revolt, even destruction were now virtues.

Berlin was committed to the Enlightenment ideals of reason, knowledge and tolerance while being wary of the movement's universalising ambitions. He appreciated German Romanticism because of its critique of the French *lumières* as well as of their elevation of diversity and uniqueness as values. Romanticism first erupted in the arts, literature and the humanities as a whole, bringing upon them a "life-giving effect." The problem, Berlin reckons, came when "the tidal wave of feeling rose above its banks, and overflowed into the neighbouring provinces of politics and social life with literally devastating results." The extreme recklessness that the movement inspired would dangerously arm nations who, if in anyway felt humiliated or inferior to others, would stop at nothing to be recognised and respected. As Berlin put it,

> If values are not found but made, if what is true of the arts (and perhaps only of the arts) applies more widely in the field of human relations, then each inventor must seek to realise his own invention, each visionary impose his own vision, each nation its own goal, each civilization its own values. Hence the war of all against all, and the end of European unity.[15]

Such was the disruption that the Romantic movement left in its wake that its aftershocks are still being felt today. The value of diversity has since become crystallised in the Western mind-set along with the correlated notions of collective identity, the needs to belong and to be recognised. These notions, to be sure, have always been present in Western political thought. But since this paradigm shift they have been infused with a new romantic, sometimes radical, tenor – the most flagrant example of which is nationalism.

Romanticism, in its inflamed state, would culminate in the atrocious and haunting experiences of the two World Wars. Because of this, Berlin believed Europe, possibly the whole of humanity, would forever be reminded of the universal validity of the moral principles that preceded this insane chapter of its history. "The disintegrating influence of Romanticism, . . . seems, in Western Europe at least, to have spent itself. The forces that make for stability and reason are beginning to reassert themselves," Berlin writes. What is universal was made evident by the shared horror at what happened when it was forgotten:

> [W]e cannot conceive of getting these universal principles or rules repealed or altered; in other words, we treat them not as something that we, or our forefathers, freely choose to adopt, but rather as *presuppositions* of being human at all, *of living in a common world with others*, *of recognising them, and being ourselves recognised, as persons*. Because these rules were flouted, we have been forced to become conscious of them.
>
> This is a kind of return to the ancient notion of natural law, but, for some of us, in empirical dress – no longer based on theological or metaphysical foundations. [W]e cannot help accepting these basic principles because we are human, as we cannot help (if we are normal) seeking warmth rather than cold, truth rather than falsehood, to be recognised by others for what we are rather than to be ignored or misunderstood.[16]

After the back and forth between the extremes of universalism and relativism experienced throughout the last two hundred years, Berlin detects a compromise between an appreciation for variety as well as for shared fundamental principles that became universally recognised by all human beings as such. He integrates these notions and their manifestations in his wider pluralistic view of morality and liberalism, both of which emerge out of an effort to reconcile what is unique and universal, diverse and common, in human nature. Since he regards conflict as inevitable, he believes liberal institutions to be the appropriate means to the modest aim of a precarious equilibrium – a way towards mild, instead of violent, conflict. He demonstrates how oppression either robs people of their humanity, since choice is an essential feature of the human predicament, or causes them to manifest it in its fullest by overturning the power that oppresses them. Insomuch as non-belonging and non-recognition may be perceived as forms of oppression, they are latent forces of revolt that even the most well-meaning ruling power must be wary of. The following chapter will modestly attempt to shed light on the nature and possible ramifications of these forces.

Two Concepts of Identity

Belonging and Recognition as Conditions for Human Existence

The need to belong is usually, if not always, mentioned by Berlin in tandem with the desire for recognition. His considerations about these needs figure mostly in his writings about nationalism. Like Georg Friedrich Hegel, Berlin considered nationalism to stem from a nation's desire for recognition. But the nation is just one kind of group in which "the craving for recognition" manifests. "This protean entity," writes Berlin, "takes many overlapping and interacting forms: individual and collective, moral, social and political. Nevertheless, it preserves its identity in all its incarnations."[17] The focus of this study is on the concepts of belonging and recognition *per se*, of which nationalism is just one manifestation, albeit the most glaring. Since it is when writing about nationalism that Berlin dedicates most thought to these concepts, our analysis will begin by considering his views on this form of quest for recognition, before examining the concepts' specific implications for the moral, social and political tapestry of mankind.

For Berlin, nationalism "in all its guises," is characterised by four beliefs:

i. in the overriding need to belong to a nation;
ii. in the organic relationships of all the elements that constitute a nation;
iii. in the value of our own simply because it is ours;
iv. and finally, faced by rival contenders for authority or loyalty, in the supremacy of its claims.[18]

Berlin's views on nationalism are very nuanced, so much so that, as notes David Miller, the above-mentioned beliefs are not always present in all of them. In fact, Miller teases out many possible combinations that result in different forms of nationalism. Although these categories fall out of the scope of this analysis, some considerations are worth noting. First, Berlin implicitly distinguishes between a "malignant" and a "benign" form of nationalism, evident in the "contrast he draws between nationalism proper and 'the consciousness of national unity,' the latter being the benign version,"[19] as Miller points out. Before addressing the benign form, Berlin usually explains the malignant one by use of the analogy of a "bent twig," which he attributes to Friedrich Schiller. Just like a twig that is bent by a deforming force has the potential to swing back at it uncontrollably, so too can groups react furiously and destructively towards their perceived oppressor for feeling ignored,

repressed or humiliated – a form of "revenge for their insulted humanity."[20] A "wounded pride" or a "sense of collective injustice"[21] alone are not enough for the twig to be bent to its limit, however. One other condition must be met to trigger its backlash: "a new vision of life with which the wounded society, or the classes or groups which have been displaced by political and social change, can identify themselves, around which they can gather an attempt to restore their collective life."[22]

Fascism or National Socialism were the most extreme expressions of this kind of malignant nationalism, so horrible that it is widely believed they will never be revived. Berlin not only spoke of the ways in which the needs for belonging and recognition led to the destructive nationalist movements that tarnished the first half of the twentieth century; he also described the minority and independence movements that would mark the other half of that century and continue well into this one. This brings us to our second point.

> This demand to be treated as human and as equal is at the base of both the social and the national revolutions of our time: it represents the modern form of the cry for recognition – violent, dangerous, but valuable and just. Recognition is demanded by individuals, by groups, by classes, by nations, by States, by vast conglomerations of mankind united by a common feeling of grievance against those who (they rightly or wrongly suppose) have wounded or humiliated them, have denied them the minimum demanded by human dignity, have caused, or tried to cause, them to fall in their own estimation in a manner that they cannot tolerate. The nationalism of the last two hundred years is shot through with this feeling. Nationalism is the direct product of wounds inflicted on a sense of common nationhood, or common race or culture.[23]

Berlin thought that "in our modern age, nationalism is not resurgent; it never died. Neither did racism. They are the most powerful movements in the world today, cutting across many social systems."[24] He believed, in fact, that this "worldwide phenomenon" was present in newly established States as much as and in minority populations within older ones. He writes in 1991,

> This kind of nationalism is, perhaps, as much a form of social or class resistance as of purely national self-assertion, creating a mood in which men prefer to be ordered about, even if this entails ill-treatment, by members of their own faith or nation or class, to tutelage, however benevolent, on the part of ultimately patronising superiors from foreign land or alien class or milieu.[25]

But there is a benign form of nationalism that Berlin was a staunch supporter of. So much so that David Miller believes that "Berlin has some claim to be considered the founding father of contemporary liberal nationalism, that strand of liberal thought that tries to reconcile liberal freedoms with the value of national belonging and national self-determination."[26] Berlin's views on nationalism are deeply inspired by the works of Giambattista Vico and Johann Gottfried von Herder, who Berlin regarded as "the prophets of variety." These authors advanced a peaceful perspective of culture and nationhood, and Berlin's views on pluralism owe their contributions a considerable debt. "In Herder's universe," says Berlin, "you didn't need a sun. His cultures were not planets, but stars that didn't collide."[27] He was a critic more of the threats to diversity, namely of the universalising ambitions that sprang from the Enlightenment, than he was of the potential rivalry and eventual violence that could originate from difference.

Berlin believed Herder was the first "who drew wide attention to the proposition that among the most elementary of human needs – as basic as those for food, shelter, security, procreation, communication – is the need to belong."[28] This need is not simply a matter of being a member of a group, but to have part of one's identity mirrored in it, to recognise oneself in the shared elements that form the groups' defining characteristics such as "soil, language, common memories, and customs."[29] Belonging, for Herder, was not just a matter of being surrounded by others, but of being effortlessly understood by them because of the similarities that one is hardly conscious of precisely because they are granted.

Part of the Jewish minority himself, Berlin knew first-hand what this longing felt like. He acknowledged that "all that I have been and done and thought is indelibly English," for he lived most of his life as a Latvian exile in Britain, a country where he not only felt welcome, but where he also excelled, served and was celebrated. Yet, as a Jew, he was painfully aware of a sense of always being a stranger in it. He reflects,

> When men complain of loneliness, what they mean is that nobody understands what they are saying. To be understood is to share a common past, common feelings and language, common assumptions, the possibility of intimate communication – in short, to share common forms of life.[30]

When one does not share in the communal aspects of a society in which one lives, no matter how welcoming it is, one is perpetually self-conscious of their absence. For this reason, Berlin detects "three principal categories of assimilated Jews, enjoying varying degrees of discomfort about the abnormality of their status:"[31] those who act like their differences do not exist; those who acknowledge and affirm, excessively at times, that they are proud of their differences; and those who timidly and respectfully acknowledge their differences without ever mentioning them, and considering it an act of discrimination to do so. He explains how their excessive awareness of the traits of the dominant culture in which they strive to integrate, even if it leads them to be its "best friends, its champions and its prophets,"[32] is precisely evidence of how they never cease to be strangers. He wonders whether "the differences between him and other members of (his society) analogous to other, more familiar differences which divide classes, professions, churches and other social groups, within what they are normally regarded as single social wholes – states, nations, countries?"[33]

If there is on one hand a need to naturally blend in with others, there is also a need to be contrasted with them. Herein lies the double-edged need for recognition: to see oneself in the other as well as distinct from the other. Belonging and recognition are thus two different yet deeply intertwined needs. The former consists of an umbilical connection to a wider

group that fosters a sense of comfort and helps define one's identity, while the latter is the process through which one actually identifies one's own *self* in the similarities and differences seen in others.

> It is not only that my material life depends upon interaction with other men, or that I am what I am as a result of social forces, but that some, perhaps all, of my ideas about myself, in particular my sense of my own moral and social identity, are intelligible only in terms of the social network in which I am . . . an element.[34]

Belonging is experienced solely by the individual who feels effortlessly connected to a wider group, whereas recognition requires the participation of two or more people: the individual who craves recognition and at least one other who recognises him. These two needs, then, are vehicles through which the tension between diversity and universality is present in human nature, from the individual to the collective. Identity traits are the common elements that enable human beings to feel they belong to a wider group through the process of recognition by both members and outsiders. These common elements constitute what is universal for the members of each group. What is specific of its members, i.e. different, is what accounts for the diversity within that universe. Individuals never see themselves entirely in one group. Their identities are unique, forged from the particular circumstances in which they develop, combining a variety of elements that are mirrored in different groups. A single person, then, will identify on the bases of culture and nation, but also of creed, race, age, gender, sexuality, profession, class, political affiliation, interests and so on. Throughout all these layers are varying levels of universality and diversity, with corresponding degrees of cohesion and conflict.

Membership is thus a factor for the personal identity as much as it is for the group identity. A person's self is a complex combination of facets which are not reflected in one, but across many groups. And groups are, of course, the result of identifiable features that are common to many individuals. There is, so to speak, an individual and collective self. The former brings together different elements that are shared with different groups, while the latter brings together the common elements shared by many individual selves. In this sense, the individual identity tends to be more diverse than the collective self, which exists only because of what is common or universal between its members. It is across this multi-layered assortment of *Is* and *wes* ("I" and "we" in the plural) that a sense of existence is fostered – "they understand me, as I understand them; and this understanding creates within me the sense of being somebody in the world,"[35] Berlin explains. Seeing parts of oneself mirrored in others is a confirmation of one's existence, and helps define one's identity.

Hence, individuals and groups are not static, but dynamic, entities – both pervaded by a plurality of conflicting ends through which they chart their particular identities. This is why the importance of belonging and recognition in Berlin's conception of human nature only partially approximates him to communitarian critics of liberalism such as Michael Sandel, Charles Taylor and Michael Walzer. As notes John Gray, "he is able to reject both the abstract individualism of liberal rationalism and the conceptions of organic social unity that distinguish radical critics of liberalism of both the Left and the Right," defending, at best, a sort of "communitarian liberalism."[36] Indeed Berlin was inspired by Romantic ideas such as those of variety, uniqueness and authenticity but did not go as far as believing that individuals are the sole creators of their identities and moral outlooks. A great deal of what one believes and is is a matter of fate. Yet that does not preclude the possibility, indeed the inevitability, of choice. Each person is the receptacle of multiple identities and cultural inheritances, and travels a path that is unique in its combination of circumstance and experience. Just for the sheer fact that different aspects of this inner makeup will conflict, the individual is conscious of the alternative ends he is presented with, and can even conceive of others with which he is not by an act of imagination. It is in this sense that Berlin believed people to be the choosers of their own lives, and defended the value of freedom as crucial to a decent society.

Belonging and recognition tie our identities to our surroundings, which bequeath us with our language, habits, traditions and beliefs and without which we could scarcely think of who we are. A threat to any aspect of society to which a person is tied is thus a threat to a part of that person's very existence. The more vital that part of oneself is, the more visceral the reaction to any force that is perceived as repressive towards it. If in some way left unfulfilled, these needs are likely to become a source of oppression, even to themselves. For this reason, Berlin was dedicated not only to demonstrate why these needs are basic and legitimate, but to how they may be a source of destruction to all other esteemed aspects of life – namely liberty, in the name of which they often emerge.

The Precarious Equilibrium

Contemporary Challenges

Isaiah Berlin once defined political theory as "an aspect of thought (and sometimes feeling) about men's relationships to each other and to their institutions, in terms of purposes and scales of value which themselves alter as a result of historical circumstances of varying types."[37] He saw himself not as a theorist, however, but as an historian of ideas – an interpreter of the currents of thought that shaped the last two hundred years of western history. He sought to bring to light the many nuances of human existence rather than trying to make them fit together in a perfect systematic whole – the kind endeavour of which he tended to be, in any case, sceptical. Indeed, the denial of such universal and harmonious conceptions is central to his convictions. If there is one "single insight with special staying-power" in all of Berlin's legacy, it is likely to be "that there can be no universal right set of principles by which we should live, and that all attempts to discover a unique solution to

the moral questions that face mankind are based on a profound mistake about the nature of human values,"[38] his editor, Henry Hardy, points out.

His views hinge on an empirical assessment of human nature that accepts the inevitability of choice among conflicting moral ends; acknowledges its propensity for creation as well as destruction; and takes into account its basic needs, wants and sentiments – among which the need to belong and the yearning for recognition figure prominently.

Five main conclusions follow from this study thus far. First, these needs are essential features of the human condition. They are not principles or postulates, good or bad, right or wrong. They are simply psychological and political facts that can either be accepted or ignored at one's peril. Second, each of these needs can hardly make sense without the other, at least for Berlin. Belonging is a need for a subliminal connection to a wider group through shared characteristics, institutions and practices, that when left unfulfilled can lead to an unshakable feeling of self-consciousness in those who feel alien to a community. Recognition, on the other hand, is a process of identification of one person by another person or group, based on their similarities or differences. These two needs are deeply intertwined. Third, so fundamental the needs to belong and be recognised are to human existence that, like physiological needs, they can occasion the most furious of revolts when threatened – like a "bent twig" that backlashes uncontrollably against its deforming force. This sort of retaliation occurs when two conditions are met: (1) a perception of humiliation, repression or neglect; and (2) a narrative that articulates the lack of recognition and offers a vision that encourages its correction. Fourth, nationalism, in its malignant guise (different from the benign form of nationalism that Berlin endorses), is just one form in which a "bent twig" reaction can take place. This "protean entity" can incarnate in other groups that feel a threat to their common identity as a church, class, profession, party or race, for instance. Berlin also noted that nationalism was much alive today in independence and minority movements across the world. Fifth, and finally, Berlin cautioned about the tendency to underestimate the potential turmoil that these sentiments can unleash. These warnings are particularly striking given the events of 2016 – a year that has revealed an unforeseen wave of populism, isolationism and, some say, new nationalism. "The Search for Status," the sixth section of Berlin's emblematic essay "Two Concepts of Liberty," ends precisely with these already mentioned words, which we now recall:

> All this has little to do with Mill's notion of liberty as limited only by the danger of doing harm to others. It is the non-recognition of this psychological and political fact (which lurks behind the apparent ambiguity of the term 'liberty') that has, perhaps, blinded some contemporary liberals to the world in which they live. Their plea is clear, their cause is just. But they do not allow for the variety of basic human needs. Nor yet for the ingenuity with which men can prove to their own satisfaction that the road to one ideal also leads to its contrary.[39]

Berlin often expressed perplexity at the fact that nineteenth century thinkers such as Saint-Simon and Karl Marx could make predictions, accurate or inaccurate, about the impact of technology on society, yet they never expected that the nationalist sentiment they were aware of in their time could grow into a monstrous threat to liberal democracy in the following century. "What, I think, was ignored was," writes Berlin,

> That the destruction of traditional hierarchies and orders of social life, in which men's loyalties were deeply involved, by the centralisation and bureaucratic 'rationalisation' which industrial progress required and generated, deprived great numbers of social and emotional security, produced the notorious phenomena of alienation, spiritual homelessness and growing anomie, and needed the creation, by deliberate social policy, of psychological equivalents for the lost cultural, political, religious values on which the older order rested.[40]

Similarly, today, a generalised feeling of surprise at the rise of a populist tide has taken hold of the Western hemisphere. Never has the world been so prosperous, never was there so little war or terrorism, never did people live so well and for so long. The European continent, having endured a long history of hostility and war among its peoples, has never experienced such a long period of wealth, openness and peace. Indeed, having been the stage of the two most devastating wars the world had ever seen until recently, it entered a period of unification built upon principles that are believed to have been confirmed as universal after the horrors of the Holocaust. The European Union is the most comprehensive of international projects within a host of international organisations that have sprouted throughout the world precisely to assure that different states can pursue their common interests of security as well as economic and financial stability on one hand; and humanitarian purposes on the other. Just like in the nineteenth century, there has been an awareness of a growing discontent towards the international order and the globalising effect of technological progress. Yet, ruling elites tend to disregard the latent force of this unsatisfied yearning for recognition, because basic economic and security interests have never been as assured as today. But as Berlin pointed out,

> In the less unjust orders of our time it is no longer economic insecurity or political impotence that oppresses the imaginations of many young people in the West today, but a sense of the ambivalence of their social status – doubts about where they belong, and where they wish or deserve to belong. In short, they suffer from an insufficient recognition.
>
> Such people may be prosperous, take an interest in their work, realise that the Welfare State protects their basic interests, yet they do not feel recognised. Recognised by whom? By the 'top people', by the ruling class. . . . (By) a group of persons in their society who, without necessarily being in political control, nevertheless set the tone: socially or culturally or intellectually.[41]

This passage illustrates how the needs to belong and to be recognised are as basic as the needs for economic and physical security. To be unrecognised by a distant elite**,** embodied both in the government and the corporate world, instils a sense of being uncared for, forgotten, even when that elite has succeeded in assuring so many of people's interests. Berlin, however,

saw this trend's warning signs at the end of the last century. Speaking of a "worldwide revolt" that he believed was just beginning, he noticed that,

> It springs from the feeling that human rights, rooted in the sense of human beings as specifically human, that is as individuated, as possessing wills, sentiments, beliefs, ideals, ways of living of their own, *have been lost sight of in the 'global' calculations* and vast extrapolations which guide the plans of policy-planners and executives in the gigantic operations in which governments, corporations and interlocking elites of various kinds are engaged. Quantitative computations cannot but ignore the specific wishes and hopes and fears and goals of individual human beings. . . . They (the young) wish to be and do something, and not merely to be acted upon, or for, or on behalf of. They *demand recognition* of their dignity as human beings. *They do not wish to be* reduced to human material, to being *counters in a game played by others, even when it is played, at least in part, for the benefit of these counters themselves.* A revolt breaks out at all levels. [42]

These words are staggeringly reminiscent of the populist rhetoric that today feeds on the perception of distant, oblivious and corrupt governing elites of both the EU and Washington institutions. In other words, on the idea of a ruling elite that does not "recognise" those in whose name it governs. In light of the stunning events that took place in 2016 – namely the United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union; and the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States – Berlin's cautionary words are particularly striking, in the very least, for pointing out the lack of awareness of this powerful factor, now obvious in the astonishment felt by the so-called establishment thinkers who did not foresee any of those results. The general feeling is that there is some undetected trend that has been flying under the radar. A motivation to break with the path the West was believed to be on, however egregious their chosen alternative appears to be. As analysts and pundits try to make sense of this unpredicted mood swing, they generally agree on at least one thing – it is an anti-globalist trend. The power of nation-states seems to have become eroded as technology has made territorial borders less relevant and curtailed employment, as big corporations seem to decide the economic fate of many countries, and as supranational organisms appear to be stagnant and reluctant to satisfying competing national or regional interests. If local interests are felt as neglected, or as discarded in the name of other local interests – such as those of big cosmopolitan cities – unique parts of humanity will fear and resist being swept away by an homogenising current.

Berlin's forewarning stems straight from the core of the tension mentioned at the outset of this essay – the tension between diversity and universality. Humanity oscillates between these two poles because they express two fundamental sides of human nature: the inevitability of choice and the need to share common ground with others. It is, in other words, a tension between individuality and sociability. When there is too much disparity among people, and therefore very little points of contact among them, the ever-present quality of conflict becomes harder to manage, threatening the social stability that is just as fundamental for human survival. The danger of disruption prompts a desire to encounter what is universally shared among a community, if not humanity at large, in order to assure its reliability. This is why most doctrines, be they religious, philosophical or political, tend to have a monistic tenor. But universalising enterprises that aspire to eliminate all disparities and inconsistencies tend to provoke the opposite of what they seek to avoid – conflict. Even worse, in an attempt to eliminate mild conflict, they end up stirring violent conflict instead.

Because to universalise is to extinguish difference, that which is unique in all singular or collective selves that do not fit the universal pattern will be lost. "Universalism, by reducing everything to the lowest common denominator which applies to all men at all times, drain(s) both lives and ideals of that specific content which alone gave them point,"[43] writes Berlin. A strong sense of self or group consciousness, however, will eventually burst under the perceived oppressive rule. It will do so with force equal or superior to its repressive power. And so what seeks to harmonise sows revolt instead. This revolt, in turn, will seek to liberate, but will likely oppress as well. "No doubt to do entirely as one likes could destroy not only one's neighbours but oneself. Freedom is only one value among others, and cannot be realised without rules and limits. But in the hour of revolt this is inevitably forgotten,"[44] Berlin observed. A delicate balance between diversity and universality is therefore a perpetual challenge that takes many forms throughout human history. A precarious equilibrium can only be safeguarded if basic necessities, among which are the need to belong and the desire for recognition, are acknowledged and tended to.

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[1] In "Two Concepts of Liberty," Berlin dedicates Section VI, entitled "The Search for Status," to this clarification.
[2] Berlin, I. *Liberty*, 43.
[3] Ibid, 213.
[4] Ibid, 214.
[5] Ibid, 208.
[6] Berlin, I., *The Sense of Reality*, 252.
[7] Berlin, I., *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, 83. (Italics added.)

[8] Ibid, 11.
[9] Berlin, I., "A Message to the 21st Century."
[10] Berlin, I., *Concepts and Categories*, 217.
[11] Gardels, N., "Two Concepts of Nationalism: An Interview with Isaiah Berlin."
[12] Berlin, I., *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, 204.
[13] Ibid, 208.
[14] Berlin, I., *Political Ideas in the Romantic Age*, 20.
[15] Berlin, I., *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, 207.
[16] Ibid, 216–217.
[17] Berlin, I., *The Sense of Reality*, 252.
[18] Berlin, I., *Against the Current*, 345. (Numeration added.)
[19] Miller, D., "Crooked Timber or Bent Twig? Isaiah Berlin's Nationalism," 102.
[20] Berlin, I., *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, 278.
[21] Ibid, 268.
[22] Berlin, I., *Against the Current*, 349.
[23] Berlin, I., *The Sense of Reality,* 256.
[24] Gardels, N., "Two Concepts of Nationalism: An Interview with Isaiah Berlin."
[25] Berlin, I., *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, 268.
[26] Miller, D., "Crooked Timber or Bent Twig? Isaiah Berlin's Nationalism," 102-103.
[27] Gardels, N., "Two Concepts of Nationalism: An Interview with Isaiah Berlin."
[28] Berlin, I., *Against the Current,* 257.
[29] Gardels, N., "Two Concepts of Nationalism: An Interview with Isaiah Berlin."
[30] Berlin, I., *Personal Impressions*, 438.
[31] Berlin, I., *The Power of Ideas*, 214.
[32] Ibid, 203.
[33] Berlin, I., *Against the Current,* 254–255.
[34] Berlin, I., *Liberty,* 201.
[35] Ibid. 203.
[36] Gray, J., *Isaiah Berlin*, 143.
[37] Berlin, I. *Political Ideas in the Romantic Age*, 14.
[38] Hardy, H., "Isaiah Berlin's Key Idea."
[39] Berlin, I., *Liberty,* 208.
[40] Berlin, I., *Against the Current,* 351–352.
[41] Berlin, I., *The Sense of Reality,* 252–253.
[42] Berlin, I., *The Crooked Timber of Humanity,* 273–274. (Italics added.)
[43] Ibid*,* 260.
[44] Ibid, 275.

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