

POLITICAL IDEAS IN THE ROMANTIC AGE

ISAIAH BERLIN WAS BORN IN RIGA, now capital of Latvia, in 1909. When he was six, his family moved to Russia; there in 1917, in Petrograd, he witnessed both Revolutions – Social Democratic and Bolshevik. In 1921 he and his parents came to England, and he was educated at St Paul's School, London, and Corpus Christi College, Oxford.

At Oxford he was a Fellow of All Souls, a Fellow of New College, Professor of Social and Political Theory, and founding President of Wolfson College. He also held the Presidency of the British Academy. In addition to *Political Ideas in the Romantic Age*, his main published works are *Karl Marx*, *Russian Thinkers*, *Concepts and Categories*, *Against the Current*, *Personal Impressions*, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, *The Sense of Reality*, *The Proper Study of Mankind*, *The Roots of Romanticism*, *The Power of Ideas*, *Three Critics of the Enlightenment*, *Freedom and Its Betrayal*, *Liberty* and *The Soviet Mind*. As an exponent of the history of ideas he was awarded the Erasmus, Lippincott and Agnelli Prizes; he also received the Jerusalem Prize for his lifelong defence of civil liberties. He died in 1997.

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POLITICAL IDEAS IN THE ROMANTIC AGE

THEIR RISE AND INFLUENCE
ON MODERN THOUGHT



ISAIAH BERLIN

Edited by Henry Hardy

Introduction by Joshua L. Cherniss

Second Edition

Foreword by William A. Galston

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS

PRINCETON AND OXFORD

Published in the United States of America, its Colonies and
Dependencies, the Philippine Islands and Canada by Princeton
University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08540
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press.princeton.edu

First published by Chatto & Windus and Princeton University Press
2006

Second edition published by Princeton University Press 2014
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Editorial matter © Henry Hardy 2006, 2014
Introduction © Joshua L. Cherniss 2006
Foreword © Princeton University Press 2014

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ISBN 978-0-691-15844-0

British Library Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available

This book has been composed in Garamond Premier Pro

Printed on acid-free paper ☺

Printed in the United States of America

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

In memory of Solomon Rachmilevich

Born in Riga, 16 August 1891

Naturalised as a British citizen, 5 April 1937

Died in London, 30 November 1953, aged 62

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FOREWORD

Ambivalent Fascination

ISAIAH BERLIN AND POLITICAL ROMANTICISM

William A. Galston

A CENTURY AGO, Benedetto Croce published his famous commentary, *What Is Living and What Is Dead in the Philosophy of Hegel*. Now, more than six decades after the lectures than became *Political Ideas in the Romantic Age* (PIRA), it is possible – indeed necessary – to pose a similar question about Berlin.

At the beginning of PIRA, Berlin states that the social and political ideas of leading thinkers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century are of more than historical interest: ‘they form the basic intellectual capital on which, with few additions, we live to this day’.¹ Helvetius and Condorcet are alive for us in a way that Locke or Bayle or Leibniz are not, he contends; a direct line connects them to those who framed the Charter of the United Nations. Rousseau is the father of modern nationalism as well as the social contract. Social scientists and central planners channel Saint-Simon. Communists speak the language of Hegel, while the irrationalist and Fascist enemies of democracy inhabit ‘a violent world brought into being, almost single-handed, by Joseph de Maistre’.²

¹ p. 1 below: subsequent references to the text of PIRA are by PIRA₂ page number alone. For abbreviations see xxiii–xxiv.

² 2.

Not everyone agreed with Berlin's assessment. By the early 1950s, some social scientists were propounding versions of what became known as 'the end of ideology'. Despite the continuing presence of Communist parties throughout Western Europe and Fascist-tinged regimes on the Iberian peninsula, many believed that the Second World War and its aftermath had largely settled the great ideological struggles of the interwar period and that the amalgam of democratic institutions, civic and social liberties, and the Welfare State represented the West's all-but-certain future.

Whatever may have been the case in 1952, it is much harder today to make the case for the continuing ideological relevance of the thinkers Berlin explores in *PIRA*. To be sure, we have not reached global consensus on liberal democracy – an expectation that became fashionable after the collapse of the Soviet bloc. Still, refuted by their consequences, Communism and Fascism have lost not only their grip on the unfortunate nations they once dominated, but also most of their appeal for intellectuals who gravitated to them as alternatives to what they regarded as the shallowness and injustice of bourgeois society. While technocracy is not quite extinct, faith in central planning has surely attenuated. Few now endorse history as the story of progress. Some political theorists still labour to make sense of the General Will, but hardly anyone else cares. Hegel's influence on the culture and politics of the West has waned; Nietzsche, the nineteenth-century thinker with the greatest continuing influence, makes only a cameo appearance in *PIRA*.

As for the people: they may be as shallow and fickle as the nineteenth-century thinkers opposed to liberty and democracy supposed, but the alternatives – heroic leaders and vanguard parties such as Russia's Bolsheviks – proved far worse. The spread of egalitarianism has thrown elitist theories of politics on the defensive. In an ironic victory for the 'last men', even Nietzsche has been democratised. The few remaining vanguard parties, such as the Chinese and North Korean Communists, rest their case

for coercion on political necessity – national unity, social tranquillity – rather than positive freedom directed by all-knowing authority.

Nor has the emphasis placed by nineteenth-century anti-democrats on authority as a check on human sinfulness fared well. Indeed, despite Reinhold Niebuhr's famous observation that 'The doctrine of original sin is the only empirically verifiable doctrine of the Christian faith', sin has almost disappeared as a functioning category in Western culture. Religion has weakened throughout Western Europe. Not so in the United States; but the dominant forms of American Christianity now offer salvation without original sin and heaven without hell. Human beings may be weak in the face of temptation, blind in the midst of suffering, selfish in the presence of those who must depend on charity. But they are not innately prone to hatred, oppression or violence – so say today's religious leaders. Most of them emphasise God's help and love, not his restraint and punishment. The remaining heirs of Jonathan Edwards find as little resonance in the United States as Maistre does in today's Europe: fewer and fewer Americans think of themselves as sinners in the hands of an angry God.

The political experience of the twentieth century thoroughly discredited the political ideas of the nineteenth, and we no longer live in their shadow. Berlin's reconstruction of those ideas continues to be of great historical interest, but it has ceased to be living history.

The ideas that remain practically relevant in the West today are thinner and less exciting than were those of the past century, but they are more workable and less destructive. Some version of welfarist social democracy dominates the policies and self-understanding of Western nations. The West is in trouble because social democracy is in trouble. The question before the West is how social democracy can be reformed to make its promises consistent with the imperatives of economic growth.

While this challenge has sparked bitter controversy, few believe that the social democratic model should be scrapped. While representative systems need to strengthen the bond of trust between the people and elected officials, direct democracy does not offer a viable alternative, at least not above the local level. Market economies may need more regulation, less regulation, or a different kind of regulation, but public ownership and control of the means of production is not considered a viable option. In the face of rising inequality, new forms of redistribution may be in order, but hardly anyone proposes scrapping private property in favour of communal ownership. Social insurance programmes may need to be reined in or refinanced; hardly anyone wants to scrap them altogether. Economic growth is regarded as the precondition of prosperity and security; only a handful of arch-environmentalists question its merit or necessity. The challenge is how to restore or accelerate growth, not to replace it with other economic goals.

In short, the internal divisions the West faces today focus far more on means than on ends. To be sure, if new policies for growth, regulation, social insurance and fairness fall catastrophically short, and trust in the established order further weakens, more radical proposals may well find a hearing. But at present the deep challenges to that order – Islamist fundamentalism and Chinese authoritarianism – are external rather than internal. Unlike Communism, Fascism and romantic nationalism, they are not rooted in the political ideas Berlin probes in *PIRA*.

None of this is to say that we have reached the end of history; some traditional criticisms of liberal democracy and bourgeois society remain powerful, and new sources of resistance have arisen. Intellectuals with impeccable democratic credentials continue to offer critiques of democratic popular culture that rest on (often unacknowledged) aristocratic grounds. While the idea of the General Will has lost its political efficacy, Rousseau's critique of representation is alive and well, and the ideal of direct popular participation still moves insurgent democratic movements.

Still alive, as well, is the social contract, although in the English-speaking world it is understood in terms closer to those of Locke than to those of Rousseau. It is not hard to see why this concept has retained its currency. The social contract is the all-but-irresistible product of two premisses that enjoy wide currency today: that despite their social embeddedness and complex interdependencies, human beings are distinct individuals with their own lives to lead; and that consent is the most authentic source of political legitimacy. No doubt individual consent is in part fictional. Still, it retains great normative power, and it manifests itself in practices such as naturalisation ceremonies.

Although individualism helps lend the idea of the social contract its enduring hold on the Western political imagination, aspects of nineteenth-century collectivism have survived as well. Few students of politics today would deny the impact of group membership – especially ethnic and religious groups – on identity and conduct. Nor would they assume that group loyalty could be reduced to rational self-interest. One might well argue, in fact, that a version of Herder's thesis has been incorporated into the *lingua franca* of contemporary political analysis.

The explanation for Herder's continuing relevance is straightforward. During the nineteenth century, nationalism was a key source of both political energy and political legitimacy. Groups whose members shared ethnicity, language, history, and often religion, increasingly demanded the right of self-determination, a claim that struck at the heart of multi-ethnic empires. Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points endorsed that principle, which served as the basis for redrawing the map of Europe after the First World War.

Problems soon emerged. Because ethnicity and geography did not coincide, the formula of 'one people, one State' implied – and soon produced – massive, often bloody, population transfers and the rise of irredentist movements. To the extent, conversely, that the formula could not be put into practice, minority groups

advanced claims against dominant majorities that outside powers were only too willing to exploit. (Czechoslovakia's Sudeten Germans turned out to be the most consequential instance.) And dominant powers were all too willing to ignore the formula whenever it suited them. The redrawn map of the Middle East included new multi-ethnic countries (Iraq, Syria, Lebanon) and a large people (the Kurds) with a common language and shared aspirations who none the less remained divided among half a dozen countries.

The net effect of this history was to drive a wedge between peoplehood as fact and as norm. Although division of human beings into Herderian groups was acknowledged as an important political fact, it ceased to be viewed as the presumptive ground of political self-determination. Whether peoples should live together or apart, or partly both, becomes a matter of prudential statecraft. (The Kosovars were helped to separate from Serbia, but the Serb minority in Kosovo could not successfully press its claim to separate from Kosovo.)

Berlin's emphasis on identity and loyalty is part of an even larger continuing debate about political psychology. When it came to political arrangements, Berlin was firmly in the liberal camp. But he argued – compellingly, I believe – that the psychology underlying most liberal theories was thin and unpersuasive. As Albert Hirschman shows,¹ for centuries liberals have viewed the passions – especially aristocratic and religious passions – as dangerous and potentially destructive. Liberals have typically tried to construct theories and institutions on the basis of self-interest rightly understood. John Rawls insisted that liberal individuals must be understood as 'reasonable' – that is, as possessing the capacity for a sense of justice – as well as rationally self-interested. But a sense of justice is nothing like the desire for

¹ Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before Its Triumph* (Princeton, 1977).

vengeance. In nearly six hundred pages, his *A Theory of Justice* barely mentions anger in human life, let alone its pivotal role in politics; or the passion to rule others; or the burning quest for lasting fame.

I do not mean to suggest that Berlin's understanding of liberalism draws solely from the Enlightenment tradition. Indeed, he often suggests that modern liberalism – from Mill onward, anyway – represents a synthesis of older Enlightenment thought and elements of the Romantic protest against the Enlightenment. Some of his deepest commitments – his celebration of human freedom, his insistence on the variety and unpredictability of human affairs, his admiration for sincerity, individuality and passion – bear unmistakable traces of the Romantic tradition he did so much to bring alive for generations of readers.

The question Berlin poses, not always intentionally, is whether liberal politics and romanticism fit together. As he observes, readers of Herder cannot be blamed if they found that his psychology of individual and group life 'came closer to their own experience than anything they might hear from Bentham or Spencer or Russell about the rational purposes of society, its use as an instrument for the provision of common benefits and the prevention of social collisions'.¹ To be sure, he continues, liberals may be right to regard Romantic writers as the 'originators of the triumph of irrationalism in our day'. But the Romantics did what the classic liberal thinkers so conspicuously failed to do: 'they described the facts of both social life and history, and of everything in the life of the individual which can broadly be called creative or inventive, with a subtlety and depth [...] which made them seem, as indeed to some degree they were, profounder thinkers than their opponents'. Liberals cannot evade the truths the Romantics articulated; if liberals deny those truths in theory or suppress them in practice, they are bound to manifest themselves

¹ 295–6.

in 'socially destructive ways'.¹ The inadequacies of liberalism, Berlin implies, helped open the door to the disastrous triumph of twentieth-century political irrationalism.

Psychology is not the only feature of romanticism that poses problems for liberals. Berlin highlights the Romantic focus on imagination, invention and creativity. But these are more than aesthetic categories; they structure morality as well. Before the Romantic revolution, Berlin claims, the ends of life – ultimate purposes or values – were understood as 'ingredients of the universe'.² Moral propositions were regarded as descriptive statements that could be discovered and understood by the capacities that humans deploy to acquire knowledge in general. During the Romantic epoch, however, the idea emerges that value judgments are not descriptive propositions and that values 'are not discovered but invented – created by men like works of art'.³ This led to a transformation of values (Berlin appropriates Nietzsche's term 'transvaluation' to characterise it): 'the new admiration of heroism, integrity, strength of will, martyrdom, dedication to the vision within one, irrespective of its properties, veneration of those who battle against hopeless odds, no matter for how strange and desperate a cause'.⁴

Berlin goes so far as to describe the moral and political thought of his time as 'the product and the battlefield' of the clash between classical and Romantic understandings of morality.⁵ The question is whether liberalism is compatible with the Romantic conception. The Romantic virtues as Berlin describes them are hardly the ones liberalism requires (or fosters). Worse, liberalism would seem to require at least a minimum of moral universalism – perhaps Kant's insistence that human beings are ends in themselves and not simply means; that we have rights, including the right to make mistakes; that the act of individual

¹ 296.² 11.³ 12.⁴ 13.⁵ *ibid.*

choice enjoys a kind of 'sacredness' that trumps even the best intentioned paternalism of the State.¹

This difficulty, which remains largely latent in PIRA, would become explicit in Berlin's later writings. In the introduction to *Four Essays on Liberty* he puts it this way: 'No doubt the view that there exist objective moral or social values, eternal and universal, untouched by historical change, and accessible to the mind of any rational man if only he chooses to direct his gaze at them, is open to every sort of question.' And yet, he continues, 'the possibility of understanding men in one's own or any other time, indeed of communication between human beings, depends on the existence of some common values'. Indeed, 'Acceptance of common values (at any rate some irreducible minimum of them) enters our conception of a normal human being' and 'serves to distinguish such notions as the foundations of human morality on the one hand from such other notions as custom, or tradition, or law, or manners.'² The contrast between this formulation and the language of Romantic moral creativity is stark, and I can see no easy way of bridging the gap. Berlin's robust common sense drew him back from the ultimate implications of the Romantic world view, but at considerable cost to the coherence of his own.

The issue of coherence extends not only to the Romantics, but also to Berlin's favorite thinker of the eighteenth century. Richard Wollheim contends that 'The truth of the matter is that the historian and connoisseur of German romanticism, the rediscoverer for our age of Vico and Herder, is a Humean.'³ Evidence for this contention abounds, starting with their orientations toward religion. As Michael Ignatieff puts it, 'Before [Berlin] entered Oxford, before he had read a line of Hume, he

¹ 4.

² *Liberty*, ed. Henry Hardy (Oxford etc., 2002), 24.

³ Richard Wollheim, 'The Idea of a Common Human Nature', in Edna Ullmann-Margalit and Avishai Margalit (eds), *Isaiah Berlin: A Celebration* (Chicago, 1991), 78.

was already a Humean sceptic. And so he remained, all his life.¹ Hume's moral philosophy – specifically, his distinction between factual and moral statements – had a more direct and equally profound effect on Berlin's thinking. The essay on 'Subjective versus Objective Ethics'² is a reflection on the implications of the fact/value distinction, which he terms 'Hume's abiding service in the history of human thought'.³ True, Berlin rejects Hume's effort to 'reduce ethics to psychology', insisting that his argument 'can easily be shown to lead to a somewhat different conclusion'.⁴ And later in his career he propounded the thesis that values are in some sense 'objective'. But during the period in which PIRA was taking shape, Berlin accepted a version of Kant's claim that normative propositions are 'not statements of fact at all, but orders, commands, "imperatives", deriving neither from an artificial convention, like mathematics, nor from the observation of the world, like empirical statements'.⁵ For that reason, the terms 'objective' and 'subjective' simply do not apply to moral statements. Denying that morality is objective does not imply that it is subjective; imposing that distinction on morality is a prime example of what the Oxford philosophers in Berlin's time termed a 'category mistake'.

It is not hard to square Hume's account of morality with that of the Romantics. Denying that morality reflects facts in the world is consistent with Hume's own linkage of ethics and psychology, and with Kant's analysis of morality as categorical imperatives. It is also consistent with the Romantic view of values as creations on a par with works of art. It is not easy, however, to square the Humean view with Berlin's account of common human values. If those values enter into our conception of what it means to be human (at least normally so), then the

¹ Michael Ignatieff, *Isaiah Berlin: A Life* (New York/London, 1998), 41.

² First published as an appendix to the first edition of PIRA.

³ 331.

⁴ 328.

⁵ 329.

line between the empirical and the normative has become very blurry indeed. If the characterisation of our common humanity in moral terms is the condition of intersubjective understanding, as Berlin asserts, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that an element of objectivity has entered the moral world, and therefore that applying the objective/subjective distinction to that world is not obviously a category mistake after all.

As Berlin understood better than most, a direct line connected political romanticism of the nineteenth century to the murderous irrationalisms of the twentieth. If the Romantic statesman is akin to the Romantic artist (an analogy Berlin drew), then it is natural to see the nation as the statesman's clay to mould in accordance with his vision. If 'Freedom is the state in which the artist creates', it is also the condition in which the statesman acts. The worship of the artist as 'the only entirely liberated personality, triumphant over the limitations, the fears, the frustration which force other men to follow paths not of their choosing' feeds fear of, and contempt for, democracy as 'simply a conjunction of the enslaved wills of such earth-dwellers'.¹

For all of Romanticism's contributions to the understanding of the human condition, in the end Berlin had no choice but to draw back from it. Its moral and political implications were at odds with his deepest commitments. And more: its unironic, passionate, even ecstatic stance could not have been further from Berlin's. George Crowder puts it well: '[O]f all the Russian thinkers, [Ivan Turgenev] is closest to Berlin in both politics and temperament. Indeed, the picture Berlin presents in "Fathers and Children: Turgenev and the Liberal Predicament" [...] is virtually a self-portrait.'² Michael Ignatieff elaborates on this intimate similarity: 'Like Turgenev, [Berlin] was fascinated by radical temperaments, but incapable of being a radical himself.

¹ 252.

² George Crowder, *Isaiah Berlin: Liberty and Pluralism* (Cambridge, 2004), 32.

Like Turgenev, he had a preternatural gift of empathy, “an ability to enter into beliefs, feelings and attitudes alien and at times acutely antipathetic to his own”. Like Turgenev, he could not enter into radicalism sufficiently to surrender his own detached and ironic scepticism.¹

Berlin may well have been an ironic sceptic, but he was neither ironical nor sceptical about liberalism as a political creed – or about the view of human liberty that undergirds it. Among its many fatal flaws, political romanticism left no space for ambiguity or detachment. It was liberal society that made Berlin’s life and work possible – a gift he never lost sight of and for which he remained grateful to the end.

¹ Ignatieff, *op. cit.* (xx/1), 256, quoting RT2 301.

ABBREVIATIONS AND CONVENTIONS

THE ABBREVIATIONS listed below are used in this volume for the titles of books by Isaiah Berlin. Except in the case of L2, a 2 or 3 added to the abbreviation indicates the second or third edition of the work in question. The dates in parentheses are those of the first edition and, where applicable, (a) successive edition(s). In the introduction, page references are given to both editions of Berlin's works, except in the case of PSM, whose pagination is the same in both editions.

AC	<i>Against the Current</i> (1979, 2013)
CC	<i>Concepts and Categories</i> (1978, 2013)
CTH	<i>The Crooked Timber of Humanity</i> (1990, 2013)
FIB	<i>Freedom and Its Betrayal</i> (2002, 2014)
HF	<i>The Hedgehog and the Fox</i> (1953, 2013)
L	<i>Liberty</i> (2002)
L1	<i>Flourishing: Letters 1928–1946</i> (2004) ¹
L2	<i>Enlightening: Letters 1946–1960</i> (2009)
MN	<i>The Magus of the North</i> (1993; incorporated in TCE)
PI	<i>Personal Impressions</i> (1980, 1998, 2014)
PIRA	<i>Political Ideas in the Romantic Age</i> (2006, 2014)
POI	<i>The Power of Ideas</i> (2000, 2013)
PSM	<i>The Proper Study of Mankind</i> (1997, 2013)
RR	<i>The Roots of Romanticism</i> (1999, 2013)
RT	<i>Russian Thinkers</i> (1978, 2008)
SM	<i>The Soviet Mind</i> (2004)
SR	<i>The Sense of Reality</i> (1996)
TCE	<i>Three Critics of the Enlightenment</i> (2000, 2013)

¹ Published in hardback in the USA as *Letters 1928–1946*.

References to PIRA in the foreword and introduction are given by PIRA₂ page number alone. References to notes are given in the form 123/4, i.e. p. 123, note 4.

Curly brackets – { } – identify Berlin's handwritten marginalia (mostly notes pointing to further revision; occasionally topic-signposts for his own reference, somewhat analogous to subtitles), here presented as footnotes. Square brackets mark editorial comment or intervention, except that such brackets have not been used to identify exact references to published works, almost all of which have been supplied by the editor.

Any corrections needed in this volume will be added to the list posted at <<http://berlin.wolf.ox.ac.uk/>> under 'Published work' as soon as they come to the editor's notice.

EDITOR'S PREFACE

A Tale of a Torso

[I]n accepting the invitation to become President of Iffley College in 1965 Berlin was acknowledging that he was incapable of writing a big book.

Maurice Cowling¹

275 printed pages! *Quel horreur!*

Isaiah Berlin²

I

POLITICAL IDEAS IN THE ROMANTIC AGE may be seen as Isaiah Berlin's *Grundrisse*,³ the ur-text or 'torso',⁴ as Berlin called it, from which a great deal of his subsequent work derived, but which also contains much that is distinctive and not to be

¹ *Spectator*, 17 October 1998, 38.

² Letter to Henry Hardy, 10 March 1992, on being told the approximate length of the present book: see xiv below.

³ Karl Marx's *Grundrisse* ('Foundations') is the name given to his rough drafts of 1857–8 for his lifetime project, a 'critique of the economic categories', part of which was later published as *Das Kapital* (1867). *Grundrisse* was first published in German in 1939 and 1941 in a rare, two-volume Soviet edition, reprinted in German for general circulation in a one-volume edition in 1953, and first translated into English in 1973.

⁴ The metaphor became less appropriate as time went on: instead of adding missing limbs to the torso, Berlin quarried it for shorter pieces. I look forward to reading someone's *The Torso as Quarry: The Intellectual Auto-Parasitism of Isaiah Berlin*.

found elsewhere in his writings. It was first composed between 1950 and 1952, and is based on a distillate of his early work in the history of ideas, itself informed and to a considerable extent constituted by the enormous amount of background reading he did for his Home University Library biography of Karl Marx¹ in the 1930s, when he was a Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford. It is the longest continuous text he ever wrote, at over a hundred thousand words.² The prologue was written somewhat later, and Berlin revised the main text in his own hand – particularly heavily in the earlier chapters – after it had been typed from his initial dictation.

I have already recounted the story of this text briefly in my preface to Berlin's *Freedom and Its Betrayal*,³ an edited transcript of a set of radio lectures that derive from it. But let me expand on this a little here.

On 21 April 1950 Katharine E. McBride, President of Bryn Mawr College, Pennsylvania, wrote to Berlin, inviting him to give the Mary Flexner Lectures. The letter reached him at an opportune moment, as he was about to return to All Souls to become a full-time historian of ideas. He accepted with alacrity, in the first place provisionally, and six weeks later definitely. In his second letter⁴ he proposed a topic:

As for the subject of my lectures; I am wondering whether you would find the political ideas of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century a suitable topic. What I should like to talk about is the different fundamental types of approach to social and political problems – e.g. the Utilitarian; that of the Enlightenment (rational and sentimental) from the Encyclopedia to the French

¹ *Karl Marx: His Life and Environment* (London and Toronto, 1939).

² Originally it was perhaps up to half as long again: see xxix/2.

³ *Freedom and Its Betrayal: Six Enemies of Human Liberty*, ed. Henry Hardy (London and Princeton, 2002; 2nd ed., Princeton, 2014), xii–xv; 2nd ed., xxvii–xxx.

⁴ Dated 2 May 1950.

Revolution; the Authoritarian-Reactionary (de Maistre and his allies); the Romantic; the Technocratic-Scientific (Saint Simon and his followers), and perhaps the Marxist.¹ These seem to me to be the prototypes from which our modern views in their great and colliding variety have developed (only stated, it appears to me, with much more clarity, vigour and dramatic force by the founders than by their modern epigoni). My lectures, while occupied with the history of ideas, would have a very direct bearing upon our present discontents. I don't know what I ought to call this subject – it is part of a work on the history of European ideas from 1789 to 1870 which, in any case, I must at some time write for the Oxford History of Europe,² but perhaps the title could be thought of later. Perhaps something quite simple, 'Six (or however many) Types of Political Theory', or perhaps something a little more arresting. However, if this kind of subject is suitable I could set to work and prepare some lectures.

[...] I hope you will have no hesitation in rejecting my suggested lectures if for some reason they are not what you desire, but I am pre-occupied with the thought of the early nineteenth century and its antecedents, and should find it difficult to turn my attention to something very different; but that is no reason why you should allow this to be foisted upon you if some other plan would suit you better. If, on the other hand, my suggestion is acceptable to you, I have no doubt that I shall myself vastly profit by the experience.

Naturally, Berlin's suggestion was accepted. And he was right to predict that giving the lectures would serve his own purposes,

¹ In the end Berlin did not discuss Marxism, though he did include a chapter on Marx's historicist precursors – Vico, Herder and Hegel.

² A contract for Berlin's contribution to this series (the Oxford History of Modern Europe, edited by A. L. C. Bullock and F. W. Deakin) survives among many that were offered, agreed to or signed for books he never wrote. The book was first discussed with him at dinner in Wadham College, Oxford, in 1948, and was to be entitled *Ideas in Europe 1789–1870* (though the end-date varies).

because the invitation proved to be the catalyst for the preparation, over the next two years, of the present work, which can for once rightly be described as 'seminal'. I say 'preparation' rather than 'writing' advisedly, since in December 1951 he is still 'in process of hysterical dictation of the rough draft'.¹

The only other surviving detailed evidence of Berlin's thinking as he worked towards the typescript, so far as I know,² appears in a letter to Bryn Mawr written in November 1951, sent in reply to a request for an overall title under which to announce the series, and for titles for the individual lectures:

I am not sure what the best title of my lectures would be, perhaps 'Political Ideas in the Romantic Age' would be best, and you can put in '1760–1830' if you think well of that. I have been looking for some title denoting what I really want to talk about; i.e. the particular period during which modern political and social beliefs really came to be formulated and the controversies acquired their classical expression, in the sense that present-day arguments still deal in concepts and even terminology which crystallised during those years. What I wanted to avoid was a term like 'origins' or 'foundations', since this would commit me to talking about people like Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke etc., who may be the fathers of all these things, but are definitely felt to be predecessors and precursors and, certainly as far as mode of expression is concerned, altogether obsolete. I had therefore thought of as an alternative title 'The rise and crystallisation of modern political

¹ Letter to Anna Kallin of 11 December 1951: see 349 below.

² There is also an undated sheet (MS. Berlin 570, fo. 23) in the Berlin Papers in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, on which Berlin has written what seems to be an intermediate version of his plan: 'The Rise of Modern Political Thought / 1. Nature, Rights & the new scientific spirit (The philosophes & the Encyclopaedists) / 2. The Problem of Freedom (Rousseau & Kant) / 3. Idealism & Romanticism (Vico, Herder, Fichte & the Romantic movement) / 4. The organization of Society (St. Simon & the beginnings of socialism) / 5. The revolt against Reason (De Maistre & Görres) / 6. History & the Individual (Hegel & Marx)'.

ideas'. If you can think of something more elegant than either, I should be grateful. Perhaps the first might be the title, the second a subtitle. I leave that to you.

As for the individual lectures, I should like to suggest the following: (1) 'The Concept of Nature and the Science of Politics' (Helvétius and Holbach); (2) 'Political Liberty and the Ethical Imperative' (Kant and Rousseau); (3) 'Liberalism and the Romantic Movement' (Fichte and J. S. Mill); (4) 'Individual Freedom and the March of History' (Herder and Hegel); (5) 'The Organisation of Society and the Golden Age' (Saint-Simon and his successors); (6) 'The Counter-Revolution' (Maistre and Görres).¹

His mood as he finished the draft typescript was characteristically unselfconfident. As he wrote to a close friend at New College, David Cecil:

here I am trying to write this book on political ideas, & it is coming out all awry – sentimental, vague, clumsy, soft, unscholarly, a mass of verbiage & dough unseasoned, no sharp points, only occasionally little gleams of what I thought I said, what I thought I wanted to say. However I persist. I don't know what the lectures will sound like, but there *will*, unless I fall ill or die, be a book. Not very good, less so than I can do on the Russians. But I must get the circulation of blood going: I accepted the lectures because I knew they wd lay the foundations of a book. – & having dictated 150.000 words, I suppose there is.²

The lectures were duly delivered in the spring of 1952 – the first on 11 February and the last on 17 March – after a good

¹ Letter of 20 November 1951 to Mrs Samuel H. Paul, Bryn Mawr.

² Letter of 29 January 1952. The word-count is not necessarily reliable, but may indicate that he did draft the whole work (see xxxiii/2). He continues: 'I shd rather like Cole's professorship at Oxford: perhaps the book will help with that: I am being quite frank.' He always said afterwards that the BBC version of the lectures was instrumental in winning him that very professorship in 1957.

deal of characteristic administrative flimflam into which we do not need to enquire here. As usual, the act of lecturing caused him terrible self-doubt. Between the second and third lectures he wrote to Marion Frankfurter: 'The lectures are an agony, of course, I seem to myself to be screaming meaningless phrases to a vaguely discernible, half darkened, audience; & feel terrified before, hysterical during & ashamed afterwards.'¹

Berlin certainly intended to publish a book based on the typescript he had prepared for the lectures, and to do so within a year or two of their delivery. As he told A. L. Rowse during the last phase of preparation, 'I am even now in the throes of the most awful agony of writing lectures for Bryn Mawr to be given in February & then printed, I suppose next year.'² On 25 November 1952 he wrote to Arthur Schlesinger, Jr, that he would have 'finished the politics – Bryn Mawr book' in 1953. The following January he remained optimistic in a letter to President McBride:

This brings me to the subject I am trying to evade and avoid, the question of the manuscript, which I really do hope to be able to send you by about May. Heaven knows what its condition will be, whether it will be 140,000 words or 60,000 words or both – but let us turn away from this bleak and distasteful topic.³

In a letter to the Warden of All Souls (John Sparrow) dated 17 February 1955 he writes that he has 'concluded the second draft of a book on Political Ideas in the Romantic Age, arising out of lectures delivered at Bryn Mawr College and later broadcast by the BBC'. This may put a slightly optimistic gloss on what he had achieved, but it does add to the evidence that all six chapters were originally drafted, and that the text published here represents a comparatively late stage in Berlin's preparation of the work.

¹ Letter of 23 February 1952.

² Letter of 20 January 1952.

³ Letter of 22 January 1953.

Nevertheless, he clearly realised that there was a good deal more to be done, since on 28 July 1956 he writes from Oxford to his friend Morton White: 'in Sept (abroad) & Oct. (here) I shall try to work like a black to finish my Bryn Mawr politics book. Then to fresh pastures.'

As late as 1959 Berlin is still promising eventual delivery. Miss McBride wrote to him on 11 February 1959, with immense tact, suggesting he send the manuscript as it then stood. In his mildly disingenuous reply of 16 February 1959 he writes:

I am covered with shame. If the lectures which I delivered at Bryn Mawr had been written down I should, after all these years, have let you have them, closing my eyes and ears to the consequences. But I fear they do not exist, only a hideous collection of fragments and notes to remind me of what I should have done and what I did. But I am still determined to produce a book and send you a manuscript. Despite everything that has been said about good resolutions, provided we are both alive – and I feel beautifully optimistic on that score despite everything – you should have my lectures within two years or so. Please forgive me for my dreadful, but all too characteristic, dalliance.

And later that year he writes to Oxford University Press as if the book was on his agenda; at any rate, it provides an excuse to explain the delay in writing his book for the Oxford History of Modern Europe, from his commitment to which he then proceeds to extricate himself.¹

Three years later, his beautiful optimism has disappeared. As a postscript to a card written on 6 August 1962 to Alfred A. Knopf, who had enquired, in a postscript of his own, whether he might publish the lectures, Berlin writes: 'The Bryn Mawr lectures I have mercifully consigned to the dust bin.' Not true, at any rate literally, but the torso had been laid aside and

¹ Letter to Dan Davin of 11 November 1959.

abandoned – perhaps forgotten – despite the fact that he had revised much of it extensively. But it is clear that he had by this point finally accepted that he would never deliver the book to which the present volume is the closest approximation now possible. In a letter of the Ides of March (15 March) 1963 to Chester Kerr of Yale University Press, he puts this down to ‘diffidence on my part, of which [Oxford University Press] were somewhat critical’, and says that ‘no manuscript was ever delivered to them, nor, now, is ever likely to be’.

II

In 1992 I produced a fair copy of PIRA, incorporating all Berlin’s myriad handwritten alterations, and the prologue that he had written subsequently, but I do not believe that he ever looked at it, at any rate seriously. Here is the relevant part of the covering letter I sent with the typescript:

With somewhat bated breath I enclose my provisional rendition of what is by far your longest unpublished work (about 110,000 words, or 275 printed octavo pages), the ‘long version’ of the Flexner Lectures. Don’t panic! I’m not asking you to do any work on this – not even to look at it in any detail. But since it now exists, it seemed reasonable to show it to you, if only so that you might admire its bulk. Perhaps you had no idea you had in fact written such a long book?! I have inserted after the contents page a note on the text¹ which you might find of interest. It raises one or two questions, such as: Was there ever a corresponding ‘long version’ of the last two lectures, or did you never have time to draft this? Why did you never publish the lectures with OUP, as you were under contract to do? Was it indeed Anna Kallin’s plan that the Third Programme version should be the 1952 Reith

¹ Reproduced at 349–54 below as ‘Note from the editor to the author’.

Lectures, and if so, when and why was this notion scotched? Was there a recording of the lectures as delivered in the USA?¹

Berlin replied:

275 printed pages! *Quel horreur!* I don't know about the last two lectures – the BBC texts are in their own way surely complete? I have no recollection of a contract with OUP (remember, I shall be eighty-three in June). Anna Kallin did indeed wonder whether they might make Reith Lectures – I was only too ready. She put it up, I had a letter inviting me to do them, followed by a letter two days later countermanding. That was that. I was asked to do the series seven or eight years later, and by that time said that I had nothing to say. That was before I thought of Romanticism.

Even though I have still found no trace of the last two chapters, there is some evidence that they were drafted, though one cannot be certain.² In any event, for Maistre he could make use of a typescript prepared some years before. He was right about the BBC texts, and his views on Saint-Simon and Maistre appear in *Freedom and Its Betrayal*. A longer version of his treatment of Maistre is the centrepiece of *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*. I have not repeated these accounts in this volume, but the reader

¹ Letter of 3 March 1992.

² In November 1951 he writes to his parents: 'I stay at Harvard anyway till Xmas. Then I have a month or so to finish the Bryn Mawr lectures. [...] Then I shall go on working – correcting all the six chapters of the book which the Bryn Mawr chapters will become.' At this stage, of course, the later chapters might have been planned rather than actually dictated, but by 21 February 1952 he writes (again to his parents): 'I *have* written the first draft of a *book*. Which is an event. It will take about another 6–8 months of polish but shd appear, in 1953.' And on 7 November of the same year he writes to T. S. Eliot apropos the BBC Lectures: 'I possess the MS. of the text on which the talks are based, even longer, fuller, duller, with an apparatus of notes.' He is perhaps unlikely to have expressed himself thus if two chapters remained unwritten, however great an exaggeration he committed in referring to 'an apparatus of notes'.

may wish to turn to them after finishing the present text, to complete the journey begun within these covers.

III

Readers familiar with Berlin's *oeuvre* will hardly need to be told where in his later work the ideas of PIRA reappear, in a more or less altered form; those less well travelled in his writings may welcome some brief preliminary guidance. At one stage I contemplated an exhaustive concordance of parallels, but once I began compiling this it quickly became clear that a complete listing would be more confusing than helpful, since so much of Berlin's work consists of journeys across similar terrain. The context and the purpose of the enquiry often differ; nor does Berlin ever exactly repeat himself – even when he is ostensibly recapitulating discussions that have appeared elsewhere – which means that one needs to read all his discussions of a topic to be sure that one has squeezed out every drop of what he (not always consistently) has to say about it. Nevertheless there is a good deal of overlap in his work taken as a whole, and readers who tackle it systematically will recognise a number of previous acquaintances – eventually old friends – as they travel onward.

A striking example of Berlin's avoidance of repetition is provided by his multiple treatments of what he sometimes calls the 'three-legged stool' or 'tripod' of key assumptions (for him mistaken) on which Western philosophy has, in his view, rested for some two thousand years. In his usual account, these assumptions are that in ethics and politics, as in science, all genuine questions have unique answers, that these answers are in principle discoverable, and that they all fit together into a coherent whole. This leitmotif is implicit in the first chapter of PIRA, though not set out there in a single coordinated passage.¹

¹ See, for example, 28, 29, 35, 70 and 98–9 below.

It becomes explicit in Berlin's later work, for example (among many other instances) in 'The Romantic Revolution' (1960; SR), in the second lecture – 'The First Attack on Enlightenment' – of *The Roots of Romanticism* (1965), and in 'The Divorce between the Sciences and the Humanities' (1974; AC).

These accounts are broadly similar. However, if we turn to other treatments of the trope, differences appear. In 'The Birth of Greek Individualism' (1962; L)¹ we find that the usual first and third legs have become legs 1 and 2, and that there is a new leg 3: 'The third assumption is that man has a discoverable, describable nature, and that this nature is essentially, and not merely contingently, social.' Though this substitution is obviously motivated by the topic of the lecture, made clear in its title, one does wonder if there is a certain arbitrariness about the selection of legs for the tripod, indeed about the number of legs this supportive piece of furniture is said to possess. In chapter 4 of 'The Magus of the North' (1965; TCE) we find the Enlightenment tradition resting on 'three pillars' of faith – 'in reason', 'in the identity of human nature through time and the possibility of universal human goals', and 'in the possibility of attaining to the second by means of the first'.² The cake is recognisable, even if the recipe is subtly different. In any event, as Berlin wrote in another context, 'like all over-simple classifications of this type, [it] becomes, if pressed, artificial, scholastic and ultimately absurd', though it can certainly offer 'a starting-point for genuine investigation'.³

Let me now mention a few of the other principal correspondences between PIRA and later works that may strike the reader who comes to the former when familiar with the latter, or indeed vice versa. The first and most straightforward of these, of course, is between the four chapters of PIRA, the first four Mary Flexner Lectures, and the first four BBC Lectures published in *Freedom*

¹ L 290 ff., 319.

² TCE 278, TCE2 348.

³ *The Hedgehog and the Fox*, HF 2, HF2 3 (PSM 437, RT 23, RT2 35).

and *Its Betrayal* (reckoning the introduction to that volume together with its first chapter – on Helvétius – as the single item they originally constituted). Next in line is the use of the second and third chapters in ‘Two Concepts of Liberty’,¹ and of the fourth in ‘Historical Inevitability’. These are the reworkings that George Crowder has in mind when he sums up the main thrust of PIRA in these terms: ‘In the torso Berlin sketched the outlines of what would become his mature position in many areas, but three in particular: the complex political legacy of Enlightenment rationalism and its critics, the contrast between negative and positive liberty, and the vulnerability of positive liberty to corruption.’²

This brings us to more local echoes of individual chapters or passages from PIRA in later writing. Here one should first strike a note of caution: there is not necessarily a straightforward one-to-one correspondence between the subject matter of earlier and later passages, since different topics, or different aspects of the same topic, appear in different combinations at different times. So, for example, the earlier pages of ‘The Divorce between the Sciences and the Humanities’ echo the depiction of Enlightenment scientism in the first chapter of PIRA – the idea that cumulative progress is possible in all areas of enquiry if one applies the scientific method (allegedly the only rational method there is) – while the later part of the essay, with its focus on Vico, is more closely related to PIRA’s chapter 4. Conversely, chapter 1 points forward in some ways to ‘The Divorce between the Sciences and the Humanities’ and in other ways to ‘The Concept

¹ Several early drafts of ‘Two Concepts of Liberty’ survive, and sometimes display more directly than the published text of that lecture their roots in PIRA. Some of them are published as appendices to FIB2 and the present volume; others are posted online (see <http://berlin.wolf.ox.ac.uk/published_works/tcl/index.html>).

² George Crowder, *Isaiah Berlin: Liberty and Pluralism* (Cambridge, 2004), 56–7.

of Scientific History' (1960; CC, PSM); indeed, chapters 1 and 4 themselves overlap a good deal. So the specification of parallels is a necessarily inexact science. That said, some rough signposting is possible.

The prologue to PIRA contains Berlin's well-known definition of philosophy as a third way, different from both empirical and formal disciplines.¹ This resurfaces in fuller form in several places, including the introduction to *The Age of Enlightenment* (1956; POI), 'The Purpose of Philosophy' (1961; CC, POI), 'Does Political Theory Still Exist?' (1961; CC, PSM), and 'An Introduction to Philosophy', a television interview with Bryan Magee.²

The prologue and the first chapter of PIRA, 'Politics as a Descriptive Science', set out the avowedly oversimplified view of the Enlightenment that Berlin rehearsed many times throughout his writings, refining it to some degree as time went by. Notable later instances are the chapter on 'The Enlightenment' in *The Magus of the North* (1965), described by John Gray as canonical,³ and the relevant part of 'The First Attack on Enlightenment', the second lecture of *The Roots of Romanticism*, delivered in the same year. As noted above, all these works include accounts of the variously triform bedrock on which Berlin saw the Enlightenment as being founded.

In addition, Berlin begins the first chapter by raising the problem of obedience as fundamental to political philosophy: 'Why should anyone obey anyone else?' This question also inaugurates the first Flexner/BBC Lecture, and 'Two Concepts of Liberty'.⁴

¹ See 11–12 below.

² Published in Bryan Magee (ed.), *Men of Ideas: Some Creators of Contemporary Philosophy* (London, 1978), 14–41.

³ John Gray, *Isaiah Berlin: An Interpretation of His Thought* (Princeton and Oxford, 2013), 136.

⁴ FIB 1, L 168. It appears, too, in 'Does Political Theory Still Exist?' (PSM 64, CC 148, CC2 194) and in 'The Birth of Greek Individualism' (L 293).

One of the main themes of the same chapter, namely the difference between the logic of enquiry in science as opposed to the arts, and the linked rejection of methodological monism, reappears in 'The Divorce Between the Sciences and the Humanities'.

The discussion of Rousseau and Kant in the second chapter, 'The Idea of Freedom', is recognisable in a condensed form in 'Two Concepts of Liberty'. And the section on Kant that ends the chapter is developed in 'Kant as an Unfamiliar Source of Nationalism' (1972; SR).

The material on Fichte in 'Two Concepts of Freedom', the third chapter of PIRA, is used not only in 'Two Concepts of Liberty', but also in the fourth lecture, 'The Restrained Romantics', of *The Roots of Romanticism*. In chapter 3, too, we find intimations of the extended treatment of historical realism that Berlin provided in 'The Sense of Reality', written soon afterwards (1953; SR), though here he calls it the 'sense of history'.¹

The fourth, last surviving, chapter, 'The March of History', after a recapitulation of much of chapter 1, includes not only the material (on Hegel, for instance) that is reworked in 'Historical Inevitability', but also sections on Vico and Herder that can be seen as the germs of Berlin's later work on those two thinkers, represented especially by the studies of them (1960 and 1965 respectively) incorporated into *Three Critics of the Enlightenment*. In this chapter too we see the beginning of Berlin's preoccupation with pluralism and the Counter-Enlightenment, and also the main origin of the discussion of historicism and of differing views of the nature of history in 'The Concept of Scientific History'. Some later resonances of the appendix on 'Subjective versus Objective Ethics' are identified in Joshua Cherniss's introduction.²

Once again, I emphasise that the echoes catalogued here

¹ See 251 below (the 'sense of reality' appears at 241 and 323).

² See lxix–lxxiv below

comprise only a small selection, chosen more or less at random, and should not be taken as any kind of comprehensive guide to the ubiquitous presence of ideas from PIRA in Berlin's later work. Nor, on the other hand, should their existence be allowed to obscure the fact, alluded to at the outset, that there is a great deal in PIRA that is not said at all – or not said as fully and/or as well – in Berlin's later writings. Some dimensions of the thinkers Berlin discusses receive much more detailed treatment here than he ever gave them subsequently. More importantly, as Joshua Cherniss explains, PIRA uniquely draws most of Berlin's main themes together, exhibits them as a coherent overall thesis, and shows how the debates discussed are prototypes of many of our current preoccupations. In this context I should like to quote Ian Harris,¹ who has pointed out that PIRA

reveals the unity in Berlin's thought much better than anything published hitherto. In particular, it shows very clearly that like Cassirer, Croce, Lovejoy, Oakeshott and Collingwood, Berlin wrote a history that was formed by, and which was a vehicle for, his philosophical views. That is also what makes it intellectually interesting, and puts it in a different category from any number of specialised works published in the intervening half century.

IV

As compared with the other works I have reconstructed from Berlin's *Nachlass* – chiefly *The Magus of the North*, *The Sense of Reality*, *The Roots of Romanticism*, *Freedom and Its Betrayal* – PIRA presented a rather special problem of intellectual archaeology. Those other works were in a sufficiently completed state for me to turn them into books that needed no special explanation

¹ Personal communication.

or apology beyond making clear what their origins were, so that they would not be judged by inappropriate standards. PIRA, however, was in a far more rough-hewn condition, like the massive sculptures for the tomb of Pope Julius II left unfinished by Michelangelo, or the colossal *kouros* that lies, a moment of arrested history, on a hillside near the sea at Apollonas on the Greek island of Naxos. This lent it a certain mystique and grandeur, but meant that it couldn't be brought to completion in the same way as its predecessors were, especially since it lacks its final two chapters. I and Berlin's other Literary Trustees therefore decided to give it the rather different treatment that this volume constitutes. PIRA, that is, is offered to the public not as any kind of forgotten though essentially finished work, but as the 'torso' Berlin knew it to be, without artificial prostheses attached where limbs are missing, and without excision of his unimplemented notes for revision, or concealment of other signs of incompleteness.

I am most grateful to Joshua Cherniss, whose introduction skilfully places PIRA in context in the development of Berlin's thought and of his subject. Joshua has generously helped, besides, with the above sketch of later parallels. I should also like to thank Robert Wokler for invaluable contributions from his expert knowledge over a long period; Alan Ryan, one of my fellow Literary Trustees, for his indispensable support and guidance during the preparation of the volume; and James Chappel for timely and efficient research in the Berlin Papers on PIRA's history. Help on individual points was given by George Crowder, Steffen Groß, Jennifer Holmes, Michael Inwood and Serena Moore, whom I warmly thank, as I do all those whose input I have carelessly failed to keep track of.

New to this second edition are William Galston's foreword and the concluding appendix, in which the delivery text of Berlin's famous inaugural lecture, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' – only half the length of the text printed shortly afterwards (in

1958) – is published for the first time. Far from being generated by mere cutting, this distinctive, fast-paced text throws considerable light on the complex issues broached in the lecture.

Since this new edition has been reset, its pagination differs from that of the first edition. This may cause some inconvenience to readers who wish to follow up references to the first edition in the second. I have therefore posted a concordance of the two editions at <http://berlin.wolf.ox.ac.uk/published_works/pira/concordance.html>, so that references to one can readily be converted into references to the other.

I hope and believe that Isaiah Berlin would have approved of the dedication of this book to the memory of Solomon Rachmilevich. As Berlin said to his biographer, 'He was the first person who gave me a taste for ideas in general, interesting ideas *telles quelles*.'¹ 'Rach' died in 1953 at the age of sixty-two, at about the same time as the PIRA project, and it seemed right to bring them both back to life together.

Henry Hardy

Wolfson College, Oxford, May 2005

Heswall, October 2013

¹ See LI 141/1.

ISAIAH BERLIN'S POLITICAL IDEAS

From the Twentieth Century to the Romantic Age

Joshua L. Cherniss

A study of the history of opinion is a necessary
preliminary to the emancipation of the mind.

J. M. Keynes¹

The use of the word 'freedom' is one of the surest indices
of the user's general ultimate ideal of life, of what to
want and what to avoid, [...] one of the most faithful
indicators of where a man stands.

Isaiah Berlin²

I

ISAIAH BERLIN WAS A FUNDAMENTALLY unsystematic thinker. His work ranged across many disciplines – principally the history of ideas, political theory, analytic philosophy, Russian literature, Soviet politics, and the philosophy of history and the social sciences – and embraced a varied cast of characters. Berlin produced no great synthesis or magnum opus; temperamentally,

¹ Keynes 1926, 16. For full references, see xxiii above, and the bibliography at the end of this essay (lxxxv–xcii).

² 259.

and stylistically, he was an essayist. Value pluralism and liberalism formed the leitmotifs of much of his mature work;¹ but his writings cannot be reduced to a systematic statement or comprehensive exposition of either of these doctrines. Yet while Berlin's thought did not constitute a centripetal system or converge on a single solution, it did form a cohesive whole, consisting of a set of recurring, overlapping, interrelated concerns and convictions. The themes that he pursued across many years and pages ultimately fit into a pattern; but they are held together by his intellectual personality, rather than by a single master idea, or guiding principle, or preordained plan.

Political Ideas in the Romantic Age (PIRA) is not a summation of Berlin's career as either intellectual historian or political theorist. It is by no means the best, most original or most interesting of his historical works. It is not a characteristic example of his approach to the history of ideas, largely lacking the psychological insight and focus on individual thinkers that mark his best historical essays; nor does it provide a comprehensive statement of methodological principles. And it contains no major ideas that cannot be found – often more fully and coherently worked out – in his other writings.

Yet PIRA occupies a central place in Berlin's intellectual life; and read properly, it reveals much about the development and nature of his thought and career. For it contains, often in embryonic form, most of the ideas, and encompasses most of the concerns, that would dominate Berlin's work over the next three decades. Here we find early manifestations of his conceptualisation of liberty, his analysis of the philosophy of history and critique of determinism, and his accounts of the Enlightenment and its varied critics and successors – romantic, reactionary,

¹ For the relationship between these two concepts – a topic of considerable controversy in recent literature on Berlin – see Gray 2013, Galston 2002, Crowder 2002, and particularly Crowder 2004.

historicist and socialist. Furthermore, we find all these, which Berlin would develop in separate essays over many years, laid out side by side. PIRA helps us understand the development, and appreciate the unity, of Berlin's thought, and reminds us how venturesome a thinker he was. For this reason it is an important document for those who wish to understand, and learn from, Berlin's work.

II

Berlin began his career as a professional philosopher, absorbed primarily by questions in the theory of knowledge. Although this field of interest is still in evidence in his later work, his intellectual attention shifted to other areas. While working on his biography of Karl Marx in the 1930s, Berlin became fascinated by Marx's precursors and exegetes, and by the problems of social and political theory and the philosophy of history that they forcefully raised. The looming threat of totalitarianism, which cast a shadow over the 1930s, and his first-hand experience of both political administration in the USA and the suffering of the Russian intelligentsia under Stalinism during and immediately after the Second World War, further turned his mind towards politics. He returned to Oxford in 1946 more engaged with the political events of his day than previously, and determined to turn his attention from analytical philosophy to the history of ideas.¹

This conjunction was not coincidental. For Berlin the history of ideas was not only a subject of intrinsic fascination, but also a means to self-understanding. Berlin interpreted contemporary political conflicts in the light of the history of ideas, and he turned

¹ For the latter, see his letters to Herbert Hart, early October 1944 and 23 February 1945, and to Sir Anthony Rumbold, 11 January 1945, L1 498, 518, 534.

to history to make sense of the concepts that dominated the politics of his day: he sought to make past ideas speak to present problems. 'Political words and notions and acts', he declared, 'are not intelligible save in the context of the issues that divide the men who use them. Consequently our own attitudes and activities are likely to remain obscure to us, unless we understand the dominant issues of our world.'¹ Social, political and moral problems arise in every age. But ideas are especially powerful at moments of particularly rapid change and acute confusion. In his inaugural lecture as Chichele Professor of Social and Political Theory, delivered in 1958, Berlin pronounced his own age to be such a time: 'there has, perhaps, been no time in modern history when so large a number of human beings [...] have had their notions, and indeed their lives, so deeply altered, and in some cases violently upset, by fanatically held social and political doctrines'. Some professors and intellectuals could wield immense and destructive power; it was up to other professors and intellectuals to understand their influence, expose their errors, and provide a clearer and truer understanding of reality.² This was the task that Berlin undertook.

But why approach political ideas *historically*? Because, Berlin replied, such ideas were historical phenomena. 'Political theory is 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*, not least in terms of new models derived from other fields of experience.'³ To understand past ideas required knowledge of the circumstances, social and intellectual, out of which they arose. But it also depended on some features of human experience remaining the same, so that the problems of the past continued to be absorbing, and the responses to them comprehensible, to the men and women of

¹ L 168.

² L 167.

³ 15, italics added.

the present. '[E]ach political philosophy responds to the needs of its own times and is fully intelligible only in terms of all the relevant factors of its age, and intelligible to us only to the degree to which (and it is a far larger one than some modern relativists wish to persuade us that it is) we have experience in common with previous generations.'¹

These successive and competing political philosophies 'are not commensurable, any more than novels, or histories, which spring out of a given world and sum up each experience, can be ranged in some strict order of merit or "progress", as if there were a single goal which all these works of art were seeking to attain'.² To contribute to human self-understanding, the historian of ideas should seek not to rank the belief-systems of the past, or portray the inevitable progress from one to another, but rather to describe the dominant models which have shaped human experience over time, and continue to underlie the outlook of the present. Berlin's approach to the history of ideas was thus consistent with his pluralism and his anti-teleological philosophy of history.

Berlin regarded the period surrounding the French Revolution as a political and intellectual watershed. The ideas that emerged at that time continued to 'form the basic intellectual capital on which [...] we live today'; the political discourse of Berlin's age depended on 'the concepts, the language, indeed the images and metaphors which were generated during that period'. During those years 'the issues debated were literally identical with those which stir individuals and nations' in the present.³ While he

¹ *ibid.* For a later statement of Berlin's conception of the nature and importance of ideas and their relation to history, fully consistent with the points made in PIRA, see Jahanbegloo 1991, 24.

² 16.

³ 3; cf. PSM 86–7 (CC 169–70, CC2 221–2). Such passages reflect the gulf separating Berlin's view of the relationship between the history of political ideas and the present from that of, for example, J. G. A. Pocock, Quentin Skinner, and those influenced by them. Without seeking to make any claims for either

disavowed the practice of attributing blame to past thinkers, or seeing the ideological tree fully grown in the philosophical acorn,¹ Berlin was at pains to draw links between the ideas of the past that he discussed, and the political assumptions and ideological movements of the present. He linked the rationalism and humanitarianism of the Enlightenment, as well as the Utilitarianism of the more radical *philosophes* and of Bentham, to the later liberalism of Mill, Morley, Wilson, the architects of the League of Nations and the UN, and to liberal opponents of Communism. Berlin identified with this tradition; yet he was also critical of many of the *philosophes*' assumptions, and especially those of the physiocrats and early Utilitarians. And if he traced the influence of the Enlightenment to liberalism, he also saw it feeding into one of liberalism's most treacherous ideological rivals: Communism. Thus what Berlin saw as the central ideological struggle of the times in which he was writing, that between Communism and liberal democracy, was a conflict not so much between the Enlightenment and its critics, as between different dimensions and implications within, and successors to, the Enlightenment.

Berlin expressed a similar ambivalence towards Rousseau's place in the history of ideas, the value of his thought, and his legacy. Rousseau is here identified both as an adherent, and as a passionate critic, of the Enlightenment. He is portrayed as the intellectual progenitor both of radical individualism and of authoritarianism, of nationalism, with all the good and evil that it entailed, and of all movements of 'resistance to foreign and

approach, it should nevertheless be noted that the contention that the incendiary political issues of the 1950s were 'literally identical' to those of the 1800s is dubious. Such an assertion is also a notable departure from Berlin's essay of a year or two earlier, 'Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century' (Berlin 1950b), in which he had argued that there was a fundamental difference between the outlook of the twentieth century and that of the nineteenth.

¹ 2-3.

domestic oppression', with their noble ideals and often destructive means. Rousseau broke with the materialism and scientism of the radical Enlightenment, but not with its rationalism, or its conviction that liberty could be reconciled with order; he thus both went too far, and not far enough, in his intellectual revolt.

Berlin saw the influence of Hegel at work all along the political spectrum, affecting Fascists, Communists, imperialists (all of whom Berlin strongly opposed), as well as liberal republicans and constitutional monarchists. He claimed that social scientists (of many of whom, as his letters of the period show, he had a low opinion),¹ as well as 'planners and technocrats', of whom he was much afraid,² and 'New Dealers', whom he admired and sympathised with, and with many of whom he was on the warmest personal terms, had all had their outlooks shaped by Saint-Simon. The opponents of these groups – reactionary irrationalists, and existentialists and other intellectual exponents of 'anti-intellectualism' – were the (sometimes unwitting) epigoni of Maistre and Fichte, respectively. For Berlin, to paraphrase Faulkner, past ideas were not dead; they weren't even past.

III

Political commitment was a source of tension and unease for Berlin (and one which he explored in his works on Russian intellectuals of the nineteenth century).³ Berlin was at once engaged and disengaged, politically committed and politically cautious. He was a lifelong and passionate anti-Communist, and an intellectual guru to the anti-Communist left; yet he was wary

¹ e.g. to Shirley Anglesey, 9 May 1949, L2 85.

² Although he remained deeply wary of F. A. von Hayek's attacks on all forms of State control as posts along the 'road to serfdom'.

³ e.g. Berlin 1962a and 1972.

of becoming a propagandist or crusader.¹ He intensely admired political courage, and liked and respected political activists; but his temperament and outlook were too moderate, tentative and ironical for him to be capable of activism himself. Berlin's work was decisively influenced by the moral conflicts and quandaries inherent in politics; yet he usually shrank from making direct pronouncements on current events. He was a political theorist who rarely wrote directly about political theory, and ignored many of its central, perennial topics – the basis of political legitimacy, the demands of citizenship, the nature and functioning of political institutions. Of the thinkers discussed at length in the surviving chapters of *PIRA*, only two are generally recognised as major political thinkers – Rousseau and Hegel. Moreover, Berlin's interpretations of these decisive figures are among the weakest parts of the book; and his account of Hegel focuses on his philosophy of history far more than his theory of the State. Finally, Berlin sought to avoid political partisanship in his writings, offering sympathetic accounts of deeply anti-liberal thinkers, and pointing to the dark sides of the ideas of the founders of liberalism, despite his own firm commitment to liberal values.

Yet, for all this, Berlin's writings on the history of ideas – particularly those dating from the period surrounding and succeeding *PIRA*'s composition – were inspired by moral convictions and political fears. He was often ambivalent, but he was not uncertain. His judgements were complex and qualified; but he was constantly judging, even as he sought to understand.

Central to these commitments and judgements was his distinctive vision of human liberty. Although *PIRA* is not explicitly focused on the idea of liberty, this idea is central to Berlin's account: for, as he first wrote here, and would repeat in 'Two

¹ See the insightful account by Ignatieff 1998, 199–200, 231, 237. This tension between commitment and aloofness, enthusiasm and irony, is reflected in the conflicting estimations that Berlin continues to inspire; see e.g. the differing reactions to the first volume of Berlin's letters in Lee 2004 and Kirsch 2004.