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The Philosophy of History: A Value-pluralist Response

Abstract: Vittorio Hösle's evaluation of the Soviet Revolution on the ground of the philosophy of history can be usefully examined from the value-pluralist perspective of Isaiah Berlin. Although Berlin would agree with most of Hösle's judgements on the Revolution, he would do so for very different reasons. Most importantly, Berlin would not accept the teleology that lies at the heart of the philosophy of history. For Berlin, the notion of a human *telos* to be realized at the end of history is a species of moral monism, and so falsified, indeed rendered incoherent, by the deeply pluralist reality of human values. However, Berlin's pluralism also seems to present a problem for the justification of liberalism, and I consider a range of responses to this difficulty.

Keywords: Vittorio Hösle, Soviet Revolution, ethical evaluation, philosophy of history, value pluralism, Isaiah Berlin, liberalism

1 Introduction

In his stimulating and erudite article Vittorio Hösle argues that the Soviet Revolution can be evaluated in accordance with the norms of 'the philosophy of history'. I take this to be the Hegelian view that history has a progressive shape, culminating in the realization of the human *telos*. In its Marxist variant this is also the philosophy of the Soviet Revolution itself. From the perspective of the philosophy of history, Hösle argues, the Soviet Revolution was largely unjustified but did possess some redeeming features.

I suggest that Hösle's approach may be fruitfully compared with that of Isaiah Berlin. Although Berlin would agree with most of Hösle's judgements on the Soviet Revolution, he would do so for very different reasons. Most importantly, Berlin would not accept the teleology that lies at the heart of the philosophy of history. For Berlin, the notion of a human *telos* to be realized at the end of history is a species of moral monism, and so falsified, indeed rendered incoherent, by the deeply pluralist reality of human values.

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I begin by evaluating Hösle's philosophy of history from the perspective of Berlin's value pluralism, emphasizing the latter's rejection of teleology on the ground of monism. In the second section I compare the two thinkers' responses to the Soviet Revolution, which I shall argue are similar but with qualifications concerning positive liberty and the developing world. A third section considers the extent to which the rival frameworks, the philosophy of history and value pluralism, can provide foundations for the defence of liberalism. I shall be especially concerned with accounts of how liberalism may be given a pluralist basis.

2 The Philosophy of History and Value Pluralism

The principal point of contrast between Berlin and Hösle is that the former would reject the latter's philosophy of history. For Berlin, any standard for normative judgement that relies on the realization of the human *telos* at the end of history is refuted by the ultimate reality of value pluralism. In this respect Hösle's philosophy of history is of a piece with the intellectual basis of his critical target, the Soviet Revolution.

In his article, Hösle provides his most substantial description of the philosophy of history in the course of his sympathetic account of Rosenstock-Huessy. That thinker "follows Hegel in the assumption that despite all the breaks in history, caused by revolutions, there is a hidden continuity" (Hösle 2017, 202). This continuity takes the form of "an evolution toward a goal—toward what we are and at the same time toward what we ought to be". The goal of history is "the secret *telos*". At its simplest, as in Aristotle, the idea of a human *telos* is the idea of what is most essential or valuable in human development. As an ethical ideal it implies that the full development of the best human potentialities is desirable, and that those potentialities constitute ideals that measure our progress. In the historicized version presented by Hegel, Marx and Rosentsock-Huessy, the human *telos* is the end towards which all human development is tending, albeit by dialectical zigzags rather than a linear smoothness. Since the historical telos is the culmination of human development, it not only makes sense of the pattern of that development but also constitutes the ultimate ethical standard for human conduct: both what we are and what we ought to be.

Berlin's principal objection to this picture is that it implies a monist conception of morality, which is falsified by value pluralism.[1] Moral monism, in Berlin's usage, is the notion that all ethical questions can be answered by a single, correct formula—"a final solution" (Berlin 2002, 212). The idea of the *telos* at the end of history is one version of this: all genuine human values will finally be realized— or at least can in principle be realized—harmonizing with one another to produce the ultimate answer to our problems. All apparent conflicts of value will melt away because people will finally see how such apparent conflicts can be resolved at a higher level of understanding. Only the solutions will be left, leaving "no loss of value on the way" (Williams 1979, 221). The resulting contoured values will fit together like a "cosmic jigsaw puzzle" (2013d, 6). The teleological vision is a monist vision of a single, perfectly coherent ethical life.

There are two major problems with this vision, in Berlin's view. First, it is a dangerous idea. The end of history is a utopian conception in which all genuine goods are realized, so what costs may not justifiably be paid in order to get there? "To make such an omelette, there is surely no limit to the number of eggs that should be broken." (16) Hösle makes this point himself when he is judging the Soviet revolutionaries—"ends do not matter that much, if people feel entitled by them to use whatever means they want" (Hösle 2017, 217)—but the same logic applies to his own Hegelian position.

Second, the idea of the realization of the human *telos* at the end of history is, for Berlin, nonsensical. "The notion of the perfect whole, the ultimate solution, in which all goods things coexist, seems to me to be not merely unattainable— that is a truism—but conceptually incoherent." (Berlin 2013d, 13) In part this is because values conflict. "Some among the Great Goods cannot live together. That is a conceptual truth. We are doomed to choose, and every choice may entail an irreparable loss." (Berlin 2013d, 14) Some valuable forms of life are inconsistent with others, not just contingently, as for example when one does not have enough time to go to the library and the cinema on the same day, but intrinsically—for example, the benefits and costs of single and married life.

But the problem goes deeper than conflict. A monist thinker could acknowledge value conflict but still assert that all such conflicts can be resolved according to a single correct formula. The heart of Berlin's value pluralism is the idea that there is no such formula: the most fundamental human goods—liberty, equality, justice, say—are 'incommensurable' with one another, meaning that each pos-

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[1] References to value pluralism are scattered throughout Berlin's work, but the principal texts are Berlin 2002; 2013a; b; d; e; Berlin/Williams 2013. Other notable treatments of value pluralism include Raz 1986; Kekes 1993; Chang 1997; Gray 2000; 2013; Galston 2002.

sesses an intrinsic value that is untranslatable into any other terms. Consequently, such goods are not subject to any 'final' or ultimate ranking in accordance with a final or ultimate formula. Rather, the plurality of basic goods is itself the final and ultimate reality of human value, and with that comes the potential for such goods to conflict in ways that bring about uncompensated loss.

The idea of the historical *telos* in which all genuine human values are realized is consequently, on this pluralist view, a nonsense. The promotion or emphasizing of one significant good will inevitably bring about the diminution or loss of another, and there is no overarching formula that justifies any ranking or trade-off that is more final or complete or authoritative than all others. This is not to say that there cannot be good reason to stress one good against another in particular concrete circumstances—I shall return to this point later. But as circumstances vary so will reasoned judgements of this kind, which will not indicate the kind of *telos* contemplated by the philosophy of history.

Might Hösle respond that his philosophy of history is consistent with Berlin's pluralism? There are two possibilities. First, he might argue that pluralism is not without a *telos* of its own if this includes some notion of human nature or human essence. One way of conceiving of the fundamental goods that are said to be incommensurable is to see them as components of the human good. Berlin sometimes refers to the "human horizon", by which he means those basic interests characteristic of all human beings, interpreted in many different ways by different cultures, but uniting all cultures in mutual comprehension (Berlin 2013d, 12). At other times he has in mind the narrower idea of a "core" of universal values that are not only universally comprehensible but actually endorsed by all or most human societies (Berlin 2002, 45).[2] So, for example, while the practice of human sacrifice falls (like almost all practices) within the human horizon, it is arguably outside the human core.

But although Berlinian pluralism certainly involves some notion of universal values along these lines, this does not equate to the kind of *telos* invoked by the philosophy of history. Berlin's ideas of horizon and core propose frameworks or limits for the field of human values, within which many specific conceptions of the good, or ways of life, are possible and legitimate. By contrast, the kind of *telos* envisaged by Hegel and Marx is itself a specific conception of the good, the apex of a process of development in which other conceptions have preceded it and been subsumed by it. The *telos* proposed by the philosophy of history is a point to which history tends, or at which it culminates, rather than a framework within which history develops, as with pluralism. The pluralist framework is present through-

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2 On the relation between 'core' and 'horizon' in Berlin see Crowder/Hardy 2007.

out history, while the *telos* imagined by the philosophy of history emerges only at history's end.

Alternatively, Hösle might argue that the historical *telos*, although indeed a point of culmination rather than a framework for development, will be in its nature pluralistic. The kind of society that is to be expected at the end of history will be one in which fundamental values are recognized as multiple, conflicting and incommensurable. Indeed, it may be suggested that it can only be after a long process of historical development that this recognition is likely to be widespread, in contrast with today's world of opposing monisms, religious and otherwise.

Again, however, such an outlook does not fit well with the kind of teleology distinctive of the philosophy of history. For one thing, the classic texts of the genre tend to look forward to an experience of harmony that is quite at odds with the pluralist message. Marx's ex-proletarians glide effortlessly between their various freely chosen occupations—hunting, fishing, disputing, and so forth—untroubled by the need for a state or for any conception of individual rights. Hegel does acknowledge different levels of life, including separate realms of state and civil society, but there is a hierarchy between these, and so presumably a clear and universally accepted ranking of the values they embody.

Moreover, if 'the end of history' were pluralist in Berlin's sense, then it would not be the end of history. Value multiplicity, conflict and incommensurability are precisely what keep the historical process in motion, so that as long as they remain central to human experience, that process will not come to any recognizable end. A historical *telos* that admitted such deep conflicts would be riven with disputes about how to resolve them, and those disputes would lead to further historical developments. Such a condition would not constitute the end of history but the continuation of history; it would be business as usual.

Note, too, that if Hösle attempted to identify the philosophy of history with pluralism in either of the ways suggested, that move would leave him with the problem of how to justify his evaluations. If the philosophy of history has a strength, at least in principle, it is that its constituent notion of the historical *telos* promises to identify a specific conception of the human good as superior to the alternatives, and so it promises to identify a set of ideals against which we can evaluate different societies and their political systems. But if the content of the *telos* turned out to be pluralistic, then we would be confronted again by conflicting ways of resolving collisions of values, and the problem of justification would be back on the table. I shall return to the problem of justification under pluralism later.

In the meantime let us conclude that the philosophy of history cannot be reconciled with value pluralism. The notion of the historical *telos* cannot be stretched to embrace a pluralistic content; to attempt to do so is to destroy that notion. So,

if value pluralism is correct, then the philosophy of history cannot be accepted. If fundamental human values are irreducibly multiple, conflicting and incommensurable, then we cannot expect them to harmonize at the end of history.

In that case can Hösle argue that value pluralism is mistaken, or at least no more persuasive than the philosophy of history? The speculative nature of the philosophy of history is well known. How can we know the contents of the human *telos* unless we are standing at the end of history, and how do we know that we are standing at the end of history? But might a similar issue not arise with value pluralism: how do we know that values are 'ultimately' plural rather than ultimately convergent? Perhaps, with further experience and reflection, we can eventually dispel what seem to be conflicts and incommensurabilities, and finally see how the pieces in the cosmic jigsaw puzzle fit together. Then we would join Hösle at the end of history, and the Berlinian outlook could be consigned to some earlier stage of cognitive immaturity.

Let me say immediately that I know of no argument that conclusively demonstrates the truth of the pluralist thesis against this kind of speculative objection. Berlin himself appeals to the evidence of "ordinary experience" (Berlin 2002, 213), but it is logically possible that this is merely our experience to date and that a less ordinary resolution lies somewhere in the future. The same argument that prevents the Hegelian from assuming that we already stand at the end of history prevents the Berlinian from declaring that the plurality deep plurality of values is self-evident or unquestionable.

Nevertheless, I suggest that to bet on the truth of the pluralist outlook against the teleological alternative is a safe wager. Pluralism is a plausible and cogent idea, and it has actual experience on its side: our experience, both historical and day-to-day, of the multiplicity of intrinsic values, of their potential to conflict with one another, and of the absence of a convincing super-value, ultimate rule or 'final solution' that would resolve all such conflicts. There is also the sense, even when we are confident that we have made the best decision possible, of real loss and regret when a genuine good has to be sacrificed or traded off in order to realize another important value (Williams 2001). If there were a justified monist rule for ranking values, we could follow such a rule with no regrets, but the feeling that basic values are plural and intrinsic seems to survive all such proposals. Perhaps we shall transcend this condition some day but that is a big 'perhaps.' After more than two millennia of Western philosophy there is still no sign of our doing so.

3 Evaluating the Soviet Revolution

How do Hösle and Berlin compare in their judgements on the Soviet Revolution? Hösle's analysis is structured by his consideration of ends, means and consequences. First, he sees the October Revolution as at least having the merit of aiming at "the abolition of the exploitation of man by man" (Hösle 2017, 214). Exploitation is a concern for Berlin too (2002, 172). The problem for him with the Soviet vision is not the goal of defeating exploitation but the incoherent picture of what will replace it: the monist vision of the perfected society that has transcended conflict and incommensurability among values.

What about the means used to achieve that end? Hösle identifies this as socialism, on which he takes a balanced view. On the one hand, socialism is vulnerable to the standard liberal objection to its economic inefficiency, on the other hand the Soviet version of socialism brought about rapid industrialization in Russia, which among other things enabled it to fight off the Nazi invasion in 1941–45. There is no evidence that Berlin would disagree with this, but he might add that there is more than one vehicle for socialism and the Soviets chose violent revolution. Large-scale violence has large-scale and unpredictable consequences (Berlin 2013d, 18).

This leads to the third element in Hösle's analysis, his condemnation of the Revolution in terms of "individual rights to property and liberty" violated and, most importantly of all, "the number of human lives lost in the Civil War, the Holodomor (the Ukrainian terror-famine), and then under Stalin's state terrorism" (Hösle 2017, 216). The only question is whether such consequences were reasonably foreseeable such that the Soviets can be held responsible for them. On balance Hösle finds that they were. Again, Berlin would strongly agree with all of this.[3]

At this point Hösle sums up his view by saying something that, in terms of his own philosophy of history, I find puzzling: "From what I have said it is clear that the Soviet Revolution does not fit into a teleological construction of human history." (218)[4] Hösle has, of course, given us good reason to take a dim view of the Revolution in several respects, but to say that it 'does not fit into' the pattern of history strikes me as an odd statement, especially for a Hegelian. Is it not the case that for the Hegelian philosophy of history every event or development of any significance contributes in some way to the pattern of progress, even if that

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3 Berlin's writings on the Soviet Union are collected in Berlin 2004.

4 He makes a similar comment about Nazism: Hösle 2017, 203.

progress is dialectical rather than smoothly linear? If this is not so, then how do we know which events contribute to history's purpose and which do not?

Hösle's position on this issue is unclear, at any rate to me. He describes the philosophy of history as "essential in order to make sense of the whole of human experience" (Hösle 2017, 219). But in an interview he appears to distance himself from the idea that all events serve the ultimate *telos*. After asserting that there is historical evidence of moral and legal progress "at least at the macro level and in the long run", he adds that "this, however, does not entail that all events are meaningful, even if all of them have causes" (Reeve/Calcagno 2010, 10). Nevertheless, in the same place he appears willing to say that at least some violent events (which?) are justified by their teleological purpose: "[I]t is hard to conceive how humankind could have moved toward building larger political units without the use of violence."[5] How can it be that an event as momentous as the Soviet Revolution is simply outside this historical process, even if its consequences appear to be undesirable?

In any case, Hösle proceeds to argue that the Soviet Revolution has an up-side after all. Although he observes that the Revolution "did not extend the reach of human freedom but produced a hideous totalitarian system", and although "the ideal of social justice for the poorer classes was far better achieved by the Western welfare state", still there were two positive achievements (Hösle 2017, 218). One was "the extension from negative to positive rights" in Russia, which "contributed to their quick expansion in the West" (218)—so it seems that in the end Hösle believes that the Revolution *did* "extend the reach of human freedom", at least in this respect. The other positive side of the Revolution, according to Hösle, was the "plausible model" of modernization that Marxism-Leninism offered to "Third World countries, particularly in Asia" (219).

What would Berlin make of this? In general he would accept that the Soviet Revolution must exemplify *some* positive values, if only because it falls within the "human horizon". If an historical event is comprehensible to us, that must mean that we are able imaginatively to "enter into" the purposes of those involved as if they were our own.[6] What makes that possible are the fundamental goals that are embodied in such purposes, and that are shared by all human beings. The purposes of the Soviet revolutionaries are not our specific purposes, but they rest on, or are interpretations of, basic human ends that we do share with them:

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5 The background here is his belief that part of the macro pattern in history is a movement towards political structures of increasingly large size, culminating in the emergence of a world state "within a few decades": Reeve/Calcagno 2010, 11; see also Hösle 2004.

6 This 'inside view' account of historical understanding, influenced by Vico, is a point of overlap between Berlin and Hösle: compare Hösle 2017, 4, with Berlin 2013e.

perhaps the quest for recognition of human and personal dignity, the desire for some control over one's life, a sense of justice.

What about the more specific benefits identified by Hösle? In the first case, that of the extension from negative to positive rights, there is room for dispute about how to read Berlin. He is often presented as a narrow champion of negative rights and liberties against positive rights and liberties, suggesting that he would discount the latter as a genuine advance in freedom. Actually, his position is more complex. Part of the problem is that there are at least two distinct versions of positive liberty at stake here. The first is the idea of freedom as an individual's being self-directing in accordance with the 'true' or authentic part of his or her personality. In the classic *Two Concepts of Liberty* Berlin is indeed suspicious of this idea, because he believes that it is easily distorted for authoritarian ends. The authentic self is vulnerable to being interpreted as the self that is approved of by the state or Party, so that freedom is reconceived as obedience to such external authorities. He attributes this 'monstrous impersonation' of freedom to Rousseau, Hegel and Marx, among others (Berlin 2002, 180).[7]

Whatever the merits of those readings, it should be said that Berlin goes too far in condemning the whole notion of freedom as authentic self-direction, since it also embraces individualist versions such as the personal autonomy celebrated by modern liberals such as John Stuart Mill. Berlin himself came to believe later in life that he had been too hostile to this kind of positive liberty (Lukes 1998, 93; Berlin/Polonowska-Sygulska 2006, 120). All this is to say that, if Hösle means by 'positive rights' the positive conception of liberty as authentic self-direction, then Berlin may be wary of agreeing that its extension represents an overall gain in human freedom, but his best view would allow that at least some versions of this idea really are valuable.

In all likelihood, however, it is the second sense of positive liberty that Hösle has in mind. This is the idea of freedom as "a positive power or capacity", as T. H. Green expresses it, where freedom consists in the ability to pursue goals made possible by access to resources, notably economic goods (Green 1991, 21). It is true that in 'Two Concepts of Liberty' Berlin holds to the seemingly pedantic line that, strictly speaking, this is not a conception of liberty at all but rather of ability. This contrast is in keeping with his pluralist desire to separate genuinely distinct values so that we can keep track of value conflicts and their costs, but it also loses sight of a genuine conception of freedom (Crowder 2013, 54–55, 57–61).

Nevertheless, I doubt that Berlin is really an opponent of the basic sentiment behind this kind of positive liberty. He makes it clear that possession of negative

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7 For Berlin's discussions of Hegel in this connection, see Berlin 2014a; b.

liberty alone can be of little value without the means of taking advantage of it, and he is happy for some degree of negative liberty to be traded off for the purposes of greater equality and social justice (Berlin 2002, 45–46, 172; 2013d, 13). Indeed, there is evidence that part of the reason why he was attracted to the Russian populists of the nineteenth century was precisely because of their promotion of positive liberty in this sense (Walicki 2007, 61–62).[8]

The upshot is that Berlin would, I suspect, be in broad agreement with Hösle's claims about the extension of rights by the Soviet Revolution, but with two qualifications. The first is that although Soviet citizens might henceforth have positive rights, those rights came to mean little in the context of the inefficient socialist economy that Hösle himself highlights, and he rightly observes that social justice was more effectively pursued by Western welfare states. Second, I suspect Berlin would look askance at Hösle's claim that Russian extension of positive liberties accelerated the acceptance of those liberties in the West. That development was already well underway, for example in the thought of Green and other 'new liberals' of the Victorian period (Freeden 1978).

What about Hösle's judgement that the Soviet Revolution provided a 'plausible model' of modernization for the developing world? Again, this judgement is made questionable by Hösle's own persuasive condemnation of the Revolution on the score both of the socialist economic inefficiency it led to and of the violence it involved and engendered. But I think that the point that Berlin would be more concerned to make—did in fact make in 'Two Concepts of Liberty'—is that an even greater source of inspiration for the developing world has been nationalism (Berlin 2002, 200–208; Crowder 2013, 61–65). Hösle refers to "the Marxist philosophy of history as a tool of modernization that enthused and motivated people to great sacrifices, some of which led to admirable results" (Hösle 2017, 219). Although this is true to some degree, the same thought applies, with perhaps greater force, to the value many cultural groups attach to their sense of identity, leading to a demand for positive recognition that has typically involved a quest for their own nation-state. This points to another parting of the ways between Hösle and Berlin, the former looking forward to the inauguration of the world-state at the end of history, the latter reminding us that the demise of nationalism has often been predicted by universalists and the predictions have always proved exaggerated (Berlin 2013c). Once again, the basic contrast seems to be between speculation and experience.

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8 Berlin discusses the populists and other Russian thinkers in Berlin 2008.

4 Liberalism, History and Pluralism

One point that Hösle and Berlin do have in common is a commitment to liberalism. The values by which the Soviet Revolution is judged and found wanting by Hösle are the liberal values of fundamental individual rights and liberties, which reflect a fundamental respect for the person. But how do Hösle and Berlin link liberalism with their favoured philosophical approaches?

In the case of Hösle, liberalism has to be justified by the philosophy of history. That means that if liberal values are to be defended as the ultimate standards of ethical judgement they must be embodied in history's hidden *telos*. In other words, there has to be liberalism at the end of history. Merely to state that claim is to suggest major problems with it. Earlier I reviewed pluralist reasons to deny that there is any historical *telos* or end of history, but even if we set those doubts aside there are obvious problems with ascribing to such an end-point a set of values as specific as those of liberalism. How do we know that the world is heading towards a liberal destination rather than something else? Liberalism is very far from being universally accepted at present. Although the nationalist challenge of the 1990s has faded for the time being, other rivals have strengthened, including religious fundamentalism of various kinds, the 'East Asian' model of illiberal capitalism, and a resentful and paranoid populism that has sprung up all over the developed world. Even if liberal democracies are still dominant in economic and military terms it would be a brave prediction that such will remain the case into the future. And unless history delivers us liberalism at the end of the rainbow, why, if we follow the philosophy of history, should we judge in liberal terms? Perhaps we could accept liberal norms as provisional, reflecting a current, imperfect stage of human development, but then why should we not say the same of its current rivals?

So, the philosophy of history raises serious problems for the defence of liberalism, but might one not say something similar about Berlin's value pluralism? In his epic *Morals and Politics* Hösle declares that Berlin's value pluralism is "obviously absurd, since in such a system everything could be proven" (Hösle 2004, 181). This appears to be the classic worry that under pluralism any ranking of values appears to be as good as any other. If fundamental values are irreducibly plural and incommensurable, then no single ranking is correct for all cases. Liberty does not always come before equality, nor equality before liberty. In that case, how can liberals, such as Berlin, justify their characteristic prioritizing of a package of goods that includes certain senses of individual liberty and of equality ahead of alternative packages that would be favoured by socialists (including different interpretations of liberty, equality, social justice, etc.), or by conservatives (respect for

tradition, authority and hierarchy)? Why should pluralists rank the liberal package of values above the alternatives?

I believe that liberal pluralists can give good answers to this question, but the following can be no more than an outline.[9]

One line of argument from pluralism to liberalism focuses on universal values. A key feature of pluralism, distinguishing it from relativism, is the idea that there are at least some values that are authoritative universally. These are the fundamental goods that are said to be plural and incommensurable. Pluralists differ over the content of such values. Berlin himself was rather ad hoc in his approach, referring at various times to values such as liberty, equality, justice, compassion, and so forth. More recent pluralists have been more systematic (Kekes 1993; Hampshire 2000; Nussbaum 2011). What is interesting for present purposes is the idea that the universals can be seen to qualify and discipline choices among incommensurables, and even that they narrow down such choices in a liberal direction. Jonathan Riley, for example, argues in one place that Berlin upholds a universally "common moral horizon" that is "minimally liberal in the sense that it (at least implicitly) privileges some minimum set of human rights" (Riley 2000, 121).

This line of argument suffers, however, from an obvious limitation: genuinely universal goods are necessarily too generic to indicate any political view as specific as liberalism. Riley's minimal human rights, which include freedom from slavery and arbitrary killing, could be respected by non-liberal societies.[10] The universality of certain fundamental goods is a valid idea, and value pluralists need to have some notion of universal values in order to indicate what they are claiming there is a plurality of. This is what separates them from relativists, for whom plurality fixes on perspectives rather than objective goods. But even the most fully developed account of universal values, if these are genuinely shared across all times and places, cannot by itself get anywhere near recommending a distinctively liberal form of politics.

An alternative approach picks up on the point made earlier that incommensurable goods may be ranked for good reason in context. Although one might say that the 'first law' of pluralism is that incommensurable goods cannot be subject to a single reasoned ranking that applies in all cases, there may still be decisive reason to prioritize values in a particular set of circumstances. Berlin, writing with Bernard Williams, gives the example of justice and loyalty (Berlin/Williams 2013,

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9 For further details see Crowder 2002; 2004; 2007; 2015.
10 In his more recent work Riley argues only that Berlin's common moral minimal implies a set of rights that satisfy a standard of 'human decency' rather than liberal democracy specifically: Riley 2013.

326). Although these cannot be ranked in absolute terms, there is good reason to place justice before loyalty for the trial judge, and good reason to place loyalty before justice for the parent at her child's football match. This kind of contextual ranking of conflicting incommensurables might be theorized on the model of Aristotle's *phronesis*, or situated intuition.[11]

If that is correct, might it then be argued that liberal values outweigh others within some particular context? For a start, we are talking principally about the context of politics, but that does not get us much further because forms of politics have to answer to different cultural contexts, and obviously not all of these favour liberalism. Some value pluralists appeal to cultural context to make just that point: that on pluralist grounds liberalism is defensible only where it is endorsed by a pre-existing liberal cultural tradition (see, e.g., Gray 2000). It is only where the surrounding tradition is already disposed to make liberal concerns overriding that a liberal politics is justified. The limitations of this from a liberal point of view are too plain to need much emphasis. Suffice it to say that on this view the liberal doctrine of human rights can be sensibly proposed only for those cultural conditions where it is accepted already—which is precisely where a liberal will say its assertion needed least.

Cultural tradition, then, seems too narrow a context within which to justify liberalism. What about historical context? Here the leading inspiration comes from Berlin's close friend and fellow liberal-pluralist Bernard Williams. Williams sees the case for any ethical and political system as hedged by historical circumstances, and more specifically he sees liberalism as defensible only within the bounds of 'modernity'. It is only within the terms of modernity as identified by Weber and Habermas—rationalism, individualism, secularism and bureaucracy— that liberalism "makes sense"; on the other hand, given those modern conditions it is *only* liberalism that is legitimate politically (Williams 2005, ch. 1; 2006).

Williams's historical-pluralist defence of liberalism is not wholly convincing but can be strengthened. What exactly the link is between modernity and liberalism and how strongly that link holds are matters that Williams does not explain in detail. Nor does he account for the rise of the East Asian model, which appears to contradict his claimed nexus between modernity and liberalism. But Williams's view can be reinforced by appeal to the work of Christian Welzel, whose basic claim is that the conditions of modernity have created and justified liberalism by giving freedom a value that it did not have before. The Scientific and Industrial Revolutions, by making it possible for people to meet their material needs more

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11 For explicitly pluralist accounts see Hampshire 1983; Taylor 1997; Nussbaum 1990; Richardson 1994.

efficiently, make it possible for them to look beyond mere survival needs to more emancipatory goals. In pluralist terms, the new conditions lead to new value rankings as people begin to "prioritize freedom over security, autonomy over authority, diversity over uniformity, and creativity over discipline" (Welzel 2013, xxiii). The ideals and ultimately the institutions of liberalism attain a new value under the changed conditions. On this view the East Asian model is likely to be a transitional phase, destined to be transformed by aspirations generated by its own prosperity (Welzel 2013, 55).

Yet another possible approach to the link between pluralism and liberalism is a "conceptual" argument by way of reflection on value pluralism itself. Again the initial hint comes from Williams, who suggests that there is an intimate relationship between the concept of value pluralism and the diversity of values that is best promoted by liberal institutions (Williams 2013, xxxvii). Once more, Williams does not unpack the argument in detail, but it may be developed as follows (Crowder 2015). If pluralism is to be taken seriously, we should take seriously the full range of basic human values, meaning that we should downgrade or diminish any such value only for good reason. Of course, any society will need some kind of political framework that will place limits on the range of goods that can actually be pursued, but by and large pluralists should support a framework that will allow or enable people to pursue as great a range as possible. The liberal mix of individual rights and equalities has a strong claim to meeting that requirement more successfully than the alternatives, since the liberal ideal is to enable people to pursue many different conceptions of the good life.

Moreover, reflection on the concept of pluralism also yields the insight that among the rights and liberties that constitute the liberal framework, a special emphasis should be placed on personal autonomy. To live in a liberal-pluralist society is to be obliged to choose among competing incommensurables. Contrary to conservatives, no single tradition is an adequate guide for such choices, since traditions themselves comprise contestable value rankings. Nor are the standard modern ethical systems, Kantianism and utilitarianism, for the same reason. Consequently, pluralist choices are best coped with by individuals who are capable of thinking flexibly and for themselves—that is, those who are capable of autonomy in a strong sense. It follows that pluralism is linked most strongly to that kind of liberalism for which personal autonomy is a central value.[12]

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12 This point addresses a division within contemporary liberal thought between those who ground liberalism in personal autonomy and those who emphasize toleration: see, e.g., Galston 2002, ch. 2; Crowder 2007.

In my view a persuasive case for liberalism can be constructed that combines all of these elements of universality, context, and concept. From the first, liberal pluralists will take the generic framework of the human good that is the starting point of their normative argument. From the second, pluralists derive the historical framework of modernity within which the good of individual liberty attains a value that it had not had before. From the third, pluralists receive their most distinctive insights, which concern the special value of diversity and personal autonomy. To say that diversity and autonomy will have a special value for liberal pluralists is not to say that those goods will be overriding in all circumstances—that would be a monist view. It is to say that they will be emphasized to the extent that they impart a certain character to a society, reflecting a recognition and concern for pluralism itself.

5 Conclusion

I have argued that Hösle's evaluation of the Soviet Revolution can itself be evaluated from the perspective of Berlin's value pluralism. Seen in that light, Hösle's substantial judgements on the Revolution can be accepted as generally sound, although with qualifications when it comes to his positive estimation of the Revolution's contribution in terms of positive liberty and model for development. However, Hösle reaches these conclusions for highly questionable reasons. The Hegelian philosophy of history, with its assumption of a hidden *telos* in human affairs, is hard to accept, and value pluralism points to a powerful reason why that is so. If pluralism is true, as is highly probable, then fundamental human goods cannot be expected to cohere, either any time soon or any time in the future, because they are irreducibly plural, often conflicting, and incommensurable. Our future is likely to be pluralist, like our present, rather than teleological. If that is true, however, it is not a ground for concluding that 'everything can be proven'. The deep plurality of values does not undermine the justification of liberalism; on the contrary, it arms liberalism with a distinctively pluralist case.

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