



Gavriel Cohen's Conversations with Isaiah Berlin: No. 7

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Gavriel Cohen: Conversation No. 7

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NB This is a draft transcript uncorrected by GC, and presents more problems than the transcripts he corrected. With luck the recording will help when checked.

Selected topics

Shortage of historians of ideas in England

No English intelligentsia

The Church of England

Writing about Karl Marx

Karl Marx

Vittorio Strada

Unoriginality of Russian ideas

French versus German and English imperialism

Herder and nationalism

IB's closest friends

Freddie Ayer

Mary Fisher

The Lynds

Shiela Grant Duff

Marrying a goya

IB's self-belittling temperament

His wish not to influence people

GC We were discussing last time – yes – you said there was nobody in England dealing with history of political theory or political thought; there was nobody to talk to ...

IB No, I didn't say that. Plenty of people dealt with political theory and plenty of people talk about political thought, but nobody was interested in the history of ideas.

GC History of ideas?

IB Yes. Nobody listens.

GC Why is this?

IB Well, that's the general question. Nobody has answered . That is because, broadly speaking – one of those answers which is not an answer, which repeats the question, which is that the English in general – like others, certain other nations – are not interested in ideas. They don't regard ideas as an object of serious study, either by academics, or by journalists, or by historians or anybody else. There are people who take an interest, but not many.

Let me explain what I mean. Supposing you were an educated Peruvian or an educated Indian in the nineteenth century – towards the second half – there are certain writers whom you either had to have read or had to have pretended to have read; know something about, at least. They were [A. C.?] Benson – maybe; John Stuart Mill – certainly; [Thomas] Carlyle – certainly; [Herbert] Spencer – certainly, in those days; Darwin – certainly; some people – Ruskin, Tolstoy, Murphy[?], [Thomas] Arnold. If you were a Frenchman, I don't know whether you would have read much Arnold. But anyhow, these principal thinkers of *world renown*, who were regarded as absolutely *the thinkers* of the nineteenth century on social, political and to some extent religious, aesthetic problems. Every other county has books on the history of ideas of their own county, particularly social ideas – in Germany it would probably be called *Geistesgeschichte* – to the very prominent academic subjects. Americans would call it intellectual ideas – there are at least two famous books on American intellectual history. The French have plenty of books, let's say Montaigne, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Michelet, anything you like. The English are the only people who have no history of English ideas at all. I think there are one or two, but they are too obscure to remember. Monographs, yes – about given thinkers. But no such thing as a continuous history of ideas. I don't say its a good thing to wite a book about. I think perhaps the ideal thing is not to regard it as succession – for one person to influence another, and so on; all this business of influences is vey dubious. But still, the symptom, or the fact that there isn't enough interest among publishers, or among writers regarding the topic. And that is so, and has always been so. History of movements, history of socialism – maybe history of the Oxford Movement and religion, history of utilitarian movements. But broadly speaking, history of English ideas, social ideas, say in

the 1890s, nineteenth century, nothing except for little articles – monographs.

GC You mentioned the name of Lepe[?] in the nineteenth century. You can go back to Milton, or even to Hobbes.

IB History of political ideas, there are. But not general ideas.

GC But when you started occupying yourself with this, you said you had nobody to talk to.

IB And still haven't.

GC You still haven't?

IB No. There are people. There is somebody who has a position in Hester [Chester? Exeter?] University, to the man who has a position in Sussex, to the man somewhere in East Anglia. But these are isolated persons, not in touch with each other, or with me, much. There is a very intelligent man, for example, in Sussex University, who has written about history of English ideas in the mid nineteenth century – historian ideas [*sic*]. He's interested in this. He's an exception. I can talk to individuals. Of course, I can talk to someone like Bernard Williams, or somebody like Stuart Hampshire, because they are educated people of a civilised kind. But professionally, people who have read these people, who can tell whether I am right or wrong in a particular estimate? No. My interest in the history of ideas doesn't come [from?] really English writers. G. M. Young is a man who wrote about nineteenth-century English ideas. But it's very very – it's not very superficial, but not really the genuine article.

GC But did you try to persuade your friends that it was an important thing?

IB No.

GC You didn't?

IB No.

GC It's quite incredible. Friends of yours, colleagues of yours were probably rather puzzled that you decided to make this switch.

IB No. Nobody was puzzled, or not puzzled. Nobody showed the least surprise, however you may explain it. Not in the least. Nobody regretted it, nobody tried to persuade me to stay in philosophy, nobody tried to persuade me to leave it. In English academic life there isn't that kind of interest in each other – it doesn't exist.

GC Including close friends?

IB No. I didn't have many close friends in my life in general. Close friends is rather ...

GC Is rather rare?

IB In England, not all that frequent – one or two, perhaps.

GC Generally speaking, people have one or two close friends. I don't think that in this respect, in England, it is worse than in other places.

IB No, it's not worse.

GC In my opinion it is even better than in other places. People in England can be rather reserved and cold, and have close friends. And in places like France and in other places, that can be outgoing, but it doesn't mean that.

IB But you are talking of close friends of an intelligentsia kind .

GC Yes.

IB Well, that doesn't occur in England so much, because there is no intelligentsia. Intelligentsia only exists in countries where there is a common enemy whom these people feel they are to some extent embattled against in the name of progress, or freedom, or whatever the cause may be, which is near to their hearts. People who are against st... make friends with each other – with other people who are against st.... In other countries there is the Church and the state

which are hostile to liberal principles, to liberal practices. So, in France, we had an intelligentsia in the nineteenth century and the eighteenth century – eighteenth certainly – and the *philosophes* were a kind of intelligentsia in the seventeenth century, because there was still an enemy, some were pro-evolution, some were violently anti. So there was a right and a left who battled with each other in the field of ideas. The same thing in Spain – an intelligentsia because there is a black[?] pro-Catholic[?] Church. In Russia, of course, they are against the word – the word isn't even mentioned there. There is not much of an intelligentsia in Scandinavia. There are civilised people and intelligent people, but intelligentsia, as such – nothing. In Vienna there is an intelligentsia because there is a Roman Catholic Church. In Italy there is an intelligentsia, some who became Communists in the end, because there was the Church.

GC In Vienna, is it only the Church, or is it a special situation of being the caterpillar of an Empire, strongly nationalist, ready to ...

IB – Well, that's what created the German atmosphere in Vienna, of, say, anti-Semitism. Of course, that's a different question. I am only answering about intelligentsia. The fact that there are many nationalities in Vienna is not the cause of the creation of intelligentsia, just clash of nations, clash of people who belong to different cultures. That doesn't create intelligentsias. That just creates conflict; that just creates nationalism, anti-nationalism, anti-Catholicism, but not solidarity among people engaged, as they feel, in some struggle against some oppressive force which is in power. Nobody in England talks about being in the hands of the clergymen – in the hands of priests, yes, but not in the hands of the clergymen. The Church of England is not such an institution. In fact, some members of the Church of England today complain that it isn't oppressive, it isn't organised and it isn't conservative and it isn't militant enough.

GC Mind you, from their own viewpoint, they may have a point.

IB Yes, that may well be.

GC Fundamentalism in the Church – because I think the liberals are going too far. The Church is now facing a very interesting phase in the history of ...

IB I cannot take an interest in the Church of England.

GC I know. I realise that you don't take an interest, generally speaking, in the ...

IB They have a very decent social record. So have the Nonconformist Churches. In England the Church – perhaps in the eighteenth century it was [?] to the squires in the countryside and was, broadly speaking, anti-Whig and anti-progressive. It was! But how much force it had is not clear. I have a colleague in All Souls called Jonathan Clark who thinks that Locke and Hume and [Jospeh] Priestley, and all these people – what might be called the progressive wing of English thought – had no interest whatsoever. The only thing that really had an influence was squire and parson. Not that different from seventeenth-century France. England is a good concierge regime country. I think that's exaggerated. I don't think that's true – books were not burnt by the University of London as they were in the Sorbonne. I think that's totally absurd. But there is such a view. Plenty of people who think of it as a *good solid* conservative country, and all these liberal thinkers, who are not read by anybody, and have no influence on anybody. But people read their sermons, and not pamphlets by a lot of intellectuals. Could be. I'm not an eighteenth-century historian, at least not an English historian of the eighteenth century. Germany is a bit different. There you are talking about the beginnings of some kind of an intelligentsia – not so much against the Church as against the monarchy. Yet Fredrick the Great himself, who was a highly enlightened figure, was against Prussia and the rigid discipline which it imposed on its citizens. Both ways the right-wing and the left-wing intelligentsia – both exist in nineteenth-century Germany.

GC Yes, but coming back to our ...

IB What caused me to take an interest in it is, of course – was first of all having to write on Karl Marx, which made me read eighteenth-century anticipators of Marx, which is French history of ideas in the

eighteenth century. That's what started me going. Then Herzen and the Russians, and Marx and the Russian Revolution – all that coalescence, so that a combination of eighteenth-century radicalism and nineteenth-century ... There was a very good article about me, though I have to say it, in the *Corriere della sera* two days ago, three days ago – by a very intelligent Italian left-wing critic called [Vittorio] Strada, whom I greatly respect, who has written an article in connection with his prize. He says that one of my interests in Russia – my interest in the history of ideas – part liberise [?]. And I think he is right, I never quite thought of it that way before. From the fact European ideas – mind you, he doesn't say that, but it's true – there isn't a single idea in social, or political, or even aesthetics, or even general – in Russia that doesn't come from the West. In theology maybe there are, but about that I know very little. I think Dostoevsky's ideas come from the West, but they come from deep-rooted Russian – mainly, and that kind of thing. But if you take what might be called the history of political and social ideas in Russia, in general, it comes from the West. But it never got – for whatever reason – to such an acute and exaggerated form as it reached in Russia. And so the collision of these ideas is much more violent, and much easier to follow, in Russia than it is in the West. I think I have said that in one form or another. What I said in my writings is that if you take Paris of the 1840s – there are plenty of doctrines there and they are no doubt completely different, and they clash, but not very violently, on the whole – where all these ideas nullify each other, or at least weaken in each. In Russia we have a vacuum. When the ideas come they dominate – they are accentuated – because people really believe them, they become transformed, they become weapons – that is not so, to such an extent, in the West. There is a story which I tell: for example, Herzen tells you that there are all kinds of-rate French thinkers who travelled in false bottoms in Russian suitcases to Russia and the Russians became terribly enthusiastic about them. Fourth- and fifth-rate French thinkers were tremendously admired. In fact, there is a story about a French mathematician who discovered that his theories, which were not at all well received in France, were lectured about in Russian. He burst into tears. This could well have happened to the minor disciples of Saint-Simon.

GC Can you compare any other civilisation, or place, or period to this situation of Russia? Is it on the margins of Europe in general, was it the same in Spain, or Italy back ?

IB No. Not so violent.

GC There is some ... of Western thought, was so strong, was so big, that played so central a role in the life of the intelligentsia ...

IB You mean European ideas, or English ideas in particular?

GC European ideas.

IB Well. Latin America, enormously. The United States to a very large extent. India – certainly. Japan – certainly. I mean lately, the last thirty, forty, fifty years. Of course, we could take the Middle East. There isn't a great deal of discussion of ideas – not only original ideas, but there isn't much discussion. Since so far, if there is any ideology, it is certainly not native, apart from Islam, that's what it runs against. What Islam is against is the unfortunate penetration of Western ideas: nationalism, socialism, Communism, secularism.

GC But we came to this point of the intelligentsia just indirectly.

IB Excuse me. Take, for example, Algiers, which is a good example. There are quite a lot of Arab intellectuals in Algiers, quite civilised once, it comes from France.

GC Surely you are right. In the ex-French Empire even stronger than in the ex-British Empire.

IB That's certain, because the French paid a great deal of attention to ideas.

GC To ideas and to education. Creating a link was a major facet ...

IB Franco par élite.

GC ... and it is still very much so.

IB If the Germans had entered colonies for any length of time, they would also have tried, but they weren't in a position to.

GC They might have tried, but with the French it is a different tradition. I believe it goes back certainly to the Jesuits, and maybe even further the idea of imperialism by assimilation.

IB Yes, certainly. The French certainly wanted to create a France out of mother France, whereas the English want to leave natives alone.

GC Exactly. I think maybe the Germans are like the English.

IB Maybe. I don't know. I wonder.

GC But it's very interesting. You see, even from our own point of view ...

IB The Italians should be like the French, but I don't think much happened.

GC But they tried. You know that the Italian government financed teacher[s?] of Italian in ...

IB In Palestine. That they did Really? Even in high school?

GC In this respect they imitated the French.

IB But if you ask about the Italian ideas, it's a little thin. But Bourguiba's Tunis is said to have been penetrated by French ideas. I don't know. Perhaps they were. But Libya, not much.

GC But in Libya you didn't have [?] anyway. Tunisia was far more advanced than Libya.

IB But Tunis is French and Libya is Italian. So in Libya you don't get it, nor in Somalia.

GC Nor in Ethiopia.

IB Well, in Ethiopia, not long enough.

GC It's very interesting. It touches upon even Jewish history and – the French government supported and encouraged study . They are less [?] as educational measures. In Germany you had the same thing – the *historine*[?] that was supported by the government, and they tried to help the Jewish community in Palestine also in the educational system. But England they *never tried even*.

IB Sarona and Wilhelma [German colonies in Palestine] are not centres of German culture. You can't say that. But what you can say is that about Herder, for example, as a figure. In the Balkans – no, not in the Balkans, in the Austro–Hungarian Empire, Czechoslovakia. Czechoslovakian nationalism owes everything to Herder. So does, probably – for all I know, certainly – does the Jewish nation. They may not know it. But Zionism was given impulsion by that kind of cultural nationalism. Talmon was quite good on that – on that subject – on the influence of Herder on that particular kind of cultural nationalism, on [in?] backward communities.

GC Yes. But that again is an entirely different story. It's history of ideas. But when you are speaking about education as a tool of imperialism ...

IB That's a different story, of course. Still, the Germans germanised – they did. Again, Talmon tells the story of two Czech schoolmasters in the 1790s – or some such date – saying: the Czech language will soon cease to be spoken. Everything is gone. Nothing is left. Little did they know what would happen. But the German influence – the Austro–Hungarian Empire is German-speaking.

GC But it's not Germany.

IB German-speaking. Hungarians spoke German, the Czechs spoke German, certainly. They all did. And they read German books. And they went to Germany universities. And they produced German intellectuals.

GC But it might have been a natural process and not a deliberate thing.

IB Well, a deliberate policy in the sense that the government is in Vienna and if the officials are German and only speak German, school are created – German schools – which are obviously superior to the native schools, and those are subsidised and the others are not. It comes to the same. I mean, Kafka's father spoke Czech, but Kafka is a German writer. It didn't occur to him to write his books in Czech.

GC I know. The phenomenon is clear.

IB I don't know how much Polish Martin Buber spoke.

GC No, he didn't. Yes, I know. But it doesn't mean that it was such a deliberate policy as the French. I think perhaps partly.

IB Yes, I agree. I know, but let's not discuss it so long. The French think French civilisation is the only civilisation there is, and that French culture is *culture*, and thus if you want to educate people, there is nothing but French education which is any good. They really believe that. And nobody else believes that but themselves. It is a form of *tremendous* cultural chauvinism which is unparalleled anywhere else.

GC And they believe that you *can*. The Germans are also cultural chauvinists – I mean you can be a cultural chauvinist but not ...

IB No, the French were universally more so than others. The Germans did not mind what foreigners did.

GC But coming back to the intelligentsia, which we came to only indirectly, we were speaking about friends among the intelligentsia, and I think that you attach too much importance to the correlation between having close friends among the intelligentsia, and the very existence of the phenomena of intelligentsia. You see what I mean?

IB No.

GC You talk about intellectual friends in England, and it is not even intelligentsia.

IB Intellectuals are not intelligentsia. Intellectuals don't necessarily make close friends. Intelligentsia does. Because they are bound like brothers and they are fighting against a common cause and therefore morally and spiritually there is an affinity. Among intellectuals that doesn't have to be.

GC Yes, that I can see. All this as a social phenomenon is clear. That's when you speak about friendship. When we come to close friendship ...

IB Yes, that's a different matter. Nobody can tell. It's a very individual affair. No general propositions hold, of course.

GC So in this respect we understand each other. All right. Now, who were your closest friends?

IB It depends when, at what stage in my life.

GC You say that you have very few close friends.

IB No, no. One has more close friends before marriage than after, which is the natural effect of marriage.

GC You really think so?

IB Absolutely. It happened to me and to every married person I know. If they are happily married, if the marriage is a success, a certain number of friends are automatically shed, partly because one's wife doesn't have the same [?] and partly because one needs friends less. One relies less upon – simply, one's loneliness is cured. One of the great causes of friendship is, of course, solitude. The need to talk to people, to be with people, to have contact with human beings. That certainly is true. No. I had quite a lot of close friends before the war. Certainly, in Oxford, where I lived. Who were they? Well, as an undergraduate I had a friend called Bernard Spencer – a poet. I had a friend called Dennis Cuppelson [sp? possibly Denis Hayes Crofton], who afterwards became a high civil

servant who looked after academic affairs in the Treasury. I had a friend – at school, even – I had a friend Arthur Calder-Marshall, who is still alive and whom I haven't seen for years. I had a friend called Aviram Halperin [Halpern] – a close friend, certainly. I had also Ettinghausen at school, who was certainly a close friend. Not so much afterwards, but certainly in those days. Then in Oxford I made quite a lot of friends in my College. Who are my close friends? I have to jog my memory. Bernard Spencer I told you, Cuppelson I told you. Humphry House, who is a very eminent English scholar, became a great friend. The notorious Goran Nauric [sp?] who is now talked about because of his wild effects on various people who have been spies[?] and so on, he became a close friend, certainly.

GC Your generation?

IB My generation. Exactly. He certainly was a close friend. So did Freddie Ayer, a philosopher who became a close friend, certainly.

GC This is a friendship of many years?

IB Oh yes. It continues. Not quite so close as it was in those days, but it goes on. I occur a little too frequently in the first volume of his autobiography. He constantly competes with me and squares up to me, and so on. Tries to defend himself against potential effects on my part and tries to make out that in some respects he is superior to me – all of which may be true, but still. No, I am certainly a figure in his life. And he in mine. And Stuart Hampshire of course. In the middle 1930s. And Philip Toynbee is a friend – not a close friend, but certainly a friend. And so was Jeremy Hutchinson. He is now Lord Hutchinson – a friend. Ben Nicolson – we all lived together in a house. Let me see. Then there are all these ladies. Mary Fisher, daughter of the Warden of New College, who has only recently retired as Principal of St Hilda's College, was a close friend; still is, in fact. She is called Mrs Bennett.

GC She lived in Surrey, I believe?

IB Yes.

GC She was the first [*unclear*].

IB I didn't know that. Mary Fisher worked in the Colonial Office during the war. She is a Roman historian by profession, but she worked in the Colonial Office and married a Colonial Office official called Bennett.

GC Ah, yes Bennett – there was a Bennett ...

IB I know, but I don't know which, that would be it? I wonder whether that's him. Someone told me it wasn't. But it may have been. They are still married to each other. I think probably it is the same. I think that's the man you did have problems with. John, I think it is.

GC I'll check it.

IB And also the Cyprus area. She does the Cyprus area. Near enough.

GC I'll check it.

IB Do. Because I've always suspected him of being an enemy.

GC I'll see how far he was an enemy, I don't remember.

IB No. If it's the same one, he was an enemy. She never bought it up with me. We never talked about Israel. They still live in Oxford – the Bennetts. But we drifted apart after marriage. She said to me: 'I hear you are married to a divorcee.' So it weakened relations between us. Probably old-fashioned. She was a great fiend, very intimate. And so were the two daughters of an atheist called Robert Lynd who used to write for the *New Statesman* under the title [pseudonym] of Y.Y., in the 1930s. Charming [write]r[?] but not very important. He had two daughters called Sigle/Sheila Lynd and Máire/Moira Lynd. With Sigle Lynd I was in love. Máire Lynd was a Communist. So was Sigle Lynd. They both became fervent Communists, but Sigle left over Hungary and Máire, my friend, still is, and her husband is called [Jacob, 'Jack'] Gaster. He was the solicitor of the Communist Party – all his life. He must be retired – he is very old [1907–2007, aged ninety-nine].

GC [*unclear*]

IB Certainly came from Rhode[Antrim Road?]. How do you know?

GC A friend of mine live[d?] there.

IB They still live there, as far as I know. She's a very charming woman; she is a sweet, innocent, high-minded Irish girl, she was very beautiful, and a very pure character, and once being a Communist remained one. And she recently said to me, about three–four years ago: 'Now, there are no good countries left.' That was a very sad remark. I think it was after Czechoslovakia, something like that. Let me see who else was my friend. Christopher Hill was never a good friend of mine, but a friend. Let me see now, who else? Well, there must have been others whom I don't remember. Von Trott was a great friend, Adam Von Trot. Really was a friend, in a good genuine way. David Astor – never.

GC Of all those names –

IB Shiela Grant Duff, whom Madame von Trott opposed, who wrote a book on Czechoslovakia and then an autobiography, who was married to various people.

GC I know her. I came across her.

IB Great friend. Still is.

GC I just met her a few months ago.

IB Here in Oxford?

GC Here in Oxford. She is not in the College, but she used to be.

IB Curious girl. I know.

GC I was told that she was a daughter of ...

IB She is called Mrs ... Wait, I'll tell you her first husband's name – he was a friend of mine whom I very much liked, but he is dead – what was his name? She has her father's name. I don't remember [Noel Francis Newsome]. She was a great friend. And she lives in Ireland, married to a Russian called Sokolov. These are all people I have been friends with.

GC [*unclear question, perhaps 'Was Herbert Hart a friend?'*]

IB Yes, and remained one. His wife was called Jenifer Williams. Great friend, independently of him.

GC You were friends independently because so many people like Herbert and don't like Jenifer?

IB No, I am very fond of both. I am devoted to both.

GC I mean, from the existing friendships in those days is Herbert Hart and Stuart.

IB There was a lady called Miss Walker, who is the aunt of Edward Mortimer – his mother's sister. That was a very complicated relationship and in some rather insane way [she] fell in love with me. I was very moved by all this, but it came to nothing. She went mad and is alive and for about fifty years is in a lunatic asylum. She is Edward's actual aunt. It is not a very balanced family.

GC Did you at any time face the possibility or problem of marrying a goya?

IB Oh yes. I didn't face it because it didn't actually occur. But I certainly could have done.

GC And you wouldn't mind?

IB No.

GC And [*unclear*] your parents?

IB They would have minded. Yes, they would have minded, but I don't know how strongly. They wouldn't have forbidden it, or my father wouldn't have said he'd never speak to me. There wouldn't have been a pouring [an appalling?] crisis. They would have been saddened.

GC And you would have [*unclear*].

IB No. I really wanted to marry somebody – I never came near it.

GC Did you correspond continuously with any friend, then or in later years?

IB No. There is no correspondence from beginning to end.

GC Why?

IB Because I don't write letters in that sense. I reply to letters sent to me. I don't suddenly sit down and write that kind of letters to an old friend saying this is what's happening to me. And how are you?

GC Even when you were young?

IB Even when I was young. Well, I did write, but I can't remember. Oh, I'll tell you who was a great friend in my Oxford days. That was Elizabeth Bowen, the writer. She was a tremendous friend and remained one to her dying day. She became more of a friend to my wife – in the end – but still she remained a friend, certainly. David Cecil became a great friend, but that was only later, after 1938. We both became Fellows of New College in 1938.

GC And then, in the war years, where was he?

IB In England.

GC And after 1945?

IB I came back to England.

GC And remained [a] friend?

IB Absolutely. My best friend in New College; my best friend in Oxford, in fact.

GC [*question unclear*]

IB Hampshire was not in Oxford then. James Joll was a friend. He was a pupil, a pupil and friend. I liked him very much.

GC I know. I know that you liked him.

IB He became a friend – certainly. Very positively so. I don't see him very much now.

GC But there were times, I would say inconsistently, to ...

IB John Sparrow was a friend – although now he's over [out of?] his head. He was certainly a friend. Douglas Jay was a friend, anti-Israeli as he always has been, and xenophobic to a violent degree. Certainly was a friend.

GC Those are in your undergraduate days, or later?

IB No. In All Souls. In 1932 onwards.

GC You tried several times to belittle your position academically. When you were an undergraduate and then ... Why do you do that? It's not at all so. After all, when you see memoirs of so many people, who were either pupils or colleagues, and so on, they so often mention you as something exceptional.

IB Only because I made some impact on them personally, but not intellectually. I never had disciples, till very lately. One or two perhaps. I never had real disciples. Never. There is no school of followers of Berlin. No. Never. Other people did.

GC All right. And I may even be able to see why. You don't want to be an imposing ...

IB I hate being an influence. Partly, I didn't want to influence people; I have always been terrified of altering people's lives.

GC You wouldn't believe how I can understand it, because [*unclear*].

IB That's true.

GC That I can see.

IB Heavily troubled. If anyone did something because of being under my influence, I would have been deeply troubled, because I never believed in the validity of what I believe to a sufficient extent to preach it.

GC It's very interesting, because your psychological tendency and your intellectual cleave[?] are in affinity. I mean, you are against ...

IB Let me explain. Whenever I expound ideas or opinions, I always overdo it. I expound them with considerable passion, I expound them almost dogmatically – I have always been accused of that. I go too far and I become too obstinate and I try to reject objections to [them] with great stubbornness, and I tear myself into whatever I am saying. But within this there is profound scepticism about my ability. It's a very curious combination. And I defend [my opinions] with passion partly because I am not absolutely secure in holding them. If I were, I would go about them in a much more tranquil and balanced way.

GC Well ... maybe ...

IB That's the same way in which I defend certain of my heroes when I speak with passion. All these characters whom I have described, I slightly import myself into them. They seem to resemble me to a high degree because I enter into them a little too strongly and in fact they enter into me. But if you ask me whether I am prepared absolutely to put my hand on my heart and defend these ideas against all objections – never quite. There is deep scepticism together with a certain desire to believe.

GC I am, as you can see, unfortunately at the end because we have come to a point which is very essential. I believe that really you came to your intellectual belief. It came to you naturally, in your nature, to the character, because it's really fantastic how the very fact that you are against any hegemony of theory typically suits this natural inclination.

IB Yes. I am sure that's right. It's a matter of temperament.

GC You came to your . . .

IB Inevitably. My political views or my moral views are certainly shaped by my temperament and not by reading books.

GC And that's why you are so influential, despite the fact that you don't want to . . .

IB Never wanted to dominate people.

GC I can see.

IB I loathe responsibility: that's the point. I loathe responsibility in an almost cowardly way – I loathe it. I don't want to be committed, in that sense. I don't want to be responsible for what other people are and do. The only movement to which I suppose I was wholeheartedly committed all my life is Zionism, and the paradox is that in the 1930s and even early 1940s, I didn't know very many Jews. I lived an-Jewish life. The number of Jewish friends I had in the 1930s was, in contrast with non-Jews, very small indeed.

GC I must say it is a very consistent attachment to Zionism and Judaism.