



## **Michael Ignatieff's Biographical Interviews with Isaiah Berlin**

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# Michael Ignatieff's Biographical Interviews with Isaiah Berlin

**IMPORTANT NOTE** The recordings of the interviews Michael Ignatieff conducted for his 1998 biography of IB – *Isaiah Berlin: A Life* – are often of very poor quality, and IB's speech is in any case hard to follow at times. Partly for these reasons, the working transcripts in this PDF are very rough, often inaccurate and sometimes selective. Any offers of improved passages will be gratefully received by **Henry Hardy**.

It is hoped that one day the enormous task of checking the transcripts throughout will be undertaken. In the meantime, to maintain consistency, and to avoid confusion, all quotations from, and references to, the MI Tapes should use the transcripts and not the recordings.<sup>1</sup> In addition, if any published use of the transcripts is contemplated, the passage(s) in question must be checked against the recording, and permission for the use must be sought either from **the Trustees of the Isaiah Berlin Literary Trust**, who own the copyright in the interviews with IB, or from the literary heirs of the other interviewees, who own the copyright in those interviews, and who kindly gave permission to include below the material they control (with the exception noted at <https://bit.ly/MI-interviews>). Passages in bold have already been checked, but permission to use them is still needed. Some recordings have been transcribed twice to different standards: in these cases both versions are included, since it is not always the case that the same transcription is better.

The recordings were originally made on double-sided analogue cassettes, which have now been digitised, and most of these are posted online **here**. The digitised files sometimes include both sides of a cassette: this is indicated in the transcript where it applies.

Write to **Henry Hardy** with full details of what you propose to use, and he will supply a corrected text.

*Original transcribers: Henry Hardy, Michael Ignatieff, Esther Johnson, Kate Payne*

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# MI TAPE 1

Conversation date: 20 October 1988

Date transcribed: 27 April 2004

Transcriber: Esther Johnson

Subjects covered:

Family origins

Jewishness and Hassidism

Pale of Legislation

Andreapol' 1915

Zionism

Namier

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*Side A*

MI I wanted to ask you, Isaiah, was – tell me about your grandparents.

IB Yes, well, my family doesn't come from Riga as far as the centuries are concerned. Riga was outside the Pale of Settlement. The only Jews who could live there were of two categories. One was a mysterious category which I won't go – people who were there before Peter the Great conquered it. They were there, and the Swedes, a minute community. But I once met a Jew in Riga who said in German, [German quote]. By the time of the old Swedes, it wasn't so. This was said in 1914, in 1915, I mean I was six, five, and I remember a man who said, 'under the old Swedes', which was two hundred years before.

MI But your family does not come from that side?

IB Oh no, no, no, no. The other kind of Jews who lived in Riga all come from Russia and they moved for business reasons. Now, under the laws of the Pale of Settlement created really by– but

rather earlier but tightened by your great grandfather – the rules were as follows: no Jew was [permitted?] outside the Pale, which was roughly Lithuania, Eastern Poland, bits of the Ukraine I should think, unless: there are two conditions– three. One, if they were promoted to being members of the gentry which was true of about five families, not more– maybe seven: two, if they had professions, if they were dentists, if they were mail men, anything you like, mail makers, I mean whatever– artisans who supplied something, actually created something: three, if their business turnover exceeded a certain sum, in which case they were called Merchants of the First Guild. Merchants were divided into Guilds, the Guilds were determined by the turnover, not by actual capital. This is true of all Russians, I mean, not just of the Jews; all merchants are written down as merchants in the order of Estates, and the [Guildia?], the actual Guild was noted in their documents. And that was the First Guild [?] and that meant certain real wealth. Now, the kind of Jews who lived in Riga– I think I'd better give you the– it won't be a waste of time– the social hierarchy. At the top in Latvia were the Balkan Barons; they were Counts, the Barons [?], they came in the fifteenth century, Riga was conquered by the Knights of the Sword. They let them baptise fairly late, the Lithuanians in the fifteenth century and the latest– oh, they had large estates which they came by, by conquest. Under this Latvia, under Lithuania they bought a [?] which passed from hand to hand, from Sweden to Poland, Poland to Sweden, ultimately Russia. They kept their estates ...

MI When to Russia? [IB What?] Pardon the question of ignorance, but when to Russia?

IB From Peter the Great, about 1712, '13?

MI In the battle with the Swedes?

IB After the battle with the Swedes, yes, it must have been after Poltava, it must have been, I think, that was the famous window

into Europe, famous phrase [Russian quote], 'he hacked— he broke a window into Europe.' The window into Europe was Petersburg, but although a bit [MI The literal as well, yes] [ ] was a bit Swedish and therefore it's only after he eliminated his twelfth the twelfth of Sweden that he conquered all these provinces and married Catherine the Great, I mean Catherine the First. She was a—nobody quite knows what relation it was— Pastor Gluck, some such name, was she his mistress, was she his servant, depends on whether you were a left wing right or right wing right on writing about Peter the Great. But anyhow, she was captured by [Menschikov?] who was Peter's, in fact fazir, and Peter the Great took her from him, married her and she became Empress after him. She was a Baltic girl. Now, ... [MI The Jews?] Yes; no Jews then ...

MI Come in the van of the Russian ...?

IB No, no Jews, no, no, no Jews in Russia at all, officially, Jews were not admitted into Russia at any stage, but the partition of Poland brings in that portion of Poland. As you look at historians, there were [crypto?] Jews, there's something called the Jewish heresy which means something was going on which had to be eliminated by the church, but there were certainly settlements. They were concealed, hidden under other names, no doubt there were individual Jews who filtered in from Germany, but there was no settlement and no Jews officially known to exist. The Empress Elizabeth, Peter's daughter, was asked if she would like to admit some Jews because commerce and trade would be stimulated by them. She said, 'From the enemies of Christ, I do not desire even profit.' [claps] You see? And so they were not admitted. Under Catherine the Great, only with the partition of Poland I would say, which [ ] a large chunk of Jews you see in Eastern Poland and Lithuania with the [?]. **Right, we go back to Riga.** At the top were these Baltic Barons; they're called Benkendorf, they're called Korff, they're called, I suppose, Keyserling, those sort of names which would be Counts, Budberg— Count here is like Baroness, Barons

and Counts, they were at the top. They spoke German at home and they were fanatical supporters of the Russian throne. They got jobs at the court, they were made governors, they were made heads of police, they were much favoured because of their fanatical loyalty. They were detested by the Russians at all times and sometimes they didn't feel it because, unlike the sort of Prince of Pushkin who was of German origin, that's a bit different, because the top Germans were regarded as a kind of – not exactly aliens – but reactionary oppressors, very Germanic type. Under them came rich German Merchants in Riga, who in the nineteenth century created the German Opera, German Theatre. The conductor of the German Opera in the 1840's was Wagner; the conductor around nineteen hundred was Bruno Walter. So it was a real German outpost. Riga was not a Russian town at any stage, later perhaps, the only Russians in Riga were the Governor General, the police and bits of the Army probably, fruit vendors, newspaper vendors, odds and ends. But it was not– they spoke Russian because people had to because after all they were part of the Empire, had been for two hundred years, not fundamentally; Russians did not feel at home in Riga and didn't inhabit it. No Russians went and settled there in a comfortable way. The same is true of Estonia, the same is true of Finland, even more. Finland had its own parliament, these people didn't. Now, under the great German merchants, were Scandinavian merchants also, the same type, Danes, Swedes, Norwegians, who traded with the [ ], with Russia. Their main occupations I suppose were exporting things from the great Russian [ ] end, manufacturing things and so on. Very prosperous. Under the German merchants came the poorer German merchants. Underneath that came the Germanised Jews, who were quite civilised, quite well educated, again talked German at home, quite cultivated, couldn't get into Russian Universities because of the quota and so tended to go to Königsberg or Berlin to be educated and then came back to Riga– doctors, engineers; Eisenstein is a typical example, son of a baptised Jew, you see? Baptism helped but not much. If you were baptised, of course you could live anywhere but you remained a Jew, I mean the baptised

Jews or friends of baptised Jews rather than baptised Jews I suspect. It helped up to a point, legally it certainly did, socially not all too much, under some suspicion, and then gradually probably all right, but they themselves not. Then, under the richer Germans or more cultivated Jews, bourgeoisie, came the ghetto. The ghetto meant— quite rich people sometimes— they talk Yiddish, lived mainly in a place called the Krasnaya R? ] which now is a river, you see, as you know, [Duna ] in German, Dvinsk is [Dunabourg?] and [Itava?] is [M?] and all these towns of Russians and Germans.

MI How was the ghetto enforced?

IB It wasn't enforced, it was self chosen. These were people who had a legal right to live there, so it wasn't enforced in that sense; but they were poor, they were Yiddish speaking, they lived in poor lodgings, they crowded together like the East End of London.

MI And they had come from Poland, they had come from the partitioned ...?

IB They had come from Russia in the nineteenth century. I don't think many people came from Poland in the eighteenth, I think they just stayed there. They couldn't infiltrate into Russia because they weren't allowed to under the laws of exclusion, you see? Your great grandfather created a rather tightened law by which no Jews from the Pale could remain for twenty-four hours anywhere outside.

MI Yes, or acquire agricultural land.

IB No, but I meant spend the night. In Petersburg they were arrested. Weizmann couldn't spend the night, you see? That wasn't so I think in the 1870's, it became so later, that was called the temporary laws for some reason, rather ironically. [laughs] Now, these Jews were pious, Yiddish speaking as they might be in any other Russian Pale of Settlement. No difference, except that their

children could go to secular schools unless prevented by their parents. They were taught Hebrew, they were taught the Bible, taught bits of the Talmud exactly like anyone; but it was thinner. There weren't so many of them, they weren't surrounded by the Jews, so that my grandparents belonged to that. Now let me tell you in particular. They lived in the ghetto and they were Chassidim; that meant that the centre of their spiritual life was Lubavich, a small town in western Russia where the saint, Saint [?] had held court; and they were called the [Chabad?] Chassidim, and I am descended from the founder, in direct line— not the direct male line but directly all the same; and my seventh cousin, Yehudi Menhuin, is also descended from him.

MI And the founder— his name is ...?

IB Schneur Zalman; Schneur and Zalman are Hebrew names; he was called Schneur Zalman Schneerson because he had to have a Russian name. He was born about 1730 and he founded this, the origins— I won't go into this, it's too boring— the origins of Chasidism is early eighteenth century, is the Carpathians; this is the Russian branch. They were Methodists; they believed in union with God, emotion, out with clericalism, out with— not much respect for learning, not much respect for the rigid hierarchical structure of the Jews in the Middle Ages: some kind of spiritual outbreak of a slightly corybantic [laughs] slightly, if you see what I mean, Quaker, Shaker type. Exactly the same. The mystery is that the Moravian Brothers from whom Methodists are in descent, direct line, got going at about the same time as the Jews in roughly the same part of the country. There was no traceable contact. Zeitgeist works in very mysterious ways. Right, well, my ancestor was much more severe than the others, he did believe in learning, he disciplined them, there was no wild— no excesses, he kept them in order but he was persecuted by the official Rabbinate as a disagreeable— I mean liturgically they were not heretical but their habits and outlook and general view of life was regarded as unfortunate because learning is what he had lived by, they were



rather contemptuous of it, they were accused of drinking vodka in order to get into mystical states and other such things, and my ancestor was denounced to the Russian government by the great sages of Vilna which was the centre of Judaism in that part of the world, as in some ways subversive, and he was put in jail. And his followers to this day celebrate the day on which he was let out, and they have sort of dances, they danced, which the other Jews did not do, and that was one of their certain qualities, they danced round the Torah. That's the kind of thing. Now, my family— my parents were first cousins. My father's father and my mother's mother were brother and sister, and they in their turn were descended from the granddaughter of the third saint of the dynasty who was the grandson of the founder. So the status was terrific among those sort of Jews. You must understand that what happened was this: I think I'd better tell you of these fragments of my biography. Among the Jews of that sort, that's to say ninety-five per cent of the Jews who inhabited Russia, there were only two ways of acquiring status: one was learning, the other was money. Either you were very rich, you were very important, or you could be much looked up to as a man of colossal learning who could, if you gave him a tractate of the Talmud of which there are at least sixty, each of which has about fifty or sixty thousand words, if you put a pin on a given letter on page one, he could tell you which letter came on every other page underneath. This wasn't frequent but it could happen, it really was a fantastic exercise of the brain over nothing, if you see what I mean. These were the learned volumes of the Talmud which were mainly [?], they started and they reform; by the time they were seventeen they were chock-a-block with this, they had no other life. Now, if you were a rich man, what you wanted was your son to marry the daughter of a learned man, or your daughter to marry the son of a learned man, hence these cross marriages occurred. And that was the way these people, genetically, developed. Now, in the 1860's there was a man called Berlin who bought some land which he was only allowed to buy before the laws came down; I think it was during some period of Alexander 's reign; they could. A railroad was built over this land

so that his capital became something like fifteen times— he became a multi millionaire. He still spoke Yiddish and had no contact— you must understand that in the Pale of Settlement, these people had no social contract with their founders; they were peasants, illiterate, Christian, barbarous. They were literate in Hebrew, they spoke enough Russian to barter goods with the natives but not much and they were completely [a] state within a state; and because the Russian government forced them into certain territories, adjacency developed; that made them into a national minority which they not in Germany or America or wherever they could live scattered. But here they were crammed into certain territories which produced the artificial effect of something like Ruthenians, you see? And that's what gave them a national identity without at all being intended in that way, and that's what created Zionism in the end, the fact that they were a close community, territorially congested into the same narrow bottleneck, if you see what I mean. It's quite interesting. This isn't usually said by historians but it was a miniature fact, so that they simply travelled with their household goods to Palestine and simply took their culture with them, because they had no contact with the neighbours. That's the whole trouble with the Arabs, is that, you see? Just as they talk about Russian peasants, they didn't hate them but they feared them. From time to time a Priest would appear, programmed to appear, with some kind of [?], some kind of religious procession that might result in hating the killing of the Christ killers. Well, Arabs are exactly the same to them. When they got to Palestine, these were remote people who couldn't communicate with; their parents spoke another language, nothing to do with us. That was the psychology. The only people who talked to the Arabs were liberal Jews from [?] who tried to get into contact for high minded reasons, you can imagine.

MI Who precisely is this Berlin who becomes a multi millionaire?

IB Wait, wait. He's just a merchant, I don't know anything about him, he's just a merchant in western Russia. He has two sons; one

of the sons was called Isaiah. Went to Riga. What they owned was forests. The forests were cut, laid onto rafts by peasants; the rafts were floated down the Dvina river, lumber, arrived in Riga which was a Port. There they were sawn into planks, logs, whatever it might be, and then sold to the West: and the man I was speaking of settled himself in Riga with a hundred persons working for him. If they worked for him, they were all right, because then they could be described as having professions— a log cutter or a clerk. [MI They are Jews?] They were all Jews, yes, he employed nobody else, he could employ nobody else, he couldn't communicate with anybody else, Yiddish was the only language he spoke. He was very, very rich. Now that's the strange part of the whole story. Wait a bit. Now, in Riga if you were a dentist, you had seventeen assistants, all of whom were called dentists, none of them knew anything about dentistry. In order to describe yourself as a dentist, you had to bribe the police, which you did. There were two sorts of policeman, good policemen and bad policemen. Good policemen took bribes, bad policemen didn't. Good governors, bad governors, good officials, bad officials, exact inversion of values, exact. The good work people worked to live, for a price. The bad people did not [ ] to live even for a price. That was the psychology. Now, this rich man married the daughter of one of these [wonder?] railways. He was a Hassid so he was brought up as one, therefore he went to Lubavich every year to some festival and took food with the— no doubt subsidised [ ], enough rich people to make offerings because the whole thing was highly superstitious but anyway he had to go once a year on a pilgrimage for the— and consulted him about business. He was the Delphi Oracle because so many people told him about themselves, he had some knowledge of what was going on, probably gave quite good advice. [laughs] Anyway, he married the granddaughter of one of these splendid saints. He had no children. Her sister, whose name was Zuckerman— no, who married a man— her name was Schneerson which was the name of the saint of the wonder Rabbi. These Rabbis didn't perform miracles, in Poland or Hungary they did, but in this particular sect, the Lubavich were perfectly sane. They were

fanatical but sane. [laughs] And her name was Schneerson and she married a man called Zuckerman. Zuckerman spent his entire day in the Synagogue, was totally incapable of doing anything, was a sort of saintly figure who poured over the Bible, was a half-wit I think, backward. She kept a shop and she got the goods in. She was an active intelligent woman who I still met. Her son— wait a minute— her son, that's right, her son was my father's father and her daughter was my mother's mother.

MI Just to check that I heard something correctly, that was the woman who kept the shop?

IB This is the sister-in-law, the shop keeper was the sister-in-law of the millionaire. Now he wanted progeny so he adopted my grandfather on condition that he change his name [MI To Berlin?] hence Berlin, yes. That's why I am not related to a great many other Berlins, it's a Jewish name. God knows why, it's nothing to do with the town, I think it probably has to do with Behr, Behrl, Russian ending, that's my theory, but I don't know these things. Anyhow, he adopted my grandfather who was a ne'er do well, never did anything at all but was quite richly brought up; and he married ...

MI What would 'richly brought up' mean in that context?

IB That he was brought up in a comfortable house and looked after by servants and didn't— narrow Piety.

MI But again, a strictly Jewish world?

IB Couldn't be more. He spoke only Yiddish, my grandfather. My grandmother, ditto. Now his son, my father, was born in, theoretically in Riga, officially— in fact I think he was born in Vitebsk, and his mother ...

MI Can you remember the date of your father's birth?

IB Eighteen hundred and eighty-three. My mother was born in 1880. His father married the granddaughter— no, the daughter of another Chassidic Rabbi, that's how things happen. She was not uneducated. My father went to a German school in Riga, was bilingual in Russian and German. He spoke Yiddish because he had to at home, he knew it.

MI A German school in Riga, but within the ghetto? He begins to move out ...

IB No, no, no, no, no, not the ghetto, he was allowed to. A German school in Riga among Germans. No, no. He was allowed to— he was [?], it's exactly like the Lebanese speak French. [MI That's interesting ...] My mother also. [MI ... but isn't that a moment then in which your family tradition changes?] Yes. By the 1890's and by 1895 if you lived in Riga, you were not forced, there was not enough fanaticism. The children of these people, because they lived in Riga, went to German schools, it was quite common. I'll tell you an example of a man like that. When you were in Israel, did you hear the name of a man called Leibovitz, extreme left wing? He's exactly that. He comes from Riga, he's about— I don't know what— seven years older than I am, his parents were Chassidim, exactly that. They were already educated in German schools, like my father, his grandfather was exactly like my family, that was typical. He was highly educated; he went to Königsberg, Berlin, he was a highly sophisticated bio-chemist who read philosophy.

MI I think I still don't understand how this happens because I would have thought that the Chassidic traditions would be ...

IB Yes, but there was no Chassidic Rabbi in Riga. There were— the whole thing was too remote, it wasn't the heart. The Jews there were not ever a colony, they weren't part of the sort of mass of the Jews. For some reason, the sheer assimilation, the sheer life of Germans around them, the fact that my father had to travel about Europe, selling the timber, he couldn't do that unless he knew

languages. It was clear that he was an able boy, and so, since everything seemed to be left to him and had decided to, I suppose, to Europeanise him— this was true of his entire generation. They all learned— they spoke Russian and German, my parents.

MI So to resume, you have a great grandfather who's a kind of— or an adopted great grandfather who is a ...

IB I have an adopted grandfather, no, my grandfather was adopted. He was adopted by his uncle.

MI Yes, it's the uncle I'm referring to; the uncle is devoutly religious, tremendously successful ...

IB My grandfather's father was called Zuckerman. His wife was of the Royal family [ ] Chassidim, but he was not.

MI I'm trying to trace a descent in which you have a movement away from this Chassidic ...

IB Oh, I'm no longer part of it at all.

MI But that's already begun in your father's time?

IB Oh absolutely. You see the fact that my mother was allowed to go, as a girl, to a German school and became word perfect in German, was already— and she was the daughter of a super fanatical father, who did not allow her to play the piano, did not allow her to learn to sing in a sort of Puritan way, Hassidim were not Puritans, but he was as it happens. Nevertheless, such was the morality of these Jews in Riga, that apparently they could not resist that degree of assimilation. I can't tell you— you see there's the case of my pseudo great grandfather, the rich man. I can tell you how he lived and you'll see. Every summer, every winter, he went to Menton, south of France. Four villas were taken. He went with a staff of about forty people, a Maharaja was what he was thinking

in terms of. These forty people were sent by train to Paris, it was directly from Riga to Paris; there they went to the guichet where they were told, 'Donnez-moi un billet, troisiŠme classe, Menton.' They got their billet and they went to Menton and when they arrived in Menton, they scattered themselves— what were they? Two Rabbis, a Kosher butcher, a Kosher slaughterer, court fools, clerks, favourites; it was an Oriental thing. And in these four villas, they spent a month. They then went, rolled back to Riga. Every winter— this is in winter; every summer they went to Bad Homburg, same thing. But there he could talk to German merchants because Yiddish was sufficiently close to German for communication to occur, and they were clients, they were people who wanted the goods. They called because he was so rich and they wanted to ingratiate themselves. Communication was slightly easier. Now he was made hereditary honorary citizen of the Russian Empire; that was given to rich merchants, which meant he could go anywhere and live anywhere, certain privileges. His children did not need to go into the Army unless he made them. Every morning, the Governor General, General Zvegintsev, sent a messenger to inquire after his health; every afternoon, he sent a messenger to inquire after the health of the Governor General of [Lieflandia?] which was a Province, Leafland. That was Latvia and Estonia, I would say.

MI When did this pseudo great grandfather, Isaiah Berlin, die?

IB Before I was born. He died in about 1905 I think— I was born in 1909— 1904, thereabouts. But everything was done by him, he was the Patriarch and ...

[Pause in the tape]

MI ... depended on him, your pseudo great grandfather. What about your grandfather? You said, 'a ne'er do well.'

IB Oh absolutely, he did nothing at all. I mean he had enough money to live on because he was given it. He tried to do business but failed time and time again, he had to be prevented. His wife was competent; she was a very competent woman, she ran the household, had four sons and two daughters, all of whom remained in the Soviet Union– I must tell the story– apart from my father, who was the eldest. But my father became the favourite of the millionaire and brought up by more than by hand; and he was– he looked after– he was the Chief Manager of the whole affair and travelled round Europe. And– well, we'll come to that.

MI Just to give myself a sense of this milieu, this– does the family live in a kind of patriarchal compound as it were?

IB Not my bit. My family moves out of the ghetto quite early on, long before I was born. It's understood they are bourgeoisie. They become middle class and they go on seeing these people and being on terms with them and they're permitted to move into better quarters; so that they live in a large, broad street called Albertstrasse, Albertovskaya, in a large building as I told you, with two Sphinx's on either side, on the fourth floor containing about twelve rooms. You see, that's straight bourgeois life, such as any German merchant.

MI An apartment on one ...?

IB A proper apartment in the smart part of Riga. That's the day they move in in 1900; my father is twenty, my mother is twenty-three.

MI They marry when?

IB Maybe they married a little– they must have married probably a bit before that, they married in– I don't know when they married– in 1901 or 2.



MI What do you know of your father's education?

IB He went— there was no university in Riga at all. He could have gone to Dorpat which was the German university in Estonia. It still exists, it's still one of the best universities in the Soviet Union, Germanic type, a man called [I?] but [quotes Russian], [?] is the Russian which is where Zhukovsky went, those sort of people. They instructed them in German, [ ] sort of Baltic university. He went to a Polytechnic in Riga but he first went to school, classical education, he learned Greek, he learned Latin quite solidly in Riga, German teachers.

MI Does he also learn his Talmud?

IB Not really. Of course when he was a boy he was taught these things but superficially; and once he went to school at the age of eleven, he wasn't forced to bother with the other. There just wasn't enough fanaticism of that kind by then.

MI What about Synagogue?

IB On Saturdays— the millionaire had his own Synagogue, entirely paid for by him, kept by him and entirely attended by his Staff. That Synagogue I went to as a child once when I was— I wasn't forced to go every Sabbath; now and then, just [ ] was needed, so about six, seven, eight times a year I was led to it. But that was entirely managed by his sort of people and there was a Chassidic— some sort of Minister looked after it. That was after his death, so I can't tell you, and nobody was forced into it. Kosher of course, there was that, yes. I was taught Hebrew— no, I wasn't taught Hebrew, I wasn't taught Hebrew until we went to Petrograd, and I was taught German. My first nurse was Latvian. Oh, I forgot to tell you: underneath these poor Jews came the vast bulk of the population of this country, they were Letts, they spoke Lettish, they were helots, they didn't exist humanly, nobody had relations with them.

MI Not the Russians, not the Germans, not the Jews?

IB There were very few Russians. The Germans despised them and oppressed them. They were serfs working for the Baltic Barons. In town, they were servants. They were very lower classes, they spoke their own language which nobody understood. It's a language which was closest to Sanskrit of any language in Europe, and the reason for that I suspect is, that since nobody intermarried with them, it remained pure. They'd given them German names for some reason or other, but the point is they did develop a national consciousness by 1905 or so, there were sculptors, there were minor poets, they'd begun to rebel. I mean they did finally produce a kind of native bourgeoisie, exactly as the Slovaks might have done.

IB And they come into your house, into your consciousness as a nurse maid?

IB Servants or nurse maids, yes certainly. One saw them in the streets, the tram conductors were, some shop keepers were, but they spoke German for our purposes. Some spoke Russian, but my mother happened to have a nurse who taught her Lettish and that was very exceptional. I'll tell you a story about that afterwards, but that's what happened. Now, my nurse was a Latvian but I was, I suppose, three when she abandoned me, so she talked German to me, or nothing, I don't know. Then I got a German nurse at the age of about two and a half, I think, and learned German, which I lost at the age of four when I got a Russian governess. Now the whole idea of governesses was not known in the ghetto. By this time, we are Western for all those purposes.

MI Where is Yiddish, where is Hebrew in this?

IB Yiddish is spoken by my parents' parents, and my parents knew it for otherwise they couldn't communicate with their parents; and

my parents— my father's brothers didn't speak it, they were too young.

MI What do your parents speak to each other?

IB Russian, occasionally German, never Yiddish. Their parents did speak Yiddish, it was all they could do, didn't see them very much, but when they did, yes. But that was a plunge into the ghetto; my mother was brought up Yiddish speaking, but because of the German school which she attended from the age of ten [ ]. It lingered, she never forgot it. I mean, it wasn't— we were, so to speak, a world below the educated German sort of Jews who didn't speak it at all and disliked it, regarded it as a slave language and had nothing to do with it. I mean, my [ ] becomes a lower class in the end, socially speaking, and the grandparents certainly belonged to the ghetto in the full sense. My parents were emancipated, more or less emancipated, so that after the— and then again in— you see, what happens to me is this: I am born in 1909 ...

MI What exact date?

IB 6th June. 24th May by the Russian reckoning. At the age of— by about 1914 the war breaks out. Every summer one goes to the seaside in Riga and one bathes, one rides a bicycle but the ghetto Jews don't go there. The Jewish bourgeoisie does. There is a bourgeoisie; by this time there must be thirty thousand Jews like us, all of whom speak Russian or German.

MI 'Like us' means there is no distinction sartorially?

IB Between them and the Germans? None, no.

MI Nor in culture, in outward culture?

IB Because they've got a certain Jewish basis they still are not fully emancipated. They know what's what, and of course they have

these oppressed cousins in Russia proper, I mean, they're second class citizens, or third class. But they have their own newspaper in Russia, it goes on after the revolution, some of them have become Zionists— this is quite early, there are no Yiddish speaking Zionists.

MI And what does it mean— do you have a sense of what your father's politics were before the first world war?

IB Not really. Certainly they were just ordinary, Russian liberal bourgeois, liberal bourgeois; if he had to choose a political party, he would have been a Kadets but not a socialist of any order, or interest in that. He couldn't be anything of the right of that because they oppressed the Jews, because they were oppressors. Kadets were liberals.

MI Whereas presumably your great grand parents or back of that, would have no politics at all?

IB No, the idea has nothing in it, remote from [ ]. Some of their children probably ran away from them and became socially the ... the great analogy, I can tell you, was produced by the late Sir Lewis Namier, who wrote an article in the *New Statesman*, which had a considerable effect on me. It was a very queer article, [they stopped it?]. He comes from Galicia but he knew what was what. He said the following: the Jews in eastern Europe were a frozen mass of a medieval kind, Middle Ages persisted among them. It was absolutely true; it is why I understand what the Middle Ages were like better than some, I'll tell you moment why, too. When the rays of the Enlightenment began to shine upon these people in the nineteenth century— and of course the enlightenment of the Jews began in the 1840's, heretics began to breed and they began learning languages, but they were expelled from the community and rather assumed disfavour— but when I say the sun of the Enlightenment began, the following happened. Some of the frozen mass remained frozen, nothing happened, they remained super powers and outside the system. Some evaporated, other ones either

became Russified or German or whatever– [?], assimilated to some degree. That's Eisenstein's parents for example, they were likely baptised, that's an extreme case. Some turned into Russian streams; the Russian streams took two directions, Socialism and Zionism. What he left out was the bourgeois section which I was telling you of, of people who were cultivated, they were [ ], they did, so to speak, go to universities. If there had been a university in Riga, my father would have gone to it. His brothers did.

MI But no question of baptism?

IB Yes, some Jews were baptised but not spoken to. In my family, nobody was baptised, but neighbours were.

MI Do you know why that's so?

IB Eisenstein's parents were known to my parents. He was an engineer. He was baptised.

MI Well why didn't your father think of it, either for ...?

IB Disgraceful. Weizmann, who was not religious, felt exactly that; I mean this was regarded with horror as a form of treason.

MI Cultural treason as much as ...

IB Religious, cultural, you don't distinguish. Now let me tell you, when you say 'cultural', in nineteen– let me continue with my story and you'll see what I mean. In 1914, war was declared; in '15, it looked as if the Germans might move in because Tannenberg and the great victories of Ludendorff and Hindenberg [ ]. My family, the [ ] of my family was not loyal Russian citizens; they wouldn't have least have minded the Germans were coming. There were loyal Russians among the Jews, like Aline's father for example, Baron Guinsburg; he was the only Baron, Jewish Baron, and he dressed his children in Paris in little military Russian clothes. You see what

I mean? There were such people, regarded Zionism as horror, rather as we regarded Fascism, you see? But my parents were just ordinary Jewish bourgeois, the Germans were just as good, they didn't mind, they'd been to Germany often and of course the Kaiser scattered leaflets saying 'Meine liebe Juden'. [laughs] And of course, in 1914, Nikolai Nikolaevich who was the Commander in Chief, expelled the Jews from their villages in a very violent— oh, within forty-eight hours, they had to move bag and baggage and in turn became refugees in Riga, that I remember, poor Jews arriving in [ ], I mean people I couldn't talk to, they didn't talk Yiddish. I didn't know, you see? And suddenly they were accused of [ ] disloyalty. They were allowed to remain in the towns but Cossacks and policemen drove them out very brutally, towards the end of— oh I should think about October, November, '14; and I remember an old, old man to whom I offered some food— I was then six, five— and the woman with him said, 'No don't, he only eats once a day.' I'd never heard of people who only ate once a day. [laughs] That lingered in my memory. Poor old thing with a stick. That was a very brutal thing, and that created more anti Russian feeling among the Riga Jews than anything could have done, for obvious reasons. Anyway, what they were afraid of was being cut off from their woods, because you see the Germans— because if they cut off from their forests, their source of income would disappear. So they moved into the heart of Russia in '15. First they moved into a company union town, a little town called Andreapol, not far from a place called Veliki Luiki in the gubernia of Pskov. Now that was a little village, about a thousand persons; they were called [?]. They did the cutting of the timber and all menial tasks and they sat on the rafts and they took the lumber to Riga. In front of them was a little townlet, hamlet, where lived the clerks, the shop keepers, the policemen; it was a company union town, seventy percent were Jews, twenty percent were Russian ...

*Side B [sides A and B are combined in the digital recording]*

IB ... they were alive. It wasn't a ghetto because here were the forests and here were the streets and it wasn't a town; but, what they realised then, religion and secular life were one. You couldn't have got that in Riga which was too cultivated and too German and too Western, really. I mean if Bruno Walter was the conductor, [laughs] it couldn't occur. But this was a little town of small town Jews and they talked Yiddish and the children talked Russian, some of them then entered the Cheka, all kinds of things happened [laughs], that I remember; and my governess had an affair with a German who was hiding from the Russians and was skulking— he didn't want to be arrested. They [ ] him and that was discovered, she was sacked, they lived in some attic not far from our house, as I say, it was uncovered. And then there were these officers, Russian officers waiting to go to the front, the read aloud to my mother in the evenings. They flirted with her and by the light of sort of kerosene lamps, they read Russian stories about her. It was pure Chekhov life or Turgenev. Next door was the landowner who was called Kushnev, his name was Andrei, his father was Andrei, his grandfather was Andrei, hence Andreapol which was [Andrei?] city, and he was old and drunken and ruined, living out his last life. He had a terrific park, wild overgrown park to which the clerks' sisters and aunts and I would go picking mushrooms and berries, and the officers came and played balalaikas. That was the last bit of of that kind of old Russia which I actually experienced, in that rather remote place— not very remote. But my point is that these people— religion, I mean the religion and secular life were one as they were in the Christian Middle Ages, that language was drawn from the Bible and from the Prayer Book, quite naturally. You couldn't ask them, I mean, if they were religious or not; of course they were, they followed the religious rites mechanically, instinctively, there couldn't be any revolt against it. At the same time, they made money, they were merchants, they had perfectly ordinary relations, some of them talked Russian, that's how the Middle Ages were because that's what medieval life was like; you can't say they were all very religious. It was part and parcel of daily thought and life. It only ceased very late, I think.

MI As I understand that account of living in that company town though, you live not just in one world but in two worlds [IB Only six months] but you live in two worlds at once; you live in a Jewish world but you also live ...?

IB I was a Russian speaking child. I was sent to a little religious school where they taught the Bible, but I couldn't understand Yiddish and so this unfortunate Rabbi of a schoolmaster, because I was so grand and a child you see of the owners, I was treated with excessive respect— it was rather disagreeable— made up to by other children, I was a kind of Princeling, it was awful, and the Rabbi, who knew a little bit of Russian tried to translate the Bible for me into some kind of [laughs] pidgin Russian. This didn't last very long. Then I was taught the [T?], I was taught the first book of Genesis I think, it's about as far as it went. Then towards the end of '15, they moved to Petersburg where the— Petrograd— where the Chief, the Head Office was.

MI I want to stop you from going ...

IB At that point there was a certain amount of Hebrew teaching. The life became totally different.

MI I wanted to ask you, I think since we've been talking so much about Jewishness, for you to then draw back from the narrative and ...

IB I was brought up as a Jew from ...

MI What kind of Jew are you? That's where it ends up.

IB I was brought up as a Jew from the beginning and never ceased to be. I never had trouble about that because there never was a time when I wasn't a hundred per cent Jewish. I didn't believe in God, I didn't believe in the religion and so on, I didn't like Jews



too much; but there was no question of being something else, that's why it worked in my case.

MI You're easy in your skin?

IB That's what I mean. I had no problem. If I am asked now, what are you? I would not say I am an Englishman. Other people would say it about me sometimes. I am a Russian Jew. That is the first and last, absolutely correct description of me. I have never been anything else, I am an Anglophile. [laughs]

MI An Anglophile Russian Jew! But ...

IB Well, I am devoted to England, I would perish with it. I mean, they've done everything for me, my loyalty to England is total. But that's all; but I'm nevertheless— I'm a foreigner.

MI Your loyalty is total but your identity is somewhere else?

IB Mm yes, I'm metequé, in the end I'm metequé, I'm a resident foreigner. I mean I'm completely dedicated, I do what they do, I serve this country [laughing], I mean I wouldn't leave it and so on, you see? When asked to have jobs in America, I wouldn't dream of accepting them, I never did. All this has happened constantly, you can imagine, but: you see I came here at the age of— I was ten and that was that.

MI OK, I want to go back though ...

IB But my accent isn't that unusual, [MI No, no] not really, I don't know what it is but there is something funny.

MI It's of your own invention, I think.

IB Perhaps. But if I am asked by sort of you, say, I would say something exotic, something odd. It's not foreign nor is it English.

MI Just before I get you back– when you say you are a Russian Jew, what part of you is Russian then?

IB Quite a lot. I once delivered a speech on this subject, when I got a degree at the– I think the [?] university, maybe– no, no, when I got the Jerusalem Prize which should never have been given me, it was meant for virtuous foreigners or friends of Israel. There was no point in giving it to me, I was sort of coals to Newcastle, it was ludicrous. It was given to me by Mr Begin, that's a story too, although I wouldn't shake hands when I came, I was pretty late, interpolated. **In 1961 or 1962, I was in Jerusalem with my wife and Robert Silvers, who until then thought that the Jews were just fanatical militant sects with guns, shooting Arabs up. [MI 1961?] It was 1961, he just took the usual left-wing line about frightful – once I persuaded him to come to Israel, we discovered the Jews quarrelled among themselves constantly, had every sort of party, total democracy among themselves, and every sort and kind of person; they weren't at all united, far from it, they weren't beleaguered people all sort of sitting on their walls with guns. That made a difference to him, and – that really did, he just saw what was happening, he was only there a week – it was enough. And then I got into a lift or elevator [...] in the King David Hotel which was always very [...], and another man came in, and the man looked at me and said, 'I think we've met somewhere. What is your name?' I said, 'Isaiah Berlin.' 'That name has been heard in these parts. My name is Menachem Begin.' He put out his hand; I didn't shake it. I am a total coward. If I'd thought, perhaps I would have done. It was a chemical reaction of an instinctive – I was in Palestine in 1947.**

MI And it's a chemical reaction to Jabotinsky ...

IB Terrorism – no, not Jabotinsky. [MI To terrorism?] 1947. [MI To the bombing of the King David Hotel itself?] That

sort of thing. I was there in 1947 when the horrors were going on. I hate terrorism, and I had an immediate reaction against bloodshed, you see, which I was totally horrified by. The kind of Zionism I believed in was a sort of weak-tea – I mean a sort of liberal Zionism of the most Western possible kind, you see? And suddenly this man – well he didn't notice it, I think, because we then met afterwards when I was given this prize. I had to shake hands with him. I did. By this time he was Prime Minister, at that time he was not.

MI Now in the speech at the time of getting the Jerusalem prize ...

IB I said there were three strands in my life: one is Russian, one is Jewish, one is English; and then I tried to trace what the Russian strand came from– came with– I was sort of– fundamentally really my interest in Russian literature, my fascination with certain Russian values, those are the things I had been writing about. The history of ideas is really stimulated by reading Herzen across whom I came accidentally in the London Library. The Russian/Jewish problem was obvious, the Jewish problem was ...

MI But that would make Russian-ness much more an elective affinity discovered in exile, curiously enough, or strengthened in exile.

IB Oh, I think it was, I think it probably was. I mean, I don't know that when I was ten, I didn't have any. If you'd have asked what I was at the age of nine, I couldn't have understood the question. I was a Jew, I was a Russian, what do you mean? I was a Russian Jew like a lot of other people I knew, like Mr Leonard Schapiro and anybody else whom I still knew in Petrograd.

MI OK. Well let's not pursue that further because I will look at the Jerusalem Prize ...

IB Jabotinsky is a very odd story.

MI Well, that's another— I wanted to get back though ...

IB The English part was, I suppose, was political really, the notion of compromise, the notion of, if you see what I mean, of decent human existence of, as it were, the sort of minimal decency of public life; and I think in English, the only language I think in is our true English, you see, and that's how I am steeped and my values are English values, they're not Russian values or Jewish values.

MI Let's go back to the moment of your birth, now it's time for ...

IB Truth and false or good or bad, it is purely English; and private morality is not— I look on the Jews or on Russians through ultimate, I'm sorry to inform you, English eyes.

MI Why should you be sorry to inform me? [IB No, no, but I mean ...] because I had no expectations that you should judge them otherwise.

IB I know, but that is so. In that sense, I'm Anglicised. But, I know that I am different, yes.

MI You don't feel a fault line between these three identities, a sense that they're not [IB No] fused, that they lay on top of each other.

IB No; no, no, no. No, no, I don't [ ] the word, they're tangled up, they're tangled in some way, they're on the rope, they don't ...

MI Yes, you formed them into a rope by your writing, by your thinking.

IB They formed themselves into a rope, it wasn't a deliberate act, it wasn't a policy, I just find ...

MI It's a consequence though of a certain kind of life.

IB Yes, yes, that is so, meeting certain sorts of people.

MI OK. Isaiah, we now have to [IB We're now in Petersburg] No, no, no, we now have to up the violins now because we have to tell the story of your birth.

IB Well, why is that so [?],

**MI Well, you haven't told me about being born.**

**IB How can I possibly? I can't remember it.**

**MI (*laughs*) What is the story?**

**IB There is no story. My parents had a stillborn child originally; my mother had puerperal fever, but she didn't die, and was told never to have children again. She was my father's first cousin, he was passionately in love with her; she married him in order to get out of her father's house.** She wanted to be a pupil of Rimsky Korsakov in Petersburg; she had a cousin called Raoul something which was already highly emancipated, he wasn't called Abraham or Samuel or anything of that kind. Raoul Guinsbourg his name was. He was a friend of Korsakov and he arranged for her to go to him and he said, yes he would take her on; she had a good voice, but her father stamped on it. The first thing she wanted to do was to get out of her father's house. The only way of doing that was by marrying my father who was rich by the standards of those days. Her father was poor although they were first cousins, so she married, she was fond of him, she liked him, she was familiar, they came from the same universe. But love him? I don't think she did ever did much. That's why she wanted a child and that's why I was born.

MI Sorry, I don't follow.

IB That's why I was born, she wanted to have a child so that obviously her love and affection would be centred on something. She was a very passionate, powerful, feminine sort of woman and she was a terrific Jewess, in no way Russian. She was a Jewish Nationalist of pre-Zionist character. That did have an influence on me, inevitably. Now I will tell you a story about her and you will see what's she's like. I was born in 1909; I was a semi Caesarean birth because I didn't emerge from the womb at all comfortably and I was seized by a not very skilful German, I suppose, surgeon, by my left arm which made it— produced a bad arm forever. It could have been operated on I think. The only person who had an arm like mine was the Kaiser [ ]; I can't tie a bow tie, I can't play the violin, I can't play the flute, I can't ...

MI Because you can't raise your arm to your [IB I can't] up to your ...

IB It only goes up to here, then I can do it with the other hand. The muscles won't work, it does anything you like but it will only go as far as this; at the bottom it does anything you like but it's weaker, my left shoulder slopes more and the result is that I couldn't of course— incapable of [encountering armies?] and so on; it saved me from that at least. But I've always had a bad arm but I have never felt a cripple, that I've not, but I've played cricket, I've played football ...

## MI TAPE 2

Conversation date: 20 October 1988

Date transcribed: 27 April 2004

Transcriber: Esther Johnson

Subjects covered:

Mother and father

Zionism

Petersburg 1916-20

Feb/Oct Revolutions

Departure for Latvia

Emigration

Surbiton

Learning English

Kosher

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*Side A*

MI You were about to tell me about your mother who you described as ...

IB A Russian Jewish Nationalist. I'll tell you the story. Well, we arrived – she felt my father was a middle class, mild, liberal Jewish timber merchant, as many were; not much temperament, sweet character, he liked French comedies, liked French comedies, that he liked. I can't remember [French title?] and French authors of that sort. [MI Not Feydeau?] Read books that – well, he could have liked Feydeau – if you gave him a book, he read it but he would never get it for himself. He had not many friends, some Jews, some Russians and other merchants would come to dinner in Petrograd.

MI An effective businessman?

IB He was a very able man and very timid. He never made or lost fundamentally. He never made much money, and wasn't liked by the enterprising Jewish merchants, some of whom he knew, because he didn't play cards, didn't have any temperament, wasn't adventurous. He could have made a very good civil servant. He had an excellent brain, but he was timorous. He knew what he was doing. He never did anything dangerous, so he always was comfortably off, not very comfortably, fairly comfortably. I mean, he was very rich in Russia before the Revolution, of course, because of the firm, but after that. Well, there we were, we ...

Well, there we were, we lived in Petrograd ...

MI That's your father. But your mother?

IB My mother was poor, brought up in the ghetto but socially a class below my father, even though they were first cousins. She was brought up in poverty and had rather a tough life: **full of humour, strong temperament, lively, imaginative and colossally frustrated by being married to a dull decent friendly husband, when she really wanted a lover.** She fondly used to remember a man who proposed to her and whom she wasn't allowed to accept, otherwise she might have been happier. And she wanted to be an opera singer more than anything in the world which she might have become; sang – that was why I was brought up entirely on a diet of Verdi and Bizet because that's what she sang at home, the long arias. She sang very well, great feeling. She wasn't a great singer but her voice was very pure and that kind of music was her life. Now, she read ...

MI Did some of that operatic feeling translate itself into her feeling about Jewishness? [IB Mm, no] In some ways, as part of the same temperament?



IB Maybe; it's the kind of Jews who like that sort of music, Italian music, French music, not Russian, church music or Wagner or Bach, nothing of that sort. I mean Beethoven, yes, but Moonlight Sonata no doubt, but – you see but the symphonies I shared later as a result of her bearing of me, but there you are. Now, she was there, we lived in Petrograd. I'd better tell you about my life in Petrograd before I come to her character which you'll see in a moment; this is some haphazard manner but you'll see inevitably why it must be so. First you see, we lived on Vassilevsky Ostrova; above us was a mosaic factory and I used to go for little walks with my governess and read the novels of Jules Verne, translated into Russian. I also read Don Quixote for children, and Swift and Gulliver for children and – what else did I read? – Dumas; Three Musketeers, [V?], [V?] – that was the third volume of the trilogy whom I've never heard of anyone else refer to, but it was. And that sort of thing.

MI Mayne Reid?

IB I told you last time, [corrects pronunciation] Mayne Reid. The Russians call it [Main Read?] ...

MI Because Nabokov talks about being fascinated by Mayne Reid.

IB Captain Mayne Reid. He was English, not American.

MI But these were stories of the Wild West, of cowboys.

IB Mm, but Mayne Reid certainly, [?] certainly and children's books, [T?], these were children's books which were read by sort of little boys, that I also read.

MI Did you read things like Bilibin's illustrated Pushkin and all these high minded ...?

IB No. His son was my school fellow at St Paul's so I was shown them afterwards but not at the time, no. No, I did read some Russian stories, I read fairy stories, yes, and I read a lot of stuff about Russian heroes, [B?], I mean [B?K?, Ilya M?], that kind of thing if you see what I mean, all these Rimsky Korsakov heroes and so on, all that. Certainly had a perfect contrast from all that; these sort of nightly figures, Zadko, meant something to me. I was taken to the Opera in 1915 and heard La Boheme, I'm afraid I don't remember, or [Gema?] at the Mariinsky Theatre. In 1917 I heard Chaliapin sing Boris Gudunov and I can't pretend I remember very much but I do remember one thing: that when he sees the ghost of Dmitri, he fell on his knees and crept under the table and sang from underneath the table in a terrified manner and drew the tablecloth over his head. That I liked very much. [MI laughs] You obviously would, do you see what I mean? [MI It's just the kind of thing ...] Any child would, you see? I knew I'd heard him. Well, the first piece of news I remember is Rasputin's murder, late 1916, a newspaper headline. I was given lessons in Hebrew by Jewish students, Zionist Jewish students, who taught Hebrew in Hebrew as was the fashion, because my mother wanted that. I was taught – I never went to school in Russia at all.

MI Always tutored at home?

IB I was tutored at home by the Russian governess and then by my uncles, they would come and teach me. I was very bookish, I think I told you that story about the lady. [MI Yes] And if I was ill, I would be given a book called [Elada? Helas?] which [ ] on the cover. I still remember Greek mythology entirely from that: or a book on Egypt in which all the names were in ancient Egyptian and not Hellenised; instead of Nytokris, called [Nitakert?]; the Emperor [Cambises?] was [Cambugia?], all this I remember, you see? Rameses was Ramesu, you know that was correct and that was the book I was brought up on and that sort of thing I devoured. Then came the revolution. I remember it quite well; my parents were very pleased by the first revolution, liberal, that was OK;

tremendous excitement in the streets, there was a coup d'etat, meetings every where, my uncles and aunts, my father had, one, two, three, four brothers and two sisters; and brothers – when we were in 1916, '15, '16, were in top classes, were at school and became students I should think, at university about that time. The elder brother was already an engineer; one was a doctor, two were engineers and the third brother died of typhus in 1919 when there was an epidemic from which his mother also died in Moscow, where they lived; we lived in Petersburg, Petrograd. They used to come quite regularly, once a week for some reason, to Petersburg and used to give me lessons – Russian literature, history, Garibaldi, whatever they were doing, Nibelungs; all kinds of smatterings I got of that sort. But I never had a regular education. I read Pushkin, I read Nekrasov, that was purely amateur. The Zionist students used to come twice a week and would then teach me to write little Hebrew doggerel verse which I've totally forgotten, couldn't do it now. Then there was another teacher who planted heretical ideas in my head who explained that Mordecai was really [Marduk?], Babylonian God; that Esther was really [Estarta?] and other very wicked and terrible things which the Rabbis would be horrified by. There was a man who tried to teach me the Talmud; I found it so incredibly boring that it had to stop. It starts with a bull who gores with a cow which damages him, it's [ ] work; two men who seize a garment and tear it between them, to whom does it belong, and so on. I didn't find it fascinating. Then came the revolution, crowds, my father and my mother's sisters and my father's brothers from meeting to meeting, one saw speakers like Kerensky as you call him.

MI Wonderful speeches by Kerensky. Does that mean that you heard them?

IB Oh no, no, I heard no speeches, I was told. Well, they came to our houses [ ], they'd just come with such enthusiasm and they began talking about everything that was happening and Milukov was and [Lukov?] was and [Kerest?] was and Milukov didn't want

to stop the war in order to get at some of the workers. Well he did and so on and so on, all that [?], excited talk and the streets were in a state of turmoil at that time. I don't mean they were in disorder, people were sort of shining faces, that's all. Pasternak describes it quite well in Zhivago. Then, in the summer, we went to place called Staraya Russa which is a resort where some children of our relations came; I played games with them very happily. There were tombolas, there were children's amusements in the parks, there were friends with just parties of children, exactly as if there was no war. Then in about June/July of 1917 an Italian orchestra, which wanted to get out of Russia, playing with a very limited number of scores each of which had to be called something else. One day it was called the Venetian March, then it was called the Finnish March, then it was called the Italian March; the music was the same.

MI This was in a band shell [IB A band shell] in your summer place?

IB Yes. Very jolly time. Not much talk about revolution, some; vague news about the front. We come back to Petrograd, posters everywhere for the constituent assembly; twenty four parties. I vaguely gazed at these, I remember their names including a Zionist which was absurd. And then I saw some young men tearing down some of these posters and putting up posters with a hammer and sickle on it. I reported it, I thought it was jolly, I didn't know what it meant, I reported it to my father and he was extremely displeased and said it was a very wicked and terrible thing to do. Then came the Balfour Declaration of Palestine which spread like wildfire among the Jews of Russia: indeed, one of its purposes was to seek the loyalty of Russian Jews to prevent them from stopping the war. My mother was very excited, my father less so, didn't want it to come to anything, thought it was a bit mad. And then there were marches of Jewish children with shields of David to which I was led, so I walked about with a blue and white flag, not quite clear as to what I was doing. But I knew that something good had

happened to the Jews in Palestine but I didn't know anything about a State then.

MI These were marches to give thanks for the Balfour Declaration or ...?

IB Well, to celebrate it, celebrate it. There were plenty of Russian Jewish Zionists by that time, I doubt if anyone – where they all came from in the end. And Namier was right; Zionism comes out of the insulation of the ghetto; it then melts and we get to talk about political ideas. Some say socialism will save us and some say only our return to the soil, in fact what is pig farming, ideologically.

MI We are now in October, 1917.

IB I heard there was a terrible Party called the Bund which one was not suppose to have anything to do with, that was Jewish Socialism. Jewish Socialism said, yes, Yiddish, and a separate Jewish Party of Socialists, denounced by Lenin as Nationalism. It was denounced by Zionists as a betrayal, Martov, [Z?]. Now, I met them all in New York in 1940, '41, those that survived; and really funny it was too, wonderfully exotic and talking to them was rather wonderful. They were the last generation you could still meet at that time. And then came the Bolshevik revolution. Nobody had any idea that revolution had occurred in my world. The first thing was General Strike, against the revolution. The lifts stopped working, the porter appeared in officer's trousers which he was very pleased to have because they looked quite funny; no trams, no lifts, bakers' shops closed – oh, I forgot to tell you. In the early parts of the revolution, the only people who remained loyal to the [?] was the police, [MI The Pharaon] the Pharaon, not in the books. I've never seen Pharaon in the histories of the Russian revolution. They existed, and they did sniping from the rooftops or attics. I saw a man like that, a Pharaon, being dragged off by a lynching [?] in the street, a pale man struggling with the crowd dragging him to a very nasty fate. I've never forgotten it. My whole horror of terrorism dates

from that. [MI Of violence] Of seeing this man's face; he may have been the wickedest man in the world for all we know but a pale faced man being dragged off to his death [ ], by a savage crowd, screaming [ ], I think it's about March, March/April, '17. Remarkable.

MI Do you remember where you were when you saw that? Were you in the street or were you ...?

IB In the street [MI You were in the street with your governess] in Nevsky Prospekt. We moved in the middle of '17 to Angliisky Prospekt and above us, I told you, had lived – we had Rimsky Korsakov's son in law and daughter below us; we had the [?] [Evgenia Emeritinskaya?] from the Caucasus above us ...

MI Who were they?

IB Emeritinsky was a Caucasian royal – one of these royal family with sort of small states, they were always called [?], most [ ], [?] was. [?] means 'most illuminated', I mean top Prince. Royal Princes were usually called that, [ ] not the Russian [ ] who were called the [?] but [?] was client Kings I think, I mean children of dynasties, Caucasian or Swedish dynasties, [?] I think was [ ] because of the sort of Swedish Royal connection. Well, Emeritinsky, he married here, his province was in the Caucasus, unless there was the old lady upstairs whom we knew and who else? And this [Tovarich?] Minister, the Under Minister for Finnish Affairs, whose daughter I would go for these little walks with. Then came the revolution and the Finnish Minister disappeared after a short while and typically enough was paid a pension by the Finnish government for all his life because he had dealings with Finnish affairs. He was an oppressor, the Russians were not nice to the Finns but, very pedantically, because he had dealings with Finnish affairs, he was paid this [Tsarist?] pension to the end; very Scandinavian thing to do. And after about two days, the streets were [crowded?] and I

didn't hear any shooting. As you know, the whole story of the great storming of the Winter Palace is a myth – I mean to put it ...

MI Put about by another Rigan Alumni, [IB Who?] Sergei Eisenstein.

IB Eisenstein, absolutely, absolutely I mean. All that happened was that – well they were of course – troops marched, [Moravian?] sailors amongst them with no resistance except by the women, [MI Yes, by the women's' battalion] by the women's battalion and the [?] cowering inside, except for Kerinsky who escaped in women's clothes; and Jovets Tereshenko whom I knew afterwards in London who was Minister for Foreign Affairs, friend of Blok, who had heard Tristan seventy-four times in one year in Europe while studying 'Fuga and Kontrapunkt' in Leipzig [MI laughs] and became – I could tell you all about him but it's just not relevant – he escaped to Norway on foot, married a Norwegian [laughs] and had a yacht in the Mediterranean which he managed to sell and that got him going for a short while in England.

MI Now, we are several days after the revolution ...

IB After the revolution, you are quite right, and then gradually it dawned that there were two men called Lenin and Trotsky, they're responsible. Now, Lenin was mentioned as a dangerous fanatic, perfectly honest but fanatical and fatal and might do anything; but certainly not exactly pure hearted but incorruptible. Trotsky was some kind of villain. They were referred to always hyphenated, Lenin-Trotsky, never separately in my circle. They were the wicked men who made this revolution, never knew how it would end or what it was for, it gradually dawned – and then the pamphlets began to appear, newspapers. I remember very well what happened. There was a newspaper called, 'Dien' – 'The Day', liberal paper that was suppressed. It appeared as 'Noch', suppressed; it appeared as much suppressed; it appeared as Polnoch, suppressed; it appeared as 'Glukaia Noch', [MI laughs]

Dead of Night, suppressed. End of that. It's exactly what happened to undergraduate papers in Oxford when I was a student, Proctor suppressed it and it then kept on appearing under other names. Now, after about a week or a fortnight it was realised it was here to stay, probably. My father supplied timber to the Russian railways and went on doing so, quite peacefully, he wasn't touched. But we had to move out of our flat because there wasn't enough fuel, we had to live in two rooms, but nothing at all awful happened to us. We had a very monarchist cook who, when all the money was given – the jewels and money were given to her and she hid them. When Cheka, sort of Commissar – not Commissar, Under Commissar – people came in order to search the flat, she covered them with abuse; as she was a proletarian, they dared not enter. In the very early days you could not shove aside a member of the people. That saved us, for the time being. My father was never arrested, nothing, I've got no dramatic stories to tell you: but all that happened was, as I say, that we went on living in two rooms, enormous queues for food formed immediately. I was put to stand in the snow in felt boots for hours; [MI Valenki] valenki, I wore valenki all right and stood there waiting to be replaced by some grown up in the end but for an hour or two nobody moved, and we subsisted [that might be my wife], we subsisted. And then gradually my parents said they couldn't bear it, sheer hatred of the regime. [MI What caused that?] Just ordinary bourgeois sentiment, whatever people may dislike; they thought it was a fear of constant – look, people were shot in quantities. When you hear that terror only started with Stalin, it was far from true, and all kinds of people were shot for all kinds of trivial commercial offences. It wasn't political; speculation it was called and anybody could be hauled up, be falsely accused immediately, executed and so on. My father was sent for, once, by Goronchovaia in number 2 which was the Cheka. We went to Pavlovsk for our summer holidays [MI This was the summer of '18?] '18, yes, and there I remember hearing a concert in the station where there was a – station had a concert hall for the Royal Family and by this time I heard a symphony by C, sar Franck, conducted by a Polish conductor called Fiddelberg. [Pause, query from Lady



B] In Pavlovsk there were these concerts; there were – I made friends with, I don't know, somebody my parents knew, boys and girls, we played games perfectly normally and met in the park – there was a Palace park – and we used to sit in those arbours and, I don't know if I can remember very much, went on reading Dumas and talking about it. [S?], Quo Vadis, it's the kind of book one read then. The war meant nothing, the revolution meant nothing : but what I used to see is men in leather jackets with guns and pistols. They were Cheka figures and they were thought to be the people who were the executioners, and the girls hugged them like mad, they were frightfully exciting with young women who were enormously excited by these wonderful gangsters. They used to walk about three in a row, up and down, up and down so to speak, in the park and they were thought to be executioners, constant eyeings by these girls, some of them probably they had romances with. But I remember asking who they were and they were regarded as dangerous, sort of diabolical types of a very exciting sort. That I do remember; that was – didn't happen very long I imagine. But the early revolution did produce these romantic executions, most of them lefty social revolutionaries I think. The man who murdered the German Ambassador was such a one, called – what was his name? – Mirbach was the German Minister. He was a left wing social revolutionary. They were all executed later, the lot. [laughs] But anyway, these kind of Arditti were not D'Annunzio types, not at all, they're not at all what Lenin liked in the end. Then we moved back to Angliiskiy Prospekt, life carried on, but my parents were determined to leave. They decided they were Latvians for some mysterious reason which I've never understood. Then they let out these three countries. I never knew why, nobody's ever explained. Maybe he didn't want to be bothered with them but there were still Germans there of course towards the end of the war.

MI But isn't – don't we have Brestlitovsk, we have ...?

IB Well, that's early '18 and nothing to do with Latvia and Estonia. Brestlitovsk stops the war with the Germans, the general [ ] wandering about in that part of the world, there's the intervention a bit later, that's [ ]. But I don't know when he let them out but he let out three Baltic republics; anybody who came from Riga could be repatriated there quite legally. So after about six months we had of bureaucracy, we went back to Riga, quite normally without any – it took about five days, the train moved at about three miles an hour. But I still didn't tell you the story about my mother.

MI We are March, 1919?

IB We are May, 1919 [MI When you returned] May, May – April, May. And then ...

MI Do you return to Albertstrasse?

IB No, no, that had all gone. We stayed with – first for three nights in a portion of a flat owned by some relations, then we moved into a flat of our own. I can't remember, not Albertstrasse, no, I don't think we could go back to that. We lived in – I think it was called Vigonaya Damba in Russian, God knows what it is in Latvian.

MI And Riga at this time is one of the Baltic [IB Capital letter] is an independent Baltic republic?

IB Absolutely, yes, yes, nice decent little bourgeois republic of a dreary but dull but decent kind. Perfectly ordinary democracy, Baltic Barons had been misappropriated. Count Keyserling has been made Admiral of the Latvian Navy. No great hatreds, some dislike of the Russians but not acute; but collaboration with the Germans in 1940 in Riga was due to ultimate hatred of the Russians. By that time, they disliked them more – I suppose '41 rather than '40 – the Russians annexed them in '40, the Germans must have left in '41. Anyway, what I remember is this: we crossed the frontier, all the policemen and firemen who were Latvians

cheered like mad when we entered Latvian soil. We had to stop for – I think it was some kind of quarantine for lice covered persons who came from the Soviet Union. We had to spend six or seven hours being deloused because we hadn't got into a night train for Riga from a place called Rezhitsa, that's the Russian name of it, what is was in Latvian I can't tell you. We travelled, hard sort of carriage all the same, my father, my mother and me. Such money as we had was concealed in the right shoulder of my greatcoat. It was not searched, otherwise tremendous searching went on of course at the Soviet front, Finnish marks, diamonds – diamonds were put, I think, under the tops of brushes, not very many, but still, what we had, we had.

MI Do you have any memory that you left precious things behind?

IB There was the whole flat, everything – books, furniture, everything we owned – clothes, all that was left behind. [MI Did you feel a sense of ...?] Oh yes, because I loved the books. There were these wonderful books in marvellous vellum covers; there were the works of Tolstoy, works of Turgenyev, works of Zhupovsky in very handsome covers which I remember very well. There were translations from Goethe by Zhupovsky in a separate volume. I have got vivid visual images, there were encyclopaedias and things, all that – well my father's brothers may have taken it away, I don't know, but that was all gone.

MI What was the state of mind in which your parents made that journey? You remember them being [IB Hope] Hope.

IB Hope and – not enthusiasm but hope, we must get out of this terrible place.

MI Was your state of mind the same?

IB I don't think I knew anything, I think they said we were leaving; all right, we were leaving. I don't know that I can remember

thinking that the Communists were terrible. They certainly thought the Bolsheviks were dreadful people, not the faintest atom of sympathy for the regime, none. No discussion about whether some people were better than others or whether there was such a case for Russian Communism. Socialism, yes, but not even socialism; liberal state, Kerensky, yes, Milukov, yes, republic, yes, you know the Bolsheviks were uniform, horror, hatred and fear, straight ,migr, state of mind just like the White Russians minus the sort of Tsarist religious elements. And some shame about the number of Jews engaged in these operations, number of the Jews employed, number of Jews, I mean, in the Politburo.

MI Much discussion of Trotsky?

IB My friend – my uncles, but not uncles, not uncles so much because they stayed in Russia – they were students and they had quite decent careers under the Bolsheviks. About that I'll tell you separately when I saw the war in 1945. But my mother's sister, her husband, those sort of people would say, willingly would they pay for a string to string up Trotsky. I mean that kind of talk. No no, uncompromising. Well then, cross the frontier, entered a train to go to Riga and I sat with my father on the left and my father sat on the right, opposite two men. I was half asleep. Suddenly I saw a policeman enter and sit down on my mother's right. I don't know that it struck me as very odd but my father looked very disturbed. The following had occurred. These two Letts said that my father, unfortunately, understood Lettish which had been taught by this nurse and she had a very good memory. My father knew not a word, I knew not a word and nobody knew a word. The two Letts made very anti Semitic conversation to each other. It was normal, Latvia was a very anti Semitic country. The anti Semitic countries were known to be Poland, number one; Romania, number two; Latvia, number three: Estonia, not at all; we needn't go through all that; Lithuania, yes, half and half.

MI And as the national origins of concentration camp guards proved, that rank order is just about right.

IB Absolutely, absolutely. Now, they made made anti-Semitic talk. My mother interrupted, although she had no – she had a Soviet passport and God knows what; she interrupted and she said to them, glaring, in a very hostile and proud manner, said, ‘There are a very many great things wrong with the Soviet Union: but anti-Semitism is not a thing which is permitted there.’ They then decided she was a Bolshevik spy, Bolshevik agent, telephoned the next station and got her arrested by the police. My father was beside himself, with my mother mainly, he couldn’t understand why she – it was lunacy on her part. [laughs] I mean, making trouble. We were – hardly existed, never knew what our status was, whether we had any money, where we were going to live; we were completely [d,souevre?] at that point. Suddenly out she went, sudden explosion of nationalist. **That’s what I mean by saying my mother was an absolutely uncompromising, intransigent Jewish nationalist by temperament. Nothing anti-Semitic must be allowed.** And when we arrived in Riga, the police appeared and then a man suddenly approached my father and said, ‘Look, I’m a member of the Latvian Secret Service. I was in that compartment. I am aware, I know that your wife said none of the things she’s attributed of saying, it’s quite false, she said none of those things. On a small consideration, I’m quite willing to testify that she’s completely innocent.’ Well, he explained his bribe, proceeded to testify accordingly, but still the people – they did bring a case against her. So long as we were in Riga, the Judge D’Instruction which was the equivalent, we used to get little [pavetski?] which I recall, saying, would she appear in such a place and so on. However, finally the Judge said, ‘Look, are you staying in Riga for the rest of your lives?’ ‘No, we’re going to England.’ ‘In that case, I’ll quash the case.’ The case was quashed. **But that’s what I mean about my mother, hence my Zionism. It came with the blood, I was never allowed to think anything else. And I absorbed it absolutely naturally. We were Jews, and**

**there was a lot of anti- Semitism. Jews were not English, they were not Russian, they were not Germans, they were not Letts, they have to be somewhere else. [MI They must have a home.] They must have a home, quite simply. I mean it's no good being, so to speak, perpetually on some kind of qui vive, above all one mustn't deny it, one mustn't conceal it, one mustn't desert it, because it's undignified, unsuccessful and so on, you see? And that's really where it comes from. [MI From her more than from him] From her. Not at all from him. He went along, didn't have any views, he wasn't hostile, he didn't mind it. If assimilation had been possible, he'd have assimilated very happily. She, never; pride and passion.**

MI But isn't there a part of your own view of this question which is rather like his? That is, you would rather have assimilated more if possible?

IB Oh yes. Oh I was never passionate. I was never extreme. I was never ferocious, no certainly, oh I think I would.

MI You simple believe, or you simply know that assimilation is impossible?

IB Well, all assimilation is difficult and in the case of the Jews, it's impossible, yes. Even if it really were possible on a major scale, I'd be for it. Can't really say that in Israel, they can't talk to me, even Margalit and people like that, cannot accept, cannot understand it. Most left wing sort of – peace now. You see, I said you know if I rubbed the lamp and all Jews were turned into Danes, I'd do it. Horror, I'd just do it, how to get a particular reaction, otherwise highly enlightened, very anti Nationalist people. Your instrument's still working is it? [MI My instrument's still working, yes] And then we stayed in Riga for about three months. I went to Professor Kupfer who taught me Latin. His final verdict was that I was very superficial, in which there is a certain truth. Der [O?] is the German for that. [laughter] And then we moved to London. [MI Why

London?] Because my father did a lot of business in England before the revolution. He was an Anglomaniac, he thought it was the most wonderful country that's ever been and still thought it to the end of his days. He thought education was wonderful, he knew about public schools, knew about Oxford and Cambridge, that's where his children – child should be educated. If Russia had not blown up I don't know what he'd have done, but as it was – my mother wanted to go to Germany because inflation [ ] and she spoke the language. My father was set on going to England; he knew people there, he had a partner of sorts before the war who'd sort of co-operated in selling all his timber in England. The partner was called George Alexander Payne, informed him that the English did not live in towns, nor lived in the country. **My father decided not to live in London because it was full of Jews, Russians, other undesirables**, did it quite differently. So we moved to what he thought was the country. It turned out to be Surbiton as I told you, which was more like it then; you got sort of clergymen in black straw hats and driving about on bicycles. It was very sweet. I went to school there. [MI You prepped for St Paul's?] My parents – the first dish I had when we arrived in Surbiton was eggs and bacon. My parents were very – well they gave up the whole thing absolutely, it shows what religion's worth. Anyhow, no more observance of Jewish life, absolutely not. On the contrary, a certain [ ] Voltaire attitude. However, I have to tell you the following that happened. My mother, at a certain stage, went to the butcher, Mr Earnshaw, to get some meat for the house. In the corner she noticed an old gentleman with a small white beard and what appeared to be some kind of headgear. She said to Mr Earnshaw, 'Who is that gentleman?' He said, 'Oh that's the Reverend Mr [Fogelnest?], he comes from Reading. He prepares the Jewish food for two Jewish who live here.' She then went up to him and spoke to him. He told her he was a Kosher [ ] Rabbi. She had a conversation with him about Reading, about the Jewish community, burst into tears and recidivity occurred. After that, Kosher table. My father and I were allowed to eat anything we liked outside the house.

MI But inside the house, Kosher?

IB Not strict but sufficient. Not strict. Meat and milk are forbidden, strictly; meat, milk and butter would be on the table, it was sort of half and half. But the meat was got from a Kosher butcher and it was natural to belong to a Synagogue after that. The revolt did not last very long. My father didn't really like it but being, as I say, weak, amiable, appeasement minded sort of man, went along. I then went to school, called Arundel House School; my mother broke her ankle and was taken to a nursing home in London and I was effectively a boarder. I mean I accepted [ ] but I was there all day and became Anglicised in that sense, very rapidly, and the Headmaster and his wife were very nice to me. I suffered no persecution as a foreigner and a Jew, anything of that sort, none.

MI No persecution but [IB No mockery, nothing] but longing, yearning, [IB For what?] nostalgia.

**IB None. New life [...] I began afresh. But when I had to write an essay, I wrote some imaginative story about the Russian Revolution. They knew I was a foreigner. The only time I ever suffered, the only thing was one of the boys said, 'You're a dirty Jew' – no, 'dirty German', not Jew – because of my name. At this point – not Jew – at this point all the other boys set on him and beat him up. Unique story. I was quite popular.**

MI And you learned English effortlessly and immediately?

IB I had a governess in Petersburg, who taught me, I knew about seventy-five words.

MI But you learned very, very quickly when you arrived?



IB According to my mother, I came home in tears after the first day; all I could do was draw. But after about a fortnight, I must have learnt it really, I have no memory of all that. All I can tell you is that at the end of that year – we're talking about the year 1920 – I took part as the second murderer in Babes in the Wood ...

## MI TAPE 3

Conversation date: 27 September 1990

Date transcribed: 27 April 2004

Transcriber: Esther Johnson

Subjects covered:

Chassidism

Petrograd

Riga

Emigration to England 1921

The British Establishment

Noel Annan

Jews and OTAG

Order of Trembling

Amateur Gentiles.

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*Side A*

IB Kfar Chabad is a place in Israel. Chabad Village.

MI Can you start again, Isaiah?

IB Kfar Chabad is a place in Israel where Chasidim live. Now, Chabad is an acronym, it comes from three major virtues which respectively in Hebrew are [?] for ch, *Khochma* which means wisdom; *bina* which means understanding; and *da'at* which means knowledge; those are three virtues, entirely intellectual, that's why there are no emotional words, there are no, so to speak, no uplift about that, it's comparatively intellectual section of what was otherwise an extremely emotional movement.

MI So if you said, Chabad Chasidim means a more intellectual branch of ...

IB That group, that particular group, in Russia, not so much Poland. The Lubavich was Chabad.

MI Now, the founders name, I had a lot of ...

IB Shneyeson, it's a very common name in Russia now, lots of them. [spells Shneyeson], according to the official spelling, double e in English, but I happen to spell Dostoyevsky with a y for that reason, e-y-e, Shneye, s-o-n.

MI Zalman, Zalman. Zalman Shneyeson.

IB Wait, wait, wait. What was his first name? The [alta?] Rabbi, the old Rabbi. Shneur Zalman. Shneyeson is the name of the family. He was called Shneur. There's a man called Shneur in America which was how it was pronounced in Poland. Shneur and then Zalman, like Sir Zalman Kahn. Shneur Zalman was his name and Shneyeson was the family name attached to him; on all that take on family names, that's what he called himself, probably his grandfather was called that. [MI OK] And all his descendants, [?] including the present monster. [MI Sorry?] Including the present monster in Brooklyn. [MI Oh really?] He's Shneyeson. You can't be the Head of the sect without being that. Shneur is the – nobody else knows that except me – Shneur is the Hebrew corruption of [Seenor? sounds like Senor] that's a Jewish name. [Nassau W. Seenor?] was the first professor of political economy in Oxford and Karl Marx makes nasty remarks about him. Seenor is a Jewish name, for some reason. Shneur is a Yiddish Hebrew corruption of that, but nobody in Chabad will tell you that. They don't know it, it's a sacred name, there's no derivation.

MI Have you ever read any books about the Lubavichi and Chasidim, Chasidism? [IB No] Because I feel I need to.

IB Yes, well there are, obviously there are such things, in fact you can write to a monster in Oxford or London who writes me letters. I don't answer them, I hate them really, but still you needn't know that, no need to give a reason, but don't mention me above all. They've got a centre in London, they must be in the telephone book. I wonder if the London telephone gives Lubavich, probably does, or Chabad. If you write to them out of the blue with an assumed name and your address; and of course Baalbec Road is not too good [MI Laughs, It's a problem] you see? But if you say you are anxious to study what this great movement is about, can they supply you with something in English? It won't be reliable because it will be a work of praise, I mean, these sort of – nevertheless, it may be the facts ...

MI My friend [W?] will help me I think.

IB Yes, he will. And you can also find out about it in the Jewish Encyclopaedia, that's the best thing. There is a thing called the Hebrew Encyclopaedia; the Jewish Encyclopaedia is an old American thing but there is a thing called the Jewish Encyclopaedia now but it's in Jerusalem, which if you look under Chasidism, will tell you. Also the Russian Jewish Encyclopaedia is ten times better than any other. It stopped in 1912, subsidised by my wife's uncle, David Guinsbourg. It's a marvellous work because all ...

MI That's what I felt when I was in Moscow in June, I watched the kind of complete disappearance of that culture before my very eyes; the trains were full of Jews; the Jewish theatres were closing, the whole thing was ...

IB Eight hundred thousand application of visas had been made, eight hundred thousand, to Israel! It's very startling. [MI I want to go there and] To Israel? [MI Yes and look at] Well, they're very well received. They're regarded as [P?], they're not very Jewish, they take no interest in religion, most of them aren't Jews at all, or half Jews and so on. They all want to make money, they want to be able

to buy things from shops which they can't do in Russia, and so people find them quite normal, affable, willing to work, friendly; whereas the ones who came twenty-five years ago were detested: religious, fanatical, difficult, you can imagine, you see? Their disapproving of the sort of secular state; these are the exact opposite.

MI Now, let me move you on to a tiny thing. You told me an amusing story about your pseudo great great grandfather [IB I did] that every morning, the Russian Governor General, General Zvegintsov? [IB repeats the name] would ...

IB He had a grandson in London called by his friend's dog. I knew him.

MI I have Zvegintsev [IB tzov] tzov.

IB I think so, because it's z in Russian. No, it's tse, you can spell it t-s of course but tz is perhaps, or even z. Tzov.

MI On a more important matter, can you remember what ...?

IB He was a tremendous bore, my friend Zvegintzov. He has gone, I mean the one in London. [MI If you remember ...] His sister was charming. She's alive. Continue.

MI Can you remember the number of the street in Albertstrasse? [IB Three] Number three. Albertovskaya. [IB Or Albertstrasse. Drei Albertstrasse, three Albertovskaya] On the fourth floor?

IB Yes. Albertuieia, that's 'street', iela. Little iela. [MI OK] You know who Albert was? He was the founder of Latvia, or Letts. He was the German Grandmaster of the Order of the Sword Bearers. He was called Albert.

MI Now, a final question. When I interviewed you about your birth, you said, 'I was born in 1909, a semi Caesarean birth.' Without going into the gynaecology of it in any detail, what do you mean by a semi Caesarean birth?

IB The fact that I was dragged out of my mother's womb by forceps, attached to my left arm which is why it's always been bad. My left arm has always been unable to do certain things because I was pulled out. I don't know if that's called Caesarean or not; there's no operation. Maybe it isn't Caesarean.

MI Ah, the distinction between a forceps birth and a Caesarean birth is all I'm asking.

**IB Well, call it forceps. You wanted the doctor's name? I can tell you that too. Dr Hach, German. [MI For whom we have to blame this arm.] Unskilled doctor, yes.**

MI Now, I then wanted to ask you – I can't find the place – where you – it's the name of the little town near Pskov where you ...

IB Andreapol, the village [MI spells it and IB corrects] because the founder in the local squire's name, was I think, was Andrew. Kushelev was his name but I think they all called him Andre, near Tropetz, it still exists. We've just had a photograph of it, supplied by the Marchioness of Anglesey [laughs] for some reason, saw it or she got a photograph. [spells Tropetz].

MI Then you also mention a place called Velikiyelououki.

IB Velikiei Loouki; it's a very well known – there were great battles there with the Germans. [spells Velikiye Loouki]. [MI Right, good, good] I don't know what that means, great – great onions.

MI And the landowner's name was? I have Kushelev.

IB Kushelev. [spells it] Andrew Kushelev.

MI You are a tremendous swallower of your words I've ever [IB Oh, I know, certainly I am, I'm notorious] though in fact you're very distinct, but sometimes [IB Terrible things happen]. [MI Oy veh!]

IB Oy veh is Yiddish. Famous anti Semitic joke about a woman who put her foot into a swimming pool which was very, very cold. She said, 'Oy veh, whatever that may mean.' [laughter] It's very good, I like all those jokes about not wanting to be a Jew and Jewish; whatever that may mean [laughs].

MI Now this is a silly thing but at one point I ask you about – ah, when you lived in Petrograd during the revolution, at first you live on Vasilievsky Ostrov ...

IB Vasilievsky Ostrov, St Basil, Basil's Island it's called in English, St Basil. Vasilievsky [IB spells it with one s, then spells Ostrov] Nothing after that, that means island.

MI And twenty-eighth Lenya [Linea?] would be ...?

IB Twenty-second lenya. [MI What is the Lenya?] Exactly as in New York. It means 32nd Street. They were straight things. You see it was done – there were three big Avenues and Lenya which crossed them.

MI Can you remember anything about the location of that?

IB Certainly, I've seen it. I went to look at it in – two years ago; and location – well, there was three big streets crossing which went through Vasilievsky crossing, it's quite modern, that, and there were these crossroads which had numbers, they're called lines, and this is the bottom of it, I mean fairly far down.

MI Do you remember any street numbers or street addresses or what floor it was on?

IB Yes, it was on – again on the fifth floor. But I mean, the number of the street, no. Something something [?] line, so it's the twenty-second line. Very unsmart address. Above it as I told you, was a mosaic factory.

MI Mosaic. What memory do you have of it being a mosaic factory?

IB Well little bits of mosaic were always scattered in the sort of forefront, in the courtyard in front, you always found little fragments and little bits of shell and sort of mauve and red and green and everything, you see, lying about which fell down from the roof.

MI What impression did it make on you to return there?

IB Ah well, good question. I looked indifferently at it. I thought that's it, that's where I am, certainly. I think, I'm not sure I didn't make Reni come with me, how many years you see, come and have a look, and I know that's where we lived. Well, memories but there was no overwhelming rush of sentimental feeling.

MI Did you coldly remember things that you ...?

IB Not coldly but I mean, I remember going for walks along the main street which was round the corner from – it's a corner house, corner house, yes. Twenty-second line and Bolshoi Prospekt. I remember going for little walks with my governess along the embankment but not far away. [MI But you weren't in the ..?] That's where I saw the revolution [MI That's where you saw it, yes] from a balcony, quite high up. It may even have been the sixth floor, I mean it was sufficiently high to be able to overlook quite other buildings and things.



MI What specifically do you see from the balcony?

IB Well, I don't know now because I didn't go up there. You then saw troops, I mean some open spaces of some sort.

MI But in terms of seeing the revolution, what did you see?

IB Oh, I'll tell you. I saw crowds with banners. The banners said, 'Land and Liberty' [Russian translation]; it said, 'All Power to the Duma'; it said, 'Down with the Tsar,' [Russian translation]. It said, [Russian translation], 'Down with the War,' which they didn't get, though it did say that. That's about all it said. And then I saw a milling crowd of some sort, I don't know, I just saw these banners because they were lifted quite high, you could read them from where I was because it was not far, rather near; big sort of plywood banners, I mean, huge boards. Not flags but of cloth so much that it was rather stiff boards and [it was] written. Then I saw troops in formation marching on them. It meant nothing to me, and then when they drew up level with the crowds [MI Troops, not cavalry?] Not cavalry, no, troops, infantry, yes, foot soldiers marching on them and I didn't know what that meant particularly. And then they mingled, fraternisation. The crowd didn't give way, they weren't frightened, I mean they didn't give back and as far as I could see, it wasn't a question of a march they were afraid of, they didn't have their rifles pointed at them, they just marched on peacefully; the crowd was probably quite still, wondered what had happened. That was all right, they were just – they broke, the troops broke and mingled before they even reached them, within twenty, thirty yards; waved their arms in the air and generally behaved like friends. And then my parents, who observed this with me said, 'That's all right, fraternisation, they're not shooting. Wonderful.' Bratatsa is the Russian for fraternise, Brat is 'brother', Bratatsa is 'to brother away.'

MI Does it seem incredible to you that you watched one of THE historical ...?

IB Well later, but it didn't – it meant nothing at the time. And then my parents said that something big was happening, but I was – how old? Well I was seven and a half and something, and then I was – did I tell you the terrible sight of the policeman being dragged – not policeman, a sharp shooter from the rooftop – being dragged away by a lynching bee, [MI Yes] that made a [MI In the Nevsky] No, no, on Bolshoi Prospekt [MI On Bolshoi Prospekt?] Yes, outside the house, yes, you see? I didn't go to Nevsky much when I was seven, if you see what I mean – I did I mean, my governess took me there because there were nice sweet shops there and by Christmas when it was time the year before, were these wonderful things in the shop windows, little trains moving around and little bears nodding and, you can imagine, and little mobile toys and every sort of thing. And a particularly delicious chocolate which was called Kvorost which means – now what is the English for that? – when you have a lot of branches lying about one on top of the other, what do you call that? Supposing you want firewood, you go into the forest and you collect, you see, not logs you see because they're branches [MI Faggots] Not quite faggots, I mean the collection when you just embrace it and carry it off, you saw a lot of dry branches, you saw a lot of faggots on the ground, you saw a lot of – firewood really is was it is, but firewood might be logs.

MI And was this chocolate in the shape of ...?

IB Exactly, it was grey, it was dark grey, obviously painted, and there was a tiny little – thin branch like objects lying one on top of the other, attached to each other more, you broke off a bit. But it was a name for a kind of sweet. Kvorost, particularly delicious. I remember that.

MI When you – in the summer of ‘17, you go to a place you say to a place called Staraya Russa. Where was that resort? [IB spells Russa] Russa. Where was that? [IB Can't tell you] On the Baltic?

IB No, no, no, no. Inland. Certainly not far from Petersburg, from Petrograd. No, no, not the Baltic. No, it wasn't seaside, oh no, no. Staraya Russa still exists, it's a resort, can't tell you exactly, you can find out by looking at any gazetteer; and there was – my various relations, little boys and girls who appeared to be cousins or I was told they were, and I played games.

MI And then in the middle of 1917, presumably when you come back from that holiday, or slightly before, you move to Angliiskiy Prospekt, you move off the island?

IB That's right, off the island. Angliiskiy Prospekt is near the Embankment, near the Angliiskiy [Nevsky?] which means the English Embankment, which is now called something else, obviously. But that is not far from the centre, I mean not far from the Winter Palace and all that, Nevsky, that kind of neighbourhood.

MI Can you remember where, what number?

IB Certainly, that was a corner house, too; not quite corner, yes. Our entrance was not quite the corner, we had to move about – [addresses Lady B?] Did you find your thing? [addresses MI again] – we had to move about I suppose – [addresses Lady B again] what me? Perfectly all right, it doesn't matter if you are recorded, it won't make any historic difference. [To MI] I'll tell you, it was about thirty yards down to the corner and there were shops – there were artisans in the basement shops below. I remember very well there was somebody who mended samovars and it was misspelt. Instead of calling it samovar, it was spelt shamovar. [MI laughs] The sort of thing one remembers. [MI A little boy would notice that] Of course. Here are mended shamovars. They may have been Jews,

couldn't write Russian. God knows who they were, we never met them. But there was this Tinker, Tinker's shop, said, 'Shamovars mended.'

MI And you were in the Angliisky Prospekt apartment until you left [IB Yes, right to the end]. It was from that apartment that you leave ... [IB Right to the end]. Do you remember privations as the revolution proceeds ...?

IB No, not really, not – I'll tell you exactly what I mean. Yes and no: what I mean – as far as food is concerned, no. One stood in queues all day for hours; however one got something in the end. I don't know what I got but I was put in queues and took away whatever I was supposed to take, bread or vegetables or meat or whatever it was. The privation was that there was no fuel, therefore we were obliged to live in one warm room, one small warm room where we lived all day, all three of us, my mother, my father, me. Nobody else. And we slept, one of us I think – I'm not sure they didn't put me to sleep there – and my mother slept there. My father slept next door in a slightly colder room. Then my father's office was in the same flat. [MI And had always been?] And had always been; and there – that's right, two large rooms and there were these clerks who used to come and do the work. They went on coming. I remember there was a man called Axelrod, that's a very Jewish name, God knows why, famous revolutionary of that name, you see? And he used to bring sandwiches made by his wife, I remember that, Butter Brodi they were called, that means butter bread. And then students or even professors used to bring fuel which they sold as a black market turf which burnt slowly and gave off some heat, cubes of turf. It was one of the ...

MI At least they didn't chop up the furniture, as it were?

IB No, no, I mean the maid who stayed with us; she lived somewhere else but she came in. I told you she saved our jewels.

MI Yes. And your father continued to work for the Commissar?

IB Yes, railways, worked for some kind of central railway organisation [MI Providing railway ties ...?] providing – yes, three ply plywood – what are they called? – things trains run over? [MI Yes, railway ties, sleepers] Sleepers and other forms of timber, whatever anyone needed for the State. He did that before the revolution. [MI Yes, (?) he did it after] It wasn't new; I mean the railway organisation remained; no doubt it was replaced by other persons but the mechanism remained the same. I don't know how they were paid, whether he was paid by the timber or by salary, I can't remember. He was given a pistol somewhere [MI Your father?] Yes, in case of people erupting [ ] by law, it was a paper thing, he was entitled to it.

MI And he had no occasion to use it? Did he take it out with him or did he leave it ...?

IB No, no, no, on the desk, in the desk. Only Molotov has to take it with him, put it under his pillow. Molotov. [MI Oh really?] In America, hotel, always with a pistol, always put it under his pillow. [MI How do you know this? How do you know?] Because of San Francisco to which he went, it was noticed by the American spies. I assumed – I mean assassins could appear, obviously, in some danger.

MI One of the things you said when I interviewed you on the subject before, is in the Angliisky Prospekt house, above you there was a Royal family – the Emeritinsky's?

IB Imeretinsky. [MI How do we spell that?] Imeritya is a province in the Caucasus. [spells] Imeretinsky and was [?], special title for Princely families of that sort, I mean would have been Royal – there must have been a Tsar or a leader or something [ ]. In [?] there was no Prince, there was only a Princess, given that [MI An old lady] old lady, yes, Evgenia Imeretinskaya. Underneath her

lived the Ivanov's, I've told you about them. He was Assistant Minister of Finnish Affairs, his daughter was my friend I afterwards met in Providence, Rhode Island.

MI And you also had Rimsky Korsakov's son in law and daughter?

IB That's right, he was called Steinberg, was a professor in the Conservatoire – cellist, I think.

MI And then there's someone else called Jovetz Terechenko?

IB [Repeats the name] Nothing to do with me. He was the Minister of Foreign Affairs under Kerensky. He was a tycoon, he was a sugar King or something, anyhow a millionaire of some sort, liberal millionaire.

MI I guess he's not in the house, sorry I was ...

IB Liberal millionaire whom I knew in London. He walked – he escaped – he walked into Norway, married a Norwegian.

MI And he's the one who studies 'Fuga and Kontrapunkt'.

IB Kontrapunkt. And went to Tristan seventy-three times or something [laughter], same year, in Leipzig, he studied that. He lived in [Millbank?] in London subsequently. He's called Jovetz Terenchekov, the Jovetz was dropped. Friend of Blok and other poets.

MI Another tiny detail: when you leave the Angliisky Prospekt flat, I asked you was it painful to leave things behind and you said, 'Oh yes, I loved the books in their marvellous vellum covers [IB That's right] then you say, 'works of Tolstoy, Turgenev,' and then Zhupovsky? [IB Who?] Who? [repeats the name]

IB Zhukovsky. He was a famous Russian poet and Pushkin's tutor. He was the tutor of Alexander the Second. [spells] Zhukovsky, and he was half Turkish [ ] his mother, he was a Turkish prisoner of war. Zhukovsky, yes. Translated Heine, Goethe, wonderfully. [quotes in German and then Russian from the Erl Koenig].

MI One of the things I did not ask you in sufficient depth if you can take me through it, is the decision ...

IB There was also a book which we left behind called the Jewish Encyclopaedia, which I read with attention. That gave me my whole basic knowledge of Jews and Judaism. Nothing else did.

MI And this, in fact, is the [?] edition that you ...

IB [ ]. Very nice brown covers, paid for as I say by my wife's uncle, the Baron David. Why it was so good is because all the Russian Jewish intellectuals were employed by it. They didn't have much money, so they did what they were told to do. Hugely [?], highly civilised document.

MI I wanted to ask you to recall for me how it was that you left Riga, how it was ...?

IB Which time? [MI In nineteen twenty – ] Oh I see, not 1915? [MI No] That you know. [MI I do know that] 1919.

MI Yes, when you leave for London, what is the atmosphere in Riga that prompts that decision?

IB None, nothing. Riga is a perfectly decent little provincial town, capital of a small democratic republic, containing relations of ours. I am sent to a German professor for lessons on Latin, Professor Doctor Kupfer, yes, and I read Goethe in order to know how life should be lived, he said to me [German quote]; didn't think of any – I told you – didn't think highly of me – I was very superficial

compared to Leonard Schapiro who was much better. Wait a bit. And then it was simply that my father determined to go to England. He thought Riga was a small provincial town and he was getting bored.

MI Where did you stay when you were in Riga in that period?

IB With relations; with a man to begin with – with a man called Berkhin, Uriah Berkhin, and then after that we moved into a flat but I cannot tell you – I can tell you roughly where – in – I don't think I remember the address. It was no longer Albertstrasse. Where was that? I think I'd be lying if I told you, it was only two months sort of thing.

MI OK, but you had no sense of wrench?

IB None. I had no sense of Riga, either, none at all. I didn't really recognise it as the town which I had been to in '15. Four years later, it meant nothing to me, and ...

MI The wrench I'm hearing or the emotion I'm feeling most clearly is about leaving Petrograd. You have some feeling there, about that ...

IB Yes. Yes, I had some feeling about that and the unknown future and I didn't know where we were going. I knew we were going to Riga but that meant to me little – well, we'd come from there, we'd all been born there, that was fine. The real wrench was coming to England, not wrench but shock. It was a totally alien culture.

MI Can you tell me the story of the voyage to England from Riga, how does it happen?

IB Certainly, certainly, I can tell you. First my father went in order to get a visa for us. It wasn't all that easy, for – what were we then? – I don't think we were Latvian, maybe Latvian or we may have



been Soviet, you see? Not quite clear what our legal status was in '19. We certainly became Latvian citizens, maybe we became them straight away. But anyway, there wasn't all that eagerness about Latvian immigrants, I'm sure. And so he went first to fix it up. We stayed in Riga, my mother and I. Then we were sent a ticket and passports and visas, or rather we were told go and get them from the British Consulate which presumably we'd have done, German visa, through visa, transit visa. We got into a train, lot of luggage, trunks, proceeded to go from Riga to Berlin, where we stopped for three days. I don't know why. We went to theatres, circuses, quite enjoyed ourselves, it wasn't at all gloomy. And Berlin was rather, in '19 – this is January '20, you see? – it was rather derelict but I don't think I would have noticed that much. There we stayed for three days, then we took a train to Ostende where the boat train went from to Dover. There was frightful excitement because my mother thought the luggage wasn't on, got into a state of panic, so all night she worried and therefore, I worried. When we arrived in Ostende, it was there. We then got onto a boat. I was very tired and went into the hold, the lower part of the ship where there was an enormous mattress about fifty yards long and forty yards wide, which anyone could lie on. So I simply rolled onto that and slept. And we arrived and my father was [MI And you arrived in what ...?] Dover. My father was waiting on the other side of the gangway. There was a passport officer at the ship's end of the gangway. When I saw my father, in my enthusiasm I ran up the gangway to be embraced by him and the officer let me through. I was a small child, he didn't sort of immediately put out his huge arm saying 'Wait'. My mother had the document looked at. We then got into a separate compartment of the train hired by my father and had supper. We arrived in London and went to Surbiton that night, straight, didn't stay in London. We arrived early enough, about seven in the evening or something, so there was a train.

MI And he'd already taken lodgings in Surbiton?

IB He had a house, yes, he took a bungalow, a large house – not large house – in 3 Elmers Avenue. I think I remember it as Avenue Elmers but I don't think it can have been, it must have been Elmers Avenue. And there we arrived and I went to bed. In the morning I rose and our first breakfast, delicious eggs and bacon which I'd never eaten before. At that stage, both my parents completely abandoned their Jewish religion.

MI Until she saw the Kosher butcher in Mr Earnshaw's butcher's shop? [IB Exactly] But you don't have a feeling – what feelings are coming through that?

IB I got up, went to the piano and played God save the King in one key. [MI laughs] Showed some enthusiasm to the new country to which I had arrived. I was dressed very oddly; the only thing which made me ashamed was, in the Soviet Union, in Riga even, I wore a fur collar or fur coat and funny hat and long gaiters, whatever children wore in Riga in 1919. And that, even in Berlin, was a little odd. In England it was totally unacceptable. I don't think my parents were fully aware of this but I realised that I couldn't go about like this. By this time I was eleven, not quite, ten and a half. This is February '20.

MI Good. Let me stop there for just a minute.

[Long pause in tape, then ...]

MI What's your impression of it? [Noel Annan's 'Our Age']

IB Only read half of it, some things are good, some things are not. It's true of all books. The thing on Munich is excellent. The thing on homosexuality is two chapters, it's too long. [MI Two chapters too long] on homosexuality ...

*Side B [sides A and B are combined in the digital recording]*

IB ... but he writes a very small segment of it, and by the time I came up it no longer existed and lasts about five or six years whereas the Cambridge thing lasted on, King's and so on. It's very harsh about Blunt & Co, [?] and no good on modernism, don't know why, he has to explain modernism. Well, Ezra Pound, Eliot, Picasso, Wyndham Lewis, he knows nothing about that, he goes blind and deaf, literally, and I mean he – the only remarks he makes about philosophy are no good at all, no idea, he copies out what people say but I mean it doesn't come to anything. He doesn't understand it. G. E. Moore means nothing to him although he created the very people he's describing.

MI What do you mean?

IB He created Bloomsbury. The whole morality of Bloomsbury is application of G. E. Moore whom they worshipped, they worshipped. Leonard Woolf, Desmond McCarthy, Keynes, all thought Moore was a great genius who discovered moral truths for the first time by which they lived their lives. That he doesn't get right. On the other hand, I don't know what the second half contains. It's very well written, it's very readable, it's smart, it's – you can imagine – brisk, it goes at a pace, it's a kind of tour de force, you could call it that.

MI Oh good. Well, I'll read it with [?]. I wanted to ask you a sort of silly, journalist question but it does lead somewhere; which is, in what sense there is still an Establishment in this country? And then the obvious supplementary is [IB Now?] Yes, and the obvious supplementary is are you part of this? [IB Quite] The first question is as interesting to me as the second, how you define it.

IB Well it's very difficult. It's a term invented by a journalist called Henry Fairlie [MI In the fifties] who was a very, very un-nice man, very, and after he died there were a lot of glowing obituaries, but – and I knew him, disreputable character. But anyway – well of course there is, the great and the good from whom all Royal

Commissions are formed. They exist, yes. I am and am not. I'm not part of what might be called the upper bureaucracy of people who are thought to be able to manage things or people who are put on committees or people who are trusted or people who the government thinks could be useful in various ways. I'm nothing to do with that and never have been.

MI But that's partly of your own election.

IB No. No, I don't know whether I will have done it or not but I've never been asked to. No.

MI Right. You don't have a long history of declining Royal Commissions [IB No, no, nothing of that sort] or being asked to be Governor of Bermuda?

IB No, no, no. I'm regarded as rather exotic in that sense and therefore to that extent, I'm not a member of the establishment in the way in which say, Noel Annan is, or Lord Franks is who is the essence of the establishment [MI Yes, the arch] arch, yes you see? Or Nicholas Henderson, I mean my friend; or – or who else shall we say? – sort of dependable – on the other hand, I'm something in the world of literature and in the arts and that's why I am put on the National Gallery. Covent garden was entirely petticoat politics because I made friends with the wife of the Chairman, otherwise I would never have got on. So on the whole, in spite of it, although I am regarded as a sort of solid part of the neutral, non left wing and therefore decently dependable, non revolutionary – [] it's true. At the same time obviously not, because I'm a foreigner and exotic and both things are true. I'm a don, I'm part of the academic catchment, not of any other. [MI What do you make then of ..?] I'm not part of the literary establishment, not really; well only [?] or something but I'm OK, too OK, too much so. You could say I was part of the intelligentsia establishment, that you could say, but not part of the governing class.

MI And you distinguish between the governing class and the establishment?

IB Yes – No! I distinguish between the governing class and the intelligentsia and I mean each has its own establishment otherwise it would overlap as in the case of Lord Annan, Lord Bullock, Franks, I don't know, the Vice Chancellor [ ] [Klaus Moser?] who was asked to be [?] but I'm not part of the overlap, I'm very much on the intelligentsia side. I am not regarded as a candidate for anything else, never have been.

MI OK. What truth is there in the argument that Mrs Thatcher has broken the back of the power of that old post war establishment, particularly the part of it that you know best, the university chancellors, the Lords Bullock and Moser end of the establishment? That she's simply ceased to defer to that kind of expertise and set about, in effect, to destroy their power?

IB I don't know how far previous governments had deferred [ ] the new. Mr Baldwin and Mr Chamberlain didn't defer to it. Churchill didn't defer to it in any way. Wilson, yes, because he's a don and had contact with what might be called socialist academic, left wing intelligentsia in some sense. Heath – yes – I would say probably a bit. No, not true, not true, they say so, they have a point of view of their own; I mean they have their own – I mean not one of us. What 'us' includes, if you like, [distant?] members, I mean intelligentsia traitors – [Pinter?], there are such, I mean Quinton and Thomas [ ] my friend – oh, all the other advisers [ ] that world. Michael Howard, Trevor Roper, [?], all these people serve her.

MI And she does defer to them in some – or she ...?

IB [ ] incredible thing, but never gave a – that's all that's ever happened. There never was a situation in which the left wing were not [left wing?] The liberal intellectuals were called upon to occupy important positions in the running of the country. In America, yes,

very much; people were suddenly sent up to Washington [to be] part of the government: in England, maybe people wondered why not, you see? Someone like me, supposing I'd been American, I would have been on some consultative committee on the State Department or something. It doesn't exist in England.

MI Like Galbraith, they would have packed you off to India to become Ambassador or ...?

IB Might have done, might have done. They might have offered me – somebody would have suggested that I might go and be – I don't know – Cultural Attach, in Uruguay. [MI laughs] That wouldn't happen here. English Cultural Attach,s do not, the British Council does.

MI But you'd be inclined to doubt a very tremendous ...

IB It's a very [ ] situation. The fact that people hate her makes her say that she's true; grants have been cut, university demands are not met, tyranny has been established under Baker about appointments for jobs or more money to be given. All that is true, but it is an exaggeration or intensification of what was there before. The only real harm she did to universities was the abolition of the UGC [which was in?] pious – which was by constitution filled with academics, whereas her committee, whatever it is now called, presumably is not. [ ] No, I think it's exaggerated [ ] not terribly there. I mean the harm she's done is health, education, schools, not so much universities: but a lot of [?] departments are abolished because there's not enough money but there's no interference, there's no appointing of unsuitable people to posts in universities because they're one of 'us'. A bit but not much.

MI But to the degree that, you know that being Master of Trinity College was always in the gift of the Prime Minister and she's exercised that power but that's no different than anything else.

IB That's the only thing which isn't [], everything else is [] college, you see? Oh – Churchill, [?] appointment. It's new yet because of Churchill, he gave the power to the Prime Minister, you see? The appointment of Bundy as the Head of it can't be regarded as a particularly noxious act.

MI Well, what do you make of the charges which I keep reading, that the whole tone of the establishment has been changed in the last ten years – the last twenty-five years, in your own experience; much less influence of the landed classes, much more influence by kind of [IB True] vulgar shopkeepers [IB True] and self made millionaires [IB True] and all those trusting chaps. [IB True, true] Do you think so?

IB Particularly under Mrs Thatcher; she doesn't like the aristocracy at all [] character up to a point – well the landed gentry. [MI Willie Whitelaw] Willie Whitelaw, he's about the only one – well she sacked Pym you see, he's the same. [MI And hated Gilmour] She does, probably because he's [] but he does []. But she can't believe in do-ers who come from the middle and lower middle classes. The heavy foot of what might be called the real aristocratic establishment which reigned in England through the [] and through everything [MI Has gone] yes, that is true, and the advice she takes, she takes from thrusting middle class tycoons and managers and shop keepers, apart from [Marks and Spencer's?] which she loves.

MI What do you make of – this is too big a question to be answered but I suppose the supplementary is, do you think that's a good thing, or do you think it's a bad thing?

IB Well, I can answer: both. What is good? It's very good that the various aristocracies no longer play such a part because a great many of them were deeply prejudiced, extremely feudal and had great contempt for the poorer people below them; it might have been that the individual was highly magnanimous; and the people

she appointed were much closer to the average citizen in England. But these people never were. On the other hand, the [ideals?] which she attempted to pursue, were abominable; I mean the sheer emphasis on thrust, drive, getting away from [?], achieving, achievement, success, and has led to enormous weakening of the benevolent welfare state mentality which was there before the welfare state; I mean it was there certainly with Lloyd George but also in the nineteenth century to some extent, you see? And therefore, sort of civilisation has been to some extent ruined. I mean culture has been badly affected, the assumption that everything must be done by civilised methods by civilised people who have some kind of relationship through some kind of acceptable ideal of life, that's been knocked on the head, that has and [ ]. When you see who their governors are, not a single one of them who you can trust for the conduct of your family affairs, I mean none.

MI You wouldn't want your daughter to marry a single one of them, no.

IB You wouldn't put them in charge of any institution which you value, is what I mean; or a theatre or a concert hall, a school or a university, not a society of propagation of this or that. None of them would be suitable there, not one. I'm trying to think who would be closest to it. The aristocrats she didn't probably like, Carrington and Gowrie didn't stand up for their class, I mean she let them down, didn't stand up for them because she didn't want them to, cowed in the end. Well, Carrington not for long but Gowrie certainly. The [ ] thing in the old days, now some [ ] support, well you could support the arts but it wasn't just the arts, supported schools, arts, civilised institutions, thought, ideas, [ ], that had been undermined and that's the worst thing of all. I mean France, it was traditional, absolutely untouched; in Germany often, in England cracked [ ], cracked. I mean Gilbert Murray couldn't breathe in this atmosphere. [MI Why do you say that?] because he was a great supporter of the League of Nations, he used to go there



and take the public part as opposed to the intellectual one, you see? I mean the climate would have been impossible to him. Take a cultural figure looked up to – Trevelyan wouldn't have [ ], [?] wouldn't have [ ] though he did have an influence on civilisation and so on. The sad condition of the arts in England [ ] and so on, is not an accident; on the whole, the first rule is [ ] in the end expendable. Quite right to have it but it isn't very important, the icing on the cake, the cake can be eaten by the rest. [ ] Philistinism, it's called that, it isn't; and at its worst it's not a question of our taste not coinciding because by their devaluing it as such, that's not Philistine. Pphilistines have rare taste, their own culture, that's not it. It's more anti cultural than it is vulgarisation.

MI I ask because I'm thinking of writing something about all this because I've been reading some books on the subject. [IB What have you been reading?] I've been reading a rather facile but extremely amusing book by Jeremy Paxman, a BBC journalist, who is not a stupid fellow [IB Not ...?] He's not a stupid fellow and he did a lot of interviews and some of the stories, the anecdotal evidence [IB Is very good, yes] about what happened is well done and it's led me to think and I find it difficult ...

IB He's a Jew is he? He must be. He looks like – fantastically Jewish.

MI He looks – but it doesn't – it's very much concealed if it is.

IB Must be. He may be Crypto, it's a well known thing, that means he hasn't come out of the closet. I'm sure he is. I mean, if you investigate, you will find that he's a member of what Namier used to call Order of Trembling Israelites, [MI laughs] which I renamed as Order of Trembling Amateur Gentiles, the OTAG it was called in Washington and I worked out who they were in America. The Chairman of OTAG was Mr Salzburger who was the [MI Oh yes, Cy] not Cy, no, Cy's uncle. Cy also, but Cy was not so important. The owner of The Times [MI Ox, yes] Well originally Ox but then

Ox's son-in-law who was called something Salzburger – what was his name? Arthur: Arthur Ox Salzburger, the son-in-law, you see? Or nephew or something. He was the man who said to me, in New York in 1941, 'Mr Berlin, don't you think that if the word Jew were eliminated from all mention on the media, newspapers and the radio, say for fifteen, twenty years, it would do a great deal of good?' Do you see what I mean? I'll tell you another story about him. He was the Chairman of OTAG; the Secretary of OTAG was Walter Lippmann who hated being a Jew beyond anything. There were other members of the committee; there was a man called Oscar Cox; there was a man called – what were their names? Crock, a journalist who actually denied he was one, [ ] didn't, regretfully admitted it. I can't think who the others were, there were a number. People didn't like the word Jew mentioned, didn't see why it was necessary; the Rosenwald family in Chicago, that was Seers Roebuck, some of them had to be reminded. But I enjoyed that rather and I like smoking out creatures of that sort. Let me tell you the story about Salzburger and then you can go if you wish. [MI I have to, yes] He has a son called Punch who succeeded him as owner of the New York Times. Punch was in the Korean war. There was a golf club – a country club created in Hope Sound by Harriman, by, I should think by [Reizmann?], by various gentlemen of great wealth. Naturally, Jews were not admitted – this was done in the fifties – but Mr Salzburger was such a nice man, such a gentleman, so very nice and such good manners, that maybe an exception could be made for him; so he was allowed to become a member of this country club, he wasn't deterred by the condition [ ], he wasn't. He used to go down there and enjoy the society of these people, very much – they liked him, he liked them. His son telephoned from New York saying he was back from Korea and the father said, 'Oh good, wonderful. Come on down here; very nice down here, very good place, come and stay at the club,' where he was staying, 'I'll get you a bedroom.' He then went to the secretary and said, 'My son's coming down, can I have a room?' And the secretary looked a bit embarrassed and he went to the committee. He said, 'Look, we've accepted Mr Salzburger because

I mean he is one of the exceptions. His son is also a Jew and once we admit him, I mean you know it may start – the rule will be broken. What shall we do?’ Well, no doubt they went into elaborate agonies, decided he could not stay. Well, poor old Salzburger resigned, immediately went and stayed in a hotel and all right. It was a terrible story. That’s what I mean, that’s what I mean you see by saying it’s no good Jews trying to – you know the word Goy? [MI Yes] meaning non Jew. There’s a story about a man who wanted to get into some sort of country club and the secretary was sent to vet him, which apparently was done in America, even though he was supported by several members. ‘Name?’ He said, ‘Forbes.’ ‘Where were you born?’ ‘Vermont.’ ‘Profession?’ ‘Merchant banker, investment bank.’ ‘Address?’ ‘Number 123 East 65th Street.’ ‘Clubs?’ ‘Yes,’ he told him something about a club in Vermont, golf club. Looked absolutely perfect, everything was all right. ‘Religion?’ The man said, ‘Goy.’ [laughter] I was told that story by Richard Pipes, professor of Russian history who was writing a history of the Russian Revolution. It’s a very good [], it’s rather like your ‘Oy Veh, whatever that may mean’, it’s part of the same thing [laughter].

MI Let’s leave it there, Isaiah.

*End of tape*

## MI TAPE 4

Conversation date: 27 October 1988

Date transcribed: 27 April 2004

Transcriber: Esther Johnson

Subjects covered:

Surbiton

St Paul's

Bar Mitzvah

Upper Addison Gardens

Schoolboy reading – Spengler, Tolstoy

Sexual inhibition

Mother and father: Jewishness and adaptation to England

Knighthood / OM

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### *Side A*

MI Isaiah, it is the 27th October 1988. We were talking last week about arriving in England. I wanted to ask you how your mother took to exile.

**IB A perfectly good question. I'm not sure that I've a clear answer. Unlike my father, who was an anglo-maniac, as I told you, [...] she was all right. She was rather like an old Italian woman in New York, firm in her own culture, rather like somebody sitting on her bags in Ellis Island with fourteen children, except she didn't have – she only had me. She took to it quite well, that is she learned English, she never felt politically at home, not really – my father too much so, if anything – my mother could not [...]. She remained a Russian Jewess, unreconstructed.**

MI How do you know that she didn't feel at home?

IB Well because I sort of noticed it in some way, she didn't make friends with the English, she had very few. My father had business friends and so on who used to come to the house; she was always rather self conscious and stiff with them. The maids in the house were, as a rule, foreign – you know, German, Italian sometimes, gypsies, all kinds of people, but they weren't straight English; when they were straight English there was always a slight tension.

MI Did her English become good?

IB It wasn't ever perfect, it wasn't ever perfect. She was a rather powerful character, strong personality, great sense of humour and responsive in its foremost – everything; she was musical, she had a very strong sense of people's characters. If she liked them or disliked them, there was no question, no doubt about that, no hesitation. She – no, she was self conscious. I felt she, in the presence of English Gentiles which occasionally happened particularly in my company afterwards – at St Paul's I used to bring boys back to tea because it was a day school and lessons so to speak stopped at five. At five o'clock I was on foot, accompanied by two or three friends who I would bring home to tea, that was permitted, late tea. She was perfectly nice to them but I didn't feel she was relaxed or free, ever.

MI What did you – what was her name?

IB Do you mean her Christian name? [MI Her Christian name] Marie, that really was her name. How she came to be called that in the ghetto, God only knows, but in her passport she was Maria, Maria [Ysakovna]. Her father was Isaac, therefore Ysak, Maria Ysakovna. [MI And her family name to remind me?] Ah well, her family name was very mysterious, very odd. Volshonok. Volshonok was a corruption of Volchonok, which means little wolf, from volk. The original name was I'm sure, Volfson, but since these people always tended to Russify names – first I had an

uncle called Samunov who married my mother's sister, whose original name was [Zamanov?] which is the name of the inventor of Esperanto for example, a Dr Zamanov. [MI So Volchonok would be ..?] Volshonok, not a name borne by anybody that I know of, except by her father and his brothers.

MI So her Christian name is Marie. What do you call her at home if I may ask?

IB I don't know that I called her anything. Mamma, I think, or Mama; that I learned to call her later. Mamma is the Russian for that, and Mama was slight upper class English, and I didn't call her Maman, but I called her Mama towards the end of my life quite unconsciously. But Mamma is what I called her, yes. Pappa and Mamma, that was the ordinary Russian names.

MI You always spoke Russian to her in the home?

IB No, no I didn't. I talked English. I did not talk Russian. Now and then, when she lost her temper with me which occasionally used to happen, she would then break into Russian, whereas I would break into Russian too. Then she would say, 'Talk English, talk English,' because she thought I would be much ruder to her in Russian than I would be in English. I was not to exploit Russian for the purpose of inflicting some kind of wound upon her. Talk English, that's more formal, let's go over to English, more formal basis for discussions; that's what that meant. But no, no, I talked English to her. I talked English from the third month of our being in England, continuously. I knew Russian but ...

MI Did you have English tutors to learn English?

IB Yes, well at the very beginning, yes, at Surbiton there was a Russian woman who – I think an English woman who lived in Russia for a long time or something – who must have come in answer to an advertisement. She taught me English, yes. She taught

me long vocabularies, lists of words, no grammar. That I picked up by about – I was about six months in 1920 used to it, adequately.

MI Did you have a sense when you came to England that you'd come down in the world? [IB No, none] because there were maids, you were saying? There was a tutor?

IB There was a maid in the house, there was one maid, that was all. There was an English tutor who used to take me to the zoo in London, he was a graduate I should think.

MI But you didn't feel you'd come down?

IB In no degree, neither up nor down, nor have I ever had that feeling in my life in general.

MI Because your father took up with his ..?

IB Did exactly what he did before, originally supplied the government, now he became a private trader; but I mean [MI Continuing to trade in timber] exactly the same thing. He went to the City in the morning, he had an office, he had a Company, he had one partner and everything went on exactly as before: came home in the evenings, read the Evening Standard and after that [chuckles] had dinner and then went to bed. If you gave him a book, he read a book, never got one for himself I don't think.

MI Whereas your mother would have read books?

IB My mother read books in German, very considerably when she was in Russia because she was bilingual. She read – oh certainly she did – she read what fairly advanced persons read then. [MI Such as?] Knut Hamsun, which was a Russian [gumshoe?] widely read in Russia. She read Couprine because he was so friendly to the Jews and that's a very good reason, it's like Aline had an aunt in Paris called [?], a very rich, grand sort of French Jewish family of

practically the eighteenth century, and she had a marvellous collection of pictures. And someone said, [French quote to the effect that 'You have no works by Degas? 'No.' 'Why?' 'Because he was an anti Semite.'] And the Dreyfus case [], right. No, my father had a very acute sense of the Jews and so on. She read Hamsun, she read Baroness Zutner whoever she was, some kind of Austrian feminist I would say. There were stamps with her on, in modern Austria you get Baroness Zutner somewhere. I've no idea who she was. She read D. H. Lawrence with great admiration [MI Really? In English?] Yes. She read Lawrence, she read – what else did she read? – she read Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky, all that she read. She was in that sense quite civilised but she remained lower middle class.

MI When you say lower middle class, what does that mean in ..?

IB In the Jewish sense. Somehow her roots were in the ghetto, in the Riga ghetto, it wasn't a real ghetto as I told you, it was just where the poor Jews lived. Her roots were there, that's the world she understood, that's the world she liked, that's the world in terms of which she used to talk about, described characters and personalities in it with great vividness and great humour. She had a considerable gift for penetrating, so to speak, human nature, describing very characteristic stories about the way people behaved to each other.

MI Can you remember stories that you heard as a child from her?

IB No, no, no, I don't, no, not a single one.

MI But when you say that she had a kind of lower middle class ghetto character, how did that translate in terms of behaviour? The things she did?

IB In terms that she wasn't comfortable in England, that's all I mean. She was a natural Zionist, she was a Chairwoman of little



Zionist societies, dominated them totally, Lord Goodman's mother was [chuckles] one of the clients. She was the most hideous woman I've ever seen in all my life; she was a monster in appearance and that's why when Goodman, who was not a beauty, when he was suggested to her after her solicitor died – who was a perfectly nice man called Snowman who is the uncle of the man who looks after the South Bank at the moment, music in other words – when he died comparatively young, the question was who should she employ as solicitor. And the accountant who was working for us suggested Goodman. 'No, I can't, I can't. He looks terrible, I can't get on with him, I can't.'

MI Because of memories of mother?

IB No, no, no, because of his appearance. No the mother she was quite nice to, poor woman, very hideous and ugly, but kindly and amiable and one shouldn't be nasty. But Goodman struck her as – looked to her rather like the leader of the Mau Mau, do you remember? [MI Jomo Kenyatta] Yes, rather like Kenyatta [laughs] A sort of Kenyatta like look. He looked – terrible, ugly – she sort of recoiled, said she couldn't, she couldn't. When her solicitor became my solicitor who was at Corpus with me, who was the solicitor to the Privy Council, to the Cabinet practically and to a number of millionairesses, although she got on quite well with him, she was never completely comfortable; she was too grand. So that's what I mean by saying that there was social self consciousness which is due entirely to her origins, you see? The name Rothschild meant too much to her. When old Mrs Rothschild used to come and see me in Hampstead about forty years ago when I was ill, she would call. My mother was transported with pleasure, you see? I used to be very humiliated by that, I disliked that very much for obvious reasons.

MI Yes. How did she dress? Do you remember how she ..?

IB Not at all, nothing very unusual, she dressed like any woman of her class would dress, perfectly ordinary clothes, unnoticeable ...

MI You don't remember her as a stylist?

IB No. She was fat; they're both fat, my parents. That's why I am as I am, and [MI I beg your pardon?] Oh yes, I'm fat all right, certainly, every time I eat proper lunch, proper dinner, my weight shoots up. I have a complex about weighing myself every morning. No, she was plump, she dressed neatly and perfectly nicely but not very grand; and when balls occurred or evenings when she had to go out, it was a little overdone. My father always disliked her clothes. He thought she was too – I don't know – her stockings weren't tight enough, sometimes wrinkled. He couldn't bear that. The dress sometimes didn't sit on her with a degree of elegance which on the whole he rather expected. He didn't say anything very much but he winced. The difference between them class wise – they were first cousins – was total funnily enough. He assimilated to in some way a different form of life from hers although he loved her. But she didn't love him. As I told you ...

MI She didn't love him. [IB No] How did you know that?

IB It was obvious. She picked quarrels with him of a bitter and unnecessary kind. He was a very nice, peaceful, sensitive, charming, sort of honourable, not very interesting man. There was no jam in his doughnut at all, something was lacking in the centre. He never lived his life. When he died it was very pathetic, he died like a – he was to me he was like a schoolboy, I mean he never really experienced very much and he died innocently as he had lived without having been through any kind of emotional turmoil, or ever having done anything interesting, or been in anything interesting and had no real life at all. It's rather like that story by Henry James which is called *The Beast in the Jungle*, you remember, when the man says, 'If you haven't lived your life, what *have* you had?' [MI And he didn't?] No, but she very much. **She**

resented being married to him because she thought he was a dull man and depended too much on her, and was uninteresting, and ... She was very sexy, my mother, basically. Nothing ever happened or remotely happened, but she really wanted to be loved, she wanted to be lifted, she wanted some kind of emotional relationship with somebody, which she never had. She resented the fact that she was relegated in this way. That's why all the love was directed at me, you see, and I really could have been ruined by it but if I wasn't, it was rather mysterious. I wasn't mother fixated, that I wasn't. I could have been and should have been, but I wasn't. [MI Why?] Don't know, because I mean I never knew what it meant, I mean it just didn't happen, because I have an easy nature, because by nature I was very unfixated in general.

MI And also there was a very strong counter pull in your life which was to ...

IB Well at school and College and I had another life. But when I came home, it was home, I had a meal, I had dinner and after dinner I went upstairs and worked [ ] together, she was very economical which used to irritate, because my father and me – he tended to be a spendthrift, slightly. He liked luxury, he liked comfort. When we used to go – even after the war when we went to Switzerland, he stayed in the Hotel des Bergues which was a respectable hotel in Geneva, she would stay in a boarding house [MI With you?] with me. I was there already but I didn't mind, I didn't mind where I stayed. But she was always trying to find third class hotels which my father found unbearable, so there were conflicts about that. In the end, she would win and my father was in permanent discomfort as a result, he couldn't understand why. She said, 'Well, the day may come when all the money I've accumulated as a result of not spending on house money might come in useful, against a rainy day.' Well it very nearly happened but it never did. In fact, my father did think he was ruined once, but he wasn't, so that was all right. [MI When was that?] At the

beginning of the war, the last war, when suddenly Riga was cut off, you see? There was no timber and he had debts to settle which he couldn't because he had no goods to sell and the goods dropped in somehow – those sort of things dropped – well part of the financial crisis of '31 really. But that he got out of comparatively easily. But in '39 – well I am now running ahead – [MI Sorry, we can pick that up] – come to that later, yes.

MI I wanted to come back to your mother because I ...

IB She had a powerful, strong character and influence on me in the sense that she somehow – I think what I derived from her is a very strong sense of whether people are substantial or not, if you see what I mean, whether they have substance, have insights and are dependable and have some kind of personality of a real kind; or whether on the contrary they are frivolous and unreliable and trivial and ...

MI And that was her basic distinction between people?

IB To think [ ] said it, yes, yes, if you see what I mean, you see?

MI And she would have been cruel enough to put her own husband in the second category?

IB Well – I don't suppose she allowed herself to think that, quite – but I suppose if she have been asked, she would have thought, yes, he was – yes, he was trivial, yes, not worth very much. Nice, amiable, but she liked strong men, strong women, and historically too.

MI Who were her heroines and heroes then?

IB Well, certainly no Gentile figures; she was steeped in Judaism. Aline noticed that I remember, more so as she grew older. I don't think she had heroes in that sense, I don't think she did. Did she

ever call anybody a great man? No. She wasn't in the least historically minded. I mean she knew who Catherine the Great was, or who Peter the Great was, but it didn't extend far beyond that.

MI Did you in the end have a confessional relationship with her? [IB No, I did not, I did not] You didn't come and tell her all your troubles? [IB No] Even from the beginning? At any time?

IB Never. I never told anybody my troubles, I don't think I ever did. I think I didn't have very many troubles because I didn't tell them, and because I didn't tell them, they in a sense evaporated. Troubles are much more painful if you actually go and – it's false to say that relief is obtained by confession: on the contrary, one becomes much more aware of what they are in the telling of them, by being described you alter them somewhat and they become engraved to a high degree.

MI But isn't that a defence of the uses of repression then perhaps?

IB Well yes, but I'm all in favour of that. [laughter] No, I was very repressed, I've no doubt I had complaisance. Well, sex for example you see meant nothing to me at all for far longer than otherwise. I never masturbated in my life, never felt tempted to, never did. I think I was almost unique in that respect, I had no idea what it was, you see? So this is nothing very abnormal about my upbringing certainly, certainly. But I think we've got to go back chronologically on that.

MI Yes, I wanted to just to get the sense of you now in the early twenties. You move from ...

IB I don't think I would have confessed anything to anybody, I think it was – if I was unhappy, I swallowed it. I don't think I talked to my friends either. I was a talkative boy, quite open, but if I was frustrated at school or offended or insulted by a Master or failed

in something, I think I was just unhappy, but I don't think I talked about it. **I don't think I complained very much. I was irritated by being made to do this rather than that. When my mother used to go into my bedroom in the morning – I used to have breakfast in bed because I was spoilt in that sense – she would say, 'Well, what is the plan for today?' That used to madden me. 'I have no plan, I don't intend to have a plan.' At the age of thirteen I said that: 'Plan, plan.' [MI laughs] That's what she was like. She was tidy, she was strong-willed and she wanted life to be orderly and she always [ ] money.**

MI Was your father essentially absent from your child ..?

IB Strong sense of money my mother had, strong sense of who was rich and who was poor, which is a Jewish thing in general. The point about the Jews is as you know, that the only security they ever had was money; there was no other, and that's why they accumulated the whole secret of money lending or wealth or general money mindedness on the part of the Jews, which was absolutely true, which was all they could cling to, because from every corner, terrible insecurities threatened them. They could be expelled, they could be imprisoned, they could be killed, anything could happen. This is the only thing with which they could buy a certain degree of independence. Consequently, my mother was brought up in that world very conscious of the differentials of wealth; and one of the reasons, no doubt – I should think she wore, I think, two rings on her fingers which I also dislike, diamonds, diamond ring, golden ring. I can't look at jeweller's windows now, I've an absolute phobia [MI Because of the elements of display?] probably, of her Jewish friends, too. I mean they used to go to these – there was an annual party given by an organisation which was founded by Aline's grandfather which was intended to make Jews artisans and productive workers. It was called [ORT?] and David, the present, David Young who introduced its methods was head of it in England and introduced its methods now, in the [ ] of England. They work extremely well [laughter]. Anyway, there was

an annual ball in London under the auspices of this organisation. It was called something like – in Russian it was [?], something like that; in England, Organisation of Rehabilitation through Toil, I don't know, some nonsense, Trade, but something of the sort, you see? Well they had to translate it somehow. Well, all the sort of bourgeois Jews, Lord Beloff's parents, rich, sort of affluent Jews living in Hampstead used to turn up to this. I was occasionally taken. Once a year, this was a kind of sort of identifying act on the part of mainly Russian Jews in London, whom otherwise my parents didn't keep up. And I used to see these bejewelled ladies, these huge fat fingers, you see, and these jewels shining upon them. It was obviously an exhibition, I mean tremendous demonstrations of wealth.

MI And it left a certain distaste?

IB A very violent distaste. There are two things; I can't do with that and I hate looking into shops with women's clothes in them, which I have no wish to look at whatever, take not the slightest interest. Men's clothes, yes. My wife thinks it's highly homosexual on my part, you see? [MI laughs] I like knick-knack shops with odds and ends which I like best, knick- knacks, I mean mixed goods of every sort; pen knives; bird cages [laughter], anything you like, I mean the sort of gadgets of a million kind, the shops I like best.

MI Let's now resume the narrative [IB I hate banks, too] What? [IB I hate banks] Yes. You start in Surbiton, you stay in Surbiton ..?

IB For about just under a year. We begin in February [MI February '20] Yes, and I think I talked Cockney then because that's what the other boys talked, I called money, 'chink' as they called it I think, and I probably said instead of saying 'I say,' I think I probably said 'I sigh.' I suspect this must be so because the maid who looked

after us, whenever anything was said to her, said, 'I sigh,' meaning, 'I see.' No, no, I sigh is not I see, I sigh what I see.

MI When do you move to Hampstead?

IB Well, oh in 1929. [MI You're in Surbiton and then..?] in Kensington. You see we move from Surbiton – my mother broke her ankle and was removed to London where it had to be set, and went to a Nursing Home for about a fortnight. And some grand doctor looked after her and I remember him, Lord Dawson of Penn. He was the King's doctor, a real old-fashioned bedside-manner charlatan. He was a Lord, and Lord Eccles is his son-in-law. And he looked after my mother and then, during that period, I was I suppose – that took a month I think – during that month, I lived my life at school in Surbiton because there was nobody to look after me at home, and my father only came back in the evenings from the City to Surbiton; and I stayed at school from half past eight in the morning till nine, or half past eight. I lunched and I dined there. That's where I was taught English manners which I don't think I had when I arrived, I think I probably speared bits of meat or ate peas off a knife or might have done anything. But I imitated the other boys and presently – the Headmaster and his new wife were very nice to me. I was a poor foreign boy obviously who had to be looked after. [MI What was the name of the school?] Arundel House School. It still exists in Surbiton as far as I know. The Headmaster's name was [Dunstable?] and he was a B.Com from Birmingham. [MI And when did you go to St Paul's?] Well, I'll tell you. Then my mother's ankle was cracked and then it was difficult, she limped a certain amount and the question was, could she really be brought back to Surbiton? There were no doctors, no surgeon to look after her. So they then decided to move. We moved I would say in the winter, Christmas roughly, of 1920 – '21 maybe – and we moved to a hotel. We lived in the Kensington Palace Hotel. It still exists under some other name, you know where it is? [MI Yes, exactly] There we lived for about four months and I absolutely adored it. Breakfast was brought by



a waiter, delicious scrambled eggs which I didn't get in Surbiton. I liked the food in the restaurant very much. The whole idea of lunch in a restaurant pleases me very much because it's after the comparative squalor of all these confined Russian and even English houses. This grandeur of a restaurant and a waiter and this wonderful food which was quite unlike the Jewish food my mother prepared which was I mean perfectly ordinary English food. I was delighted by all that. There we stayed for three or four months; this would have brought us to 19 – wait a moment – it happened '20 – no, we came in '21, I'm muddling things, we came in February '21. We moved again – Kensington Palace Hotel, I should say, was about December '21 and stayed there till about May, '22. At this point I was given tutors in order to go to St Paul's and I didn't tell you. My father met – knew a KC, King's Council called Stuart Bevan, he must have done some business with him. He took to him in a big way and they became friends. He was a Governor of Westminster School. He said, 'You've got a boy, he's got to go to Westminster. It's a very good school, I recommend it.' So I was put up for Westminster. I was then given a coach whose name I've forgotten in New Quebec Street I think, or Old Quebec Street, not very far from Marble Arch, where cramming went on; upstairs the Classics, downstairs, mathematics. Mr Bird taught me mathematics, Mr Crouch taught me the Classics, that was the name; and just straight cramming with five other boys. Westminster School accepted me without examination but for some reason there was some test I had to pass of a rather easy kind, or a scholarship [ ] maybe, I don't know, something like that. And Mr Crouch said to me, 'Your name is Isaiah. Maybe the boys in Westminster will be unfamiliar with that and it would be easier for you if you took on some ordinary English name. Why don't you call yourself James, Robert, something like that?' That, for some reason, upset me. I really didn't like it at all and I thought, oh dear, I understood all right. Here's a boy with people wearing top hats which they did just as much as at Eton and they wore Eton jackets. It was a smart school, more then than now, King's scholars and they worshipped as they do now in Westminster Abbey. It's all very

Christian in a way. There were Jews there but very, very few. And suddenly I came home and I said, 'Now I don't want to go to a school where I have to change my name. I don't think I'd feel very happy there.' And my friend Leonard Schapiro with whom I used to play in the English Garden in Petrograd, who came from a grander Riga family than mine, went to St Paul's, and I said, 'Well, I know Leonard, he seems quite happy there, he's two years older.' You know who I mean? [MI Yes] the man who wrote all those books [MI Absolutely] 'Can't I go to St Paul's too?' We inquired of the maid and we found there were seventy Jewish boys there – large ghetto at St Paul's if you see what I mean – all the sort of English bourgeoisie sent there, I mean Leonard Woolf, Victor Gollancz, that was the kind of school it was, that sort of thing if you see what I mean. So then all the sort of German Jews who came here, prosperous German Jews sent their children there. And so I was put up for St Paul's instead. My parents were surprised, that was the reaction, but I curiously love – it was one of the few self consciously sort of decisive acts I ever took in my life – I said I'm not going there, I don't want to. The only other crisis – then I did my Bar Mitzvah in the new West End Synagogue which was very smart, kind of real West End affair, and I wasn't allowed to sing the portion of the Bible which boys in that position do, because I was adjudged to have no musical sense whatever and I wouldn't do it right; and I received a prayer book at the hands of a man called Sir Meyer Speilmann who was the chief warden. All this I remember. And everyone wore top hats there, too, so I wore a top hat there but not at Westminster. And I went to St Paul's which was within walking distance. That's why they settled in Kensington in the end, to make it possible for me to go to school on foot should I wish to do so. The only other thing which happened to me of a critical nature which is of some interest which I don't think I've ever thought about until this moment, was that one day I told a lie, a great big bold gratuitous lie; to the effect that on – oh, I don't know what – on Friday morning or something, I'd gone to see Mr Crouch and he said this and he said that, then I came home. And then they wanted me for something and they happened to

telephone there saying could they speak to me, and I wasn't there. When I came home they said, 'Why did you say – where were you?' 'I was there.' 'But you weren't, we telephoned and he said he hadn't seen you all morning.' It was an absolutely gratuitous lie. I don't know what I was doing, I walked the streets, I went to buy a gramophone record in Kensington High Street. I was thirteen, you see, exactly what I was. And then my father became colossally upset, colossally upset and couldn't speak to me and said he would never have lived to the day when his son did something so absolutely dreadful. I am sure I was reduced to tears, I don't remember that I was but I – and my mother also but my father particularly. He said he couldn't speak to me and it broke his heart and he didn't know how he was going to go on and he made a fuss of an unbelievable kind. That did make some dent upon me, and although I can't say that I've never told a lie since then, the whole idea of lies being wrong and the sort of value of the truth, I think in some way was ingrained into me. I didn't tell them easily. When I do tell a lie it [MI It gives you trouble] yes, you see? It certainly gives me trouble, quite a lot of trouble. You see I tell myself I'm only afraid of being found out but it isn't quite it. And I have great respect for truth tellers, people – never mind what even if they hurt feelings – are incapable of lying. Kant, Kantian philosophy it is. However, I then did my Bar Mitzvah, quite normal, there was a little dinner, I had to make a little speech, that was a frightful agony and nuisance, and then I went in for a scholarship at St Paul's and didn't get it. I was put down in the ordinary way because my parents were prosperous enough, wouldn't be needed. Then I went to school at the end of '23, in fact September '23 was when I went to St Paul's. And I was put in an a – I don't think anything very strange happened to me there. Some Masters I liked, some I didn't, but on the whole I was unhappy in one of the forms because the Master was obviously a kind of sublimated old fashioned homosexual I didn't much like; he might even have been a trifle anti Semitic, I don't know, but that couldn't be, never never never emerged. But under him I felt bullied and I didn't know the sort of thing English boys knew, my education was too rapid. For

example, when I was told to write notes on the following characters – wait a moment – Beatrice, Puck, I had no idea who Beatrice Puck was, so I wrote this down as Beatrice Buck. I didn't know who Buck was; Beatrice I thought was a lady Dante was in love with, which was quite correct. The teacher [ ] [Italian pronunciation of Beatrice] he calls her. Beatrice is right but that wasn't what was wanted, and so there was a Shakespearean background which the other boys obviously had by the time they were thirteen. I did not, it was not what I was taught at my Prep school. All I was taught at my Prep school for nine months was the New Testament which I took to in a big way. I enjoyed that very much. My parents had no objection. I read the Epistles with the greatest interest [laughs] you see? And other things of that sort, Latin, a little bit of Latin, a little bit of English essay writing, grammar, that sort of thing. But I had no idea about Buck [laughs] and who Puck was, I didn't know who Beatrice was. Hamlet I had heard of. Well that was an obstacle so I used to come home and used to ask my parents who these characters were. And I had an aunt, my father's mother's sister who was very saintly and who was a mathematician by training, and who was then a rather elderly student of LSE. She taught me mathematics to the extent to which I was never any good at it, it was always torment to me. She taught me that, she told me about Buck and Beatrice [laughs]. Then after that I was perfectly happy at school, no trouble at all. I was quite popular with other boys, Masters quite liked me, I was never top of the form, never, nor second. I was sort of respectable, I mean eighth, ninth. I was never twenties but I was never near the top. I worked very hard but I wasn't very gifted, I never really learned Latin and Greek properly because I used cribs, I cheated. That's why I never learned Latin as I should have done, you see? I didn't use cribs at first but later, certainly. I used to go to Charing Cross Road and buy these tuppenny and thruppenny translations of the Aeneid – your thing hasn't stopped has it? [MI No, no we're fine] I played games. [MI How were you at games?] Not bad, not good. I played cricket, I played football. I played soccer at my preparatory school, Prep school, and I played – I even bought a football

because I was so addicted to it, I use to sort of kick it about in a jolly manner. And I played cricket, not well. I even played tennis. We lived in one of those houses in what is now called Upper Addison Gardens which was a large green lawn like thing between the houses, or one street or another, you know something [ ] these commons and there, there was a tennis court and I used to play tennis, pretty badly, but I played it. I used to go to [?] my left arm didn't quite function. But I'll tell you about my cricketing career: I played quite steadily at St Paul's. I was no good for I didn't suffer, I didn't like it very much, I didn't loathe it. But one day, already quite late in life, I was about sixteen, fifteen perhaps, a ball came towards me, I struck it with my bat but I was very awkward always. I made five runs, six runs, but never twenty and I was in a low team. The ball went perpendicularly upwards, I somehow tipped it upwards in a very awkward way, and the fielder came and cupped his hands in order to catch it. I caught it myself, it seemed to me to be coming down on my head. This had never happened in a game of cricket before, it could be in the – what's that book of records? It was not well received, it was thought a rather cynical, rather immoral – I can see it was enormously disliked. It was somehow a mockery of the game. After that I wasn't allowed to play for about six months. I could score and be an umpire.

MI You couldn't take the game in vain.

IB No, for six months I was semi ostracised for that.

MI But you weren't regarded at St Paul's as kind of tremendously studious, [IB No] owlsh?

IB No, no, don't think so, no I wasn't.

MI Did you wear glasses from childhood?

IB No, in England, from my Prep school, that's when I suddenly became short sighted. I was given a pair of glasses about a month

after I arrived, for some reason my parents noticed whether they were Russian or not. No, no, I wore glasses, yes because I was short sighted in the ordinary way and I worked quite hard and I quite enjoyed my school life. The thing was, it was a cramming establishment. We were at school from nine thirty till one, and three till five, and we lunched wherever we liked. We didn't have to lunch at school, so we went and had lunch at Lyons Corner House, or ABC as it was called in those days, or the something Dairy Company, with my other schoolboys. That was very nice. We walked towards Hammersmith Broadway and had jolly lunches, cost tenpence.

MI What uniform did you wear?

IB None. When I was at Junior School you wore, I think, an ordinary – no, it wasn't uniform until I became older. I think we wore mainly grey flannels. I never wore short trousers but the senior school wore a black jacket and grey striped trousers; the junior school wore caps, the seniors wore bowler hats and walking sticks, to that extent, that degree of snobbery. But socially it was not a public school, officially of course, it was, founded in 1511 or whereabouts, it was called Paul's Churchyard originally. The social range came from the children of Astronomers Royal, or civil servants; two policemen's sons, or bank clerk's sons, the whole range. It was very grammar school in texture, though public school officially.

MI My father's memory of it is sort of great unhappiness. [IB Why?] I think he felt young, he felt initially his English wasn't very good, he felt bullied, he felt ...

IB What did he do? History? History or Classics?

MI History. He wasn't terribly – he wasn't very happy. His brothers became kind of prefects and boxers and had a good kind of outdoor, robust kind of public school ...

IB I never became a prefect, I was never a prefect, no.

MI Is St Paul's the moment when you get a sort of dawning intellectual interest? Some subject begins to emerge?

IB Yes, yes, yes. The point about St Paul's was, because it was a London school and because there were these quite clever, sophisticated boys, some of them, we went to concerts and we went to exhibitions of pictures, and by the time they came to Oxford, most of the Paulines were exhausted, they were sort of spent. They were rather knowing, they'd been to too much, unlike the public schoolboys who were preserved in some kind of aspic, you see? These were the sort of – probably Westminster was much the same or Merchant Taylor's or City of London – all these London schools. And we read books, I mean we read fashionable books. By the time I got to the, I suppose, upper seventh form, or eighth form which was the name of the sixth form at St Paul's, I must have been told to – clever boys read Joyce and they read Eliot and they read, I don't know, Carl Sandberg suddenly, just thrown in; or, I don't know what, Humbert Wolf who was the great poet of those days, and that sort of thing. So they were sophisticated, pretentious and sophisticated, that was the point. But the homework was very heavy, I wanted to work, at least I did, because I am a slow worker, I had to work quite hard, for after dinner I used to go – and then there was a thing called repetition which was learning verse by heart, whether English or Latin. That was a nightmare to me. That's what I'd forget, that's the one thing which used to blacken my mornings at breakfast, that's when I used to try and so to speak try and memorise these things and I knew that if not, the ...

[Pause in the tape]

MI I was asking whether this was the moment your intellectual interest began to focus.

IB Yes, I think it did. I think partly the fact that I'd read these Russian novels when I was still in Russia, lingered on [ ] take an interest in. What did I take an interest in? I'm trying to cast my mind back to what happened to me – what did I read? I read Anna Karenina, too early, it meant nothing to me; I read Jane Austen which bored me stiff at the age of thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, which I came round to later; I read Talbot Baynes Read which was school stuff, Fifth Form at St Dominic's, Give a Dog a Bad Name [laughs]. These are school stories, Victorian school stories of the 1890's. I read the other Reade. I read The Cloister and the Hearth, it was schoolboy reading. I stopped reading Jules Verne. I read Scott with considerable interest, nobody except me liked it. I read Dickens, I read Thackeray. I did not read George Eliot, I read one novel by her, rather bored. And I read P. G. Wodehouse. All that I did read. Now, about interests, yes. I think I must have begun reading, quite late, in about – when I was about sixteen, seventeen – I began taking an interest in ideas, that's undeniable; and the ideas I was interested in – I read Spengler, the Decline of the West which was an influential book of the day, must have appeared in about – English translation – in about 1926. I read that and was fascinated by it, very panoramic. I read books about books; I read Gilbert Murray; I read McHale who was Gilbert Murray with water.

MI Are these on your syllabus or off it?

IB Off. I would read a book on pre-Islamic Arab poetry, it was certainly not on the syllabus; Greek lyric poetry which was, up to a point.

MI Did you find these in the Pauline library? At St Paul's library?

IB Yes, I did, I think that's right, yes. I wish I could remember what I read in those years. I liked reading second order books, discussions, essays, discussions of other books. I read one or two essays by Aldous Huxley, or I did then because other boys did too



at St Paul's, it wasn't all that rare. Anatole France I read because I went to France – we always went to France for our holidays and it was easy French, and so I read that volume by volume, that has quite a lot of ideas in it, it's not just straight novels if you see what I mean, like *Penguin Island* or [?]. All these things are full of sort of discussions of things because that's what he was like. I read Chesterton, essays. I read Macaulay which I bought for myself, not in the syllabus. At the age of fourteen, I went and bought a second hand single volume edition of Macaulay's *Essays* which I thought were super-marvellous. I was absolutely fascinated by the facility of style, obviously by the infinite readability. That I loved.

MI That's a very odd thing to do at fourteen, isn't it?

IB Well I did, I did, in that sense I must have been a bookish boy but it didn't show at St Paul's. I mean I wasn't obviously the sort of boy with a book under his arm perpetually.

MI And you didn't have an awful reputation as an inky swot?

IB No, I did not, I was not an inky swot, no I was quite popular with the other boys because of my natural anxiety to please. I think I was rather good at making friend in that sense, so I think I probably adjusted myself with some skill, unconscious skill, to the new life. No, I wasn't an inky swot, not a bit. There were inky swots but I didn't like them, or they me. And I was too talkative, too lively, too much interested in people's characters and lives to be an inky swot, if you see what I mean, you see?

MI Now, at what point does it become obvious to you that you're going to go to Oxford? That you're going to go to university, that you're not going to go and join your father in business?

IB From the beginning. My father was quite clear that I had to go to university, there was never any doubt of it. St Paul's – the doctrine at St Paul's in your father's day and mine was, it was better

to get a scholarship in a bad college than, even if you could afford it, to go to a good one, because what they wanted was scalps, the number of scholarships per annum. Tremendous competition. St Paul's got a great many comparatively speaking, you see, more than any other London schools; and that was the aim and intent. Therefore, the assumption of going to Oxford or Cambridge was fairly clear, besides which I was sufficiently sophisticated. I wrote something for the Chancellor's English essay prize which was thing in my – now I was – about '26 or something, and the then High Master as he was called said, 'This is rather like Greats in Oxford. This is a quite interesting essay, therefore you ought to go to Oxford to do Greats, you have that sort of mind.' I had no idea what that meant. But the assumption that I'd go to Oxford was never questioned. My father did want me to go into business, yes, but I made the end of that. I was quite clear I wouldn't; not for any idealistic reason but mainly because I didn't understand what it was, I didn't understand about mathematics and bookkeeping, and when I used to go to lunch with my father in the City and his fellow business acquaintances used to come, I couldn't laugh at their jokes, I thought they were awful, great red-faced drinking men []. My father seemed to get on quite well with them all. I realised I'd absolutely no rapport with these people and therefore seemed quite apart from everything else. The City was no good for me. No, I knew I was going to Oxford but I didn't know where. My St Paul's life – I went to the concerts, I went to Promenade concerts. My mother sang, as I told you, Verdi, Rossini – not Rossini – Verdi, Bizet, [?] and Puccini, plus the kind of Opera they put on in Riga. [MI She'd sing at home?] Yes [MI You had a piano and she would accompany herself?] Yes, that's right, that's correct. We had arias from Mignon by Ambroise Thomas [].

MI And did you take music – did you learn to play?

IB No. There was a man tried to teach me piano in Surbiton. I realised quite early that I would never be good enough to enjoy it, so I gave it up.]

MI How did you – how did your – do you have any memory, just to conclude this period of St Paul's, of becoming an adolescent? Your sexual change, becoming a ..?

IB Well, let me tell you. I think I must have had crushes on boys but I don't think I was aware of what it meant. The homosexuality was talked about; there wasn't any in St Paul's to my knowledge and not in a single one of the boys I knew. More conspicuously, it was alleged that in the boarding houses of St Paul's – it was a mainly day school but there were these boarders – that there, something sinister of that kind went on. But it wasn't in the forefront of attention, they didn't have obvious affairs. But in my last term, there were sort of obscene boys who used to talk about how pretty so and so was and so on. In my case, I was in love with a man who afterwards became a clergyman, it's clear to me now that I was. We were great friends – there was no physical contact – but we used to go to concerts together and Covent Garden together; and I realised retrospectively when I was at Oxford, that I must have been in love with him. He also came to Oxford and became a clergyman and then preached a sermon at St Paul's Cathedral to some Pauline gathering. I thought I'd go and see if I had sort of feeling for him. None; large, fat, absolutely unattractive looking man. I thought, how could I? But no doubt I had longings in that direction. Girls? Very faintly, faintly. I found some more attractive than others but I didn't know very many. My parents had friends who – and I used to go to little dances in, as it were, Bayswater. One of the people who used to come to dances with me, who I used to meet in dances, is Jonathan Miller's mother. She was a very, very nice woman, Betty Miller, she wrote a very good book on Browning. She was shy and she was bookish, she was intellectual, very aesthetic and I liked her very much. She was not at all beautiful or attractive and she and I didn't like dancing. I had a great, great – I was taught it and I could do it but I absolutely loathed it; again some complex of a sexual kind, no doubt. She didn't like it either, so we used to be asked to the same sort of

parties and we used to sit it out, so I was the bane of hostesses because I used to gather men round me and tell them stories [chuckles]. And then they weren't available for dances, you see? But she and I used to go into corners, have long, quite interesting conversations about books. And I made friends with her. And poor lady, I met her not long before she died; very – some fearful disease, she was in the Wallace Collection about fifteen years ago. Still very charming. She was a great niece of Bergson.

MI Oh yes, yes I think Jonathan's told me that and she died of Alzheimers, she died of premature senility.

IB She died of brain tumours too and things went wrong in her head, not just Alzheimers. I mean she suffered all the pains, it wasn't just – her husband was a psychoanalyst as you know, called Dr – what was his name? – Miller. I think she must have psychoanalysed by him, you see? And he was called – he was a member of the Reform Club when I was there and I used to talk to him about his wayward son, Jonathan. He hoped he'd be all right but I didn't meet him then. He used to consult me as to what to do about his son. I didn't like him, the psychoanalyst. [MI Why?] I don't know, he was rather vulgar looking with a moustachio and had a kind of slightly self conscious, slightly thrusting Jewish air. That I've always disliked very much. So I have a strong streak of anti Semitism in me. I know Jewish vices more obviously than general vices. When Jews have specifically Jewish qualities, I mind that more. I feel ashamed and hostile, you see? What was his name? I don't know where he came from or what he was but he married this lady who was not happy with him. What his relation was, I don't know what Jonathan's relation to his mother was.

MI Difficult to fathom, difficult to fathom. We talk a fair bit about it but it's hard to register.

IB She was very sensitive and understood poetry very well.

MI Did you feel drawn to her, attracted to her?

IB Not physically, no, not physically in any way, she was not at all handsome. But even that – she wasn't physical at all, she took no interest in sex at all consciously.

MI Do you remember whether your closest friends at St Paul's were Jews or non Jews? One of them's a clergyman, so that's ...

IB I'll tell you. Now that's, largely that, but no. At prayers, the non Christians or the non Anglicans were herded together into the Art School where their names were called by roll call and the others went to prayers which counted as the same thing. There was a man at the door taking names so that you couldn't escape one or the other fate. If you were late you see, that was a crime. So the Jewish boys therefore saw each other in the morning, they were all herded together which naturally made for a certain [?] for ten minutes, quarter of an hour, whatever it was. I did have Jewish friends, yes, among them but they were not my only friends, no, no. I had Jewish friends. I had I suppose three Jewish friends in all and ...

MI One of them Schapiro?

IB No, no. He wasn't a great friend of mine, ever. He was two years older, I knew him very well, I never completely liked him ...

*Side B*

IB ... he had somehow – he worked harder, he was more English than I was, he thought I was rather a foreigner, was very pleased to be born in Glasgow and was slightly snobbish about all that. When I got a scholarship at Oxford, he didn't, and then my parents had a certain amount of money, his father was completely feckless and lost any money he was ever given. He was a charming man, played the flute. His mother was the daughter of a minor Rabbi in

Glasgow, and therefore there was always a slight tension when we talked to each other of course and we were quite friendly but he wasn't exactly a friend, I can't say that. There was one thing which did draw us together and that was that we both hated these – the rather smart Jewish circle we went to because we thought it was very artificial, insincere and top hats and all. So that at one period he and I – he was seventeen and I was fifteen let us say – we used to go for little East End type Jewish Synagogues round the Portobello Road where we both obviously experienced some kind of religious emotions which one does at that age, and that we liked. So we went together; and all these Jews were East European Jews and they prayed in a very sort of intense, rather corybantic sort of way, if you see what I mean, where they shook and they rolled and they screamed and we thought this was the real article, when you really believe. And that moved us. And that was the closest friendship period, friendship with him that I ever experienced.

MI Was that also the only period in which you experienced religious feelings and temptations?

IB Yes, yes. I was taken to Synagogue by my parents but I was very bored. I didn't hate it but it's exactly like the Church of England, one had to do it because one was Jewish but not much importance was attached to it, and I was bored stiff with these long, boring prayers, you see? I must have prayed in my life; I don't think I'm conscious having ever believed in God at all. Prayer, yes; identification with the Jews, yes; Jewish history – I knew quite a lot about that always, because in Russia there was a little Russian Jewish periodical written in a rather sophisticated manner which we subscribed to, which told stories about Jewish heroes of the past, exactly like children's books, I mean, you see? [MI This was in Russia at that period?] In Russia, yes. I absorbed that before I was ten, you see? And that stayed. So I knew who the Romans were and I knew who the people who rose against them were and I knew who King David was and I knew what the First and Second Temples were and I knew roughly what the Talmud was. All that I

knew very well and that was very firm. But at St Paul's I never talked about this. Now, the Jewish friends: one was a man called Ettinghausen who was a German Jew; his family came from Frankfurt, his father was born in England [ ], his uncle went to the first performance of Carmen – a jeweller in Paris – told me about it in great detail, charming man, Uncle Toto. The father was [Lady B enters] My wife? Yes. The father was a bookseller, a thing called Maggs Brothers which was rare books, and he was brought up in Jewish piety, violent anti Zionist but pious and strict which I was not. And then came Hitler and at first he didn't believe it was real and then he realised it was [not safe to stay?] and a total German-type transformation occurred and he became a hundred per cent Zionist. Total break, as with the Germans, exactly like being a Nazi suddenly. And he never got a fellowship at Oxford but he was a lecturer in German. In those days there were not many Jewish fellows in Colleges, that also I can tell you about, but I was in fact the only one I think at one time, literally. [MI Really?] Yes, and – not quite, as I'll explain to you. And he then went of course to Palestine immediately, blamed me severely for not doing so, changed his name to Eytan became Head of some Foreign Office school, got into the Foreign Office, became Israeli Ambassador in Paris, married quite a rich wife, became Head of the Israeli Broadcasting system and is still alive in Jerusalem.

MI But started out in St Paul's with you?

IB Was – exactly, went to St Paul's, so was his father at St Paul's too, before him.

MI Is anyone else from that period still alive?

IB Yes. Surviving? [MI Yes] No. There was a man called Halpern who was only half Jewish, his father was a Zionist, financial official. His mother was English and he was beautifully educated in a rather superior fashion by his father, and he was at St Paul's with me and then we came to Oxford, did get a scholarship and then married

the niece of Lytton Strachey and was killed in the Battle of Britain as an airman. And in his papers, he described himself as belonging to the Church of England which was rather awful because they didn't. And that was vaguely embarrassing but it only emerged after he died, after he was killed. He was the second Jewish friend. The third Jewish friend was a kind of lunatic. He was called Marmelstein, son of a teacher at Jewish College, very sort of theological teacher, who – large, fat, quite an amusing man who told one infinitely obscene stories of every kind, homosexual, heterosexual. He was Hungarian by origin and read Hungarian gallant literature of the 1840's. He got into Cambridge I think, I don't think he was at Oxford, and then went to Iraq as a teacher at the [?] Israeli school in Baghdad and remained tremendously pious and violently pro-Arab and still is alive. He was the BBC's Arab expert. His hatred of Israel was frantic, absolutely pathological [MI laughs] because they were not pious and they were secular and so on. But he was a bit touched, I mean he was a little crazy, but he's much admired by all the pro-Arabs, regarded as a great man by them. He was in fact abnormal, still is. I remember him well, I was fond of him and if I met him now, I'd be quite nice to him. He grew an enormous beard, if you see what I mean, a vast, great fat man of an eccentric kind. He learned Arabic and was a great Arab propagandist and great denouncer of Jews, Palestine, Zionism and all that. So I haven't seen him lately but – for the last thirty years. His brother was quite normal and ordinary bourgeois Jewish family I think. He was my other friend. But he used to fill one's – not just mine – used to tell people fantastic stories about affairs which went on, frightfulness, awful homosexual friendships, enormous indecency and obscenity, wrote obscene verse. Then on the non-Jewish side, I had at least five intimate friends at St Paul's, all of whom have disappeared from my life. There was a man called Stevenson who was the son of a bank clerk. I use to go and stay with him in vacations in boarding houses, he was bank clerk's son in Eastbourne in Brighton. There was somebody called Whitley who was the son of a barrister with whom I made great friends. There was somebody called – I used to bring them to tea as I say



– they were real intimate friends and more intimate than the Jews, of the two, broadly. I enjoyed their company more as long as I didn't talk to them about [?] in many ways. I wasn't very Jewish, that's my point, I was but I wasn't. I mean I didn't feel out of order in any way, separate; on the contrary. There were about two others, yes there were. There was a man called Maurice Ashley who afterwards – from Oxford – became a don and editor of *The Listener* who was a great friend but was older than me. We drifted – he's alive I think – we drifted apart. He was a friend. There was – who else was there of that sort? There was somebody called Patterson who became an Archbishop in Africa with whom I was on excellent terms, became a clergyman. I felt absolutely easy with them. I felt no barrier at all, less so than any other Jewish boy I knew, if you see what I mean. I mean absolutely none at all. They knew what I was, I knew what they were. It never came up.

MI I'm wondering – we talked quite a bit about your mother's attitude towards her Jewishness and one gets a strong – a sense of a very strong Jewish identity. What about your father?

IB My father was an ordinary middle class Jewish timber merchant. He was a Jew, he knew other Jews, he went to Synagogue, he took some interest and knew a certain amount about Jewish history, brought up piously; he is not a Zionist, nor did he mind it very much. He took some interest in his own family, told me all about my descent which I think I told you was from this founder of the Lubavich dynasty; that he knew. He knew all the details of that, who was who, who married whom. But his attitude was very, very what's called relaxed. I mean, if I'd married a Gentile, he wouldn't have minded very much. He thought it might go wrong and was never sure – Jews marrying Gentiles and that sometimes didn't work. My mother would have minded very much but she would have put up with it, but she would have minded because I drifted apart. But she would have minded – she would have put up with it because my life took such a different turn from theirs once I was at Oxford, not even as a don I mean, even as an undergraduate.

My life was lived so differently, my friends were all different, my interests were different. But although I lived in a very warm and cosy, perfectly friendly life at home, nevertheless they assumed that I was going to have a life quite different from theirs.

MI And they encouraged that sense?

IB Yes, yes, anything I wanted, yes. They respected it. They believed in sort of academic life, intellectual life and all that, they respected it. They were very respectful towards it, they were in favour of it. My father wanted me to go into his business because he wanted the business to continue, but not all that much.

MI So there was never a fight or a conflict about that?

IB Never, never, no, nothing like that.

MI When did your father die?

IB In say, nineteen hundred and fifty three. [MI And your mother?] In nineteen hundred and seventy four. She was ninety-four years of age. [MI And your father at his death was ..?] He was seventy, she was ninety-four, lived on for many years.

MI Your mother lived to see you in all your glory. Do you think she was surprised?

IB No, she was surprised, she didn't understand the glory. [MI What do you mean?] She didn't know what the glory consisted in, I mean she wasn't clear about the glorious nature of the glory. For example: [MI Well, you were knighted ...] well, let me tell you. The Knighthood was entirely due to her. The story of the Knighthood I will tell you. I was, to my great surprise, offered a Knighthood by Macmillan; and I was surprised and upset. I didn't want it because I thought it would – it didn't fit me – I thought other dons wouldn't like it, it would cause jealousy, I don't know, it felt uncomfortable.

I was insufficiently socially snobbish to want it, really, and I felt it was rather like putting on a paper hat; it wasn't criminal but it made one faintly ridiculous. So I said to Aline to whom I was married, this happened in '56 I suppose, the year after we married, not very long after – I may even say we were married, what? '55. I think, I'm not sure if it was '55, I can't remember – anyway, I think it was '56 and I said, 'I'm going to refuse, I'm going to refuse it, I don't want it really. Would you mind very much?' She said no, she didn't mind, she didn't mind either way, I could take it or not. Wonderful. Then of course, I'm always nervous about these things, I consult people about everything, I'm not at all a decision maker. So I consulted David Cecil who was my great friend who said, 'Oh, course you must, no question, absolutely. You can't take any reason against it. Certainly.' Then I consulted other people, all of whom were in favour. Sparrow wasn't in favour. He said, 'Well, yes, I don't think it would quite fit you. Of course you deserve it ...' and so on. Anyhow, both up and down it went. Finally my mother-in-law who stayed with us said, 'I can see that you're going to refuse it. I can see that you're not going to take it, absolutely. You've made up your mind.' Well, all right, I did then make up my mind. I then went home to London and saw my mother and thought, oh I should tell her that I'd been offered a Knighthood, she understood that, and that I wasn't going to take it. She looked terribly sad and said, 'Well, you must do what you want. You must do exactly what you want, I don't want to persuade you in this direction.' But tears entered her eyes and I observed then that if I took the Knighthood, it would give her pleasure every day of her life thenceforward. It was quite clear. Nobody quite believes my story but it is the truth. It is the truth and I thought, well I can't be quite so selfish, I told Aline that. I said, 'She would be absolutely transformed by it, she'll love it, it'll be the nicest thing which ever happened to her.' You see I don't mind that much but [MI Why do you think it was so important to her?] Because she lived by these public values; because if you were famous and important, you got a Knighthood, you see? So it's a marvellous thing to be, Knights were very important people. In her life, it was quite clear,

particularly in the Jewish world, a Knighthood was a glorious thing to get. There weren't all that many Knights, the Jewish Knights of 1956, and after that, two a penny, [laughter] you see? But that's what happened. I came back and so I then wrote a letter, at first refusing and then I thought, no, I can't, I [ ] distress so I wrote – I remember sitting in All Souls – I wrote a letter saying thank you very much for this. And then I was terribly upset by doing it and my right eye began to tremble as a result of some nervous thing. It went on doing this for about nine months. It had a neurotic effect on me, funnily enough. It wasn't easy, it was an absolute crisis. It needn't have been, it's not that important. But still it was, and then ...

MI That is to say you felt slightly ashamed of yourself?

IB Yes – well, didn't – yes. I felt reluctant to do it, I felt it was the wrong kind of value, didn't fit with what I believed in. Mr Berlin was better, more honourable. I believe in equality, I didn't want to have a title, I didn't want to dress up, I didn't want to go to the Palace, none of that. It was the kind of thing I was theoretically against. I wasn't a member of the Labour Party by then which I had been before the war, more or less. But even so.

MI But what about the Order of Merit?

IB Oh well, my mother didn't understand what – didn't know what that was, never heard of it. [MI And when did that happen?] That happened in 196 – quite early on – '64? Thereabouts, you see? At that – I mean, she telephoned me one day – well, I'll tell you what happened then. I left England because I didn't want to be telephoned to about that, I left for three days in Italy. I rang up Aline – she'll corroborate – from Wolfson of which I was already the President; there wasn't a building but I was sitting in a rather squalid office in one of those Oxford streets, and said, 'Disaster has occurred.' She said, 'What?' 'Well, I'd better come home and tell you. Absolute disaster.' She said, 'What do you mean? Someone

has died?' I said, 'No.' 'You've been offered something.' I said, 'Yes,' and I then came home and said, 'Too awful.' And then I remember being told – by whom? – by David Cecil again, saying, 'It's impolite to refuse, you must.' By that time I didn't care enough, I thought all right, it'll be rather nice really, I didn't mind a bit. Well, I'll tell you. To me in a way it really meant a recognition of some kind of genius, and I thought, now who – because I didn't really fit the class, you see? [ ]. Bertrand Russell, yes; Henry Moore, yes; G. E. Moore, the philosopher, yes, if I got it for him in a way; who else were they at that time? Wait a minute, there were one or two, rather eminent ones of that period [MI Some scientists?] Trevelyan was, Trevelyan was; scientists, yes [MI Dorothy Hodgkin was, wasn't she?] by then she may have been, yes, she got a Nobel Prize about then. Dorothy Hodgkin certainly; Trevelyan certainly; one or two politicians. Lloyd George made himself one, you see? But then I saw that Lord Zuckermann was one and Veronica Wedgwood was one and then I thought, all right [MI laughs] that made it all right, you see? Those two [ ] had absolutely nothing like that, I couldn't say – neither of them was in the least first rate, so it's exactly as it were, it may be all right. Still, nobody seemed indignant. [MI You are amusing] Some people were – [Gordon?] Lord Nuffield was very irritated by it, a man called Chester. My friend Mrs Hart who was a communist agent before the war, said, 'Have you been around Buckingham Palace lately?' [laughter] It was started entirely by Wheeler-Bennett who was my great friend the historian, because he was the historical – he was a terrific snob – he was some sort of historical adviser in Buckingham Palace and had a great respect for me for some reason, already quite admired me, and I'm sure he said he would like me to get it. Nobody had ever heard of me but [clap!] there it was, it was done.

MI Let's stop there for today. [IB I agree].

## MI TAPE 5

Conversation date: 18 March 1989

Date transcribed: 17 May 2004

Transcriber: Esther Johnson

Subjects covered:

St Paul's

CCC

Frank Hardie

New College

Crossman

Harold Wilson

Oxford Philosophy in the 1930s

JL Austin

Louis MacNeice

America post-war

Laski, Tawney, Cole

George Kennan

Harvard 1949

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*Side A*

MI ...the war?

IB So do I. No, even before the war.

MI You wanted to talk before the war?

IB A little. Let me tell you this. As I told you, at school I was not very encouraged, I was not bad and not good. I was never top of any form, I wasn't really thought particularly clever or brilliant for anything. I'd started rather low, partly because I'd just arrived in the country probably – about a year after, two years after. I

gradually hoisted myself. I wasn't very good at Latin and not very good at Greek – I don't know, I mean I was sort of quite good but I didn't have any sense of competition with anyone. And therefore, broadly speaking, if I have any natural modesty, it was reinforced by my performance in school. I was sort of sixth, seventh, fifth in the form, ninth; second, right towards the end, but never first. And I used to work terribly hard because it was a cramming school. They wanted the boys to get scholarships more than anything else in the world; even if you could afford to come up without one, they still wanted to be top of the league in that sort of thing. [MI This is St Paul's?] St Paul's; and this was a lower middle class school in many ways, middle to lower middle, there were no upper class boys and no proletarians really – not quite; one or two proletarians. Anyway, there I was and then I lived at home, I made friends and led quite a peaceful, uncompetitive, overworked life. I used to work every evening for four hours otherwise I really couldn't get the homework done. I did a certain amount of cribbing which is why I didn't learn Latin and Greek probably because I bought, as everyone did, translations in Charing Cross Road which was where the cribs came from. Then I was sent up for a scholarship at Balliol. I didn't get it and my school wrote and said would they give me a place at Balliol even if I had to pay for it, and they said no, I wasn't good enough to be accepted at all.

MI Did this rankle?

IB At the time, yes, 1927, yes Autumn or whatever it was, I think it was Spring '27. Yes. To be told I couldn't enter College – it was the only College I put down because I was thought to be good enough to try for a Balliol scholarship, and they did think so. I can't have been all that bad. And then, later that year, the Autumn of that same year or maybe the Spring of the next one, I got a scholarship at Corpus Christi. That was a tremendous liberation as I told you. I left my parent's house and was totally freed and the beginning of a sort of ascent.

MI And you're twenty-one – twenty – no?

IB We're now in 1928, I was therefore – I am nineteen. I'm nineteen, rather older.

MI What do you look like at nineteen?

IB I was fat and black haired [MI Lots of hair?] Yes, not tremendous. Plump, certainly, fat. [MI Bushy eyebrows?] Probably. [MI Prominent ears?] Yes, sure. There are photographs of that period, school – I mean College photographs exist. And I became very lively at that point which ...

MI Why are there, parenthetically, family photograph albums?

IB Not quite that but plenty of photographs. I mean, ten or twelve I mean, from myself at the sort of age of two; sailor suit at the age of seven. All that exists – in Petersburg, that kind of thing does exist. Now, at that point I went to Corpus Christi College, I got over my humiliation of Balliol. Humiliation wasn't great. I thought I didn't deserve it, I didn't think I was unjustly treated, I thought I was probably justly because I was rather, so to speak, got down by it. I thought, oh well, I'm no good, that sort of thing but no worse than that. And then I began to bloom slightly and Corpus, as I described it to you.

MI When did you have first intimations of a bloom?

IB: Only when I got a collections examination prize – collections being a college examination – of a straw vote type. The Hague Prize, 1931. **I was between 20 and 21, that sort of thing. Then I made friends with various people. I became editor of a high-brow magazine called the *Oxford Outlook* – that sort of got me on. And that sort of thing. But, it was the rescue of me really. I hadn't started to live much before I got to university. My mother was always very worried about the fact that I**



hated dancing when I was young, that I might grow up into a terrible bookish child, and not marry (which of course I didn't for years), and altogether be a sort of indoors, bookish, no good, uncirculatable. But once I got to Oxford, that was all right. Then I got interested in philosophy. I had an absolutely wonderful tutor [? sort of teaching], extremely clever, modest, sharp, clever – one couldn't get away with a single piece of rhetoric, however harmless, without explaining exactly what one meant, very clearly. Extremely deflationary; all the same, just and kind [...] to whom I owe a great deal.

MI: His name?

IB: Hardie. He was the son of a classical scholar, a classical scholar himself, brother of another one, got all the prizes from Balliol in his day, modest, shy, rather repressed, Scottish – from Edinburgh, strong Scotch accent, [had] written a few books, which are not particularly praised, on Plato and Aristotle. Knew a lot of Greek, but was a very minute tutor, and extremely careful and clear; never humiliated one, merely corrected one; said 'This can't be right because you say so and so, but in what way do you mean that? But that can't be right, can it, because ...?' All done with extreme gentleness and firmness. I never met anyone else like that, really. That had a violent effect on me by which clarity became an obsessive value to me – I mean, one might be shallow, one might be superficial, but obscurity and pretentiousness, and sentences which [*slaps wrist*] tumbled over themselves, he wanted authority – from then till this moment.

MI Is there any possibility that you came to Oxford with a kind of expansive, Russian mind, which to Hardie's way of thinking was slightly untidy?

IB Oh yes. Oh yes, he thought I was quite – he realised I was quite clever because he made me go into All Soul's. I would never have

thought of it. All Soul's was remote from me, it was a sort of upper kind of House of Lords which I never really knew what went on inside it. I never thought for a moment that I was conceivably fit for it.

MI Yes, but it was his suggestion?

IB His suggestion. He must have thought I was bright ...

MI But only after he'd knocked you into shape?

IB Well, I got a first, which in Corpus – in that particular – in Greats, that's a Lit Hum, particularly [ ] was unusual because the philosopher before him was a famous philosopher called Schiller, who was a friend and pupil of William James. His views were so unacceptable in Oxford that nobody thought he could ever get good marks. The ancient history tutor was totally stupid and about ninety – well not quite that – but a sort of old British soldier type who had been all right in the 1890's. He wasn't much good by the twenties. So nobody ever got any kinds of first classes in that. Then they were replaced – no, Grundy was still there, my ancient history tutor – but Hardie was a genuine trainer of philosophers. Something like six philosophers came out of Corpus in his day, all of whom got fellowships, all of whom made careers. He was a tremendous teacher of – without being a prominent philosopher himself. Frightfully good at trying these sort of Mr [Pleith?] who was the greatest cello teacher in the world, but not a first class cellist himself. I owe him a great deal, because by nature I was, of course as you might imagine, had a jungle-like mind, did not form sentences, everything was topsy-turvy, it was Russian, it was so to speak completely rich and vague and, so to speak, and overfilled and multi-coloured, and everything tumbled over everything.

MI So Oxford taught you a style of thought which was, in a sense, antithetical to what you were?

IB It was, certainly. It did nothing but good. I could never have remained academic, for I'd gone on – except in English literature or something which was not a subject for that reason, because I mean a great deal of it is nothing but hollow rhetoric, to this day because of academic [discipline?] as you well know. Not hollow perhaps but certainly rhetoric.

MI But it taught you an abiding suspicion of rhetoric?

IB Not rhetoric so much. I admire rhetoric, I rather like it. An abiding suspicion of pretentiousness and confusion and just sort of wordiness, although I am very wordy. Nobody can deny that I use a great many words when a very few would do. Nevertheless, the kind of reviews I read, pretentiously – I've just read a review in the New York Review of Books by a perfectly respectable professor of German, whose name you will know, called I think J. P. Sterne, of a biography of Heidegger. It was perfectly clear to me that he tried to convey some of the ideas of Heidegger without understanding them at all. I don't know what they are, but nobody reading it could tell, is what I mean. Therefore, he shouldn't have taken it on. To try and convey at that level, his proof of some kind of total lack of intellectual cutting edge. His book on Nietzsche similarly, quite a good book at a certain level; tells his story, tells what he said but if you really want to know what makes Nietzsche wonderful, you're not going to [ ]. But on a Noel Annan level, it works, if you see what I mean. I'm very suspicious of Dr Leavis. I didn't approve of – but I admired to some extent, that was an attempt to make criticism a real weapon; fanatical, narrow, wrong, but [MI Rigorous] rigorous and clear, and modest, I mean genuine. Genuine, perhaps noxious, but genuine, you see? Equally I admired David Cecil who loves his [coserie?], very clever and delightful and it meant something. It wasn't very profound but it was charming, and being a very clever man, it was amusing and agreeable and exhilarating. [MI And it was clear?] Yes, certainly, absolutely. What one doesn't like is sort of George Steiner, I mean, which is – sort of Hannah Arendt, I mean. That is what I react

against, very ... [MI Higher German nonsense] Yes, you see, which I hate. If it's anything at all I think it's – I mean I have a sort of deep personal loathing of it. [MI Why loathing?] I can't tell you, just because I think it's getting away with it because I think it's kind of charlatan. I respect moral qualities, I mean intellectual morality in which people at least are honest.

MI About what they know and what they don't know?

IB Yes, and they're honest about what they think. They really say what they think and not write sentences, not just get themselves into some kind of fuzz or fog and then just start generating. There's a famous case – someone telling me – I don't know if it's true but it's rather typical – of the publisher Cotta saying to Hegel that something he had written didn't seem to him quite long enough to make a proper volume. Would he mind adding some more? [chuckles] Hegel, without difficulty. And I realised then that maybe there was a certain tendency at what might be called, kind of somnabulistic talk, I mean just sheer rhetoric, just using what the French call *cliquetis des formules*. It's a wonderful phrase. [MI What is it?] *Cliquetis des formules*. I don't know what *cliquetis* means, I suspect it must mean clicking in and out, means a sort of coining, the sort of minting of formulae. You just have a sort of formula this, formula that, one formula clicks against another. [MI Right. And that you suspect?] Patter, patter. But I don't like patter very much but pretentious patter ...

MI And you think you learned all this from Hardie?

IB Well, I think so, because before that [MI What's Hardie's first name?] Frank, W.F.R. William Francis something [MI Still alive?] He's still alive, aged 87? [MI Do you ever see him?] Not very much now because he lives near a golf club, he hardly appears, he's very old. But I would see him if he came to Oxford ever. I'd rather like to, in fact I feel guilty about not seeing him. I went on a holiday with him once to Salzburg. He was very shocked at *Così Fan Tutti*.

[MI Why?] Too cynical, too cynical, dreadful, dreadful. Simple, honourable, slightly naive, very clever. Superb classical scholar, hence all this clarity, if you see what I mean, you see? People who are very good at Greek, are very good at Latin, have extremely clear minds.

MI Now, you then [IB Then, all right] What I want to know is, we've talked at some length about All Soul's life in the thirties and I suspect that you think we've talked about the politicians and [IB Oh I'm sure we've done that] but we have not talked about – what have we missed, that's what I want to know? [IB In the thirties?] Yes.

IB Have I told you how I got into New College? Crossman? [MI Yes] I've told you that [MI Yes] the lies which Crossman told? [MI No, that I don't know] Well, look, I became a quite decent philosophical undergraduate and I joined a thing called the Jowett Society which was the undergraduate philosophical society. [To Lady B who has entered] Did you find anything?

AB Nothing. They'd all gone up, nothing's the same, or make.

IB I think they'll probably sell you – they could sell you. Those people do. Moss Bros sell things.

AB Yes but they've all gone up, that's what I've been ringing up ...

IB Who's in Clarkson's?

MI I think they have to be made in Saville Row. You have to go one of these great tailors ...

IB Have a look in Clarkson's. Just look up the word Clarkson in the telephone book, shop, theatrical costumiers. [Tape stops and then restarts] This is an irrelevant little piece of information. There's a thing called Letters From Iceland by Auden and

MacNeice, when they went to Iceland, and a lot of poetry and prose and sort of rag bag of stuff. In the middle of that there are bequests to various people they know and for some that they don't know, but know about. And Louis MacNeice did almost all of them. And then he says – I was reading this book quite peacefully in bed in a small little village near Salzburg in 1936, I think. Suddenly I came across my name with horror and I remember being very annoyed: 'To Michael Jeffrey Thackeray, a gown of quilted silk. To Isaiah Berlin, a saucer of milk.' [coughs then laughs] I didn't like that at all. [MI No] After that, my relations really, which had never been good, were broken off.

AB What did they mean by it?

IB I was catty, it must have been that. That's what you give cats. [AB ?] No, not to me, that was the other man. It rhymed. The word 'silk' rhymed with milk. It was somebody else, a man called Jeffrey Thackeray, a gown of watered silk, whatever that is. What is watered silk? [MI Very beautiful silk, whatever it is] Right. To Isaiah Berlin, a saucer of milk. I still remember shivering in bed. [MI It still rankles?] Suddenly, come across one's name. I had to sort of – you know what I mean? One gets a [MI Frisson] a frisson. And then I met Louis MacNeice fairly soon afterwards and he said, 'I understand we're not on very good terms.' I said, 'So far as I'm concerned, we're on no terms at all.' [MI laughs] I was quite pleased to say it, too. I don't often have powers of repartee. [MI Yes, but you had it that time] Yes. I met him in ...

MI How does MacNeice know you?

IB He was a fairly contemporary of mine at Oxford. He never met me at Oxford, too grand for me to know. [MI Oh really?] Oh yes, he was a very leading eccentric poet; wore a long flowing cloak and used to get drunk.

MI So how did he know that you deserved a saucer of milk?

IB From talk, by other people. No, I don't think I'd ever had a conversation with him, not to my knowledge.

MI But word had circulated that you had a malicious tongue?

IB No doubt, no doubt. I fear there's some truth in that. [laughter] Sharp tongue you might call it. More kinder version, exactly the same. Well, of course I made nasty jokes I'm sure, all my life. What I remember is the saucer of milk. I never really got over it.

MI I promise you I will ask my friend [AB And then we'll find a better ?]

IB Not in London she wouldn't [AB She'll do it in Geneva ...] or New York.

AB Paris, they might do it. [] And I have quite enough imagination to [] and find the right stuff.

MI I think I know – I know a lady, prominent in the costume business. I will canvas this problem and give you a report.

IB Well, Covent Garden will tell you, the dress department of Covent garden will certainly know. I've been through it once, when I was director, I met all these ladies. [AB I could at least look at their models] That is more difficult, but you just ask for Don Pasquale, that's all you need. [MI laughs] [?] for Jeremy Isaacs.

AB [Mentions something about jackets]

IB What? Who? [AB The one they made for Don Pasquale] That's wrong, you should have a long one. They made the short ones. That's a very grave mistake. Can't think of anyone else who wears a dressing gown in either play or opera. [MI Opera more] Yes, I

did admire a quilted one I think. Don Pasquale is [?] operatic dressing gown. [AB inaudible] You must ask Janey Isaacs to tell you who is the head of the dress department. [AB I'll have to talk to the top] Oh, always, that's a general rule [laughter] if you want to get anything done. Start at Sainsbury if you like. [AB No, he wouldn't] He can order it all right. [MI laughs]

MI Tell me about New College.

IB Well, I'll tell you what happened. I was quite a fairly leading young philosopher among – I used to go to the society and talked a bit. Herbert Hart was there, my colleague, and then I got a first in Greats which was a very great source of surprise at Corpus Christi – a bad first but a first. When I say bad, the examiners wrote to my tutor, Hardie. They were usually right about people who get degrees with their tutors, letters always written, saying well I did get a first but of course, I wasn't a flyer in any sense, couldn't be described as that. Not as good as Crossman, a man called [Gally?], a man called somebody else, I can't remember. [MI Gally the philosopher?] Gally whose elder brother was a philosopher, not the one you're thinking about, his elder brother who died young who was not very good. But still, all right. Well, I was not as good as that and not as good as about four others. So I was put in my – but still, I got a first. A bad first is better than no first. I never thought I would get it, never. I've never valued – the thing about me is, I've never had any – I've told you often – I lack self confidence to a high degree and never think of myself as much good. This is genuinely true. I've never said, 'What?! [claps] They haven't given me a first? They must be mad!' I've never been in that mood.

MI You feel the judgement's a righteous condemnation – a righteous estimation of you and your work?

IB Yes. I judge others by the same criteria but I judge myself just as harshly. I'm a rather stern critic and I'm not ...



MI Oh yes! Absolutely!

IB Yes, but of myself as much as anyone, and I don't think I'm very much good, I may have got away with an awful lot in my view. My view is that I've – my entire career is securely founded on being systematically over-estimated. [MI laughs] That is my opinion.

MI But this is not my place to argue it [IB All right, all right] but I would like to put down a marker to the effect that I disagree, but let's ...

IB Thank you, thank you. Now, the thing is that having done that, I went on doing philosophy. You see I got a scholarship to do Honour Moderations and Modern History, neither of which I did. I didn't do the first because the Ancient History tutor told me my classics weren't very good, there's no point in my doing it; would I kindly devote myself to Ancient History? I did not do that [claps] and did philosophy instead, partly because my philosophy tutor was extremely intelligent and my ancient history tutor was a kind of old British Colonel. [MI He was in his dotage] Not quite, but he was a sort of old Colonel type. Next, what happened was that I wanted to go on doing philosophy. Now, in Corpus Christi College you were not allowed to do something called PPE – philosophy, politics and economics, because that was regarded as too easy a solution. Corpus was a very old fashioned college and totally different to any other in the university; more conservative, more remote, totally loyal to itself. I enjoyed it very much but I didn't realise how different it was from anywhere else. The only man who ever tried to do it had his scholarship taken away. He did do it and got a first, but his scholarship, I think, was restored in the end but no compound interest. But – interest may have been paid on it, I don't know – but anyhow, because I got a first in my first – in Greats, I was allowed to waste my time. So I went on doing philosophy. By this time, I became more and more interested, I was sort of part of the Oxford philosophical sort of undergraduate

world; and then I got to know Crossman because of the Oxford Outlook and meeting intelligentsia figures. He had the rather curious boast: he was enormously admired by the fellows of New College and he was made a fellow before he ever took final schools, to teach ancient history and philosophy, which was unheard of, the sort of thing you did in the nineteenth century when philosophy meant Greek philosophy. And he therefore was a half-time philosopher, half-time Greek historian. Now, that meant the other half had to be filled. He thought I was exactly what he wanted because I was pedantic, interested in the subject. He took not the slightest interest in real philosophy, he was essentially a marvellous teacher – clever, exciting, sort of bold, adored, working pupils up, completely sort of working people up, splendid lecturer. But all he was really interested in was Germany, German politics, himself, Plato as a Fascist, that kind of thing you see? He needed somebody who did the pedantic stuff. There was another philosopher at New College who was already doing it, but still he had too many pupils. So he told New College that I'd been made offers by three colleges and if they didn't secure my services as a lecturer in philosophy, they might lose me forever. No college had made me any offers of any kind. This was straight lies. [claps]

MI Was this subsequent to your election at All Soul's?

IB No, pre. So the first job I had was at New College, not as a fellow which was a full thing as you know, as a lecturer which is sub-fellow. That was the first time I'd crossed over from the undergraduate world to the senior world. I was tremendously depressed. . It was **the most boring, priggish, pompous collection of people I've ever come across**, I became totally miserable. September 1932. I went to Salzburg that summer which I enjoyed very much and I came back – which I went to from 1930 onwards, every summer – I came back to Oxford. I was given a room at New College. I went to dinner in the common room before the [ ]. Crossman was on my right. I was reduced to silence and either I feel in a specific atmosphere in which I talked non-

stop, or I don't because I don't talk at all, unless it's to my neighbour. If it's a general conversation, I take no part. This is still true. Well, they were talking – I don't know – a lot of sort of donnish talk, and Crossman said to me, 'Be bright, Berlin, be bright, otherwise you'll never get on with these people.' That didn't encourage me much. [MI laughs] He was a horrible bully as a man. I got to know him extremely well but anyhow he was my patron. Well, in the end I began teaching which I enjoyed, but the company in All Soul's – in New College – was ghastly. There were three people I could talk to. There was an ancient historian called Cox who was **lively and amusing and sensitive and very good company and**, sort of, **a tremendous human being**. There was a ridiculous ancient [archaeologist?] called Casson who was a jester but you could talk to him about anything because he wasn't pompous: and there was – Crossman one could talk to in a fashion – and there was a philosophy tutor called Smith who was rather curious but awkward, could have a conversation. The rest were impossible, by which I mean they talked about the bypass, they talked about the weather, they talked about a little bit about politics. But one realised one couldn't say anything one thought; one realised that the one thing one couldn't do was express oneself, or go too far, or express strong opinions. Well before that, I'm afraid there was nothing but strong opinions, lively conversations with undergraduates. So, when after two months I was elected to All Soul's, it was total liberation. It was full of young men, all arrogant, all lively, older fellows who, so to speak, had to be on their toes before the younger fellows because the majority were young, arrogant, I mean talkative, strong opinions and, so to speak, completely lively. I talked for three days and three nights I think in All Soul's and fell ill in the end as a result with sinusitis, had to be taken to Amalfi [MI To recover?] to recover.

MI From the sheer pleasure of being listened to and ..?

IB Well, I got a terrific temperature and tremendous sinusitis and fell ill and so on with sheer excitement of finding myself in

congenial company. Crossman was furious. He intended to, as it were, to acquire me as a kind of client and I liberated myself rather too awkwardly. At about this time I fell in love. I think I perhaps told you about that. [MI Yes] And so I got it to end, oh I did tell you. In All Soul's, it was **total liberation**. It was – one could chatter, one could talk, I made friends very rapidly and that was an extremely happy period of my life, 1933, '34, '35. **I was terribly disapproved of** by the senior fellows

[MI Why?]

IB: **By the academic senior Fellows, because they thought I was a time-wasting chatterbox who would never write anything and wasted the time of people who might. I felt waves of disapproval, not from the politicians, who were quite nice to me, but from the, sort of, people of fifty – Sumner, who later became Warden, a man called Woodward, famous English historian, a man called Bryony, professor of international law, a man called G. N. Clark, who became Regius Professor of History at Cambridge and Provost of Oriel College, Cambridge. These were the, sort of, solid academic element; they thought I was just a – I don't know – sort of talking just to chat [...], talked too much, and didn't show any signs of settling down to work and getting things out. It's quite true, I didn't in my first three or four years. When I produced a book on Karl Marx, they were totally astonished that I could have generated anything at all.** You see. That was my reputation.

MI Who was your dominant intellectual influence in the All Soul's – before the war?

IB It depends what you call intellectual. My friends at All Soul's. Goronwy Rees, the notorious Goronwy Rees, a year older than me. I'll tell you in a moment, I'll answer your question in a second. My set: who were we? I was elected with a man called Reilly who became an Ambassador and a man called Wilberforce who became a famous judge. But they left All Soul's and they didn't live in

Oxford. I suppose Austin, the philosopher, who was elected the year after me with whom I used to talk about philosophy every morning for three years, and it had a very dominant influence upon me, certainly philosophically. Otherwise – well there's Maurice Bowra of course.

MI Can you define the influence of Austin in non technical terms?

IB Again, like Hardie, he was extremely acute, extremely severe, extremely clear, and nothing ...

MI All the things that naturally you were not?

IB Well, exactly, that's why I craved them and profited by them. He said things which were highly original, he wasn't just a – Hardie was rather conventional. He made me read books of exactly the kind I hated, Hegelian philosophy. He himself was not that, but the books he was in favour of were; I couldn't understand what they meant. I was liberated by reading books he had not recommended. Austin would say to me – I wrote a little essay about him as you know – he would say to me, 'Determinism. Have you ever met a determinist? I know they say they are, but have you ever met one? I never have.' That's the kind of thing I liked, you see? Or, yes, you see [MI Very precise] yes. 'Determinism. A causes B; B causes C; C causes D and Y causes Z. And then what? A again? In endless cycles? No, no. Something changes, with knobs on. Now what about the knobs?' That's how he talked. It wasn't philosophical, he didn't talk in professional language. But the point was he talked in absolutely clear English. At the same time, the points he made were bold, original and devastating. And that I enjoyed very much.

MI Is there any way that you can define in what his philosophical originality for you consisted?

IB Mm, no more than anybody else. Just puncturing received ideas and having devastating new ones which upset some kind of taken for granted view of something or other. Anything that blew things up, anything which made one think, that's all it is really. Anything which caused one's mind to move, stopped one in one's tracks in some way; questions asked to which one had no answer at all and all in very simple language.

MI Can you remember an example where you felt the sort of mental furniture of your head being rearranged by something he said?

IB I wish I did. A lot of people with other ideas experienced that, but I didn't. I don't think I did, funnily enough; I think I agreed with him to such a degree that when he said these things, it seemed to me that you're entirely right and I hadn't thought of them, but I don't think it upset – and I was wrong to say that it sort of stopped me in the sense that it made a difference so that I became worried. No. I'm trying to think. Yes, the first class we ever had together. He and I held the first class in Oxford, ever, on modern philosophy. We'd never had such a thing before. 1935. There's a book called, 'Mind and the World Order' by an American philosopher called C. I. Lewis, professor at Harvard, the last pragmatist, which I came across in Blackwell's. I'd never heard of him but I bought it, it looked rather interesting. I showed it to Austin who said it was very interesting, so we thought we'd have it on that. Well, we began, there were about twenty people came, quite nice. And then the question arose about universals; that's to say about the nature of redness. And Austin said, 'Supposing there are three red things of exactly the same hue. Is there one hue? Are there three?' – yes, wait a minute – 'Is there one red colour, or three?' I said, 'One.' 'No, there aren't, there are three,' he said. Then we started arguing. I suddenly realised that so far from being polite and friendly as he'd been before, he was determined to win, and I was suddenly cut into small pieces. Such a thing had never happened to me before and that was something. And I could see

that some of the members of the seminar felt very sorry for me, [chuckles] came to my aid entirely in order to prop me up. That isn't a question of changing my mind. I don't think I ever did, in fact, change my mind. But that was my first experience of Austin in public. Now, if you ask me whether he ever taught me anything – no, I don't think specifically he did. No, no, I don't think so. I just admired the sheer brains.

MI Yes. How long does your association with Austin continue? Did it continue after the war, into the ..?

IB Oh Lord, yes [MI Fifties?] Certainly. [MI When did he die?] '59. We remained friends to the end.

MI But it was his influence on you before the war that was in some sense more important than after ..?

IB Yes it was, because it made me – his [?]. Oh yes. If he praised a philosopher, I knew it was good. If he said somebody was no good – 'He's chuckle-headed,' he would say – that was the strongest volume of dispraise. 'Simply chuckle-headed.' I can tell you story about Austin which is nothing to do with me. When he was elected, there was a junior fellow, had to send him a telegram from St Andrew's. It was to say, 'You're elected to a fellowship. Congratulations. The College hopes you will be able to dine on Monday.' The answer was, 'Thank you. Stop. Was coming to Oxford on Monday in any case.' [MI laughs] Unusual. Then what more do I want to tell you? Deliberation was really at Corpus [does he mean All Soul's?]; that I made friends, that I thought I was not stupid, that I thought I might come to something, where everyone was very friendly and where my whole academic career really began.

MI Yes. I'm wondering whether we can move forward to the post war period ..?

IB The point was I never was a first class philosopher. I was never envious of those who were. I never thought I would be. I was a perfectly happy don among dons, teaching philosophy quite well – not very well – quite well, part of a Brotherhood, and perfectly happy to paddle along. I never wanted to shine. That's true of my life in general. And I was perfectly ...

MI But you're not without ambition?

IB Not much, not much ambition, not much. To know, I think, if I have too little, if you ask me. The thing which causes everything which went wrong in my life, is idleness, passivity, lack of ambition. I mean, the thing which I most hate is competition. I don't want to compete; I didn't compete at school. I never competed in Oxford and I've avoided situations in which I was in competition with anyone if I could help it. I mean I never, as it were, [?] any job I ever had, part from the last ones, I went in for. To that extent I was in competition but at least I didn't know with whom I was competing. But I was never in a situation where I felt I had to win. If someone said something I didn't agree with, then I simply had to do them down, I had to force my view. Talk them down, yes, because I'm such a talker, but not defeat. It sounds [?] but believe me it has been an obstacle in my sense. If I'd been more ambitious, I would have written more, written books and maybe come to more, maybe discovered, invented things on a larger scale than my own. I've never – when people produce wonderful books, I never say to myself, 'I can do better than this. My God, I don't think that's very good, let me try, I'll have a shot.' Never. Whenever I went to philosophical society, I always thought all the other ones were valid, both for and against any position. That's why I realised that I couldn't be good at the subject. I was usually silent, I never dominated any philosophical discussion in my life, never, and was always too shy to intervene, afraid perhaps of being disturbed or defeated or – it could be cowardice maybe. It comes from the same as lack of ambition, the two things fuse into each other.



MI One of the things that does not figure as being very important in your narrative so far has been your relations with students.

IB: Well, before the War I adored teaching. I don't think I was a very good tutor because **I used to take to pieces what they said. I didn't really feed them with positive doctrine.** Perhaps one should [...]. All I did was to – old Oxford system of Socratic dialogue in which you, as it were, undo what they say, and **I probably left too many of them in a broken state. That's possible. The clever ones were all right. The second- and third-rate ones may not have profited,** but I never, so far as I know – don't think I ever [...] hatred or despair from any pupil actually. One or two I conspicuously didn't get on with.

MI But you didn't have closer, intimate relations, because you didn't feel caught up in their lives and their affairs and their destinies?

IB I was extremely anxious not to be. The one thing which I was terrified of was influencing in any way. [MI Really?] That's been permanent in my life. I wanted to ...

[Pause in Tape]

IB ... historian was a great friend of mine. [MI Momigliano] Arnaldo Momigliano, professor of Roman history in London who is one of the two or three best Roman historians living, had a very, very great talent. He's a friend because he was interested in typical Jewish, Italian-Jewish intellectual, interested in lots of things, rather like Primo Levi, that kind of man. He said to somebody I knew, 'In any other university, Isaiah Berlin would have had followers. But in Oxford, none. Isn't it strange?' It isn't strange because it's one thing I managed to get rid of, fob off, prevent, with any kind of – I didn't have a doctrine, didn't have followers, didn't want to create a senacle, didn't want to have a school.

MI But you have extremely devoted students – Charles Taylor ...

IB He was never a student. Friend; he was never a student. He was at Balliol, I had nothing to do with him, no, no. I never taught him. Students: well, my students aren't always devoted to me, no. I think before the war, I had no devoted students. [MI After the war?] One or two graduate students. Undergraduates? I became a professor, you see? And I only had graduates after that.

MI When did you become professor, by the way? [B '56 or 7, can't tell which] Annus Mirabilis. You get married, you're Knighted ...

IB '57, that's Annus Mirabilis, no I was married in '56 I think. I became professor in '57; I was made a fellow of the British Academy; I became a professor; and I was Knighted, same year. [MI Jolly good] Quite correct. Like Roy Jenkins, who said, 'You're getting an Honorary Degree again? I said, 'Yes.' 'Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard and Yale. Nobody has ever done that before.' It was the last thing that occurred to me, I do have too many Honorary Degrees. I have twenty, that's too many. Well, I mean, why? [MI Why are they giving them to you?] Well exactly.

MI What do they say the reasons are? You're a great figure.

IB My view is that usually there are candidates for it and there are people who [merge?] them, and there are usually two schools for A and against A, for B and against B. Then somebody mentions my name. I have very few enemies, so they settle on me as a kind of compromise candidate. I'm perhaps a professional compromise candidate. [laughter] God knows – why should Cambridge give me a degree all those years ago? Fifteen years ago? What had I done?

MI Well you'd written some good books, that's what.

IB Not one. I wrote a book called Karl Marx and then just a few essays which hadn't been printed I don't think, that's all. I mean I

never wrote a proper book again, not really. The book on Karl Marx was a primer and nothing very original.

MI It's a more interesting book than that.

IB Is there a more? It may be a little but it's fundamentally a sort of [?]. I've told you, I've no ...

MI No, what seems interesting to me about it, very interesting psychologically, is it's one of the most interesting examples I know of a book written by one temperament, mainly your own, that inquires into another temperament radically different. [IB And not friendly, either] And not friendly to it and yet it gives an account from the inside which seems to me very subtle and perceptive.

IB Well, let me tell you. The one thing about that book is nobody could make out what my own political views were from that book. That's typical of me. That's like not accepting responsibility to some extent, you see? I don't – I sit on the fence, I mean I don't plump. I am not a crusader. In the last ten years I've had views of a strong kind and not concealed them. [MI Mostly about Israel?] Yes, but about other things as well. In the thirties I was anti-conservative, hundred percent. No no, anti-appeasement, anti-Chamberlain, anti-Baldwin, no use for that at all. I was a perfectly decent member of the Labour Party. [MI And in the fifties? In the late forties and fifties?] Well, I left the Labour Party on their Palestine policy, Bevin, that's true. After that, there was no SDP, there was sort of Lib-Lab, an ordinary sort of [MI A Butskellite in some sense?] Mm, yes, sort of liberal of a certain kind, but no strong views, shocked by this, shocked by that. I never was a socialist for reasons which I tried to explain to myself. Partly because I didn't want toward management from the centre, that is true and that is genuine. [MI Because of your libertarianism?] Yes, and partly because – for more technical reasons I thought that socialism meant, to some extent, an attempt at autarchy; that's to say self control by a country, a country which controls its own

economic destiny and therefore not buffeted too much by things outside which it couldn't control. Russia and America could do that, because they could live on their own resources. England, never, because of exports and imports. The attempt to, as it were, control – to have total state control of industry or trade, couldn't succeed if there were storms from outside. It would make a difference and that was absurd even to try to create socialism in one country, in a country of that size, and so dependent upon imports. It's a simple view.

MI You remember yourself as being sympathetic to the post-war Attlee government, or was the Palestine question so overshadowing?

IB No, no, no, I was sympathetic, in general, yes. The Welfare State I liked very much. I didn't know if Attlee was as anti-Zionist as he was as a matter of fact, but it wasn't him I particularly – no, no, this was a perfectly isolated thing. In general, I had absolutely no distaste for the Labour government, I didn't mind it a bit.

MI Did you keep up with Crossman when he went into politics?

IB No. I see him, inevitably, from time to time because he lives in Oxford and so on, even then you see? But no, no, I was never really a friend of his either. We were on quite familiar terms but not exactly friendly.

MI Because you felt he was a bully?

IB Yes, and false in some way. [MI Why false?]

**IB: Because he didn't really believe in anything very much. He wasn't bogged down. Politically what repelled me was that he was a left-wing Nazi. The nearest to it that I can describe his political lean. He was anti-capitalist – quite genuinely – hated the civil service, hated respectability,**

hated, sort of, conventional values of a sort of peaceful, honest decent dreary civil service. On the other hand, what he wanted was young men singing songs, hearty, vulgar, sort of students with linked arms drinking beer and singing songs corrupt and Freudian, I mean, sort of, Nazi marches, torchlit. The combination was exactly what was meant by [ ...] Stasi Brothers [...] whom Hitler eliminated on June 30th, shot them, [...]. And that is fundamentally a strong Fascist streak of wanting himself to dominate, liked power, hated mildness, liberalism, kindness, amiability. It provoked him.

MI You never confronted him with this?

IB Not really, no. No, I don't think I ever did, no. I remember a story which he told me which is highly typical. His father was a very respectable judge called Sir Stafford Crossman, he was a chancellor barrister, became a judge. He went to see him and said, 'I'm going to get married.' Sir Stafford said, 'Oh? Who?' 'She's German,' his first wife. 'Oh? Really? Does she have a profession?' 'Yes, she's a prostitute,' which was an overstatement. The judge was taken aback rather obviously, this is Crossman's story, very [square?]. He said, 'But in that case, why do you want to marry her?' At which Crossman struck the table with his fist and said, 'That's what members of your generation will never understand. It's because she's a prostitute that I've got to marry her.' It was a Dostoyevskian position. That's what I mean; I mean he wanted somehow blow up his father, to do something violent, to do something of that sort, let them tremble. And the great thing is to put sort of squibs under them, you see? Make them blow up, that was achieved as a – he was highly destructive. At the same time, he was a Wykemist, went to Winchester, very good brain, organising ability. When he was sub-Warden of New College and when Fisher had a nervous breakdown, the Warden, when he was a minister, the government – extremely good departmental chief. Very good at the actual business of organising college or a department, together with this ferocious, nihilistic streak. That's what I didn't

like. And coarse, coarse. ‘Our friend Crossman is greatly coarsened with time, you know,’ said Auden about him, to me. [MI laughs]

MI What does coarse mean?

IB Lack of sensitive, delicate, civilised, the opposite of all that. Coarse means crude; it means thick; it means lack of feeling in one’s fingertips, lack of ...

MI All of which made him a successful politician?

IB He had no refinement. He wasn’t such a success – he was and he wasn’t. He wanted to be Prime Minister. He never would get enough people to be loyal to him, ever, to be capable of that. He couldn’t help biting every single hand before it fed him. [MI laughs] Not many after. I mean that.

MI What about Harold Wilson as a young Oxford ..?

IB I’ll tell you, though I hardly know him. He was at [UNEV?], he was lecturer at New College. I used to sit next to him at dinner in New College. He was as dull as a man could be; thick sort of little, sort of – Crossman once said about Wilson, ‘Like a little ball bearing, that’s what we need.’ I said to Crossman, ‘Who are Wilson’s real friends?’ Crossman said, ‘He thinks I am, ha, ha, ha!’ That’s what I didn’t like, if you want an example of what is rather awful. [MI Of coarseness, yes] Not coarseness but [M Just awful] the awfulness, yes. ‘Ha, ha! He thinks I am, ha, ha, ha!’ He was cynical, he was – Wilson, yes, I don’t think I ever thought about him at all, but I’m trying to think about – Crossman is a subject all right.

MI Were there any other left wing intellectuals – figures in the Labour Party with whom you ..?

IB I'll tell you a story about Crossman in his element. He went to a Labour Party Conference. Bevin wanted something passed and he thought that Crossman might be an obstacle. So he persuaded him, he got him to himself and said, 'Look, if I do this for you, promise not to do that.' Then Crossman agreed to this. Bargain. Bevin then broke it and did exactly what he promised not to do, so Crossman's thing was defeated. He then approached Crossman, put his arm on his shoulder and said, 'No hard feelings, I hope? No hard feelings? You don't mind, you don't mind too much, do you, Dick?' 'That's a great man,' said Crossman. You see? That's my story. [MI Fine. I get the picture] You see? You get the picture. He betrayed him, he lied, that's the way to do it; and suck up afterwards and not mind talking to you, not care what the other man feels at all. No hard feelings, we can still co-operate in the future, I had to do it because I had to win.

MI Were there any other figures in the Party or on the left with whom you had any contact? Laski, people like that?

IB Yes. I didn't have contact. I met Laski once or twice. I couldn't bear him. He was a kind man, he was very nice to colleagues, he never wrote a nasty review in his life. Personally kindly, generous. He was a terrible liar, pathological liar and he was – I can't help it, I thought although ...

*Side B*

IB There was something absolutely indelibly cheap about him. [MI Really?] Yes, which I couldn't get over, which I couldn't get over.

MI Why did you take so strongly against him? [IB Against ..?] Against Laski.

IB [coughs] Because I didn't like his sneering tone, I didn't like his sort of sneers, I thought he was too extreme. I thought that he was a pseudo-Marxist, I thought the books were no good. They weren't

– the trouble was with them that they weren't obscure, they weren't pretentious, they weren't what I most disliked, but they were superficial to the highest degree. If you wanted to know about a subject, you read an essay by Laski, you realised it was perfectly empty. I discovered that before I ever met him. He was in some way jealous of me when we met because I'd been praised to him in some way and he was very competitive, the opposite, and very competitive, he wanted to be top. I don't know what it was – he was a cheap-jack; there was something totally – he was what's called clever-clever. He was clever, he was quick, he was fast on his feet. And I don't know – I think I like the opposite. I think I like integrity, nobility, extreme clarity of thought, stern sort of clarity and severity of thought and some degree of originality and depth, all of which he lacked, all of which. And there was the result – let me tell you something funny about Laski: he didn't have a single disciple in England, none. Think of it; brilliant lecturer, everybody you'd ever see worshipped his lectures, best they'd ever heard; he was very popular, personally, in the Labour Party. English Socialism was created by the Webbs, Graham Wallace, Cole, Tawney. Above all, he has to have exactly one pupil, one real disciple who was someone in Leeds, can't think of his name, something like – not Bullivant or Elephant, but something like that, some man who writes left wing books. In India, any number of disciples. In Africa. Some in America, Israel, [MI Some even in Canada, yes] Israel, Canada probably. In England, none.

MI What does that tell you? The further away you are, the better it looked?

IB Well, the trouble about England of course is that all the socialists in England were really clergymen. In some sense there was a very strong Christian component, even in Gaitskell, not perhaps consciously but I mean, they were all clergymen really. I mean Cole was a tremendous clergyman. Kingsley Martin was a hedge-preacher. [MI Tawny above all] [ ] He really was a Christian, real Christian.



MI And that was what was attractive about him in many ways.

IB Yes, yes, oh and Sydney Webb could have been a non conformist clergyman perfectly easily, you see? But the point was that Laski was a sort of Weimar Republic man, there was something – you see? – something – he danced about. And in the end, the English don't take to that. They enjoy it, they read it, but it doesn't rub off. It evaporates.

MI What was it about his background that led him to behave that way?

IB Nothing particularly. His father was a Jewish, prosperous Jewish merchant in Manchester, born in England – or maybe not, but his grandfather came from Poland. His father was a jute merchant or something like that and he and his brother were Manchester Grammar School, afterwards at Oxford, at least Harold was, I don't know if Neville his brother was. I think perhaps he was. You see, nothing in particular. He just was a very clever boy at New College I think, and was just a – you know – exactly what Jews were thought to be, too clever by half, clever as you make 'em. The sort of thing anti Semites say, you see? No, there were some sort of short cuts, some sort of corner cutting occurred. And his lies were pathological. This is part of the Walter Mitty business, you see? I mean he told me stories. [MI Such as for instance?] He would say some story he didn't expect to be believed. He said, 'I was going for a walk the other day near Hindhead and who should I meet? Lloyd George. I was in a car as a matter of fact, driving along slowly. I said, 'Hop in,' He hopped in. Believe it or not, the next man we met was Baldwin. Then we met [Ramsay?] MacDonald. We had a marvellous talk.' Then he reproduced it rather brilliantly 'That I don't think he could quite, even he. But he told me the following. 'When I went to Moscow, I went with the Labour Delegation after the war,' which was true. 'We went to see Stalin. At the end of our talk, when we were leaving, one of the

people there said, 'Professor Laski, would you mind leaving your umbrella behind? Because the Boss wants to speak to you, face to face.' So I left my umbrella behind and I went to call for it and I talked to Stalin. We had two hours together, it was quite wonderful. And I said to him, 'You know, your foreign policy isn't quite right, it is alienating people quite unnecessarily.' And he said, 'You know, you're absolutely right. It's Molotov that makes me do it. I just can't move him, he's so obstinate, there's nothing I can do.' I said, 'You know, we've got exactly the same trouble with Attlee, it's exactly the same. One can't make him move, it's a terrible thing.' And then Stalin said, 'Would you like to come to the Politburo? I've got a meeting on at four?' I said, 'Yes, sure.' So I went to the Politburo and I had three hours with them. It was absolutely fascinating.' He never was with Stalin alone, ever at all, he never – everything is totally false, pure cock and bull, because I talked to somebody with him on that delegation. He never was away from the delegation, none of these things happened and couldn't have happened, given Stalin. It's wildly improbable, you see? Well, it didn't begin to happen. I mean some element of truth, they did actually go to see Stalin, yes, but that's all, that's the only true bit, otherwise nothing. Then he said to me at Harvard where I met him – a party was given for him by the great Morison historian, what was his name? [MI Samuel Eliot Morison] who was a great – I rather liked him because he'd been a lecturer at Harvard in the – I don't know what – 1921; and Lowell was very hostile to him because he was a Jew and a socialist. And Sam Morison was very snobbish, [ ] nevertheless a kind of Yankee abolitionist to cop his cause, as he might of a Negro. And a party was given for him to which I went in '49. He there told a story which was embarrassing because he said when he was very young, he'd met an old professor, very old professor, whom everyone couldn't remember at Harvard, in the street, and the man said, 'What are you doing this morning, Laski?' And he said, 'I have a class.' 'Dismiss your class, you've got something interesting to say.' So I went to this man's class and he said, 'You know, it was quite a day in my life. A hundred and fifty years ago, my brother died.' And you can work

it out with very old fathers and half brothers, it can just be worked out, if you were seventy, eighty, when you were a child. Now that story is true about a man in the 1890's in Harvard. If you told it at Yale or at Princeton, it might have been believed but at Harvard, it was known to have happened to somebody in the previous century, that story. So it was very embarrassing when he told it [MI And there was a kind of pause?] aiming it at himself. Yes. But then he said, 'You know, in that boat I came, Churchill was standing by it. We had quite a talk. He summoned me and I told him he was wrong about this, that and the other. You know, he admitted he'd made all the mistakes.' They did come by the same boat. Churchill travelled first class and Laski in the second, naturally, and I asked John Martin who I knew very well – still alive – and was Churchill's Private Secretary, whether he'd met Laski on the journey. Never. He didn't stir from his cabin. So that it's all [beno trovato?] and it's all Walter Mitty.

MI And it's slightly pathetic.

IB Deeply. 'I met Kingsley Webster the other day. He said, 'You know, the Foreign Office, they don't tend to like you. If you really want something important, if you go cap in hand as I did ...' Nobody ever went less cap in hand to anybody than my old friend, professor Charles Kingsley Webster who was a kind of Roundhead type, rude, rough. But Indians were the gibier, they were his natural material. [MI They lapped it up?] Absolutely. Nehru, Krishna Menon, thought he was wonderful, lapped it up absolutely. And Americans did. Maurice Bowra once told me that he was in a compartment on a train where Laski and a Rhodes scholar were, and he began saying that he'd been to Georgia – in Russia I mean – and that when he shook off the Cheka man and the NKVD man and the Intourist man, they took down their hair and they had a marvellous talk with the students. And the American Rhodes scholar said, 'Professor Laski, do you speak Georgian?' He said no. 'Russian?' He looked like a child – Maurice Bowra said, he said, 'With my kind of background, it sort of comes.' Well look, that's

enough about – this is no story, nothing to do with me. But anyway you say, ‘Why didn’t I like Laski?’ For these reasons. I didn’t hate him.

MI Just to round this off since we’ve been talking about this ...

IB Cole I liked very much. Cole was a schoolboy. He made bad jokes, he hated bankers, couldn’t be in the room with them, he said he’d never been happier in his life except in socialist company. He was very intolerant [MI Intolerant?] Yes. He went to my school and there was something child-like and boyish and disarming about him. He was very vain and very good looking; and when I delivered lectures in Oxford, it was quite well attended, he asked me not to lecture at the same time as him, which I found touching. He didn’t want his audience taken away by anyone. So I didn’t. I had classes together with him. Him I liked very much, he was a very pure spirited man, rather silly sometimes, rather silly and rather naive. Hated Americans, that sort of thing, you see? But in a kind of a left wing way. But the one thing which used to infuriate him was American students who wrote him, ‘Dear Professor Cole, Now that Professor Laski is no more, you are the leading ...’ [laughter]. Hated Laski. Tawney was quite nice to Laski.

MI Tell me a little bit about Tawney because you worked with Tawney in Washington. [IB Not really, no] Or you knew him.

IB No I didn’t. I was in New York when Tawney was in Washington.

MI Ah. He was the Labour Attach, in Washington?

IB He was exactly that, he was the first ever, anywhere, it was a notion of Attlee’s I think. I met him from my job – what I told you I think was that my job in Washington was entirely due to a contretemps with Tawney. Did I tell you that story? [MI Yes] But I never really knew him, no. I met him once or twice. He was

extremely nice to me. He'd read my book on Marx, thought it was quite good and was extremely kind. Laski had nothing to say on the subject. I don't know about Laski, poor old thing. I mean I just felt he was ultimately pathetic, yes. The vanity, the sort of desire to blow himself up. There was no harm in him, but I mean the famous occasion when he was sued. He sued for libel because somebody had said in some speech, he made remarks which were technically subversive of the British constitution, and therefore he ought to go to jail for that. I mean he more or less preached revolution, said we wanted – oh, I don't know – enabling acts and that sort of thing and [?] of parliament. Extravagant statements. And he denied he'd said these things which were technically criminal. And so he sued the man for libel, [ ] some journalist, and lost. He had said exactly those things. Nobody would have arrested him for it but he said them all right. Then the hat was passed round to enable him to pay for his costs which were, I suppose, ten thousand pounds, I don't know, and I contributed, I was asked to. He died worth about seventy thousand pounds. That's rather awful. [MI Sad story] That sort of thing. But he wasn't a bad man. [MI I wanted to ...] He's typical of the extremely shallow nature of socialist ideology in England in the thirties, Marxist ideology, because he saw himself as a Marxist. Well, Marxism in England in the thirties was a very [?] affair. I've never known Laski convert anybody to anything, that's what I mean. Something which didn't seize hold. John Strachey converted more people to Marxism than anybody.

MI Yes, Strachey was much more 'the coming world crisis' or whatever it was called. [IB That's right] That book exerted a large influence on my father, I remember. [IB Well, it is a very powerful work] What – you went to Harvard first?

IB He became a follower of Toynbee in the end, had to have a system.

MI Yes. Poor man. You went to Harvard first in '49? And then again in the early fifties? [IB Yes, '51 and '53] to lecture for a term at a time?

IB Yes. And then in '62, I think. Cuba number two was then, wasn't it? [MI The Cuban Missile Crisis was ...] No, not the first one – yes, missile crisis is what I remember, that's when I was at Harvard. [MI You were in Harvard during ...?] then. That would be what? Sixty ...? [MI Two] Two. And then I wasn't lecturing, I was in some kind of research, forward research into something or other. George Kennan was the man who recommended me to Harvard.

MI Originally; because you'd known him in the Moscow ...? [IB Quite so] What kind of impression did Kennan make on you? Complicated character.

IB Very. I met him in Moscow and he was a man of great charm and genuinely distinguished personality. He took great interest in Russia. He read Pushkin and Dostoevsky and Tolstoy and above all, Chekhov, on whom he wanted to write a book.

MI And his father had written this great book [IB His uncle] about the penal settlement thing. [IB Uncle, uncle] His uncle, sorry.

IB A famous book called, Russia and the Penal – Russia and the – something like Penal System or something, written a book denouncing – what happened was that he went to Russia and he was very strongly pro-Tsarist, the uncle. And then he became anti because they – he'd written articles in favour, so they gave him every facility. Came back and wrote a denunciation, rather the sort of thing there is with Israel nowadays. [laughter] And all these unfortunate – he met a lot of liberals sitting in chains in Siberia, you can imagine. Was asked why they went, because they were in favour of proportional representation, [chuckles] which they were tortured – you can imagine the absurdities of all that, you see? All

right. He was his nephew, yes, either great uncle or uncle. He came from Indiana, South Bend I think, and he was – talked to me at great length about Russia, its character, and was very good on Russian politics at that time. His hatred of Stalin and Stalinism was absolutely obsessive, then. All that changed later and I enjoyed talking to him very much. He was highly intelligent and we used to discuss these things and we got on extremely well. He was a genuinely intellectually interested American Diplomat. Unusual. [MI Few and far between] Well, my great friend Chip Bohlen, to whom I was devoted, wasn't that. He studied – he took a volume of Lenin to bed with him every night, but that was different. He's like a south – like a sort of East German junker watching the animal, every so to speak tremor in his body, he wanted to interpret – Bohlen. Whereas Kennan took a rather, what might be called a sort of rather more intelligentsia line, general propositions, and on the whole understood what was happening rather less in some ways. But still: then after that, I saw him in Washington I suppose, I came back – no, I don't think I did – I came back in '46. He was still in Moscow I would think, but I met him in Washington when I came back in '49 when he was – who was President in '49? [MI Truman] Truman. I think he was then in the State Department, head of some policy planning thing. And I saw him at the table with his wife [MI He was writing 'The Containment'] that's when Mr X, which I entirely went along with. I thought it was very good, quite right. I then met his Norwegian wife, Annalisa, then he came to Oxford as some sort of – he was then sacked by Dulles. He went to Berlin and gave an interview at the airport in which he said that Stalin was worse than Hitler. That was enough, not being persona grata. He couldn't go back, and then Dulles sacked him and put him in charge of some minor thing. Then he went to Princeton. Then I saw him there and probably when I went to visit, in probably '51, and then in Oxford when he came as professor of something, he came to All Souls at one point – three times he came to Oxford. Nice to talk to. But then he became Ambassador to Yugoslavia and they obviously were extremely affable to him and that's when he wrote the thing on polycentrism. Then the

Soviet Union began to cultivate him in a very intensive way, and then he gradually turned. He's a man of colossal vanity, colossal. I remember when the Afghan, Afghanistan was invaded. I was at Princeton. He left for three days in case journalists wanted to know his views. Nobody asked him, in fact. He then said, 'This is the end, it's the twelfth hour, we're done for. We shall now be destroyed, we have no way of saving this country.' The atom bomb, this way, that way, he talked about it in an apocalyptic manner. The guests at dinner were hideously embarrassed. He saw himself as a world spiritual force on a par with Ghandi, Mother Teresa [MI Oh God!] Nehru ... [MI Was it as bad as that?] Yes. [MI Really?] Above parties. He was asked if he would like to be – stand for the Senate I think, in West Virginia which I think [ ] father. He was only provided – both parties nominated him. He saw himself as au dessus de la meele, yes, great spiritual force. Oh yes, he'd got mystical convictions about himself. Very nice man at the same time; kind, generous, intelligent and a very good writer. Oh, I'll tell you a story about him which is nothing to do with me – well, it has up to a point. He was delivering lectures in Oxford of a book, which afterwards became the story of American intervention in Russia. Very good lectures they were and [?], beautifully delivered and so on. In the middle, he suddenly said, 'Next week is the 7th November, anniversary of the great Russian Revolution.' [?] interrupt these lectures, they were general talk about the Soviet Union, enormous [?]. He came in looking pale, handsome, good full voice, went up to the Lectern and said, 'Russia is a very great country, great nation. They're marvellously gifted; they have produced some of the world's greatest masterpieces. As human beings, they're one of the best people, most gifted, the most interesting and most distinguished the world has ever known. But, what they seek is power. The people in the Kremlin sit, thinking intensively about only one thing, and that is how to acquire world power. And because they're able and fanatical and think about nothing else, they will have it. And we know, pursuing leisure, pleasure, the arts, and we will cave in. There is no doubt about it. They will destroy us.' It was like a [Petainese?] speech in France in



1940, saying we are right and we have gone on whoring after pleasures and the Nazi's are something, and we're no good, we're corrupt, you see? This went on, all this happened. And then he said, 'The Russians are a great nation, but even they haven't solved every problem. They have never solved the problem of death.' A shiver ran through the audience. He then went on and he said, 'In 1917, a man called Lenin came in a train to Russia during the revolution. That was a fatal moment. Lloyd George, who was Prime Minister of Great Britain, should have gone to Paris and should have said to Clemenceau, 'Lenin has gone to Russia. He will destroy everything we believe. We must stop [?]. Kerensky cannot do it. The Russians are in disarray; they're being defeated by the Germans. For God's sake, get them out of the war. If you don't, Lenin will win, and then the situation from our point of view will be far worse. What at worst could happen but the Kaiser will win this war against us? That would matter far less than Lenin.' You can imagine, can you not, Lloyd George taking the boat ..?

MI Yes, it's such a plausible scenario, really.

IB ... saying, 'Monsieur Clemenceau, a man called Lenin – you've never heard of him? Well he's in Russia, I can tell you that, and if he gets it, if Kerensky doesn't stop, we're in trouble. I mean, the Kaiser's bad enough but, nothing ...' He said it, you see? So there is a touch, something – a screw is loose somewhere. I talked to him afterwards. I said, 'Look George, you don't really mean that Lloyd George could have said, 'M. Clemenceau ...?' He looked rather pensive and said, 'No, maybe not, I suppose I went a bit far.' I said, 'I think, a bit, but still you know ...' He then talked about Lenin exactly as Churchill would have talked about him. [MI As a demonic figure?] Was, yes. Destroyer of the world, certainly. More curious. It's a more complicated picture of Kennan than one gets from his autobiography. [MI Indeed, indeed]

*End*

## MI TAPE 6

Conversation date: 30 November 1988

Date transcribed: 17 May 2004

Transcriber: Esther Johnson

Subjects covered:

Self-confidence

Lecturing technique

Thatcher

Reagan

Oxford 1928–34

Oxford philosophy: Ayer, Austin

S Rachmilevich

Writing Marx

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*Conversation begins on Side B*

*Side B*

**MI:** I'm very puzzled by your lack of self-confidence.

**IB:** It has nothing to do with the facts. It's a purely psychological phenomenon. A minor form of neurosis, I suppose.

**MI:** Here you are a much loved and treasured only son, ...

**IB:** True

**MI:** ... by anybody's standards successful and successful early in your own terms

**IB:** Fairly early. I never was [ ..]. I was not a top of any form at school, never, and if I came anywhere near, it was through enormous hard work. I never learnt Latin and Greek properly, so I used cribs, [...]

**MI:** A persistent doubt about your intellectual capacities, then?

**IB:** Oh, yes, certainly. An extreme, acute knowledge of lack of depth, of lack of, so to speak, having something to say, and a hatred of saying something without having something to say, like [...]. I'm the opposite of Freddie Ayer, who's written 40 books, 30 books, beautifully written in excellent English, never – no repetitions, lucid, best English philosophical prose style since Mill, I would say – and never had an idea in his life.

MI But I'm still deeply puzzled by someone who is a tremendously good talker in private, not merely good, but consequential talker in private, it has substance; and who says he's terrified of public utterance. I can't see why the transfer between one to the other [IB Nor can I] should be so daunting.

IB I cannot tell you but it is so. It is so. Faced with a silent audience, instead of saying, 'Ah! Captive audience! I can do what I like,' – exactly the opposite.

MI But you must have, by the end at Oxford, been such a – had that audience in the palm of your hand? You could have read the phone book, for God's sake, Isaiah!

IB I had no idea what they were, I have never seen a face.

MI You look off into the middle distance?

IB Top right, never top left. [MI Why not?] Can't tell you. I'm telling you about sensations, yes. No, it's hopeless. Top right and upwards. If I meet an eye, I say to myself it's because it might smile or yawn or something. Kant was a bit like that; he always talks of a button on a man's waistcoat. [laughs] One day the man didn't come, he didn't know what to do. **I fixate myself on some still point and then just emit.**

MI Whereas in person, face to face, you fix me and other interlocutors, very directly in the eye. [IB Oh absolutely, yes] So I still don't get it. Why ..?

IB Well it's just like a sort of acrobat, I mean when you think about [MI Getting to the other end of the rope] the rope because I never look at any audience and think, am I doing well? Don't you think I'm wonderful?

MI Because that's akin to looking down and you might fall off?

IB Anything might happen. I feel unsafe, obviously. Insecurity is the [ ], that's the sort of thing and sort of not knowing if I might stop in the middle because I'm not sure what I'm going to say. You see, **my lectures always take the same form. I make fifty pages of notes, which I throw away;** in this case not, but it normally is. **These I boil down to about ten pages. The ten pages I boil down to a page and a half, mainly of headings, [?] in case I am struck with aphasia, and then I don't look, and wind myself up like a clockwork clock, and proceed to the end. The relief of its being over is enormous.** And I always often start with a sort of silly joke in order to, I'm sure, ingratiate myself, what the [?] called [captativa revalentii?] in the middle ages, it's sort of the [tropes?] which [laughs] or [?]. Captativa revalentii is the first thing that would make you friendly. It's no good beginning by saying, 'I don't know what I'm doing here, I've lost my notes, total ignorance of the subject, I'm here on false pretences, etc.' you see? I have a regular joke I used to make. I used to ask people at the

back if they could hear me, and if they said, 'Yes', I would say, 'Well, there's not much point in asking because if you can't hear me, you can't hear this question either.' [laughter] And that used to produce a laugh [MI And then you'd feel better?] Yes; which means obviously that I need some kind of assurance of being well received and non hostility.

MI You have said of yourself that you have a hysterical desire to please. Is this working ..?

IB Well hysterical may be a little overdone. A habit, yes. Anxiety to please, certainly. Certainly; I mean that's why on the whole, you see, I like talking to anybody. If I meet somebody I theoretically detest, I immediately start talking to them amiably. Mr Murdoch, whom I met at a large party in honour of – to say good-bye to Mr and Mrs Reagan, given by Mrs – what's her name – Graham, because I never greeted them when they first came, I didn't quite see why I should have to say good-bye to them. [MI laughs] However I went and there was a moment, and so amiable must I be, they met me somewhere and began talking; his wife was a sort of pretty blonde who also began talking and in the end, they invited me to Thanksgiving in Colorado [laughs] [MI Gracious me!] Two days later I didn't – I didn't go, no, no, I said I couldn't or wouldn't. But still, here was this horrible man, horrible man, a very bad man, really bad [MI But you talked to him] has done a lot of harm in England, no doubt, probably in America, too, you see, who I disapprove of strongly. I can't deny that he does a lot of damage and I'd never defend him to anyone who attacks him. And yet, I must have been so amiable as to be invited to Colorado in a private plane, on first acquaintance actually, you see? It's really shameful. [MI laughs] One can't deny it. [MI Well, it's a venial sin I would have thought] But it's [?] all the same, all the same. I meet Mrs Thatcher. I don't shiver with hatred. She always says the same thing to me when we meet [MI Which is?] because we don't meet very often, about twice a year maximum, if that. 'Are you gainfully employed?' [MI Really?] Yes. And I say, 'No, I'm not.' 'Why not?'

I say, 'I'm very old, I've retired. 'No excuse, you must go and write something immediately. Go and do some work, you can't go on like this.' [MI In a jesting, bantering tone?] Yes, yes. [MI And you smile back ingratiatingly?] Not quite, not quite as much as I would with somebody I liked. I think I'd smile more to the Prince of Wales if he said that. Nicer man, you see? Oh no, I can tell you about myself in that sense. No, no, I mean I talk fast and – no doubt in order to make myself agreeable to people, I am sure, and feel ashamed quite a lot of the time. A. J. P. Taylor, I once asked him – he was a [?] lecturer as you know. He said, 'Well,' – he walked for an hour or so, got up early. He lectured at nine in order to see how many people would go to his lectures [laughs] [MI That's a point of vanity] Oh yes, he wouldn't have denied it. 9.10am I think it was, and then five, some ridiculous thing like that. He said he walked in Addison's Walk which was in Magdalen Garden, as you know. He used to get up at seven in a leisurely way; breakfast; then about eight o'clock, quarter past eight, he started walking and preparing the lecture in his head. Then at nine he would begin. The first half hour was absolutely all right, I mean the information was given, so he said what he meant and then the second half hour – pure ham, for which he was ashamed. That's where it failed me. I believed this to be true, that's why he was such a [?] lecturer. Half an hour; he then started saying anything he liked and making awful jokes and attacking people.

MI Well, let's shift gear slightly. Last time we talked we had reached St Paul's – oh we got you through St Paul's.

IB We got through to the end, did we? [MI Yes] Did I tell you who my friends were?

MI I think you told me who your friends were, and then the question came, which we didn't get to, why Oxford, why not Cambridge?

IB Oh because that was automatic, that was if you read classics, that was a tendency – well, it might be either. Some others at St Paul's decided for me. Oxford and Cambridge were called Oxford and Cambridge and not Cambridge and Oxford. So they said I could go and try Balliol, which I did. I not only didn't get a scholarship, I wasn't offered a place. Rejected totally in 192 – I think it must have been Spring of '27. Spring, I was eighteen – not quite, 17½, yes. Spring of '27. It could have been late '26, I don't think it was '26. The idea was to send me as a trial run over that period. They said my classics were no good, the viva didn't go at all well, so that was that.

MI How do you remember yourself at eighteen? Were you – do you think of yourself now as a kind of callow youth or rather sophisticated? Or what?

IB No, rather sophisticated, and so were my contemporaries. At St Paul's, because there were all these operas and theatres and galleries, St Paul's boys were very knowing by the time they were sixteen. By the time they came to university, they were exhausted. [MI laughs] And they couldn't adjust themselves because all the callow youths ...

MI Were you disabused and knowledgeable like they, in the same way?

IB I was sophisticated, yes. I mean my contemporaries – I didn't read T. S. Eliot but they did. But I must have read that kind of thing and I thought about musical theory and I thought about that kind of thing. And I travelled to Bonn in 1937 [1927?] for some concert with Beethoven's original instruments for the Beethoven Centenary, and that kind of thing. And I certainly was sophisticated, yes. I don't know what I read. As a matter of fact, I wrote an essay for the school essay prize, which I got. I was never top of the form but I did get a couple of prizes. The essay was on something or other and the man who corrected it said it was rather

like an Oxford Greats essay on philosophy so that's where I must go. He himself came [?]. I don't think I ever thought about Cambridge particularly, I wouldn't have minded but Oxford seemed the natural path.

MI So not with Balliol and not with – it was Greats where?

IB I'll tell you what happened. Balliol was a failure. I remember sitting in the hall, cold and cheerless and looking at a portrait of Cardinal Manning. It was peculiarly repulsive, severe, skeleton-like, skull-like head and terrifying appearance. I don't think Newman was much better but Manning was at Balliol whereas Newman was at Trinity and [?]. Still; so that was a kind of disappointment, not acute because I had another year. Then Corpus Christi College, Oxford, which had not taken boys from St Paul's for about twenty years because of what I am telling you, because they were charlatans; because they were all right, they were clever-clever but not much solid. Corpus is a small college of ninety undergraduates then, mainly classics, very well endowed, created in – founded in I don't know what, in 1509 I think, rather like St Paul's, maybe even later, sort of renaissance, humanistic college. Small and sort of modest and to go there you had to be good but not brilliant, rather like Denmark [MI laughs] the passport is all right, it was quite all right to maintain, or Norway or something, was very respectable, very respectable but not flashy: and they offered a scholarship in modern subject which for them was a tremendous departure. And that meant Honour Mods, which was classics and Modern History. That's about as original as they could get. You must realise at St Paul's you were not allowed to do Modern Greats, you were not allowed to do PPE, it was a perfectly good Oxford examination, it began – what? In 1923, '22. Still, forbidden. Very conservative, a little crazy and rather nice in a way. Home from home, cosy and small. Everybody rowed, every body had to play football, everybody played cricket because it was so small, everybody did everything; and if you got a blue [Soccer?] Union, it was slightly disapproved of – showiness, terribly in, it was really rather showy.



That was Corpus. Anyway, I came in for this exam and I obviously wrote quite a good essay. My classics weren't very good but the essay was all right and the general papers were all right. I got in, to my surprise. Then I was sent for by the ancient history tutor who was a man called Dr Grundy, who by this time was about seventy-two or three, by the old statutes, he can go on indefinitely. He was a grumpy old military type who had written quite an important book on economic chapters of ancient history in about 1908 perhaps, and had not done very much since. There was a book also on Thucydides and His Age and The Great Persian War; and the second volume of The Great Persian War found no publisher because the first book hadn't sold. It was more of what used to be called British [Warm?], it was a kind of British military coat [ ]. He came to a boarding house in Kensington, sent for me and told me my classics weren't terribly good and I wasn't going to do Honour Mods, because if I did, I wouldn't get a very good degree. I was to proceed straight into Greats and do Ancient History and ignore philosophy. Straight orders. Well, I was terrified. He was a severe looking don, old, grizzled white hair. But he was a character. I remember in later days, he said – well I'll tell you the kind of thing. He ran in a hoplite's armour from Athens to Marathon to see how quickly the famous runner could give the news of Marathon to Athens could have run. [laughs]

MI With every Greek, local peasant splitting his sides?

IB Mm, you can imagine. He also said to me, 'I was standing on the platform of a bus and suddenly a man reached for my pocket and was going to pick it. I knocked him down. The first man I'd knocked down for eight years,' he said. [MI laughs] That kind of thing. Those were the kind of stories which accumulated round him. Anyhow ...

MI So you took his advice?

IB One moment. [Pause; door closes] Yes, I did, I did. I came up and I agreed not to do Honours, yes I didn't do Honour Mods, I did two pass examinations. And then I did Greats and became interested – the philosophy tutor was excellent. He was no good, of no interest to me at all, Grundy, so it wasn't possible. Nobody at Corpus got a first in the school examinations for, I think, ten years. I think I'd better tell you the kind of college it was, as far as the common room's concerned. Before me, there was a man called Hilton who has lately come into the news because he was at Marlborough with Blunt, MacNeice. There's a rather bad book just been written, another spy book by a man called Costello, which I've looked at. It's very boring; enormous amount of work went in it and it's inaccurate. But anyhow, it's a bit like [?]. Hilton – it's the first time he's mentioned. He was a mathematical scholar, as Blunt was, in '20, and got a second in mathematical moderations, and thereupon said he wanted to do PPE, it's called social studies, philosophy, politics and economics. His tutor was a man called Dr Pidduck, who was mad in his own way, accused him of disloyalty to his subject – mysterious offence – and his scholarship was taken away, literally taken away. [MI My God!] I mean it's inconceivable anywhere else by that time in either university. One greats was called girl's greats, or American greats, people who didn't know Greek. Scholars who knew Greek were not allowed – mathematics is a real subject, modern greats was absurd and you couldn't get a tutor in it. Nobody in Corpus taught it. Now then, he got his scholarship taken away and then, in the end, he got the John **Locke** Prize which was the chief philosophy prize in the university, another first. Then his money was given back to him, in [?] I think; I doubt if he was given any interest on it. But anyway, he then became a theologian and finally a neo-spy. [laughter] He was an ordinary intelligence officer. As far as I know, there was nothing against him. But he was the first person in Corpus to [lose?] us at all, two years senior to me. I did greats, I knew enough Greek for that, I didn't get **alphas** in my ancient history papers. I got what's called a bad first. I wasn't [?] at length, I did get it in a formal [?] which meant the marks were good enough. But it was the manner

of one of the people examining who wrote to my tutor, who said, 'He's quite good; not a flyer like Crossman, [laughs] Gally, somebody else, a lot of people [?] nothing to it. Then my tutor, who had a certain faith in me, who was a very modest, extremely hard-working Scotsman from Edinburgh who was a very, very good tutor, exhausted himself entirely by teaching, persuaded me to come into All – no, no, sorry – then I did PPE for a year. Now first of all having me came up. One person had to be allowed, couldn't my scholarship be retained? Because in theory, I'd do history. I think rather, Professor Prichard, who was a professor of philosophy, I think moral philosophy [ ], did say to them that if it was refused, he would complain to the university authorities and Corpus would not be allowed to go into the inter-collegiate lectures. I mean it was a defiance of the rules – the rules of the university were very serious, and he would see to it the college was expelled from the general collegiate arrangements. Threats of that kind, saying it was monstrous, unheard of. He was perfectly right, it was unbelievable not to let people do – you see? And so there it was, grudgingly. Well, I just went on doing philosophy as before, there was no graduate studying [?], there were a few but it wasn't very common. And then I did – economics; I got a very tutor so I never learned it, to this day I know none. Politics; I had no tutor at all. I was told to read it in the newspapers. [MI Really? laughs] Literally. So, not a subject ...

MI It's a miracle you survived this education, Isaiah.

IB Well, I got a quite good first and PPE isn't standard, even lower than greats, and I got rather bad first [laughs] in greats and I got a rather good first in modern greats, after one year's more philosophy. My examiners, Ryle and Oliver Franks, complained that the philosophy papers – I only did one question occasionally putting three and seven when the subject strayed towards another question, I didn't divide them up. I did a long essay which was relevant to about three questions [laughter] in the paper. Yes I know, but I was very happy at Corpus. I did not row because I had

a bad arm, it was a birth injury, and I didn't have to play cricket because I didn't want to. It was perfectly all right, I much enjoyed it at school. I told you about my cricketing career? [MI Yes. Hitting the ball straight up into the air] That's right. I did not play football, I didn't play any games at all. That was perfectly all right at Oxford. But in my second year, I had a friend called Calder Marshall [MI Calder Marshall] in St Paul's [MI Arthur?] Arthur Calder Marshall, who is now about eighty, must be a year older, eighty-one, who became a novelist, a not [ ] novelist. He used to – taught, I think [ ] who became an actress. He was a great friend and a very sophisticated boy and he became a communist for some years, perhaps still is; and he became the editor of a thing called the Oxford Outlook which was a high-brow Oxford periodical published by Blackwell's. Before him, there was somebody else before Auden and before Auden, similar; a sort of high-brow periodical anyway, and he passed it on to me. So I must have been sufficiently, so to speak, familiar in what might be called intellectual circles in Oxford, to have been given this. And I accepted ...

MI So you edited it in 1928, '29? [IB 1930. '30, '31] What do you remember about editing it? Do you remember any of the pieces you ever wrote or edited?

IB Oh yes, oh certainly, I didn't write very much, I merely commissioned things. There were two periodicals; one was called *Farago*, that was aesthetic and rather charming and had elegant essays by sort of elegant writers. My periodical was severely high-brow, wrote about Cocteau and wrote about – I don't know – wrote about sort of intellectual issues. My contributors – I made it a condition that I shouldn't have to meet the contributors because there was a kind of homosexual society I didn't really want to mingle with, and some of them were, perfectly good writers. Well, who did I publish? Heavens, I can't remember now. I got Humphry House, afterward he became [a] well known critic who's a friend. Crossman probably, I'm not sure if he wrote something for it. Stephen Spender certainly wrote quite a lot, whom I knew in

my second year. This was a really sort of really sophisticated essays about transition, about Joyce, much more that sort of thing. It was severely high-brow. I did write in it, I wrote editorials. I had a row with – quarrel with Prince [Mirsky?] who was a well known [MI The Story of Russian Literature] Yes, who by this time was on the way to being a Marxist. He converted himself, went to [MI And the returned] Russia and was then done in, before the war. [MI Ghastly] Probably, yes. But he was already sort of getting on towards it and had written something I didn't much like, so I argued it with him and he wrote a severe answer. We had quite a good little argument in the pages of Oxford Outlook. I wrote music criticism under the pseudonym of Albert Alfred Apricot. [MI laughs] I can't tell you why. I did that. I reviewed – I was always urging the Opera Club to do things like Wozzek which they couldn't possibly have done.

MI Oh yes. So you have avant garde tastes, advanced tastes?

IB Distinct tastes, distinct. And I didn't get so far as to – I think I imported Ulysses which I didn't read then, a bit later. I gave it – my last year when I did PPE, I lived – I shared a house with a man called Bernard Spencer who was a poet, quite a good poet, who fell out of a train going over the – on the way from Vienna well after the war. He worked for the British Council. Nobody noticed [whether] it was suicide or an accident; there were volumes of his works which were quite respected. He wasn't a major figure in any way. Very nice man. And then there was somebody called Copplestone who went to the Treasury who did – oh, the entire money at the university was via the UGC; he was called Cop [by the?] Chancellors. He was married to a black girl and [ ] I lost sight of. But they were fairly high-brows, and then there was Martin Cooper who was a music critic and ultimately and – who else did I know? Freddie Ayer, my contemporary, a year younger, I made friends with him. I used to go to the philosophical society. Herbert Hart, the philosopher. Who else were my high-brow friends? Stephen Spender, I told you. Auden is [down?]. MacNeice, never.

I didn't like him, he didn't like me. [MI Why?] Difficult to say, nothing in particular happened but I didn't get on. I met him about twice. He was too grand, too aesthetic, too arrogant, just took a dislike to me I think for no particular reason.

MI But you must have, at this point, begun to feel this was where you wanted to be?

IB Oh yes, I was very happy. I went to endless literary societies and listened to Harold Acton read D. H. Lawrence aloud, and I went to the Union, I went to everything. I mean I was in a state of continuous vitality. But what I liked best of all was meeting all these public school hearties who were people such as I had never met before in my life, all these – there were not many from Eton or Harrow but a lot of people from Rugby and Haylebury and Marlborough and Winchester, and they were completely different from anyone who was a Jewish day boy in London, if you see what I mean? And they were much freer, in a sense quite different, extremely gay, frightfully agreeable, very gentlemanly. I thought they were wonderful. I liked them very much, they liked me. My anxiety to please worked and I became perfectly accepted by a philistine, rowing, games-playing set of persons. At the same time I was obviously an intellectual and had friends on the other side, but it wasn't minded because I appeared to have friends in both camps quite easily.

MI What attracted you about hearty, hale – both sides?

IB Oh, I think simply the vitality and the gaiety; the fact they lived jolly lives, they were un-preoccupied. They laughed a lot and they constantly used jokes and they were always – I don't know – somehow there was something rather – in those days. This was before the financial crisis which altered things a lot. '31 was a crucial date. This was '28 when I came up, you see? What did I like about them? A certain easy humanity. You see they weren't very hearty, they weren't very – Corpus as I told you was Denmark, it

didn't go too far. Corpus didn't take anybody below a certain intellectual standard. [MI So they weren't brutish?] They weren't totally stupid. No, none of them were, none of them were, that's the point.

MI Have you retained friends with any people who would fall into that circle?

IB Now, you ask me this question. When I used to go to [?] at Corpus, my generation, I was on very happy terms with them, yes. I used to know who they were and we chatted together quite amiably. Have I retained any friends? Well, only the ones who stayed in Oxford, I suppose. Who was there? I don't think any of my contemporaries became dons in Oxford, funnily enough, at least not in the humanities. A philosopher called Barnes – he went to Liverpool, I think. There were a lot of Corpus philosophers but none of them were exactly contemporary with me. It was was a source of philosophers in Oxford.

MI Now, on the intellectual side, did you ...?

IB Still, it's a good question. I'm trying to think how could I not have retained some contacts. There was a man called Jerry Kornis who was a near Olympic runner, who became – went to the Colonial Office and then bought a school which was a Preparatory school of which was he was the Headmaster. I retained connection with him until about ten years ago, then I don't know why we drifted apart. We used to go to lunch and I used to meet him in London, that kind of thing, very nice man. Sent down for drunken behaviour. Wait a bit. Bernard Spencer I kept on terms with, the poet, certainly. [pause] Oh, yes, somebody vaguely. There was a very nice man called Kenneth Robinson, became Headmaster of the – was a Yorkshire man, with a strong Yorkshire accent – became Headmaster of Bradford Grammar School whom I tried to teach, talk southern English. And I would say, 'Say, blood.' He

would say, 'Blud.' 'I said blood.' 'I am saying blud.' [laughter] That I remember.

MI Were you going – were your intellectual orientations coming, fixing on philosophy at this point?

IB Yes, yes. I became absorbed.

MI What was it that absorbed you?

IB Not desire for the truth. I think that clearly my tutor was extremely searching. Once I produced a sentence, he'd start criticising it, and I suddenly realised one had to be very meticulous, know exactly what you were saying because it was a kind of challenge; and that absorbed me, that stimulated me. It stimulated me to be able to formulate propositions which would pass that particular test. I think more than anything. But I became a conventional, Oxford realist, which is what they all were, and I used to – I became head of the – I think it was that. I became interested in the problems themselves, I did just become interested. I mean it was clear that when Moore, G. E. Moore gives an example of what it is to be interested in philosophy, for example: if you – supposing you ask yourself where is the image in the mirror? Now, what do you answer? You say in the mirror but not the same as the glass is in the mirror. On the mirror, not the same as a postage stamp which you have fixed to the mirror. So that it looks behind the mirror but it isn't there when you look. Well, what does it mean to say there is an image 'in' the mirror? What does 'in' mean? If you press your eyeballs and see double, what are you seeing double of? Which is the real image? Which is correct and which incorrect, how can you tell? At what distance [?] do you have to stand to know what it really looks like? How do you know that's the right distance? What is the test? That kind of thing. Puzzles of that kind. And I really did want to know the answer. Ethics interested me, whether right and wrong, good and bad, that was of general interest, I wished to know that. I was taught Hegelian



philosophy to start with which I found unintelligible, frightfully boring and got out of as soon as I could.

MI But you were drawn to English precision?

IB Yes, I liked the idea of English honesty. The great thing about philosophy in England, unlike philosophy in Germany, or philosophy in France – it's plain, it's sometimes rather not very profound, it's sometimes rather blunt. It's very honest. There are very few British philosophical charlatans because ...

MI Almost in the sense of sceptical, in the sense of ..?

IB Not casting clouds, not casting clouds on the subject. Not cheating, not rhetoric, not like German philosophy where you simply enter a cloudy region, you don't quite know what the words mean. Or even France where meditations begin or with lots of paradoxes which are brilliant but not entirely intelligible, if you see what I mean. Any philosophy from Bacon onwards, that's what people on the continent didn't like very much. He's rather penny plain, he's not coloured. That really is so. I don't think any Cambridge philosopher ever – I mean there are people like Wittgenstein produced – occasionally [Kierkegaard?] but even they, in some sense, always had a perfectly clear meaning, rather profound, rather ambivalent; but they weren't like Hegel or something where you don't know where you are. With Hegel, one feels like Polyphemus cave with it's description, I think it's in Virgil, where all the footsteps face the same way. Nobody comes out. [MI laughs] It's called [?], the footsteps terrify, you see? Everything [laughs] going that way, nothing facing this way [laughs]. That's what Hegelian philosophy is very like, you see?

MI When you say you say you were a conventional Oxford ..?

IB I read Kant. I couldn't understand a word [MI Really?] except to – when I began reading him, no. In English. I sat on a boat going

down the Danube from Salzburg – no, from Linz to Vienna and sat there trying to make it out. I was totally puzzled between the end, I mean the result between commentaries and then it became perfectly intelligible.

MI When you say you were a conventional Oxford realist, what did that mean?

IB But fundamentally – that particular school was what Russell invented before Logical Positivism but Russell didn't hold it. Russell, Moore, Cambridge philosophers; in Oxford we had Broad [ ] Cambridge. In Oxford we had Price and we had a man called [Neale?] and we had Ryle – all these people believed in the existence of material objects [laughs] and in an outer world, you see? And some of them believed in the sense data – if you didn't see objects, you only saw data which had to be in some way connected with some sort of causes which were – of which scientists dealt, and so on. It was a very common sense philosophy indeed, that was the point, nothing speculative or romantic in any way.

MI Were you ever pried off it in your philosophical career or did that remain bedrock for you?

IB It's still bedrock in a way. I was pried off, yes. Yes, I mean when I began reading people like Schopenhauer or – I've never read Heidegger in my life, shameful but true. I've never read Sartre properly either. I think it remains. I had some kind of naive realism, I think that's true of me, show me, a sort of Missouri-like position [MI laughs] I'll tell you. When I read Russian thinkers, not philosophers, political philosophy mainly, I realised it was inapplicable to politics, not very applicable to ethics. [MI That kind of realism?] That kind of method for worrying things out in a very exact way. You see what I mean is this: that analysis, so-called philosophical analysis, when applied to ethical propositions,

tended to leave dust behind it, little pebbles which was not what you meant. There's a very extraordinary statement to have been made by of all people, Russell, whom you would least expect – at least I would least expect to make that particular statement, which is that in order to understand somebody's, philosopher's general doctrine, the fundamental doctrine is fundamentally, basically simple; and you have to understand what that is. The cleverness and brilliance goes into rebutting possible objections and arguing for it, but not the doctrine itself. The, as it were, the castle which was defended is easily grasped and that has to be grasped first. The stuff on the walls, all the instruments which lob [laughs] and all the balls they give to the enemy and all the various methods of repelling attack, they can be of infinite sophistication and brilliance and ingenuity: but you can never understand what a man meant by only understanding that. If you follow somebody's argument, it will not lead you to what he really believes. It may or may not be true, but I believe that. Now, in the case of theory of knowledge or logic, that isn't entirely true – probably obviously if you read [F?] or even if you read Russell, if you accept the conclusions, you might be traced back to the premises, like Hobbes, you remember, who said – what is it he said about Euclid? 'By God, this cannot be true.' And then he traced it to its source, found it was and then adopted the method. It's obviously true of logic, up to a point true of [ ]. But in the case of value theory, what you have to understand about political theory is just how they see the world. The first thing you have to see is what their values are, how they conceive of society, the relationships of people in society, the ends of men, goals, the means they use. That is not firstly contained in the ingenious arguments which they use to rebut.

MI But that means you have to – they have to seen historically?

IB Well, you have to emphasise, no, you have to emphasise, you have to understand what I'm defending, what kind of viewpoint, what is the world which they see, what is the form of life as they conceive it? Yes, certainly historically, or contemporary, too,

equally. But – I mean I can understand what sort of [Nietzsche?] wants by understanding the kind of world as he sees it, never mind about what he says about the Soviet Union, I mean what he criticises, maybe that's right. But that's not the point. You see from what point of view it's being done, then you understand it better. But it is certainly true of political philosophy because exact – application of exact methods if you ever have done of course in Oxford and elsewhere, seems to me to lead to arid results.

MI Yes. Now, this raises the question – I was reading this morning when I was about to come to you, your wonderful essays on Austin, your of kind of ,loge of Austin ...

IB Indeed. I was much criticised for it by Freddie Ayer who was present at this meeting. You see it was the thousandth meeting of the something society and Price had to read a paper on Oxford philosophy in the thirties. I had to read one on the forties and Ryle read one on the fifties and – no, I did one on the thirties I think, Price and Ryle did the forties. Price really did do the twenties. I talked about Austin and Ayer, not much about Ayer; and Ryle talked about himself, entirely, [laughter] nobody else at all. Now, Freddie Ayer said to my wife, who was present at this meeting, 'I don't know what he means about – I'm the only person who counted! I'm the only person who was important. He wasn't important in the least, I was of the thirties, just me, nobody else!' I was rapped over the knuckles for that.

MI But Ayer made a very perceptive point about Austin, that he was a greyhound who wouldn't race, he just nipped [IB He nipped the others, they wouldn't run either] But the question I wanted to ask you is how you see yourself in retrospect, in those conversations. The paper is a wonderful description of debates between Austin and Ayer.

IB I do partly, I do talk about them. There were five people there in my room. It all began in All Soul's in 19 – I should say '36 – '35?

The only people who came were Ayer and Austin; and when he became a fellow at All Soul's, Hampshire towards the end of '36; and a man called McNab who was a fellow of Pembroke; and [pause] I don't know that [Woosley?] came, he was a philosopher, I don't think he came – he must have, somebody we all knew in those days, of our age, you see? These were all people under thirty, we were twenties. Not more than five. And as I said in that paper, once we'd satisfied each other – and I thought of – I think I argued in favour of one proposition endlessly, which was discussed week after week after week. I'll tell you how it began, chronologically, it's quite amusing. In 1933 there was a question of importing German refugees into England, Jews, and I thought – there was a man called Cassirer who was a famous German philosopher, also who was immensely learned. The point about Oxford was we weren't immensely learned. We argued quite well, Socratic, but there was not very much – I kept [ ], so I thought, well it wouldn't do us any harm to have a man of [?], so I persuaded All Soul's to take him. He arrived; he was fifty-seven, he looked about eighty, and I didn't know what to do with him, so we decided to have a seminar which is not a class. What about? Well, he'd written a book on Leibniz in 1910, we thought we might do that. He spoke no English, so we imported the only people who understood German. It was very galactic, the gathering. There came to it Ryle and Price and [Neale?] and Crossman, a man called Foster who wrote a doctrine at Keele university, an Hegelian, and Ayer, Austin and myself, in All Soul's. That's how it began. And one or two other people certainly came. And nothing happened. We read the *Theodice* by Leibniz, that sort of work, *Theodice*, and we read it in German I think – French? I'm not sure and somebody was asked questions that ...

*Side A* [Second side]

IB ... it's altogether consistent with what he says somewhere else. And Cassirer would say, 'Well yes, you mustn't think – take these sentences so precisely,' which we didn't like much, being trained –

then other people would say, 'But is it true, what he says?' Then he would look shocked, as if you'd asked whether what Racine said was true. It wasn't the question to ask. What you wanted to know is what he meant and not only what he meant but what he taught, and to what extent was it [ ] under the influence of Kant. That's what you wanted to know. 'True,' he would say, 'that is indeed a very difficult question.'

MI He was asking historian's questions?

IB Entirely. And then someone would press. He would say, 'That is such a difficult question, I think it might have puzzled Leibniz himself.' That made very top marks as a question. What he thought about was Rousseau. Kant of course was his centre, all rivers go towards him. In the end he became very boring. He was very unhappy at Oxford and he left us very soon, thinking none of us was any good at what he called philosophy. Ignorant, talkative. Crossman was the only one who was any good. [MI Really?] He was a kind of German, someone who talked like a German. And finally went to Sweden, to G'teborg. A great success, then he went to Yale where he was absolutely worshipped. Well, he was a good historian of philosophy but nothing else. There was no sharpness, no – I mean he couldn't persuade anyone of anything that was offered I don't think. It's bland, it's learned, it's lucid, it's beautifully done; somehow unmemorable. Anyway, as a result of this, we all met together in my room. We thought why didn't we go on meeting under more interesting – talk about real questions? That's where it got going, as a result of this seminar. Well that possibly happened in – maybe '34, so in '35 was when we began to meet. Who else came? **[Donald M.] MacKinnon [1913–94] used to come occasionally, but he talked terrible nonsense, always; just a very worthy old fraud is what he is. Pupil of mine.**

MI What emerges from what you're saying, though, is I find hard to understand, that is there's a certain sense in which the glamour

of philosophical precision is leading you to say that the history of philosophy, the history of ideas is a kind of bland second best?

IB No, no. The history of philosophy as taught by the Germans [MI As taught by the Germans?] yes, that's all. The history of philosophy is a perfectly good subject. If you've really done philosophy yourself and you know what keeps you awake at night; if you've agonised, then you know what they're talking about. If you could try and enter the clothes of Descartes [?], ask yourself how they looked. Again this business – but the thing is, then if you can see how such questions might have been troublesome or might have preoccupied them, then I think it's all right. But if you just copy out, you see, they said this and they said that, they didn't say this, so and so objected, so they answered – it's very boring.

MI I'm trying to trace your own turn towards historical questions.

IB No, I'll tell you. In these discussions – I'll tell you in a moment – in these discussions which are entirely UN-historical, I took as much part as anybody else. I made it, because it was about – I wasn't going to talk about myself, Austin and Ayer were two bitter antagonists locked in a perpetual struggle. That gave it a certain nip, you see?

MI But you said earlier, you defended one proposition ...

IB Well just in order to show that I took part in the discussion. I went to a paper given by Russell in Cambridge when he went back to philosophy. It was quite late, in the thirties. I went with Austin which I would, he knew he was going to read this paper which rather excited us, and he – it was called the Limits of Empiricism, it was a new line. He produced an example which I can't remember which I then – which is really his story rather than mine – but I then went on – you see logical positivism was then beginning to be dominant. That meant the propositions were either empirical or logical tautology. It was either, I mean logically deductive or they

were really too fine to be experienced. Now the proposition that I used to keep on – I used to bring it up – that yellow is more like red than it is like blue, is not the proposition that follows from any definition, because you can learn what these things are by pointing. You can't define colours anyway but the problem whether you could or not, there was no logical premise for it is followed deductively.

MI But it is a true statement?

IB It's not only true but irrefutable, and you don't verify the experience because once is enough. You don't say, 'One day maybe, we can't tell, it may be blue or turn out to be more like yellow than it is.' It wouldn't mean anything. What I mean by yellow, what I mean by red, what I mean by blue has a fixed relationship in the sort of chart of colours. This seemed to me a priori, [claps] not a priori but anyway – and not so much a priori as incorrigible. And that was denied by everybody who wanted to say all propositions were either calculable and rather logical in structure, rather deductive, or had to be verified by experience. Then I used to go on and on pressing and it did become something, it entered the literature in the end. And it's – I can't remember what it's called, it's got a name – incorrigible position of a certain type and so on. More or less categorical statements. It's called conceptual truth, not empirical nor logical. All right. So that contribution I constantly ... Another thing which – I won't bore you with the particular [MI No, I'm asking the questions, I want to know] it has nothing to do with the history of ideas. Another proposition was that it is not true that all singular propositions could be either verified directly or could follow from general propositions, could be made probable, which is an ordinary rational proposition. If you say something is something, either you see it, you verify it and there it is; or you say it's a general proposition that affects all bodies, all water, all bodies gravitate, this is a body. How do you know that all bodies gravitate? It follows from something else maybe. In the end it rests on



observation, probability, coherence, anything you like; and all these empirical tests. I would say, 'No. There are propositions which are not true, they're completely irrational and one needn't believe them. They have no evidence for them, they couldn't have, but they have meaning. The great thing, problem with meaning, not truth.' You see, really meaning. I said, 'If this horse had been called Charlemagne, it would have won.' You say, 'Well why would it have won?' I give no reason. It just would have won. Now, it's counterfactual. Counterfactual propositions on a whole are deducible from general propositions. If this horse would have been defeated because it was weaker than the other horses, if some reasons were given. I give no reason. It's perfectly irrational and I'm convinced it would have won. I bet on this horse because it's called Charlemagne and I'm quite – and then you see it doesn't run and I said, 'It would have won.' How do you know? I don't know but I assert it. How do you verify that proposition? Well, you say that there are no general propositions, or the general propositions which it follows are too weak. They may be too weak, but that's not the point. I think it means something by itself to hold general propositions. I'm not talking about that, you see? In other words, there's something funny about hypothetical, unfulfilled conditionals that's counterfactual. That also got into the literature in a big way. After I abandoned philosophy, it had a career.

MI [laughs] You regard it as a kind of child of yours?

IB I regard myself as a secret pioneer. Nobody knows that. I didn't write it down – as a secret pioneer of this – I didn't go on very long about it but it became something, anyhow. It's now imaginative, about possible worlds and possible things in them and all kinds of things of that sort. But I got it going on with these people, it never got outside the walls of All Soul's. But someone of them then gave it to ...

MI But you never got it down on paper in any extended way? [IB Never. Never, never] Do you regret that?

IB No, I don't think particularly. I have no sense of copyright. Then what else? [pause] I used to complain about phenomenalism, which I was against. That's the proposition that nothing exists except sense data. That if you say something like there were dinosaurs in the world, it means if you had been there and were like you are now, you would have seen a dinosaur. I didn't believe it meant that, I thought it meant there were dinosaurs whether you were there or not, but even if you hadn't been there, and even if you had been there and hadn't seen it [laughs] and so on: and that I used to defend. Mainly anti-positivism, the great thing was it was against Freddie Ayer, that's what – and he was the only positivist of a hundred per cent we had. He got it from Vienna, he got it from Schlick; he thought he got it from Wittgenstein, he got it from Schlick and other people in Vienna in 1932, in the autumn when he went there. [MI And he never let go] And he spread the doctrine. Yes, he did let go in the end, not not for – I thought there was something wrong with that. And there is indeed a footnote about me, my objection, in *Language, Truth and Logic* which is a great manifesto. I don't think I earned much more than footnotes. He was never a first-class philosopher, never. He was quite a good tutor and enjoyed teaching. He never taught for less than an hour and a half, he was [?] intelligent.

MI Do you regret that you weren't a better philosopher?

IB Yes, yes, I was sorry not to be better than I was. I envied those who – but not very strongly, because I had lots of other interests. I was quite happy, I mean, I had a full life, you see? But I would have been glad to have been much cleverer than I was. **I knew that I wasn't first-rate. I knew I was good enough, to take part – but I was quite respected. I wasn't despised, but I was one of the brethren.**

MI Among the brethren, who of your time do you think was the best philosophical mind?

IB: Without a doubt, Austin. Cleverest man I ever knew, apart from Keynes, whom I didn't know at all well. Very clever man. Somewhat negative, somewhat [...], very, very clever man of the rigorous kind. Became a great friend. All my life I've been bound by ties of friendship. I was never frightened by him.

MI I find that odd because your picture of him is antipathetic in certain ways. You obviously deeply admired him, philosophically, but I have a much stronger sense of a radically different temperament [IB Well yes, it is true] and a [habit?] of mind. [IB But all the same] What drew you together?

IB Pace and – he came to All Soul's, you see, after a year and I used to talk to him about philosophy every morning from breakfast till lunch if I didn't have pupils. And that taught me more than I ever learned from anybody, that itself is enough. He was entirely honest, he was very vain, [...] rigorous, and extremely kind by nature. I thought he was admirable, he really was dedicated to his subject; and very sceptical about himself.

MI What do you think he liked about you?

IB God knows, God knows, just felt me to be sympathetic. He thought I was honest and adequately intelligent, sufficiently intelligent to be an interlocutor. I think he had a certain respect for honesty, that on the whole I was. And I used to ask him questions which he quite enjoyed. He could talk freely to me, that's the thing. He was a difficult man, with very few friends, very locked up. For some reason it worked chemically, and he found me very familiar, could talk to me easily about his plans, about himself with no difficulty. He wasn't exactly familiar with people; with me, he was very much tremendously at ease. He talked about music, he talked about politics. He went to Russia, liked that because people were so rigorous and austere and rather fanatical. It wasn't quite like that, we didn't – very long. Yes, he was very terrifying at Magdalen

as a fellow, he kept them in order. He was a tremendous disciplinarian. I was never in the least afraid of him, never put down by him and he chatted to me easily as he did not ...

MI You didn't feel a sense of intellectual inferiority in relation to him?

IB Yes, but I didn't mind that [MI It didn't bother you?] I thought he a much cleverer man than me. If he said something, I paid respect to it more than I would to my own view. I defended my views but he used to get the better of me and then I would accept his views quite a lot. He always understood what one meant, he never made one translate into his own particular lingo. He was the only philosopher I knew who did not have a formula. With Freddie Ayer it had to be positivist formula; with Ryle, similarly. I mean one had to translate your proposition into the kind of language they liked. They said, 'You mean so and so,' and then said it in their words. Well, you would try to adapt yourself to what they were saying. With Austin, he understood you immediately and talked human language, such as you understood totally. Ordinary English from the beginning, there wasn't a particular vocabulary which was tied to a particular doctrine.

MI In an extraordinary sense, the nuance of ordinary language [ ] confidence in its subtlety.

IB Certainly, certainly. But above all he talked your language perfectly easily. When you said something, he answered exactly your language without any difficulty because he had no addiction to particular ...

MI Isaiah, I wanted to talk a little bit about the biographical thread. You go through ...

IB Well, I was going to tell you about the history of ideas. That was purely accident. Two things happened. One was a Russian called

Rachmilevich whom I've never talked to you about. [MI No] Right. He was a dominant influence on me [MI Say that again? Rachmilevich?] I know, not easy. He's a name I acknowledge in my book on Karl Marx; you'll find it spelt there: R-a-c-h-m-i-l. Rachmil is a Hebrew name, it's a Jewish name. He was called – what was his first name? Lemchen is what his parents called him, in German, but his real name was Solomon. [MI Where did you meet him?] In London. He was a Russian Jew, fifteen years or so older than me. His career was simple. He came from Riga, my town, knew my family. He'd been to four or five German universities before the first world war. He studied Kant, and philosophy in general. He could read musical scores – he was deeply interested in music. He knew a great deal about composers, conductors and players. He was one of the most, in that sense, interesting people I knew. He came to London because – as a refugee. It's typical of him, that when they left Russia, they went via Constantinople; he sat in the garden because they were waiting for an English visa, reading Eddington. [*laughter*] Then in 1919 or '18, whenever it was, reading Eddington in English, which he had learned, and suddenly found that a sound was going round him, suddenly stopped. He realised that he was sitting in a Synagogue; they were all saying Psalms and they thought he had a prayer book when it came to his turn. [*claps*] He was reading Eddington's last book at that time, which had to do with Einstein, I think. He knew mathematics, he knew some physics. He came to London. He was a social democrat, a Menshevik, and he used to talk to workers in Riga. He wore a beard – a bearded Menshevik talking to workers on crossed logs in the outskirts of Riga about the Seventh Menshevik Congress, you see? Now, when he came to London, he lodged with a cousin of his, who was a timber merchant whom my father knew, who was very sort of – a tremendous businessman who made and lost fortunes, called Shalit (it's a well-known Riga timber name), for whom he worked by studying the English law: gave him legal advice, used to get things up. It wasn't really very helpful. He was his [Schalit's] wife's cousin, and so they gave him lodging. and he worked in his office. He wasn't terribly interested. He was

tremendously ingenious and tremendously sophisticated, and brought all these gifts to bear on the business. Not very useful. Every Saturday afternoon he went to the British Museum [*slap*], where he read till seven [*slap*]. What he read I can't tell you, but every Saturday afternoon, one o'clock till seven, he read for six hours, steadily. He went to every concert there was in London. He sat in the gallery, leant forward to look at the conductor. You could see this figure, leaning forward prominently.

Well, I met him – God knows – in the house of these timber merchants whom my parents knew and he began talking to me about something. I was fifteen, sixteen: I was a schoolboy. And he began talking about Russian literature. Well, I saw I had an unusual man before me, so I began talking to him. He then began telling me about Kant and about [other] philosophers, and I only half understood. But I *was* fascinated, and I went on knowing him until his dying day. He talked about physics, he talked about mathematics, he talked about everything in the world. He was a pure amateur, he'd never taught anywhere or anything. During the war he made friends with a man, an independent Labour Member [of Parliament] called Horabin, whose speeches he wrote, just like that. He did everything. I mean the point was he was the most generalised intellectual I ever met.

When he came to Oxford and he looked at Maurice Bowra's translations, he pointed out certain errors, I regret to say, and Bowra said, 'I don't wish to meet him. He's a one-man demolition squad.' [*laughter*] But David Cecil, for example, thought he was delightful, and Stuart Hampshire thought he was delightful: so he got on amongst intellectuals, easily. He was not very beautiful. He had a bad end: I think he had a brain fever; he went off his head. In the end he did go mad, began writing love letters to seven or eight ladies at the same time. [MI When did he die?] I think in the fifties, late fifties I would say. But I used to ask him to come and see me in Oxford.

MI But he was an influence in your turn towards Russian literature?

IB In this sense, in the first – in every respect. First of all he turned me towards philosophy by explaining what they were about. I only half understood. but I began to have some inkling. Secondly, he talked to me about Russian literature. Thirdly, he talked about Marx, because he was a Marxist, of sorts, and explained that Lenin betrayed the Revolution. I thought [?] wrong with him, quite simple. Plekhanov he made me read, you see? Fourthly, he made me talk about music, talk about conductors, talk about differences of styles of conductors, talk about composers, talk about what Bach would have said if he had lived now, what he would have said about jazz. He would have said, ‘Das ist eine Teifelsmusik’ [‘That is devil’s music’]. [MI *laughs*] But he would have been interested, you see?

He went to Sicily for his holidays and lectured to the Sicilians on philosophy in Italian. He was an extraordinary man. He came to nothing. He didn’t write a line, and he died poor and neglected, although his relations kept him going. I used to see him, but in the end, as I say, he began to suffer mentally, and that was the end of that. But he was very amusing. The point about him was that he was very witty and terribly funny; and when you said things to him, he would say, ‘Vait a moment, vait a moment, I vill answer. Vait a moment, not so fast, vait a moment. [*laughter*] Now, Kant says ...’ – we talked in Russian, of course – ‘???’.’ And then he explained to me what Husserl was about, what Husserl’s disciples were about. He was a tremendous polymath. But he had a sharp brain and a wonderful imagination and I owe him a very great deal. That’s why I thank him in the thing on Marx. [MI Yes, I’m sorry I didn’t notice that, I missed that.] No, no, nobody knows that unless they’re told. But he was a genuine influence and partly kept my Russian going from the age of sixteen, seventeen. I didn’t talk much Russian until then, but with him I did talk. He had a strong Yiddish accent, which he must have got from his parents.

But he was a clever boy – I mean he went to these German universities; gives [sc. gave] very good descriptions of Heidelberg, Freiburg, one year in each, as people did, or a term in each. He wandered about. He told me about lecturers, what Hermann

Cohen was like, what – I don't know – Windelband, all these well-known names. He knew all about [K?] Fischer and what Trotsky made of [K?] Fischer. He was an extraordinary figure, I tell you. Not many people knew him. I was the only person he could talk to like that, in the world.

MI And I would have thought also, a kind of opening outwards from the inwardness of Oxford in a sense, offset ...

IB: Certainly. But he was the first person who gave me a taste for ideas in general, interesting ideas *telles quelles* – as such. And then, you see ...

MI Already, in St Paul's?

IB Towards the end of St Paul's, last two years. I didn't see him very much, I saw him – what? In those days, five, six times a year. But when I was at Oxford, more frequently. I used to look him up, we used to have lunch ??? and on Saturday afternoons I'd find him in the British Museum.

Then the Warden of New College, Fisher, in 1933, asked me to write a book on Karl Marx for the Home University Library. It was first offered to Laski, who refused. It was then offered to Frank Pakenham, Lord Longford, who refused. It was then offered to Cole, who refused. It was then offered to four or five other people, I expect. In the end, in despair, they offered it to me, I was in my first year teaching philosophy quite [...] – this would have been the end of '33 – I'd begun at the end of '32 – and I thought, well – I'd read a little bit of Marx because I had to in PPE, where *Kapital* was a set text: I could never get through it, but I read a certain amount of it – obviously Marx is [going to be] a great deal more important, not less. If I don't write about it I'll never read it, and I'll never know what they're talking about – just as I haven't read Freud, and I shall never know, because it's too lengthy, too boring, no good, which thrilled his reader. So I said rather yes, all right. Then I began reading the forerunners, and I began reading the French



Encyclopaedists, beginning in the 1750s. That gave me a great taste: I thought they were wonderful. And Plekhanov wrote about them in a very appetising way. Plekhanov is a mordant and extremely clear and rather sharp writer [...] of all the Marxists by far the most readable. I read Engels a bit too, but mainly So I read Helvétius and Holbach and Diderot and Rousseau and everybody. I'd read Rousseau before but erratically in Oxford. Then I read various Germans such as like God knows who – Rodbertus, von Stein, if that's the word, Lasalle – and that gave me a general taste. And finally of course in London I went to the London Library and by pure accident stumbled on Herzen, because there's a very good Russian collection, (MI: yes) you see, done by this man Hagbide Wright who was a Scandinavian and Slavonic scholar. Now it isn't; I mean, since 1940 it's not much good, but so long as he collected it's better than the Museum, the British Museum, in some ways; and I knew vaguely Herzen, I knew there was a bearded sage – nineteenth-century, heavy stuff – and then I saw his name, so out of pure curiosity I took out one volume, (MI: and was enchanted) and never looked back. He became a central figure in my life. Well that – if you take all this in combination... (MI: This was happening 1933/34/35?). '33 to the War. Then I began lecturing on these French Encyclopaedists. Well, nobody took the slightest interest in that in Oxford, but I got an audience. God knows where they came from. I told them all about Holbach, all about [...] and the French [...] Cordorcet, you see? And that was a series of lectures which was intellectually not very taxing, but to me of interest. And that's how I got into that world, simply in order to write a book on Marx – which I wrote and wrote and wrote and wrote – the original book on Marx was twice the length than what appeared, and then I was forced to shorten it. That was agony of the most ghastly kind, because I couldn't leave out chapters because it was chronological. Drops of blood. It's fearful that I didn't keep what I threw away. (MI: No?) No. Still. (MI: It's a shame.) [...] I think you have to go. (MI: Yes.) And I must dress.

## MI TAPE 7

Conversation date: 8 February 1994

Date transcribed:

Transcriber: Kate Payne

Subjects covered:

Burgess, MacLean 1934-56

Washington 1940

Alsop

1929 Drunk at Corpus

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MI: This is 8th February 1994 and I'm in Headington House in the library.

IB: No, no, not in the library.

MI: I'm not in the library, what am I in?

IB: The TV room.

MI: Isaiah's sitting inside the TV room in a brown ...

IB: Brown woollen suit.

MI: Brown woollen suit and very nice brown polished Oxfords and we're going to talk about the spies, if that's OK with you?

IB: Perfectly.

MI: The first one you meet is Burgess. When do you recall first meeting him?

IB: I'm no good on dates. He was then an undergraduate at Cambridge. He was about two or three years younger than me, it must have been I should guess, 1934.

MI: You have a memory of already being at All Souls?

IB: Oh yes, indeed yes, been at All Souls for some time. How did I meet him? I can tell you. He was a bright young man at Cambridge and a particular friend of Dadie Rylands who was famous English tutor at Cambridge, a sort of Bloomsbury figure in Cambridge and connected with it, in love with Virginia Woolf, famous English tutor, still alive – 91 or 2.

MI: I remember Dadie from Kings.

IB: He was a great friend of Maurice Bowra, and no doubt when bright young men appeared at either of their tables they passed them on to each other, they must have come with a recommendation from Dadie. He knew Keynes, he knew Forster, he knew all the Kings' lights, though I didn't know it he was 100% homosexual, and he was very bright, and I met him at lunch at Maurice Bowra's, had no idea who he was, but he was extremely agreeable to talk to, intelligent, amusing, and we made friends at lunch. I sat next to him and I thought he was very agreeable to talk to – we talked about books, talked about people and I thought he was probably one of the – but I liked him

MI: Did you sense immediately that he was homosexual?

IB: No I never knew that about anybody. I had to be told, no I did not, nor anything else in particular. Certainly not [ ]

MI: Because Goronwy Rees' memory of Burgess was that he knew he was homosexual from the very first moment they were alone together because he made a slight pass at him.

IB: No pass was made at me, I'm sorry to say, I feel rather insulted. No homosexual ever made a pass at me. It's rather shocking, I think. It doesn't say much for me. No, no he didn't ruin it.

MI: Why do you think that is? Because you gave off such stern...?

IB: Oh no, no, physically unattractive. The truth is perfectly simple, nothing to do with being stern! Mind you, homosexuals always know each other when they meet. Goronwy was not homosexual, he was what was called by Maurice Bowra 'normally sex pansy', yet he liked women and homosexuals liked him and occasionally out of politeness he probably went to bed with them, but he wasn't really homosexual, didn't do it regularly or with any particular pleasure but occasionally allowed himself.

MI: You had lunch with Guy Burgess?

IB: Lunch at Wadham, with the Dean of Wadham I think it was, and after that – I vaguely remember lunch at all – I just remember that it happened, after which I don't think I ever met him, no I think then I next met him at lunch with the late Lord Rothschild in Cambridge, Victor, in what was it called, the house in Cambridge, I met Victor in 32, and we made friends and I used to go and stay with him. He was married to his first wife – what was the house called? – Brighton(?) Hall or Pythagoras it was also called for some reason, it was shaped like that and he was there, and by that time I rather think that Blunt was there too and [ ]. So I saw him again and again thought he was very agreeable, cosy in a way and very jolly and I took to him rather. Then after that, he...

MI: What was it you liked about him exactly? Could it just be his quickness ...?

IB: Charm, cleverness, and agreeable bright intelligent talk about books and about people, particularly these distinguished people. His descriptions of Keynes or of Forster were amusing to listen to;

and he was bright in the sense that you could discuss anything. I would never talk to him about politics in all my life, never, which is startling, but true.

MI: It is startling. Why?

IB: Because he was a notorious Communist. I never knew he was a Communist, not even an agent.

MI: He was a notorious communist and then you said you never knew he was one.

IB: No exactly, notorious retrospectively.

MI: But not at the time.

IB: Not known to me, everyone else knew. When I say notorious, nobody didn't know except me. I knew he was left wing, probably strongly left of centre, young, left wing, Cambridge undergraduate, which was normal. Well so was I in a way, I mean, anti-Franco and so on. **I packed parcels for Spain quite enthusiastically**, but I didn't feel him to be somewhat specially left wing. I never knew he was a member of the Party. I don't know that I even knew if he was Marxist but I think that's false, I think he did talk to me, not about Marx, but he used one or two Marxist phrases. Yes, but I mean not specially, not more than [ ] and when he escaped I was *totally* surprised – I mean completely – and **not only did I not know he was an agent, but I had no suspicion of him being a member of the Party, though most people did.**

MI: That's getting ahead. You meet him at Victor Rothschild's, did you spend a weekend together with Burgess?

IB: No, no I didn't. He just came to a meal. He was at Cambridge. Then I heard about him, he didn't get a proper degree, he couldn't write, he could never write anything.

MI: So he got an aegrotat degree?

IB: He did, the FO got that wrong when [ ] about it in the House of Commons, I can't remember by whom, I should think Macmillan, they said he got a First. Not so, he got an aegrotat then he rang me up say about once a year, maybe twice every three years, long intervals, saying 'It's Guy, I'm in Oxford, are you doing anything this evening, can I come and see you after dinner?' Yes. 'Can I bring my Swedish friend?' By that time I knew, I would say 'No, I don't want to see your Swedish friend, leave him behind at the Mitre.' He would then come at about nine, bring a bottle of whisky, would drink the whole thing slowly ...

MI: Did he come drunk?

IB: No, no, he came sober, or at least I didn't notice.

MI: And did he look disordered?

IB: No, no, no, he looked as he always looked. He was rather ill-dressed, slightly dishevelled, that he was. I never knew about his eating garlic which everyone else complained of, my olfactory sense is rather weak and I never – no, he wasn't drunk. He was a bit, I mean, not exactly a tramp, something of a hobo, he was obviously on an adventure of some sort. I realised it then, but very agreeable, very amusing. We then drank his whisky and we would talk.

MI: He would then at that period be working for the BBC in London?

IB: No no. His first visit to me was when he was doing the City Letter, advising on stocks and shares to various persons who wished to invest.

MI: Including the Rothschilds?

IB: Victor's mother. She apparently took his letter. I never saw the letter, it wasn't sent to me naturally. Where he got his information from I don't know but I now think Communist agents in Argentina, Mexico who'd asked for some information from old friends. They didn't last very long. Then he would turn up, we would talk from nine o'clock, half past nine till midnight, he would gradually become more and more sozzled in those days, drunk, then he would tell me he wanted to go to bed, I would find him a bed, next door here in the College and next day by seven am he'd be gone, long before I got up. What did we talk about? Never politics which now seems to be astonishing, literature, books, [Cottrell?] I think was the man who wrote 'Companion to English Literature in the 17th/18th Centuries' who was a friend of his; we talked about all the arts, the Compendia, article from his book, we talked about Forster, we talked about novels, George Eliot, and gossip.

MI: Any Russians? did you talk about Turgenev? Chekhov?

IB: No, no, not at all. He never liked Russians, he didn't like Moscow either. No, no never, no entirely English. No French, no German. We'd talk about people we knew and their private lives and very agreeable it was, not very serious, but exhilarating. Then a year would pass, a year and a half, he would ring up again and the same thing would happen again. At that level one could know him quite comfortably. The idea even then, on giving him material [to post?] seemed mad to me. I don't think he would be but nobody ever suggested it. He moved on from the City Letter – no, sorry I'm getting it wrong – I don't think I knew him. The first job he had after Trinity was in the Conservative Central Office, it was never admitted by anybody but I happen to know. His Colleagues were a man called Stannard, whose real name was Steinhardt whom I knew nothing about and Lord Longford, then Frank Pakenham, who was a conservative Sinn Fein, pure Sinn Fein of a very stout

... there was a conservative party [ ] became a Don at Oxford; but he was in the central office. When I mentioned these things to Frank Longford, not best pleased, didn't want to go on talking about it. He was caught up with – oh yes, the head of the office who was a man called Neville Chamberlain. He was obviously planted but how could I know that? So that was his first job.

MI: Is this '34, '35?

IB: '33 – all right '34, '35, very early, no, no you're right, I don't know when he took schools, '35, '36 – – mid 30's. I can't tell you exactly about dates. Anyway his first job was the conservative ... I think he was caught up in some way but that didn't last. I think they got rid of him for drunkenness or telling lies or something, the usual reasons. Then he started the City Letter and after that, it may have been simultaneous, and then he began working for a man called Captain ??Plug, MP, conservative, who I think had shares in, or owned Radio Luxembourg, nothing with the BBC just after the war. Never as far as I know, nothing before the war. Then he knocked about, got money wherever he could, I never knew exactly what he was doing, he used to tell me now and then but I didn't listen very much, he used to come, he dropped in twice before the war, maybe 3 times.

MI: Then there are letters, because in your incoming correspondence there are letters from Guy saying I've been involved in my usual orgies in Soho and the I retired to some suburb to recover, that kind of thing.

IB: Quite. I knew he was orgiastic, I knew he was homosexual by then, no question, Swedish friend! And then I remember very well an extraordinary evening given by Felix Frankfurter who was, I suppose, he was the visiting Eastman Professor in Oxford, that must have been '34 and that was an evening commemorating something like – what is that famous American festival which happens in the autumn?



MI: Thanksgiving.

IB: Thanksgiving. And he gave a dinner party, Frankfurter did.

MI: Marion and Felix would have given a party on Thanksgiving?

IB: Marion and Felix, yes. They were here and they gave a dinner party because I came to it, Maurice Bowra, Roy Harrod, Sylvester Gates who was a great friend of mine who was then a lawyer in London who had been a pupil of Felix's at the Harvard law school and met and became a great friend of Edna [Wilton?] at that time; and then came Goronwy because Felix must have met him somewhere, liked him and I think – I don't think it was me, I think it was he brought Guy Burgess with him [ ] I think they became friends as early as that; and we had a very jolly dinner – and Freddie Ayer, and everyone got rather drunk except me ...

MI: You never got drunk?

IB: Once in my life. Do you wish to hear about that? Do you want me to interpolate that?

MI: Some time we'd better- perhaps you should interpolate it briefly now.

IB: It's not a very long story. I never really touched drink because it disagreed with me, it made me ill or I couldn't sleep after and so on, I didn't know why but it was so. One day I was sitting in Corpus somebody's party, on the floor in the summer, and we drank fruit cup which didn't feel like alcohol but there was a lot of rum I think in it, maybe gin, and I drank two glasses of it and didn't feel anything and then I smoked a pipe in those days and got up in order to get a box of matches from the mantelpiece, and found I couldn't get to the mantelpiece, I always went somewhere else. By that time I knew I was drunk, I wasn't so drunk as not to know, I

kept veering away from the mantelpiece, I couldn't walk straight. Well, I thought about that, I sat down again, so I'd better leave the party. I was having dinner with Goronwy in the George restaurant which was a smart restaurant that evening, a party of about six and at about seven I suppose I must have got up and tottered out of the room, I don't remember tottering but I must have done. I wore a hat in those days even then and as I walked down the High Street I bumped into people, and every time I bumped I remember very well I would give elaborate apologies that drunkards of my kind ... saying, 'Dear madam I would never have dreamt of bumping into you had I any control of my body, I assure you. I do hope you will not think it an offensive act on my part but I fear I'm not fully in control otherwise this wouldn't have happened.' I went on apologising in various elaborate courteous ways and they all looked at me as though I was mad and gave me a wide berth. I got as far as the George successfully, sat at a table, Goronwy opposite. I couldn't see him great walls stretched out between us. Then I drank about two gallons of water after which the darkness disappeared and I was perfectly sober and terribly depressed. I then went to bed, and then I never drank again. Now back to Burgess, this dinner party at Frankfurters. On that occasion there was a dispute about whether Wittgenstein had said 'Whereof we cannot speak one must be silent,' whether it was said once or twice in the Tractatus and Freddie Ayer said once and Sylvester Gates said twice and Burgess said 'I don't know what it means.' He didn't volunteer and [ ] his friend talked about it.

MI: Did you have an opinion on this question?

IB: None, I didn't know, no I didn't.

MI: Because you hadn't read the Tractatus at that point?

IB: No I hadn't, I'm sure I hadn't. In the end Sylvester Gates proved to be right, Ayer was wrong. He said it in the introduction and again in the text, that I remember. I don't know, we just drank

the health to various persons and so on and we all got up and drank the health of Mr Justice Holmes who was nearly ninety at that time and that kind of thing. But I remember that Burgess was there because he was someone who didn't really belong at that party but he was very friendly with everybody and they all liked him and he was sort of one of us, very much. And [ ] also got rather drunk on that occasion. And then he would drop in at these infrequent intervals and then I heard, in about 1937, that he joined a thing called Britannia Youth which was an organisation founded by the Mayor of Hove, whoever he was, to take English schoolboys to Nuremberg for the Parteitag which was straight pure Nazi. Course, they planted him there too but I took it as Fascist, I couldn't know him. Mind you, he never came to see me then, made no effort on his part so I didn't have to avoid him [ ] he never had a moral basis to his life. But one thing was clear to me was that he was man with no moral basis to his life whatever, not any. He was agreeable and everything but moral basis, no. I never heard any remark which so to speak entailed moral judgements; the others were social, personal, aesthetic. No, [he] never said somebody was very dishonest or a scoundrel or whatever it might be.

MI: But that didn't stop you liking him?

IB: No, he was perfectly agreeable company, he was my friend, I liked anybody who I felt sort of exhilarated by, all my life that's been true. Now, what happened then was that I didn't see him and that was that. I heard no more about him. The next meeting was a little more dramatic – well dramatic, different –and that happened in June 1940. Now the war had already got into a hot phase. I had [ ] at Oxford teaching, indeed examining, in PPE. I was not offered a job by the government because I was born abroad and that wasn't allowed.

MI: Did that rankle? I've seen that in your correspondence. Did it rankle that you were barred(?) an Alien ...

IB: No it didn't rankle for one moment. I was sorry that they wouldn't offer me one because all my friends were in governments departments, there was a war on and I would have liked to be. The fact that I wasn't appointed I rather regretted, I was sorry, not exactly irritated, but rather sad about that, I minded but not minded being a foreigner, I didn't feel it made me more foreign than I had been before. And then I remember I had a friend in the Department of Education who did offer me a job and I accepted it – no, I don't think I did accept it. I went to Fisher who was the Warden of New College and said, 'I've been offered this rather lowly post.' 'No, no,' he said. 'Don't. You're more use here.' In the end I got a letter from my friend saying it was no good, he couldn't have given it to me, they'd looked into me, I was born in Riga, no good. There was nothing else against me except foreign birth and I think on the whole that was true of most people who were born abroad. I think it may have been relaxed in the course of the war, but anyhow, 1940. Well then there was a tap on my door in New College. I was sitting in a rather depressed state because the war was going so badly – that was about the time when I read my paper at Cambridge which I think I've told you about.

MI: The one in front of Wittgenstein?

IB: Yes, round about then, came back from Cambridge. Tap on the door. As you know, Dons are like prostitutes, doors are not locked except deliberately and a man came in, it was Burgess. He said, 'Look we have not met for some time, I know what you would think of me.'

MI: Meaning?

IB: 'I know you heard that I was a member of this pro-Nazi group. You must despise me and loathe me and – I can imagine what your feelings are. But of course I am terribly unstable. It suddenly came over me, this. I suddenly thought: Everything in England [was] very dreary, and, you know, the Liberal party didn't exist, the

Labour Party was totally useless and dull, the Conservatives were a bit better than that, a little bit tougher – I rather respect them, in a way – but I thought: At least the Nazis knew where they were going; it was real, **they were doing something, there was something modern and new.**’ Anyway, we chatted away like this. ‘Anyway I don’t expect you to forgive me or anything else, I’ve come on a quite different errand.’ What is that? ‘Let me tell you. I am now in the Intelligence, I’m now in MI6’ – I don’t know how that happened, too – ‘I’m in touch with all kinds of people, among other people, Harold Nicolson who is a great friend of mine. He’s as you know in the Ministry of Information, he’s No 2. At that time he was an MP and the Head of it was then Tom [ ] and he wants to know if you would agree to become British Press Attach, to Moscow because you know Russian and they think it might be rather useful. Nobody there speaks any Russian, Cripps doesn’t know the language, nobody there knows anything.’ So I said, ‘Well, I will take any post the government offered me,’ and I thought for a moment and said, ‘But I must say there’s something a little peculiar about this job. The idea of getting bits of British propaganda into Pravda during the Russo-German pact does seem to me rather eccentric.’ He said, ‘Oh well never mind. Go and talk to Harold.’

MI: But just to make it clear; Burgess is saying the idea is coming from Harold when in fact the idea comes from Burgess?

IB: Yes. One could [ ] at the time though. [ ] It was nothing to do with Intelligence.

MI: But was that your reaction at the time, that it was an attractive but deeply implausible post?

IB: Yes. I then went to see Harold Nicolson. He was sitting in the Senate House of London University which was where the Ministry of Information was, and he said, ‘Oh well, yes,’ he got this from Guy of course, ‘I think it’s a very good idea, you know the language

well.' And I said, 'But **Press Attaché** – I mean, being attached to the Soviet Press?' He said, 'Oh well never mind, none of us knows Russian, you'll be very useful there, there aren't many Russian speakers, I'm sure you'll be awfully good, I think it's a rather good idea.' And I could see he got it from Guy but he didn't say that. 'Now I can't appoint you because it has to be done jointly with the Foreign Office, so would you mind going to see a rather good looking young man, handsome young man called Gladwyn Jebb, he is the Private Secretary of the Permanent Under Secretary, Harry Cadogan and talk to him about it.' Off I went.

MI: This is June '40 still?

IB: Late June. So off I went to see the good looking young man whom I had never met before who I later became a friend of and he said, 'Harold talked to me about this, it's a jolly good idea. Now look, we can't send you by Norwegian tramp to Russia because they're all sunk these days. There are two ways of going, one is via South Africa and Persia, the other is via America and Japan. Which do you prefer?' Very pleasant type risk! I didn't ask what I was doing or anything of that sort, it was all fixed up, they knew what they were doing. I said 'Well if it's all the same to you I think I'd rather go through America and Japan, I don't in the least want to see South Africa and I don't all that much want to go through [ ]. He said, 'OK, we'll fix that up. Right, now look, only one thing here, I forgot to add that Guy's going with you if you don't mind, he's got his own stuff to do, nothing to do with you, [ ] you needn't know anything about it at all. But you'll both be carrying bags, diplomatic bags, that's the best way of doing it.' So then he said, 'I'll get you a Visa [ ] will fix that up, I think his office is probably better on that.' So I said, 'What kind of Visa? I think I might need something special. I was born in Riga and I'm not sure that I'd be really safe in the Soviet Union because there is a clause about being Naturalised, that your country of Naturalisation can't protect you in your country of origin unconditionally.' He said, 'Oh well, yes, all right, though I can't really agree. Maisky gave a Visa to [ ] but

he was stopped in Rumania and couldn't go on, same sort of reason as you. No, no the man in Washington is the man, he's very much in with them, a man called [Nurmansky?] I think he must have been in the [ ] somewhere, his Visas work.' **All right, I heard all this through some, it was all new to me and, [...] I knew nothing about any of these things, and so I said, 'All right, I'll do anything you tell me', and behaved in my usual very obedient – [...] which is true of me in general, anxiety to please. So that was that. Then Guy said, 'Well, one thing, yes ...'.**

MI: Did Guy come with you when you went?

IB: No, no, solo. Then he said, 'Well, we'll fix that up'. I saw him again, I had lunch with him or something and he said – er – 'Passport, I think I can arrange that all right, give me your passport, and get the Visas all right, my office will look after it,' though they were forged, I knew. And these bags you have to carry, makes it a bit better for us, safer. I don't know what they will contain, stones, empty bottles I should think. There's a boat going called The Antonia, Cunard boat about fifteen thousand tons from Liverpool to Quebec, that's what you're going in. Meanwhile I rather think I'd like to take you to see a man called Colonel Grand(?)' – he was man in the Intelligence but I didn't know why I had to go and see him, but I did. Colonel Grand was a very stupid man. He said, 'Ah well you're going off to Russia with Guy here, you know there's a lot of business to be done there. The Achilles heel of these people is of course the Caucasus, that's where the oil comes from. If we can hit them there, that will be much more useful to us than anything else,' and that appeared to me to be total nonsense. However, that didn't last very long and that was that episode. Well, I told my parents, told various other people. I always felt it was bit queer, this whole thing, it was irregular.

MI: What was it about it that struck you as being irregular?

IB: The fact that I had been sent to Moscow as a Press Attaché, because I didn't think it was a real post, so why was I being sent, what would I do when I got there?

MI: Did you stop and examine your motives at any time and ask yourself why it is that Burgess disappears and the reappears and he has this fascist ...

IB: No, no, never. I always take things [ au pied de lettres?] when he said 'I am an unstable character' that's when (I?) become excited, that's when I thought yes, he is an unstable character, incapable of being a fascist, incapable of anything. That I knew. Guy – there was no loyalty in him, he could go from one thing to another, he was completely an unstable character. Nothing about him would surprise me altogether.

MI: Did anyone that you told this to attempt to dissuade you?

IB: No, nobody. I don't know who I told it to so I can't have told it to many people. Who did I know at that time in June 1940, most of them had gone. My parents knew.

MI: You didn't talk to Jenifer Hart for example?

IB: I may have done but I don't remember doing it. I wouldn't have concealed it. I may have chatted about it. I didn't say 'Burgess is coming with me on something of his own' – none of this. I wasn't told not to but I think vaguely the dream went on, about a fortnight it all took. And then I remember getting into a train with Burgess, seen off by some [ ] and we travelled very comfortably to Liverpool and then we got on to a boat. And I then thought I must tell somebody what I'm doing for I may never come back, somebody ought to know.

MI: This was the SS Antonia?



IB: This was the SS Antonia. But before it left harbour I must post letters, tell people. Well, I said, there's a man called Lionel Curtis in All Souls who wasn't a friend but he was a tremendous operator [ ] of a first class kind, great intriguer from the British Empire. I'll write to him. If he knows then steps can be taken for retrieving me, at least somebody can try. So I wrote him a letter. 'Dear Lionel, I don't really understand why I am going or what I am expected to do but I thought I had better tell you what is happening. We're going to Washington in order that I might get a Visa from [ ] and I thought perhaps if anyone ought to know, you ought to and you can tell members of the government should it be necessary what is happening. You are the most politically important person I know.' Roughly. I don't know what happened to that letter – well, that letter was intercepted by the Censorship. Letters from boats, even though they were in harbour were thought to be [ ] and he was interrogated, who I was and all this! He was frightfully displeased, thought I'd in some awful way compromised him, sort of [ ] somewhere. I remember when I saw him later he complained, but later, when I became important in Washington he suddenly totally changed his view and said how clever of me to have written to him. He was a time server if ever there was one. And then we got on to the boat, Burgess and I, it was not occupied ...

MI: Is this early July?

IB: Middle of July, we must have arrived end of July, I think, it took about ten days because we avoided icebergs. Burgess and I did not occupy the same cabin, I was in a cabin with a rather interesting man who was an Austrian of Jewish origin, I mean baptised, who was the head of the Economic department of the Austrian Foreign Office from the nineties. He was pretty old then, he was probably in his late seventies. He died later at a hundred and two. He was called ... he was a top economic official of the ... and then when the Nazi's came he thought he'd better get out. He walked across the Alps into Italy and the Italians arrested him at the frontier and he then sent a telegram to Mussolini whom he

knew and dealt with [ ] and Mussolini said – Benvenuto Amico Shuller, that was his name, so he was admitted to Italy. Then he came to England and the Foreign Office was very pleased to see him, he was a friend and might be useful. And then he was sent off to Washington, I suppose to help the English in some way, I don't know, I didn't see him after that ever.

MI: And it's not on this trip that you see Aline on the boat?

IB: No, no.

MI: This is a subsequent trip, much later.

IB: She wouldn't be on a boat coming from England. On this boat was Elizabeth Bergner, Lord Strathallan(?) now Lord Perth who became quite a friend, I think he was being sent as a semi Press Attach, to Washington because he had an American wife or whatever reason, I knew all of them and met one or two people, a couple of Queers

MI: But did you discuss your mission further with Guy on the boat?

IB: No, the mission was clear, Press Attach, in Moscow.

MI: And what did Guy say about his mission?

IB: Not a word. I knew he was a spy of some sort, MI6 – I knew what that meant. I wasn't going to ask him what he was going to do there. He obviously wanted to get there and I was the cover and it was entirely a plot by him sold successfully to all these worthy men. Let me now interpolate the following proposition. Nearly every job that Guy ever got, certainly from some date in the thirties, was arranged for him by Harold Nicolson who remained a loyal friend throughout presumably [ ] and no doubt he found him agreeable company as we all did, I mean certainly this was, but later

too when he came back [ ]. And he went on corresponding with him in Moscow; in his diaries you'll find an account of, I think, dining with Burgess and me in some restaurant after we all came back.

MI: You arrived in New York in early August 1940.

IB: Late July or early August. We arrived in Quebec, from Quebec we took a train to Montreal, from Montreal we took a plane to New York. In New York we stayed for two days for some reason and Guy went to see Michael Straight, the one you were asking about.

MI: In Arlington, Virginia.

IB: No, I think in New York.

MI: He was by then married?

IB: Can't tell you, I knew very little about him really, I met him once or twice but he was obviously an agent, too and that persuaded him to go. He said, 'I'm going to see Michael, Michael Straight.'

MI: How did you know Michael?

IB: I didn't.

MI: But you knew who he was.

IB: Yes I knew who he was, vaguely [ ] at Cambridge with him, maybe Guy told me. I think he was new to me, no I don't think I did know till he told me about him, and not all that much. Maybe I knew there was a character like that in Cambridge, maybe I didn't, that I can't tell you, it's comparatively unimportant. And I went for two days, I thought there was the only man I know in America is

Felix Frankfurter so I rang up his office in New York – in Washington, I think he was by this time at the Supreme Court, he came to Oxford twice then and also later in the thirties and we were great friends. And they said, no he's at a place called Heath, Massachusetts, and I said well, we arrived on a Saturday and Mr Shuller told me 'Don't go and see the Embassy on Sunday, no Embassy likes that.' So I thought all right, I'd never seen new York, I thought I might stay for two days, look around, no hurry and then I went to Heath. [ ] In Heath I met him [ ] and Archie MacLeish(?)

MI: Both for the first time?

IB: [ ] And (?) asked me a question about what I was doing and I explained that I was going to Moscow and he said 'Oh well, I know Crippsy well, I'm going to tell him it's awfully good.' He took to me in a big way. We chatted away and I thought he was an awfully nice man which he was and 'I'll write to him, I'll tell him, jolly lucky to have you. Would you like me to write to him?' He did and from then disasters began after that! And then I stayed in New York for two or three days and then to Washington where I knew John Foster who was my colleague at All Souls, a great friend, now at the Embassy as legal adviser, and Guy Burgess whom he also knew [ ]. We stayed together. Next day, Joe Alsop my friend came for lunch and I took to him and he took to me. He loathed Burgess partly because he wasn't wearing socks.

MI: That was the first time you met Alsop?

IB: Oh absolutely.

MI: And Burgess wasn't wearing socks – did Alsop comment on that?

IB: He certainly did, yes, he commented to me. However we got on very well and I began staying there with John Foster in

Georgetown. A question arose about my Visa to Russia. How can I get hold of [ ], that Burgess couldn't help with. So then about three days later ...

MI: Didn't Burgess need a Visa?

IB: Not for everyone, I didn't ask. Next I was told that Maisky no good and I should have asked about that, you're right, can't think why I didn't. Well what happened then was, about two days later he was recalled from London.

MI: Burgess was recalled?

IB: Yes. He was very displeased and irritated by this, didn't know what it meant but he couldn't do anything else, by his office, presumably by the Secret Service, and said, 'Will you come back too?' I said, 'No, I don't why you could, with your job, I have my job to do, I must continue to Moscow.' I didn't quite see why I should come back. I had not been sent for. Not very pleased but he did go back. Then I remember ...

MI: And did you see him, just to complete this (?), did you see him after August '40? Did you see him again in London during the war?

IB: Certainly. I saw him I think at least twice. I saw him, not very much, I saw him immediately after I came back from America which was October 1940 and I think, I rang him up or something happened and he and I had a little bit of lunch together.

MI: Which is in Nicolson's diaries.

IB: You will find that. By that time he'd already been appointed to the BBC in the News department. Well, I then had to get this Visa without telling you the story at great length, and then Cohen was a friend of Alsop and a friend of Frankfurter and they said he works for the Department of the Interior, he seems to have dealings with

the Russians. Would you like him to be introduced to you, and I made friends with him, very noble good character; and he knew Nurmansky(?) because of the Interior department under (?) were dealing with the Russians about great (?) and little (?), Islands between Alaska and (?). So he said 'Would you like to meet? I think I can arrange that.' Good, because I asked the Embassy if they could do something and they said No. I was [boggled] by the whole thing, it already seemed a bit odd to me. So I did go to lunch with Ben Cohen, no, with Oscar Chapman who was the Under Secretary of the Interior. (Pause in the tape)

MI: This is lunch at the Soviet Embassy

IB: Me and a friend of Cohen, Cohen assistant Chapman, high American politician

*Side B*

IB: There was a conversation that I remember. I said to Nurmansky ...

MI: In Russian?

IB: No. Everyone talked English. Nurmansky was an NQVD agent, I knew him quite well in his day, he later became Ambassador to Mexico and was killed in an air crash, whether deliberately or not, I couldn't tell, and I said to him, 'Why did you invade Finland?' – no, not at all Finland – 'Why did you annexe the Baltic States?' By this time it had happened obviously. And he said, 'Oh that's quite easy to answer. New deal for Latvia, New Deal for Estonia, New Deal for Lithuania. You will understand,' he said to Chapman and then Cohen, 'New Deal, these countries are under dictators. Naturally they want Democracy.' At that point fish was brought in and he said, 'This is a very rare fish, my government knows that I am a great gourmet. It comes from The Black Sea, it's quite difficult to [ ] tins and wrapped in a very special paper so it

preserves its freshness' At that point the Butler with long black whiskers, obviously a [ ] Butler said, 'It is Bass.' That embarrassed him, this song and dance. Afterwards we chatted about this and that and I left. And then I went back to the Embassy and I thought, well – I'm not sure about the journey – does the Foreign Office really want me to go on because I'd heard nothing, the Embassy got no instructions about what to do with me, whether to put me on a plane for California or anything. I had some money which I was given by Burgess, two hundred dollars or something, so I made the Embassy – I knew two people there very well, one was Foster, the other was a man called Tony Rumbold, Sir Anthony Rumbold, Bart. who was the second secretary, I knew him at Oxford, an old friend. I said, 'Would you find out from the Foreign Office? What do they want me to do, when and where and how, what are the arrangements? Do they pay for these cab fares [ ]?' And they sent a telegram and the answer was, 'It is not desired to employ Mr Berlin in this or any other capacity. He is free to stay in the United States or do anything else he wishes.' That was the telegram from Fitzroy Maclean [ ] friend, head of the – number two of the Northern Department which had never been told about this.

MI: The Northern Department of the Foreign Office?

IB: The Foreign Office, yes.

MI: So the refusal comes from the Foreign Office, not from Cripps directly?

IB: Nothing to do with Cripps, no. And then when I got back to England – as a matter of fact, Cripps did send them a message saying, 'We don't want Latvians here.'

MI: Did he?

IB: Yes.

MI: Good gracious!

IB: I met Cripps afterwards, I didn't tax him with it [ ] compromising, someone must have said that to him in the Embassy. He only knew I was coming because of unfortunately – Niebuhr, warm letter from Niebuhr saying I was a wonderful man and splendid in Moscow but he didn't protest, they didn't ask him, I was there already, they would have to sack me on the spot because they hadn't sent me, they didn't know anything about it, the whole thing was mysterious. There is in fact a file in the Foreign Office saying, 'Mr Berlin's Mission' which somebody interrupted at some point, it didn't go on, somebody in the Intelligence, a man called [S Heathcote?] who I knew at Oxford as a man who worked in Intelligence said he came across it, so he wondered what my mission was. He was looking for details about something and he said suddenly in 1940 there were no further documents. What was it about? Anyhow, so then I thought what shall I do? Better go home. I was placed in what was called a false position.

MI: Weren't you astonished that someone like Gladwyn Jebb hadn't sorted this out? It does seem incredible to me that you'd have to go all the way across the Atlantic to learn that Fitzroy Maclean at the Northern Department at the Foreign Office back in London hadn't even heard of it.

IB: Not only Fitzroy Maclean – the Head of it, who was a man called Collett or Sargent or somebody – he was number two, and I'd met him already before that in Oxford. He used to come and see Clarissa, now Avon, he was one of her *soupirants*. But I didn't like him and he didn't like me very much, then, and it was he who stopped me. But I don't know, I could have gone on, without Burgess but it made no sense. It was all a plot. And then – no, I don't think it does surprise me, it was all done in a very sort of quick war time fashion given that Harold Nicolson was clear about appointing me, the Foreign Office didn't want to stand in the way. I remember ringing up Roger Makins who I knew from All Souls



who was in the Foreign Office saying, 'I'm being sent there, do you think the Foreign Office would like that?' He said, 'Oh well, if Gladwyn says it's all right, if I come across anything, I'll give it a push.' Didn't have to. Anyhow I felt nervous somehow, I did know that something was odd, clearly I did. **Then I began to be offered jobs in, British jobs, in Washington. I could see what it was. By this time we'd reached mid-August, Battle of Britain; they thought, 'Hey, the Germans might win, they might invade Britain' – in which case, if I was there, I'd be caught and tortured and killed, and I must be saved. Not a word was said about this, but it was clear to me that was the secret agenda. I was touched, but nobody said it, and I began to be offered posts:** 'Would I like to be number three in the Press Department in the Embassy under Mr Childs who was on my boat going out?' 'Would I like to do this or that?' I could see that I was being saved, but I was embarrassed about this, I couldn't have stayed, either I had met somebody at Oxford or Moscow, nothing in Washington, that's because I was there by accident. People did do that but I didn't think I could, I don't know why, it's like Caesar's wife, the feelings I had.

MI: Also it was a miserable time for you, the letters from the Shoreham Hotel in New York in late August are not happy letters at all.

IB: No they're not. I was put in a false position and what happened then was that finally they said, 'Will you just do one job for us? 'What?' 'Would you look through all the dispatches for the Associated Press to see whether they're anti British as we think they are and defeatist and generally not in our interests?' I said, 'Where do I do this?' 'Do this in New York in the British Library of Information under a man called Angus Fletcher.' 'And how long will that take?' I said. 'It might take two or three weeks', because there were hundreds of them, not only from England but from France, Germany, wherever the AP was. And they were short-handed, I could see there was still a way of saving [ ]. I said, 'All right, this job I will do provided I can go to England after that.'

They didn't say anything, I went off to New York and spent the whole of the second part of August and September, and I did do the job and I did report that they were unfriendly which was what they wanted to know and that did make a difference to see it in print(?) for the man particularly in Germany with his pro Nazi dispatches of an extreme kind called Louis Rachner(?); and there were English ones so I said the English are huddling in their shelters, the country's going to end in the opposite of victory as the whole Nation is terrified. Not true. But I mean there were very extremely defeatist and panic-stricken letters, all except one. The worst of them I regret to tell you, though I never told him that was a great New York Times figure of whom you will have heard and you might indeed know called Scotty Reston (?) who was English or Scotch and he lives in London [ ] must have been the AP then and he produced some ghastly things, not pro Nazi but defeatist; and the only man who was all right was that excellent man on the radio, you know who I mean – oh dear!

MI: Murrow?

IB: Murrow. Very stout even then, a man of good character.

MI: Did you do those things through September and October?

IB: Not October. Early in October I got into a Yankee Clipper, flew from New York to Lisbon, sea plane, with Lord Lothian who was going home.

MI: Did you have conversations with Lord Lothian?

IB: Certainly, one couldn't avoid it. We stopped in Horta in the Azores, took a walk for six hours. He said, – very charming, I mean beautiful island, extremely wild – he said, 'Very unlike Broadway, isn't it?' – that kind of thing and we talked away about nothing in particular. He was very good company, he hardly knew who I was I think [ ] and then we went to Lisbon. He went straight to

England. I couldn't get onto the plane and I went to the Hotel Estoril and went to the British Embassy and said can I please be sent to England. I was employed by the Foreign Office but I was in a rather dubious position but I do want to get home. Well, they didn't know what to do with me but apparently I sufficiently impressed them for them to put me on a plane. So about four days later, I had to wait rather nervously, I was put on a plane which went to Bristol. There was an air raid going on when we arrived; I was delighted, I thought this was what I had come for, I felt better. I'd always felt guilt and I felt, well I was rather like somebody – yes – somebody might ask me afterwards, no I didn't feel it then I felt it later, sorry, just a moment. No not then, I just enjoyed the air raid. Then I took a train from Bristol to Oxford, came back, then back to New College where I was living and started life again as if nothing ...

MI: ... had happened, and began teaching?

IB: Yes. Nobody asked what I was doing in the summer, long vacation whatever, nobody asked any questions and I began teaching.

MI: How soon did you resume contact with Burgess?

IB: Not then but I think maybe in October, late, I don't know, I can't tell you. I remember there was this lunch with Harold, I don't know whether it was then or later.

MI: Did you ask Burgess to explain why he had been called back?

IB: No, nor would he have told me. No I never, I don't know why, I didn't probe. Anyhow he was certainly sacked from the Intelligence. I think Victor Rothschild who was a great friend must have said he wasn't very reliable. He must have had some certificate to say that he wasn't dependable, nothing was wrong, he

wasn't accused of anything but he must have got some kind of unfriendly testimonial doubting his utility.

MI: And possibly from Victor Rothschild?

IB: That's what I suspected but I never knew. He brought it on himself really. Then in about November, late November, I received a letter from the Ministry of Information saying, 'Dear Mr Berlin, you appear to us to be overstaying your leave. Would you kindly explain what you are doing?' I wrote back to the American Department and said as far as I knew I wasn't employed by the Ministry of Information indeed anybody else so that I didn't think I could have leave. What does this mean? They said, 'Oh well, yes I see, I think there's been some confusion, perhaps you would come visit us?' So I went to London quite happily to the Ministry of Information, saw a man whose name I can't remember, some journalist, drunken journalist who said to me. 'Look, you've been appointed to the British Information Services in New York.' 'When?' 'Oh, two weeks ago.' 'But you failed to tell me!' 'I'm afraid I think we did.' (Laughter) 'Now why was I appointed?' Because during my AP days I met two people who took to me; one was a man called Aubrey Morgan who was a Welshman married to Dwight Murrow's(?) daughter, brother-in-law of Lindbergh; and the other was called Wheeler-Bennett. They were working in the British Library of Information which had been turned from being a British Library of Information into a propaganda bureau of sorts. And they took to me and liked me quite, thought I might be useful and recommended to the Ministry of Information that I be appointed, wanted to have me back. Very sweet, but nothing was said to me! So then I began to negotiate, when to go and what to do and I was then told that my clients, because they wanted to get America into the war really, to influence the Press and the radio media in the British direction.

MI: That was November '40.

IB: November '40 and I then went off in January '41.

MI: OK. I want to pursue a different hare which is to keep pursuing your connections with Burgess.

IB: I didn't see him during that period; maybe I had lunch with him but I didn't keep up, I didn't see him in any systematic way.

MI: And you didn't see him in Washington or New York during the war at all, he was never there?

IB: He was never there. He came back much later. He came to Washington in forty – I can go on to you, Burgess and me. All right. No. I did certainly meet him I suppose when I was back on leave, '42, '44, I can't promise you whether I did or didn't, I have no recollection of it. I knew he was in the BBC where Harold put him and I didn't think, I don't think I saw him then, so I don't think I saw him in '42. He was then transferred to the Foreign Office, News Department and I think I saw him then, '44 I think I must have seen him, just to talk to like that. And then I saw him much more after the war when he was properly established in the Foreign Office. It was all done by (Hector?) McNeill for whom he worked, he was very impressed by him; and then he was in the Far Eastern Department and when the Chinese thing began, which was about when?

MI: '47, '48?

IB: '47 it must have been, he became terribly excited. Even that didn't indicate to me that he was a Communist.

MI: I mean how did you see him after the war?

IB: Oh, he rang up and said, 'Let's have lunch together,' and I saw him once every six months in the ordinary way.

MI: He would come up to All Souls?

IB: No, no, only in London.

MI: You'd meet him in a club or something?

IB: RAC, that was his club, he'd invite me and Goronwy, or me and Shiela Grant Duff and Goronwy, or me and somebody else. I knew him as a Foreign Office official; and then I met him at the Reform Club of which I became a member after the war, and Blunt also who I had known before, that's another story; and I used to talk to them about Zionism and they were both ferociously against it.

MI: Why did you talk to them about Zionism?

IB: Because I was interested in it at that time and because I'd been to Israel and Palestine in '46 – '47. '47 I went and I came back and I was staying with Weizmann and all that and I began talking to them about all that and they were bitterly anti Zion, both of them. Again, I could have deduced from that it was the Party line.

MI: But anti Zionist on political grounds rather than on ...

IB: Well, they didn't quite say. Monstrous, I mean the Arabs, the usual; you know anti Zionists are anti Zionists, they didn't need to be, all anti Zionists were political, they were all political but what could they be? They weren't anti Semitic but I did have a row with them about that.

MI: And you remember Blunt and Burgess together at the Reform Club talking about Zionism in '47?

IB: Yes, together at the Reform Club, talking about anti Zionism to me, yes. I was there in '48, that sort of period because I remember conflict with them, they were quite sharp encounters.

MI: Did you have a sense that Blunt and Burgess were together as a couple?

IB: Oh no, they weren't a couple in that sense; they were great friends, I knew that long before. Burgess converted Blunt to Communism, that I didn't know, but they were great friends before the war, that was perfectly known to everyone. I met Blunt independently.

MI: Can you remember your further contacts with Burgess '47 through '55?

IB: Yes. I must have met him now and then [ ] in a social way with no suspicion of anything particularly. He talked a lot about – jokes about Bevin was all I remember. He worked in a private office.

MI: Who, Bevin?

IB: Bevin and [ ] O'Neill(?) were together in the political office in the Foreign Office.

MI: What jokes did he make about Bevin?

IB: He said the wine he likes is called Newt St George – Nait St Georges – there is such a wine, isn't there? 'Newt St George, that's the wine I like.' And I remember Stuart at that time – Hampshire – who said to me how awful Bevin was. And I met Bevin in Moscow but that's a long story. And he used to tell a little story about the Foreign Office but he was like any other Foreign Office official as far as I was concerned than a dear friend, I don't know, I had nothing against him and I saw him quite casually. And then [ ] who was a best friend at that time, there was a meeting in London [ ] they [ ] perfectly conventional and nothing was said which one can remember, a rather amusing old friend whom I saw in that way. But then at that time when David Cecil in New College gave a party

in honour of a very nice woman called Phyllis Young who was the wife of a man called Adrian(?) Young, a little salon in Oxford, and she was going to London and he gave a farewell party for her to which he invited Goronwy [ ] and he brought Guy and I met Guy at New College and he said to me then, 'I am being posted to Washington.' And I said, 'A dangerous thing for you to go.' I never knew he was a Communist. 'After all with your sexual addictions, McCarthy is very violently anti homosexual.'

MI: You said that to him?

IB: Yes, well it was notorious. People talked about 'bed fellow travellers', that was a joke. 'Are you safe? Should you go?' He said, 'Oh well, I don't know, I've been appointed, quite an interesting place.' But I said, 'You hate Americans!' 'Well I don't like them very much but I suppose there's work to be done, so all right, they've sent me, they've appointed me, I have to go where they tell me,' that kind of line and I thought he's going to get into trouble, he will get into trouble, I must tell somebody, I must tell Roger Makins who was at that time a high official in the Foreign Office but then I said I can't [ ] behind people's backs and say 'beware!'. No. So I didn't. I did nothing at all. Then he went off to Washington and the rest you know. He got himself arrested by police for speeding in order to return to London with Maclean.

MI: And when did you first – you found out in the papers as it were – did you ...?

IB: Entirely. I met Maclean in Washington, that's a long story too.

MI: You met Maclean in Washington during the war?

IB: In the Embassy.

MI: And then again in Moscow in '45?



IB: No, no.

MI: Oh no, I'm wrong, yes. It's in Washington that the famous scene occurs where Maclean gets ...

IB: That's right, he says ...

MI: ... drunk and you tell a story about Alice Roosevelt Longworth.

IB: Yes, yes in fact I knew her. 'How can you know a woman like that?' It was a violent scene. He was drunk, very truculent ...

MI: And he actually shook your lapels?

IB: No, that's a story told by Mr (?)

MI: [Boyd?] no, it's not true. He simply shouted.

IB: He shouted, yes. It's also not true that Douglas Fairbanks was there.

MI: Who was there?

IB: Well, I'd better begin at the beginning. Have I told you of my relations with Maclean?

MI: No, you'd better tell me about Maclean.

IB: I never saw Burgess again after '51.

MI: After '51 at that party at New College.

IB: No, the party at New College was before that. '51 is when he went to Moscow. I didn't in fact see him after the point when he

was in Washington, no opportunity, I didn't go there. '51 was a total surprise to me, equally Maclean [ ].

MI: What about Maclean?

IB: My friend Dr Katkov must have worked a bit in Intelligence as a white Russian, saw quite a lot of Burgess in the sort of late forties and he saw quite a lot of people, made himself extremely agreeable to a large circle of persons. Some didn't like him ever.

MI: Maclean was a different kettle of fish altogether.

IB: Well, Maclean was a proper public school Foreign Office official, a great friend of my friend Rumbold, married to an American lady called Melinda and him I met in 1944 I think when he was posted to Washington. He came to see me in my room and said, 'My name is Donald Maclean, we know a lot of the same people, we know the Bonham Carter's, you know Sinclair, you know Cressida Ridley, we ought to have met before, we have a lot of good friends in common. I think we ought to be friends.' [ ]. He was very good looking, extremely agreeable, very amusing and altogether charming. Well, we made friends, sort of, I don't know we used to see each other on the corridors in the Embassy and I had a meal or two with him. Then one day he said to me, 'You know I work with people in the Pentagon in the State Department, [atomic energy?] and they're very pompous, people in the State Department are awful, the Pentagon's pretty awful. I hear that you know some New Dealers, no?' I said yes I do. 'Could I meet them?' It seemed natural to me, a man of liberal convictions, the sort of person I would know in England, so I said, 'All right I will try to do it.' So I rang up a lady whose identity I shall divulge to you in a second to whom I said, 'There's a very charming, good looking and agreeable man called Donald Maclean. Do you think you could ask him – he doesn't know many people – do you think you could ask him to dinner? I am sure you will like him very much,' and then she said, 'Yes, all right.' She was then living in number 173

somewhere which wasn't far away and that's [ ] Mrs Graham who was then a sort of war widow; her husband was in the Pacific and he didn't want her to live in her father's palace, which was Mayer – that was her father – she had to live as the [ ] wife. It was all very ideological [ ] at that period. But she said 'All right,' and so she invited Maclean and his wife, me, my friend Edward Prichard who was about my best friend in Washington and a couple called the Bingham. He'd been a member of Congress for years, son of the American Ambassador in London, New Deal –ish [ ] there weren't many people there, just quite a nice lot of people. Well we all turned up, we had dinner, dinner was all right and then there was a dispute about whether 'Gone With the Wind' was worth reading and Mrs Bingham said she thought it was, she had begun reading it and Maclean said it was absolute rubbish, kitchen rubbish; there was some dispute about that which I didn't take part in but I could see it was rather sharp. Then we moved into the other room for coffee and then I could see that Maclean was drunk ...

[At this point Lady Berlin comes in and offers tea to which MI says, 'Don't make it on my behalf,' to which IB adds, 'Oh, on my behalf, yes!']

IB: ... and then he suddenly said, 'The trouble about you is that you see people like Mrs Longworth. She's a horrible woman with **horrible views**. I don't say,' he said, 'you shouldn't see her if you want to see her, what I say is there is a kind of taste that makes it possible for you to want to see her which is what I think is terrible about you.' So I said – I was taken aback, it was a real attack. He said, 'I don't say that at the twelfth hour you won't be on our side but until then you run with the hare and hunt with the hounds.' Which is true to a certain degree. And then ...

MI: Let me back you up, I missed something. What is the context in which he says that?

IB: None, out of the blue.

MI: Out of the blue where?

IB: We were drinking coffee or whatever it was.

MI: At Kay Graham's?

IB: Yes, yes in her drawing room, sitting opposite me and suddenly he attacked me apropos of nothing.

MI: Had he been drinking?

IB: Heavily. I'd never seen him drunk before but I knew he was drunk, and I said, 'Well you say that but I'm supposed to be fighting for civilisation against barbarism. Civilisation means that you are free to know anyone you wish. Of course, you must be judged by your friends, that I concede, and you must be prepared to shoot them in a war or revolution even though they are your friends. But until then you are allowed to know them even if people condemn you because they don't like those sort of people.' There was silence and he said, 'No! I disagree. Life is a battle, we ought to know which side we're on and we ought to know the people who are on our side and not have dealings with the other side. That's my view.' Everybody in the room agreed with this.

MI: With him?

IB: Yes, totally with him.

MI: Kay Graham included?

IB: Everybody. So then I felt I was rather like Douglas Fairbanks on a table, fencing off people with a rapier. That's why I said to Boyle(?) that's how Fairbanks came into the story. Douglas Fairbanks was already dead! But I told the story as I'm telling you, I remember making it a joke, Douglas Fairbanks! As you know I'm

rather indistinct in some ways when I talk. And then they all attacked me and said it was very wrong what I was doing, I ought to know on which side one was, the New Deal, Roosevelt, couldn't know horrible people. Of course Alice Longworth was an intimate friend of Kay's parents and I met her for the first time at her father's table with Kay.

MI: That is to say you met Alice Roosevelt Longworth at Eugene Mayer's table?

IB: Yes. Kay was present [ ]

MI: But Kay in this discussion appears to take Donald Maclean's side against Alice Roosevelt Longworth?

IB: They all agreed but she was no longer part of the story; the story was that life is a battle, we must know which side we're on and then have no relations with the enemy. From that alone I could have deduced ...

MI: But didn't?

IB: No. And even before that I went to dinner with him with Dick Law, Richard law who was number two at the Foreign Office and I sort of knew him and he asked us both to dinner, I think it was (?) atomic stuff too and at some point Maclean said – there was Jewish doctor who I brought along I remember – and Law kept on saying, 'tell me, Doc!' (Laughter) He was Canadian I remember and at a certain point Maclean began talking about the standard of living in England and that sort of thing and Law said, 'That's Communist talk.' But it made no impression on me.

MI: Why would he have said it was Communist talk, what's the flavour of what Maclean is saying? I don't follow that.

IB: I can't remember what he did say but it was something to do with the working class, standard of living, something struck him as that. It wouldn't have struck me as it, so I saw that as slightly jocose which he would say to someone in the Foreign Office. Then after that I went wherever I wanted, then they all rang up in the morning and said, 'Hope you're [ ], awful of me, oughtn't to have said that to you, hope you don't mind,' a lot of peacemaking went on. I received a letter from Maclean saying 'One cannot keep one's friends if one behaves as I did last night,' it was an apology. 'Will you come to lunch on Thursday?' So I went to lunch on Thursday and his wife was there, her sister was there, we talked of this and that. At a certain point the name of Henry Wallace came up. He was then I suppose Vice President ...

MI: Yes, this is '44 I suppose he would be. No! Isn't Truman Vice President?

IB: No, no, '45. Well, this conversation may have occurred early in '44, even late '43, I can't remember when Maclean came, round about then, certainly he was Vice President then. He was replaced by Truman at some point, you're right '44 well he was still about then because it may have been Spring '44, quite possible. And I said, 'Well, I know people admire him but I think there's a screw loose somewhere which I believe and still believe. I thought there was a screw loose; and they didn't say anything and looked [ ] changed the subject. Then when the women left the room he said, 'You know, you shouldn't have said that about Henry Wallace. My wife and my sister admire him very much and so do I. I think he's a very good man, I think he does a great deal of good and you shouldn't say things like that, it's simply wrong.' Then I knew we were no longer friends. After that I never saw him again.

MI: Really?

IB: No in either country, there or in England and he said quite disagreeable things about me. We were in fact on bad terms;

because I realised he was sorry to have said it but he meant it and meant it even more after I turned out to be anti Wallace who was a fellow traveller by that time.

MI: And you never saw or talked to Maclean again? Then he was transferred away from the Embassy?

IB: Never saw him in the room. I don't know when he was transferred, whether I went before him or he went before me, I don't know, our relations severed. Because the general view was that Burgess was awful, Maclean was charming, I took the opposite view and – let me try and think – there was a Senator's ex-widow who was a mad old lady [ ] to Baltimore and they occupied a gigantic mansion called 'Evergreen' and I quarrelled with her about something and Maclean complained about me, said it would be a bad day for England my not being nice to this old lady. If my name was mentioned he would say something unfriendly, so [ ] friends, we never met in the room again.

MI: Let's stop here.

IB: But I didn't know that he was a Communist. Philby I never met but I knew that there was something wrong because Burgess lived with him in Washington. I knew enough about Burgess to know he was very left wing [ ] and he called him Kim, he was a very great friend so when it all happened I knew that Kim must be involved. Nobody else did.

MI: So when Burgess went you knew that Philby must be involved?

IB: '51; and they absconded. I never met Philby, I knew nothing but I was sure that if they were Communists, so must he be, the intimacy was too great.

MI: Did MI5 come and talk to you about all this?

IB: Yes, very late, about '62 or 3, Peter Wright, notorious Peter Wright. He came and saw me at All Souls and he said, 'May I talk to you, would you tell me some things?' I said, 'Yes, yes, certainly.' I quite enjoyed it, I was interrogated. He wasn't an interrogator so he must have done that off his own bat; he was a technician, an electrical technician, that's all he was but for some reason he undertook to do it. [ ] He wasn't a professional interrogator. [ ]

MI: Did he ask you about other people, did he ask you about Jenifer Hart, did he ask you about ...?

IB: He also asked me about Burgess who had just died around then; nothing about Blunt who had just been blown though I didn't know it. This was the year they found out about Blunt, his name wasn't mentioned.

MI: '62.

IB: Yes. And then he gave me a list, 'Do you know anything about the following?'

MI: And who was on that list?

IB: Nobody I remember, nobody I knew.

MI: Not Stuart Hampshire, not Jenifer Hart, not Goronwy, not ...?

IB: No, no, none of these people. No, there may have been one person, one American I knew. And then he said, 'Did you have any connection with Marxism?' I said, 'Well you know I wrote a book on Karl Marx. If you have read it you would realise that Marx wouldn't be terribly keen on me.' He said, 'Yes I have read it and I agree with you.' (Laughter) And then we chatted away, I don't know, he must have asked me questions but I talked quite freely. Then he saw me again in the Reform Club, or not, perhaps in [ ],



no maybe the Reform, yes, a couple of questions of the same sort. I replied to it quite truthfully and didn't compromise anybody because I didn't know any of the people he was talking about – Maclean, yes, I told him all about that because by this time he was safely in Moscow, it was eleven years after he absconded. Burgess died about then. [ ]

MI: Let's stop there, there's more to ask you about that but I have to go in a second.

IB: (Tape distorted) ... then afterwards, hangers-on. And then Driberg appeared at that party, how he appeared I don't know how he made his way [ ] Soviet Agency, that's where I saw Krushchev for the second time and the Politburo was there, Molotov [Caucasus] and he rolled(?) up to me and he said – I chatted to him – and he said, 'Nothing wrong with the Soviet Union except that I think it does do a bit too much suppression of native languages. I think local cultures could be supported but apart from that I found absolutely nothing to complain of.' I said 'Really?' He then said, 'There's an old friend of ours living here, name of Burgess, I'm going to see him tonight, would you like to come?' I thought oh dear, I don't mind meeting him again really, Communism doesn't [ ] me but I think he behaved too badly. EM Forster, a great friend, was always telling me about personal relations being so important, he compromised Blunt, poor man, who suffered; and other people whom he knew. Goronwy was grilled, Blunt's career was to some extent damaged, no I didn't want to have a row with him, besides which I am staying with [ ] I kept the report, if I were to see him it would be rather an embarrassment to go to report that things were not worth it, so I said, 'No, I'd rather not.' And I said, 'Do you see Maclean too?' 'I don't see why you should ask that, plenty of Englishmen live in Malaga but they don't necessarily know each other, they're just Englishmen living in Moscow, why should they know each other?' (Laughter) I remember that. He then said, 'There is one thing I would like you to do. I am writing a book about Guy Burgess, it's going to be rather a surprise, would you

mind not telling anyone because it's out of the blue?' I said, 'Oh all right. I won't tell.' He thought it was just cowardice on my part, not to see him, and maybe partly it was. Anyway I didn't. Whatsisname went to see him – er Randolph Churchill, and he said to Randolph, 'I'm still a Communist, still a homosexual. The only thing about me is I love Communists, I hate the Russians.'

[Could I have a slice of something?]

[*Tea continues and the conversation ends*]

## MI TAPE 8-1

Conversation date: 14 December 1988

Date transcribed: January 1994, June 2004

Transcriber: Michael Ignatieff, Esther Johnson

Subjects covered:

All Souls 1934–38

Move to New College 1938

Appeasement, Fascism, Stalinism

The Abdication

Writing Marx

Salzburg, Munich

Namier

Jewishness

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*Esther Johnson's transcript*

*Side A*

MI December 14<sup>th</sup>. We were talking about All Souls in the sort of '34 to '39, that's the period we're discussing.

IB '38 I moved from All Souls to New College.

MI To New College. [IB Yes] But let's talk about the period before you moved, '34 to '38. [IB Certainly] What I'm interested to know is – you said yesterday that being at All Souls in the early thirties was your first encounter with how Britain is governed and ruled [IB Well, because of the people there] and I wondered what that meant in terms of who you specifically dined with and talked to. Give me a feel of that.

IB The feel is this: these statesmen, I mean these London people of whom there are more of than there are now, not more but now they don't come so much, used to come at week-ends, and they used to come on Friday or otherwise Saturday morning and spend the week-end there religiously. It was a kind of English thing to do; they liked doing it, they liked meeting each other, they liked meeting junior fellows, they liked pretending that they were all very cosy with us; the left-wing junior fellows on the whole [were] anti that with certain obvious exceptions like Quintin Hogg or Wilberforce who although had no particular politics, obviously tended to the right and Quintin Hogg was a straight Conservative. But apart from that, everyone was Labour inclined and nevertheless relations were quite peaceful, each society was quite interested in the other and they came much more frequently, and you could say the idea of coming was part of the pattern of life which they rather enjoyed. They liked being child-like among – the Bishop of Gloucester came, who was a very severe Bishop in Gloucester. He once asked me to stay a night with him, which I did. He was a man who objected to my election and then we made friends of course, naturally, inevitably.

**MI Why do you say, 'naturally' and 'inevitably'?**

IB Because whenever people do that and the other thing happens immediately, you try and show that you're aren't really against this person personally, it's purely on general theological grounds. I mean we got on quite well. He was amusing. He was a learned, theologian of a very reactionary kind. He said to me, 'Tomorrow I'm giving a party for my clergy,' – in Gloucester this was – 'you can come to it if you like, you'll never have met so many fools together in your life.' [MI *laughs*] That's why he wasn't entirely popular in his diocese.

MI Did you go because you wanted to show you were above rancour yourself or because you genuinely liked him?

IB What, me? [MI Yes} Oh, he invited me, I thought it would be fun to stay with a Bishop. I'd never done it before, or after. I mean we were obviously getting along quite well, he was sort of a man – he rather enjoyed his own savagery. He said, 'You know, in the nineteenth century – eighteenth century there was a Bishop called Warburton. He was regarded as a very stern, contemptuous sort of man who bullied his clergy and [had] rather secular tastes. Learned. He wrote a famous book called, 'The [Legation?] of Moses' which is quite an important work. I am sometimes called, 'the twentieth century Warburton'. Then he told me the following story. When Bishop Warburton was approaching Oxford he approached in a very handsome carriage and his followers said, somebody said who met him, 'Do you think Our Lord would have entered Oxford in this state? On horseback, followed by a retinue?' 'No,' said Warburton, 'He'd have ridden you.' [*laughter*] I am sometimes called [MI The Warburton!] The Warburton, yes. Well, that was all rather fun. And he produced – these stern figures behaved like children at All Soul's, I mean they chatted...

MI Now who were the stern political figures?

IB Who were the stern? The people who used to come were: Geoffrey Dawson, a sort of tall and nice man, was a very powerful editor of the Times, was highly influential, and in intimate touch with a conservative element [MI And an appeaser] I mean fanatical appeaser. In 1938 when we were digging in sort of air raid shelters and things, he refused to help in his own square because no war, this was just jitters [ ] Munich. Now, there was Geoffrey Dawson; there was Amery, who was anti-appeasement but solid conservative statesman.

MI I get these Amerys confused. Which one? Not Leo Amery?

IB Yes, he was the fellow though I don't know about fellow, ex-fellow, but he used to come. He was a very heavy, dull man of very good character. He was honest, he was kind and dull. And he used

to make speeches occasionally and the duller he was, the better one wished him because one had a certain feeling for him and liked him [MI *laughs*] and he didn't show off in any way. He used to lecture the Cabinet on conservative philosophy. It used to bore them to tears because he didn't think there was a point in conservatism. He was a disciple of Milner. They were the Milner kindergarten, these people. There was Amery, there was Bob Brand who was Head of Lazars, who was an extremely clever, detached, sardonic man who was agreeable to talk to, he was so intelligent. He was part of the Milner circus. Then there was Lionel Curtis who was a kind of fanatic of the British Empire who founded Chatham House and who was mainly *éminence grise* of a tremendous kind behind the scenes. He had no money and no great ambition for power but he manipulated people. If you wanted your letter to be signed by both Archbishops on the next day, he and he alone could do it because he was a close friend, you see, intimate friend. Then there was Donald Somerville who was an ex-liberal who was, I think Solicitor General under Baldwin. He was Home Secretary in the caretaker government. He was a Conservative politician of a civilised, mild, sort of amiable kind, who started life as a chemist. And then – this was Sir Donald – then who else? Wait a moment, the people of that sort ... When I first came there was a man called Steel-Maitland who died fairly young, it was to do with the general strike of '26, but he died somewhere in the thirties, but he was a junior minister in that government: Simon, came regularly, absolutely awful, as awful as you think he is, but came with sort of assiduity and when I first came...

MI What was awful in your mind about Simon?

IB Oh, the smoothness, the butteriness, the obvious lack of integrity, the kind of cunning quality and the sort of whole complacency and the butter, above all. When I first came, he was always very flattering to people newly elected. First of all, I got a letter of congratulation from him which I've never done to other people but ought to have done because senior fellows always

congratulated the newly elected, which of course swelled their heads. And then he would say, 'I've just been on the India Commission,' – he was the chairman of it, 'If you've got any interesting ideas about India which we ought to know, would you send me a post card?' [*laughs*] You really thought he meant it, too.

MI Naughty. Very naughty.

IB That sort of thing, you see? And he was no whited sepulchre – exactly what that phrase means. Who else? Then there was – Halifax didn't come very much. He was an ex-fellow but he became Chancellor about the middle and therefore he stayed nights, when he was chancellor he used to stay nights when he had anything to perform.

MI What impression did you form of him?

IB Well, I worked under him in Washington, him I knew quite well. Oh, I can tell you about him, but that's a separate...

MI I think we should save that till later, the Washington – it will probably come up later.

IB Yes. Who else used to come of that sort? Conservative...? [MI M?] No, he wasn't a fellow. They were broad guests, all these people were broad guests for the week-end because they could contain them there and they'd go upstairs and talk about matters of serious – and the guests were always eminent and exactly of the same sort, as it were Dennis [Raights?] who was a Boer politician of a powerful kind – Smuts – those sort of people, Colonial Governors. There was Coupland who had been an ancient historian who was purchased by these people to become a Colonial historian and was very much in with them, wrote excellent English, was a very good colonial historian, but was again drawn into the liberal imperialist circles as they were called, round table – Milner etc. Then there was Curtis who was a kind of parody of Milner. Let

me see – but he was part of that push. There was in nineteen thirty – before I came in the early twenties – there was an effort to make All Souls a centre of liberal imperialism, there was elect to it deliberately, people to do with that sort of thing. The academics objected, there was a battle and the academics won. But still there were enough. That's how Lionel Curtis became a fellow, because he was to do with that. T.E.Lawrence became a fellow on that ticket but he wasn't – he was alive but he never came in my time.

MI And how did you react to imperial liberalism as a kind of credo?

IB No, we were against it, we junior fellows, we disapproved. But when they came and took [?] very freely, it was fascinating to listen to, one argued with them. They were very courteous, we were quite courteous, nobody was rude to them. Round the fire – this has long ceased to exist – round the fire on Saturday nights people used to gather, quite automatically and somebody would start the subject and say I think we ought, the position – our financial position is very, very – our accountants say why are we doing this and that. They would then defend it; there would then be an argument. When people like Henderson came in the mid thirties, he was very much part of the critical, so to speak, attitude towards all these people, towards the fat cats. But they answered – well there were minor figures like Roger Makins, now Lord Sheffield, aged eighty-five though he is. He was a Foreign Office official, so he had something to say. There were other Foreign Office characters.

MI What about this specific issue of appeasement? It's often said that that was a little nest of...

IB There's a book about it, a book about it by Rowse. It was highly inaccurate. His friends are not sort of appeasers and people he didn't like turned out to be appeasers when they weren't. Henderson was a violent anti-appeaser, occurs among the appeasers. Just revenge on him because they hate him. No, I'll tell



you, there was some truth in it, yes. They didn't talk about appeasement in front of all of us so very much, but they did in the privacy of their own rooms. They brought, as it were, sympathisers, well wishers, with them and then they would disappear into one of those big rooms [?] one of them, and there they would have practically committee meetings. So it did happen but it didn't happen publicly as it were, except that in the thirties there was formed a thing called the All Soul's Group. Now that was nothing to do with the general fellows. I wasn't a member of it. That was meant to be a sort of planning group, how to organise a better Europe. That consisted of the Warden of All Souls, Adams, who was just a dear old thing, presided over it; and it had in it Lionel Curtis and it had Amery and it had Brand and it had Toynbee and it had Rowse and Hudson representing the left, it had Henri Siegfried and Beveridge; and they all used to come to All Souls on Saturday evenings, one used to see them and then they would wander off to the Warden's lodgings. And the famous occasion: they began talking about the new parliament of '38, and Beveridge laid it down there had to be precise numerical representation, every million persons ought to have one. 'That,' said Henri Siegfried, 'meant that the Germans have 70 millions and the French, 40.' 'Precisely,' said Beveridge. After that, Siegfried didn't turn up again. [MI *laughs*] Now, it also had a man called Lord Allan of [?wood] who was an ILP, left Labour, tremendous appeaser, super-appeaser, super, super, more than anybody, particularly favourable to sort of Sudetenland going to everything. There was no holding him at all.

MI What about you in this story, politically, on the appeasement issue?

IB No, on the appeasement we were together with everybody else of my age and Austin and everybody. We were strictly against. There were no appeasers except Hogg in our group. Of my generation, nobody was, nor people younger than me. No, no, certainly not.

MI Was there a moment in which you could understand the appeasement of that generation or did you..?

IB No. No, at no point did I understand that because it was strictly – I'll tell you exactly what happened. The British Empire Group were fundamentally, particularly Curtis, were fundamentally racist; they weren't anti-Semitic in any overt sense but they believed in the Arian ascendancy. They didn't want Italy or France to be part of them, really. They believed in Germany, Scandinavia, the White Empire, you see? And that, fundamentally, had a kind of Cecil Rhodes aspect to it, and the Russians were right outside quite apart from being communists and terrible that way. They were just not part of the system, so when Lionel Curtis began to preach for a United Europe because that would have included Italy, France and other undesirable countries, the Soviet Union, Russia, was to be outside it. That was the basis of it, the defence of what might be called white Western values against horrors of the East. The Germans were a dubious case because they misbehaved. Hitler was rather a misfortune, but still it was better to be friends with Hitler – I mean protection against communism fundamentally is what stirred them. Rowse, in his book, says the opposite, that they were just ignorant of Europe, they knew the Empire, they had no idea what they were doing. This is totally false. They knew very well what they were doing and therefore they were fundamentally unsympathetic as a group. Some were better than others. Bob Brand was a friend of mine because he was rather sardonic and detached and didn't quite belong to it, thought very badly of this policy. He was in favour of it but didn't think it could possibly succeed. Still, when his [ ] who was so to speak a very prominent sort of German figure of that period, went over more or less, he had a lot of trouble. He thought he was a very good and nice man and difficult for him to – and when people like Rosenberg arrived – oh, I'd forgotten one man. That was Sir Dougal Orr Malcolm. He was the Head of the South Africa Company after Rhodes I think, again part of the Johannesburg group [*chuckles*] if you see

what I mean, you see, in Capetown it was. And he would come back and say, 'I've been meeting Rosenberg at dinner. One needn't agree with what he says but he's an awfully interesting fellow.' That was the line. They didn't all say that but there was a tendency in that direction, you see?

MI What about – where does the Cliveden set fit in in all of this?

IB Well, exactly the same thing. I think more people came to All Souls and more – I think the private talks in All Souls – not in front of us – probably did more because they were – produced specific people of that sort. They sat in a room. Then Cliveden, but it overlapped. Chamberlain never came to All Souls but he went to Cliveden for example, you see? I will say Von Trott had nothing to do with these people much, that wasn't it. But broadly speaking it was clear that there was a group of conservative figures who were pro Franco for instance which is a particular sort of criterion. They were all, to a man, pro Franco, even when Winston changed because he thought that there was some danger to us once the Germans began to see he was pro Franco. Once the Germans began supporting him, he switched completely but it made no difference to them, and they would deeply sympathise with old Professor [D?] who was a Spaniard by origin who had talked to us about poor little Priests being savaged by these horrible revolutionary gangsters. But that was the mood of those people. But there were rows occasionally, one argued, yes. There was the Rhineland for example; why didn't we do something to prevent the Germans reoccupying the Rhineland? There were fairly fierce arguments about that.

MI Can you remember their tone and texture? Who was against whom?

IB Well, Roger Makins tried to defend the Foreign Office. Henderson for example, afterwards became [?] on the Economist, father of Nicho Henderson, the Bursar, said, 'I mean why not?' He

said, 'Well, very difficult for us to act unilaterally.' 'But,' I said, 'but Flandel came in order to talk to us about the...'. [MI Who came?] Flandel who was the French [Foreign Minister?], there was no French government. At that moment it was one of those moments when there was no government being formed, it was in a kind of mess in Paris. Well, he didn't make it very clear, that sort of thing [*chuckles*] 'Well you've lost your last chance,' 'Oh I don't think so, I think I didn't bother, oh I think we'll be able to – oh I don't think we'll be overrun, you know by Hitler.' 'Yes, yes, I think there'll certainly be a war.' 'I don't quite see why you should say that, I think steps can be taken.' They didn't say hooray for Hitler. The Archbishop of Canterbury was, after all, an ex-fellow, Lang, who when the [?] moved into Austria, first into Sudetenland, to Austria said all this stuff about German self-respect being regained, the German movement are in the back garden – made speeches in the House of Lords. He didn't come much because he was a visitor and therefore visitors weren't supposed to ping too much. He had been a fellow by election. I can tell you what happened when he came and that's perfectly relevant to all this. We were all lined up to meet him in a rather royal fashion, all the junior fellows. This grand figure arrived in tremendous canonical dress, looking like a Cardinal, mauve, this wonderful – I mean the most simply super Anglican dress you could wear, this Archbishop. When he talked to us, he moved imperceptibly from one to the other like certain sorts of peasant ballet, you know, and the women glide. [MI *laughs*] He was talking to X but by the time he was finished he was already standing in front of Y without any perceptible movement. When he got to me, he asked what I did. I said I taught philosophy. He said, 'Ah, yes, philosophy. When I was at Balliol College, you know there was a Master there called Jowett and quite a well-known professor called T.E.H.Green. I'll tell you what Jowett said about him. He said, "The trouble about Professor Green is that he confuses the real with the ideal." Speaking myself, great though my shortcomings doubtless are, nobody has ever accused me of that!' [MI *laughs*] Quite a good remark from an Archbishop. [*laughter*]

MI And then he kept the peasant ballet going and disappeared. Very good.

IB He was a really cynical figure. He was one of the people drove – I mean he was very good material in the famous abdication crisis, he played a very central part. Anyway, those people came from that time so one was aware of who ran England because these people did. Baldwin didn't come, Chamberlain didn't come but the immediate persons under him did come and they brought other Cabinet Ministers with them; and these people dined and you sat next to them and you could talk to them, you see? That's what I mean. In that sense, All Souls was a kind of remarkable place.

MI And that was the only period in its life that you think it enjoyed that role?

IB I think they never – I don't know about before, it might have been done in Asquith's day too, because Asquith's son would probably come in a lot or something; but in my time there was this particular group it's fair to say, and the conservative politicians of that time were apt from time to time, to meet with relevant people in All Soul's College. And a lot of [colonial communists?] came because that was the British Empire thing – some perfectly decent people, Lugard, those sort of figures regularly appeared. So I met him. Well Lugard was a very high-minded administrator of African territories who believed in self-rule by the Chiefs and all the rest of it, you see? He was not part of that but still he was obviously heavy [MI Heavy] yes, it meant a great deal, had power, you see?

MI Did that kind of heaviness – it's a typical facet of intellectuals to admire that kind of heaviness.

IB Well, it wasn't so much admiration. One felt that these people were serious, humourless and dedicated to their task and there was a certain dignity about them and they talked about serious topics, they didn't just chat, they [had guests?]. The others of course

behaved like people in the club, all club members are equal, so they were just sweet to everybody and liked – and then there was a thing called the College Walk on Sunday morning, I think it rather faded in my time, which the senior fellows would take junior fellows for four hour's walk [MI Really?] and talk to them.

MI A senior fellow would pick out a junior...

IB Two or three senior fellows would pick out two or three junior fellows and proceed to go on the College walk. Summerhouse.

MI Can you remember such occasions?

IB I never went on a College walk. [laughs] It went on in my day but I wasn't a volunteer, didn't think I'd enjoy it. But I think it ceased about the middle thirties, but there was such a thing. It went on from the twenties.

MI What impression did you have..?

IB I can tell you this sort of thing. When Chelmsford died, was the Warden of All Souls which I told you, who had been First Lord of the Admiralty under Ramsay MacDonald's coalition government. He was a liberal, the famous Viceroy of India. He died in April, '33. To his funeral came aged persons who had known him as a junior fellow, practically. One saw people one never saw again in one's life – Lord Earnlie. Lord Earnlie was called Prothero. He was in two Gladstone administrations, [MI God, yes] you see? And he wrote a book called *Horn, Hoof and Corn* [MI laughs] and dedicated it to the Ministry of Agriculture, I think some sort of book, and edited Byron's letters, you see? The figures of that sort emerged from a past world. There was a man called – I've forgotten his name – who was a high Indian Civil Servant who horse-whipped his daughter's seducer with his own hands and he used to write Indian stories on sort of very delicate paper.

MI Survivors of the vanished liberal ascendancy.

IB Of the nineties. These persons turned up in '33. They were eighty-three or they were seventy-three but they were all born in 1860, if you see what I mean, even earlier than that, you see? You see there was a procession of these people. There was Grant Robertson who was a famous historian, who was Vice Chancellor of Birmingham – oh, came every week-end practically, I mean I don't know, he taught the Prince of Wales and talked about him and [?]. 'Remember, your Majesty, remember your Royal Highness, remember the Bourbons.' He didn't,' he said bitterly, 'he didn't remember them at all. He didn't know what I meant. The most ignorant young man I've ever tried to teach.' He said that about the Prince of Wales.

MI This of Edward, the future Edward V111?

IB Yes, yes, yes, and so on. So you got all that, so therefore it was a fairly happy time for me because I lived in college. On weekdays I taught five hours a day, morning and afternoon. I talked to Austin who was elected the year after me, I went for walks with him or Maurice Bowra or some other friend; I dined at All Souls night after night. There were about seven or eight people to dinner on weekdays and about twenty-five at weekends, you see? That sort of thing. And I had a very regular life, I was an Oxford don absolutely, much more than I've ever been since, and fitted into the Oxford texture absolutely, sort of perfectly cosy and comfortable in Oxford academic life and was very, very academic. I really was a super don in those days.

MI So, what does that mean? You were scholarly, you were...?

IB Well I was a friend of the other philosophers, you see? I used to meet them and I was cosy with them and we talked on the same sort of subjects and I used to dine with Ryle or Ryle dined with me and I would ask philosophers to dinner or we had tea together or

I met them in Blackwell's and talked to them. But I was among brothers and I lived a purely donnish life, I didn't know the great world, you see? I didn't go to London much, I wasn't asked out to dinner in London, much. I didn't go to country houses, this happened later in my life. I did have a social period to which we shall come in due course.

MI In this period in the thirties, that sounds to me like the primary world, the don's world. The world of politics [IB Didn't impinge on it] is a kind of secondary [IB Oh absolutely] It's a world of opinions after dinner...

IB Well there was a Labour Club and Cole presided over it, but I didn't go to it much. I went to it for a bit. I tell you, the Pink Lunch I told you about it. The Pink Lunch, so-called, was created in the mid thirties by Cole and to it came everybody who was anti-Franco, roughly, and the anti-appeasement, anti-Franco, anti the government. And the members of it were, to the best of my recollection – we met in some sort of, one of these low grade restaurants where bread and cheese was eaten and beer; not exactly pubs but there were these undergraduate hostelries in Oxford, still exist, where you paid a shilling or something for lunch. And there was – Cole was obviously its founder. Present were Rowse; Roy Harrod in those days, he became very conservative afterwards; James Meade who is a famous economist now; Christopher Hill; Austin; myself; Freddie Ayer; a man called A.H.M. Jones who was a Roman historian of great eminence who was then at All Souls; Gordon Walker; Frank Pakenham; Crossman; people from Ruskin College who were just professional Labour Party people, it's rather a Trade Union college. They came, two or three []. Who else in those days? Stuart Hampshire, after he became a fellow of All Souls, started a bit earlier; a man called Ian Bowen you wouldn't have heard of who was an economist at All Souls, who was one of us.

MI And what did you do in those Pink Lunches?



IB I'll tell you exactly. Somebody came and talked to us from outside, usually a member of the Labour Party or a German refugee, some German political refugee would come.

MI Can you remember a specific.

IB Well, yes certainly. There was for example [Breitscheid? sounds like Brightside?], it was after he was killed by Hitler, it was a short while in '33 I think, and he certainly – no, he didn't come there, it's a mistake, I think he'd gone ... No, I remember there was a woman called Lilo Linke, God knows who she was, but Austin said, 'There's a great deal in what Lilo Linke said.' She was a Communist, German Jewish refugee lady. Rod [Parsfield?] came, [ ], he talked to us; Dalton came; Attlee wouldn't come. Who else came in that world? Beveridge came; John Strachey came once, certainly.

MI Strachey made a tremendous impression on my father.

IB His books [ ] fairly modern with communism than any other single factor, I would say. *The Coming Struggle for Power* had a very widespread effect.

MI It's the book that my father [IB Reacted to] reacted to very strongly and remembers that in his intellectual [IB Quite so] formation quite ...

IB Well, it was, it was a very influential book. Now let me see who else would come? Not Lindsay, no, he could have done but he didn't. Brand. Wait a moment. Who came from outside? You are quite right to ask. One or two politicians from the German Socialists came, were in England then.

MI So you're quite well informed about..? [IB Norwegian socialists] you're quite well informed about the European situation and German situation?

IB That, yes, that we knew. A lot of refugee professors arrived in Oxford of course, also. They [MI Among them, Cassirer] Cassirer I was responsible for.

MI Yes. A couple of sessions ago we talked at length about...

IB Oh it was a great failure, yes, he certainly did not enjoy it. No, there was a man called Marshak who was a Russian who came via Heidelberg, was a famous econometrician, and then was a professor at Yale. He was a very clever and interesting man. He came to All Souls. About him, the Bodleian librarian who had some dealings with him, a man called [?], he said, 'He's the kind of man who doesn't take yes for ahorsen answer.' [*laughter*] Yes, and let me see who else in Oxford among these people – there were people like – there were classical scholars, I mean Fraenkel was professor of Latin in Oxford but not political. [?] and [?] who were respectively to do with archaeology and with Greek historical sources. [.]

MI What is happening to you intellectually at this point? You're in the middle of the book on Marx?

IB [Kepansky?] was to [?]. Kepansky was fairly typical, people were [?].

MI At this point you're writing Marx?

IB Yep, I sure am.

MI And your memory of that is of getting into something and just disappearing down a kind of mineshaft?

IB Absolutely, down a complete cylinder, down a sort of tunnel. I didn't talk to anyone about it, there was nobody to talk to, although people read Marx, it was a set book in PPE – apart from Cole who read books on Marx and Lindsay had written a little book on Marx, there was nobody much to talk to.

MI What was Cole like to talk to on that subject?

IB Well I didn't know him then, I only got to know Cole when he became professor after the war. We made friends. But at that time he was at University College and rather stern, severe, leftist and I don't know, I was rather frightened of him. I didn't think he'd approve of me much. All Souls was very disapproved of by the rest of the university, as being a sort of terrible sort of Venice, haven of luxury and corruption. Dons at Balliol tried to persuade the best pupils not to apply for it because it led to terrible decadence. Money was paid and no work was done, all these Londoners came down, it wasn't right for good young men who were serious, you see? There was all that.

MI Tell me a little more about your experience of working on Marx, though. It was your first sustained, extended intellectual piece of work [IB Yes it was] and what was it like to do?

IB I read an enormous amount because I'm always very nervous about appearing ignorant. So I sat there reading volume by volume of the Marx/Engels [Auszage?] in German. My German is not good – with dictionaries – but if I could read anything in translation, I did it the same way as I used cribs at school, and I then – the editions stopped in '33. Then it began to appear in Russian. I was able to acquire a volume of that from the Soviet Bookshop, so I read everything he wrote sort of absolutely – took notes; and I read books about him, three or four, including a rather good book by E.H.Carr. It was called *Karl Marx: A Study in Fanaticism*. Each chapter ended with the words, 'But worse was to come.' He did not reprint it. [MI *laughs*] He was asked by his [?], he

said, 'Oh well, I don't think it was such a very good book.' It was very anti-Marxist, quite good, quite interesting at the time, yes. Quite interesting. Anyway, I read some books and then I started writing by hand with a pen [MI When? What date?] It was about 1937, maybe no, in '36, and I wrote and wrote and wrote a certain amount at Oxford but it was difficult because there were pupils coming and it had nothing to do with philosophy, nothing. But as a result of reading a lot of French Encyclopaedists, who had forerunners who were much more readable and much more delightful than Marx, I began lecturing on these people. And there was no real sort of custom for that, but in the end, [*phone rings*] my lectures did get somewhere.

MI So it's Marx who leads you into the discovery of the Enlightenment?

IB Ideas, yes, and the history of ideas as a subject. That, plus Rachmilevich whom I told you about which in a sense also stimulated my interest in ideas as such. But teaching philosophy was so remote from Marx and anything to do with it, that I did lead two lives in a sense, then. Well, then – let me see – then I produced a huge thing by 1937 which was twice the length than the Home University Library demanded. I was then told to shorten it. I refused, and finally was prevailed upon by Fisher who offered it to me, saying it'd be the making of the book; and since it was chronological, I had to squeeze blood from each chapter. It was a very painful proceeding. I went with my parents to the Riviera for, I think, the spring of 1937 it must have been. I think, yes I think that's when I began – it was '36 I must have begun writing it, late '36. But then I lived a regular life you see? I taught in term, every summer I went to Salzburg. I was always there in August, regularly, and very enjoyable it was and far better than later. The music was better and the company was better, you see, and cheaper. And then one used to sit in the gallery and it was absolute heaven, all those marvellous conductors and wonderful orchestras and wonderful singers, the like of which was not repeated after the war much, I

mean certainly not in the fifties. And that was the regular thing to look forward to. I adored it.

MI Did you go alone?

IB No. I went alone but I always had company, I always arranged to meet people, usually from Oxford.

MI And you would stay in a guest house..?

IB Yes, yes, in a guesthouse, Gasthof, certainly, all that you see? Certainly.

MI Anyway, to finish off the Marx business.

IB Then I went down to – wherever it was – Beaulieu sur Mer where I proceeded to squeeze [MI Blood from the...] Agony. [MI In your parent's company} in my parent's company but I mean I was locked up for eight hours a day and it went on for about a month and I did finally manage to – and I destroyed all the pages I didn't use. Threw them away. Nothing was left. Angrily. I didn't see why – I never respected what I wrote anyway at any part of my life. I never thought they might be of value. But I threw them away and finally the book was reduced to a manageable size and I surrendered the manuscript in '38. It was published in '39.

MI And what do you feel about it now?

IB It's a decent, obsolete textbook, can't do any harm. You couldn't tell from that what my political views are. It received some curious reviews. '39 was rather late, summer of '39, it was almost the beginning of the war, not quite I think. It must have appeared in – maybe it did appear after – it was quite late in '39. It received a mild praise from the TLS. I don't know who wrote it. There was a man called Campbell who was to do with the case of Campbell scandal which was part of what ruined MacDonald's government

of the twenties, a famous communist who wrote a review of it in the *Daily Worker* in which he said that of course it was unsuitable to be placed in the hands of comrades. I mean, it didn't contain the truth, wrong point of view. Nevertheless, it showed that progress had been made by the bourgeoisie since the nonsense they talked in the twenties. [MI *laughs*] That was his praise.

MI Oh yes, very high praise.

IB It was a more serious book, although of course wrong. It was denounced by something called *The Labour Quarterly* or something of the sort, by a man called – I can't remember, Ad something, that sort of name anyway, who kept on calling me [Howard Hobson Marxophile?]. It's the first thing I ever wrote which was reviewed which is what I remember vividly. It was denounced in very violent terms by a man called Postgate in the *New Statesman* [MI Raymond Postgate] who was Cole's brother-in-law. Raymond Postgate, who had already written a little book on Marx, so no reason for another [MI *laughs*] and he pointed out the mistakes of dates by me; two howlers certainly; June for July I think or vice versa; and something else of the same sort and said that considering that Freud had not been applied at all, it was worthless. He obviously ceased to be a communist by then. It received quite polite reviews otherwise, but nothing much, and sold quite well. Then the war came. It went through five editions since then or some such number. I revised it from time to time. I had not used the economic philosophical manuscripts to the extent which I should have done, so that the alienation[ ] to put in later because it had appeared by the time I was writing, but I don't think I knew it. It appeared in Germany, or in German at least somewhere – a little two volume thing containing these unpublished early writings. But I think for some reason I must have ignored them, and so I read them later and saw there was a case for inserting something. So in the fifties, I put them in, I did revise it. But it's not a very bad book. Cole thought quite well of it. Lindsay thought I hadn't done justice to Marx as a Hebrew prophet [MI Really?] that sort of thing. It wasn't

sufficiently – he felt he was a biblical figure, instead of which I fussed about his talk about Hegelianism and economic ideas and that sort of thing. The economic chapter is much the weakest because I know nothing about economics. Rowse wrote a review saying it was over-estimated. Wait a bit, I'm trying to remember what was said. Later, when the final edition had come out, I made Jerry Cohen and [Elisha?] Kolakowski read it. They were very flattering but I think it was just because they were quite fond of me, I don't believe they quite meant it. Jerry Cohen said it was a very good book, which I suppose he wouldn't quite have said if he really hadn't liked it to some degree. It isn't a very good book, that's the [ ] of it, but it's quite a decent, neutral account which isn't tendentious.

MI And what place does it occupy in your intellectual biography, do you think?

IB It does. It taught me what Marx said. It gave me a permanent attitude to Marxism which underwent changes as communism went on. I didn't become – I mean I realised he was a man of genius, I gave him his due in that sense. But I thought that Lenin had perverted him, not just Stalin or anybody, and I was always very anticommunist, never not. And it was in that respect somewhat unique among the left-wing members of – well they weren't communists but they didn't feel as strongly as I did. When Austin went to Russia, he was rather impressed by the austerity of life and the seriousness, which he liked. I was anti-Stalin absolutely rigidly, as soon as I began to think about these things and that to some extent influenced me in the direction of some degree of anti-Marx, too; because I felt the idea that Marx had been betrayed by these people, was false. These people were faithful Marxists [*chuckles*] and although he was to some extent perverted this way and that way, ultimately they were true disciples. And he was responsible. One didn't like what they were doing; it could not be said that of course Marx was a humanist, a democrat and didn't mean – this sort of thing. He did. There was famous occasion when

Sydney Hook called on Bernstein, you know, the revisionist Marxist, in Holland after Hitler – or maybe no, maybe in Berlin before Hitler, when he was writing – Hook was a Marxist, writing his books on Marx. And he said to him, ‘What do you think Marx...’ and Bernstein knew Marx very well. He was Engels’ literary executor. ‘What do you think Marx would have thought of Lenin, what he did?’ Bernstein lowered his voice, [according?] to all kinds on his books and said, ‘Well, you know, the old man was very, very strongly in favour of violence.’

MI Yes. The way you’re talking makes the book sound...

IB It’s a different attitude to Marxism. I hadn’t thought about Marxism as such, as a doctrine, very much and I had to settle accounts with Marxism one way or the other, whether I thought it was true or whether I thought it was false.

MI But is it anachronistic, in terms of reconstructing your intentions, to think that that book was also your reckoning with the simultaneous phenomenon of Stalinism?

IB No. That preceded it. I was anti-Stalinist before I read Marx, at school. I mean, I just knew [MI because of your..?] Because I’d seen the revolution, [MI Because you’d been there] because we were driven out by it. We didn’t need to leave, we left quite legally, we could have stayed. We weren’t persecuted at any stage. My father was never arrested, we didn’t have searches, I mean that didn’t happen.

MI Yes, in this respect your intellectual biography would be exactly the same as my father’s though from a different point of view; that is he was strongly influenced, as I said earlier, by Strachey’s *The Coming Struggle* as it were, and all his friends were on the left – some of them like Edward Norman became fellow travellers...

*Side B [sides A and B are combined in the digital recording]*



IB I'll tell you. The thing that influenced me was, I read books by Englishmen who'd been to Russia, like H.G.Wells... [Tape stops for a few seconds] ...although I was...

MI But the Russell book's very astringent, isn't it?

IB Russell is anti, yes, but nevertheless. And I read – what else did I read – not exactly fellow travelling books but occasionally articles appeared. [MI The Lincoln Stephans kind of stuff] I didn't read Lincoln Stephans [MI André Gide's *Retour de...*] that's quite late, that was thirties. But I speak of being a schoolboy, my schooldays, twenties. You see my father would bring home these things about which he would speak with some indignation. I would then read them, I didn't agree with what my father said, necessarily, and even though I was only ten when I left Russia, nevertheless I knew this not to be true. It wasn't the Petrograd I knew and it wasn't the looks of things which I knew and it just was no good telling me. And I was always suspicious, even in the twenties. And when nothing much was written at that time – Lenin's death meant nothing to me, the opening of the Hebrew university much more, it was [] spontaneous. But then Stalin was an obscure figure in '25, '26, nobody quite knew who he was, what he was doing. So one vaguely knew the names of all these people. By the time I came to Oxford, I knew it was no good. I can't tell you why. I was quite clear that it was a despotism, a tyranny, and they were doing awful things, you see?

MI How does the news there filter out? There's so much more historiography about the filtering out of news about the Nazis that I've never quite understood how, you know, a British intellectual would have – the news of Stalin would have percolated out.

IB The *New Statesman* wrote continuously about the Soviet Union, Louis Fisher in the thirties and equivalent figures in the twenties reported on the Soviet Union quite in a semi-favourable way.

MI But then how does the nightmare of collectivisation become apparent, or does it?

IB That's because it didn't. That only became apparent in the mid-thirties. By the mid-thirties I got to know Victor Gollancz and I never exactly liked him, he never exactly liked me, but we were on terms because somebody who worked for him was somebody I'd been in love with for a time, a girl called Sheila Lynd. And so she kept on bringing us together, she loved him, he was her boss, later detested him as almost all his employees did. And he – I would then go to dinner with him [*claps*] and I would then bring news about horrors, and he would say, 'No, no, it's not true, it's pure bourgeois lies, you mustn't be taken in.' Then he went to Russia...[MI This would be '34, '35?] '34, '35, yes. He then went...

MI What horrors do you remember? I mean what...

IB Well, I remember the fact that there were some kind of reports of people starving in trains and people being dead. And a man called Chamberlain write a book, *Russia's Iron Age*, I can't remember when that was, maybe later thirties, but something of that sort, well written, about what went on. [?] yes. And then Victor Gollancz went there with his wife and said, 'But they have to do it. They're trying, they're doing their best, they can't help it, they're starting, there's this...' endless apologies were given of a furious kind. The more furious the apologies [MI The more unconvincing they were] [?] I became. I didn't thunder but I realised this was – they'd been taken in, taken in. I couldn't produce facts against them because I didn't know anything [MI You just knew] I just knew, you see? And for some reason, I was inflexible about that.

MI Can you remember arguments with that Pink dining group on this kind of subject?

IB No. The Soviet Union was never mentioned [MI Really?] No, they didn't talk about that. [MI Being on the left was a basically..?] It was entirely anti the Germans and Spain [?] Germany. Italy wasn't mentioned at all, Mussolini was of no account, it was mainly to do with the Nazis. These refugees had mainly to do with appeasement and the non-intervention committee; in Spain, the dangers of Fascism in Europe. That's why people became communists, you see?

MI I'm going to have to leave in a minute so there are two questions that come out of what we've said. One of them is about Salzburg [IB Yes?] your love of music and going to Salzburg. My father's memories of Austria in '37, '38, were very, very dark and clouded. He had a wonderful time but he really felt the Nazi world was closing in. [IB Oh it was] Did you feel it in Salzburg?

IB Yes; because the people who were pro Nazi wore white stockings, more or less up to the knees, it was a kind of uniform, these white stockings. There were a great many of them [MI Sort of walking breeches and then white stockings?] Lederhosen and then white socks up to here. [MI Men and women or..?] No, men, not women, no. A great many of them and I knew what that meant and they were everywhere. I mean Salzburg was full of foreigners of course at the time of the Festival, there weren't all that many – but still, so far as there were natives in Salzburg, that's what they looked like.

MI As a Jew did you feel a kind of dread here?

IB Oh yes, certainly. Dread, I don't know. [MI Anxiety] Well, I wouldn't go to Germany. When I went to stay with my parents in Marienbad to which they tended to go for the waters, I had to walk round through Austria, I mean the train went through Germany into Sudetenland, whichever that is. But I went to, first of all, I had to go to Austria first and then straight in to Czechoslovakia and

out; and when I went from there to Salzburg which I tended to do, there was...

MI Why on earth were your parents going to Marienbad for the waters?

IB Well Marienbad was Czechoslovakia, that was all right until '38, there was no touch of Fascism there, Masaryk and model democracy until 1938 which was a thing which all fat persons tended to do; rheumatics, fat persons, people who suffered in some way – Carlsbad, Marienbad were visited by those sort of people, by Aline's parents, too, from Paris, you see?

MI But you go – you wouldn't go through Germany but you would go through the Austria of Dolfuss? [IB Yes, certainly] You didn't feel the same sense of...

IB Oh no. No, no, no. I went to Salzburg in the very year, '34, when Dolfuss shot up the socialists, and I remember in Oxford Naomi Mitchison coming and making passionate speeches about how dreadful it was. And I accepted it was dreadful but for some reason, Austria was a clerical state governed by Priests and Dolfuss and right wing anti-Semitic parties but one didn't feel it, because nothing – as you walked the streets or [?], you didn't get clerical symbolism or obvious anti-Semitism in the shops or things like that, no. It was a pure tourist place, Austria, in that sense. It was like Switzerland, you just went there to enjoy yourself, it had no political flavour at all till '38.

MI Did you go in '38? [IB No, no] The last time was in '37?

IB Yes, of course. After Anschluss there was no question. I mean some Jews did go through Germany. The thing which most astonished me was that Leonard Woolf and Virginia went to Germany for their holiday in about '37, 6 or 7, to Germany! It

struck one – she – I don't know. But he was a very identified sort of Jew.

MI Because my father went through Austria in '38 in fact... [IB Ah, '38 was after Anschluss] and went to a rally at Nuremberg in '38 and it was one of the decisive events of his life [IB Of his life, quite so] partially because he went with a close friend who was taken for a Jew in a couple of cafés. He was in fact, a kind of dark Irishman.

### **IB He wasn't a Jew but he was insulted?**

MI He wasn't a Jew but was, because of you know, various stereotypes, was taken to be a Jew. It was a very, very, very uncomfortable experience.

IB From 1932 onwards, I was fully aware of Nazi horrors, more than most. I had no doubt it was not temporary, I knew it was unique, I knew it was terrible, and I didn't for a single moment think that one could have peace with them. I was sure what was coming and I was sure it was necessary. My father was not. When Munich happened, my father said exactly what Blum said in Paris. He felt shame and relief, that's what Leon Blum said. That was my father's sense. Thank God, no war. I felt indignant, indignant, violently angry – not angry but I mean upset, deeply depressed by Munich. I thought it was a terrible thing to have done. Betrayal, straightforwardly. And people in Oxford [were] divided about that in quite interesting ways.

### **MI How do you recollect those divisions?**

IB Well, the late Dennis Brogan was violently anti-appeasement. 'If the Times is going to...' I went into an electrician's shop to buy a torch which was then necessary. In '38 we all had to buy torches to prepare for war – this is Berchtesgaden before Munich, in that fortnight – 'If the Times is going to become the Englischer

Beobachter, I am not going to stay,' and so on. Geoffrey Dawson was quite clearly in a mood of violent appeasement then. On the other hand, someone like Hodgkin, the Provost of Queens – I dined at Queens at that time – said, 'Well, peace after all is more important in the world and maybe the Germans will calm down, you know? I think there's a good chance of it. Chamberlain is very wise.' Then in 1939, 1940, still presiding in Queens, he had a Jewish lecturer called Ettinghausen who afterwards went to Israel and became the Israeli Ambassador in Paris. He said, 'Do you know, if the Germans come, it may not be so bad. France recovered from 1870 quite quickly. I think we might not have such a bad time.' Then he suddenly saw this unfortunate – 'I suppose it won't be quite so nice for you,' he said. [laughs] Rather terrifying. He was an ex-Quaker, he was a Quaker by birth but was in favour of the Boer war and then was expelled from the movement. [chuckles] But there were people like that, so... the President of Magdalen was a man called Gordon, a straightforward appeaser, for example. The President of Corpus, Livingstone, was just rather feeble. The Provost of Oriel, Ross, eminent Aristotelian scholar, thought it was a bad business and didn't entirely approve but wasn't sure. I'm trying to think. Maurice Bowra said [claps] – was violently against it. I'm trying to think who I knew but I don't know that we talked about it very much. In All Souls there was a certain amount of disagreement of a fairly open kind about that. The great rows occurred over the abdication, where one fellow of Exeter threw a glass of wine at another fellow of Exeter for being against King Edward VIII [MI Really?] There was passionate feeling. Roy Harrod canvassed the London to Oxford train, compartment by compartment, to find out if they were in favour or not in favour after the Bishop of somewhere had revealed the facts about Mrs Simpson, and found on the whole that the great majority were in favour of the [MI Of the abdication?] No, of the King. I was in favour of the abdication, I thought there was something very wrong with him. Her pro Nazi sympathies were already known.

MI Ah! That was important to you in your...

IB Well it was clear, yes. Yes, yes, I could see that. They were pro Nazis, yes. I didn't think I could like them, no. I'm trying to think of anyone in Oxford who went as far as that. Germans used to brought in – I remember a German Baron being brought in. The Germans sent people who they thought would get on with the English, so suitable noblemen of a hillbilly kind were sent to try and show that Germany wasn't all that bad. This man appeared in the tow of some fellow of All Souls and I didn't really want to be there after lunch much. The man didn't get on very well, he didn't know what to talk about, so he pulled out a piece of paper and said, 'Some jokes,' which he read out aloud. That didn't go down terribly well and Namier appeared at that point in All Souls, of course was a Jew and very conscious. He was secretary of the Zionist organisation and all that. And somebody, one of these Germans appeared and said, 'We really do think countries are entitled to colonies. Why shouldn't they have colonies?' He got up and said in German to him, – I think I quoted that – 'Wir Juden und die andere Farbigen denken anders.' I was present at that actually, the coloured peoples think otherwise. [MI That's a great remark] Wonderful.

MI A great remark. I've very much revised my view of Namier because I come from the generation who regarded Namier – of young historians who were raised with Namier as the kind of enemy. You'd say Namierite history was exactly everything that the kind of insurgent...[IB Why?] Edward Thompsonian kind of social history of the early seventies was against, you see?

IB Of course, but it was conservative but it was also – the ideas were unimportant.

MI But when I read that, I thought, my God!

IB Oh no, no. As a personality he was not like his history books.

MI Oh yes, because at the end of Namier's life and what one saw in his books was what you described, a kind of endless delectation and fascination of the wiles of the English ruling class; and if you were trying to create a history that was from the bottom up as it were, Namier was definitely your enemy. [IB Of course he was a snob] The snobbishness was insufferable by the late sixties. [IB It was there] But that remark redeemed a great deal, I thought.

IB There was that famous remark which I've also quoted about when he went – he used to go to muniments and look at papers in country houses, had a special tweed suit which he wore on those occasions in order to give pleasure and he was also a friend of all these [ ] in earlier period when Chatham House was created. And he said, [*mimics*] 'Lord Derby said to me, "Namier, you are a Jew, why do you not write Jewish history?" I said to him, 'Derby' –that was the point of the story – 'Derby, there is no Jewish history, there is only Jewish martyrology and that is not amusing enough for me.' That he would quote. That's much more the sort of thing. When I sent him a piece on historical inevitability, he wrote me back saying, 'You must indeed be a very intelligent person to be able to understand what you write.' [MI *laughs* That's wonderful stuff!] That's all [ ] he hated it.

MI It's a wonderful disguise for a man who was so intelligent and such an intellectual in lots of ways, to take that disguise was very kind of cunning in a way.

IB I put all that in my essay about – I wrote about Namier but it's the only thing I've ever done which was not commissioned. Every other piece I've ever written was always written to order, I've never just sat down and wrote a masterpiece uninvited.

MI Yes, it is a masterpiece, that one. It's one of your finest...

IB Well, I enjoyed it so much, doing it, because he was such a man, such an extraordinary figure. [MI Last question, and then...] Not



at all a nice man, far from it. [MI I'm late] He made the most anti-Semitic remark to me that anyone ever made but I did not put it in that essay, I thought it might be – do harm to Jews. [MI Which was?] I came back in 1942. First he made me take off my plastic mackintosh which you could get in America, which hadn't come to England, and give it to him as a present. [*mimics*] 'Ah, here you are in this beautiful light garment and I have to tramp home at night in this heavy...' [MI laughs] I saw what that meant. He then said, [*mimics*] 'You know, they say' – we were sitting in his Zionist office – 'you know they say that the black market has compromised the Jews in this town. That is not true. The Jews have compromised the black market.' [claps] That was one, very typical.

MI I do find that kind of remark baffling, deeply baffling as a Gentile.

IB He couldn't bear the Jews. He knew, for his snobbish point of view, he thought they were awful – I mean ugly really, didn't know how to behave, un-English and there was something fundamentally anti-Semitic. He fundamentally hated being a Jew, really, but he was clever enough to realise, and proud enough, not to try and not be one because that was no use, that was contemptible; to try and assimilate – he used to talk about the Order of Trembling Amateur Israelites – no, Trembling Israelites, which I then later changed to Order of Trembling Amateur Gentiles of which the publisher of the *Times* was the President and Walter Lippmann was the Vice President [MI *laughs*] I think there were some more names, that particular order of people, OTAG, Order of Trembling Amateur Gentiles. But anyway, you see therefore he realised the only way in which you could go on being a Jew is by dragging them up to his own level so he would cease to be ashamed of them. Weizmann he worshipped because he was the one man who he thought was all right, was a gentleman who was completely proud, un-self-conscious [[MI Unapologetic] well, made of one piece and therefore him he absolutely looked up to completely. And if the truth can be made like that, he despised the

Zionist organisation which is why he was never made a member of the famous Zionist Executive because he kept on insulting them. He thought they were dreary, sort of crawling provincials. That's what Namier was like. He was a D'Annunzio really. He wanted to ride into Amman on a white horse, that's what he wanted.

MI A kind of Polish D'Annunzio though [IB Oh, well yes] the Polishness of him was very important in that kind of...

IB ... was very strong. Well his father was baptised, you see, and he lived among those sort of people and he [ ] it certainly, was proud of knowing members of the Polish nobility and so on, all that. So all these things he wrote about at the beginning of the war, found in Polish documents. That's all you see? No, no, he was rather pro Polish. OK.

## MI TAPE 8-2

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*MI's transcript*

MI: December 14th. We were talking about All Souls in the, sort of, '34 to '39 – that's the period we're discussing.

IB: '38 I moved from All Souls to New College.

MI: To New College.

IB: Yes.

MI: But let's talk about the period before you moved, '34– '38.

IB: Certainly.

MI: What I'm interested to know is – you said yesterday that being at All Souls in the early '30s was your first encounter with how Britain was governed. Can you give me a feeling for the people you met?

IB: The feeling is this. There were these London people who used to come on Friday and spend Saturday religiously. It was an English thing to do. They liked meeting junior Fellows They liked pretending they were all very cosy with us. The left wing Fellows were anti them with certain exceptions like Quentin Hogg who was straight conservative or Wilberforce who had no particular politics. Apart from that everyone was labour inclined. Nevertheless, relations were quite peaceful. And they came much more frequently because it was part of the pattern of life. They liked being child-like among us. The Bishop of Gloucester came with a very severe Gloucester bishop – a man who objected to my

election and then made friends inevitably and naturally afterwards. He invited me to stay afterwards.

MI: Why naturally?

IB: Because whenever that happens, you immediately try to show that it wasn't personal and on theological grounds. A learned theologian of a reactionary kind. He rather enjoyed his own savagery. He told me: I'm going to give a party for my clergy tomorrow. You can come if you like. You will never see so many fools together in one place in your life. These stern figures behaved like children among us. Who came? Geoffrey Dawson, editor of the Times, came, a fanatical appeaser; he refused to dig air raid shelters in his own square. Leo Amory, anti-appeasement Conservative. Very heavy dull man of good character, honest, kind; the duller he was the better one wished him; he didn't show off in any way; he used to lecture the conservative cabinet on conservative philosophy and bore them to tears; they didn't believe there was such a thing. A disciple of Milner. They were the Milner kindergarten. There was Bob Brand, head of Lazards, extremely clever, detached and sardonic man. Then there was Lionel Curtis who was a kind of **fanatic of the British Empire, who founded Chatham House, and who was an *éminence grise* of a tremendous kind behind the scenes. He had no money and no great ambition for power, but he manipulated people: if you wanted your letter to be signed by both Archbishops on the next day, he and he alone could do it [...]** a great friend. Donald Somerville, ex liberal, solicitor general under Baldwin, Home Secretary under the caretaker government, a conservative of a mild-mannered, civilized kind, who started his life as a chemist. Steele Maitland, he died, a junior minister. John Simon, came regularly, absolutely awful, as awful as you think he is.

MI: What did you think was awful about him?

IB: The smoothness, the butteriness, the obvious lack of integrity, the cunning and complacency. He was always very flattering to people; he always sent you a letter of congratulations when you were elected a Fellow. Which would swell their heads. He would say things like: "I've just been on the India Commission. Any ideas you think about India you think I ought to know. Could you send me a postcard?" And you really thought he meant it, you know. He was a white sepulchre. Exactly what that phrase means. Who else? Halifax didn't come very much. When he was Chancellor, he used to stay nights. I worked with him in Washington. Smuts was a guest; colonial governors; liberal imperialists. Curtis was a parody Milner. In the 1920's there was an attempt to make All Souls a centre for liberal imperialism. T E Lawrence became a Fellow on that ticket. He never came to the college in my time. That was how Lionel Curtis became a Fellow. We junior Fellows objected. But it was wonderful to listen to them; Round the fire on Saturday nights, and someday would start a subject and they would then defend it, and there would be an argument. We called them the fat cats. Minor figures like Roger Makins, now Lord Sheffield, now 85, he had things to say.

MI: What about appeasement at All Souls?

IB: There's a book about it, highly inaccurate, by A L Rowse. Henderson was a violent anti-appeaser but appears among the appeasers. Just revenge. They didn't talk about appeasement openly with us, but they brought sympathizers with them and talked in the privacy of their own rooms. There they would practically have committee meetings. Now there was a thing called the All Souls Group, planning the new Europe, consisting of the Warden, just a dear old thing, and Curtis, and Amory and Brand, Rowse and Hudson, Henri Siegfried and Beveridge, Toynbee. After dinner on Saturday nights, they wandered off to the Warden's lodging for meetings. On a famous occasion, they began debating the shape of a new parliament about 38 and Beveridge laid it down that there be precisely proportional numerical

representation. That would mean, said Siegfried, the Germans would have 70 votes and the French 40. Precisely said Beveridge, after which Siegfried didn't turn up again. The group also had Lord Allan of Irtwood (???) ILP, a super-appeaser, in favour of the Sudetenland going; no bolding him at all.

MI: What about you in this story? Where did you stand?

IB: Together with everyone else in my generation, I was strictly against. There were no appeasers in our group, except Hogg.

MI: Could you ever understand appeasement?

IB: No. The imperialist group, represented by people like Curtis, were frankly racist. They believed in the Aryan ascendancy. They didn't want the Italians. They believed in Germany, Scandinavia, the white Empire. The Russians were right outside. Apart from being Communists. When Curtis preached a united Europe, Russia was to be outside, that was to be the basis of it, the defence of white Western values against the horrors of the East. The Germans were a dubious case, admittedly, but it was better to be with Hitler than with the Russians; Rowse in his book says the opposite, says they were ignorant of Europe and only wanted to defend the Empire. They knew exactly what they were doing, and therefore, they were fundamentally unsympathetic. I was quite friendly with Bob Brand because he was sardonic and detached about the policy. Sir Dougal Orr Malcolm, head of the South Africa Company after Rhodes. One of the South Africa group, he would come back from meeting Alfred Rosenberg, (German ideologist) "he's an awfully interesting fellow, even if he doesn't agree with everything he says." That was the line.

MI: Where does the Cliveden set fit into all of this?

IB: Same thing. I mean it overlapped. Chamberlain never came to AS, but he came to Cliveden. Von Trott had nothing to do with

these people. They were all pro-Franco, even Churchill was, until the Germans began supporting him. They were sympathetic to stories about poor Catholic priests being savaged by these horrible revolutionary gangsters. That was the mood of those people. Occasionally there was a row. About the occupation of the Rhineland in 1936.

MI: Can you describe how that shaped up?

IB: Roger Makins tried to defend the Foreign Office. Henderson, father of Nico, afterwards head of the *Economist*, said it's difficult for us to act unilaterally. But I said Flandin came in order to talk to us – A mess in Paris. Well, he didn't make it very clear, that sort of thing. Well, this is your last chance. Oh, I don't think so. I think we'll be able to – I don't think we'll be overrun by Hitler. Yes, yes, I think there'll certainly be a war. Don't quite see why I should say that. I think steps can be taken. **They didn't say "Hurray for Hitler"**. The Archbishop of Canterbury was, after all, an ex Fellow, Lang, who when the imperial walked into Austria, first into Sudetenland towards Switzerland all this stuff about German self-respect being regained, the German movement are in [...] made speeches in the House of Lords. He didn't come much because he was the Visitor and therefore – Visitors weren't supposed to impinge too much. He had been a fellow, by election. I can tell you what happened when he came but that's probably irrelevant to all this. We were all lined up to meet him in a rather royal fashion, all the junior fellows, and this grand figure arrived in *tremendous* canonical dress, looking like a cardinal, mauve with wonderful – I mean, the most supra-Anglican dress you could wear as Archbishop. When he talked to us he moved imperceptibly from one to the other, like peasant women in a ballet, he glided. When he came to me, he asked me what I did, I said I taught philosophy. When I was in Balliol, Master Jowett and a teacher T. H. Green. The trouble with Professor Green is that he confuses the real with the ideal. Speaking of myself, great as my shortcomings may be, nobody has ever accused me of making the same mistake. Quite a

good remark I thought. A really cynical figure who played a central part in the Abdication crisis. These were the persons who came and you knew who ran England. Cabinet ministers came and you dined with them and talked to them. A lot of colonial governors – Lugard – regularly appeared, that’s where I met him. He was heavy, he had power.

MI: It’s typical of intellectuals to be drawn to this kind of heaviness. Were you?

IB: It wasn’t so much admiration. They were serious, humourless, dedicated to their task, and there was a certain dignity about them. And they talked about serious topics. They didn’t just chat. The College Walk on Sunday mornings. Senior Fellows took Junior Fellows for a walk. Two or three would take two or three for several hours. I never went on College Walk. A custom which ceased in the middle 1930’s. When Chelmsford died, Warden of All Souls, First Lord of the Admiralty in R MacDonald’s coalition government; a Viceroy of India; died in April 1933. To his funeral came aged persons one had never seen in one’s life. There came Lord Earnlie (Protheroe) in two Gladstones administrations. He wrote a book called Horn, Hoof and Corn and edited Byron’s Letters. You see. Figures of that sort emerged from a past world. Vanished figures from the 1880’s and 1890’s. Grant Robertson, Vice Chancellor of Birmingham, came, taught the Prince of Wales. “Remember your royal majesty the Bourbons. He didn’t. Didn’t know who they were. The most ignorant man I’ve ever tried to teach.” Edward VIIIth.

IB: And so on. So you got all that. So therefore it was a fairly happy time for me because **I lived in College. On weekdays I taught, 5 hours a week, or whatever it was, a day, morning and afternoon. I talked to Austin, who was elected the year after me. I went for walks with him, or Maurice Bowra or some other friend. I dined at All Souls night after night. There were about seven or eight people to dinner on weekdays and about twenty-five at weekends.** You see,



that sort of thing. **I had a very regular life. I was an Oxford don absolutely, much more than I have ever been since, and fitted into the Oxford texture, absolutely – felt perfectly cosy and comfortable in Oxford academic life – and was very very academic, I really was a super-don in those days.**

MI: And what does that mean? You were scholarly.

IB: Well, **I was friendly with the other philosophers – you see; I used to meet them, and I was cosy with them, and we talked about the same sort of subjects. I used to dine with Ryle, or Ryle dined with me, and I would ask philosophers to dinner, or we had tea together, or I met them in Blackwells and talked to them. But I was among brothers. Not only, you see – I lived a purely donnish life, I didn't know the great world, you see. I didn't go to London much. I wasn't asked out to dinner in London much. I didn't go to country houses. This happened later in my life.**

MI: In this period in the '30s, that sounds to me like the primary world, the dons' world. The world of politics ...

IB: There was a labour club and Cole presided over it, but I didn't go much. The pink lunch was created by Cole in the 1930's and to it came anyone who was anti-Franco and anti-appeasement, and we met in one of those low grade undergraduate hostelries where you could eat for a shilling. Present were Cole, Harrod, Rowse, James Meade; Christopher Hill; Austin, myself, Freddie Ayer; A H M Jones, A Roman historian at All Souls; Gordon Walker, Frank Pakenham, Crossman; Ruskin College, professional labour party people. Stuart Hampshire after he became a fellow at All Souls; Ian Bowen, economist at All Souls. Someone would come to talk to us: a labour party official or a German refugee. Lilo Linke. Austin said there was a great deal in what Lilo Linke said. A communist German Jewish refugee. Dalton Sydney Webb, Attlee didn't, Beveridge came; John Strachey. His books converted more people to Communism than anybody else. The Coming Struggle for Power. (My father remembers this book) Lindsay didn't come: too

grand. Norwegian and German socialists came. A lot of philosophical refugees arrived. Marshak came via Heidelberg; of Marshak, the librarian of the Bodleian was reputed to say he's the kind of man who doesn't take yes for an answer.

MI: what is happening to you intellectually at this point? You're writing *Marx*.

IB: I sure am.

MI: And your memory of this is just disappearing into a mineshaft.

IB: Absolutely. Down a tunnel. I never talked to anyone about it. there was no one to talk to. People read Marx. There was a set book in PPE. Apart from Cole and Lindsay who had written a book on Marx.

MI: What was Cole like to talk to?

IB: I didn't know him then. I only got to know him after the war when he was made professor. At that time he was at University College, a rather severe, stern figure, leftist, I was rather frightened of him, and I thought he would rather disapprove of me. All Soul's was very disapproved of as being a terrible Venice, a home of luxury and corruption. Dons at Balliol tried to persuade their best pupils not to apply there, because it led to terrible decadence. Money was paid, no work was done, all these Londoners came down, it wasn't right for good young serious men.

MI: What was it like to write Marx? It was your first sustained piece of intellectual work.

**IB: I read an enormous amount, because I'm always very nervous about being ignorant. So I sat there reading volume by volume of**

the Marx–Engels *Ausgabe*,<sup>2</sup> in German, badly – my German is not good – with dictionaries, but if I could read anything in translation, I did it, the same way as I used cribs at school. And I then – The edition was stopped in ‘32, ‘33 – by Hitler. Then it began to appear in Russian. I was able to acquire volumes of it from the Soviet bookshop. So I read everything he wrote, sort of absolutely, and took notes. And I read books about him, three or four, including a rather good book by E H Carr. It was called *Karl Marx: a study in fanaticism*. He ended the final chapter with the words: and worse was to come. He did not reprint it. It was very anti-Marxist. Then I started writing with a pen, in about 1937, no 1936. (Characteristic stretching of the words here, Nineteen. . thirty. .. (very rapid) six....no, seven. No 36. I wrote and wrote a certain amount at Oxford, but it was very difficult because there were a lot of pupils and it had nothing to do with philosophy. Nothing. But as a result of reading a lot of French Encyclopaedists, who were forerunners of Marx and much more delightful to read than he was, I began to teach them. But there was no real custom for it. No one was interested. But I began to lecture on them and these lectures began to get somewhere.

[Phone rings.]

MI: So it's Marx who leads you into the discovery of ...

IB: ... ideas

MI: .. the Enlightenment. .

IB: Yes, and the history of ideas...

MI: Yes

IB: ... as a subject.

MI: Yes

<sup>2</sup> 'Edition'.

IB: That plus this man Rachmilivich whom I told you about.

MI: Yes.

IB: Which in a sense also stimulated my interest in ideas as such. But **Teaching philosophy was so remote from Marx or anything to do with it that I did lead two lives** in a sense, then. Well then, let me see, then I went on – then I produced a huge thing by 1937 which was twice the length the Home University demanded. They asked me to cut it. I refused. Finally I was prevailed upon by Fisher who had offered it to me. Since it was chronological, I had to squeeze blood from each chapter. I went with my parents to the Riviera for the spring of 1937. Beaulieu sur mer where I proceeded to squeeze blood. Agony. Locked up for eight hours a day. I destroyed all the pages I didn't use. Angrily. Finally the book was reduced to manageable size. I surrendered the manuscript in 1939, and it was published in 1939. [Note by Henry: 'Sometimes he says this, sometimes he allows they may survive. I may have some of them. I dream of reconstituting the original!']

MI: And what do you think about it now?

IB: Decent, obsolete textbook which didn't do any harm. You couldn't tell from it what my political views are. It received some curious reviews. Mild praise from the *TLS*. A man called Campbell, a famous communist, reviewing it in the *Daily Worker* said that it was unsuitable for the workers and incorrect, but nonetheless showed that progress had been made among the bourgeoisie since the nonsense they had talked in the 1920's.

MI: High praise!

IB: Indeed. It was denounced in very violent terms by Raymond Postgate in the *New Statesman* (Cole's brother-in-law) who had already written a book on Marx and saw no reason for another. He

said that considering that Freud has not been applied, the book was worthless. It received quite polite reviews otherwise. It sold quite well. It went through five editions. I revised it from time to time. I did not make sufficient use of the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, as I should have done, which means that the alienation material is neglected. It had appeared in Germany, but I don't think I knew it. I must have ignored them. I read them later and then in the 1950's, I revised them. Cole thought quite well of it. Lindsay thought I hadn't done justice to Marx as a Hebrew prophet [chuckles]. He was a Biblical figure. The economic chapter is much the weakest since I know nothing about economics. Rowse wrote a review saying it was over-rated. [chuckles]. Later when the final edition came out, I made Jerry Cohen and Kolakowski read it, they said quite nice things about it. Jerry Cohen said it was a good book. It isn't a good book. But it's quite decent account which isn't tendentious.

MI: What place does it occupy in your intellectual biography?

IB: It taught me about Marxism. I realized he was a man of genius. I gave him his due. I thought Lenin had perverted him. I was also very anti-Communist. I was somewhat unique among leftists of that time, who were not as anti-Communist as I. When Austin went to Russia, he was rather impressed by the austerity and seriousness of life, which he liked. I was anti-Stalin as soon as I began to think about things. And that influenced me to becoming anti-Marx. I thought that the idea that Marx had been betrayed by these people had been false. Though Marx had been betrayed in certain way, these people had been true to him. It could not be said that Marx was a democrat and a humanist. He wasn't. There was a famous occasion in which Sydney Hook called on Edouard Bernstein in Holland. After Hitler had come to power. He said to Bernstein, who knew Marx well, he was Engels' literary executor. Hook said what would Marx have thought of Lenin. Bernstein lowered his voice and said the old man was very strongly in favour

of violence. I hadn't thought of Marxism as a doctrine. It enabled me to settle my accounts with it as a doctrine.

MI: Is the book also your reckoning with the phenomenon of Stalinism?

IB: No, that preceded it. Before I read Marx. At school. I just knew. I'd seen the revolution.

MI: This would have made your biography similar to my fathers.

IB: I read books by men who'd been to Russia like H G Wells. And Russell.

*Side B*

MI: But Russell was very critical ...

IB: Russell is anti ... What else did I read ... articles, in my schooldays. My father would bring home and speak of them with some indignation. I didn't necessarily agree. But even when I was only ten, I knew that it wasn't the Petrograd that I knew, you can't tell me, as it were. I was always suspicious even in the 1920's. Lenin's death meant nothing to me. The opening of the Hebrew University, which was almost simultaneous, meant much more. [Chuckles] But then Stalin was an obscure figure in the 1920's. By the time I came to Oxford I knew it was no good. I can't quite tell you why. I just knew it was a despotism, a tyranny. You see.

MI: How did news of Stalinism leak out into intellectual circles in England in the 1930's?

IB: The *New Statesman* wrote continuously about it. Louis Fischer was one who reported in a semi-favourable way.

MI: How does the nightmare of collectivisation become known?

IB: It didn't exactly. Not until mid 1930's. By then I got to know Victor Gollancz. I never liked him. He never liked me. But we were on terms. Someone who had worked for him, Sheila Lynd, was someone I had been in love with for a time. She brought us together. She loved him as her boss and later came to detest him as almost all of his employees did. I would go for dinner with him and bring him news of horrors and he would say [claps hands together] 'Pure bourgeois lies. You mustn't be taken in.'

MI: What horrors do you remember?

IB: Reports of people dying of starvation in trains. (Muggeridge ?) I remember a book by Chamberlain, Russia's Iron Age. Victor Gollancz went there with his wife and came back with endless apologies for the system. They're trying this and that. You must understand. And so on. The more furious the apologies the less convincing they became. They'd been taken in. I couldn't produce facts. I just knew. For some reason I was inflexible.

MI: Can you remember arguments about the Soviet Union at the pink table lunches?

IB: Nope. The Soviet Union was never mentioned.

MI: Really?

IB: The subject was Germany and Franco. The dangers of fascism in Europe.

MI: What about Salzburg? My father's memories of Salzburg were very dark. The Nazi world was closing in.

IB: Oh yes. Those who were pro-Nazi wore white stockings, more or less up to the knees. Walking breeches, lederhosen, then white stockings (the men). There were a great many of them and I knew what that meant.

MI: As a Jew what did you feel? Dread?

IB: I wouldn't go that far. I wouldn't go to Germany. When I went to stay with my parents in Marienbad, for the waters, I had to go around through Austria, the train went through the Sudetenland, but I skirted around Germany to get to Marienbad, which was after all in Czechoslovakia, perfectly safe, or so we thought until 1938. Masaryk and model democracy.

MI: What were your parents doing taking the waters in Marienbad?

IB: It was something all fat persons did. Rheumatic persons. Carlsbad. Aline's parents went too.

MI: But you went to the Austria of Dolfuss.

IB: I went to Salzburg in 1934 after Dolfuss had shot up the socialists and I remember Naomi Mitchison coming to Oxford and making a passionate speeches about how dreadful it was. I accepted it as such. Austria was a clerical State governed by priests and Dolfuss, but one didn't feel it. When you walked the streets, you didn't encounter obvious anti-semitism. It was a pure tourist place, till 1938.

MI: You didn't go in 1938.

IB: After the Anschluss it was out of the question. Leonard and Virginia Woolf went on holiday in Germany, for heaven's sake.

IB: From 1933 onwards, I was fully aware of Nazi horrors, more than most. I knew it was unique, terrible and didn't for a single moment think we could have peace with them. My father didn't. When Munich happened, my father said exactly what Blum said in Paris: shame and relief. Thank God no war. I felt indignant. Upset.



Deeply depressed by Munich. A betrayal. Straightforwardly. People divided in quite interesting ways in Oxford.

MI: How do you remember those divisions?

IB: The late Dennis Brogan was violently anti-appeasement. If *The Times* is going to become the *Volkische Beobachter*, I'm leaving. I went into an electricians shop to buy a torch, to prepare for war. This was Berchtesgaden, before Munich. On the other hand, Hodgkin, provost of Queens – I dined with him – said that peace was more important than anything in the world. Chamberlain is very wise. If the Germans do come, it won't be so bad, he said. The French recovered from 1870. Then spotting a German Jewish refugee – Ettinghausen, who later went to Israel and became ambassador to Paris – he said, I suppose it won't be quite so nice for you. An ex-Quaker. There were people like that. The president of Magdalen – Gordon – was a straightforward appeaser. The head of Corpus – Livingstone – was just feeble. The head of Oriel thought it a bad business.

Maurice Bowra was violently anti-Munich. In All Souls there was a lot of open disagreement. **The great rows occurred over the abdication. One Fellow of Exeter threw a glass of wine at another Fellow of Exeter for being against the Prince of Wa..., against King Edward VIII.**

MI: Really?

IB: **There were passionate feelings. Roy Harrod canvassed the Oxford to London – London–Oxford train, compartment by compartment, to find out if they were in favour or not in favour after the Bishop of Somewhere had revealed the facts about Mrs Simpson,<sup>3</sup> and found on the whole that the great majority were in favour of the**

<sup>3</sup> Wallis Warfield Simpson (1896–1986), American wife of Ernest Aldrich Simson, her second husband, became Duchess of Windsor in June 1937 when she married the former King Edward VIII (1894–1972). The Bishop of Bradford, Dr Alfred Walter Frank Blunt (1879–1957),

MI: Of abdication.

**IB: Of the King. No. Of the King. I was in favour of the abdication. I thought there was something very wrong with him. Her pro-Nazi sympathies were already known**

The Germans used to send Germans who the British would like. So they sent some hillbilly baron who arrived in tow with one of the AS Fellows. He didn't know what to say so after lunch he took out a piece of paper and said "Some jokes." That didn't go down very well. At this point Namier appeared. Very Jewish indeed. A secretary of a Zionist organization. When the German said he didn't see why Germany shouldn't have colonies, Namier got up and said very loudly, in German, "We Jews and other coloured peoples think otherwise."

MI: My generation thought Namierite history was the living end. But I've revised my estimate.

IB: Namier used to wear a special tweed suit which he used to wear to country houses to inspect muniments, which gave pleasure. He was friend of all these grandees. He said Lord Darby said to me: Namier you are a Jew. Why do you not write Jewish history. Darby – I replied, that is the point of the story – there is no Jewish history. There is only Jewish martyrology and that is not amusing enough for me. When I sent him my piece on historical inevitability, he said, you must indeed be a very intelligent person to be able to understand what you write. He hated all that stuff.

MI: What a cunningly anti-intellectual disguise.

IB: I put it all in my piece. It was the only piece that was not commissioned. Everything was to order. I never sat down to write a masterpiece, you know, it was all to order. He made the most

**criticised the King in a speech on 1 December; this precipitated the first coverage in UK newspapers of his relationship with Mrs Simpson.**

anti-Semitic remark I've ever heard. I came back in 1942 from the States and he made me take off my plastic mackintosh and give it to him as a present. Here I am in this beautiful light garment and I have to tramp home at night in this heavy ... I saw what that meant. You know they say the black market has compromised the Jews in this town. That is not true. The Jews have compromised the black market. That was very typical.

MI: I find this type of remark baffling as a Gentile.

IB: He couldn't bear the Jews. From a snobbish point of view, he thought they were awful, dreary, didn't know how to behave, un-English. Hated being a Jew really. But he was clever enough and proud enough to realize not to try to assimilate. He used to talk of the order of trembling Israelites. Which I then changed to the order of trembling amateur Gentiles, publisher of The Times was president and Walter Lippman was vice-present. OTAG. He realized that the only way he could go on being a Jew was to drag them up to his own level. So he would be ashamed of them. Weizman he worshipped. A gentleman who was proud, completely unapologetic, all of a piece. Looked up to him completely. He despised the Zionist organization, he thought they were crawling provincials. He was never on the executive. He was D'Annunzio really. He wanted to ride into Amman on a white horse.

MI: He was a Polish d'Annunzio.

IB: Yes, his father was baptised, and he was rather proud of knowing the Polish nobility ... O. K.

[*Conversation ends*]

I led a regular life. I taught in term and every summer (*slaps his thigh*). I went to Salzburg. Regularly. And very enjoyable it was. Sitting in the gallery, it was absolute heaven. Wonderful singers,

*MI Tape 8-2 / 18*

orchestras, the like of which was not repeated. I always arranged to meet people. Stayed in Guest Houses.

## MI TAPE 9

Conversation date: 23 December 1994

Date transcribed:

Transcriber: Esther Johnson

Subjects covered:

Auden

Spender

Virginia Woolf

Bowra

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### *Side A*

MI We've talked about your Oxford life in the thirties, we've talked about your academic and professional life, we've talked a little bit about your family but we've not talked about literature, art, painting, writing, in the thirties and those circles as they impinged upon you.

IB Yes. Well, I didn't really know very many – I was a don and I lived in Oxford and I only knew people whom I vaguely met through that. I mean I wasn't a prominent figure in the literary – not a figure at all in the cultural world, really then.

MI But I think you said to me that you'd met the Woolfs at one point. Is that what's in my mind?

IB Yes, yes that's quite right. Let me begin. The first literary person I met was Stephen Spender, who was my contemporary. He was a year older, he was absolutely charming, he was very good looking and very friendly, and he managed somehow to – and very naïve and generous natured and he went about both with Blues and with highbrows, and that was unusual. The only other person who did

that was the present Lady Longford who was then called Elizabeth [Harman?] before she became Pakenham. She also broke through the barrier. But still, Stephen Spender was at Univ. I met him in my first year, in his second year, and we made great friends and we used to go for walks together on Hampstead Heath because he lived there. My parents lived there and in Oxford up to a point, too. Well, the poetry he wrote at that time and for a few years after, was really very good. After that I think, though I oughtn't to say it, it seemed to be in decline, though he is a very good critic, a very candid and penetrating critic to this day. I mean there's nothing between him and the object, which is unusual. He's not – state categories of any kind, or frameworks or doctrines.

MI Are you as close to him now as you were?

IB Yes, he has remained a friend for life, I know him now, too, very well. He really is a life-long friend. Well, he introduced me to Auden with whom I got on frightfully badly. Auden – I met him in Stephen's house in London about 1934. He wore a wig [MI A wig?] Yes, or what appeared to me to be a [?] yellow wig, that was accepted, but I'm not sure he didn't have a false beard, that may be an invention on my part. But he looked at me with extreme disdain and he obviously thought – oh, I don't know, he decided I was a minor bourgeois intellectual of some kind at best and treated me with a certain amount of contumely. So I didn't make friends with him. But I met him later.

MI He was one of those for whom the term bourgeois was, at that point, a term of contempt.

IB Certainly; certainly, and he was a kind of homosexual Freudian-Marxist. I don't know that he ever read Marx but that kind of thing. They all were, you see, Stephen also was a man of the left but in a very vague and general way. He did try to – finally he did join the Communist Party in 19, I would say, 37 or so. I begged him on bended knee not to and kept on asking why he must. He said well,

he wanted some firm organisation to measure his views against; everything else was vague and soft and no good, the Labour Party was – well, a lot of people felt that, and it was a really bureaucratic affair with no fresh ideas and so on, the other parties were impossible...[MI And you urged him not to: why?]

IB Not to become – because I thought he wasn't one, nor is he, nor has he ever been.

MI You thought it was untrue to him?

IB He has no political instruments, so to speak, he hasn't got [MI No compass] his uncle was a famous political journalist called J.A.Spender, famous friend of Asquith, Lloyd George and so on, so he imagined – his father was a political journalist also, called Harold Spender – so he imagined he had political ideas. Well he was a man of the left as we all were but he had no doctrines and he didn't have an analytic mind, hasn't one now. He has general sympathies.

MI But the judgement that he shouldn't join the party was much more a judgement about him than it was really about the party; it didn't come from a sense that this was a kind of incarnation of infamy.

IB Oh yes, a bit, I can't deny it. I was anti-Communist, strictly. I mean I knew Communists and I didn't refuse to know them, I mean I knew – I didn't know any dons. I knew Christopher Hill whom I did not know to be a Communist. I knew him to be left wing, Marxist. He was the only left winger, Communist, I ever knew who went into Russia and came out again entirely unaltered. He went there, I should say, in about '35, came back probably a year later or so; no difference at all. I had postcards from him from Moscow which shows we were on very good terms, above all one showing a lot of Soviet Marshalls together. Most of them were

purged [*chuckles*] not so long after, it's a very compromising postcard which I must...

MI But you didn't take him up on this [IB Never] inconvenient...

IB No, because he – well, he wouldn't have minded at that time. I think he believed every word Stalin ever said until the Twentieth Party Congress whenever it was. He was a true believer. He's now no longer a member of the party but he was a hundred per cent Marxist in his day. But he was the only one I knew of whom it could be said that he was in fact a Communist except as I say, I didn't know it at the time. And there was a – well, wait a minute – I've told you about the Pink Lunch Club? [MI Yes] Well I won't go on about that, he belonged to that. Anyway, Stephen Spender, yes.

MI Well, tell me a little more about why Auden was so disagreeable to you.

IB Can't, I don't know, he just was rather rude, so I didn't take that very well, no reason was given. It was clear...

MI Did you find his homosexuality distasteful?

IB Mm, he wouldn't have known it although of course Stephen was, too, and we were great friends and I knew that about him. And I'd never – about homosexuality I can talk to you about separately, that's topical, of some interest, Comintern – but – a word invented by Maurice Bowra – but Auden; well I'll just finish to you about Auden, we might as well. I met him afterwards in New York in nineteen hundred and forty-one when I was stationed there, can't remember how. Through a woman called Anne Freemantle who was a Catholic lady whom I knew, who – oh I don't know, sort of lived – sort of Bohemian lady who lived partly in Washington and partly in New York, who knew him. He was extremely friendly and we got on beautifully from that moment on,



and I went to see him in Brooklyn where he lived with Gypsy Rose Lee and – Gypsy Rose Lee. [MI No! Really?] Oh yes, she was – I don't but in was in the same house and a man called Jimmy Stern and his wife. He was a minor literary person, translator and so on. And we had dinner and he was extremely warm-hearted and friendly. I thought he was awfully nice. Can't think why, total change of attitude. Whether they were both Englishmen abroad or in exile or whatever it was. And then I learned something about him. He played to me records after dinner, in particular Nabucco which you must know to be an opera by Verdi. Now in Nabucco, Nebuchadnezzar whom it's about if you remember, he suddenly boasts he's a [hubrist?]. He says, 'I'm King of everything, I'm King of the world, I'm God.' At that point, God strikes him and he's not killed but he collapses and goes out of his mind and starts eating grass, according to the legend. At this point, Wystan said, 'Ah! the Headmaster', – he began talking American-English in his head – 'Master didn't like that much.' I realised then and forever after that Auden's view of the world was in terms of public school. He thought of the world in public school – that he liked living in images and similes. He thought in terms of some kind of construction of that kind, you see...

MI How did one [IB The world of school] how did one story allow you to make this elaborate judgement?

IB Well no, no of course not. When he talked about the [?], I realised when he was talking, as he made remarks, it somehow fitted. I realised what he thought was – I checked with Stephen Spender, too. But he thought on the whole the world was a place where there was a Headmaster, or *Headmaster*, [American pronunciation] that was God, then there was Masters, one had to obey, some of whom were unjust, some were unfair some were fair, you couldn't tell. Then all sorts of things happened and he went to the rules. The rules had to be obeyed. The rules had no rational basis of any kind but if you didn't obey them, you were rightly punished. In other words, he believed in a kind of

mysterious discipline. Stephen later put it by saying for him, the world was a chess board. If you were on a white square you were all right. If by some bad luck, you were on a black square, you suffered. But there was no telling why black was black or white was white. There was not a moral basis for it; a theological basis of a mysterious kind maybe, you see, but no moral basis, it was just transcendental, transcendent rather, somehow. This is what he thought of the world as, and he thought – he and the other boys, you see, and the relationship was boys, homosexuality, boys, school, it was all one. David Cecil once said to me about him and Betjeman and somebody else, I think some other homosexual, not Stephen, some third one – who was it? Isherwood, I think, that they had the sentimentality of the changing room, which was very brilliant. It's exactly right; infantilism of a certain kind; homosexuality, sentimentality, infantilism; but it was all – the jokes were public school jokes, the language was public school language to a large degree, there was a certain arrestedness, you see?

MI Arrestedness presumably even in the way he thought about politics, because the schoolmaster metaphor applies to a vision of the political world?

IB Yes, yes. Freud was an important master, Marx was a very important master and you could change topics, you could change subjects of course, you could stop doing mathematics, start doing history – all that was allowed but within a school framework. The world was organised in, no doubt, ultimately intelligible but to us, non-rational lines. We couldn't understand but we had to obey, and one had to develop certain fixed habits which got one through life. Auden always drank until six o'clock in the evening, vodka Martinis, then stopped drinking – oh, I mean the opposite; he never drank before six. At six, he drank steadily, by eight he was drunk. That was so in New York, it was so in Oxford afterwards, I noticed. But we became great friends; he even dedicated a poem to me which I am very proud of because I thought he was a poet

of genius, still do. We had one or two – I won't sort of mal entendu – misunderstandings ones...

MI Can you tell me?

IB Oh yes, certainly, yes. Let me try and think. Yes. He wrote a review in the *New Yorker* of a sort of biography of Maurice Bowra, whom he had a sudden – he was part of his world, I mean he didn't like him really, Maurice Bowra liked him but it was part of the Oxford he knew and therefore was designed to some degree of immortality. Anybody at Oxford in his day was OK in some way, they belonged to a proper context. And Maurice Bowra reported in this letter that he had been in America and after he failed to become Professor of Greek which was a great disaster for him in Oxford because Gilbert Murray didn't like him though he didn't say that; and an excellent man, who was Auden's greatest friend in England called E.R.Dodds was made Professor of Greek, which was a very just choice. Auden...

MI A brilliant scholar.

IB Yes, and a father figure to him and MacNeice in [B?] where they both were at one time. Anyhow, Maurice Bowra reported that he wanted to take a – he wrote us all a letter saying he was going to take a job in America, and we all dutifully wrote saying, don't stay in America, come back to us, come back to us, [*laughs*] which we were obviously intended to do. And he did come back, became Warden on Wadham and all was well. And Auden said, 'I don't know why Isaiah Berlin should have said that. Why shouldn't he have stayed in America, what's wrong with taking a job in America?' And then he said – by then he was a great success in America, was a notorious success in America – 'God knows why,' roughly, he didn't say God knows why, 'and therefore this piece of advice to Maurice Bowra seems quite inconsistent and absurd.'

MI To which you then had a kind of correspondence on the subject?

IB Not quite, but I think I complained in some way. I think I wrote him a postcard, maybe, saying that I couldn't quite understand why he...

MI And the subject was neuralgic with him obviously because he...

IB Because of exile, yes, because of being in America, and because Maurice Bowra didn't stay and behave like an English patriot all through the war, you see? And did not join the Comintern in any true sense – although he was homosexual, he wasn't regarded as one of them by then. He would have made a perfectly good father and husband; in fact he was pitched into it by failure with women, by a number of factors. He wasn't one of nature's homosexuals whereas Auden was. Well, then, I think that's only – course, the trouble was I think he was a bit contemptuous about me in this connection. [MI Why?] Well, why should he – you see, I mean saying it's all very well, he seemed to do very well in America, what's wrong with it then?

MI But not contemptuous of you in other connections?

IB Oh no, no, not at all, not at all. Oh no, no, no, not to my knowledge. Wait – now let me think...

MI And your friendship continued through the war?

IB To the end, and then he came to Oxford, you see? He came to England and I saw – he became Professor of Poetry and I saw him frequently then. He delivered some good lectures both on poetry and on libretti in which he took an interest. He sent me all the libretti of his operas which I wrote him long letters about which I'm sure he destroyed, about [?] which was about [the Bacchi?] and *The Magic Flute* which he did for television in New York with –

what's his name, with his friend, who was already there in '41 – what's his name?

MI Yes, I know who you mean.

IB Chester, Chester Kallman who was a sort of little Brooklyn Jewish boy. And Auden took an unnatural interest in Yiddish, Jewish stories, everything which came from Brooklyn. [MI Why unnatural? Because of Chester ?] Why should you not be interested in Yiddish speaking Jews as such, and he used to read a book called – by some Jewish author called, *The Rabbi who rose late on Friday*. It's kind of *Father Brown* stories translated into a Jewish context or a Rabbi who was detective. He read them avidly [*chuckles*], he used to talk to me about it and so on.

MI Did you ever kind of twit him, did you ever tease him about that kind of...

IB Of course, yes [MI Sort of Judaphilia] it wasn't Judaphilia, he didn't like Jews that much, it wasn't that, but he was somehow obsessed whatever he happened to be in the middle of, it just became a kind of object of interest. One never knew what he would pitch into in that way, you see? And then he came to Oxford and I saw him when he was Professor of Poetry. He held court in the Cadena Café – I don't know whether it's still called that – to undergraduates on probably Friday morning or something.

MI This was in the fifties?

IB This would have been the fifties. Then he came back in, I suppose, the late sixties, early seventies. Rather like E.M.Forster, he wanted to settle at Christ Church and did. They weren't quite sure they wanted to have him, but still, a great poet, they couldn't not. And then he was a great bore to them because he was drunk at dinner. I used to come to dinner with him occasionally and he would tell the same story over and over again. I used go there with

other people. He noticed me, he would address me, you see, and he talked endlessly you see and – oh, I could tell you quite a lot about him in Oxford but that's not really relevant. But I had to go to his opera written with Nicolas Nabokov which was called Triple L, *Love's Labours Lost*, which was being done in Brussels I think. Anyway, all that is gossip. Go back.

MI Go back to the thirties.

IB All right. Then, in the thirties I met Stephen Spender, certainly. I met Virginia Woolf. I met her – I never became a friend of hers but she's one of the people I really had hero worship for, still have. I am by nature a hero worshipper, I can even give you a list of my heroes. I thought about that the other day, somebody asked me, I said this to somebody. Who were they? I gave a list as I remember it.

MI Well, let's have it while we're at it

IB Well OK, while we are fresh. [*claps*] My heroes were, before the war, Toscanini. I thought his whole attitude, I mean of course the conducting came first, I thought they were the most marvellous performances of anything I ever heard: Schnabel, not quite so much, the pianist, but near because his performances of Beethoven transformed one, gave one a new conception of the seriousness of music, Schubert and Beethoven were wonderful. Stephen and I used to go to these performances, endlessly. Toscanini, absolutely extraordinary, I've never been – and also frankly he was extremely passionate, proud and handsome, wouldn't go to Nazi Germany. All that rather pleased me, you see? Every story I heard about him – when he was in Salzburg in 1937 which of course produced more money for Salzburg than anything ever had done because all the Americans came. They hadn't done before, and [Schussnin?] who was then Prime Minister of Austria wanted to be on good terms with the Germans, tried to persuade him to have Furtwängler who was then playing in Germany, and he refused flatly. '36. And

[Devalle?] said, 'You know, he's not really a Nazi, he plays along with it. He's a weak man. He just – I don't know, he's a German, he sort of conforms but he doesn't believe these things.' And Toscanini said, 'Exactly as I believed, not even a Nazi.[*laughter*] That's the sort of thing I liked.[MI Other heroes] What? In the end, he did come, Furtwängler. Then, my next hero in order – well, Virginia Woolf was, then Edmund Wilson was: Weizmann was. Wait, I've now forgotten who they were, there are some more, but politically, nobody else. Roosevelt was, during the war, certainly. Stravinsky was.

MI Did you ever meet Stravinsky?

IB I knew him quite well, we'll get to that, yes.

MI Tell me about Virginia Woolf.

IB Well, she – her mother – no, her father was the brother of the mother of Mr H.A.L.Fisher, who had been an historian as you know, and he was – Lloyd George made him a member of his Cabinet, he was Minister of Education, and then he came back as Warden of New College, and he was a first cousin of her and he invited her to stay a week-end. His wife, Mrs Fisher said, 'I never liked Virginia Woolf, very priggish, prissy woman. I never liked her. Herbert is a cousin of hers so I suppose I can't help having her, but...' Well, the people who else I knew, I knew Fisher's daughter very well and still do, called Mary Fisher. She is now called Mary Bennett who became head of St Hilda's College in the end; and she consulted me about who should be asked. Then we made a list, that was all right, at least my list was all right. We asked John Sparrow, I think, who certainly admired her greatly; David Cecil wasn't in Oxford so he couldn't be asked, not then, was a friend of hers; Mary herself; a friend of hers called Rachel Walker who [ ]; C.S.Lewis because he was the English lecturer, Fellow of Magdalen, English lecturer at New College, so he was asked automatically. A man called Carr who was a Classics don at

Brasenose because he was a bright young man with a future; Crossman who Mrs Fisher liked fervently, though he didn't. Now, who else were we? I think that's probably all we were. And she came. I thought she was the most beautiful person I'd ever seen in my life.[MI Oh yes, incredibly beautiful] Very beautiful, very light blue eyes and a kind of unfocused gypsy look, very thin. She was rather like an idealised version of English governesses, like a sort of, yes, sort of idealised, in the end of this somehow, outside the series towards which we attended. But she was wonderful looking and she had a beautiful voice and she talked in similes.[MI Why beautiful?] Well, it was silvery, it was high, extremely – I don't know, it was even and, I don't know, difficult to say about a voice because it was gentle and firm and rather musical [MI Precise] very precise, very firm, she didn't waffle. Well...

MI She spoke in sentences, her diction was clear, she's...

IB Very good, complete sentences and similes and analogies and images which were almost as good as her books. All I remember is at my end of the table, Fisher would say, 'Virginia, do you ever read Scott?' She said, 'No, no, I think it's all terrible nonsense.' Fisher would say, 'But David Cecil has just written quite an interesting lecture...' 'Ah, David. Yes, well he's got a very wide taste.' Then, silence. Then he said, 'Do you go for walks in the country?' She said, 'Yes, I do, quite often in Sussex.' 'What do you most like?' 'I like goats on the sides of hills, they look so ecclesiastical.' [MI *laughs*] That sort of thing. At the other end, Mrs Fisher would say, 'I like Uppingham, it's a hearty school.' Crossman was shouting, C.S.Lewis was shouting; they couldn't bear her. She was the opposite of what they wanted to meet. They were hearty, coarse, tough, you see? Lewis hated women anyway, you see? Crossman hated intellectuals, prissiness, I mean highbrowness of every kind. Bloomsbury was frightful in spite of...

MI But in that division on the table, you were clearly on her side?



IB Well obviously and that night I suppose I talked a little, then we all went upstairs afterwards, about fifty undergraduates. She was like a Bishop, very nervously about to confirm. She didn't know what to say. She stood and said, 'Has anyone here read *Jane Eyre*? Someone put up his hand. 'Oh, oh, I'm so glad. Can you tell me the plot?' [MI *laughs*] She went on like this very nervously, she really was embarrassed until Mrs Fisher said, 'Well, ten o'clock. I'm going to bed and I advise everybody else to do the same. Stay here if you like.' And she tramped off and everybody went away. I was left with her and him and five or six other people and then she relaxed completely and chatted very amiably. [MI Leonard was there?] What? [MI He was there, Leonard was there] Who?

MI When you said you were left with Virginia and her husband.

IB No, no, no, no. He refused to come and for this one good reason. He thought that Fisher was the man who invented the Black & Tans in Ireland; that Lloyd George had said to him, 'Fisher, you're a historian. We have a mutiny on our hands, what does one do?' Well, I can imagine, probably imagined that Fisher said, 'Well, take a lot of men, put them in mufti, put them in khaki or whatever it is, put them on trucks, put them on lorries,' and so on. He was convinced that Fisher was in favour of the Black & Tans, such a man could not be spoken to. He refused to come. That certainly happened. Then later, she wrote two letters, one of which is mis-dated in Nigel Nicolson's edition, both about me – not only about me, about lots of things but mentioned. Not at all favourably. She says about me – well, yes and no – she says about me, one was written to Quentin, you see, her nephew and one is written to her sister: and she says, 'Opposite me I had,' – not quite the notorious, the famous or something, something that surprised me in 1934, 'Isaiah Berlin.' Obviously I'd been talked about to her by somebody. 'A Portugese Jew by the looks of him.' Why Portugese? 'I believe a Communist.' [*laughs*] It had no bearing on anything. I think my looks must have suggested that vaguely. Wait, how did it go on? [MI The second letter] No, no, it went on,

something like, 'too clever by half,' something like that, something mildly contemptuous. Then the next letter said again, 'Clever, clever,' I think, 'but reminds me of the young Keynes – young Maynard,' which was rather better, and went on slightly in this style but it was ironical, not friendly.

MI Whereas you seem to have been much more smitten...

IB I was overcome. I met her again, you see, with – without knowing she had written this about me – I met her again with Lady Tweedsmuir who was the widow of, the by then dead, [MI Governor General] John Buchan, yes, who had been brought up with Virginia in some London Square [requests the tape to be stopped for moment] Lady Tweedsmuir who was brought up playing in one of the London Squares with – what was her name? She was a Grosvenor of some sort, and then I don't know, she chatted away. Then she – and we talked about Stephen Spender and I said, 'Have you met his friend?' – with whom he was living, she was called Tania Heinemann who went to Spain whom she had to rescue; and she said in her silvery voice, 'Lower class?' I said, 'Yes.' 'Oh well, yes, I don't think I'm very anxious to meet him.' The snobbery was total, total, the whole of Bloomsbury. She then said, 'Stephen is such an enthusiast, he talked about a book called, *In the Province* written by' – what's his name? – Prince Charles' mentor [MI Laurens?] Yes, Laurens van der Post which they did publish, the Hogarth Press. 'It's quite a decent book but the way they carry on! I simply can't understand it. I mean, it's quite good, not bad. We did publish it,' she said. She talked about literature quite...that I don't think is recorded in the letters, that meeting. Then she more or less fell in love with, or at least took up with a lady called – who I mentioned to you last time – called Sally Graves, Sally Chilver, who then said to me that she wished me to come to dinner, which I did quite late in 1938 I think. And well, that was all right, it was in Gordon Square where they lived. Leonard was there, the first time I met him. He was very, very nice to me, very charming and very typical again; the conversation was

– first of all she always liked to guy someone, to make somebody a butt. On this occasion that was Nigel – Ben Nicolson who was a friend of her great lover and so on, as you know, but who was then Assistant Keeper of the King’s pictures. And she said, ‘Ben, when you go to see the King, do you bow very low? Do you go down on your knees?’ A lot of that went on, just as she said once to Hugh Walpole who was a friend, ‘Hugh, is your car lined with gold?’ [MI *laughs*] That’s the sort of thing. And Ben tried to answer, ‘Oh no, no.’ Then I remember she said, ‘You know, Royalty are quite interesting. I remember when I was with Duncan’ – Duncan Grant – ‘and Princess Beatrice or somebody came to visit the studio. Leonard was fumbling with the gas fire and with a trembling hand, couldn’t find the match, said, ‘I don’t see why you should say that. Royalty are treated exactly like everybody else, they’re perfectly ordinary people, there’s no difference at all.’ ‘You’re quite wrong. They’re very, very different and they’re simply wonderful.’ [MI *laughs*] She then said to me, ‘You came in carrying a book with you which you put in your overcoat pocket. What was that?’ I said, ‘It’s a book about Henry James, a book about...’ [MI Swinburne] No, no, no, about the man who wrote *The Red Letter* [MI Hart Crane?] No, no, no, that’s *The Red Badge of Courage*. No, no, 1840’s, American author [MI Hawthorne] Hawthorne, a book by Henry James about Hawthorne. There is such a book. ‘Ooh!’ she said. ‘Henry James. You read him a great deal do you?’ I said, ‘A certain amount.’ ‘Yes, well, I expect you have bats in your belfry,’ she said. [*laughs*]

MI What did she mean by that?

IB That I was very rational, clear-headed, nothing funny. She said, ‘Plenty in Henry James’s, you know.’ Well of course, I didn’t know him. By the time I met him, he was nothing but a frozen-up old monster, yes. All that I can report to you. And it went on like this, it was a very happy evening. She talked a great deal; she talked about [MI This is ‘38?] Yes, about. I met her only once again in the same year when Ben Nicolson had a kind of vernissage and some

sort of – of his new flat in Bloomsbury and we all turned up. She sat on the floor, her long silk dress spread elegantly in many directions. We all sat round her in worshipful attitudes; and then again – I can't remember what she said but the images were wonderful. She described how her dress caught fire. It was very well done.

MI Really? In what circumstances...?

IB In some house somewhere. She didn't notice, suddenly she began describing the flames. It really was a terrific turn. She was very eloquent but she was nervous. She'd met about five people in her life and if she met other people, she barked like a nervous dog.

MI She could take five at a time, is that what you're saying?

IB No, she didn't want to meet strangers, she was nervous. She knew four, five, six people intimately, met very few other people, Bloomsbury entirely. And when fresh people presented, she was nervous, she didn't know what to say, she, as I said, barked nervously, she could be rather rude. Didn't really want to make friends with anybody much; lived confined to her own circle. She was of course very anti-Semitic but that only came out in the diaries and that was censored by Leonard. In theory, every word is printed because Bloomsbury believed in no concealment but he did tell me by the time I came to know him after her death. There was a passage of such appalling Nazi-like racism that he thought well, of course she was rather crazy and sometimes went off her head. And he looked after her with utter devotion. Oh no, he was wonderful, he was saintly to her.

MI Your worship for her was based on her person but also her books?

IB Both. Both. I didn't like them all equally but three or four books are wonderful.

MI Which ones are the ones..?

IB Well, I'll tell you. I thought *Mrs Dalloway* was wonderful; I thought *To the Lighthouse* was wonderful. I did not think *The Waves* was wonderful, you see? I thought *Night and Day*, which people thought was a pot-boiler, was wonderful. *The Years*, fairly good. I thought *The Common Reader* was wonderful, the essays in it. I thought *Jacob's Room* was all right, fair. The feminist tracts not terribly interesting. Now what else have I read by her? I didn't terribly like what everybody adored, that was *Between the Acts* which I think was posthumous, almost, quite late. This is [ ]. Now what else did I read, or could I have read? Oh yes. I thought the first one was very, very good, the very first one of all. What was it called? Written during the First World War, before *Jacob's Room* I think. [MI That's got to be Dalloway] What? [MI I thought it was Dalloway] No, that was written in the twenties. I'll tell you what I didn't think, again I'm being critical. The pages in each book were absolutely marvellous; for example, I didn't terribly like the one about Vita Sackville-West. That was – what was that called? Elizabethan one. [MI Orlando] Orlando.

MI But there are some wonderful bits in...

IB Marvellous. The description of the freezing of the Thames and people on – too wonderful, oh wonderful. I thought she was the one authentic writer of genius in that whole group, much better than Forster, much better than Lytton Strachey, much better than any of them. Leonard I got to know after the war. He was very amiable to me and I dedicated, I wrote a book on Vico and Herder, to him because he made me publish it [ ], he sort of encouraged me and wrote me letters and so on. Very nice man. One thing which I never understood about them: in 1937, quite late, they took off on a [?] journey. Well, Leonard was always a very identified Jew. I mean he cared nothing for the religion of the other Jews but he used to talk about it, and his autobiography goes on about his

mother going to synagogues and all that. How could they go to Hitler's Germany then for a holiday? More than that, he asked Harold Nicolson for a letter of introduction. Harold said he couldn't do it but if he went to a man called Wigram in the Foreign Office, he might fix it up. Well, he went to see Wigram who was rather anti-German in fact. Wigram introduced him to Prince Bismarck, who was Counsellor at the German Embassy; and Bismarck wrote a letter saying, 'Mr and Mrs Leonard Woolf are very eminent literary persons. I hope they will be treated with every courtesy,' and so on; and there's a description of a Nazi march in the autobiography. That I could never understand. I asked Quentin Bell, who professed not to be able to understand either. They were so arrogant that maybe he thought the Nazi regime was not that much worse than any other. All regimes were horrible, they were all ghastly. He was a very devoted socialist, a Labour Party man. Well, and then that was my only – then she asked me to dinner, Virginia, again, but this letter arrived when I was in Washington, but it arrived after she was dead and it was somehow or other eerie. The letter arrived saying, 'Do come and knock on the little grey door [*laughs*] in Gordon Square on such and such,' but I think it came fairly late in '41. It was forwarded to me with a lot of other mail, to the Embassy, to New York I think...

MI By which time you knew she was dead.

IB By which time – yes. So that I could have dined if I'd been in England. So obviously, in some sense, we got on.

End of *Side A* and Tape 9

# MI TAPE 10

Conversation date: 13 December 1988

Date transcribed: 12 July 2004

Transcriber: Esther Johnson

Subjects covered:

New College

Crossman

Election to All Souls

Adam von Trott

Palestine 1934

Knowledge of the Holocaust

1928–38

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*Starts on side B: continues on side A*

*Side B*

MI Tuesday, 13th December in the year of Our Lord, 1988, and we had slipped you into All Souls in fact, and we were talking about philosophy in All Souls, we were talking about some of your intellectual influences that shaped you. We're now in the early 1930's. But we have not talked about how you were elected to All Souls and to the degree that that is something that I should know about.[IB Yes, yes, you could] You should tell me about that.

IB I'll tell you. It wasn't anything exceptional. The point was this. I'd done these two final schools. I'd got my bad first in Greats and my rather good first in PPE a year after. My tutor was a man called Frank Hardie, who was a very, very honourable Scottish philosophy tutor of great meticulousness and impeachable integrity and a very good tutor, suggested I might go for All Souls. I didn't know what that meant, but I did know – I was by this time

– came to New College as a lecturer and I lived in New College from about September 1932 onwards. There was no gap from being an undergraduate and being a don, it was straightforward. I began teaching two months after, in those days – there was no B.Phil, none of these intermediate examinations which now occur. Well, I loathed New College then, absolutely hated it. The only people I could talk to – the Common Room was dreary beyond words.

MI What about the teaching?

IB The teaching was all right, I quite enjoyed that. But the pupils – I talked lively philosophy to them and they talked lively philosophy to me. That was OK.

MI But did you say to yourself, ‘Aha! Isaiah, I have discovered I am a teacher.’ I mean did you have a sense of vocation?

IB Oh no, no, no, I just went on talking about philosophy as might be for anybody else who would read a paper to me and I either liked certain – or I wanted to argue; was it right, was it wrong. No no, I didn’t feel the slightest vocation as a teacher, nor did I feel this was a change of life.

MI You just float seamlessly?

IB Just float, I’m afraid, as far as I remember. I didn’t say to myself – I was very pleased to be given the job because there was nothing else I could do. I was given the job because Crossman – I think I told you that – who appointed me, wasn’t very interested in philosophy. He was a marvellous tutor. He was lively, he was provocative, he excited people, but philosophy as a subject bored him, and above all, the pedantic aspects of it. He thought I was a quiet hack, [MI *laughs*] would sit in the back room, quite correctly, and I would do – all the sort of necessary preparation of the students would be done by me while he went about exciting them



and preaching to them and delivering exciting lectures on Germany and Plato, Plato, Germany, Fascism and that kind of thing, you see? Which he did, he did excite them, particularly Rhodes scholars who were tremendously uplifted by him because he was unlike an ordinary tutor and he was – used to, so to speak, pucker his face, his eyebrows, large eyebrows suddenly became lowered and he would then more or less bully them, shout at them. They liked it.[MI *laughs*] Well, he was a personality of the first order but he was not intellectually – he was not an intellectual, fundamentally. [He was] a well trained Wykehamist, knew a lot of Greek, read Plato very well and knew Plato, knew Aristotle; extremely well-trained, accurate, all that, only interested in influencing people and that, you see – whereas I was, all my life, I've always pathologically avoided trying to influence people. The thought that I influenced anybody, is to me a source of horror. I did not want to be involved.

MI Oh, Isaiah! You've [IB It's true] you love influence. Isn't that a little self-deceiving?

IB Not at all. No, no, no. If someone says he's greatly influenced by you, I give a start.[MI Why?] Because I don't want the responsibility, just for that reason. I don't want the responsibility for other people's lives at all. I mean, it may be selfish if you like, but the point is that I don't want to be involved, I want to extricate myself. The thought that someone is doing something because of me, fills me with guilt and anxiety and responsibility. That's all. It isn't...

MI Well, but you see, you told me before we began recording... I saw you standing on a railway platform in 1946 with what I think was the Vice Chancellor of Oxford and whispering in his ear two proposals for an honorary degree, one for Pasternak, the other, de Gaulle. You didn't win, but that's also how I see you, whispering discreetly into the...

IB Not discreetly, not discreetly, quite openly [MI *laughs*] quite loudly. Quite loudly, on the platform, I said, 'I've just come from Moscow and there's somebody there who I think perhaps...' He said, 'Who?' I had to spell the name. Well, how could he know?

MI But that's a kind of influence, to get back...

IB Oh, persuading people, oh, I'm quite good at that and I tried that. No, no, when I say influence, I mean I have never had disciples in my life, never, no such persons, you see? Given how long I've lived and how much I have talked [*chuckles*] you might think it's rather odd but that's part of the thing.

MI And that, you prefer?

IB Yes, you see? But I've never had anybody regard themselves as a disciple of mine, unlike people who like disciples.

MI Of whom Crossman would be one.

IB Crossman very much but not intellectual disciples but political, emotional, whatever it is. Crossman, you see, his habit was to make young men attach to him and when he no longer liked them, dropped them over enormous cliffs; suddenly lost interest and some of them were ruined by it. Not permanently, at least for a time.

MI Do you feel you were ever the disciple of anyone else?

IB Yes. I was the disciple of my tutor in Corpus, and whenever I went to a philosophical meeting, all the arguments on both sides appeared to me entirely convincing. I hardly spoke because each seemed – I never said, 'No, no, that isn't so,' I hardly ever spoke because it appeared to me that what everybody said had a lot of truth and this is not a very good thing for – it's what is called polemical. The pupils were different, then I really did take to

pieces and some of them did complain that I left them in ruins, because I was over critical. That certainly happened. But at philosophical societies, dons always appeared to me to be much cleverer than me; know more, argue much better, always. And that still remains.

MI But would it be possible to describe yourself as a disciple of Austin at any time?

IB Yes, you could say that. I mean in the sense that he had, certainly had an influence on conversations with him, he taught me a great deal, certainly. He was about the only one, I can't think of anybody else in Oxford of whom this could be said. Certainly none of the others.

MI OK. Let's get back to...

IB You want to get back to All Souls, yes. Well, I went to this common room which was boring and dreary and pompous. **'It's the first time a young man like me discovers he can't say what he likes** because **People are too** shocked and they're too **conventional. They talk about bypasses, about cars,** about – I don't know what – **what they read in newspapers. It was impossible to say anything genuine.** There I was in September; the only people I could talk to were Crossman, who was a bully, but however one could talk to him. The first time I dined there, he said to me, – I couldn't speak at all, I was so shy and I still am. In the wrong company, I don't speak. He said, 'Be bright, Berlin, be bright. If you aren't, they won't take to you, you know.' That did not increase my self-confidence.[MI *laughs*] So typical. Then there was a man called Christopher Cox who had great charm, who was an ancient historian, who afterwards went to the colonial office [ ] education authority; and there was a man called Casson, who was a kind of archaeologist, who was a sort of jester; agreeable to talk to but not worth it. And who else? And Smith, who was a philosopher, who was a man of some charm whom I could chat to

in a kind of formal way. Apart from them, and I hesitate to say it, concerning who is still alive and who was in the common room at that time, like Sir Henry Phelps-Brown, the economist, you see, certainly; or – oh, I don't know – no, Harold Wilson came later. But anyway, I was very, not only bored, but depressed by it. I went through a very melancholy period. My friend, Maurice Bowra, who I had met only the year before but it did rather exhilarate me, was gone on a Sabbatical year. So then, I went in for All Souls rather mechanically; but when I was elected, the relief was enormous. I left New College with the greatest possible relief and suddenly went to All Souls. Everybody was **young and bright and talkative** and all the old men had to be on their toes before the young men because the disproportion was enormous, and there I talked for two days and two nights non-stop. Then I fell ill. [MI *laughs*] I had to be taken away for about two months, had sinusitis and various diseases. Totally exhausted. Now, All Souls.

MI How did the election occur?

IB I'll tell you. I had some friends there; one of my friends was Douglas Jay who I'd met somewhere. Then I knew Goronwy Rees, notorious figure who was a year younger – older – well, he was the same age as me but I was elected the year before, and I'd just met John Sparrow because I was an editor of a highbrow magazine, as I told you, *Oxford Outlook*, and I invited him to write an article against William Empson, who was his contemporary at Winchester. They knew each other; there was an altercation between them which is quite amusing to read even now. And I'd called on him in All Souls and then I remember, the night before my examination, my second examination, I went to dinner in Christ Church with Freddie Ayer, my friend; and there was Maurice Bowra, John Sparrow, my friend Martin Cooper, a musical critic and contemporary of mine, oh I don't know, Roy Harrod whom I just knew, and so on. And there was a very gay, lively, intellectual dinner party, and Goronwy Rees was there, so – and Sparrow was there and I talked to him at great length and got on

with him. So I knew three fellows. But that wasn't in itself probably, they were all very junior then. No Jews had been made fellows and tutors of colleges except one, before me, in all. [MI In Oxford?] I'm telling you. That was Professor Samuel Alexander from Melbourne, who I think became a fellow of Lincoln in the 1890's. I doubt if they knew he was a Jew when they elected him. He was called Samuel Alexander, Melbourne, probably the people who wrote letters about him didn't say it. The number of Jews in Australia at that time cannot have been great – suspicion that he might be. He was a perfectly identified Jew, I mean became a Zionist and all kinds of things. He wrote a book about Spinoza, he – Australian philosophy is still influenced by him. There's a man, famous guy in Melbourne, what's he called? Who everyone – a Wittgenstein man – a great influence on all Australian philosophers. He was a Freudian and a Communist and you've probably heard his name, he was a Freudian and a Communist and original figure and Proust and everything was taught by him. Anderson! [MI Yes, don't know] There was a man called Anderson, Andersonians, they're a famous Australian school of philosophers, still.

MI In turn, descended from Alexander?

IB Well, they never [ ] read Alexander. Alexander was in England, but maybe because he was Australian, Anderson took an interest and became a disciple.

MI And you were the first Jew..?

IB After Alexander. Alexander left for Manchester in the 90's, or '92 or 3, became quite famous. He got an OM. He was a sort of well-known philosopher with a beard, and very noble, holy, nice, distinguished man, not much good, in my opinion, at philosophy. But never mind about that. You see he became an honoured figure, friend of Whitehead, that sort of figure do you see? Well, then the next Jew to be made a fellow – [*claps*] no, look, I'll tell you the story

of the Jews in Oxford. The first Jew to be made a fellow at all, was a mathematician of great talent in Cambridge, called Sylvester. He could not become a fellow of a college because of the religious tests which only admitted Anglicans to the universities; there were no Catholics and no Non Conformists. Then religious tests were abolished in Oxford and Cambridge I should think probably by Gladstone I should think in the early 70's and that sort of thing. And then he became a fellow of – no, then he was elected to a professorship in Oxford. That carried with it a fellowship at New College, so somewhere in the 80's he became a fellow of New College, stayed two years perhaps, then he went to, I think, South Carolina, somewhere like that, somewhere in the southern States where he wasn't particularly – Louisiana perhaps, I don't know – where he wasn't particularly well-treated. Stayed in America; he may have come back to die in England. But anyway, he was a passing figure. Then we have Alexander. Then nobody; and the assumption was that Jews wouldn't be elected. I mean Laski, I'm sure, attributed his non-election to any fellowship, including All Souls, to that.

MI With justice?

IB Who can tell, 1912, I don't know. Yes, I should think it played a part. Then, yes, I mean he was probably noisy and rebellious in his own way, I mean he was sort of left wing, no doubt rather unsuitable sort of Manchester figure, but apart from that, the fact that he was a Jew can't not have played a part. Then, let me see – foreign name and all that – then Goodhart, who had an English sounding name, who was an American Jew, was cousin of the Lehmanns and the Morgenthau and was very rich, was a fellow of Corpus and Cambridge, and came to Oxford as a professor of Jurisprudence in '31, and his wife was called [ ]

MI Philip Goodhart?

IB His father. He was called Arthur Goodhart. His children were Church of England. His wife was an Englishwoman, not Jewish. He was not very anxious to talk about that sort of thing, he looked like nine other Jews, people like that always do. But, after Hitler, he became more conscious, and began not to publish reviews of Nazi books in the *English Historical Review* of which he was the Editor. He adored English judges. He was adored in England by all judges, he was an Anglomaniac. He was frightfully sweet and extremely snobbish and very smooth and terribly enthusiastic about England. Simple minded man. He died after the war.

MI So then there's Goodhart and then there's you?

IB The very next year I was made a fellow of All Souls. The idea of a Jew at All Souls was sensational, to the Jews, certainly. Well, I don't know – there were three people elected that year. Wilberforce, who's now a retired judge, Lord Wilberforce; Patrick Reilly who's a retired diplomat, Sir Patrick Reilly; me. Normally they elect two, this year for some reason, they elected three. The Bishop of Gloucester did make a speech saying we are a Christian Foundation, is it wise, is it right to elect a Jew? That must have brought about ten votes to my side by then, sort of pro-Negro vote [MI *laughs*] you know what I mean? Probably, I mean I knew nothing about it. My rivals, whom I defeated I am sorry to inform you, at the election were Freddie Ayer, a man called Gore Booth who afterwards became Head of the Foreign Office – who else one would have heard of? – oh, you wouldn't have known the others; an eminent civil servant called Sir Frank [Figures?], Tommy Hodgkin who became a kind of left wing Africanist, member of the Party.

MI Did that election proceed on the basis of you submitting a...?

IB No, no, no, exam, still is. [MI I don't know anything about it] You see, there's no thesis; you do an ordinary straight forward exam. You choose. There are two subjects, law and history; by this

time philosophy had been added, but that's all. You either did law, there was a general paper, there's an essay, another two general papers. Then you do two history papers plus another, which now can be philosophy or politics. In those days, philosophy was the only subject – no, I think economics had been added. That's right, I did the economics paper which pure rubbish. And two philosophy papers – I think one philosophy paper and an essay and general paper. And on the strength of that – and you are viva'd, but the viva was a torture then: you had to go into a room, full of fellows, and you are given four unseens, Latin, Greek, German, French. These were read in whatever language you chose and then translated straight away. It was mere torture. Well I can't remember what language I did, probably German, it may have been French. The Warden of All Souls was Lord Chelmsford who'd been Viceroy of India and was elected in '31 and began to be Warden in '32, and died in '33 after a very, very short period; and as I left the room after this viva, I heard him say, 'Nope! We don't have to have this one.' [*laughter*] which rather lowered my morale. By the time I was asked to dinner, it was all right, you see?

MI How quickly did you know that you..?

IB Oh no, I knew the day – I didn't know I was doing well, I didn't know I was improving, no. Nobody said a word. But then, Goronwy Rees met me in the street on the morning after the election by pure accident – I was going to Blackwell's – said, 'Oh yes, congratulations, you've been elected.' I said, 'It's not possible, not possible.' I never thought I would be. I never thought I'd be elected to anything, really, in a way. I always thought I've done badly, like my lectures as I told you.

MI See through me.

IB Yes. It isn't genuine, it's all put on, it's all a froth. And then of course I moved to All Souls two days later, which one did in those days. The relief of leaving New College was enormous. Crossman



was furious, furious I remember; didn't like All Souls, didn't like my going there, the whole thing was a nuisance.

MI And thought he had you under his thumb?

IB Yes, oh yes, and did for a bit. And did. I'm just about to talk to a man, second man who's writing his biography. Two biographies of Crossman are being written at this moment; one by...

MI That seems wretched excess.

IB [ ] even one, I think. No, perhaps not. [?] is an interesting man, Crossman. One is Tony Howard who is writing one, the other is Tam Dalyell [MI Oh my God!] who is a maverick figure, who I think shared a house with him, would have done if you know what I mean.

MI So you're elected early '33?

IB Two, two, November '32 [MI Late '32] November '32. I moved to All Souls in November '32, fell ill by December, sometime in December, fell in for about a week and then again about mid December, '32, was visited by Von Trott...

MI Why did you fall ill?

IB Because I went to bed too late and got up too early and, I mean, was so relieved at leaving New College that I simply – I mean I talked all night to people and so on, you see, and played the radio. There were these wonderful concerts from Germany which you could hear in those days and particularly during the Nazi period. I could hardly go back to bed before half past two because the operas from Stuttgart and from Munich which were broadcast were of the most marvellous order. They started at midnight for some reason, for propaganda I suppose. Anyway, I fell ill because

– out of pure ill-living and sleeping too little really, and exhausted myself and talking too much, all that sort of thing.

MI But you were in heaven?

IB In All souls, absolutely. And then I went to Italy because the doctor said I must go and sit in the sun. It was towards Christmas time, Amalfi, where there really was sun and I did sit in the sun, it did cure me. I came back in about February, also '33. I went on teaching in New College till the war. That was all right, it was a source of income.

MI ... the need to live there and be entombed in [ ]

IB Well, I went to – once a week I used to go to dinner there and I felt very confident, I didn't mind who was there. I felt quite differently; if it was very boring, I wouldn't go into the common room. There was a common room every night, there isn't now.

MI Just before, you said it was at that period that...

IB The great philosopher was a man called Joseph who was a very clever, sort of old fashioned, Aristotelian teacher; everybody's teacher, vastly admired by everybody. Not at all a nice man in my opinion, who was quite polite to me because I wasn't subversive in any way, a real defender of vested interests: Winchester and New College, I mean every possible conservative doctrine, so to speak, Plato, Aristotle – hated positivism and the new philosophy [ ] and he taught Sparrow, he taught Crossman, he taught Herbert Hart and they always thought he was marvellous.

MI But you didn't.

IB I did not. I wasn't like Freddie Ayer who thought he was odious and silly, that went rather far. No, no, clever. He was a very good

tutor. He was a very sharp, clever arguer. He produced a lot of very good solicitors, people said.

MI [*laughs*] You said somewhere back there, two minutes ago – I have to catch you because you move so quickly – that that was when you met von Trott.

IB I suddenly produced von Trott's name. I met von Trott in 1931, in the, I would say, summer of '31. I was in my fourth year in Oxford [ ]. No, I think in the spring of '31. In the spring of '31, I was doing my schools, my second lot of schools. He was a Rhodes scholar in Balliol. We met at lunch in Balliol, given by a friend of mine called Tony Rumbold, who then became a Foreign Office official, remained a friend for the rest of my life, Sir Anthony Rumbold, Bart. and [*laughs*] that's what he was – and he was there at lunch and I liked him very much.

MI What impression did he make on you, von Trott?

IB He was handsome, charming, infinitely agreeable, lots of charm, intelligent, friendly and simply delightful.

MI And perfectly bilingual.

IB Perfectly bilingual; well, with a German accent. The English loved him because they – highest compliment they used to pay him was, 'You might be an Englishman.' No better thing could be said to anyone. Well, he was studying for what not and we...

MI What was he studying?

IB PPE. He originally came to Oxford to Manchester College, Theological College in about '27 or '28, that sort of year, and then got to know some people, as a sort of theology student curiously enough. That's when he met A.L.Rowse, who fell in love with him and remained so, I think, for some time. It came to nothing.

MI Von Trott was not an active homosexual?

IB No, he was not a homosexual at all, he wasn't one at all. I mean there's no reason for thinking he was in any degree. But Rowse was, of course, and is; and writes about it, I think, it's no secret. And then he went back to Germany. [MI In?] He went back to Germany probably in '28 or so, I don't know, '27 or 8, then came back as a Rhodes scholar.

MI Returned, '31.

IB No, earlier than that, no, three years I think, possibly returned in '30, I think in '30. That's right. And I didn't meet him in his first year; and his great friend was, and remained, David Astor, who adored him beyond – more than anyone has ever adored anyone. He loved him intellectually, morally, spiritually, politically, in every possible respect, and still does; and worships his memory, he's an icon. If anyone has any criticism, as I am apt to, I mean on not very major matters perhaps, but it's enormously ill-received. He regards one as a traitor. I mean, he can't talk to one, has a fantastic domination.

MI What criticism can you remember launching of him?

IB Oh, I'll tell you later. At the time, I didn't, no, now we're getting to the Nazi period, you see? At the time there was nothing, and then I thought he was a very nice man, we agreed to meet again, more or less. At least, he said, 'Do let's meet again,' and I was only too pleased, and then we used to go for walks in '31, and we would talk about philosophy. Whenever he got into difficulties with any question I put to him, he would say, 'At this point, I fall back on Hegel,' [MI *laughs*] whom I hadn't read and still haven't read, really. [*laughs*]

MI Did he do that humorously or with serious intent?

IB No, neither. It was sort of ironical way out, like an acrobat with a net under him. If you have to fall, you fall into the net. He half meant it, yes. Yes, certainly, no I think he believed in Hegel all right but he didn't say what it was. He didn't say, 'He says,' or 'The Hegelian way of putting it.' He just said that, full stop, not followed up. It wasn't a joke, it was meant to say, 'Look, this is too pedantic and too exact, I don't think in these terms and I think there's a larger way of thinking about these matters which you, in Oxford, have no idea of.' Rather like that. Not contemptuous but as a kind of defensive measure.

MI Where did these walks occur? Do you remember?

IB In the parks, university parks in Oxford; Christ Church meadow; Addison's Walk at Magdalen; where everybody walked in those days. Before the war and by about half past two, you observed a large number of dons walking. Never after, because they all got married and had children and had to look after them, and so on. Oh, academic walks were very frequent, one met a lot of colleagues, one chatted to them on corners.

MI Do you remember von Trott talking about politics?

IB No. He did not talk about it, he was a social democrat. He was a member of the German Social Democratic Party. We didn't talk about politics any more than Burgess ever talked about politics to me. I was obviously deep – clearly uninterested, shamefully so. I mean, I was on the whole, liable to become a member of the Labour Party, which I did become, but all the same I wasn't very political.

MI When people came to see you, they did not talk politics? [IB No] You didn't give off those radiations?

IB Oh no, no, I didn't tempt people to talk about politics, I wasn't a person to whom it was natural...

MI They can't have just talked to you about philosophy, that would make you a kind of fearful...

IB Oh no, no, no, we just talked about literature; we talked about literature, we talked about English, and then we had common friends. Our common friends were: a girl called Shiela Grant Duff, whose letters to von Trott, or rather his letters to her, have just been published. She was a pretty girl whom Douglas Jay was in love with, couldn't make up his mind between her and the lady he finally married. They both came from [the same?] girls' school. She had a long, happy affair with Goronwy Rees. Von Trott proposed to her on a park bench in the university parks. Now, that was a common friend. Then there was another girl called – well, I suppose, Peggy Garnett whom what's his name, Jay, married. Then who else? Goronwy Rees was part of that circle. It became a circle and we just talked about each other, met each other. There was a girl called Diana Hubback, who became the mistress of von Trott, who's also written a book about all these things. The memoirs about von Trott are frequent, you see, so when you say, what did we talk about, well we talked about ideas, not philosophy technically; about ideas, about morals, but not politics, about German literature which I didn't know very well. He was absolutely intoxicated by Kleist, who became a Nazi author, and to whose collected plays he wrote an introduction during the Nazi period at some point. He talked about Kleist, he talked about Schiller, he talked about life in Germany, his father, who was a Minister of Education under the Kaiser. He talked about his brother who was a Communist, he talked about another brother who was not, right wing rather. He talked about his South African or British ancestors. I don't know, one just chatted away about nothing particular. But he was very humorous and very gay, in the non-modern sense, and full of spirits. And then we talked about the news of the day.

MI Did you count him as one of your closest associates at that time, or someone in a sort of outer periphery...

IVB No, inner periphery. He was a real friend. I remember when I fell ill in All Souls in '32, Humphry House, who was an eminent English critic as in later years, wrote this famous book on Dickens and edited Dickens and edited the Jesuit poet – you know who I mean – Hopkins; they came to call on me when I was ill, and then, when they remained outside in my outside room, they took a music stand which was not mine, which had been there for some reason, put a mortar board on it and a gown, dressed it up as a scarecrow, put a huge notice on it, saying, 'Don't Enter.' Well, that was a mood...

*Side A*

MI ... it was like a public school, you were saying, it was like *Passage to India*.

IB Well, I'll explain to you what I mean. Palestine was the least smart of the places to which the Colonial Office sent its people. If you were any good, you went to the Sudan, India, wherever it might be. Palestine was a rather [mandated?] territory or rather obscure, so that the officials were not top officials. They were missionaries, like all British Officials were then, they really believed in improving the lives of the natives, their motives were perfectly good. They were not coarse imperialists, but it was a like a public school in this sense. The boys were Arabs, the Masters were English. There was a Jewish house because we were living – at this period one had to have one for some reason not quite clear to some of the Masters. The Jewish boys were different to the other boys; first of all they were cleverer; secondly, they were pasty-faced and didn't play games. The other boys were fresh and young and vigorous, played games and had natural human emotions – were, in a way, frightfully easy to get on with and one could try and lift their status. They were poor, they were ignorant. The effendis were charming and extremely agreeable and civilised and polished and dignified. The

Jews were ugly, not dignified, arrogant, came to their own country, couldn't understand why they weren't given the whole of it, you see, and so on, didn't care about the Arabs at all. This irritated the English, naturally, the officials, who took against them in a big way – partly like school, where the boys are clearly cleverer than the masters, which itself humiliates the masters. [MI Oh yes, absolutely] It makes an impossible situation, impossible. Now, moreover, they were trained to believe there were Whites and Blacks. Now, what were the Jews? What are they? If they came from England, they were presumably white; Germany, yes. Now, if they came from Russia it wasn't absolutely clear [ ] Poland; if they came from Tashkent they were certainly black, if they came from Morocco it's clear they were black. But somehow there was something uncertain. It was like Pavlov's dogs, they couldn't salivate and bark at the same time [MI *laughs*] so schizophrenia began, schizophrenia. And if you kicked an Arab down the stairs, that was the end of that; but if you kicked a Jew down the stairs, the next thing which happened was the boys would write to their parents in America, and their parents in America would write to one of the Governors whom they knew, and then [*chuckles*] and inquire – you see if you kicked a Jew, he might know someone in America who would write to Mr Justice Brandeis. [MI And then you'd be in trouble] Nothing masters liked less than I mean, Governors suddenly starting interfering as well as going into school. So it was all very uncertain about the Jews and awkward. Moreover, they thought they were wrong, and the Arabs – and they took a straight anti-Zionist position, which was perfectly natural. The Arabs *were* the natives, the Jews *were* these absurd invaders, what's all this about? The Balfour Declaration was obviously absurd and a crime and a mistake. The only people who were more or less in favour were tired, old sons of Mornish?] sort of officials, who were bored by the Arabs and bored by their colleagues and amused by the Jews. There were one or two people like that but they were rather exhausted, rather cynical.



MI What physical recollections do you have of Palestine as a place in '34? Where do you remember staying, what do you remember doing?

IB Well, I stayed in the King David Hotel in Jerusalem, which was a hotel which was part of Shepherd's Hotel, Cairo. It was part of a chain. The servants were black Nubians in long, white sort of shirts, and it was a straight Imperial hotel and the bar was full of British officials. And I knew – I forgot to tell you – I did know a man called Tommy Hodgkin, who failed to get into All Souls when I did. He was Secretary to the High Commissioner but I'd known him in Oxford quite well, and I stayed with him. He was a Communist at that time but that was hidden; he was a member of the Party. That wasn't known.

MI What was his name again?

IB Hodgkin, Thomas Hodgkin.

MI Any relation of the Hodgkin..?

IB Yes, yes, yes, all of them. His brother worked on *The Times*, he was called Edward Hodgkin. His cousin is a biologist in Cambridge, was Master of Trinity. His father was Provost of Queens and so on, you see? And he was at Balliol.

MI And he gave you an introduction to the British Colonial set?

IB No, no, no. I stayed with him in the Austrian Hospice. I didn't need to be given an introduction to anybody but I talked to him. We came in on donkeys, riding in on Friday afternoon, but stoned by religious Jews, rather like Christ [*laughter*] when we came in, you see?

MI This was in Jerusalem?

IB Jerusalem. He worked in the Secretariat; he was a Private Secretary, High Commissioner, Sir Arthur [W?]. He was a thousand per cent anti-Zionist.

MI But not anti-Semitic.

IB No, because he was a Communist and therefore wasn't allowed to be. Fundamentally, yes, but in fact restrained himself. I'll tell you a story about him, it will tell you what I mean. When he was discovered, he had to resign. He then led an Arab delegation to London, and there was a 'bus strike or something, and the Arab delegation said, 'Why don't you just shoot them? We can't have disruption of the Communist [*laughs*] Unions.' [*claps*] He then went to Africa and became a tremendous sort of pro-Ghana man, friend of Nkruma, stayed there longer than Connor Cruise O'Brien who was Head of the University. Well, he was a sort of left wing, pro-native, sentimental, pro-native figure of Balliol after some sort of colonial studies. He was a perfectly nice man. But I got the full impact of what British officials felt. Now, he knew some of these people and I used to have drinks with them. They were cautious with me. The only people who didn't mind the Jews were the Intelligence Officers who co-operated with them to find out what the Arabs were at. But all the rest – the Head of Education I remember, I can't remember his name, just loathed them quite openly. Bowman was his name.

MI You met German Jews there and what I'm trying to understand is what you said earlier, which was that your [IB No, bewildered] sense of Palestine – that Zionism somehow reduced your anxieties about what was happening and what was happening...

IB No, I'll tell you. I was so pleased by what was happening in Palestine and so happy about Jews going there, that the idea of their being persecuted in Germany didn't hit me as hard as it might because they weren't being killed as far as I knew, then. And they could get out if they took their property, gave their property to the

Germans. I mean there was a terrible – numerous clauses imposed by the British, but people with property could get out. Most German Jews had some. So I thought in '34, '35, there was a chance they could escape, I didn't think they were doomed, physically doomed. But then later of course, I realised they were done for...

MI 'Later' means when?

IB '37, '38 [MI Really? Kristallnacht?] First, before Kristallnacht, yes, because it was clear that they couldn't all get out as easily as before. There was a traffic through Palestine. That's one of the darkest pages in Zionist history, was the collaboration with the Nazi authorities to get the Jews out. It was perfectly honourable but it doesn't look right[ ] colleague to go to Vienna to interview Eichmann, you see, about getting Jews out. Perfectly proper but [MI A nightmare] But I knew nothing of that, then. I didn't know Weizmann; I didn't know any Zionist leaders. I was at Oxford and knew very few Jews, let me tell you, very few Jewish friends.

MI This is the final question because you have to go in a minute, somewhere else, but what did your Mum and Dad, your mother and father, make of you now? You're now a fellow at All Souls, you've now moved into the Oxford world. Did your mother and father come to see you at Oxford?

IB Yes. They had no idea what this meant. They didn't know what All Souls was; and it was clear to them, when I came back – my father was frightfully excited. He knew that it meant something because his business friends told him it was very, very – in those days, although it was much grander than it is now, frightfully – it was supposed to be absolutely tops, absolutely blue ribbon or the bluest of blue ribbons. You see, very few of [ ] was called *The Intellectual Aristocracy of England*, I can't tell you. On the whole it had no justification, in fact. But it is true, as I told you before, that if you wanted to know how England was governed, the members of the governing class at All Souls [MI They were there] were highly

systematic, they were there; and you could discover from their conversation, because it's very English, from the junior fellows, they loved talking freely. And you could disapprove of them and dislike them but you were in touch with the governing classes in a very direct way. Very.

MI But the question was, did your mother and father come up to see you at Oxford?

IB Oh certainly. [MI See your world?] No, not my world, that happened later. No, they used to come and have lunch with me or something; and if I had friends there, I introduced them. But they weren't part of that world and it didn't really connect. But in vacations, I stayed with them, because always in vacations I stayed with my parents in London. They knew about my life. It's like they met my better – I suppose three or four of my best friends they certainly knew quite well.

MI What did your mother think of your success, your elevation?

IB They were pleased, that's all I can say. I was the apple of their eye, I had no brothers or sisters and they were pleased with what happened. They suddenly realised I'd got into a world where I was all right, I was paid a salary, it was regarded as rather grand, and they were extremely satisfied. They had no idea what it really was. My father had a much better idea than my mother. My mother was a simple Russian Jewess and I think, not aware of these things. She didn't know how All Souls differed from other places. She knew that Oxford was marvellous but that's about all. But then, when the war began, in 1940 when I was sent to America for the first time – to Russia as I thought – the Blitz began, so I arranged for my father to live in my rooms in New College. My mother couldn't live there because women were not allowed so she lived in a boarding house next door. My father met all my colleagues in New College and outside, made great friends with them, was a great success. They used to drop into my rooms to talk to my father. I

was surprised but pleased. David Cecil and he got on beautifully. So in a way, they stayed in Oxford for three years, [MI Oh really?] my parents, yes, you see, because they were away from the – in London. They used to go occasionally back to their house in London but it was a comfort for them because of the Blitz and post-Blitz, they used to come to Oxford. By this time, there was a Jewish community there of people like themselves who'd also taken shelter there. They knew them. Lord Samuels suddenly appeared, used to come to tea, Herbert, that sort of thing, if you see what I mean. So in that sense, they understood my form of life, but not until then. They then knew Oxford, its streets, its houses, its inhabitants, dons with whom they got on extremely well – I mean my mother gave a very comical description of the christening [*chuckles*] of David Cecil's youngest son in St Mary's [MI Yes, I can imagine] to which they went, and so on, you see? So that's the answer to that.

[Tape stops and re-starts]

I went to lunch in 10 Downing Street this year – I think it was this year, maybe last year – and the President of Israel came on a State visit, a man called Herzog whom I know, I knew him before. We were all asked to Downing Street and old Mrs Rothschild, Mrs James Rothschild was there; and she was extremely old and very distinguished and grand. Mrs Thatcher said how pleased she was to welcome this wonderful woman, and she was obviously expected to say something. She got up and said, 'The last time that I had luncheon in 10 Downing Street was when Mr Asquith was kind enough to invite me,' and sat down. That was 1915 I think, [MI Incredible!] seventy years before. Rather sweet. Asquith liked her very much; she was a pretty girl and Asquith was rather susceptible. So she died – I'm afraid she died two days ago.

MI When was the last time that you saw her?

IB The last time I physically saw her was three days ago.

MI And how was she then?

IB Well, she was rather – her eyes were closed, her mouth was open, you see she was dying of a heart attack. She didn't hear what I said, I'm sure. People thought she did, but no. I just sat at her side and uttered a few words. She was perfectly all right, she was breathing, she was quite comfortable, but she died about – what? – nine hours later.

MI And your association with her goes back..?

IB To James, her husband. That goes back – that's quite amusing. 1933, I was elected to All Soul's College – '32. James de Rothschild was a *grand seigneur*, really the only one among the Rothschilds, I mean a sort of racing figure, member of a thing called The Other Club; friend of Churchill, F.E.Smith, Beaverbrook, Lord Jowett – I mean amusing people, talked about cads rather, but was a terrific figure in English life. He was a Liberal Member of Parliament. I can tell you a little about him, just to convey the kind of person he was. He went to school in Paris; his father started the Colonies in Palestine, the Baron Edmond, and the other Rothschilds thought he was stark staring mad, rather embarrassed by it, and they were French and so on, that was all this. And then he went to school during the Dreyfus case where, being called Rothschild, was perhaps not very useful and was so conceived with such hatred from upper class French circles in which his parents moved, that he left Paris in a sort of rebellious manner and went to Australia where he became a cow puncher, punched a certain number of cows North to South. His parents were absolutely beside themselves, so they wrote him letters begging him to come home and discuss his future. He wouldn't come further than Argentina which was half way, where he met them and the Baron Edmond finally persuaded him to come back to Europe but not to France. So he went to England, went to Cambridge. He got, I should think, some third class degree I should think; but he was a friend of the Prince of Wales, he played polo and he was very amusing and very dictatorial. He had a strong will and he did what he liked. He really

was sort of, what the Russians call [?] and imperious is what he was. And then he went to play golf and he was thirty-one, saw this girl of seventeen, married her. She was the daughter of a man called Pinto; her grandfather was a very rich Jew from Egypt but she was completely English in character and temperament, remained an English lady, Church of England character. I wouldn't have known she was Jewish except that she was. And then he – he was a Zionist, James, because his father was, and looked after the colonies with him – polo and all that, yes – and he certainly was relevant to the Balfour Declaration. She and he opened doors to Weizmann in London, in England generally. He had a country house after all; he lived in Waddesdon. It was a tremendous house, now National Trust. He knew useful people for Weizmann to know, and I think he played a real part in all that. And then, in 1918 there was a Zionist delegation which was led by Weizmann. The two officers attached to the delegation were Captain Ormsby-Gore and Captain, maybe Major, Rothschild. Major always we called him. That was very typical. However – and he always looked after these colonies but he was a dictator, and I used to tell him that his agents in Palestine, by bullying the unfortunate colonists in the name of the great benefactor, was the richest breeding ground for communists in the whole of Palestine.

MI [*laughs*] How did he take to that?

IB Very badly but it was not untrue. When the parents are humiliated, the sons...

MI Yes indeed. When did you meet them?

IB Now, when I was elected to All Souls, he became very excited about that. The very idea of a Jew being elected to All Souls – he knew what it meant, and I was immediately asked to lunch in 1933. My friend, John Foster, became my friend, he was a friend of theirs, and I was driven to Waddesdon. I'd never been in a country house before in my life. There were footmen, it seemed to me,

behind every chair; there was Mr James – Baron James but he never called himself Baron in England, Mr James de Rothschild, MP; Mrs James de Rothschild, who was very gentle and quiet; Victor Rothschild, later Lord Rothschild; Miss Rothschild, later Mrs Lane; Elizabeth [Flees?]; [Menetia?] Montague, the widow of Edwin Montague, the minister in Asquith's government; the Chief Whip of the Liberal Party which was then not very flourishing but there was a man with a large red tie overflowing; and there was a man called Scatters Wilson, who was a sort of man-about-town of a dubious character. They were all present and I was – I'd never seen such luxury or such grandeur. And then I was left behind with Miss Rothschild and Victor Rothschild and we made friends quite independently and I knew them for the rest of my life. However, he was very amusing and very agreeable. Before the car came to fetch me at All Souls, the first thing the chauffeur did was to produce a huge cigar box and offered me a cigar. When I left – Wadston has marvellous treasures in it; they were also locked up, all of it. About ten rooms were open; the rest was under lock and key and under covers. I was offered a cigar again at the side entrance to which one was brought by car, not the grand entrance of now. That's how I came to meet him and saw him ever after. I used to visit him in London; he used to ask me to meals occasionally, sometimes Wadston, sometimes London. I didn't know him intimately but I was a friend, I mean I was – dropped in so to speak. From time to time he would send me messages saying why couldn't I come and have a cup of tea or something.

MI When did he die?

IB '57. He – I don't know, I think towards the end of his life kept on falling off – I think he fell off his horse about twice, playing polo. He looked like an antediluvian monster; extremely distinguished but not exactly beautiful – huge nose, enormous eyeglass, endless caricatures of him. He was a public personality of the first order but the great thing was, he was what is called a gentleman and very – did what he liked.



MI What does 'gentleman' mean to you?

IB Well, that; that he was the opposite of ignoble. I don't know what noble is but he was not ignoble. 'Gentleman' means somebody – you know what Desmond McCarthy defines a gentleman as? A man who never gives pain unwittingly, un-deliberately, and does not count the change from the bill.[MI Indeed, yes] That's his idea.

MI [*laughs*] Indeed. I see both of those, clearly.

IB You see these clearly. No, I think by a gentleman, I really mean someone who is opposite of what is called ignoble. Difficult to say what ignoble is but we all know what it is. Can only be done by pointing to instances. It's a social and moral quality but it's social in the sense that it wouldn't exist, I think, if all men were equal. It goes with certain authority in society. I mean, it's therefore not a purely moral – when people say, 'You know, he's quite a little gentleman,' or what Lord Halifax said to me about Truman, in fact, 'quite the little gentleman.' [MI Oh, really] That is patronising and so on. The lower classes don't have gentlemen in that sense. People attribute this to them because they think it means honest and dignified and good manners.

MI Yes, they have virtues but they're not gentlemanly virtues.

IB 'Gentlemanly' is partly a social category entailing a difference of class. That's what it means to me. I mean I wouldn't describe a saint who happened to belong to the proletariat, as a gentleman. Herzen knew what it meant. When he was moved into a place called[Allsit?] House, near Paddington which is where there is a plaque on it, he says in his autobiography, 'I felt a gentleman had lived there,' and took it.

MI I think that we should [IB Stop] no, we should stop but I – yes, we'll stop now.

IB One more thing. About the Jews: what I'm ashamed of is this. I went to Washington in 1940 and again in 1941. After all, there was this German who employed Jews in his factory and saved them about which there were novels written. He went to Switzerland [MI Schindler] Schindler. I think it was Schindler, it may have been somebody else who went to Switzerland during the war and told the representative of the World Jewish Congress about the gas chambers. It must have been '43; I think the Final Solution was only decided on in '42, so it was late '43 or the beginning of '43. This man sent a telegram to Rabbi Stephen Wise in New York, reporting this. Stephen Wise reported this to Roosevelt. Nothing happened. People sometimes didn't believe it, thought it might have been invented, it was not really credible that such things were going on. But my wife's father, who was a French Jew for these purposes, moving among, in sort of upper class refugee circles, did know something about it, someone told him. He certainly told Aline. There were rumours that something of this kind was going on. I never heard anything about it until something like January '45. I knew Weizmann, I knew Frankfurter, I knew Ben Cohen. Weizmann may have left America by then, I admit, '43...

MI Did you know Stephen Wise?

IB Mm yes, but – I met him but I didn't really know him. Anyhow, I never heard about this. I mean I lived insulated in British Embassy circles. All right. But I did know Jews and I met Zionists, not very frequently, but I met them, you see? I only learnt of it – I'm sure it was printed on page 32 of the *New York Times*, or something, somewhere. The Israeli papers had it.

MI But can you remember the occasion in January '45 which...

IB No. No, no, I just became aware as I became more – well, like everybody else. The real thing was when American troops reached these places, the photographs and so on. But I think I knew about it before. I think I'd heard about the gas chambers in early '45, certainly not before, and lots of people must have known in lots of countries, you see? That makes me feel ashamed that I couldn't – I mean I just wasn't told. I wouldn't have disbelieved it.

MI You wouldn't have?

IB No. I thought the Nazis were capable of anything. The one thing which I did do, which made me unpopular, people said, 'Why didn't they bomb the trains?' – carrying the refugees – I mean the prisoners, 'Why didn't they bomb the concentration camps, or Belsen?' Already by '45 I think, I realised that they wanted to kill the Jews more than they wanted to win the war, because they went on killing Jews to the last moment. In '45 they were losing the war on all fronts. Still, they didn't stop. Therefore it convinced me that if they did bomb the trains – mind you I wouldn't have known that in '42 but by '44 I knew it, sort of – that if they did bomb the trains, they'd rebuild them in no time. If they bombed the camps, they'd kill quite a lot of Jews, some Germans, but they wouldn't allow that to stop, ever. What they could have done, and didn't do – but I don't want to talk about that, it's not part of what we're talking about – they could have threatened the central Europeans in the Balkans, who were not so sure that the Germans would win the war after a certain date, say in '43. If they'd been bullied and told that if they went on handing over Jews, terrible punishments would clamp on them, some of them might have quailed.

MI You mean the Hungarians and the Yugoslavs, the Rumanians...

IB Yes, and Rumanians, Hungarians, yes, anybody you like of that sort, if you see what I mean, Albanians as it were, people who were handing over. Austria was no good but these, who were anti-

Semitic but not particularly exterminatory, if you see what I mean, they, some of them would have been frightened of retribution, you see? And some of them might have tried to establish a record for themselves as having saved Jews, might. But it wasn't done.

MI I know this takes us away from our subject but I do find genuine difficulty as a historian [IB Yes] to put myself back in the world before the facts were known. That is, to the world in which you confront these realities in January of '45. I am sure that a large part of me would say, it just isn't [IB Possible] possible.

IB It's like the First World War, I mean all these cadaver factories, invention. It's a piece of [?] propaganda, atrocity propaganda, that's typical invention.

MI Babies on bayonets as it were.

IB Babies on bayonets, exactly; lamps, which were made, lampshades were made, but why would one have believed that? You see, I agree with you. I think a great many people dismissed it. Frankfurter did; that wasn't to do with me because I only discovered it much later. There was a Jew who got out of Hungary, one of these Jews – [MI K?] not the famous one, no[K?] was a Finn, that's another story. No, I mean a man called Joel something, anyhow, you see...?

MI Who went to see Frankfurter?

IB But he didn't – it was some other Hungarian – a Jew, and told Frankfurter that this was happening. 'I don't believe it,' said Frankfurter, 'nonsense, it can't be true.' I didn't know he'd visited him, I didn't know he'd said it, he never told me the story. I discovered that – what? – two or three years ago when a man wrote a book, you see? You are right. The general reaction would have been, 'impossible.' But by '45, I would have believed it. No, my conception of Nazis – I knew about Hitler in the twenties because

I am a reader of the *Jewish Chronicle* and the name of Hitler began to crop up in 1923 and I knew there was this violent anti-Semite in Germany long before most people had heard of him. I was aware of him.

MI And the *Jewish Chronicle* was tracking him, as it were?

IB Well, reported from time to time, he made a speech and was arrested in Munich or he had made a violent speech. However, the *Jewish Chronicle* was full of nothing but news about anti-Semitism, all over the place, in those days, you see? Right. Let's stop there.

End of *Side A*.

## MI TAPE 11

Conversation date: 18 June 1989

Date transcribed: 1 July 2002

Transcriber: Esther Johnson

Subjects covered:

Salzburg 1930s

Music: Toscanini, Walter

Chaliapin, Callas

Palestine visit 1934

Meeting the Stern Gang

Eden, Potsdam Aug 1945

Leaving Latvia 1921

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IB [ ] Munich couldn't work. It couldn't have worked.

MI But in Vienna they knew exactly what he was talking about.

IB But of course they did, you see. What I mean is that, maybe you could say because a lot of races came into conflict in Vienna, there was a greater deal of censure as well with it. But whatever it is, the anti-Semitism was acute and it's most at its [ ] in the world now. It remains.

MI Yes, as I think I tried to imply at the end of that paragraph about these absolutely heartbreaking Jewish cemeteries which make you weep to look at and they're guarded by these dogs.

IB In Salzburg even more [ ] Acutely [ ]

MI To which you returned with great pleasure.

IB I don't mind anti-Semitism.

MI But how did you feel it in Salzburg? Did people make remarks?

IB No, no, not at all. Not in the least. [ ] The Nazi symbol before the war was wearing long white stockings up to the knees. There were more white stockings in Salzburg than anywhere else on earth! That's all I mean. Then I went to one of those restaurants on the [ ], the Mark Peters Keller, the Virgo Keller, the something Keller. There was a man there and somebody said to the man – (conversation in German ending in two sharp slaps of the hands) – 1934. Sorry, not '34, no. I went in '37. '38 Anschluss ... (he continues in German) Klemperer conducted, that was the last time. I went from 1930 onwards, every summer, it was the centre of my life in summer; when I sat in trains nearing Salzburg I used to be in a state of physical excitement at the mere thought of being in this marvellous town. I adored it to such a degree. And now I don't know anyone, I always had friends ...

MI Where did you stay?

IB In Gasthofs, cheap Gasthofs, the sort of Gasthofs in gardens outside Beer Gardens. But we used to eat in the keller of the [ ] which no longer exists but was very cheap, same food upstairs at a quarter of the price.

MI And did you meet friends again and again who would come the same ....

IB Yes, yes, not quite meet but even go with, yes I went in 1930 with a man called Ettinghausen who was a Jew at school with me who then became the Israeli Ambassador to Paris in due course [ ] but I immediately met a Don from Worcester and most of the undergraduates from my College, Corpus. It was quite easy. The Americans didn't go then, the English very much more than anyone else, more than what were the Germans, but more than the French and more than the [ ]. Very cheap, too.

MI What was the programme of your day at Salzburg, what would you do, how would it go?

IB I would get up fairly late in the morning, I would then have breakfast, I suppose downstairs, shouldn't take it up to one's room as they did, just a roll and butter, cup of coffee of course; then I would go for a walk with friends who were staying there, we'd go somewhere and sit in a coffee house, look at shop windows, sit in a caf, and then sometimes there were concerts in the morning. There were marvellous concerts, eleven a.m. conducted by Walter in the (?), the best Mozart concerts I've heard in my life by far. But when there weren't, we'd stroll around the town, we'd meet for lunch in one of these kellers either at the bottom of the hotel or in one of the hills which was also cheap, hostel with beers, some cooked omelettes or pancakes or sausages or goulash and we might eat schnitzels. Then we would go back to the hostel I think, from about three o'clock to about six, by that time it was time to go to a caf, and eat a lot of food before the concert, the opera which was on, every night I went, which started at seven, sometimes earlier and that went on till eleven including long intervals, and we might stop on the way and have an ice cream or something; and that was day after day after day.

MI How long did it run in the thirties?

IB Like now, every month, a night for every five weeks(?). I wouldn't come there at the beginning, I would come the second week and stay until the end, a fortnight at least. It was absolute bliss. Now in the later years I went with Stephen Spender who ...

MI Thirty years before the war ...

IB Thirty three; and we went to the Barber of Seville which was not allowed in the [ ] they would only allow Mozart and Strauss, Rossini was vulgar, when Walter conducted and marvellous people



at La Scala sang it – divine – because it had to be at the Stott(?) Theatre, not [ ] Then I met Osbert Lancaster whom I knew and somebody [ ] Malcolm of the Foreign Office). One might meet anybody. In 1933 I went with Stephen Spender, he had no money so he decided to eat some kind of food which would give him indigestion because he wouldn't want to eat anything else because he wouldn't spend money on food; the 'studenten futter' – student fodder – some squashed horrible decaying figs, dates which really might give us some disease. Then he discovered inside a pocket of his jacket a five pound note sewn into it by his grandmother. He'd forgotten about it. He opened that and then he could live more comfortably, five pounds was – – it was very very cheap to have English currency. We lived in a place called [ ].

MI And that helped keep the prices down, you mean?

IB No, Austrian currency was terribly inflated, in terms of British currency Austria was cheap, that's all I mean. If I wanted to draw some money from England I would go to the bank, but then, '34/'35 ... In '34 I can tell you exactly who I went with. I went with (Mary?) Fisher, daughter of [ ] who was with our friend Miss Walker [ ], she was one: Julia Pakenham, the sister of Lord Longford, who died before the war and who was a great friend – they were all there; Richard Pearsley(?), famous historian was there on his own but associated with us – he came with somebody – we had lots of people, plenty of people to eat lunch and dinner with. We went to [ ] where there was a salt mine, we took a [ ] belt down to underneath the earth where the salt came from, with an underwater lake, salt water [ ] there was plenty of that sort of thing [ ] the waterworks and at [ ] there was a princely palace where you pressed the button and water spurted and you could see it was a practical joke on the guests – seventeenth century fun. You sort of pressed something and all the guests – soused! It still exists, it can be seen.

MI Did you go for walks in the Alps?

IB A bit. Not the Alps, not big walks just one or two of the hills immediately outside the restaurants.

MI You weren't rural then, striding along and singing ....

IB No, no, not a bit. That's '34/5. '36 that's the people I described to you, then John Foster appeared and from there we went to Venice and from Venice to Palestine, straight from Salzburg – [ ] that was '34.

MI It must have been a marvellous journey by boat.

IB Yes, we went by boat from Venice. We went to Venice for three nights and then I was late and I was running, couldn't do anything else, gondolas are very slow, to the hotel to pack my bag, then I had to get to the boat because it was leaving and John Foster in a gondola shouted but I didn't hear him, suddenly I did see him so I was able to stop, he had my luggage with him, so I got straight into the gondola from the shore, leapt into it and onto the boat. That was all right; and then from Venice to Alexandria.

MI Direct? Was it a tremendously hot boring voyage in a little tramp steamer?

IB No, no, like a Stena boat, 10 – 12 thousand tons but it was quite big, not a tall boat and a quite nice restaurant, we talked to a British planter from Egypt and Foster talked to him, I talked to him, he kept on holding his head like this, didn't know where to look, completely (?) up, I mean dog-down house(?) God knows! Then on the boat was also ....

MI Did you talk down to him about being a planter?

IB No, no, just chatted about anything. Then we arrived. There was a rich Jew on board who tried to make friends with me but

some Pasha came to meet him [ ]. Then a lot of men appeared in long coloured sort of (?) gowns and these were Egyptian – God knows what – agents, seized our luggage. They looked like British caricatures of natives one sees in Punch, summer number of Punch, they seized our luggage: ‘I’m not porter, I’m agent for porter, give me money!’ They would take me to a porter who would take more money! So we got to the hotel in Alexandria, then we went to Cairo. In Alexandria we looked at the pyramids and then we got onto a train which took us to Jerusalem. Well we had to get off onto the ferry, the sea, you see – it was an adventure beyond belief, the ferry, there were a lot of sheep, goats, a camel or two, at night the eyes of these animals glittering, total darkness, discordant cries, it really was (?). Then I got into a train in Kantara East or Kantara West ...

MI This was late summer, mid summer? This is August ‘34?

IB This is September. The Festival had come to an end in August. And then we got to this train and then suddenly we went to Sinai, that was all right, it was frightfully exciting looking out of the window at five in the morning – dawn – across these marvellous hills, you see, extraordinary desert, desert covered in terrific scenery, the Negev in Sinai. And then the Jewish ticket collector came in, it’s the first time I’d seen a Jew in uniform anywhere. I was very moved by that. And when we got to reach the borders of Palestine, tears came to our eyes which John Foster couldn’t understand. We were tremendously moved, sentimentally moved at the thought that this was a Jewish country – still British, but still: there was a specific Jewish settlement and there were British officials, British ticket collectors, British policemen. Wonderful. I was moved exactly as all Jews were moved in later years. It happened to me rather early. And then we went to King David hotel. It was a fine hotel built by a horrible fellow against his father, Frank Goldsmith, a Jew against his father for [ ] with the Germans; and there were these Nubians, jet black, with enormous great trailing gowns serving one as waiters, jet black, [ ] for the British

return, and that's where more of the British officials would gather in the bar in the evenings. I went to see my aunt who was already living there with a Zionist uncle, and she said, 'You mustn't go to the hotel because it's very anti Semitic.' I didn't mind about that. And then did I tell you the story about when I arrived in Palestine? No, never?

MI No, you've told it to me in a different way ...

IB The police sports?

MI No

IB The first thing John Foster and I did – he knew some officials, I didn't – we came as pure tourists, we knew nobody there and didn't visit Zionist notables because I didn't know any. The only officials [ ] was a don at Oxford with certain connections, but I had no contact with the official movement anywhere.

MI You were still in your twenties, anyway.

IB Yes, twenty-five. **We were invited to go to the police sports in Nablus. We went, we sat there, police sports occurred – boring beyond belief! A kind of gymkhana with people on motor bicycles, and cars whizzing past. I sat next to a man wearing short trousers who was obviously a British official [District Commissioner], and I said to him, "We are looking at two hills: I think they must be the biblical Ebal and Gerizim. Now I know Samaritans live there and they bring a pascal lamb as a sacrifice at their Passover.' They have a Bible of their own, and a High Priest and all that. I said **Which is Ebal, which Gerizim?" He said, "I don't know. Just hills to me. No good asking me that kind of question."** He later became Lord Caradon. He was called Hugh Foot. He was in Palestine, the District Commissioner, a tremendous pro-Arab but took an**

interest in – went to Cyprus, Governor of Cyprus and all that, you see.

MI Father of Paul Foot, in fact.

IB – father of Paul Foot. I met him afterwards, as Brian Urquhart in New York had invited him. He was not best pleased. He was a very crude, uninteresting sort of awful man. I didn't like him at all then – I had no idea who he was.

MI Did you like him better later?

IB No, at no point. I thought he was a self-important, gooey, religiose, idealistic, sort of liberal of the most awful (?) – I mean – I don't know – a lot of preaching of a gooey kind. I couldn't bear it. Urquhart was not a bad fellow, he was a British investor at that time to the United Nations. So I couldn't bear him. Michael Foot I can just take, there's something silly about him, silly and disarming; but Lord C (?) was awful; Lord Foot, the solicitor, pretty awful; Dingle Foot pretty awful – all the brothers. No sisters. Father was probably [ ] it may have been something. Anyway – well then the police sports. Then I went back to Jerusalem and then I met the Director of Education who was a man called Bowman(?) who was a raging anti Semite, straightforwardly. I got the [ ] because he said, 'The Jews are dreadful, I don't think you know them at all, you can't [ ] if you ever come across people like that, they're Nationalistic, they're dishonest, they're crooks, they're violent, they hate [ ], they can't measure at all.' His assistant was a man called (Khallidi?) who was the father of (?). He was a flattering, cheap, vulgar man, one of the worst Arabs I have ever met, who sucked up to the British in the most – you see they would say, 'Ah well, it's a police state, ah dreadful, French – oh just tyrannical, they crushed the British. Quite a different show here!' Do you see what I mean? 'Ah well, oh no, no, we're quite happy with you, you've noticed maybe, you don't give us any trouble, oh no, oh God, no comparison.' I thought that was terrible. Well then finally I did go

to the university where I knew one or two, I called on somebody, Burnett who was a very nice German Jew, extremely learned Orientalist, very very honourable, dull, totally decent guy. He was a scholar in Berlin, and he said 'Now you must come this evening to receive Mr (?) Levine.' Mr L was a very amusing man who wrote the best book on Zionism written by anybody, called (Heart of Bondage?) – three vols. He was a Russian, [ ] very comical, full of humour and I thought, wonderful, and he had no illusions about what was going on. He said to me, as he said to everybody, 'The Jews are a very small nation but a terrible one' or 'disgusting' – something like that! That tiny percentage. I rather enjoyed that. Well then at his house I met [Gershon] Scholem, the famous [...] – he was very young, lively, slightly mad, dashed about, obviously wanted attention to be paid to him, so obviously I was glad to meet him. **He was rather gifted and romantic and interesting as a man.** Then we had attached to us as tourists some Zionist propagandist. Bored us to tears! He took us to Kibbutz's, he took us to – we didn't stop. The [ ] were all right when I had lunch with them but the people in the kibbutz's were wonderful, individually wonderful. They were simple, they were Communist, they gave us nice food, they were modest, they were sweet, those people in '34 really were wonderful. It's all gone. East, West, whatever you like to call it. But at the time they were very touching characters, everybody found them that. Well, then I met a lady – I could go on like this – I met a lady – some odd characters you could meet, it was a lady called Manya Vilboushevich[?]. She – or she was called Manya Shochot[?] – she married a man called Shochot[?]. She came from Odessa, she was a Russian revolutionary, she took very vigorous part in the terrorist section of the Russian Revolutionary Party. She made friends with the Chief of Police who – you'll remember there was a movement started by a man called Zhubartov(?). Zhubartov was the Chief of Police in Odessa. He thought he could create a Party of the Left and the Anarchists against the bourgeoisie. Populist Party. The workers and the peasants and the Little Father against the horrible exploiting liberal factory owners. (G?) was a member of that movement and that's

why (G) was killed in the end, that was why he was accused of being a traitor. But she worked with Zhubartov and when Zhubartov showed up, Zhubartov had to resign after the Bloody Sunday [ ]. He was sacked, he was pronounced a failure. She escaped and went to Palestine immediately and became a Communist and when (Weizmann?) came [ ] she led him around the place, they became [ ] friends. I met her in '34, an old lady living in a place called (?) in the Northern Colony, on the edges of Lebanon: tough, old and pensive – the young Russian revolutionary of a sort of numbed, absolutely seasoned weathered kind and I knew who she was, rather interesting to talk to: 'Perhaps I ought to pay for this meal?' 'Pay for this meal?' she said, 'there is such a thing as being over generous, there is such a thing as being over mean. Over generosity also won't do,' she said, 'that's a sin.' But I was glad to meet her. Then I met various people and then after that I got this impression of the country as I told you, I felt very strongly, it was exactly like *A Passage To India*. You see the British officials were by and large anti Jew, partly for real reasons, they were the least gifted of all the Colonial Office officials because they were the least smartly [ ] if you were any good you went to Sudan, India, Nairobi. Palestine as a protectorate was not the smartest [ ] Office of Government(?) Even Cyprus was a bit superior. So they were simple folk, they were not nasty, they were idealistic, they wanted (?) they faced (?) the Arabs. They arrived in the place – the fundamental pattern with the British wherever they went was that of the English public school and that's what the Embassy was like in Washington equally, they were here with the boys, no Arabs. There was a Jewish house, we didn't really need it but in these days it couldn't be avoided. They occasionally let off steam and killed a few people, riots in Hebron in '29 which was a very bloody pogrom for its day. Well, all right, boys will be boys, one or two were punished. The Jews were pasty-faced, cleverer than the Masters, didn't play games, cheated, deceived, did circles round the Masters and wanted everything, thought it was their country, didn't see why the Arabs should be there at all. Moreover there were these British officials that thought, if you were either

black or white, difference of treatment. Pavlov's dogs; they tried to bark and salivate at the same time! Impossible, they can't. Jews means you're obviously white; Jews from Bokhara who were obviously black, but between that what did you do with the sort of Caf, au lait? If you kicked a Jew/Arab downstairs, that's the last you'd have heard of it. If you kicked a Jew, or tried to, indeed anything might happen. The Boys were like their parents in – America, maybe. In America their parents would know somebody who knew Mr Justice Brandeis. Mr Justice Brandeis would write to the American Ambassador who would write to the Colonial office, complaining to parents and then to Governors, nothing schoolmasters liked less. Blasted nuisance. You couldn't tell – a dirty little Jew suddenly turns out to have connections, it makes it even worse. The hatred grew, it was perfectly normal but that was the atmosphere. Then if you were pure Jewish – there were some among the officials whom I met who were rather tired, Somerset Maugham-ish, they were cynical because they really didn't believe in the brotherly vision of the Jews, or they were just bored, thought it was an awful place, difficult situation, they were Jews who were more amused. They had no idealism or Colonial (?) at all, they were just living out their lives, they were out to enjoy themselves. These people preferred the company of amusing Jews. There were some Jews who got on with the [ ] they were regarded as traitors by the Jews I met. Well, the great Zionist Harry Zeicker(?) was a lawyer who was there but he was an English Jew from Manchester, a journalist for the Manchester Guardian, a very fervent Zionist; but the Russian Jews, Polish Jews, all those Jews looked on him as some kind of (?) He goes to the High Commissioner, he goes to dinner – but not one of us. So that was painful. The Jews thought that to be presented by the British was above (?) instead of which they felt they were blocked at every turn. And they preferred the Arabs for obvious reasons, they were nicer, they were easier to govern, they already knew how to be governed by the Turks, so they just applied the same technique, they had more charm, they were better looking – the others were hideously ugly, very unattractive, noisy, tasteless; imagine, East side Jews in the face of



a lot of minor public school English officials. Imagine it! The High Commissioners broadly were much better with the Jews, particularly with the Generals. The Chancellor was the worst, that's from their point of view, he is the grandfather of my friend who married John (Wells?) – his wife was the granddaughter of the High Commissioner under whom the (?) riot broke out in '31, that happened, he was very anti Semitic. But broadly, from a British official [ ] of the kind of club, upper class anti Semitism which you could feel. Except I feel for these rather exhausted, cynical lags .... MI How long were you in Palestine?

IB A month. Then I went to Jordan.

MI: To the Hashamites?

IB: Well, wait. A man I knew in Jerusalem, I forgot to tell you, was a man called Tommy Hodgkin. Tommy Hodgkin was the son of a Don at Queens' who became Provost of Queens' in Oxford. He was a very idealistic Wykehamist, my contemporary, who came to Balliol College. He was Secretary of the High Commissioner, who was a man called General Walker. He was a member of the Communist Party, though I didn't know that – nor did they. Crypto. I knew him quite well. He **was violently anti-Jewish from a purely left-wing point of view – natives.**

MI: Not an anti-Semite but just ...

IB: He thought not, but he was really, [...] a little bit , but **I think he would have denied [being anti-Semitic] ferociously.** I stayed with him in the Austrian Hospice, where he was living. **We went on the backs of donkeys, and when we came back to Jerusalem, it was Friday afternoon and we were stoned by the pious Jews.**

MI: Oh really!

**IB: Just like Christ – “Hosanna!”** Came riding in on a donkey. I remember that. But Tommy Hodgkin was of course discovered and sacked in the end. We had a wonderful time [ ] in London, there was an Arab delegation which he organised and led in ‘37 – there was a ‘bus strike and he explained to them of course, he said, ‘Why aren’t you shot?’ He was a Communist – the ‘bus strikers, ‘Shoot them!’ he said to this Arab delegation. It was very difficult to reconcile Arab Nationalism with British Communism. Anyway we all went to Amman, we all got beds [...], we all got beds except me because I stood looking at the ruins of Djerash for too long, and I slept on a stone inscription which said the Emperor, I think Trajan, maybe Hadrian, visited [...], and every letter absolutely carved itself into my back, very [...]. Then we went – I met a nephew of the Abdullah, then we went to Syria, went to Damascus – in ‘34 – and the (?) Mosque which is one of the most beautiful Mosques I have ever seen in my life. I love Mosques, I much prefer them to Churches, wonderful, empty and beautiful. Then to Lebanon and there we stayed at a place called (?) which is above Beirut, which was a suburb.

(At this point the door opens and IB addresses Lady Berlin. ‘He’s there, Aline. How do you do?’)

Then I remember at (?) it was the Day of Atonement and I suddenly discovered eminent Israeli’s concealing themselves in (?) where they didn’t need to starve. It was quite funny, one of the Justices of the Supreme Court hiding out! The motor road from Beirut to Haifa – the most beautiful in the world [ ] this marvellous Mediterranean site of Said (?), in other words Sidon and Tyre on your right.

MI I know exactly what you mean because I’ve stood up in a fortified Kibbutz, right up on the border, and looked down and you can see the coast and it is ravishing.

IB Exquisite! Well, let me tell you, little ships with red leather sails looking like a Delacroix painting – wonderful. The most beautiful sight I ever saw, the old Romantic 19th century stuff. Well we arrived in Haifa – then I went back to Jerusalem for a few days, I don't know why – at that point, John Foster left, my companion. He had business in Palestine, it was to do with the Ottoman's heirs case which is a joke: when the heirs of the last Sultan maintained that while the territories of the annexed parts of Turkey were politically what they were, the (?) tracts of the territory were the private thief of the Sultan though it belonged to them legally as personal property, and they persuaded rich American ladies to finance law suits against these two governments, the British and the French who were the protectorates. So that when they got their property back, they'd be billionaires. They were financed, this went from court to court to court to privy council. I don't know where it went to in France but the British defended it at every point, from the point of view of lawyers. John Foster was instructed by the Treasury to see some Armenian lawyer in Haifa and used that as an excuse for going. When he did his business, which was half an hour, he went home. I was left behind. That's where I met (?), a Jesuit. At that point I got onto a boat to go back to Europe, a Lloyd Tristina(?) boat called 'The Jerusalemne'(?). It went from Haifa to Trieste. I was alone, second class. There were two restaurants on the boat, one was kosher the other was not. I am not an addicted kosher eater, but second class, Italian boat, I'll fall ill if I eat Italian salami and God knows, rotting food. Kosher is very boring but absolutely clean. It's washed, it's salted, it's much more likely to be ... I'm used to it ... so I went to the Kosher part, I sat at a table, long benches and next to me was a young man, deep sunken eyes, rather handsome, I didn't know who he was. I said, 'My name's Isaiah Berlin, I come from Oxford.' He said, 'My name's Abraham Stern, I am a student of Latin & Greek at the University of Florence.' Mussolini gave scholarships to Israeli's as an anti British move, in Italian universities – for free, I think. The Arabs didn't take it up very much, the Jews of course did. This was a man who went to Florence as a Classical scholar, this was [ ] and then we

chatted about this and that, he was quite an interesting man and he said, 'You know what the British want to do? They want to create a thing called the legislative council. We shall fight that, and fight it and fight it.' I said, 'But look, one could say, arithmetically determined, 84 Arabs and 27 Jews, you can't do that so it's only advisory.' 'Never mind,' said the Jew, 'we shall fight and fight and fight and if blood is shed, it will be shed.' I realised that he was a fanatic and I tried to persuade him not to shed blood – unsuccessfully. He had a sort of follower with him who nodded but didn't talk very much. He was quite an interesting man, a poet, oh yes, he was all that. The letters he wrote to his mother apparently – I didn't read them – were very moving from jail.

MI When did he actually organise the gang?

IB He organised the gang as a breakaway from the (?), the breakaway being on the grounds that they might make peace with the Germans and try the British – they had Arab members, the Stern gang, the Palestinian Nation, they broke away about 1939, '38 maybe, whenever the (?) was created, before Begin, they created this breakaway, they were a mad group, the Shamir(?) The (?) wanted to fight the Germans, he didn't want to and that made quite a difference. He thought they could, the great thing was to get the British out. Lunatic, they were. After I came back from Trieste and back to Oxford, I tell you it was '34, we were talking about Salzburg, I went to Salzburg in '36, '37. '36 I went with – I don't know – with Stuart Hampshire and a man called Francis Graham-Harrison, a civil servant who was a trainee(?) at Oxford.

MI Does your friendship with Stuart Hampshire date to that period?

IB It was a little earlier. I met him in Oxford as an undergraduate I would say in 1935.

MI What struck you about him?

IB Extreme intelligence and charm. He lived in a house, No 7 Beaumont Street, it was a highbrow centre ...

(The phone rings and Isaiah informs someone that Lady Berlin will ring back when she has had her hair done.)

IB ...well, the house at 7 Beaumont Street consisted of Ben Nicholson the son of Harold, who was an Oxford art historian; his friend Jeremy Hutchinson, now Lord Hutchinson of Lullington who was a lawyer and was a Labour then SDP from the House of Lords married to [ ]; David Wallace, son of a Tory Minister called (Ewen?) Wallace who was a Cabinet Minister under Chamberlain who was a Crypto Communist not exactly known to me, who was killed during the war in Greece; and Stuart Hampshire. They were a kind of highbrow centre and used to ask – I was a Don, I only came on in '32 so this was three years later, (?) as young as me, new undergraduates of that sort, easy [ ] So I used to be asked to parties by them.

MI What is the age difference between you and Stuart?

IB Four years, not much more. (IB then works this out for a while) I'm 80, he will be 74. That's the age difference, five or six years. But anyway it was quite easy because [ ] bright undergraduates three years later, I met him at a class, I held a class with Austin and all these people turned up, we used to talk philosophy and afterwards I was asked to meals by these young men because of the highbrow Dons, of whom I was one, were cultivated by them as they always are, particularly the young ones. They made friends with the lot, and Stuart I thought was particularly interesting and intelligent and we became like old friends from then on. Then he was elected to All Souls in '36 and in '36 I went around Ireland with him and a man called Con O'Neill, a (?) Foreign Office, got England into the Common Market. His son was a speaker in the Houses of Parliament a man called Rod O'Neill. And then in '36,

Hampshire was there, Pam Arrowsmith, a man called Jasper Ridley who was killed in the war, the daughters of Violet Bonham Carter, all these Asquith characters were there ...

MI And did you spend most of your time with the English?

IB With the gang. Just went to concerts.

MI Did you talk politics, did you sense the clouds of war gathering over Europe?

IB Oh, in 1932 Goronwy Rees my friend from All Souls, came off a plane from Berlin and said, 'What's the situation politically?' – we talked about it, oh yes, we were very well aware of what was going on. Schushnich(?) who was the first Chancellor – no – but who was the first one? Called M(?) Maeternich(?), funny little man – er Dolfuss, first Dolfuss then Sushnich.(?) Oh it was obvious that things were going from bad to worse. There had been the assassination of Dolfuss in '34. My parents persuaded me not to go to Salzburg but I went.

MI Let's talk a little bit about the music. Can you cast your mind back to those concerts, the experiences you remember best from that time?

IB I can. The Mozart symphonies conducted by Walter were the plus ultra – best I ever heard, better than Beecham, certainly better than my God, Toscanini.

MI What was it about them that still strikes you as being so ...

IB The extreme lyrical poetical quality, the lyricism and the extraordinary velvety quality which not everybody likes in Mozart, silken quality. And there are wonderful nuances which were exquisitely done, so that every time one heard the thing done by Walter, one heard something new. He was a very gentle, extremely lyrical, mild (man) – he was no good at Beethoven for good reason,

he was Mozart, Schubert, Mahler. He was a disciple and pupil of Mahler – very different sorts. Operas. The performances of Figuroa, the first performance I heard was in Munich – no – Don Giovanni in 1932 conducted in the Munich Opera by a man called Leo (?) who was an excellent conductor. I was absolutely – I had never heard anything so beautiful in all my life. I might have gone to Covent Garden maybe in the twenties but I didn't, it wasn't part of my life. I thought it was the most marvellous experience, the tenor and the baritones were marvellous. [ ] It was a very beautiful 18th Century Opera House. Then we went on to Salzburg, Figuroa's, periods of a most unbelievable kind. After that we heard a wonderful Barber of Seville done by the Scala with Walter conducting. Then came the Emperor and the Beethoven symphonies, finally Toscanini. He came in '36.

(A short break occurs in the tape)

MI Was Falstaff the best you'd ever seen? Why the best?

IB .... because it was done by T(?) from La Scala. The tension of that (?) was absolutely ... this is it, it is inevitable, it comes from some [ ] and of course Brendel doesn't like the records at all. I thought it was too wonderful because it was meant to be the combination of extreme tightness and tension with tremendous eloquence and nobility. Falstaff was unbelievable – I'd never heard it before, I didn't know what it was, it is a difficult opera when you hear it for the first time. It absolutely bowled me over. I remember Cyril Connolly there ...

MI Was Toscanini your hero before ...?

IB Yes, I had heard him in London, he came with the (?) orchestra or something in '35 – no '33. I heard him in the Queen's Hall, which existed, doing the Beethoven symphonies.

MI Can you contrast him with someone like Walter?

IB Yes I can. With Walter it was too soft. With Klemperer – Furtwängler was worshipped by (?) and others. It was episodic. First there came one long section, then it somehow managed to reach an exquisite end, then (?) occurred once again, something started again. With Toscanini it was continuous, irresistible and completely dominated and hypnotised one. With Furtwängler it was delicious, exquisite, extremely delicate, extremely beautiful but always rising to a climax and then declining, a constant succession of hills and valleys. No doubt in the score [ ] everything went from beginning to end in an absolutely completely irresistible manner, it was like a force of nature really.

MI It sounds that when you talk about Toscanini that you're approving virtues that are not part of your own temperament – something alien to you about Toscanini's ...

IB No, I don't think so, I don't think the kind of writers I read are people like that. Turgenev is not a bit like that. No, the combination of purity and ability, integrity and tension are a lot of things I dislike most. I don't think my heroes are like that – who are my heroes? Herzen is a bit like that, a lot of tension, a lot of tautness and tightness. Sakharov is a bit like that, – at the moment in Brighton – the combination of extreme humanity with the inflexible qualities. The fact that he was anti Nazi probably had something to do with it – anti fascist, anti Nazi quality. They needed to tell you, which as my friend Jasper Ridley who was there with us and we said, 'What did you think?' 'Old fashioned sublimity,' he said which is a phrase I have always remembered. That's exactly what it was, it's what one read about in books. Marvellous! Roger Lehmann, who of course is dead, and I can't remember who all the others were, the tenor must have been probably (?) from Austria. Then he did *The Magic Flute* not quite so well and the man who sang (?) was Kipnes(?) who was an Odessa Jew whom (?) kept in Beirut, he was his son. Kipnes was a great bass – Alexander Kipnes? – yes I think so, he came from



Odessa and I went to a rehearsal and he kept on singing notes with (?) saying, Look with artists, I wouldn't feel [ ] he struck a tragic note. Then I heard Toscanini – never again in Salzburg. They were formative experiences, *Falstaff*, *Fidelio*. The choruses were of a nobility and a grandeur which I have never heard again, but the quick bits were flyed[?] through as if they were Rossini. Mozart could be a little bit too rapidly done.

MI Was that then true of your experience of Toscanini generally, that he didn't have the same ear for Mozart?

IB Fundamentally, Rossini and Verdi and Beethoven also. When one heard it one was completely bowled over.

MI Can you listen to the recordings again?

IB Not quite. I've got the actual recording of Falstaff done from the performance. The effect is not quite the same: and Stuart Hampshire was with me and he will tell you the same.

MI Why do you think it was so formative?

IB Because I had never heard anything like it before because conductors in England, ordinary English conductors, didn't do it that way; because there was something fiery and implacable which for some reason absolutely and completely captivated me. I think I like fieriness and implacability more than I like mere beauty, because of a moral quality, because there's some kind of dedication which I think I am more fetched by a romantic quality than by sheer aestheticism. Then in '37 I heard Furtwängler do the Ninth symphony, it was all right of course, it was marvellous but towards the end he sounded like he was doing Strauss, it was overdone, it was over dramatised The last bars were totally modern with a lot of clashing of cymbals. I used to go to the rehearsals of Toscanini in New York during and after the war, I heard him do the Ninth symphony four times in rehearsal, once in London, three times in

America. The same thing always happened; the first movement he corrected it three or four times, but in the second movement, he stopped at a particular place about fourteen bars from the beginning and made them repeat it endlessly but it was never any good; and he drove them off their heads by saying again and again, 'No, no, no ...' I realise that it was always in the same place, obviously a division, an image of what he wanted to hear which could never be humanly done: and that's why the orchestras were pretty good, different orchestras, always something went wrong for him in that place. So in other words he didn't respond to the orchestra at all. He had an inner vision which had to be realised in some way, some of which could be done fairly easily and some which were impossible. Here was a man who was totally dedicated, he had a fiery vision and of course the orchestras just plugged along. I heard a marvellous performance by a man called Joseph Lhevinne, (he spells the name) – an attempt to get away with it in your Viennese sense – this was in New York, a wonderful performance of Weber's Concertstuck, that made an impression, wonderful pianist I thought. Schnabel of course was my God in those years in England, the performances of the Beethoven Sonatas made a permanent impression upon me.

MI I've heard those recordings and I was tremendously impressed by them as a late teenager.

IB I've never heard anything like it. They were more serious, one learned a lot, they had a certain German didactic quality, one learned from them; and one learned from watching Toscanini, watching him alone by his movements which followed or were cont(?) with the music which in some way vividly illustrated it. The movements were not extravagant – Beecham is full belly on the podium – Toscanini had these extremely tense movements, stopped at exactly the right moment, moves at exactly the right moment and carries on on some kind of wings. I remember watching him. These two men, Toscanini and Schnabel altered my

notion of how music could be done while my contemporaries preferred Batches and Furtwängler.

MI And with Furtwängler which you didn't like was the sense that he liked a kind of continuous drive?

IB He looked like a radish – he had long limp arms. Toscanini was a circus master. It was all right in Wagner, he had long languid phrases, still I heard a performance by him in Oxford in 1946 of the Schubert C Major symphony. I disapproved of his collaboration with the Nazi's so I went to the concert with my future wife and mother-in-law. I didn't clap, that was my punishment. '47 it would be.

MI Do you feel that those musical experiences of the thirties have never been topped?

IB Yes I do. Even Beecham before the war sometimes was no good at all and was sometimes marvellous, depending on whether or not he was in the mood, on form, sometimes he didn't care. So it was up and down and he could do very poor things but sometimes; the Mozart (?) Toscanini suffered when he conducted, it was obvious that he was on an altar and when he said 'The least good composer is a higher being than the best conductor', he meant it. Whereas Beecham enjoyed himself and got pleasure from hearing music, little steps, fundamentally I think he liked Massenet(?) very much; and so each little bit of Haydn or each little bit of (?) was deliciously enjoyable and so it was for the audience, it wasn't too serious. It had a lightness, a certain frivolity, like a very very delicious light pudding.

MI But he never had a range for the darkness?

IB Don't think so. He could do the Eroica very well all the same.

MI Is it simply that you've got older .....?

IB Oh I think so. But I don't think – Kleiber today is the only conductor, in Munich, he's the only American from [ ] of those conductors, as good as they were.

MI Why, what is it about him?

IB Again something [ ], some kind of magical quality which the music flows out in a kind of absolutely unstoppable totally convincing way. I heard him do Otello in London, quite different from anybody else. It gripped one so I was in state of continuous suppressed excitement from beginning to end. [ ] Kleiber is like that, Karajan should be like that and some people think he is but for me, not. Music really is at the heart of my life.

MI Why is that?

IB Oh I can tell you ....

MI Because it doesn't seem to have been in your childhood or in your early youth. What you seem to be describing ...

IB Yes it was. In 1917 my mother I told you – that's why Carmen and Traviata and Rigoletto which of course I revolted against in due course and operas of that sort, Trovatore and Onegin and Mignon, my mother sang. Who else sings Mignon now? All that is part of my blood. When I was a boy at St Paul's in 1923,4,5 I went to a piano recital by myself at Notting Hill Gate, oh no in Wigmore Street at the Wigmore Hall and enjoyed them, I heard all the Beethoven Sonatas, all Schubert or Chopin, Thursday afternoons. I went to the Queen's Hall for the Promenade concerts three nights a week from St Paul's. Monday night was the Wagner night and I didn't go; Tuesday night Mozart night; Wednesday night I think probably tutti frutti; Thursday night maybe Handel, Bach; Friday night Beethoven; Saturday night, popular music. Every time I went to France, particularly to Aix les Bains to which I went every

year, I went to concerts, saw (?) in Marienbad, Baden Baden, wherever they went and I accompanied them.

MI Did your mother have a good voice, did you listen to her with pleasure?

IB With greatest pleasure, yes, she had a very pretty, pure voice. She was taken on by Rimsky Korsakov, she wanted to study but her father who was a religious bigot forbade it. She had no money so she couldn't do it. I'll tell you a story. Our arrival in England, 1920, we left Russia, in Russia I was taken to the Opera, I went to the Mariinski Theatre, first Opera I remember was Bohemia, second opera was Boris Godunov with Chaliapin of course and I didn't take to it really but there was one thing I remembered and that is when he sees the ghost of the murdered Dimitri, he went down on his knees, he said 'Jew, Jew!' and he climbed onto the table and pulled the tablecloth over his head and he sang underneath the table like that. I remembered that as a child, 1916, I was seven. Then we came to England, that was 1920. We went to Riga in I would say September, stayed there while my father was in England getting visas, getting us a house to live in, all that and finally we left Riga in early February, we stayed in Berlin for two or three days until the visas came through, we were Latvian citizens and then we went. Some luggage was lost on the way, my mother became frantic because some trunks were supposed to be on the train, couldn't find them, she couldn't breathe, couldn't talk but thank God they were found, [ ] we crossed the ocean for four hours, I was pretty exhausted, went downstairs and lay on some kind of mattress, slept, then we arrived in England. My father met me and I rushed into his embrace and the officer didn't ask for a passport – I remember that was quite civilised when I thought about it afterwards. My mother of course had British documents, I didn't. Then we were in a separate compartment of the train, we were in a private compartment with champagne. My mother thought it was extremely extravagant and complained. That very night we went to Surbiton where we were going to live. We arrived

about half past ten in the evening, I went to the piano and immediately played God Save The King with one finger. That shows something, Anglomania, it remains. I am a very great admirer of England, the English are not.

MI Where did you learn this? In Riga?

IB I don't know, I'm not sure, it must have been one way or another.

MI And did you play at all?

IB I took piano lessons here but it didn't go, partly my bad arm which I could have had mended except nobody – a man the other day said to me it's quite an easy operation and my arm would have been perfectly normal now but it's too late. Nobody ever suggested it, it still has its compensations, I couldn't take physical PT, I didn't have to play football, I couldn't fight in the army, I couldn't play a violin – anyway that was my sort of (?) and then I went to preparatory school. I could speak no English when I came and I was given lessons in English by some English woman who had lived in Russia. After a fortnight or three weeks of this, I went to school. [ ] And I was never persecuted, I was very well received by these little boys. I learned Cockney, I spoke with a strong Cockney accent, they were all children of Tradesmen and the like in Surbiton.

MI You learned in three weeks in effect?

IB I learned enough to get on with and towards the end of my time which was only a year I came top in English. I also took part in Babes in the Wood, the second murderer in the Christmas play. The words I had to speak were 'I'm a-comin', I'm a-comin'. Second murderer, and I still remember that I had to say that but I don't quite know why I had to say those words. Music is the heart of my life, it really is. I talked with Francis Hassle the other day and I said

to him – I saw it somewhere – but somebody had said that in order to save Venice, (?) sacrifice, a hundred people, but it would have to be done, sacrifice something immortal in order to reclaim Venice. I said No, I wouldn't sacrifice a single life. [ ] Harold Nicholson's memoirs says that quite firmly. Monstrous not to fight to preserve the ... man can be replaced, works of art, no. I said, no, there are two views about it, the idea of sacrificing your life for a single inanimate object? No, I'm not for that. Two attitudes. And then he said, 'All right, you're not at all interested in art. What about no more Schubert, no Mozart or Beethoven. Would you at least be prepared to sacrifice fifty people to that? I said, No, no, in principle, no. If I had to decide that (?), I couldn't. No more Mozart, no more Beethoven, even so it's a very definite attitude as my friend Stuart Hampshire would say, because either you are aesthetes or quite genuinely purely the opposite. Stuart Hampshire would be with me. Francis – nonsense(?) But one is surprised by things, 'I think you ought to save the art' – hundreds of people are like that, human beings are replaceable, there are more humans, there will never be another Pier Della Francesca

MI But that just seems to me to be the weakness of consequential reasoning, I could only be with you and I would only be with you simply because – I think what that illustrates though is the kind of inhuman quality of some of our attachments. There's a lot that's very inhuman about art and our attachment to it, the point is that face to face with the person you have to pull the trigger.

IB Aesthetes are very inhuman beings, intellectuals are less – more human.

MI Although not human enough I would have said!

IB I agree. Music – yes – then what happened? During the war I was a very regular attainer of opera at Carnegie Hall in New York and in Washington very little, because there was no music you see. But I would listen to the radio.

MI What musical performances to you remember with particular pleasure after the war, is there any period which is ....

IB Callas, I remember, as everyone does. It was not only her marvellous voice but a combination of dramatic quality – unbelievable. Callas was a phenomenon of the first order.

(they discuss Callas on film)

Chaliapin was certainly the greatest figure on the stage I've ever seen I think. Who else?

MI (?) is an actor and a singer.

IB Yes, one couldn't distinguish one from the other. [ ] before the war. Toscanini again conducted after the war.

MI We mustn't forget Argentina the Flamenco dancer ....

IB Marvellous! – before the war. Now after the war, Schnabel again and La Scala where I hadn't been for [ ]

MI Have your musical preferences or interests changed over time or were they formed very early as Mozart at the centre of it ...?

IB Except for (?) which is the most horrible Italian opera [ ] came back with the most deep devotion to Verdi and to Rossini which at the time I couldn't listen to them, I thought it was the most cheap awful music. Only Bach, only Beethoven, only Mozart, only Haydn. But now I love them both, I never became a Wagnerian, never. I've always secretly regretted two men of genius who changed our history for good; one is Karl Marx, the other is Wagner. Maybe we would have better without them but geniuses they certainly were. From my point of view they altered life for the worse. It's a terrible confession to make.

MI Why Wagner particularly?



IB Because I believe and am personally addicted to there being rules, music and morals and everything. You can break them but you must know what you're breaking but you mustn't do it too often, the thing is to come very near to the breaking point without breaking, like people being unpleasant to each other within the discipline of civilised speech, not just shouting obscenities. You see Wagner let loose the flood of that [ ], discipline disappeared, the doors were opening in all directions. It's entirely obviously a very valuable creative thing. Timon of Theos was the man in Ancient Greece who added four strings to the three stringed lyre – made a three string into a four stringed lyre. That ruined the particular austere kind of music. Well I think it's a rationalisation for the fact that I am never lifted by it, I see that it's wonderful, remarkable, powerful and so on, I'd never so to speak entered into it. It's unfriendly. The whole ethos of the reign(?) of all these giants, [ ] cruel to brutality and this savage world is to me barbarous and menacing and I see that the Nazi's really did come out of it. And the sexual motif – Robert (Roger?) Scruton was probably right, [ ] eroticism [ ]

MI But surely some turning back there from the full implications of romanticism as a doctrine?

IB Wagner is a Super-romantic, but I'm not prone to pro-romantic I think, they're wonderful and they changed our taste but in their extreme forms they lead to Fascism. Fascism in general is loosely all wrongs and total chaos; anarchy; fascism; cruelty; violence; brutality, crush, total suppression; and it ends in Walpurgisnacht That's why Goethe was against it. I think it's a wonderful thing, it's what interests me, it's a big attack on what otherwise I would uncritically accept as being the right line, the longer liberal view; but they discovered weaknesses in that and images which are fascinating, remarkable, they speak to us; and now we are the children of both and that's important. I don't want to defend romanticism and say romantics are for good, classical is rather dull.

That is not my view. Evident in Kant and Austin and Aristotle and empiricism and the analytical movement; not Heidegger and Nietzsche and all the rest of it. But that anyone could expose oneself to it, otherwise – follows the experience, the experience doesn't happen, isn't open to one.

MI But it's also true that there's no – yes, you say that you want to be open to experience but you've also said on an earlier occasion that there's very little 20th century music that you can listen to with pleasure.

IB That is an exaggeration. I don't think I said that. I daresay it was that there's no music by a composer born in the 20th century that I would miss. I listen to some of it with pleasure but not with dedication or devotion, it doesn't move me. Poulenc I listen to with considerable pleasure, even (?); Britten I admire but I don't like it very much but I think Billy Budd is a kind of masterpiece, so is *The Turn of the Screw* but no good to me. Unsympathetic.

MI Isn't Stravinsky a more difficult case?

IB Ah no, but he was born in the 19th century. That's OK, I love, I adore Stravinsky. Bartok also.

(IB calls to his wife and it appears that a man is there and conversation follows)

MI About what?

IB About the (?) Why did he not let me go to Potsdam Because I called him sleeping beauty and he made a lot of it. There were two letters [ ] saying I could have [ ], I thought you were French.

MI Isn't that odd because my understanding of it – the Potsdam (?) is that you felt hard done by.

IB I was. But the rule is to say about him that he did it because he was known as sleeping beauty or that I called him that and he did it for the right reason.

(Lady B enters and they talk generally for a short time before IB says

I talked to Madame Sakharov this morning ...

(There is then a break in the tape and it seems, they then start to continue talking about the sleeping beauty business)

MI Is she a friend?

IB Er yes, of a rather difficult kind, of a very demanding sort. I wouldn't mind if I never saw her again, ever, and I always felt that, she was never a very ... although she was a friend. I'll tell you: she said, 'If ever you could have said that to Anthony, no Foreign Office would ever say that Isaiah Berlin has referred to you as a sleeping beauty' True enough. 'So you must have told the journalist that. How could you?'

MI And is that true?

IB No, I said the journalist said to me, he talked to William Hayter, he [ ] of why I wasn't sent to Potsdam. It was the most terrible incident. Hayter said, 'Oh I really don't want a chatterbox telling Berlin telling everybody what they're doing here because I've never met him.' I said, 'How do you know he's a chatterbox?' because I believed that. And somebody else from the FO said, 'Oh well he's just [ ] I thought he was dreadful, very anti Semitic, you know.' And so on. He said, 'This man, the FO [ ] Well, I thought it was the most harmless – other possibilities, since the man knew that this [ ] from Potsdam had occurred. But I've told you the story about that. I was summoned to London, all the way to London to go to Potsdam and suddenly was told by a man in the FO called David Scott-(?) that I would not be going. I said, 'Why not?' He said that

Mrs Gibbs, who was looking after the agents says there's no (lodgings?) I was rather stunned. I said, 'Well that may be true but I can't tell anyone that because nobody will believe that. There isn't a bed for me to sleep? Nobody would believe it. What am I to tell them? I don't mind if there's a story I can tell. I didn't know about Eden. And he said, 'Well the FO is very bad on (?), it's very bad you're going, but ...' I said, 'Well, I don't really mind.' 'You say you don't really mind. Tomorrow you might like [ ]' It was quite clever of him.

MI And you did mind.

IB Well, then you see, of course I minded, I couldn't think why I was suddenly moved, part of the delegation. I was meant to be the interpreter for Eden. Next day, as soon as the government fell, it was in the middle of Potsdam and everybody from the FO who loathed Eden began telling me. Somebody said, 'Stalin doesn't like Latvians'. Someone said, 'They just couldn't count their Dons.' Somebody said, 'I can tell you exactly what he said. An American said, 'Sleeping Beauty' because in the State department he became known as the sleeping beauty because I had said that to an American. I did say it but I didn't say it to a journalist but it got round. Anyway it was to his very severe displeasure.

MI On other matters, I'm going to have to go in a minute but I have received a letter from Henry Hardy ...

IB Tell me. He always writes at length.

MI Yes. 'Thank you so much for your letter of 13 June, which it was a pleasure to receive. It is good of you to explain so fully the nature of your sessions with Isaiah ... I assume you have only one copy of the tapes? ... Do you think it might be possible to have copies made? I could store these, if you ...'

IB Why?

MI '... so that the two copies would be in different locations ...'  
ba ba ba ba '... I've always known there would be a biography – if  
not biographies ... There should be [one] ... we all want it to be  
as good as it ... can be. Over the years various authors have been  
suggested and none has evaded Isaiah's disapproval ...'

IB True.

MI '... I have even been driven to wonder whether I might attempt  
the task ...'

IB I thought that.

MI '... but I remain convinced that it is beyond my powers ...'

IB He's right.

MI '... though I think I could make some contribution in a critical  
capacity ...'

IB Correct.

MI 'Your description of the prodigious task that faces any  
biographer seems to me entirely apt ... Only Isaiah himself has the  
necessary range; and, sadly, he shuns the role of autobiographer. If  
you are the right person to write the biography ... I should be  
delighted, and should help you in any way I could. Whether it is  
right for me to form a view on this question in Isaiah's lifetime, I  
am not sure. It seems to me that the right view for me to take is  
that if it's OK with Isaiah, it's OK with me ...'

IB That's right[?].

MI 'An if sounds from what you say as if that condition may well  
be fulfilled ... I know nothing that counts against you ... Tell me

what, if anything, you would like me to do next. If you want me to consult the other Literary Executors at this stage, I can certainly do so: but you might feel this was premature ...<sup>4</sup>

IB There's no point.

MI 'I have to confess that I have not read your published work. I must do so ...'

IB Must confess what?

MI 'I [must] confess that I have not read your published work. I must do so ...',  
and then he writes – a certain extremely amusing paragraph then follows in which he takes me to task for certain stylistic infelicities [IB You?] in my *New York Review of Books* piece, which is the only thing he's read ...

IB Which one? The Jews?

MI The Jews, he gives me a hard time about the Jews, not terribly hard time ...<sup>4</sup>

IB Tell me what.

MI (laughing) No, no, I'm not going to tell you what!

IB I long to know what the corrections are because I'm sure he's wrong and you're right. Why not?

MI 'The only point in mentioning [these stylistic infelicities] is as a way [of] saying that in my view a biography of Isaiah should aspire to emulate his own complete clarity and explicitness of expression, would you agree?' I certainly do. 'Ps I think you aright that the

<sup>4</sup> Nothing about substance – only stylistic matters. H.H.

copyright in the contents of the tapes will belong to the literary executors after Isaiah's death (it belongs to him now); but the physical tapes, of course, belong to you.' There we are. And I was going to reply and thank him for his letter ...

IB Well, poor man he obviously did think of himself as a biographer, but he won't do. He could help, he's been through my works a million times and performs wonderful services – if I don't know where a text is, he takes ten hours and finds it, finds the place. But the other people, who are the other people? There's Aline, Brock and Patrick Gardiner. Patrick Gardiner could talk about it in a shy way, Brock wouldn't be able to do very much – anecdotes about Wolfson.

MI He was your Bursar?

IB He was number two – really was, chief executive officer.

MI I wanted to get some letter from you at some point at your leisure – and we could leave it for a while – but I would like a letter saying ... because I may want to start at some point to go and talk to some of your friends ...

IB Saying that you're my biographer?

MI So that I'm not coming to them on false pretences.

IB I will do that. I must break the news to Gaby Cohen of course who has also been taking tapes – God knows – he also wants to write a book but that's his affair.

MI But does this give you a problem? Does it give Gaby Cohen a problem?

IB Don't mind if it does.

MI You sure?

IB Quite certain. You can do it and he can't. He is what the Russians call [ ] – half intelligent, his education is incomplete. He's not really capable of coping with my life in general. Jewish aspects of it, Zionism, certainly.

MI Yes, very well.

IB He wants to write a kind of memoir [ ].

MI Well I feel very unfit so the part – it will take a while and it will take a while because I don't want to ...

IB What'll take a while?

MI Getting a book of your life written, it will take a while.

IB Don't begin in my lifetime, perfectly well begin after I am dead. [ ] much better.

MI Possibly.

IB [ ] archive. The thing about Hardy is this. He wanted to put my papers in order; there's a lot of unpublished stuff that he thinks might still be published. But he realises that the quantity of stuff which would have to be filed is almost a whole-time job. He's [ ] a half-time job from the Press and a half-time job from me, and I'd pay him. The Press won't let him go on that, rightly – he thinks that on a one-tenth part basis he can't do it. That's frustrated him frightfully ...

MI Yes, because there was so much stuff.

IB [ ] Yes.



MI Now what honestly do you think, is there lots more that you would ...?

IB I don't think so, he keeps on turning up bits and pieces. There's a long piece on Hamann; now I don't think it's worth publishing but he and a man called Hausheer who did the introduction think it's certainly worth publishing in book. It'll take weeks to look through that. I owe him a great debt, Henry Hardy. He's quirky, he's pedantic, he quarrels with people. He was removed from one job and switched on to another in the Press because probably the authors must have complained about his rudeness to [ ].<sup>5</sup> But he's a good fellow, he's like a quirky – grandson of a famous headmaster, I think of Haileybury.<sup>6</sup> And he's married to a rich<sup>7</sup> wife – her father's clever as a chemist or got a lot of royalties and so on from an invention of his – not rich, but his wife has some money. He hates the Press, hates being there, would like to leave it, hoped against hope that I might employ him full time.

MI And you won't?

IB No. Archivist?

MI But you must have a vast correspondence.

IB No.

MI Is it filed, is it in any kind of order?

IB No, it's in no order.

<sup>5</sup> I don't know what he has in mind here, but this is quite untrue. I mean, even if I was rude to everyone(!), this wasn't why I was moved: it was perhaps because I was thought not to be a good general publisher. H.H.

<sup>6</sup> Ho! Cheltenham, Shrewsbury, Sandhurst. H.H.

<sup>7</sup> Hardly. H.H.

MI It's chaos.

IB Lots of my [ ] have been stolen. Did I tell you that story?

MI Yes, I think you did. but tell me again.

IB Well when – suddenly in Sotheby's catalogue, I think five hundred letters may have been taken away but as they didn't have signatures of famous men, they said, 'Tom', 'Jack'. 'Jill' ...

MI Oh God! Nightmare! Were you able to get some of them back?

IB All of them, four letters ...

MI With the famous signatures?

IB T S Eliot, Bertrand Russell, Berenson, Einstein. [ ]

MI Mrs Utechin must have a very nicely neatly filed outgoing tray?

IB Not neatly, it's all stuffed, oh it's stuffed into some kind of, I don't know ...

Here the tape ends.

## **MI TAPE 12-1**

Conversation date: 12 March 1994

Date transcribed:

Transcriber: Michael Ignatieff

Subjects covered:

1946

1930s

Patricia Douglas/de Bubern

Penelope

Clarissa Churchill

Michael Corley

David Hume's influence

Intellectual development 1930s

Hearties and Aesthetes 1920s

Burgess/Spycatcher

Jenifer Hart and Communism

Christopher Hill and Communism

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*Side A*

MI This is 12 March 1994, All Souls, Isaiah Berlin.

IB .....

MI How did you..... did you fake it?

IB No, no, quite candid.

MI If you're *very* tired and would really just prefer to have a nap, send me away – dismiss me.

IB You have list of questions.

MI I feel like a dentist.

IB I like concrete questions.

MI This will put you under strain.

IB If I faint, call Casimir and he will take me home.

MI I met Lord Callaghan at dinner for Pierre Trudeau and he told me that he had met you in a polling booth in Moscow in 1945.

IB It's a joke. He said he saw me voting for some Soviet list in 1945. It's true there was an election going on when Callaghan came in 1945 as a young MP. I must have met him at the embassy, and ever since, he's come up to me and said, "You've never admitted it, have you? How long were you in the party?" and that sort of thing. Just teasing.

MI Do you have any memory of the scene?

IB None. I never saw him.

MI Did you meet Callaghan?

IB I have a very faint memory of meeting this young man at an embassy party in October-November 1945, at some anniversary of the revolution. The only other labour politician I met was Roy Jenkins' father, a Welsh miner and PPS to Attlee (?) who came to see John L Lewish, who was Welsh, a miner etc. and violently anti-British. They thought they could make a difference. They made none at all. This was my first contact with the organized working class of Great Britain. I got on rather well with them. Because they were nice, decent, conservative people.

MI What does Michael Corley say to you?

IB I met him in 1930. He was a Marlboroughian, after the generation of Blunt, Macneice and Betjeman, Bernard Spencer, an

aesthete who had been to Marlborough, Copleston was a friend and so was Michael Corley, a scholar of Oriel. We lived in rooms together in 1931-1.

We shared a house in John St. Copleston was sent down for writing letters about Urquart a famous don at Balliol, accusing him of homosexual tastes. He was, but it was not allowed to be said. I lost touch with these people. Bernard Spencer was killed falling out of a train between Vienna and Innsbruck. He worked in the British Council, Michael Corley became a barrister. In my last year, not knowing what to do I used to have dinners at Middle Temple, thinking of sitting the law exams, and not wanting to waste time, though I never opened a law book, we used to travel up together. He was a dwarf of a man. I've lost touch with him 40 years ago. Why do you ask?

MI Because Spender has memories of you and Corley together in 1930 or 31 at Salzburg.

IB No, that's false. We were on very good terms. We lodged together.

MI Corley was bitterly disappointed that he didn't get a first. It's at that point that your careers diverged.

IB He married a waitress in later life. I feel some guilt. We didn't part immediately.

MI There's a letter indicating you met in Salzburg in 37.

IB Possibly.

MI What guilt might you feel?

IB That I didn't keep in touch. That I didn't want to see him much. There wasn't a quarrel or estrangement. He was small, taciturn, never hail fellow well met. Rather pretty boy in appearance, very

sharp, certain amount of wit, ironical, self-absorbed. I knew his father, mother, sister. M E F Corley were his initials. Quite a rich family of blanket manufacturers.

MI Did you coincide with Harold Acton?

IB I remember a meeting of an English society in which he recited the *Sea in Sardinia* by D H Lawrence in a very oily, buttery voice, very slowly. Lawrence on physical sensations, that's what he was like, a conscious aesthete. I met him in later life: courtly, elaborate manner, amiable, polite, boring. I was never a friend.

MI Was your generation in reaction against that aestheticism?

IB I came up at the end of the Golden Age. Acton, Connolly, Waugh, Brian Howard, Bowra. They were all homosexuals. Perfectly ordinary heterosexual boys from public schools had to pretend to be homosexual to get into this aesthetic world. I came up at the end of this. There were still some homosexual aesthetes about. MacNeice was not. Spender was, but wasn't an aesthete.

MI What did it mean to be an aesthete?

IB You wore special clothes, spoke in a special manner. Let me give you an example. I met a man called Francois Capel, whose name was Frank Curtis, his father was a colonel in the Guards; I asked him what college he went to, he said, "My dear, I simply can't remember." You see, that was being an aesthete. He wore a dinner jacket waistcoat with an ordinary suit. His college was B M C in fact. He painted a painting called *Poisson Soluble* which people admired. They read a journal called *Transition* published in Paris, a Surrealist paper for which Joyce worked. They were homosexual but by the time I went up there weren't many about. There was a man called the Queen of Peru, who used to give loud parties in King Edward Street, which the proctors used to raid because the

noise was so terrible, and occasionally arrested people for indecency. He went down rather soon.

Then there was a thing called the Oxford Outlook of which I became editor on the condition that I didn't have to meet the contributors, because some of them were that (homosexual). It was highbrow not aesthete.

**There were two lots of people, there were aesthetes and there were hearties. The hearties wore huge woollen scarves and had enormous muscles and rowed and went about in groups and drank beer. Aesthetes went about by themselves and wore more elaborately expensive clothes and had very elaborate pansy manners. So when the hearties met aesthetes, they tended to want to beat them up.** I wrote about all that somewhere [..... there was a man who denied it, so we argued about that in some Oxford magazine]. **The aesthetes used to detach chains from lavatories which they wound round their arm, which then was a weapon: if you unwound the knob [demonstrates] and swung it round, it could hold off the hearties.** It was a very favourite defensive weapon with the aesthetes. **It was a very different university, I can tell you, than any you've ever known. And by the time I came up it was already ebbing; and that went on until the middle of the financial crisis of '31, which killed it stone dead.** The point about aesthetes was, **You had to have £400 a year in order to be an aesthete because you knew you'd be sent down. You knew that if you couldn't get a degree here or something had gone wrong, so you wanted an afterlife, you wanted to become an [...], you had to have some kind of income. But after '31 [a slap for emphasis] the parents could no longer pay for the clothes, no longer give you the private income. Then everything suddenly sharply – I mean [.....] abruptly in the summer of '31 – the Communists came up. And they gave much more trouble to the dons than the aesthetes. The aesthetes were just sent down – for doing no work and getting drunk and misbehaving [...] – whereas the Communists asked lots of questions in their essays: that was much more troublesome. That's about when Christopher Hill came up – you see – '31, '32. So the whole thing – The literary societies died overnight, and were**

**succeeded by political societies.** And that was quite sudden. I remember [...]. **My last year as an undergraduate was politicised .**

MI By whom? By Sheila Lynd, among other people?

IB No, no, no.

MI That's later.

IB Sheila Lynd wasn't at Oxford..... to London  
..... etc.

MI He sent you Plekhanov from Moscow.

IB We were on perfectly good terms until 1947-8, until he wrote a book called Lenin and the Russian Revolution in a series edited by Rowse. I read it and I was shocked. It said things he knew weren't true. It said nothing about Trotsky, despite the fact that the revolution was made by Trotsky. He didn't say he was an Allied spy taking £500 pounds a day, to that extent he deviated. He also said that the peasants who voted for the SR at the Constituent Assembly in 1917 actually wanted to vote for Lenin. They just put the ballots in the wrong box. I thought that was too much. Sparrow reported that I thought the book was dishonest. Hill telephoned me at midnight. I can't talk about it. Come to lunch tomorrow etc. etc. (This story repeated elsewhere.) After that, I knew it was no good knowing him personally. As Leonard Woolf said, he didn't have a free mind. He was by the way ferociously anti-Zionist, but that never came between us.

MI When and by whom were you debriefed by MI5?

IB In 1961-2, when Blunt had confessed (though I didn't know it.)

MI Was this the spycatcher interview?



IB Yes.

MI Was this your first encounter with the intelligence service?

IB My first encounter was with Burgess. And with Colonel Grand in 1940. I had no contact with them in the sense of doing things for them or knowing them.

MI When Burgess flew the coop in 1951, you didn't get in contact with MI5?

IB No.

MI You didn't volunteer information on the Communist past of your friends.

IB No. I didn't know he was a member of the party even.

IB Blunt was exposed in 74. The man read a long list of names. Did I know anything about these? Then he talked about Burgess and possibly MacLean. I told him everything I knew. I'm entirely on the side of the police in these matters. Then he asked whether I was a Marxist, or was drawn to them. And I said, if you'd read my book on Marx, you'd see it was not a favourite book of the party. Matter of fact you're quite right, he said. Then he came to see me a second time, at the Reform Club. I told him all I knew which wasn't much.

He also went to see Jenifer who sent him packing.

MI What about Jenifer?

IB No, no certainly not. She was a secret member of the party.

MI In 1939 she told you in a letter that she had left the party.

IB She met Hart when she was in the Civil Service and she couldn't marry him, so they set up a ménage. She's pretty promiscuous by nature. She was taught that by the first person who went to bed with her (Eliot Felkin, a semi-Bloomsbury figure, a League of Nations official.) This was ideological. If you want to enjoy it, don't have guilt about. He was the first person who preached to her about sexual freedom. She began living with Herbert, and he talked her out of it. She slipped out of it. She was not a Communist. She was an agent. She claimed she never did anything. I didn't know she told me. She supplied me with the girl who did all the typing for Karl Marx. I met her when she was an undergraduate here.

MI When did your friendship with Sigle Lynd begin?

IB In the summer of 1931. I went with Frank Hardie. Also Felix Markham, don at Hertford, who was a friend of Sigle. And that's how we met. And then I fell in love with her.

Nothing ever happened. We never kissed. Never touched. Very inhibited. She never suggested we should go to bed. But I think she would have married me if I had proposed. I knew her mother and father. Her mother was a Georgian poetess.

"With this sygil, with this star, King Solomon seals the mouth of many a jar" (Laughs.) Line by her mother.

There was no sexual relationship between us. I must have been very inhibited. I felt no desire to embrace her or go to bed with her. As a result of nothing happening between me, she went and married a working class Communist. I met her in a concert in Sadler's Wells at the time of Hungary, and she said I can't go on.

MI Were you ever as fond of BJ?

IB Oh no. She was very pretty. But I felt no emotions. She became a friend. Her life was ruined by a man named Howard, a Wadham undergraduate.

MI She married Jack Gaster, solicitor of the Communist Party, son of Moses Gaster, head of the Sephardim in London.

MI What effect did the Burgess/Maclean affair have on your politics?

IB None. I was influenced by Plekhanov. He had an influence on me. He wrote about these French philosophes. It was Plekhanov who took me back to the eighteenth the century.

MI You do get to things by the strangest routes. Stuart Hampshire roars with laughter to remember you reading Bouvard and Pecuchet in Russian on an Irish bus. I said, no such book exists.

IB I was going to Limerick to somewhere out west, towards the Blasketts. The Irishman in front of me was roaring drunk.

*Side B*

MI Was Plekhanov really your way back to the French philosophes?

IB Nobody else told me to read Helvetius Holbach and so on. Saint Simon, Fourier, all these people came through Plekhanov. Hamann too.

MI Your intellectual capital comes from paying attention to forgotten Russian writers of the nineteenth.

IB Kingsley Martin had written a book about the philosophes. Certainly I was the only one who went that route via Plekhanov. I read them with great admiration, as great radicals. What they said was true. I'm suspected now for being too interested in the reactionaries. But my fundamental views were formed by these people. I remain a follower of the Enlightenment, in some sense.

MI And the phrase, “in some sense” will take 75 pages to make clear.

IB In some sense means I admired their anti-clericalism. The respect for ideas, the intelligentsia aspect. The anti-metaphysical, anti-tradition, anti-Burke aspects.

MI Yet, you’re very Burkean.

IB That’s because of my interest in the reactionaries.

But earlier.

When I went on a reading party in 1949, to Italy, with Pares and Gardiner and other Oxford philosophers, I was reading Helvetius.

MI What about Hume?

IB He was an influence. Not the theory of perception. But the extreme empiricism, the anti-apriori, which seemed not entirely true. There are propositions which have validity apriori, but his empiricism, honesty. I delivered lectures on Hume’s ethics in this university, just before the war.

MI The Hume that’s important is the Hume of the Treatise and the Inquiry. Not the Hume of the History or the Political Essays.

IB No, not the conservative Hume. The ethical Hume, the idea that ethics are naturalistic categories. Good and bad are what we approve of, what our society approves. I never believed in the Kantian idea that good and bad are engraved in our hearts forever. Though I admired Kant enormously. I was never a proper disciple of Hume, only in the respect of opposition to Chuck Taylor, I didn’t believe in teleology, history was marching towards a goal towards some purpose. I didn’t think everything in nature had a purpose implanted in it by God. Hume is really just one damned thing after another. Things just do follow in regular sequences, they don’t have to. Contingency.

MI Since we're talking about intellectual development in the 30's, we ought to mention James, the novelist, which figure in your letters to E Bowen. He talks about the emotions with having any.

IB I never loved him. Virginia Woolf yes. I was addicted to her. I liked E M Forster, but I never thought he was a genius. Clever, amusing, but I never accept4d the morality. Who did I read apart from the Russians?

MI You read Kafka, Stuart Hampshire says.

IB Yes, Amerika, the Castle.

IB Aldous Huxley introduced me to Kafka. He was a very good introducer.

MI Spender and Hampshire said James was marvellous. But you didn't.

IB I didn't like him.

Who did I read? Rosamond Lehmann, because I knew her, but without pleasure. I did not read Celine. I did read Malraux, whom I admired. I read conscientiously read a lot of second and third rate Eastern European writers published in New Writing, but they didn't take. Stephen (Spender) was always going on to me about a Russian novel called Cement.

MI You're making that up.

IB No. Cement, yes.

I was impressed by Soviet films which we went down to Headington to see. Battleship Potemkin. The General Line Mother, (Mat), Storm over Asia..

MI Did you have any twinges of Russian longing when you saw these?

IB None. I saw them respectfully. I thought they were wonderful and slightly ludicrous. In the General Line, an old man was sitting under a tree and saying I think I am dying, and the other man said, Die then if you must. (Laughter.) Very typical of the solemn lines. I wrote about Storm over Asia for *Oxford Outlook*.<sup>8</sup>

MI A question about Patricia de Bendern. How long does it go on?

IB I met her in Washington at dinner with friends. That must have been in 1942. By 1943 I was head over heels in love, and used to go and stay with her in Cambridge Mass. I used to meet her in New York. She used to come to Washington and stay with friends. Then I came back from Washington on the way to Moscow in July 45, when I was meant to go to Potsdam and I didn't. I was with her when the Labour Party was elected. I was staying with her in a house in the country, and we danced for joy at the election of the labour party. Then I went off to Moscow.

MI Were you alone with her then?

IB Alone. About that time, preparing to go to Moscow, she offered me marriage, and I was excited, but said no almost immediately. Because I could see she wasn't marriageable.

MI Why?

IB Because she had affairs, was promiscuous, told lies. And because she wasn't attracted to me physically She just wanted company, that was all. She was bored by her husband and couldn't think of anybody else.

MI What if you had made a move?

<sup>8</sup> HH has checked in Bodley and been unable to find this in *Oxford Outlook* or the *Pelican Record* (Sept. 03)

IB She would have regretted it. Boredom was her motive. She liked my company. I amused her. We were on very good terms. We might have had a jolly time together. I remember consulting someone – Lady Rumbold – and she said I would be very unhappy, and I said, come to think of it, **I was faintly in love with her.** She's dead (Felicity), and so is her husband. **When her husband went off with another lady in Washington, I was living with them as a paying guest – I had to hold the hand of the abandoned wife.**

MI Who is Penelope?

IB She was Felkin's daughter. I met him in Washington. Felkin worked with the drug control administration. She was a pretty girl. And he brought her to Oxford, to get her into a woman's college. I came back to Oxford in 1946; Felkin came with this very pretty girl, who had been brought up in Cambridge Mass. On the way to lunch, I met Freddy Ayer, then a fellow of Wadham, and I thought I should invite him to join us. He came, we had an agreeable lunch. I said, perhaps mistakenly after he'd left, he's a very dangerous man, a Don Juan. I said that and went off to Washington. I came back in May 46 and Penelope was there trying to get into her college. She came to tea, (she was great friend of Patricia de Bendor from Cambridge Mass days), and I asked her what she was doing. I asked her what she was doing and she said she was seeing my friend, Mr Ayer. I suspected the worst. [...]

MI Phew.

IB Sounds like Falstaff in the Merry Wives of Windsor.

MI Or in Liaisons Dangereuses.

IB After that a total breach, a false man, a monster and so on. Freddie phoned from London and Patricia said she wouldn't see

him. He accused me of doing this. I was in fact innocent, but I was not displeased since I was still in love with her.

I remember Freddie coming to dinner with me in New College and en route he had met Penelope who had said terrible things to her. He had no appetite, couldn't eat his food, found it terrible to be insulted by girls.

MI Good for her.

IB Then she married someone from LSE called Douglas. Then she went off her head. Used to come and see me and Aline, very boring. Patricia meanwhile died. She came once or twice in the 46-47 period before I was married. By this time she had married Hornack, a Yugoslave antiquaire in Chelsea, who already had two wives, so it was a ménage a quatre. She helped him forge furniture. One of his non wives was married to Albert Hourani. So she went to see her co-wife, and en route used to come and see Aline and me. Aline quite liked her, I had lunch with her alone several times in London and she told me about her lovers. Then I heard about her once in a while from Alastair Forbes who was in love with her. She ruined him. She went to New Mexico, India, to ashrams. Ally Forbes used to tell me what was going on. She had lots of children, by Hornack by de Bendern. Years later, she died in England. Allie Forbes went to visit her on her deathbed. She died of cancer. He wrote her obituary in the Telegraph which went down very badly with her family. I was asked to give an address at her memorial service. I said I'd write something, which was read aloud. All the other speeches made her out to be a great religious saint. My speech made her out to be a social person, amorous etc. It wasn't very well received. The clergyman made a tremendous speech about her being a bridge of Christ. Very much unlike anyone I'd ever known.

MI That reminds me of the funeral service for Bruce Chatwin. Half of the room was full of his lovers. Yet the Orthodox claimed him as one of theirs.



IB Some kind of spiritual wandering did take place in her case. She died in the arms of this community.

MI From the same period, very intense letters from Clarissa Churchill (Eden).

IB Still about. Still alive. Countess of Avon. Churchill's niece. She was a friend of David Cecil's. She came to live in Oxford in 39. Because the blackout in London was very disagreeable and while we had one it was less serious. We had a little season of refugees from London. She wrote me a letter when I was in Moscow saying that when she'd known me first I was an innocent otherworldly don, and that now my head had been turned by society, which was a world suitable for her but not for me. This was clearly about Patricia, of whom she was obviously jealous. She denied writing this letter. Clarissa introduced me to Emerald Cunard. I had a real social season from 1944 and 1953. I used to dine a lot in London with smart persons. I knew Duff and Diana Cooper, the Hoffmanstahls, I was taken up, you might say. Clarissa was part of that. If I'd known that Lady Cunard had been a friend of Ribbentrop I wouldn't have. But still. When I married Aline it stopped. (Claps his hands.) She didn't like society very much. I was an eligible bachelor, the extra man. I was always a little afraid of being a social fool, amusing them. I made friends with Diana Cooper. With Dot Head. With the Asquith's who were friends of David Cecil.

My father used to make fun of me. When I came home he would say "Duff, Dot, Buff, Whip, what are your other friends called?"

MI Good for him. To this day, Stuart chides you for your associations with London society.

IB I did have a mondain period, but it came to an end. Am I a snob? Yes. I do attach some importance to knowing important and interesting persons. I'm not saintly. Not very snobby: mildly.

MI Had Clarissa married Eden?

IB [...] She married Eden in 54. Very faithful to him. A Foul weather friend. She's now looking after Goodman.

MI Is she worth talking to?

IB You could try. She's known me since 40.

MI This torture must stop.

## MI TAPE 12-2

Fuller transcript of early part

Conversation date: 12 March 1994

Date transcribed: 21 June 2004

Transcriber: Esther Johnson

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MI It's the 12th March 1994, All Souls, Isaiah Berlin.

IB[ ]

MI Did you fake it?

IB No, quite candid.[*laughter*]

MI If you're very tired and would really just prefer to have a nap, you know, just send me away, [IB No, no], dismiss me.

IB No, no, I napped in the past[ ]. However, I am prepared to do anything. You have a list of questions?

MI Oh, I have lists of questions and [ ], I feel like a dentist.

IB I like that, I like that. I like concrete questions.

MI Here's a concrete question. They're in no order, I might – you're going to be in a – [IB Go on, go on] it's going to put you in a severe neurological strain, since we will leap from 1932 to 19...

IB Continue, continue. If I faint, you might ring up the house, ask if Cassimir is there. That's where Aline is. Yes, now.

MI Beginning in no particular order, I saw Lord Callaghan [IB Yes] at a dinner for Pierre Trudeau, [IB Yes] who said that he had a vivid memory of you in a polling booth in Moscow in 1945.

IB That's a joke. It's a joke. It's a joke which he's always made to me, it's a constant joke. That joke is he's always said he saw me voting for some kind of Soviet – election in 1945, presumably for accepted candidates.

MI For Comrade Stalin himself!

IB It's true, there was an election when Callaghan came as young Labour MP, to Moscow, and I think I met him in the Embassy or somewhere, at some kind of... He's always told me, 'Oh, I remember you very well in that polling booth, you were voting. Oh, I saw you voting, I knew what you were doing then. You never quite admitted to it, did you? How long were you in the Party?'

MI [*laughs*] That kind of stuff.

IB Yes, that's right. Just teasing.

MI Do you have any memory of the scene yourself?

IB None. What, of a polling booth? [MI Yes] Never saw one, I never saw one.

MI And you have no memory of Callaghan in Moscow in '45?

IB Yes, I do. Yes, he came as a young Labour politician, trying to make his way. He didn't have a job, I don't think, in government then. It was during the Labour government but I don't think he had a job then.

MI Would somebody like Healy have been in that delegation as well? Were there other..?

IB No, he came by himself, there was no delegation. He came alone, I think – a kind of one man delegation – I don't know, just to look around. He was let in. Maybe there were others. I've got a very faint memory of meeting this young man in some Embassy party, between October/November 1945, whenever the election [ ]. The election must have been roughly at the time – probably the anniversary of the revolution or some such date. No, no, I didn't know who he was. When I met him again, I didn't realise that I'd ever seen him before. [ ] all that. [MI OK] so you can write to Callaghan and say I became purple in the face when you asked me [MI *laughs*] what I was doing.

MI That Labour figure who crops up, I think in wartime Washington, is the young Jack Jones.

IB No, I never met him. I'll tell you, something cropped up in Washington, they all cropped up sooner or later, Roy Jenkins' father, who was a man called – he was Attlee's PPS. I was supposed to know about America and American politics and all that and how to meet people, how to approach them, I was sort of called the 'occidental expert.' [ ] Cairo's oriental secretary; I was the occidental secretary. [*laughter*] And so they used to come and see me in case I had anything interesting to say to them. He was a [fuzzy?] old man, he had been a miner, he was a Labour politician, rather nice...

MI Roy Jenkins' father?

IB Yes. Roy Jenkins was a miner to start with and soon became a politician, a Labour Party politician [ ] rather able and so on, and by this time, as I said, PPS to Attlee who was the Prime Minister – no, he wasn't Prime Minister, he was Deputy Prime Minister during the war, but he was his Parliamentary Private Secretary, and he came to see John. L. Lewis because all these Welsh MP's always thought that if they saw Lewis, they could do something with him.

The fact he was Welsh and he was a miner – and Lewis of course was violently anti-British and played with the communists at that period. He was always very nice to them, extremely hospitable and kind and good; made not the faintest difference. He knew exactly why they came. He wasn't going to yield[ ]. He knows the English and remains so till the end. Regarded as Public Enemy Number One because he organised strikes in the middle of the war, which was thought very unpatriotic [ ]. No, other people – let me see, there was a delegation of conservatives and labour who came to look at American factories, I do remember, some kind of industrial delegation. A man called Isaacs who later became Minister of Labour under Attlee – 'Ooh, they sounded so cruel,' he kept saying, 'Ooh, it's cruel.' [MI What is cruel?] The middle of summer, the sun. 'Cruel. Oh, it's so cruel.' He came, several people came. Then the first one I got on with was a miner's leader of that period, Head of the Miner's Union.

MI Who was?

IB I can't remember. Talked at length about what it's like being a miner, I think, cannot remember.

MI Is this your first contact with the organised working class of Great Britain?

IB No. Great Britain, yes, but not American. Have I told you my story?

MI You've already – yes.

IB Yes, you see? Of Great Britain, yes, certainly. I always got on quite well with them, it was quite good, they didn't dislike me. What was his name? Lawther. Will Lawther.

MI And you liked him particularly?

IB I liked him very much.

MI Why?

IB Nice, good conservative man. [MI *laughs*] 'Oh, but I was a check weighman.' What is a check weighman? He'd tell you what a check weighman was, I would just[ ]. But I mean,[ ] wasn't well organised then. I don't know, there was an old cook, maybe who – he was a kind of communist really – he wasn't much good. He organised a general strike which didn't do us much good. A lot of that but they [ ] history. But it may be done by labour members.

MI Let me move you to your seat as a random...

IB You can be as random as you can be.

MI This is like all things that are [IB Be random, be random] OK, complete randomness. Now we're going to talk about – ah! What does the name Michael Corley still say to you?

IB Oh, he was a great friend. He was a great friend. I lived in rooms after – I must have met him in about 1930. There were three Marlboroughians; he came from Marlborough the generation after Blunt, MacNeice, Betjeman. That was one generation. The next generation had a man called Bernard Spencer who was an aesthete and poet in Corpus, with whom I made friends. I think I talked to you[ ].

MI He'd gone to Marlborough?

IB He had been in Marlborough, yes, and his friends in Oxford were two other Marlboroughians; one was a man called Coplestone, who I think died fairly recently, who became a civil servant, looked after universities from the Ministry or the Treasury, I don't know, whatever it was; and the other was a man called Michael Corley who was a scholar of Oriel and [ ] Balliol, and they

were friends of my friend, Spencer; they were all my friends together. And we occupied lodgings together in the year 1932, '31, '32, we shared the house. [MI Where, do you know?] It was in – it was called St John's Street and I think it was in – no, it was called [William?] Square but it was in St John's Street, corner of St John's Street and William Square, landlady and all that. Perfectly normal house and so on. And they were great friends, I got on very well with them, [?] of them sent down from Balliol for writing improper letters about a very famous don called Urquhart, who was a great, terrific figure at Balliol, accusing homosexual tastes. It was quite just but not allowed to be said, so he was removed for two terms and allowed to come back. Rather grim character but remained a friend of mine. I lost touch with all these people. Bernard Spencer was killed, falling out of a train between Vienna and somewhere – Innsbruck – he was in the British Council. Whether he threw himself out or fell out, was never known. Michael Corley became a barrister; he used to eat dinners with me at a time when I didn't know what to do. They had some dinners in the Middle Temple, which as you know, is a preliminary to doing the bar examination. I never opened a law book, I never did anything: but just in order not to waste time in my last year, I used to go up to – and he wanted to be a barrister, too. So we travelled together. I was very fond of him. He was a rather dwarf, tiny little man and there was him and his sister. [MI Phyllis] Phyllis is his sister? [MI Yes] Could well be. She married Bernard Spencer's brother who called himself Spencer Barnett, changed his name. But I never knew what happened to him at all, Corley, I mean I've not seen – he may not be alive, I've totally lost touch with him forty years ago. Why do you ask?

MI Because there are a lot of letters from him [IB There are?] A). B) Stephen Spender remembers you and Corley together in Salzburg in [IB I'd forgotten] '30 or '31. [IB Could be] Do you have any memories of going to Salzburg with Corley?



IB No. Now that you say it, he must have done but you ask me if I remember him there. No. I must have gone with him, he must have come with me to Salzburg about...

MI Stephen remembers it as being a case of Corley being rather your Page, I mean in attendance upon you.

IB Well, we were friends. I don't think he was in attendance, no. No, I think that's false. He was a perfectly independent character. He did philosophy, he did Greats and I think he probably got a second and he just happened to lodge with me. I mean we were on very good terms and we must have gone to Salzburg in '32, I should think, maybe the summer of '31. Perfectly possible. But I have no recollection, I have no memory of that. I'm sure it could easily be.

MI I get an impression from one letter I found in your files, that Corley was bitterly disappointed that he didn't get a first [IB Could well be] and you did, and it's at that point that your paths suddenly diverge. [IB No] You go to New College [IB No] and then very quickly to All Souls and he feels, I think, left behind.

IB Could be; and then he became a barrister, I suppose, and he married a waitress. [MI Did he?] Yes, that he did. I was told that, I don't think I ever met her; in later life. I think I used to ask about him, Bernard Spencer or Coplestone, any of these people, whether they kept in touch with him. I no doubt should – I have some guilt. I did see him[.]. We didn't part in '32.

MI There's a letter of seeing him in Salzburg in '38.

IB As late as that? [MI Yes] No, I can't – that's not right. '38 was Anschluss. I didn't go to Salzburg. [MI '37 then] '37 is possible.

MI What guilt might you feel about him?

IB About not having kept up with him properly; a great friend and then we drifted apart but I didn't want to see him very much. When we met, we were perfectly nice to each other but I felt that friendships ought to be kept up and this one wasn't and I thought must I do something, but not artificial and I tried to...He was there in '37? Surprises me. If you say that, all right.

MI I wouldn't go to the stake for the date; it's just three or four years after '32, that's all I'm saying.

IB Quite. Well, he might well have been there, not with me. It must have cropped up – unless I saw him of course. We never quarrelled. There was never any estrangement of a formal kind.

MI You just drifted apart?

IB We drifted apart. He lived in London, I lived in Oxford, and we didn't take trouble about seeing each other.

MI And there was a period, say '30, '31..?

IB But who remembers him? Who remembers him at Salzburg at that late date?

MI Nobody remembers him at that late date. I – there's a reference in a letter.

IB Of somebody else?

MI I think so. Very taciturn, very – Corley is in a bad mood.

IB He was rather – he was not very hail-fellow-well-met. He was a self-absorbed, small, rather pretty sort of boy in appearance and rather undersized, very clever, very sharp, very – had a certain amount of wit, certain amount of [ ]. He was – how can I describe him to you? He was ironical, amusing, self-absorbed character. I

knew him, I knew his father, I knew his mother, I knew his sister. When I knew him, I knew him well.

MI Yes, well that's why I'm going over it because there are letters – there's one letter from his mother to you, there's a couple of letters from Phyllis Corley to you [IB Could well be] there's a bunch of letters from Michael.

IB Yes. Phyllis was young. She was an undergraduette. Phyllis – I wouldn't have heard of the name if you hadn't told me. M.E.F. Corley, [MI Exactly] those were his initials. He was – he earned a certain amount of money. He belonged to a family called Earley, which was a family in [?] which produced blankets, that's where the money came from. They were called Earley, they were called, 'It's a late bird that catches the Earley warm.' That was the advertisement. They were quite a rich family of blanket manufacturers and his father married one, [ ]. It was part of my Marlborough connection. I knew other people at Marlborough, too, because they were friends of my friends. [MI Who?] Now, who died? A man called [Karel?] Jones. Cyril was his real name but he insisted on being called Karel, kind of aesthete from Marlborough, a rather silly man. But he was a friend of the Spencer's as I knew...

MI Speaking of aesthetes, did you ever, did you coincide at all with Harold Acton?

IB No, no, no, nowhere near. He was long gone. Harold Acton was about '23, '22, '23, that sort of thing and he was gone.

MI I think I meant the memory of him. Was there any kind of...

IB Oh yes, there was, certainly. He used to come to Oxford. I remember him sitting in an English Club to which I belonged, at a meeting to which he recited *The Sea in Sardinia* by D.H. Lawrence, in a very, very sort of oily, buttery voice, very slowly. [Imitates]

‘And then the sun rose and it’s rays passed through my skin and then through the warmth of my body...’ You can imagine D.H.Lawrence on physical sensations, you see? And he read it in a kind of frightfully sort of smooth, flowing, sort of rich buttery way. That’s what he was like, I mean he was a conscious aesthete, he may have done that. He wasn’t someone you just met, like that. I met him in later life.

MI And what impression did he make?

IB Well, I mean exactly what you’d think. He was very polite, he was rather boring, he was the original aesthete, he was very courtly, his manner was elaborate, rather snobbish, but amiable and polite. I used to meet him at lunch in London, people would occasionally, sort of hostesses occasionally invited us to meals. But I was never a friend.

MI Did you feel your kind of generation, five years, six years later at Oxford, rather in reaction against that kind of aestheticism?

IB No, it wasn’t, no. No, I can tell you all about that, I’ve got a piece to tell you about that, if I haven’t already. You see, broadly speaking, when the left came up – I came up at the end of the – golden age, that was Acton, Connolly, Evelyn Waugh who was rather a second order aesthete. He never was admitted to top society [ ] just a little drunk [ ], but still he was an aesthete. There’s somebody called Howard – Brian Howard, that’s all Etonians around ‘24 thereabouts. Who else belonged to that? Anyway, Maurice Bowra was their patron, he was a little older, he knew them all, got on with them. They were all homosexual and in those days, as I think I told somebody in an interview, perfectly heterosexual boys who came from ordinary public schools, had to pretend to be homosexual in order to get into this refined and very desirable society. And some of those became it.

MI It was fashionable to be homosexual?

IB It was. Now that's how it was done. I came up towards the end of the Silver Age. There were still homosexual aesthetes about. Louis MacNeice was not homosexual; Stephen Spender was, but wasn't an aesthete in the full sense. There was a man called [Roddy MacDougall?] who...

MI Why wouldn't Spender be an aesthete in the beginning in the full sense?

IB No. Never.

MI What does aesthete in the full sense mean?

IB You wore special clothes, you had elaborate manners, if you... well, I'll give you an example. By the time I came up, I met a man called François Capelle. His real name was Frank Curtis. His father was a Colonel in[ ]. I said to him, 'What College are you at?' 'My dear, I simply can't remember.' [MI *laughs*] That was – you see? – that was being an aesthete. He wore a dinner jacket waistcoat with an ordinary suit which gave a slightly odd air. His College was BMC in fact but he called it BMK, BMK because it's called BMC. That's what an aesthete was. He painted a picture called, '*Poisson's Soluble*', soluble fish, which people admired and they read a thing called *Transition* which was a journal produced in Paris by a man called Eugene Jolas, who was an American aesthete, for which Joyce wrote, and that was a very, very highbrow sort of Surrealist journal. They read Joyce and so on. But by the time I came up, there weren't any very prominent ones. They were homosexual and there was a man called The Queen of Peru. He was a Peruvian[ ] or something, who gave nightly parties in a large flat in King Edward Street. The proctors used to raid them because the noise was so terrible and so on, and occasionally arrested people for indecency. And he went down rather soon. He was called The Queen of Peru; and then there was...

MI This was active homosexuality as opposed to simply fostering homosexuality?

IB Both. Both. And there was a thing called the *Oxford Outlook* of which I became the editor; and I became the editor on condition that I didn't have to meet the contributors, unless I wanted to, because some of them were that.

MI That is to say, it had a reputation as an aesthete's journal, the *Oxford Outlook*?

IB No, no, it didn't; highbrow journal [MI Highbrow journal] but not aesthete's [MI But not aesthete's]. No, more aesthete's journal was something called – there was another journal in competition with it which I think was rather more like that. I can't think of its name, anyhow it has nothing to do with it – and Bernard Spencer was heterosexual, that was rather exceptional, although he got on with them and wore long red skirts in an elaborate manner, which I thought to have made friends with them. He was all right with me. But there were – you see, there's a book called, *Oxford and Margaret*, by a French writer called [Foyard?], son of the publisher, Foyard, *Oxford et Margaret*. That describes aestheticism in the middle twenties. There were two lots of people: there were aesthetes and there were hearties. The hearties wore huge woollen sort of scarves, enormous [ ] and rode, and went about in groups and drank beer. Aesthetes went about by themselves, wore more elaborately expensive clothes, had very elaborate pansy manners; and when the hearties met aesthetes, they tended to want to beat them up. I wrote about all that somewhere, there was a man who denied it, argued about that in some Oxford magazine. And then the aesthetes used to detach chains from lavatories, which they wound round their arm, which then was a weapon. If you unwound it, the knob held off certain people; you swung it round, it could hold off the hearties because they were a very favourite defensive weapon of the aesthetes. A very different university, I can tell you that, than any you've ever known. And by the time I came up, it

was already happening, and that went on until 1929. Then, the financial crisis, '31. It killed it stone dead. The point about aesthetes was, you had to have four hundred pounds a year in order to be an aesthete because you knew you'd be sent down, you knew you wouldn't get a degree here, or something would go wrong, so you bought an after life. You wanted to become notorious but you had to have some kind of income. But after '31, the parents could no longer pay for the clothes, no longer give you the private income. So then everything suddenly, sharply, I mean rather catastrophically, in the summer of '31 – then the Communists came up and they gave much more trouble to the dons than the aesthetes. The aesthetes were just sent down for doing no work and getting drunk and misbehaving, [], where as the Communists asked questions in their essays. That was much more trouble. That's about when Christopher Hill came, you see? '31, '32. There was a whole thing on – literary societies died overnight. They were succeeded by political societies and that was quite sudden. And I remember both these periods. My last year as an undergraduate was politicised.

MI By whom? By Sheila Lynd, among others?

IB No, no. Sheila Lynd wasn't [] in my day, Sheila is the one who was in London. I don't know if she was ever at Oxford, she was for some time. Her sister was one but no, no, she wasn't an active politician, she just joined the Communist Party quietly. No, it was done by sort of active undergraduates in the colleges, who took over the Labour Club, which had been a socialist club and became a communist club. And not many dons, I don't think, ever went. I never knew of a single Oxford don who was actually a member of the Party. There may have been but it's still not known to me, except Christopher Hill whom everyone knew to be in the Party except me. I was naïve, I never – I knew he was left wing, I knew he went to Russia for a year, but not a member of the Party, didn't occur.

MI He also sent you Plekhanov from Moscow, he sent you [M?] from Moscow.

IB He certainly sent me Plekhanov. He sent me Mayakovsky, too, a volume of poems. We were on very good terms then. Did he send me [M?]

MI You made inquiries about [M?] when it started publishing in...

IB No, I think I bought it in London, I think I got it from the Soviet bookshop. I mean he might have done, yes. Anyway we were certainly on quite good terms, then.

MI Not subsequently?

IB Well, we quarrelled, in effect. No, we were on perfectly good terms until 1947/8 after when he wrote a book called, *Lenin and the Russian Revolution*. It was written in a series, edited by Rowse, and I read it, I was a friend of his. I read it and I was shocked. It said – it still exists, I mean he really amended it, it said things I knew not to be true. I realised then that he was a member of the Party and he had to do it. But comparatively, it was not entirely faithful. It said, for example, that – it said nothing about Trotsky. It mentioned him once, maybe twice. The Russian Revolution was physically made by Trotsky. He was the man who seized the telephone exchange and the Police station and he carried out the actual *putsch* and the take over, and nothing of hard evidence. He didn't say that [ ] took five hundred pounds a day from the Allies, which was the official Soviet version. At the time he was a traitor, had paid as the English had approached, to be a traitor. That was the official line. He didn't say that: to that extent, he deviated. He also said that the Constituent Assembly of course threw the Bolsheviks out and only got a very small number of votes in that Party. The Socialist Revolutionaries got quite a lot of votes but [ ] ones. That's why they had to have a coalition in 1917. He said, 'Well of course peasants voting socialist, they were really meant to



vote for the Bolsheviks. They weren't clear about what they were doing. Lenin was quite right. He knew the peasants, he seemed to be in touch with them in Russia. He knew what they meant was him and his friends, even though they happened to put ballots in the wrong boxes,' you see? I felt that was too much. So I told – John Sparrow said to me, who rather liked Christopher Hill, who had certain homosexual inclinations, said, 'Have you read Christopher's book?' I said, 'Yes.' 'What did you think of it?' 'I thought it was intellectually dishonest.' He invited[ ] and his friend[ ], met Christopher Hill, who was a friend of his, and said, 'Isaiah says your book is dishonest.' I was telephoned to by Christopher at midnight or very near it. 'Is it true? Did you say it? You told John Sparrow that my book was dishonest?' I said, 'Yes, I did.' 'Why did you say that?' 'Look, I can't talk to you about this on the telephone, it's too silly, come to lunch with me tomorrow and I'll tell you.' He came, I told him. He said, 'Well, I don't happen to have a high opinion of Trotsky. I don't think he was[ ]. I thought the pendulum was so much more in his direction that there's no harm in giving it a swing in the other direction.' So, not a very good answer. 'As to the Constituent Assembly, well I may have been slightly wrong about that.' Well, after that I knew I couldn't – after that I realised he was – he put everything on the altar of the Party, it was no good knowing him personally because he belonged to something else. After that it was clear that I was pro American, clear that he was anti, and I tried to persuade him that Americans gave money to Africa, not entirely in order to make profit, there was a certain amount of humanitarianism – nonsense. After that we met, we talked to each other. When he became master of Balliol, I wrote him a letter of congratulations, got an extremely warm answer from him as if from an old friend. But: it was no good. Just for that reason, because I realised that he was – as Leonard Woolf would say – he didn't have a free mind, he was a servant of the Party. But we had been friends in '30, certainly. He was an extremely clever, amusing, agreeable man, ferociously anti-Zionist.

MI That didn't come between you?

IB No, it never came between me and any anti-Zionist whom I ever knew and liked.

MI Since we've come to 1947, 1948, just because we're there, I want to know, because we didn't clear this up last time when we talked about Guy Burgess, when and by whom you were debriefed by MI5?

IB Oh yes, that was 19... – the year in which Blunt was blown, which would have been when Burgess was dead, by then, so it would have been, I should think, about 1961 or 1962. I think I am right, or 1971 or 1972 [*tape jumps*]. I no longer remember dates. But it was whenever it was – not when he was exposed, but when MI5 knew all about him, when he confessed, although I didn't know it then, you see? So it only turned out to be true later. I had no idea, but whenever it was, I remember it was that year.

MI Was this the Spycatcher interview?

IB Yes, yes. Spycatcher came to see me and said, 'I belong to MI5, can I see you?' and so on. Oh yes, certainly. He came...

*[garbled passage cut 3 January 2024; contd on next page]*

MI And that was your first encounter with the Intelligence Services?

IB No, it was not. Technically, I have to tell you my first encounter with the Intelligence Services was with Guy Burgess himself. [MI Yes] And also this man called Colonel Grand, whom I visited at his request [MI In '40?] in '40. You see I had nothing to do with him, I mean I didn't know what he was doing and I had no contact with him, ever. I said I never worked for him in any way, it was purely classically entirely accidental. I was just cover, used by them for the purposes of getting them, or rather Burgess himself, getting him to Moscow. But I had no contact with them in the sense of knowing what they were or talking to them or doing things for them.

MI And when Burgess flew the coop in '51, did you make any contact with MI5 or...?

IB None. None. They didn't come to see me.

MI You did not volunteer any information as to the communist past of any of your friends?

IB No, no. No. Nor did I know it about Burgess. I didn't know he was a Communist. I only discovered it in '51. I literally didn't know he was a member of the Party, less alone an agent.

MI What about Jenifer?

IB Well, I didn't know she was. I knew her very well and...

MI You knew that she was..?

IB No, no, certainly not, certainly not. She was a secret member of the Party. She never told anyone. She didn't tell me. I had no idea.

MI That's the one – well, the Jenifer issue is the one issue where I think your memory is playing you slightly false, unless I am misreading a letter. She says explicitly to you in a letter [IB When?] in '39 [IB Ah, and then she ceased to be] that she is a member of the Party and she's thinking of getting out.

IB She wasn't. By '39 she was not. She met Herbert Hart with whom she started living; couldn't marry him because civil servants, female civil servants, were not allowed to marry till the end of the war, literally not. So she set up [MI A ménage] a ménage; she was pretty promiscuous really, is by nature, and I believed in that. Why not pleasure? She was taught that by the man who first went to bed with her and said, 'If you enjoyed it, have no guilt. Why not? If you want to go to bed with people, why on earth not?'

MI Who taught her that?

IB A man called Elliott Felkin whom I knew in Washington, a charming man, was at King's, kind of semi-Bloomsbury figure, who was a League of Nations official.

MI [?]

IB He wasn't himself, no, no. He probably did a bit, no this is ideological. It came from E.M.Forster, it came from Keynes, it came from King's, pre-war if you see what I mean, you see? It was doctrinal and he apparently, I think he other – her father was a colleague of his or something like that, and she told me afterwards that he was the first person who preached to her about sexual freedom. No, she began living with Herbert I would say in '38, and I think he talked her out of it by then. So in '39 I doubt [ ]. She slipped out of it by then, there wasn't any great renunciation, she didn't write them a letter. She was not a Communist, she was an agent.[MI Yes, yes] You see? She was an actual agent. She claims

she never did anything for them, perhaps that I can't guarantee, anything [ ].

MI But that she's telling you by '39, by letter?

IB What did she say?

MI 'I was an agent and I've stopped,' or 'I was a secret member but I've stopped?'

IB I didn't know that she actually told me. If she did, she did, that I've forgotten. I mean I knew she was at some stage but I can't tell you when. You say '39? Could be, could well be, because Herbert, I mean, paid no attention. Herbert was then liberal, not Labour Party which he became; and somehow or other... She was a great friend. She supplied me with a girl who did all the typing for my book on Karl Marx, who came from the Civil Service. We were on very good terms, always. I met her when she was an undergraduate here.

MI Speaking of women, one of the things I wasn't clear about was when your relationship with Sheila Lynd, or your friendship with Sigle Lynd, began.

IB With Sigle Lynd. That began in Salzburg in 1931, summer, I think it's the first year I went. I went with my friend, Frank Hardie, my tutor at Corpus; and we went to Salzburg together, I persuaded him to come, a very gentle, very unworldly don, and there I met a man I knew called Felix [Malcolm?] who was a don at Hartford who'd been in the Jowett Society, who'd been a philosopher at Balliol and became a historian; and his friend was Sheila Lynd, and I met her in Salzburg for the first time. We made friends and then I saw her afterwards and fell in love with her. But nothing ever happened

MI What did happen?

IB Nothing. We saw each other a great deal, I felt I was in love. We never kissed, we never touched each other. I was very inhibited.

MI But you went to concerts, you went to..?

IB Oh yes, yes, no doubt we had lunch together. She was a great friend, but I think she would have married me if I'd proposed. She never suggested we should go to bed, never; I don't think she did go to bed with people, in fact.

MI She's a very constant correspondent, I mean for many years, a long time.

IB Well, I was in love with her, well I don't know how long it went on for. I knew her parents, I used to go to parties in their house, Robert Lynd, and Sylvia Lynd was a Georgian poetess: *'With this sygil, with this star, Solomon, King Solomon seals the mouth of many a jar.'* Line by her mother. [laughs] Anyway, oh yes, certainly I was in love with her. I think she was the first person I was seriously in love with, and I asked myself whether I wanted to marry her but there was no sexual relationship between us; that's because I was obviously terribly inhibited[ ] allowed, obviously complexes of some kind. Maybe I thought myself ugly and couldn't attract her or whatever it was. I was rather conscious that I felt no desire to embrace her or go to bed with her, which I had to check; that was not so. What she felt, I cannot tell you, but as a result of being abandoned by me or nothing happening, she went and married a kind of working class Communist called Granville, which was not his name. He was a Jew I think, he lived in a house in Hampstead, Keith Grove, and became a hard working, faithful member of the Party; lapsed in the end. I met her at a concert in Sadlers Wells – I think it may have been *Fidelio* or something, and she said – this was at the time of Hungary – and she said to me, 'I've left the Party, I

can't bear it.' [ ]. Not very long after, she died. She never married anybody. At the time when I met her...

MI Were you ever as fond of BJ as you were of Sigle?

IB Oh no, no, no. No, I wasn't in love for one second. No, she lived in New College [ ] lodgings, she was a lodger of the Warden of New College, some contact with her parents and I used to see her there at meals and things when I was invited. Then I kept up with her perfectly well. She was a friend, went to Ireland with us, all that happened. No, she was very, very pretty, she was like an Irish Colleen but I felt no physical emotion of any kind. No, I quite see that people might. Her life was ruined by a man called Howard, who was a very handsome Wadham sort of undergraduate, a member of the Oxford groups; father was a man who writes articles in the *Times* [ ]. He broke her heart. She was terribly in love with him, probably [ ] abandoned her.

MI And then she married – BJ married Jack Gaster?

IB Certainly. He's still alive. He's the solicitor of the Communist Party, always has been for many years. I knew his father, he was the Head of the Sephardic Jews in London, [Ha hum?], Dr Moses Gaster, [ ]. But the Lynd sisters were friends, certainly.

MI I'm jumping – how much more of this can you stand? [IB Any amount] Are you feeling tortured?

IB No, I can tell you. [MI Who is Clarissa..?] The man who came to see me was the spycatcher man in about sixty? I was at All Souls and I was not in this room, and therefore it was before – I was married. I still kept another room, that's right. It was before I went to Wolfson; and I went to Wolfson in '66 and it was before that; therefore it was '62 or 3, thereabouts. That's about when Blunt was blown. He was exposed when? '74? '73? It was quite along time after, you see? And this man came to see me. He wrote a long list

of names. 'Do you know any of these?' I didn't know any of them, but one I think I knew. He said, 'What is he?' I said, 'Well, he's [a member of no] party.' 'Do you know much about him?' 'No.' And then he talked about Burgess, not a word about Blunt, he talked about Burgess and possibly Maclean and I told him all I knew because I was entirely [ ], such matters. And that was it. And then he said, 'What about you? Were you not – were you ever in any way Marxist or drawn towards it?' I said, 'If you'd read my book on Karl Marx, you'd have seen it was not a favourite book of the Party.' He said, 'No, as a matter of fact it's all right. I have read it and you are quite right.' Then he came to see me again in the Reform Club of which I was then a member and I think asked me these sort of questions. I told him all I knew, which wasn't much. Do give me one of your things. [MI Good!] I'd love one... [ ] full-faced. I don't know who he was. I knew he came from[ ], he said that, and that was all. He also went to see Jenifer who wouldn't talk to him, sent him packing, felt very bad to denounce her Communist friends, must have happened...

MI On that issue, don't you think that the Burgess/Maclean affair in some rather indirect way, coloured – or let me ask you this question: what effect did the Burgess/Maclean affair have on your politics? [IB None] None. You were already the way you were?

IB Where I had always been. I was never faintly drawn by Marxism. I have respect to it in some ways.

MI As an intellectual system?

IB Yes; and also I mean I can see the motive for being anti-Capitalist and so on which[ ] Plekhanov. I read him with great pleasure. He made a difference to me, not by his Marxism but by writing about these French *philosophes* who were the anticipators of Karl Marx, I therefore never would have read about it if I hadn't read him, connected to Marx.



MI It's Plekhanov who takes you back to the [ ]. You did go to certain things by the strangest routes because Stuart Hampshire roars with laughter, remembers you on an Irish 'bus, reading Flaubert's *Bouvard et Pécuchet* in Russian. I said no such book can possibly exist.

IB *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, translated into Russian by a French – very difficult French, that particular book. You know what the subject is? [MI No] All those [ ], they are trying to cultivate themselves. I was sitting on an Irish 'bus which was going from something like Limerick to [ ], a boat to the Blasket Islands. That was the journey. A lot of rough Irishmen in front, roaring about something, rather drunk...

End of *Side A*

*Side B*

IB Nothing to do with the French. [ ] I'd heard the name. I read Rousseau [ ] I had to [ ] to read Helvetius or Diderot [ ] a brilliant writer, separate essays on these people who were part of the history of the period. They shouldn't have called it, they called it [ ] rather monistic principle [ ] read it chapter by chapter [ ] Saint Simon, Fourier, all these people come through and that's what led me into these aspects of the eighteenth century [ ] Herder, Hamann, all this [ ].

MI So it would be true to say that a great deal of your distinctive intellectual task comes from being the only Anglo Saxon to pay significant attention to forgotten nineteenth century Russian critics and writers?

IB No, that's not [ ], no. Kingsley Martin, editor of the *New Statesman* wrote a book about them [ ]. I read it...

MI So you were not alone, yes.

IB A lot of people did, I mean, there must have been people...

MI No, what I meant was...

IB Well the only person who ever lectured on them in Oxford, that's certainly true.

MI But you're the only person to go to that route via Plekhanov [IB Oh absolutely] and then via...

IB No doubt. Via [ ]. No, I was rather caught with them, I liked them, I used to read them with admiration. I thought they were good radicals, what they said was true. I'm always suspected now of being rather too interested in the reactionaries. But my fundamental views were formed by these people, about the '80's, the Enlightenment, of which I am, in some sense, a follower in spite of all[ ].

MI And the exact meaning of 'in some sense' will take me about seventy-five pages to make clear, I expect.[*laughs*]

IB Well, 'in some sense' really means that I admired [MI I'm teasing you, Isaiah] Yes, I admired their anti-clericalism. I admired the intelligentsia aspect. On the whole I [ ] the argument was pretty good, but the doctrines [ ]. Anti-metaphysics, anti tradition, anti[ ].

MI And yet you're very Burkean in other ways. Your reading of the Enlightenment is also described as being very Burkean.

IB I know. That's because of my interest in these later, reactionary thinkers. [ ] which covers them up to the post-war period, not just [ ]. I mean, when I went on holiday in 1950, no '49 in Italy, there was a reading party from various younger philosophers in Oxford, I was reading Helvetius [ ] making notes.

MI What about – speaking of eighteenth century figures – what about Hume? Hume and his scepticism is terribly important to you.

IB Yes[ ], not the theory of perception...

## MI TAPE 13

Conversation date: 7 May 1991

Date transcribed: October 2002

Transcriber: Esther Johnson

Subjects covered:

Elizabeth Bowen

T. S. Eliot

Lindeman

Hans Halban

*First Love*

Gertrude Stein

Einstein

Nabokov

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MI: ... there are now somewhat reduced.

IB: On the contrary, I think increased. [MI Laughs] There's a variance you see, I don't see the same thing ever twice, that's the awful thing, it's what creates more difficulties than not. Then ...

MI: And future scholars will probably lament that baneful pair, Hardy and Ignatieff for [ ].

IB: [ ] out, comparing these existences of a trivial thinker.

MI: [Laughs] No, a major thinker obscured by trivial amanuenses. [Laughter]

IB: Well, let me tell you, he also asked me why I was known as Markovitch and not obviously Mendelovitch. It's quite true, the Russians in New York who write to me, he's not some sort of [MI Yes] thing, and the trouble is I tried to explain during the war in New York, people like Nabokov and Mandreyev I think, other

people who tended to want to call me by my patronym, of whom there were very few, what my real patronym was. They'd never heard of it, it was a Jewish name, they couldn't use it because it was too odd, because they said, well Markovitch will be easier, or Maximovitch was also correct. And then the third question ...

MI: But your patronym in fact is ...?

IB: Mendelovitch. Mendel is a Jewish name. Mendel.

MI: Not Mendelyevitch, no, Mendelovitch.

IB: No, Mendelyev is a famous chemist but that is of ultimate Jewish origin I should think. It's like Blok, there's some great obscurity on Blok's origins, he was very anti Semitic, usually a sign. [chuckles]

MI: Mark? [IB Blok] Oh, the poet? Yes.

IB: Yes, he was very, I mean pathologically which was thought to be – his mother was thought to be Jewish. Now, the whole thing is very complicated. No, second question was, third question was, why did I remove P de B from my dedication to the translation of *First Love*? Originally I dedicated it to P de B, then it was removed, second edition. Why? I told him, I began by saying, 'What business is it of yours to inquire [chuckles] about purely personal matters of this kind?' and so on. No, somebody else too, 'Why P de B?' Finally, 'Who is Tips?' I said, 'Are there any letters from somebody called Tips, who is Tips?' [ ] he said, 'What business have you got to ask about my personal affairs?' and so on, and I said, 'You must know, her name is Rachel Walker and she's the aunt of the well-known journalist Edward Mortimer and the sister-in-law of the Bishop of Exeter. [ ] earlier romance. But P de B I did. Well, the reason is that although I had no affair with P de B, the relationship was not dissimilar to that in 'First Love'. But then I suddenly thought by putting it in, it's a kind of piece of obscure personal self

– I don't know, er, – self advertisement, some sort of, to myself, some sort of showmanship of comparing two cases as if only I would know, somebody might discover, it would look as if pretty obviously, [ ] autobiographical reference; by that time, I didn't think about her, she went out of my life completely. I had no, really no wish to see her, she completely faded out of my consciousness. That why I thought why should I retain this reference to something which was dead and gone?

MI: Which was in the past.

IB: And dead and gone, leaving no – memories yes, but no traces in the present.

MI: How did the Turgenev project begin? What was the [ ]?

IB: Oh I don't know at all. I think it must have begun with Hamish Hamilton, the publisher whom I knew.

MI: Just saying to you ...

IB: Saying to me, yes, whether I'd do this or that, I mean something like that. 'Is there anything about Turgenev you would like to translate?' And er, I said, 'Yes, I think there is.'

MI: Was it difficult?

IB: Yes, I think all translation is agonising, very difficult. But two passages I remember which I couldn't get right; one for sociological and the other for purely cultural reasons. The sociological was at the very beginning. It says, 'We all meet in our country house,' and they all meet to tell each other about their first love; and one man says, 'I didn't have a first love, my first love was my Nanny, doesn't really count.' And the other man says, 'Well, I remember the period when I was –' now there is a word. In the old days you would say, 'courting' or 'wooing'. I thought it was no

good in England in the twentieth century, it isn't used. So I said to Freddie Ayer, 'What is the English for [?] la coeur?' He said, 'Making love.' [Laughter] Not at all, it wouldn't do. It was true of him, and I couldn't think ...

MI: [ ] himself is a very archaic response.

IB: Oh yes certainly, more in his case, it's automatic, but that was his life, he didn't know any other, literally not and that's what he meant and that's what it meant to him, making love to her is no point. Er, no, then I thought what does one say about taking steps towards marriage, perhaps? Saying 'going out with' – er – 'making up to', 'chatting up' – er – ...

MI: What did you settle upon?

IB: I think 'courting' probably because this is a nineteenth century story, this was all right, but you don't say that do you? What do people say?

MI: 'Going out with' ...

IB: ... which is sort of absurd, it's embarrassed, embarrassingly, as in inverted commas. Funnily enough it's sociologically interesting for there's no [ ], for it's perfectly respectable, bourgeois custom or invention. I began – a passage, you see, I thought a great deal about, something that meant having a love affair I think, I thought a lot about. [MI Laughs] I do think a lot about people you're in love with, it's correct, but that's what he used to say, 'I thought a lot about Maria [Petrovach?] at that period'. 'I thought a lot about', you see?

MI: What was the other passage that gave you ...?

IB: Ah, that's difficult. When the young man in the story, the boy is sitting on the fence – no! when he first meets her – the Russian

is 'My heart rolled down.' It can't be done in English. Now, the equivalent, and that's what Vladimir Nabokov – he said, 'Missed a beat.'

MI: 'Missed a beat'. Not bad.

IB: Well, but not quite the same; it's your heart is here presently and it's suddenly, you become feeble, you become totally weakened; how shall I tell you, you become – er – something, I mean there's a – you suddenly turn to, into a kind of soup, that's what it really means. Then I thought, well, her heart turned over, that's a night-club phrase, it could be a night-club song, this wouldn't do. I thought and thought; and I thought, well it isn't normal in Russian either but it goes very well in Turgenev, my heart sort of rolled down, like a [snowball?], that's the image; and then I thought, oh well, torment, and I didn't want to attempt it too elaborately, it was no good so I said, 'My heart,' er – something like – 'slipped its moorings' which is literally correct, the image is correct, it's not too complex, too sophisticated for something totally simple in Russian. I don't know what I did, maybe I put something else in the second edition, puzzling over this, not knowing what to say. That's the kind of thing ...

MI: Did you come up with the feeling that translation was possible?

IB: Yes, yes ...

MI: That not too much was lost?

IB: No, only in prose, poetry [ ] , at least lyrical poetry. Epics can be translated, drama can be translated, narrative, poetry can be translated, lyrics not at all.

MI: Lyrics impossible.



IB: It can be done but it's so sort of – [Zhukovsky's?] translation of Goethe's 'Erl K"nig' works.

MI: You mean in Russian?

IB: Yes. Maurice [Baring's?] translation of Pushkin's 'The Prophet' almost works, but in the right cases. [Zhukovsky?] was wonderful, translating – using it into Russian, a very flexible language. At that time, had no – you know was so very – er – all kinds of things can be done to it. After that it began to acquire a certain framework, made it more difficult, yes, conventions of a certain kind. Most translations of Pushkin's verse are nowhere at all, Onegin I mean ...

MI: Yes, including Nabokov.

IB: Nabokov is perverse, very bad indeed though not normally bad, he wanted to retain the rhythm, that [ ], the beat [ ] his English words were. It doesn't work at all. I mean monstrous. There's a man called Charles Johnston who did it not badly [ ] however it's readable and conveys something so it's the best one there is. I think poetry of that sort should be translated into straight prose, 'cause it's better.

MI: I wanted to change the subject slightly ...

IB: Certainly.

MI: I picked up, it's just slightly odds and ends of things I've been wanting to ask you for some time ...

IB: Well go on.

MI: One of them is: in what period in your life and for how long and for what reasons were you called Shaya?

IB: Oh yes. Now that comes, that's a period, a Jewish thing. The Hebrew for Isaiah is [?] you see? That is the actual Hebrew equivalent of it. The grandfather, the great grandfather after whom I was called, the rich man, was called Shaie Berlin which is short for Ishaie. [ ] In Israel now they tend to be called Shai. Consequently my parents, it was my grandparents insisted that I should be called the same way as the old man which they then did, hence that. The Russian is [?] because that's what I wanted to be known as(?)

MI: So that was something you were called by ...?

IB: I was called that by my parents and consequently by people at school and consequently until the war at Oxford, all kinds of unlikely people didn't know how to spell it – Shah, S-h-a-h, S-a-h-a. S-h-y, all kinds of things, people like Martin Cooper called me that let us say – er – John Sparrow ...

MI: Did you sign – I've seen some correspondence of yours in which you sign yourself ...

IB: Very possibly, yes, S-h-a-y-a. Yes, it was a nickname, it became a nickname.

MI: It ends with the war?

IB: Yes. No! It ends before the war. Stuart Hampshire never called me that. After about 1936, '37 it stopped. Can't tell you why, how.

MI: Because I have friends who claim that they knew you as Shaya during the war in Washington.

IB: Possible. Who would they be? Somebody called me that only if they did it before, they wouldn't have known, tried to call me that ... who now, who are your friends?

MI: John Ferguson's widow, if you want to know.

IB: All right. Now,

MI: New Dealers.

IB: I know, Ferg he was called, Ferg. Ferg's wife, she was Miss Ballantyne and far from poor. [MI Laughs] Not very pretty.

MI: Not very pretty, far from poor, still alive and very ...

IB: Now, who called [ ]? Why should Ferg, I don't know that he did call me that. Now he must have got that from Phil Graham who would have got it from John Foster? – somebody – there must be some link with some Englishman, somebody with me in Washington in the war who called me that and therefore it spread. But I can't think who did. It's quite right, I was liable to be called, I could be called that but it was not ...

MI: And it never bothered you?

IB: What?

MI: It didn't bother you or you didn't ...?

IB: No, I was quite used to it.

MI: Did you simply become too grand after the war for it to be ...?

IB: No, even before the war people called me Isaiah. Oh I think Sparrow started doing that, by the time I met Aline, nobody did. People from the past tend to do that even now. Shah!

MI: The Shah of Shah's!

IB: Say, Shiela Grant Duff would call me that, people of that period. I'm trying to think when it evaporated, it wasn't done by me as a conscious act and just disappeared. Who in Washington could have been the link? Why did I know Ferg? Did you know Ferg?

MI: Yes, as a child.

IB: Ah yes. Ferg – I never knew him at all well, nor his wife. They were part of the set I was part of which meant Phil Graham, [?] Pritchard, they all lived in a house called Hockley [ ] Butlers before they married lived there and New Dealers and I sort of cottoned onto these people, became friends of theirs.

MI: Let me ask you about what other people ...

IB: One was called Hiss, Alger's brother.

MI: Donald?

IB: Yes, Donnie to me.

MI: A couple of figures turned up when I was looking at some letters you wrote to Stephen Spender in the thirties, I see you have an encounter with Gertrude Stein?

IB: No encounter.

MI: You went to hear her?

IB: Oh yes, I never met her, in Oxford.

MI: What were the circumstances?

IB: Quite simple. There was a talk announced in the [?] Gertrude Stein is coming, I don't know under what auspices, modern

languages – anyhow it was advertised. Of course I went along. It was quite amusing. She came, her hair was cropped, she came with, I suppose, Alice B. Toklas but I didn't know that. Lord Berners appeared because I think she may have been staying with him, and other people of that sort. The place was full, I just sat there and nothing happened, she gave us a talk of a not very intelligible kind and people asked her questions. David Cecil said, 'You say the other is the same as the same, as the same as the other as the other. What exactly does that mean?' She said, 'You are sitting next to someone, you're exactly the same, some people would think you are other, although you are other you are exactly the same, aren't you? You're no different,' which was the answer to that. Then someone else asked her a trick question. She said, 'Sit down! You don't really want to ask this question, you're just showing off, you just want to be somebody – sit down!'

MI: Really?

IB: The man sat down. That's about all I remember. She was quite amusing, it was a turn. What did I say in my letter?

MI: More or less the same, I mean I just wondered how, you know, people's memory of it retrospectively might be quite different.

IB: It was a public event, other people may remember it differently – when was that, the middle thirties.

MI: Yes. I asked you because I wasn't clear whether you had met her or not ...

IB: No, no, I knew who she was and all that, that she was notorious, by then Joyce and all the rest of it, but not, no, no, oh no.

MI: One of the other figures who, people who figure in the letters is a person called Lindemann for whom you have expressed detestation.

IB: Certainly, certainly.

MI: I wonder whether you can tell me about him?

IB: Tell you one thing I have just received, talking of detested people, I interrupt myself, I have just received a long letter from my old friend [?] Means nothing to you?

MI: Mr Morgan [?]

IB: From California.

MI: From Santa Cruz.

IB: Yes, I sent him a copy of my book. He said I was very pleased to read it, couldn't understand how I could get so far as I did without Freud, Freud is his God, such empathy, such [ ] how can I have done without it, unintelligible. How could I have done without it? Because I never read for it, very little. And then in the course of his letter he says something about inadequacy of liberalism I think but I can't remember, in some correspondence with somebody else, and he says the position take up, I Berlin and [Ann Ireland?] are coupled. That won't do.

MI: No

IB: I'll produce a stiff answer saying 'b<sup>^</sup>te noir'! First time that's happened. I didn't know what she said, [ ] liberals [ ] we believe in the usual responsibility or something, and that we do. Anyway, to go back to Lindemann. He was Professor of Physics. He was the most snobbish man I ever met. He looked rather grand, looked seemingly imposing and was obviously highly able at the beginning

of his life. His story is this: he was a young physicist, his father was an Alsatian astronomer who settled in England and married a Boston WASP and they had three sons – a sister, I don't know, or a sister. Now then this one did physics, so did his brother, sons of a scientist. He then went to Berlin about 1911 –12, to study under great men, lived in the [?] hotel and played tennis with minor German royalty. He then came back to England and somehow became a friend of quite an interesting generation of people. Let me go back sociologically. You see, the reaction against Victorianism took two forms: one was Bloomsbury; out with hypocrisy, out with all this stuff, freedom, talk about anything you like, total freedom, intimacy, success is disgraceful, public life unimportant, you can imagine it, the morality of Bloomsbury. The first time that came out was when I think Lytton Strachey said, 'There is some semen on your trousers.' That was the first time it was clear. But – er – the first Bloomsbury breakthrough ...

MI: We're in a new phase

IB: the breakthrough, yes. The other form was an ambitious [ ] who want to dominate the world, I mean ruthless, ambitious, politically ambitious, money, and they were same period; Churchill, Beaverbrook, F. E. Smith, Lord Carson, they were all friends, tough young conservatives of a vocal kind who also rejected Victorian morality where everything was allowed and you could trample upon people, the great thing was to dominate. And Lindemann became friends of theirs and a main one because he was fundamentally a cynical, rather brutal man, gifted – er – then he became, during the war, he performed an act of courage. He had worked out some kind of formula for the way with which aeroplanes could descend I think much more directly than they did, I mean some sort of line in which aeroplanes could come down in much either safer or more rapid fashion. Anyway, some kind of trick. And Beaverbrook said it was absolutely no good at all, it couldn't work. He did it himself, went up in an aeroplane and performed it, did it. So he was not a man without – of course he

complained that he wasn't given enough petrol and then the sergeant [ ] 'I wasn't going to give a lot of petrol to a man with a name like that!' It may be mythical but anyway, then he became a professor at Oxford and afterwards ceased to exist of any importance, abandoned the subject, became professor, great bully, had a huge car – not a Rolls Royce but something equally good in those days – what do I mean? – of course, a Daimler; and he used to wear a bowler hat, dark clothes and the physicists who were his assistants for whom he got jobs, whom he completely dominated came in a humbler car behind him, what Maurice Bowra called 'The Profs Black Shirts.' He was called The Prof by London society [ ] he used to go to country houses. Prof he was called, 'Hello Prof, how are you, Prof?' a lot of that went on. He was unmarried, he was a vegetarian, nobody quite knows why. He was professor in two colleges, the chairman attached to Christ Church and Wadham. He had to be a member of the governing body of Wadham but he couldn't live there, he did in Christ Church which was allowed and he used to come down after dinner and the first time I dined at Christ Church he was violently anti-Semitic but he imported a lot of German Jewish scientists, e.g. Einstein and others and transformed Oxford physics though he himself wrote a book on I think Quantum which was regarded by everybody who knew anything about it as totally phoney, no good at all. Well, he was a nasty, reactionary, sadistic man; and I remember [ ] he sort of snubbed me before the war, not directly did he snub me, took no notice of me. After the war when I'd made a success of my despatches, he sucked up like mad because Churchill then knew me. He was very intimate with Churchill, he was Churchill's science adviser.

MI: That's how I know the name, I didn't know that ...

IB: Churchill completely trusted him, he was very important to the Treasury, he served in his office, finally he was First Lord and afterwards, Prime Minister. He didn't invent a single thing in the war which was any good; I mean he did invent some things but



they proved useless like those big [?] which went up as they were called, balloons, but proved useless.

MI: Barrage Balloons ...

IB: They were never used at all, they were of no interest. And the great enemy of far better scientists, the President of Magdalen – what was his name? There's a piece by CP Snow about all that who didn't know either but pretended he did, as always. [MI Laughs] Who was it, the President of Magdalen? There were battles between them, Lindemann was always wrong, this man was always right and in the end, he won. But Churchill held onto him and liked him and after the war he lived in Oxford, Christ Church, and he used to go to [ ] where I used to meet him. After that, he was politeness itself. I would never have married my wife but for him because Halban, her husband, who – you know the story of him?

MI: Yes

IB: You know how he came to Oxford?

MI: He was in ...]

IB: He was an eminent nuclear physicist who was sent by – he was an Austrian but he threw in his lot with us, he was taught by, he was something in Paris, a friend of [?] Curie, and then taught by whatsisname – er – that famous Danish

MI: Bohr

IB: Bohr in Copenhagen. Then he came to England at the beginning of the war and brought heavy water which was important with a man called [Korvalsky?] and they had very bad relations. And he was then sent – Anderson! – who was the source of the Atomic stuff, believed in him and sent him to Canada to become Head of the Anglo French Atomic Group which was in

touch with the other Los Alamos people but not – they were different. And Los Alamos never told them what they were doing, quite a lot of tension, I mean competition. Anyway, he was politically quite sound, he was a very good physicist but after two years they stopped work under him, said they couldn't bear him, couldn't tolerate him personally, he was so awful, a bully, disagreeable and so on, so whatsisname had to come to England to remove him – er – what is the name of the famous nuclear physicist who split the Atom? One of the two, oh you remember the name, you would know the name – er –

MI: My mind is stuck on Rutherford which is ...

IB: Well they were pupils, they were pupils of Rutherford and they took the experiment under his guidance was performed by these two men, well they did it, Rutherford wasn't the man who pressed the button. I mean he knew what to do, told them what to do and they did it, it happened in his Lab. I mean he was, no doubt about it, he was excited by it [ ] Cockroft! Cockroft was the Head of the British Atomic thing, Rutherford was dead. And he had to go to Montreal to remove him. Well, he was – he hadn't done anything wrong, he was just an impossible man but, so he never knew what to do with him. So then he said he wanted to go back to Paris. The Americans wouldn't let him because he knew too much, he might tell [?] Curie who was a Communist. So he had to be retained until the end of the war on this side of the water. What could be done? So they decided to get him a job in New York, in Columbia. All right, they appointed him to Columbia; three days later the physics department said they would stop work. So he was removed from there and did nothing, was paid, lived with my wife in New York doing nothing at all, finally went to Paris. Lindemann he met in the course of these things and [ ] took to him because he was sort of, a German sort of man, sort of man Lindemann liked. So then he brought him to Oxford, he was rich because of my wife, didn't have any money, he put him into his Lab. where he did a lot of good work. Oh he was hated, but there was no doubt he was a

success, relatively to them, they were no – the, what I mean, Lindemann's assistants were hardworking hacks but nothing more than that. You see? Everything [ ] But my – Dr Halban was all right, he did quite good work and attracted other people who did, so he was profitable in Oxford. Then there are others who complained that I made him leave Oxford as a result of my goings on with his wife, that I was destructive of British physics. [chuckles] But I hated him; I remember dining in Christ Church when he came in and talked about how he wanted to torture his enemies on the bonnet of his car. I thought that was unattractive, so I took a hatred to him, partly because I thought he was – I don't know – reactionary, German sort of nasty, snobbish [ ] who I felt a natural antipathy to. But Aline quite liked him.

MI: And your paths with Lindemann would have crossed at Christ Church, would have crossed at All Souls ...?

IB: Only Christ Church, when I was asked for dinner, to Christ Church for dinner and he would sort of dominate the conversation and I thought he was terribly unsympathetic and I would fall into a resentful silence.

MI: And you then would write letters to Stephen saying how awful he was.

IB Did I?

MI: One, yes.

IB: No I did detest him, I thought he was the nastiest man I had ever met in my life. I still think so. When Beaverbrook who was also very nasty, but I didn't meet him, I only met him twice, but he was more amusing; but Lindemann [ ] there was something, you see, neurotic too. He played the piano, he thought it was entirely a matter of genes whether he wanted to play the piano or not; he had a wonderful evening when Einstein talked – and he couldn't talk

English really – and Lindemann invited him and he was going to talk about philosophy or physics or something, something or other, and he said, ‘I – speak – bad – English. If – I – speak – bad – my – friend – Lindemann [ ] – me.’ [Laughter] I thought it was very funny, everyone was very pleased, you see.

MI: Was that your only meeting with Einstein?

IB: No, I sat next to him at Christ Church, two meetings. I sat next to him, I didn’t really talk to him, I was too frightened. He said, ‘Do you know why the Shah of Persia does not gamble on horses? Because he does not know which horse will win. Ha! Ha!’ [Laughter] Then I met him at Princeton, I went to see him – have I not told you this?

MI: No

IB: It’s a terrible story. Well, by this time he was at Princeton, it was 1946. Felix Frankfurter who was my great friend said, ‘Do you want to meet Einstein?’ So I said, ‘Yes, sure.’ So I went to Princeton purely as a tourist. I called on him and Felix must have written a letter about me of some sort. He was a great getter together of people, Frankfurter, no doubt, ‘I think you ought to meet ...’ but he was warm hearted, jolly fellow. Well I called at his office, this was about February ‘46, I had just come back from – yes, Russia, and he said, ‘Who –’ after meeting me, ‘You have been travelling, you have been living here, you live here?’ I said, ‘No, I come from England.’ ‘But you travel?’ I said, ‘Yes.’ ‘Where have you been?’ I said, ‘I’ve just come from Moscow.’ ‘Oh, very interesting. Tell me,’ he said, ‘Moscow, yes, the government; and do you think the government has the confidence of the population?’ I said that more or less, I tried to explain that the question of confidence didn’t arise and there was no question of consulting them, what their feelings were. I tried to give a vignette, a short picture of what life was like, directly. I could see that he got gloomier and gloomier. At that time it was obvious that he was

violently anti American, he had a frightful guilt about the atom bomb. He was never pro Soviet but he thought it was a better government than America, at least socialist, not good but still better than this ghastly [ ] government which would – he was surrounded by left wing people at that time. He was a simple man in many ways. So then he said, ‘Oh, you don’t think they are – have the trust of their people?’ That is not good. Governments should enjoy the confidence of their people.’ I agreed. He then said, ‘So, you think they do not?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘So it’s a bad business?’ I said, ‘Yes.’ Then there was a long silence and I realised that – he began to look at me as if I was a Colonel from the Pentagon, you see. He looked distinctly taken aback and when he looked at me, he looked at the ground and looked terribly distressed. So it was hard to say anything, total failure, so I said, ‘Professor Einstein, I don’t want to hold you up I’m sure, I’ve a great deal of work to do. I think perhaps I’d better leave you,’ to which he said, ‘Yes.’ That’s all I can tell you. Not a success.

MI: That’s interesting.

IB: That was the second meeting. He was a very simple man, he – er – I delivered a lecture about him which was printed; he was a good man and very gifted and in every way virtuous but our interview did not go well.

MI: Did not go well. Let me ask you about a couple of other people who occur ...

IB: He then wrote a letter about me to Frankfurter which I’ve got somewhere.

MI: Saying?

IB: ‘This strange world traveller came to see me, I couldn’t quite make out what it was that he’ – I don’t know, puzzled letter, not unfriendly but puzzled.

MI: I wanted to move on to someone else who figures ...

IB: He was terribly uninterested in me

MI: Uninterested? Why?

IB: Because he was simple. You see, he was noble, idealistic and was obviously – had moments of great illumination but he was also a silly old sheep [ ] everything, and naive and foolish and terribly simple and – er – pure. All that's true. I'll tell you a funny story about him which shows that he's not all that simple. He was a governor of the University of Jerusalem, anyhow one of the official friends, he tended to get on well when he went there [ ] he thought they were on the wrong tack, however they were a research institute and not a bad teaching university as they were in the thirties. And he went to a meeting in Berlin of the friends of the university; and the President was a man called Magnus, he was a kind of domestic chaplin of the Warburg family, was a sort of liberal, very liberal Rabbi, who said that in view of the very generous donations of our American friends, perhaps the number of American governors ought to be increased. Einstein said, 'Doctor Magnus, I am getting old and rather deaf. It is quite possible that I didn't quite understand what you said. If so, I would like to apologise in advance. Did I understand you to say that if the number of donations of our American friends become smaller, the number of American governors should be cut?' [Laughter] After that – that was rather good! So, I can't pretend that he was all that simple to do him justice. It's a funny story.

MI: Very good. I wanted to ask you about Eliot because I don't think in our

IB: T. S. ?

MI: T. S. – in our hours of discussion we’ve – his name comes up a couple of times in your correspondence ...

IB: I’ll tell you, I knew him. I first met him – I can tell you exactly where – in Oxford. He came to read his verse in a very gloomy monotonous voice which I remember the Queen Mother didn’t – was quite – what was that thing in the Spectator, A. N. Wilson. Then he came to No. 7 Beaumont Street which was the cultural home of four leading undergraduates; Ben Nicholson; Jeremy Hutchinson, now Lord Hutchinson the barrister; Stuart Hampshire and David Wallace, killed in the war; and they entertained him because Jeremy’s mother was a great friend of his. Then we chatted and he was not very forthcoming and then, somehow, he said something about how difficult it was to translate poetry and I said, ‘Yes,’ I agreed or something and then he said, ‘For example I tried to translate [? Busch?] from German.’ Nobody in the room knew who [Busch] was but I did. He’s a German comic poet, ‘Max und Maurice’, famous rhyming poetry, famous sort of Lewis Carroll sort of. And then we chatted about [Busch], nobody else talked, so I was a success. About 1935, ‘34,’35. He then said to me, I’m telling you, sorry, a little bit wrong, he then began chatting in general and asked me whom I knew and what I did in front of everybody and then other people began conversations. The first time I got into contact was when I sent him a copy of the *Oxford Outlook* of which I was the editor. He wrote me back saying ‘Thank you very much for it. I like keeping an eye on undergraduate publications, do please keep in touch.’ That’s all that happened, that was ‘31. Then this meeting was ‘34,’35, [ ] I met him twice, had dinner with Elizabeth Bowen and we talked quite normally and I remember very well we got on; and I remember very well he said, ‘I’ve just been to see the mountains of Scotland, the Highlands you know. Looking in those hills makes one give up all sense of endeavour.’ [ ] imagined he talked like, but generally he didn’t. He liked flattening the conversation, making it as flat and uninteresting as possible quite deliberately.

MI: Oh really, why?

IB: Well, I don't know, because he didn't want to be vamped, didn't want rhetoric, didn't want – Stephen Spender and I used to have a game of talking in the manner of Eliot. The dialogue went as follows: Stephen said, 'Berlin, don't you find that trams in some ways are better than buses?' I said, 'No, in what way?' 'Well you see buses of course go to many more places but in trams the fare is always the same so you don't have to think about how much you spend. That's an advantage, isn't it?' So I said, 'Yes, I see what you mean.' And then he said, 'If you buy electric torches, how many batteries do you buy because if you buy too many they tend to go wrong, they evaporate somehow so it's rather a waste. One never knows quite how many, don't you find?' And then I would say, 'You know it's very difficult to discover what people were like from their books.' 'Yes Berlin, that's true, particularly when they're dead.' [Laughter] That's – we played games. It was quite amusing. Next I met him, met him at Elizabeth Bowen's and then he sent me the Oxford Review in the Criterion. I did review a book about [ ], a book on logical positivism, something else, two or three books, so he obviously thought I was all right. We weren't friends but I was approved of. Then came the war, that was that. Then I went to Bryn Mawr, no I wrote a piece for the Hebrew university called 'Jewish Slavery and Emancipation.' Have you read it? [

MI: Mmm.

IB: Somebody sent it to Eliot and I remember in the course of it I say that Jews are mavericks, I mean they can drive people more mad but a liberal society has no right to eliminate them for that reason and must put up with annoying people. There are only three people who do not believe that, who want society to be as it were [ ] not to be as it were integrated, not too many different people, are Plato, Eliot and Koestler. Some busybody in the Jewish Chronicle must have sent it to him to get the reaction. I don't think he minded being compared to Plato but I think he minded very



much being mentioned in the same place with Koestler. And why Koestler? I can explain.

MI: Yes, I was wondering why you ...

IB: Koestler wrote an article in which he said the Jews must stop driving people mad. They now have a country called Israel, they pray three times a day to be returned to their home. For three hundred and forty dollars they can get a fare on TWA and go there. So what is the rubbish about?

*[Pause in the tape]*

IB: There's some – it's raining cats and dogs outside, just because some obscure people more than two thousand years ago happened to need it.

*Side B*

IB: ... sort of irritating everybody else by remaining separate and criticising, HG Wells said exactly the same, so I wrote an answer to him at some length [ ] all right, we were friends more or less but I mentioned him as coming from them and he then wrote me a long letter which you ought to have, to Bryn Mawr of which there's a copy in Mrs Eliot's [ ]. My copy was stolen but then came back. [MI So you have a copy ...?] Yes, yes, it appeared in Sotheby's, yes, that's somewhere. And he said, 'I read your interesting article ...' more or less and then I can't remember the detail: 'Have you got me wrong? I'm not anti Semitic' and so on, that kind of thing and, 'I regard the Jews not at all as a people or as a Nation, entirely as a religion. All I have against them is that they did not see the truth in 20 AD how it might be, you see? That's all I have against them [ ] that would have done. But otherwise I have no ...' – I wrote back and said, 'No, no that can't be quite right. In your famous treatise that's causing you the trouble after [ ] you tell the [ ] they are to be congratulated on being a uniform society and you say [ ]

can thrive if there's too many Godless Jews among them. That's why I didn't reprint it – because they were attacked at the time. I said, 'Well, you can't say Godless – Godless won't practise. You can't say atheist Methodist, you can say Godless Negroes. So evidently he would think of the Jews, quite rightly to be something different, more than just religion. He then replied at enormous length saying, 'I'm not an anthropologist, I don't know anything about all that, I'm not against Jews going to Israel, they can't all be contained there of course, far too many, there is some difficulty about that ...' and so on and so on, trying to make peace. And on some other occasion, 'When we are in war time, we must ...' First letter began saying, 'I'm so glad ...' I got it at Bryn Mawr, I one day was staying in that room in the old Deanery [ ] a bronze(?) bed which creaked eerily at night and then the heating system didn't work, a lot of friendly stuff to make it all right I mean, patter, a lot of – obviously he was very sensitive on the subject of the Jews who was anti Semitic all right, there was no doubt about that but just didn't want to be thought so, particularly by people like me. And so then, after that our relationship became much colder. Still, I wrote a piece – he sent me a fan letter about a lecture I had given on Rousseau, one of the lectures – there's a series for the BBC called something like, 'Liberty and its Betrayal.' He liked that so he sent me a fine post card and [ ] me. Then in a piece which he did to the Conservative Centre, whatever that may be, called 'Scylla and Charybdis,' which was extremely good which he said he once received an invitation from [?] or somewhere or someone, to talk about Scylla and Charybdis and he thought he couldn't, because of their affliction he realised it covered almost any subject – you know, everything in its opposite, so it was too dangerous. So he did it and then somehow I came in and he said something about Isaiah Berlin's 'torrents of eloquence', something faintly ironical reference to my rhetoric. So, mention. And then we met at, in the train going to Oxford. He was reading a book on definition by an Oxford Don. We talked but I felt that this contretemps had made a difference, it wasn't as friendly although he was polite. I met him – he came to see me at lunch. He always talked to me but I thought

– we were getting along, more, sort of better than before, he made some [ ]. That's all.

MI: So it trailed off in the fifties and ...

IB: Yes. No, I think he minded any criticism, that in some sense it was a reference to his anti-Semitism and that he was very, very sensitive on that score and I know to his friends. Leonard Woolf is the nearest to it [ ] didn't like him, walked out in the middle of *Murder in the Cathedral* because he thought it was a horrible reactionary piece, nasty religious piece, couldn't bear it, indignantly marched out. When [Russell?] said to me, 'Do you know Eliot?' I said, 'Yes, don't like him much.' 'I'll tell you, well it caused a great point, there's a scoundrel inside that man, there's a scoundrel inside him, you know.' Something in that, something very mysterious and repellent inside Eliot, there was.

MI: Yes I can see that.

IB: He was a genius but that's neither here nor there.

MI: If you've still got the stamina I wanted to ask you about Elizabeth Bowen.

IB: Oh Lord! I did talk to her biographer about her but the book is not a very good book, by whatshername – you know who I mean.

MI: Yes, I'll look it up. [IB What?] I'll look it up.

IB: Oh one of these interesting biographies of all the women poets, women writers, she reviews on Sundays.

MI: I know, I know exactly who you mean.

IB: What is her name? Married name really.

MI: Victoria Glendenning.

IB: Correct. [ ] daughter of a peer of some sort, that's right. Well, she was a great friend of mine, Elizabeth. I met her when she lived in Headington. She was the wife of the – er – what is it called? – the – er – what is the Head of Education called? It's a name, an official who looks after Educational establishments. It has a name. Director of Education! – for Oxfordshire who was a man called Cameron who was a tremendous bore, perfectly nice man. He was married to her and I met her because I went to Ireland with three friends and – what year was that in? – 1934. And I had a friend called Humphrey House who was a critic, I knew him very well, a great friend who I think had a love affair with her of some kind anyway, knew her and stayed with her in her house in Ireland, Bowen's Court which was her family house. And he suggested we might, on our way, go and have tea there, or lunch, which we did. I thought she was wonderful, made friends with her there and then. And then she said, 'I live near Oxford, perhaps we might meet?' And then discovered that Maurice Bowra, great friend of hers and furious at the fact that I had met her, didn't like his friends to meet each other in case they talked about him.

MI: What was it that struck you at first sight about her, why did you ...?

IB: She was highly intelligent, **a wonderful talker, highly intelligent, very sympathetic, charming and interesting and agreeable; and delightful to talk to, difficult to describe what that means.**

MI: And full of life obviously. [IB What?] Full of life, obviously.

IB: Full of life certainly. And we talked about books, talked about people, amusing, interesting, it just worked chemically. Afterwards I saw her a great deal, I went up to her house in Headington in

which she lived and used to dine or lunch, met people there, became a great friend and in the end went again to her house, I remember, twice; once when I travelled round Ireland with Hampshire and a man called Con O'Neil, now dead, a man from the Foreign Office and All Souls; and once when I stayed with her in '38 and finished my book on Karl Marx there. We sort of came – I used to go and see her in London, she moved to Oxford, lived in [Clarendon?] Terrace and her husband got a job in London and I used to go there for dinner. Her dinner parties were always terrible because she used to invite all these people who couldn't get on with each other, she had no sense. Well then I went to see her alone for tea [ ]. Then came the war and I didn't see her and then she – after the war, I don't know why, I saw her less. I saw her, and then she came to live in Oxford as a tenant of a house, in a house called White Lodge which we bought because New College didn't want to sell it to [ ] who would have it cheap, my wife, which was an investment and she made great friends with Aline and I thought it was rather bliss, somehow, and she saw Aline a great deal, I felt three wasn't company. I saw her but she was someone that made me slightly sort of hedge off, hedge away a bit. Well, we made friends and I went – I couldn't read her novels at all. [MI Why?] Found them unreadable, I read a little book called, '[P Paris] which I liked. I told my wife, 'No good to me.' They were wonderful, I know, but no use. And then I went to see her on her deathbed in hospital, it was very touching. We had a long conversation about our life together. She died about four days later, of cancer. But she asked to see me and so I did go. Wasn't sure how much she wanted it but she did. So my relation was a very happy one from beginning to end but as Glendinning correctly says that towards the end when I saw rather less of her than I did before, in some way I found her less good company, which isn't true. I was rather offended [ ] got it wrong, I didn't correct it or talk to her about it. That's the truth. I thought she was one of the most delightful, amusing, original and genuine people I'd ever met. **She liked – she was Christian, she was religious, she liked mainly men, she liked joking and she voted conservative and wanted people to be masculine and**

**no nonsense, hated pacifists and vegetarians and that kind of thing. [MI Yes, interesting] Couldn't bear Angus Wilson because he wrote about squalid, squalid subjects, the kind of life [ ] like, she wanted, like Akhmatova, she wanted a sort of clashing of swords.**

MI: Yes, jolly good. I can see that.

IB: We got on, people like that for some reason, evidently. So I used to go to dinner with her, Eliot would be there, there'd be some – two pansies and Rosamond Lehmann and the same quarrel [ ] Rosamond in. I can tell you that story if I didn't already.

MI: No, tell me.

IB: I had a colleague called Goronwy Rees who was at All Souls **who was extremely good looking and full of charm, a rogue but delightful; clever, agreeable, great friend ...**

(A door closes) Would that be Aline do you think? [MI I think so yes] I think she's made us a cup of coffee, I won't refuse, I feel thirsty, wait and I'll tell you the story in a moment, it's a story all right. Aline? Anyway ... [MI Continue] Aline? [Lady B Yes?] Ah!

Lady B ... always saying or meant to say [IB True] and those sort of [ ] and the children and also you used to say because she was a lady [laughing], very distinguished, yes, agreeable ...

IB: The least common person that I ever met.

Lady B Yes. One could just talk to her and she responded and understood and – I thought she was wonderful.

IB: Could you kill that? It's certainly been in the coffee. (There is a diversion during which MI says, 'Come back, you.' Lady B says, 'Might be.' MI Aha! Yes!) Good.

Lady B [ ] two books in Hebrew for [ ] I left it in the car.

(Pause in the tape)

IB: They met after the war, it may have been before the war, I don't know and – no, before the war certainly, what am I talking about? About 1930 – er – 5, 6. It was after this she fell in love with him. She liked having, **she had affairs with other men, not often; her husband didn't mind; he thought he was married to a genius. She must be allowed to do what she wished** and er ...

MI: Charles Ritchie was another of her ...

IB: That's later, quite right, certainly and [ ] who has just died, Irish novelist, he died at ninety one, two, because he [ ] his last book together – Elizabeth, Stuart Hampshire, Mrs [?], Miss – er – whatshername? – er – Sally [ ], niece of Robert Graves. They all went to, flocked together in 1936, maybe 7 – seven, and occupied a flat, there's nothing very much to tell you about that part of my life. I went to these two wonderful performances, best performances of opera I've ever heard in my life, both Falstaff and Fidelio [ ] by Toscanini in Salzburg then, not forgettable.

MI: Ne plus ultra.

IB: Ne plus ultra. Anyway, that she fell in love with him was obvious – not obvious at all. And I went to stay with Elizabeth for two or three nights when – who else went? Stuart Hampshire, Con O'Neil, the year was '36. We travelled around Ireland, went to the Blaskett Islands, all kinds of adventures we had; and Goronwy was coming and I could see that she was in a state of excitement, smoked cigarette after cigarette. When he arrived he was like a toreador arrived from Carmen, a jangle of bells as they began playing some game of quoits upstairs in the attic where there was a quoit floor, in a state of considerable excitement. Staying there were Rosamond Lehmann, famous beautiful novelist, friend of

Elizabeth's, a man called Summerson who is alive, who's a ... [MI Sir John?] famous architectural expert, and well there was Stuart Hampshire and me and – er – who else was there? Cameron and Goronwy and somebody else. And we all went to visit an American publisher who was living in an Irish castle nearby. And on the way back – the first evening before we went, we played after dinner games, which I hate and Goronwy sat on the arm of Rosamond's arm chair, [que sera?] [MI Laughs] On the way back from the Irish castle, I sat in the back of the car and Rosamond drove it and I heard her say to Goronwy, sitting next to her, 'I think it's now or never,' which I've never heard anyone say [] after which everybody []. Every time Elizabeth came into the room, they shot apart. One of the people staying in the house was Elizabeth's Irish niece, aged eighteen, seventeen. Finally Rosamond left for England, Goronwy was still there. Then her niece came to see me and said, 'You know, I keep a room upstairs and through the party wall I heard something I shouldn't have heard about Miss Lehmann and Mr Rees. Should I tell my aunt?' 'Certainly not,' I said, 'certainly not. Not a word, oh no.' But then [] if you've got something you [] so I cleared out, too, to the Lake District where I stayed with Stephen. We went to see Hugh Walpole who thought we had an affair with each other because [] he was homosexual [] on our shoulders and obviously explained that he talked to Anthony James almost every night through an ink pot. [MI Laughs] That's just by the way. And then ...

MI: Oh I love your asides.

IB: Then, Goronwy – then Rosamond began writing letters to MG Rees, Esquire, [] letters, huge envelope, [], to the house in Ireland. Finally the niece couldn't bear it and told her aunt. Her aunt then expelled Rees from the house with [], he never understood why he was put out, couldn't see the point.

Lady B Do you want tea or coffee? It's just the same, I'll have nothing, I've just had some.



MI: A little coffee would be nice.

IB: Then – then another quarrel, Goronwy and [?] who was with Rosamond for two years, lived in Oxford with her somewhere, and it was well known that he and she, I mean she was very indignant and it was well known that she was consumed with hatred for him, she was jealous and insulted, etc. Right, a year later I wrote her a letter saying, ‘Really, you shouldn’t go on about this, everyone is talking about it, forget him, he’s not worthy, he’s not worth it.’ She then wrote me a long letter of ten pages saying why she hated him so. ‘I don’t mind sex maniacs and a great many staying in my house by day but to use my house as a brothel ...’ [MI Mm] All right, I received the letter, I read it in a little telephone room in All Souls which was books and telephone, which was hardly a room, sort of cupboard and I left the letter there. You can see what’s coming. Goronwy said to me – Rees – ‘Are you going to be here this weekend?’ ‘No, I’m going to Cambridge.’ ‘Could I have tea with a friend of mine in your rooms?’ ‘Certainly.’ Some girl. On the way to Cambridge with [several?] Rothschilds ...

MI: You remembered the [ ]?

IB: From her about him. Well, nothing to be done, I was in this train, I could have pulled the communication cord [chuckles] but I arrived in Cambridge and I thought, I can’t write to the Scout, he’s mad, he’ll show it to Rees, what can I do? I suppose I could write to a friend of mine to pick it up but it was something which didn’t occur to me, so I did nothing. Nothing happened, a year passed. Then I went to lunch with Cyril Connolly and his wife, by now we’re in 1938. Elizabeth was there. Meanwhile, Goronwy Rees had written – she had written a book called ‘Death of the Heart’ of which Rees is the villain, he’s called Eddie, and Rosamond Lehmann is the villainess. I know a great deal about how it is [ ]. And Goronwy said to me at breakfast in All Souls, ‘I’ve read the book, I’m going to sue for libel and on the proceeds Rosamond

and I will live for ever.’ [Laughter] However he didn’t. Meanwhile I went to lunch with Connolly and there she was and we began talking about reading through the letters and of course they’re round the table there, Peter [Quennell?] and Connolly and all kinds of literary characters and they all said they kept the kettle practically boiling for others opening other people’s letters, [ ] three letters all the time. And Elizabeth said to me and stammering which she often did, ‘I do think that people shouldn’t leave letters from great friends to be read by strangers.’ I knew what that meant. After that I couldn’t eat or drink and I gave her a lift – I got a taxi and gave her a lift and said, ‘What happened?’ She said, ‘Well he read it and he came around straight away, that evening, to see me.’ I knew nothing of this, nobody told me anything [ ]. That’s all.

MI: That’s very dramatic.

IB: Yes, Charles Ritchie heard it during the war and he used to [ ] you see ...

MI: My Godfather.

*End of tape*

## MI TAPE 14

Conversation date: 4 January 1989

Date transcribed: March 2004

Transcriber: Esther Johnson

Subjects covered:

Love life:

Rachel (Tips) Walker

Patricia Douglas/de Bendern

Jenifer Hart

Aline de Gunzbourg

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*Side A*

MI 4 January 1989, both feeling under the weather and wondering what this phrase means ...

IB Let's say that too, to the machine.

MI Yes, and Isaiah is wearing an extremely long, splendid blue bath robe ...

IB No, this is a dressing gown. [MI A dressing gown, excuse ...]  
Not a bath robe ...

MI Brown moccasins on his feet.

IB Of school – which I've had – I've had them since I was a schoolboy I think, yes, very old fashioned.

MI Yes, very good vintage. And I wanted to talk to you – last time ...

IB But my love affairs you wish to talk about, I remember ...

MI Aren't you clever!

IB That's what you said.

MI Yes, absolutely right!

IB Yes, well now [MI Because we talked ...] but you ought to talk on another subject you ought to talk about, which is equally embarrassing, is my social life. It's a topic and none that existed at a certain point, then it suddenly burst into bloom, then it withered again.

MI We've got ourselves to 1938 and I haven't asked you a single question about your interest in the opposite sex [IB No, you haven't] or of the same sex or of any sex.

IB By 1938 it was hardly worth it indeed, yes I suppose I can report all that. Now, I don't think – I was never, certainly in my childhood, that I didn't feel drawn to boys or girls in any sense – is this [admission?] recorded? [MI Yes, every deathless word] At school, at St Paul's, I think I must have been in love with a boy, although I don't think it crossed my mind that we were – I felt some kind of – he certainly didn't respond particularly, nothing happened, I didn't touch him.

MI What do you remember about him? Who was he?

IB That I was very – loved seeing him, was somehow rather fascinated by his appearance. He became a clergyman afterwards; his name was Colin. He became a clergyman and I remember when I was a don, I saw he was preaching in St Paul's, so I thought I'd go and look; not at all turned out to be like. I was at school with him from '22 to '28. He was preaching I think in maybe '47, '48, '49, after the war. I went and looked: large, fat, very unattractive

looking man appeared in the pulpit, preached a not very interesting sermon, that's all, I just went out of pure curiosity.

MI And what was it about him as a little boy? He'd be fresh cheeked and sweet and ...?

IB No, no, well he wasn't fresh cheeked. He was musical and imaginative and of great charm, and it's quite obvious that I did have some kind of physical feeling, crush, but that's all that could be said. We used to go to concerts at Queen's Hall together on Saturday afternoons and got on very well. But I don't think he felt – we were great friends – I don't think he felt the slightest emotion of that kind on my part.

MI Well, you never know.

IB Well, I don't think there's much evidence of that. He might have said something at some point to somebody. Then I went up to Oxford – let me see – after that I had no more homosexual feelings. Opposite sex you call them; yes, wait a moment. Nothing. I assumed that I had no interest in them at all. My assumption was that I was frightfully unattractive in appearance and every other way and that I'd no – nothing would happen in that direction. I made up my mind about that quite early; I don't mean as a decision but as a statement of fact, that I was obviously – and they wouldn't look at me and I didn't terribly – felt no violent attraction and I just assumed that I would have been a bachelor forever – quite quietly, I didn't think it was a tremendous decision, not very exceptional, there were plenty of bachelor dons in Oxford in those days, but there it was. Now, when did I feel my first stirrings? No, as a schoolboy, it's true, as a schoolboy, towards the end of my school life, I'm wrong, yes. About 1927 thereabouts when I was eighteen, I did feel attracted by a girl called Ruth Baker, who was the daughter of friends of my parents called Baker: and when we used to meet, I was charmed by her looks and obviously I wanted to be in her presence, wanted to talk to her. However, this came to

nothing, it never developed in any way, and I knew that other people of my age did have, if not affairs, anyhow some kind of relationships, but it obviously didn't affect me. As an undergraduate in Oxford, nothing at all, neither men nor women.

MI There weren't that many women about?

IB Well, there were, there were, if one wanted, there were. Oh, it was Lady Longford, Elizabeth Pakenham, who was an absolutely – Zuleika Dobson, she was a famous beauty, photographs in every window. She went about both with football blues and aesthetes. It was the first time that she broke through the barrier which on the whole assumed that undergraduettes were frumps; and the upper classes, when they wanted women, brought them down from London. She was the first person who broke through the barrier of assumption that female undergraduates were of no possible interest to anyone. I dare say probably [who I know?]. But I mean, if you say there were no women, there were some; yes, among the people I knew. There were I mean, people one flirted with but nothing to me. I just assumed that it was outside my range. It wasn't a question that I felt anything or not. I behaved like a Red Indian in a society of Whites which was a different tribe in that respect, I mean still there's no ...

MI I do find that puzzling. Here you are, a charming fellow, even at that age obviously you were a good talker and great capacity for [IB Fat and rather ugly] It's ugliness, it's a feeling ...

IB Well it's just a – fat, too, I was a monster, I was frightfully fat, much more so than now. Fat and ungainly rather, I thought. Anyhow it was of no note, I didn't assume that I was, I made no effort of any kind. But wait. Now: we now reach my young don period. I go to All Souls in 1932. I remember meeting, in 1933 at lunch, a lady who is now called Mrs Hart, is the wife of Herbert Hart, who was called Jenifer Fis[c]her Williams, who was a famous beauty in her day. I felt nothing at all. Later, I fell in love with her

but that's for later, [laughs] that was well – we're now talking about 1950 and this is '32. In 1936 I had a pupil. Do you want me to mention names? I don't see why not, it'll remain private and so on will it? [MI Yes] I had a pupil, wanted to be taught philosophy by me, called Rachel Walker. Her sister was married to the Chaplain of Christ Church who later became Bishop of Exeter, and her nephew was called Edward Mortimer, who writes about Arabs, famous Arabist and so on. This is his aunt. She fell madly in love with me in a lunatic way and began to write me love letters which excited me greatly, and I felt it was absolutely no good and no use. I tried to – she was – but I got rid of her as a pupil rather quickly, I thought I mustn't do that, sent her off to be taught by Freddie Ayer, with whom she didn't get on at all, although he was a very promiscuous figure even then; flirted with everybody as a Don Juan figure though he was married but that didn't – he repelled her or she was repelled by him. But then, and I remember that she then, one evening when I came back to All Souls at about eleven o'clock after I think some philosophy meeting, she was sitting in my room, to my astonishment. And there she was, trembling with some kind of emotion. Well, we spent the night in my room, nothing ever happened; she sat on the sofa, I sat in an armchair, then I smuggled her out of the college fairly early in the morning – I was not allowed to have women in All Souls. But I could see; and then I went to Paris to visit her because I became very excited by this stage, I wondered if I was in love, because her passion was so great that it had affected me to some extent and therefore created some kind of counter feelings. She plainly wanted to marry me, that was obvious, she didn't just want an affair. We had no affair, but she – the whole thing was a little too intense and too mystical. She was a highbrow girl, she studied logic in Paris, she was fallen in love with by the principal young logician of the period who was later killed in a German concentration camp, who was a descendent of [?] Quatre, who was very jealous of me; and Monsieur Cavailles was his name, who taught her, yes. [MI Sorry, say that again] IB Cavailles, C-a-v-a-i-l-l-e-s, who had learned logic in Germany, taught it at the Sorbonne, L'École Normale in fact, quite

passionate I have no doubt but I remember in fact I flew to Paris, in order to see her at all, it showed that I was in some condition of emotional excitement, that's undeniable. But, as I say, nothing happened until finally – and I realised I would have to do something – I said no more, I can't, it's no good, no, we were not made for each other. I did a sort of Aeneas and Dido [laughter] the same thing which I had to do later in life. And she was very distressed by this and she kept making confessions to her friend, Julia Pakenham was her best friend, she was the sister of the present Lord Longford and she died quite a long time ago, a very nice girl, had a cast in her eye, who used to come and see me and say, 'Look, poor 'Tips,' which is what she was called, was 'really in a state, you know. I mean can't you really? Do you feel nothing for her, I mean she's so passionate, surely it would be very – she loves you so much, couldn't you? Can't you? Shouldn't you?' Well, I held out and then she went off her head and is still alive in a state of, presumably, schizophrenia. I don't think she's dead, she's been in the loony- bin, as far as I know, ever since, which planted a feeling of guilt in me as you can imagine, [MI Crisis] because I was obviously in some sense the cause, maybe only the occasion, but certainly not totally irrelevant to the situation. She suddenly went mad, didn't talk about this, developed a sudden hatred for me, she wrote me a violent letter and then was locked up, before the war.

MI Locked up by whom? By her parents?

IB By her family, yes certainly. And ...

MI Did you ever see her again?

IB No, no, never. Well I thought I'd better not, I thought that it might aggravate.

MI And you had no further contact with her?



IB None at all. I used to hear about her from her friends, who didn't blame me particularly, but realised that this was – that her so to speak passion for me was probably the beginning of lunacy [laughs] couldn't be a balance entirely. I think they thought perhaps, obviously I couldn't be [to account?], I was entirely innocent, but still, nobody blamed me. Things that were done, they didn't do her harm in any way, I didn't let them betray any describable offence is the word. But her friend – she had one great friend who was an ex-Head of St Hilda's College in Oxford, called Mary Fisher who was the daughter of H.A.L. Fisher who was Warden of New College [ ] and she became – married a man and became [ ] and she's about still in Oxford because I see her from time to time; that's one of our friends. There was a girl called Phoebe Poole who came into the news because she wrote, was writing something about she'd been mistress to Bill Coldstream, the painter for many years and then was discovered to be a Communist Agent long after her death. There's a story in the papers about Anthony Blunt, I don't know if you remember? [MI No] Well, I won't waste too much of your time but the point was that this girl called Phoebe Poole was very sweet and holy and extremely highbrow and very gentle and very, very sort of spiritual in character, we all liked, because she was very sensitive, read books, said interesting things about them, was much adored; she was a sort of icon, well with a lot of girls, some degree of lesbianism I think in that, in that world, of sorts. She worked in the Courtauld, and then herself went off her head. And that novelist woman – what's her name? [MI Oh, Anita Brookner, yes, now it all comes back to me] Now you remember, you remember that story. She was sent by Blunt to see her in hospital and as she would say, 'Did she say anything?' And so she then realised that she was being sent as an agent of somebody. He was afraid she might talk. She was a courier of the Party patently, you see? And she was being used by Blunt; she was a great friend but she thought she was looking after this saintly lady. Well in a sense she was but he had a motive. Supposedly he was writing a book on Picasso with her, and she was so outraged to being used by this – she adored Blunt and the

though that he never told her that he was using her as his co[?], upset her. Well that's – she was a great friend of mine [ ] of Rachel Walker, 'Tips' as she is normally known; and that has to be recorded but I wasn't in love. I was in some way – I mean obviously affected – and wondered if – I mean I contemplated the possibility of marrying her. But because the passion on that side was so strong that it had an electric effect, so I was just sane enough to realise that it was no good.

MI That's '36. And then what happens?

IB Thirties, '36, '37, '38, that goes on for some time. Then comes the war, then I go to New York. In New York, another girl displays the same symptoms. She was a Jewish girl from Palestine, whose parents lived in Riga and knew my parents. So my aunt gave her a letter to me and she came to see me. She was very pretty and was called Miss Averbuch which was to me a corruption of Auerbach. I think all these – there's a man called Averbach who is the Head of RAPP if you remember, the Communist Literary Organisation who was afterwards liquidated. I mean there was a famous sort of [Tyrranus?], despotic Communist and literary body who believed in writing – squads of writers, squads, collective writing about Communist teams, RAPP – R-A-PP – I can't remember what it's called, something – must be [R?] something [Russian term]. [MI Yes, we got two P's in] Two P's we have, yes. What RA stands for, I can't think. [ ]. Well he was called Averbach, it's the same name, Averbuch.

MI And she was obsessed and she was Averbuch. And what was her first name?

IB That I can't remember. She may be alive. [MI 1940] This is 1941; 1941 and I'm in New York and she produced the letter and I asked her, I had a cup of coffee with her or something and she was very pretty and non hysterical. Fair haired, blue eyed, absolutely charming in a way and it was clear to me after the first

fortnight that she developed a crush on me. Well, that was just a pure nuisance. I was upset by that, I said, 'Oh God.' [MI You didn't want it?] Well she was hysterical, she was obviously, I mean, in a state of constant – my aunt hoped that something would come of it, she did it quite deliberately.

MI And you hoped something would not?

IB I was clear something would not. And then she did – she didn't go mad, but she married a well known atonal composer called Wolpe [laughs] – there was Schoenberg and – a minor way, a minor atonal composer and writer on music, quite well known in those circles. W-o-l-p-e, some sort of a German Jew, Austrian Jew. Went out of my life. She wrote me one or two letters, about saying that Wolpe was coming to England, could I go up to see him and so on? She didn't hold it against me too much and at least she didn't go mad, I think she was rather less mad after than before. But I suddenly realised that I was a prey to lunatics [laughs].

MI What did they think? Did they want to mother you, Isaiah?

IB No, I think they wanted to be – to go to bed with me probably, or they thought so, they wanted to have absolute bad – no, no, there was not the slightest element of patronage. No, no, they weren't sorry for me, they didn't do things for me, didn't ...

MI They adored you.

IB They didn't serve me coffees, they didn't take me out, they didn't try and work for me or help me in any way. Well, I think they had sort of abnormal passions for me, it came from something abnormal in their natures, no sane person ever developed this to this degree. [laughs] Everything else which happened first began with me, not with them.

MI But you sound as if you're saying that any woman who comes at you with a strong passion for you, must therefore be abnormally [ ].

IB Well up to a point I had certain reasons for generalising from experience. I'd met two instances. Still, it's more than most. Not very many people have fallen in love with – and then in some abnormal way – with two lunatics, one by one, you see? So that I'd assumed that very few people could possibly feel these feelings, must be slightly mad.

MI Then later on – I know we're getting ahead of ourselves – but there is a woman in Boston, in Cambridge, Mass.

IB Exactly the same. Very good example. There was a woman at Harvard; she was a lecturer in Czech literature, exactly the same happened. She was called – a friend of Jakobson, the – [Roman] Jakobson, that's – and she came to my lectures at Harvard, developed on Russian thought. Developed similar notions and certainly told Jakobson and his wife all about it. Jakobson's wife was a Czech, then, his second wife. Now what was her name? [Sauchkova?] [MI First name?] No, I can't remember. She then began writing me letters of a slightly loony kind, rather hysterical letters saying that the world consisted of me, that everything representing everything she thought, felt and so on, was entirely irrelevant, she came from me and came back towards me and that I must see how that we – and so on and so on; they were letters of passionate adoration. Again, I had to avoid this. All I know is that Jakobson said, 'What is she lecturing about now? 'Oh,' she said,' he said pensively, "Yes, on the Czech novel.' You know there's a Czech novelist she's interested in, he wrote one hundred and ten novels, none of them any good whatever.' [MI Bad sign] Bad sign, yes, I didn't know there was such a Czech novelist [MI laughs] A hundred and ten is quite a lot, [ ] very many [ ] [laughter]. Anyway

...

MI But somewhere in this story there is a ...

IB That's the third lunatic – no, something coming in before that, no, no. That already – we're running ahead because that's 1949.

MI Ah, I thought it was during the war.

IB No, no, no. I wasn't at Harvard during the war. Oh! Yes, yes, there was somebody I was in love with who lived in Cambridge, yes. Now, but before I come to that, I think we must go to a little earlier. In 1941 I went to the United States – I've told you this story of Guy Burgess? [MI Yes] I [ ] leave it at this time so to speak, I went normally to do a job in New York; and because I had a friend called John Foster – now deceased – he got me a seat, cabin, in an American Export Line boat from Lisbon, which was certainly safer than going by a British boat at that time, which I was quite happy to take. I flew to Lisbon, got onto this boat and on the boat saw a lady by whom I was madly attracted. I didn't know her name, who she was, or anything about her. All I knew was that I was at the Captain's table because I was an official. Three tables away was this lady with another lady and a man, and I couldn't take my eyes off her. I was deeply affected, probably for the first time to this degree. But I'm trying to think if I am telling you the truth. Was there anybody before that, in Oxford? Yes, there was, yes there was. I'm [ ] up myself. Yes, I was – not much in love – but I was attracted by a girl whom everyone was attracted by, who again I think is alive. She was a girl called – she was a belle, I mean she was of everybody's taste; she was called Sally Graves and she was the niece of Robert Graves and daughter of a man called – a journalist on the Times – who was called Graves Superior, which is a joke, or Graves Superieur, [laughter] who reputed the famous blood libel on the Jews. That was a great achievement in the pages of the Times, in his day.

MI What did he do?

IB There was a famous charge against the Jews from the Middle Ages onwards, that they kill Christian children to use their blood at the Passover. This was renewed in the twenties in Germany and somewhere else and Czechoslovakia. And this man went into it and wrote a series of leading articles in the Times which knocked them out for good, that was the classical refutation, based on careful examined evidence. It comes from the – no, no, I'm sorry, it's not the blood libel, I'm confusing, I'm in a fair state, I'm talking about the Elders of Zion. That he knocked out – political – he knocked that out by his careful research. It was all written, as you know, [MI The forgery?] It wasn't a forgery quite – yes, near it. It was originally in French, written by a man in the sixties in Paris. It's an imaginary dialogue between Machiavelli and Montesquieu, directly a gift to Napoleon, meant to be a gift to the regime of Napoleon which is a kind of parody of some sort, meant to be a political pamphlet against the Second Empire. This fell into the hands of some Russian called [N?] for some ordinary way, our Russian General was called [N?] – I can't tell you the original of that name. He translated and changed it, in that sense, a forgery. But it's based on his other thing in French, there's nothing to do with the Jews, nothing, you see, that's its origin. Then it was printed and spread and the Czar believed it and everybody believed it and the Arabs still believe it, it can be bought, both in the White Russian church in Paris and in Cairo [laughter].

MI Those great centres of Enlightenment!

IB It's a very well known thing about protocols, they were – I think you could buy them in, I think, [P?]. It's absolutely regular, it's a classical text, it can never be completely eliminated. It's a wonderful thought that you should be able [ ] lots of [ ] I think, there are some by now, but there weren't then. But anyway [MI Graves] well, his daughter was an undergraduate in Oxford called Sally, who then married a man called Chilver and became Head of Lady Margaret Hall in Oxford in due course. [...] She was a friend of mine and properly agreeable and we used to have lunch together

and we made friends, so to speak, up to a point. But then it was very plain to me that she regarded me as hideously ugly, dreadfully unattractive. That was plain; that rather humiliated me. But that was quite late in life, that's about 1936. By that time I'd come to that conclusion independently, and that was the occasion of Stephen Spender's first marriage, that's [ ]. Sally Graves: she then became Sally Chilver, she married a Civil Servant called Chilver for whom she [trompeiled?] right and left, I think, and then she became Head of – she became an Anthropologist, she knew about Africa, became the Head of Lady Margaret Hall, is now retired as far as I know, if she's alive. I'm not sure she is alive, if she is alive she must be in her seventies or middle seventies – no, I think maybe in late seventies; she might be seventy-five, six.

MI Yes. I want to get back to this boat in ...

IB By the time she came back to Oxford, I didn't have one bubble of feeling for her. Again, the same thing happened and I met her, when I met her then, you see, it was well after the war, we must have been together. Virginia Woolf was very fascinated by her in a lesbian sort of way, and she took me to see Virginia Woolf, that's how I came to meet her. Virginia Woolf was very innocent in the sense she used to ask her nieces, 'Is there much free love these days?' Well, Sally Chilver sort of struck her as a perfectly modern young woman. She was totally fascinated by her. So I was taken to dinner by her in 1937.

MI And what were your impressions? Where did you go to dinner?

IB In the Woolf's house. Oh well, I can tell you about that in parentheses.

MI We've now opened a parenthesis within a parenthesis, I'll have to come back.

IB Now look; do we stop there? I go back to my love life but I think we'd better ...

MI Yes, let's come back to your love life and then I will ask you ...

IB That's how I come back to literary life in the thirties, whom I knew and who I read and that sort of thing. That's a separate subject. All right: back to love life. Well, now, Miss Graves, we've dealt with her. Then I'm in a boat, proceeding to America, [ex Cambian?] whatever that might mean, and there's this lady whom I'm [ ] with a small child and two others and another couple at the same table That ship took ten days to get to New York; it stopped in Bermuda for a day or two, obviously being examined by a British Official, all kinds of things happened to it. During the whole period – it wasn't big, the boat, I mean it had a hundred and eighty people on it – everybody took to everybody, more or less, I talked to a large number of people. I talked never to her, nor she to me, nor did she at any time at all, remember me on the boat. The climax is coming. Then, the next time I met her was in the summer of '41 when I knew a man called St Jean who was a French journalist, who was a French correspondent of some, presumably by that time, Gaullist paper, who was the lover of Julien Green, the writer, and he – we made friends somewhere, somehow, and he took me to lunch with Robert de Rothschild who was one of the Paris Rothschilds, who was living on Long Island in some fairly palatial house, and I was supposed to know about American affairs which is why the Rothschilds always like asking experts to meals [chuckles], and so I went along as a kind of bogus expert; a very hot summer's day: and there, I met two ladies, one woman was Robert's daughter who was called C,cile, still alive [MI C,cile de Rothschild] yes, who is still alive but she's rather bad, she's in a very bad state now but she still lives alone in Paris or Switzerland, I can't remember where; and there was another lady. The other lady was the one I perceived on the boat. They took one look at me and within two minutes, were gone to play golf. I have never been fled from quite so fast. [MI laughs] That confirmed my



opinion of myself. Right, right, that was the second meeting. Then – I am telling you this story because it has a climax which you can anticipate – the third occasion on which I met her was when my friend, Lord Rothschild who was MI5 as you know, came to America to see J. Edgar Hoover and because he sent me a secret message that in fact he was in the Pierre Hotel, would love to see me, so I went along. And we chatted amiably about what was going on – this would have been actually in September, '41, it may have been even '42 – when there was a knock at the door and the same lady came in, and I could see that their relationship was so intimate, that they knew each other so well, that I was *de trop*. So after ten minutes, I left. That was my third meeting with her. After that, some years passed during which I fell I fell in love with somebody else whom I am about to tell you about. I did properly fall in love. The next time I met her, just to complete this story, was in 1946 when my friend Victor Rothschild reappeared, after the war. I was winding up things in my job at the Embassy, so I was in New York for a time, I don't know if I came for a week-end or not. I was staying with a well known millionairess called Mrs Otto Kahn and my friend, Lord Rothschild said, 'There's a man called Dr Halban, Hans Halban, an eminent nuclear physicist and I see what about tending towards him? He's coming to Oxford because of Lord Cherwell who has invited him. He's married to a great friend of mine. Would you be nice to them when they come to Oxford?' I said, 'Yes, certainly, of course, yes.' 'Would you like to come and have tea with them?' Well, I knew the flat in which they were living because it was occupied by somebody called Alixe de Rothschild who was the wife of a man called Guy de Rothschild who was at present as a family, it was an identical flat and there was the lady I had met. And when I had met her originally, she had seemed to be cold, arrogant, detached, stand offish, I couldn't speak to her at all. By this time she was gentle, soft, expecting a child, but obviously beaten down by her husband. It was very clear that something had happened; she had become a victim of some sort, not a sign of pride and arrogance; on the contrary, gentle and sweet. And that was Aline, I need hardly tell you. And then they came to Oxford

and then I did ask them to lunch. After that, the second chapter begins, I [clatter of crockery] that comes later, the story of my courtship and marriage.

MI Yes, I don't know, I think we should defer that.

IB All right, but I just wanted to tell you, chronologically. There's a case of my falling in love with somebody at first sight who hadn't remembered meeting me at all, or seeing me, no notice of me was taken at all, which confirmed everything I'd ever believed about myself in that regard.

MI [laughs] But also it must have confirmed you in the persistence of your own feelings.

IB No, because I mean, it just happened. I didn't examine – I'm not a sort of examiner, I don't examine my feelings, I don't think about myself very much. I'm very un-introspective. I don't ask myself, am I the kind of person who falls in love, what happens to me, is this emotion common to me and so on, how curious to have this emotion again, I had it last four years ago, what does it lead to? Nothing of this sort occurs in my life. I don't examine myself in any degree, less than anybody you've ever known. I'm very, very extrovert in that sense, you see? When it happens, it happens and I notice it but I don't go through elaborate acts of self examination and self analysis in order to discover – in order to acquire self knowledge of some kind. I've never sought self knowledge. I have quite a lot of it, I think, but it came by experience rather than by enquiry or self examination, or even by misfortune. Now ...

MI Would you like to continue this? It's a difficult story but also a happy one? Perhaps you'd like to continue?

IB No, no, just as you like.

MI I have a feeling you did fall in love before that and it would be good to talk about that ...

IB No, because I fell in love after that, you see? I fell in love with her on the boat in '41 that led to no consequences, except much later. But that's the first time when I suddenly felt wildly attracted by somebody. I was quite attracted by Sally Graves but not to that degree. She was very, very sexy, Sally Graves, so it was difficult for anyone in her presence not to feel it because she was very – she was somewhat provocative in her manner; and as I say was a very easy going lady with plenty of lovers of various kinds. But then what happened was that in 1942 – I hope I've got the year right – I went – I had a great friend in Washington called Anthony Rumbold, Sir Anthony Rumbold, Bart. who was a Second Secretary at the British Embassy at that time, married to a very pretty wife who I also found attractive, but not to any marked degree. Still, I was mildly in love with her, too. And I went to lunch, I stayed with them and they said, 'Tomorrow, you're going to lunch with – or dinner – with Virginia Polk. Virginia was the daughter of a man called Lord Brand, who was my colleague at All Souls, part of the sort of Kindergarten, middle Kindergarten, married to a man called Polk who was a direct descendent of President Polk, not one of the better known Presidents, but still I'm not sure that [man of his?] destiny, didn't have ... one thing in Mexico, Mexican, Mexican War. Well, and you'll meet someone called Countess de Bendern there. I imagined the Countess de Bendern as a middle aged, central European sort of adventuress who they happened to know, probably rather snobbishly knew, absurd kind. [chuckles] Off we went. I found myself sitting next to a wildly attractive English girl who was indeed called that.

MI Virginia Polk.

IB No, Virginia was my hostess. The girl was called Countess de Bendern. Countess Patricia de Bendern. Why she was called a Countess I will tell you in a moment; but she was obviously not

foreign, not central European [laughter], very young, and extremely agreeable: and we talked and we made great friends and I suppose she must have flattered a bit, and I thought her terribly attractive. And I asked who she was and she was called Patricia Douglas; she was the great niece of Alfred Douglas, who married the daughter – her father was Lord Queensberry, quite right, she was the daughter of Lord Queensberry and she was a sort of actress who married – you’re quite right, that’s right. And she was called Lady Patricia de Bondern; and she married a man called de Bondern who was the son of a man called Count de Forrest. I have to go back for a second, just to see [ ]. Once upon a time, there was a Jewish millionaire called Baron Hirsch who sent a lot of Jews to Argentina [MI And to the [ ] in Canada] no doubt, who was a sort of a philanthropist. He built railways, was an Austro-Hungarian Jew, built railways in the Balkans somewhere. I think the railways [wound?] like this, so as he was paid by the yard [chuckles] he became extremely rich, and he came to England. I don’t think he was received at Court in Vienna but he did become a friend of King Edward ; and when he had a child – I suspect illegitimate though I can’t prove it to you – because he was called Hirsch, King Edward who was his Godfather, suggested that he might be called – persuaded Franz Joseph to give him a title – and he was called Baron de Forrest and that’s where you’ll find Hirsch’s running about. Baron de Forrest was half English, I mean the mistress or the wife was English but half Austrian Jewish and inherited from the old man, was very eccentric and became a Member of Parliament in England. And subsequently departed, lived in Switzerland, had a little flat built for himself amongst the branches of trees so that he could listen to birds more conveniently and became Minister of Finance to the Grand Duke of Liechtenstein [chuckles] who conferred upon him the title Von zu Bondern which is a minute village in Liechtenstein, as you know, it has fifty thousand inhabitants. There is a village called Bondern somewhere near [?]. [MI B-e-n-d-e-r-n?] Precisely, followed zu. So he became called Count de Bondern. His two sons are also called Counts de Bondern. My man was brought up in England, I don’t know

whether he went to Eton but he probably did, member of White's Club, he was a volunteer in the British Army which he didn't need to be because he was a Liechtenstein Count, and was taken prisoner by the Italians, and so on; and he married this girl. Very good looking – he – and sweet and innocent, a sort of silly man, like somebody in P.G.Woodhouse, absolutely disarming. Still about, came to see us not so long ago, married various other wives in between. She was an evacuated wife; she was sent to America because wives were, and forged a certificate from school which got her into Radcliffe College, to Harvard – only by forgery, and ...

MI Did she confess to this?

IB No, no; to me, yes, but not to them, ever. And then, she was at Radcliffe and she had a large flat, apartment, not hers I think, in Cambridge, Mass; and because she was called Lady Patricia de Bendorf which was her title in English speaking countries, she didn't call herself [Graphine?], Lady Patricia de Bendorf was correct in English terms, professors at Harvard were much too snobbish – everyone came to her dinner table, anyone what she wanted. She was twenty – now what was I? In 1941, I was – '42 I was thirty-three – no – thirty-one; she was twenty-two perhaps, twenty-one, twenty-two. And – she was exactly ten years younger, that's right, and we made friends and she was a famous femme fatale, if you see what I mean, people were her friends of the right and left, it wasn't [ ] I know. She was very beautiful; not pretty. [MI What was beautiful ..?] about her? She was small, thin, had an exquisite face and strong personality and natural aesthetic taste, greater than anyone I've ever met. She wasn't at all tutored; she was an extreme liar, total, I mean mythomaniac of the first order. Not a word was true, I mean she invented right and left, I was treated very badly.

MI And you were treated badly?

IB I was treated badly, yes, certainly I was. And she was – and she liked dons, she liked intellectuals, that's the point, for some reason; was drawn to them and those sort of people. I'll tell you how – the story in a moment. And I asked her why she married de Bendern and she said, 'Well, in the London society of our time, everyone was so awful, all these smart people,' who she genuinely disliked. She was never a natural member of London society; she was a natural outsider, that she was. She had some kind of independent taste of her own; and he was gentle, he was sweet and pure and kind and spontaneous, a nice character. So that's why she married him. He was quite good looking, that's why she got married to him. However, at Harvard, she probably conducted affairs with various handsome Greek students who she met and anybody and anybody. By the time I met her, – oh I didn't meet her at that one – she came back to Washington again – I must have met her at some party. She knew people for she obviously knew sort of titled persons and she had some [ ] acquaintance. At a certain point I realised that I was deeply in love. And then she invited me to stay at Cambridge Mass to which I went, we got on very well at the first dinner party. I met the man who wrote the classical book of that period on William James, called Ralph Barton-Perry, a very well known Harvard philosopher, Head of [?] in Britain and his wife; I met a man called W.G.Constable, an Englishman who kept paintings in the Boston Fine Arts Museum and his wife, who became a life long friend of mine, they both did; I met a man called Ted Spencer who was a famous professor of English at Harvard at the time, who died soon afterwards, and one or two other people: she gave a smart, Harvard dinner party in effect, that's what it came to. I stayed then two nights with her and we got on marvellously, and I found her conversation totally fascinating, not just looks. However, nothing happened, physically, nothing ever happened physically and I think she found me just as unattractive as everybody else. But she clung to me, for some reason, she wished to keep me and she wrote me letters, telephoned me when she used to come and see me in Washington, and it became known that I was in love with her. It was a, as it were, notorious – that I did find

her very attractive, and so did other people, I mean, this wasn't – she was a famous femme fatale, people tended to find her irresistible, so to speak. But I was [ ] because I was genuinely in love. From time to time, she would make appointments which she would break; she would tell me – encourage me to go on saying that perhaps not now but at some later stage, there was nothing she would like more than to be married to me, and then I heard that she was having a furious love affair with X,Y,Z. So I suffered pangs of jealousy of an absolute classical kind, straight forward jealousy, that was the way I had imagined. This went on in '43 and in '44, and then she went back to England, because her husband, by this time, had got out of his camp in Switzerland, was exchanged for some prisoners of war, and she then sent me a telegram saying that I was to come to England at once because her marriage obviously wasn't going to last and she was mine, roughly. I trusted my good sense not to come to England and met her again in '45 I think ...

End of *Side A*

*Side B*

IB ... she was never prepared to marry me, she was, so to speak, not doing anything else, she wasn't in love with me ... [pause in tape for several seconds, before ...]

MI Continue, Isaiah.

IB She was very intelligent to talk to. She had this strong personality, she was sharp, she was witty; although she was a terrible liar, she was very candid in stating her views, she was highly critical and totally independent. She wasn't a society girl in the ordinary sense at all. And when her husband became Private Secretary to Duff Cooper in Paris shortly after the war – they lived in Paris together – my friend Raimund von Hofmannsthal, who was a friend of – courtier to Diana Cooper – didn't like her because

she wouldn't play her part in the Court, which was typical. She had an affair with Duff Cooper, no doubt, and she wasn't prepared to spin about in what might be called the society around the Coopers, which was what Hofmannsthal wanted to promote. So it was typical of her, she had extreme independence of character and she had violent passions, they were quite genuine. She read books and she was extremely perceptive and interesting about them, she was perceptive about the pictures, she was perceptive about music; she liked best Bach unaccompanied cello sonatas, of which she talked very well. She was unusual in other words. She's still alive. And then after me, from '45 she had a very brief affair with Freddie Ayer which went wrong which I can tell you about in a moment, and then a man called Alistair Forbes whose reviews you might have read in the Spectator and elsewhere, who was a kind of smart young journalist, whose life she ruined I think, not like mine, and at least – she treated him very badly because they really were going to get married and he bought a house and everything. I never got that near. And then finally, just to tell you what happened, she was on her own, she divorced de Bubern, she said he was too naive, she couldn't go on, too simple for her; she went one day to – with Forbes – to buy some antique furniture for the house in which they were going to live together, and there was an antiquaire in the King's Road called Hornak, who I think was a Yugoslav by origin. She looked at objects – he was a – I never met him, never wished to see him – he was a drug taking, central European, bit perverted sort of man who blinked a sort of great deal and had a twisted face, I'm told. He's dead anyway. And she forgot something in the shop, came back – an umbrella – at this point he stooped and kissed her on the ankle. This did it. He fell in love with her, she fell in love with him, she married him. She married him and they lived together in a flat in which they forged furniture, I think – I'm sure they did, they just [foresayed?] a lot of antique furniture and [ ] living together, m,nage a quatre; one he was married to already [ ]; one was a mistress who became the wife of an English Arab called Albert [Vorani?], the name was [?] I think originally, whose son married David Cecil's daughter – I can go on to you like that – and



the third one, I don't know anything about the third one: and they lived – she got rid of the other two and managed to marry him. But then he finally abandoned her, after which I lost touch with her to some degree. But I mean, I don't know, we have common friends who still know about her, I may I think have met her once or twice but by that time, I mean I still found her attractive, agreeable, but the passion was over. But wait. The last time – I must go back a little to tell you the truth that really is an intimate fact. She wanted very much to see Oklahoma for some reason, which was then the musical on in New York in '45 during the end of the war, and I managed to procure tickets from some person I knew in that world. We went and then we both stayed in separate rooms in the Hotel de New York, which I think no longer exists, somewhere in the centre of New York, a rather nice elegant hotel but not one of the very big ones. And her room was next to mine. And then she had a Cuban lover which she told me about called Dabro; and the Cuban lover – I heard through the party wall the Cuban lover entered and they obviously spent the night together; and I heard various talk, sounds and so on. I was burning with the most violent jealousy imaginable as you can imagine, because I was still passionately in love. I realised that this was her lover, and he was young, dark – I met him – very serious, very humourless, student at Harvard who talked about, I don't know what, the morally bad condition of the world; very handsome in a kind of Red Indian kind of way. And I listened through the party wall. I didn't hear very much but whatever I did, fragments must have reached me. I've always kept the key of that particular hotel bedroom as a reminder to me of the most awful night I ever spent. However, I saw her after that. I remember going to Aix en Provence in 1947 to the festival, music festival which had begun more or less then. She was there and the Spanish lover was there – the Cuban lover. She wasn't staying with me but she was there, and I saw them together and she of course made up to me immediately and bought a meal and we had long conversations. She was apparently quite fond of me and attached to me in various ways, but I realised then, although I thought I was no longer in love, hoped I wasn't, I still

was. I may not have been in love but possessiveness and jealousy still racked me. By '49 it was over. In fact, if you are deeply in love, the only way of falling out of love is by falling in love with somebody else.

MI And that is what happened?

IB That is exactly what happened but it wasn't Aline; because when she came to Oxford, although we were on very good terms with each other and saw each other frequently, I don't know that I actually could say that I was burning with love. It was there, but only blazed up somewhat later, I think early, not before '51 or so. But in between then, when I came back to Oxford, there was this lady who was the wife of a colleague of mine, who in effect seduced me, and I had a passionate love affair with her which was entirely happy both ways. It lasted a year and I was terribly guilty because her husband was a great friend. I told him about it immediately, I couldn't not, absolutely, [chuckles] and he behaved in the most super civilised fashion because he wasn't living very happily with his wife anyway: but I mean my relations with him suffered a certain change as a result which have remained although we're still great friends. Now that was the real thing. That was my proper so to speak sex based love affair in which I learned everything that could be learned about what it was to have a proper love affair, a proper relationship, physical relationship with a woman. She was also rather sexy and had affairs with others but she was obviously in love with me, I was in love with her: bliss that was, you see? It lasted about a year, and then – maybe a little longer, from about '50 to about '51 – and we had to meet clandestinely in various places, we could manage that, and that was that. That was just what's called having an affair. And then I learned a great deal as a result of it. You may say that when I met Akhmatova in Leningrad in '45, but then again that was just a sort of night of extreme, intense emotion for both of us, but not – I don't know – it couldn't be called the beginning of a – I wasn't in love to any degree. It was very exciting to meet this woman of genius who talked to me in

this very free and very passionate, very excited fashion. She obviously had feelings for me of an imaginary kind but that's neither here nor there. Well, then after that, what happened was that I fell in love with Aline, properly, and wished to marry her; not just an affair, wished to marry her. Why I wanted to marry her I don't know, I just wanted marriage, I wanted a stable relationship and I think I would have married the lady, the lady I was I was in love with if she'd been willing. She wasn't unwilling but I felt no; she had children, she had this excellent husband who was very respectful who I liked very much, and she wasn't insistent, she didn't want it. If I'd wanted terribly to, she might have, but I didn't in that case. In the other case I did, there can be no other reason. And then the following happened. We used to see each other a good deal, they lived in Headington, I lived in All Souls, first New College, then All Souls; and then gradually our relation became more and more intimate. We began writing each other letters which were clearly emotional in character. I never declared my love, nor she for me. She had a husband and three children, one was born in 1950. So unobservant was I that I didn't know she had a child in 1950, though I knew her well in Oxford; and we liked going for walks together, we went to concerts together, it was clear that we had some kind of relationship but nobody suspected anything because I was a well known bachelor. Nobody thought for a moment that I took the faintest interest in women. That was the reputation I retained, you see? And then there was mutual feeling – we were great friends. When we travelled across to – when I worked at Harvard in late '48, she was on the same boat and there were about twenty other people we knew for some reason. We formed a kind of faux ménage, parties were given in every cabin by friends of ours; we were always asked together, some had assumed that we were a couple though we weren't but we behaved as one. Then my father died in '53 and no doubt I was in a state as a result. She took me back, gave me a lift from London to Oxford after something to do with my father's death, some sort of meeting of lawyers or something which I had to have, and then in the car I

suddenly couldn't restrain myself and declared myself. Nothing happened, she didn't say yes, she didn't say no.

MI She just kept driving?

IB She kept driving. After that we met and we met clandestinely. It was clear that I was in love with her and it was clear that she received this, though it wasn't clear to me that she was in love with me. It was clear to me that she was unhappy with her husband whom I detested. The only time I ever liked him was on a journey in the car between Mrs Otto Kahn's house and her flat, and he was very flattering, extremely friendly, and I thought what a nice man. Once I met him in Oxford, I thought he was quite awful which made it far easier for me to be in love with his wife. I thought he was a heavy, Germanic bully, though rather good at physics, obviously, very good nuclear physicist but awful humourless sort of heavy footed sort of German monster, really. And other people thought the same; coarse, coarse and bad tempered and ambitious. Now, I'll tell you in a moment. Well after that, she was prepared to meet me. We kissed each other no doubt, we carried on but we didn't have an affair in the full sense of the word, we never went to bed. And then one day, when I was – we met in London, we met in Oxford, mainly went for drives and then we used to stop in out of the way places and embrace each other. And then I was going – I was in Nice with my mother; we went to have her eyes seen to in Switzerland. We went from Zurich, where she saw her eye specialist, to Nice, where she wanted to go in the early summer I think. In Zurich, I had a long conversation with Aline who was in Paris in her own flat in her own house, for an hour which is what we tended to do. By the time I arrived in Nice, I had received a letter from her in which she said that her husband had listened to this conversation on another telephone [ ]; that he flew into the most terrible tantrum; that he then threatened to – if she wished to carry on, that he would divorce her and keep the children, threatened her in every possible way and said she was never to see me again, roughly; that unfortunately she was devoted to her

children, she was after all married and we must never see each other again. That's what the letter in fact conveyed. I went to bed after that for two days in Nice, I've never felt so miserable all my life, really became debilitated. And then – I'm not sure my other affair with my colleague's wife was entirely over but it very nearly was, it very nearly was. And then I went back to Oxford and received a telephone call from Aline, who could hardly speak, a kind of strangled voice, explaining that Alan Price Jones, who was then editor of the [ ] and was a great friend of the – and his family, was coming to stay with them and I'd asked them all for a drink before these things had happened; that he was – that they were coming to my house for a drink with Alan Price – they weren't bringing her to my drink all the same because Hans Halban, her husband, thought that if it was known, if it became known that we weren't on very good terms, his career in Oxford might be affected.

MI Which is an unpleasant motive.

IB I'm telling you, I'm pleased to be able tell you that. And so I gave the party, about ten people came to my room in All Souls. They appeared; she was like a sheep led to the slaughter, I've never seen anyone so white, so unhappy, so miserable. I didn't speak to her at all, nor she to me. I spoke to him, quite affably, I mean we got on [ ]. I didn't mind, I chatted to him, I thought it was no fault of his, all right; jealousy was a perfectly intelligible emotion. I didn't think that what he'd done was all that wrong, it was unfortunate from my point of view. Then, nothing happened for a bit, I was terribly unhappy. Then she telephoned me and said, 'I can't go on, we must meet.' So we began seeing each other clandestinely again, the whole thing was restored, 'I can't bear it, we must.' Then one day when we were going to have a meeting in a chemist's shop in the High Street opposite All Soul's College; it was called Tolbear and Goodall, perhaps it wasn't any more, you see, but that was the place to meet and there we'd get into a car and go somewhere. I had just finished a lecture at ten o'clock. At eleven o'clock I proceeded to go and suddenly saw Professor Halban as he was by

that time and his wife talking to each other at the corner of the street opposite which the chemist was. So, more dead than alive, I bowed, went into the Chemist's shop, bought objects which I didn't need and returned, took off my hat again, went back to All Souls without a word. I was then rung up by Halban who said would I mind coming round to the house because he'd like to talk with me? I agreed, so I took a taxi, went to the house in which I live at present which was then their house, met him and I said to him, 'Look, I know that you're entirely right. Justice is on your side. She's married to you, you love her, there's nothing I can say. I mean you have a perfect right over your wife and family ...

MI You did the talking?

IB I did the talking. He didn't say, 'You monster! How dare you.' I began talking. He said, 'Well it's a difficult situation, let's talk about it.' I said, 'Well, look, I fully understand your position, you needn't expound it to me. There's only one thing I'd like to say to you: let me give you a piece of advice, it's not entirely unbiased, as you'll see, I have a certain interest in saying it to you but I will say it to you. If you keep somebody in prison, the prisoner is more anxious to get out in the end than the jailer is to keep the prisoner there. In the end, this will not end well. If you stop her from seeing me, this will not go on indefinitely. Sooner or later, it's bound to be broken, I mean even if I do nothing at all. I don't think you'll succeed, I don't think psychologically – you may realise that I have a motive for saying it, but it is true also, and therefore it would be easier if you lifted this ban from the point of view of family life for you.' Then he began chatting quite amiably and said, 'You know, I can't live without women; all my life I've had one woman and if I have to have a woman, I prefer my wife,' or words to that effect. It was not very delicately spoken, I could see what it was about. And then he began saying this and that and we had a quite amiable conversation after that. He then said, 'Will you go for a walk with Aline in the garden? She has something to say to you.' So off I went for a walk with poor Aline, she was in a terrible – she was in

a very bad state, she didn't know how long this would last, but she felt she was sorry for him because he was in a state of utter misery about the whole thing and after all, he was quite a nice man really and was rather attractive in some ways, she was not un-fond of him, he'd fathered her children and she didn't know really to do. I told her what I said to him. He rushed into the garden with a note for me. The note said: I accept your proposal. [chuckles] You may see her once a week. OK. After that, she came to tea at All Souls on Thursdays. We saw each other at other times as well, but still, it was more or less legitimised. [laughs] And this went on for some little time, and then I remember going in the summer to Italy and they were also going, to see some of the people – I didn't, I said, 'I'd better not be seen together with both of you, that would be a little too much,' so I rather carefully avoided meeting them. When we came back to London, he bought some tickets for some concerts given by the Vienna State Opera for which he invited me as well, just to show that we were on very friendly terms. I went and he was very anxious to preserve the relationship, whether in the interests of career or what, I wasn't in judgement. That in itself is rather awful. And then, he said it was like a vase which has four cracks; one can just preserve it but it might fall to pieces.

MI Is this is what he says?

IB Yes, about our relationship to him, like a cracked vase. If we'd patched it together, it had been patched, it hadn't grown together. It must be very carefully treated. If it's shaken too much ... Then one day, as I was standing in All Souls Lodge talking to somebody called Mrs Lane who was Victor Rothschild's sister, who contemplated marriage to me at one time without being the least in love with me, the telephone rang; it was Aline who said, 'It's all over. He's gone. We've separated. It's finished. I couldn't bear it any longer. Would you like to come and see me?' So I did go and see her naturally enough, and she said, 'He's out, we agreed to part, it's no good, I couldn't live with him and he saw that it was no good. It was impossible and he's gone to Paris and he'll probably

get a job in Paris, I think the Sorbonne, something in physics, he's a probable candidate, he thinks he can. And I'm free.' Well there was the question of divorce but I mean for all practical purposes, separation had occurred. She had to pay him an enormous sum of money to get rid of him. He had to say to his friends that he had this money because his father in law was so fond of him that he had left it to him in his will, he was dead by this time. He actually hated him, the Baron Guinsburg but – Baron, what was he? – Baron Pyotr [Geratsovitch?] Guinsburg [ ] but she did pay him a huge sum of money, she's quite right and nothing have I ever begrudged less. And then we began – I didn't go and stay with her, I remained at All Souls, and then I proposed marriage to her, formally. She wasn't particularly anxious to be married, she didn't see why we shouldn't just have a – for me and her to live together in the house without being married. I said, 'No, no, no. Marriage.' For some reason I wanted something quite solid and definite which is in character with me. And I proposed to her formally in the Botanical gardens in Oxford one Monday afternoon.

MI At what period after ...?

IB About a fortnight after. Then she rather grudgingly – she said, 'Well, I suppose so. OK. Very well.' [chuckles] By this time she was in love with me, there's no doubt, it was not induced. She was quite clear that we were in love with each other in the fullest possible sense as any two people can be. And then – this was late summer '54 – then we went to stay together in Provence and we went to bed with each other, we behaved like husband and wife. Then I went to, in '55, I mean we saw each other a very great deal; the divorce wasn't through so it couldn't be talked about. We certainly stayed with each other in the spring and the summer wherever it was that we were [MI '55] '55. I told my parents – my father was dead, I told my mother, yes. My mother expressed some surprise that I should want to marry somebody with three children, but she was so relieved that she was Jewish, she had always wanted but supposed wouldn't happen, it was clear from my form of life I



could easily have married someone who wasn't without any compunction. It was clear to me that she accepted it, was only too pleased. She met her, they got on quite well. She said, 'Yes, that'll be all right, she's in love with you, that she is.'

MI Your mother could see that?

IB Yes, now wait a sec. 'She is in love with you, yes.' All right; it showed a certain insight. And then, I went to Chicago, the university, for two months in '55. Aline came to join me towards the end. We went back to New York, saw her mother who wasn't at all pleased; didn't see – I mean when she told her mother, her mother said, 'Quelle horreur!' [laughter] 'Ce jeune homme,' – jeune homme I was called! – 'ce garçon n'est pas epousable.' That's what she said. However, she accepted it, what else could she do, poor lady? And then I met her brother, now died, who was a very sort of gallant figure, who was a tremendous figure in the French resistance with a price on his head, who was very annoyed at this because he thought I was some kind of left wing Jewish intellectual; nobody he disliked more than that. And after we met it was much better, he decided I wasn't. He saw her being married to some awful academic, intellectual, with ideas and some kind of awful east European Jew; it was the last thing he wanted, you see? He was rather [ ], rather a man who never did anything in his life but was full of ideas and always giving money to causes.

MI So when were you married?

IB We were married in February, 1956. The divorce went through in Paris in late '55, they were both residents, France was no difficulty. We were married in the Synagogue in London with my mother, her mother, two witnesses and the Rabbi, and her eldest stepson, that was the lot. Nobody else was present. My mother would have probably preferred a white wedding but that was obviously an absurdity. Then a little party was given by my mother in her house in Hampstead, to which perhaps another ten people

came and that evening we were given dinner by the Hofmannsthal and that night we went and stayed in the Savoy Hotel. That's what happened that day. That was February 7th, I think, February 7th, 1956. We were formally married and I moved into Headington House two or three days later. And there were these two children there of course, plus Michel who was rather older, who was by this time seventeen – no, in '57 – he was born in '47 – no, ten, – no, I'm talking nonsense, he was ten – no, Peter was born in – talking nonsense – Michel was born in '37, he was twenty; Peter was born in '40, he must have been sixteen by then, fifteen, sixteen; and Philip was seven.

MI How were your relations with them?

IB Good question. I behaved in a very withdrawn manner. I didn't want to play the part of a father, I didn't – their father was alive, living in Paris, so they looked on me as an amiable friend of their mother's who was living in the house. They didn't take the marriage in at all much. Michel was not [ ] his son anyway though he was quite fond of him, rather broken by him, destroyed by him in some ways; but he didn't mind very much. He didn't mind anything, just couldn't get into Oxford, kept having disasters and got into Christ Church and was failed – his exam. He's now the partner in Sotheby's. Peter was in a bad state. He was bullied by his nurses, he could only write with his left hand, he was at Stowe but he was not getting on at all well; and Peter was completely mother fixated. Philip was all right, he was a small child. My great like was their governess who was called Miss Lee with whom the two younger children were deeply in love, much more than with their mother. She approved of me, didn't like Halban who was a nasty foreigner, thought very well of me. We got on from the word go, with no difficulty.

MI You had a kind of common front with her?

IB Inevitably. I mean somehow she liked me, I liked her, she was in charge of the children. That made things ten times easier, you see? Just because we got on so well. The children were deeply in love with her. She was a very nice little woman who became a Matron at Eton ultimately.

MI And you had no desire for children of your own?

IB None. I never have had. Aline wondered whether but in fact I think I was sterile by then, in fact ...

MI As a result of?

IB ... I was sexually potent but sterile – as a result of nothing. I don't think my father was very sexually active, either. I was born but I think my sterility could be cured. At that time, when I went to a doctor, he said, 'Well, it isn't certain but I think seventy per cent, seventy-five per cent certain that I can actually cure you of it, it's not at all bad.' But I didn't want it, for some reason. I had no wish to have children. I didn't like children anyway, never have liked children much.

MI And exile hadn't given you any sense that you wanted ...

IB For me, children under the age of seven are little animals. Unless one can talk to them freely, I don't recognise their humanity at all. I don't like playing with small children, it's the opposite of what I like. I like treating them quite naturally, normally. If I can't do that, the idea of behaving myself artificially, child like and sort of taking an interest in their lives which one doesn't feel and saying the sort of things ...

MI Did you resent them, the three of them?

IB No, resent I didn't; I was afraid they might resent me. I didn't resent them.

MI Do you think they did?

IB A bit, a little bit, but it wore off in the end.

MI You have good relations with Peter or you have good relations with ...?

IB I developed perfectly ordinary relations with all of them. Michel is rather remote; his mother is remote from me, rather, but when I see him, it's all quite all right. But with Peter, the relation is very warm, and with Philip, ditto. No, no, the relationship – and then, Hans came back to see them, was extremely polite to me, wanted to preserve friendship. I wasn't very keen on that but ...

MI And he died in the sixties?

IB He died I would say, in the sixties, of heart failure in Paris. Married somebody else, was always married to rich Jewish ladies. His first first wife was a Dutch Jewish banker's daughter.

MI While he himself was not Jewish?

IB Well, that can't be said. His grandfather was called Blumenstock who was a Jew but was told that he wouldn't be able to get on in Austria unless he changed his name and became baptised. I don't know what he was, he was a lawyer. So he changed his name to Halban which was the name of a hero in one of [M?]'s poems, I think he's a crusader, arm bearer. Then [ ] Polish patriotism on the part of the grandfather, Polish Jew, and he did become baptised and married a non Jewish wife. His son, Hans's father, was half Jewish, part Catholic by upbringing and professor of physical chemistry in Frankfurt and Zurich. Hans was a quarter Jewish, but all his wives were Jewish. Maybe his mother was partly Jewish too, it's not clear, but anyway he had Jewish blood, but he was brought up as a rigid Catholic and in the end was kind of socialist atheist. I

mean that sort of thing, sort of left wing Austrian professor of science. But always the other physicists and everyone he knew were Jewish and that nuclear physics world was almost entirely Jewish and so they got on very well, liked him very much. He behaved rather – a bit like a Jew, I must say. I don't think he was.

MI What does that mean? He behaved a bit like a Jew?

IB Behaved like a Jew? It means that he was on very natural terms with them and they didn't feel that he was in some way a Gentile among them; and he felt a close and intimate – he felt cosy amongst these Jews and didn't have very many non Jewish friends. I think I forgot a little bit of the jealous tragedy between, before the – or was it after? Wait a moment. No, after. After we were allowed to meet each other, once a week, I went to stay in a place called [Rue?] which was a village near Deauville with my friend Alixe de Rothschild and her husband, Guy who I met in New York during the war. He was a prisoner of war, he was in the army but he got out and we were great friends. And the Halbans were in Deauville, which was ten miles away, and we used to meet in the Casino to which my host tended to go and see; and I used to go and chat to Aline very naturally. By this time, we were on legal terms with each other. And then, Dr Halban saw her reading a letter, sitting on the beach at Deauville, which she tore into little pieces and scattered on the sands, and the letter he decided was from me – indeed it was – and he then went to the shore and spent an hour piecing them together. So he really was in a state, I was sorry for him. Then she gave me a ride to Paris on the way to Italy where I was going to stay with various friends. I was going to stay a week end with Charles Bohlen, the American Ambassador and then I was going on somewhere else. And then she said to me afterwards that he was in an impossible state, and as you say in French, 'you couldn't touch him with tongs.' I don't know what tongs are in French – *en n'est touches pas* – *ne touche pas avec des something or other*, you see? And this is just part of the story. And then we were married and after that all was well.

MI All was well, yes. Ca se voit.

IB Well, you may say that, but it's true.

MI What is it that works well? What is it about her that you ...?

IB I'll tell you, I'll tell you. There are certain characteristics of hers which I obviously particularly like and certain things of mine which she likes, quite apart – love is love; one likes people because they are what they are, not because of the attributes they have. What's his name says about that – Montaigne, it's perfectly true – they like you because of the way they roll their heads, they way they move, the way they do their hair. I mean, God knows: I mean when people say, 'I liked him because he was so honest and so nice,' that's not the reason. One loves them for what they happen to be, a particular pattern [ ]. Well, the qualities I particularly like: first of all, she's highly civilised, very civilised heart, very – she's extremely refined, she's like the Princess with the pea, that's the least trouble, that. But the fact that she can feel the pea through any number of mattresses – the slightest things upset her. She has absolutely impeccable taste, you see? A rather passive taste. I don't think she knows what she likes, she knows what she doesn't like and therefore she's incapable of any degree of vulgarity or commonness at all. In all my life, I've liked that more than anything else. The things which upset me in my life were certain forms of what I can now only call commonness and vulgarity so much, I don't like that either, or coarseness. I have known people who were coarse and vulgar; commonness – it's difficult to say – in Russian it's 'poshlost', there's no translation as Nabokov tells us, he has an essay on the subject; poshlost, you see? Poshlost means some kind of – that's worse than being common, but even [?] is bad enough. It's a social quality, I'm afraid, not a moral quality entirely. It's a certain kind of voice as a [ ] if you know what I mean, a common family from which this is absent [laughter] whatever else. [MI Upon occasion it was absent, yes, I know exactly ...] I don't think

your family, your own family, could have had it in any degree. I don't know of any aristocratic family which has commonness – coarseness, yes, Winston Churchill was very coarse, even vulgarity sometimes, yes I'm afraid the last comfort of refinement comes from forms of life.

MI So she has that. What else?

IB No doubt her tutor, her father and so on did that. She's extremely honest; she's very, very frank and honest, she's incapable of any degree of serious deception or – of that sort, she's morally very, very – almost too rigid in that respect. She's not cowardly, I am now, much less so, I'm far more liable to compromise or to – I suffer from anxiety to please which she doesn't have at all. If she has nothing to say to you, she doesn't talk at all. I see her silent among two people to know them to whom she thinks is embarrassing [ ]. She has nothing to say; I say something to her, she can't respond, doesn't respond, just doesn't make an effort. There's a certain lymphatic quality, a certain passivity which I'm not particularly in favour of but she has that. But of course she was very beautiful when I married her, she still is ...

MI She still is.

IB Yes, and nobody ever suspected me of marrying her for her money, that I will say. It looked as if I might, she was far from poor, but I don't think that was, in my case, very suspectable. It could be, if one didn't know, it certainly might. What else? She's very self centred, that she is.

MI What does that mean?

IB That means that everything is referred to herself; that when we start talking, when she comes in from outside, she immediately begins saying what things have happened to her, that I am accused of not taking enough interest in her life, because she takes rather

too much interest in it herself. So you could say that as a rather defective character, it is a defect, that's she's somewhat absorbed in herself and easily offended, she thinks she's being snubbed all the time, thinks she's boring, ugly, no good, she's thought that all her life when she was married to him even; she was ugly, boring, worthless, nobody could possibly take an interest in her, she doesn't count, she's constantly being ignored, she's only invited because she's my wife, nobody else would take the slightest interest in her. The opposite: what she does is frightens people because of a certain grandeur, you see? A certain aristocratic quality, she actually frightens people who are frozen by her, they feel not better dressed in her presence, much more that. If you tell her that, she bursts into tears. She frightens people but [it's] one thing absolutely she can't take. Why she likes me is because I think I created, for the first time in her life, I opened doors, created what's called human relationship which she'd never had before with either of her previous husbands. She was locked up. The only time that she ever had human relations was when she had affairs with people, which she did have, quite a lot, I mean having sensual sex opened some kind of possibility, nothing else did. In my case, in some way it opened windows, that she suddenly felt a human being for the first time. This really did happen, that she told me, you see, that she suddenly felt some kind of entirely new sort of capacity for having a human relation with somebody both ways. That certainly why I think she married me.

MI But were you surprised? You were an old bachelor when you married, [IB Yes I was] you married very late [IB Very] Did you have to change a lot?

IB No, nor did she. I remained an old bachelor in a sense, I am occasionally accused of it. [MI By her?] However. I clearly can go back to my old habits.

MI And what does that mean?



IB Well I can cook, I make my own cup of tea, I can boil my own eggs, I can go out to lunch and breakfast, I don't need looking after. I like to be looked after but I don't really need it, I can cope for myself if I'm left alone. I find it slightly boring but not difficult. What does it mean, changing my life? Yes, to live in a house with a family is of course different, yes, I had to adjust myself. But I'm an easy adjuster, all my life has been spent in adjustment, it's exactly the opposite of her. She remains herself in all contexts. My anxiety to please or adjust myself or adapt myself is a typically Jewish characteristic [MI laughs] which one constantly has to curry favour with potentially unfriendly persons. I'm not conscious of it but I've no doubt that it's part of the characteristic of most Jews.

MI And it's a characteristic you detest in yourself in some ways.

IB Absolutely, absolutely, I'm ashamed of it.

MI You'd like a resolute take it or leave it ...

IB Of course, of course. Pride; I don't know, I've not much pride, not much pride, not ...

MI But you're proud in a different register, some different form of it.

IB I wouldn't be described as proud, it's not a quality I particularly admire in others, but I don't have it. But I'm not conceited as far as I know, and I'm not particularly vain perhaps, I don't know to some extent. I'm easily wounded, I mean a nasty review rankles with me and remains, you see? Or a snub or something. I'll tell you a story to illustrate that which happened five nights ago. I went to dinner with my friend Sir Nicholas Henderson and his wife; the dinner was given for us. Present were the young Price Jones's, son of Alan and his wife who were old friends; Lord and Lady Gowrie whom I know quite well; and a man called Ryan, Nigel Ryan who was to do with the media you probably know, television. [MI Mm,

yes, a little] Well he was the Head of Granada, something. He was a sort of media man anyway. He was called the last attachment, he looked after Diana Cooper in her last years very devotedly. And Lady Falkender, to my surprise. Now the table order was this: I was on my hostesses right; next to me came Lady Falkender; next to her came, I suppose, Nigel Ryan, something like that. On my hostesses left was Gowrie; on his left was Lord Catcher's daughter, that's Mrs Price Jones. I said to my hostess, 'I'm very sorry, I shan't be able to talk to my neighbour at all. She's deaf, Lady Henderson.' So I had to say it in a more or less ... She said, 'Would you like to change?' I said, 'Yes.' So I got up and exchanged places with Lord Gowrie. Lady Falkender can't have failed to notice this rather curious manoeuvre. Now why did I do this? And should I have done it? Those are two separate questions. Why did I do it? Because Stephen Spender's daughter – you may think this is a curious beginning – had an affair with the last Persian Ambassador in the days of the Shah, a man called Parvis something. We went to dinner because the Spenders had to dine with their daughter persuaded that they were all going on to the same party given my John [?]. He wrote some memoirs. In his memoirs he described a visit by Lady Falkender, who came to see him and said, 'Oh, you're known to be a very dangerous man, Ambassador, I'm not sure I ought to have come to see you at all,' and sort of flattered him in this sort of way and said, 'Oh the stories that are told about her made her not sure I ought to have come, I dare say I'm in some danger,' a lot of this kind of stuff according to him. The she saw a book by me which he must have imported in order as a kind of brief on me before asking us to dinner, the thing was lying there on the table. She said, 'Oh, Isaiah Berlin, I think he's phoney.' That's what she said [MI In the memoir?] according to him. Well that was serialised by The Times, and the statement was put in a box.

But you know you're not phoney, said my hostess.  
I'm not so sure, I said.

## MI TAPE 15

Conversation date: 7 March 1990

Date transcribed: October 2002

Transcriber: Esther Johnson

Subjects covered:

1940-50

Oakeshott

Cowling

English Conservatism

Wittgenstein 1940

David Cecil

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IB ... I tell you, I didn't have to have this operation, I was told the truth, it was evidently not David. I had no hesitation.

MI Good for you.

IB I'm not at all afraid of that sort of thing. I don't like pain very much but I'm told that's not too bad so ... If I can read a newspaper or a book and there's a radio there [ ]. I have been reading your articles in the Observer ...

MI With mounting dismay I ...?

IB No, not dismay but I think on the whole I have advice to give you.

MI Yes, please do, please do.

IB Yes. Meanwhile I want to give you Spender's love of course, I had lunch with him, I'm going to see him today. I'll tell you. I don't think it's any good denouncing Yuppies and patriotism and so on

because everyone does that. It's a universal attitude. I think more interesting is to try and feed people's curiosity if you can about what goes on abroad. [MI Yes] I think; England is not a subject of much interest, I mean, it's an ordinary sort of collision between two parts of the [ ] and people say what they say and it's all rather mechanical.

MI Yes you may be right, I don't feel – I felt unhappy with the column in all kinds of ways, partially because it encourages a certain kind of moralising pontification which comes naturally to me and seems to me to be resisted rather than ...

IB There's something in that but I'll tell you, what people really want to know, I think, is what's going on in Eastern Europe and if you could speculate on what the differences of the various parties is, what their ideologies are, how far they suffer them as far as one can tell, nobody knows that. I mean if one could have some kind of analysis of the various alleged – there's quite a good, not very – rather slightly frightening article in the TLS this week, I mean by this week I mean, I don't mean this week, by the Editor who went to the Pasternak festivities, about Moscow. You know [?] [MI Yes] Well, it's more interesting than anybody would have been, interesting in the sense he saw nothing as far as I could see – reactionaries he saw, he saw [?] people, he saw a man called [Shapareyvitch?] who was a friend of Solzhenitsyn who certainly wants the Jews removed and – er – frankly Solzhenitsyn wouldn't mind either – and he then saw [Kagalitsky?] with the Left but I don't think that's very – but still, there is something to it, he's interviewed people other people haven't talked to so I give him marks for that.

MI Yes, I'll look that up immediately. No, I think on balance you're right, I think that were I not tied down at the moment to finishing this novel, I'd be on the road and use the column to find things out.

IB I think so. The best things you did on the radio, on television, were those sort of confrontations about different points of view, the Israel thing was very good.

MI But you didn't learn a thing from it.

IB I didn't because I happened to have known but I mean broadly, people did, must have done. But I think the Eastern Europe lends itself, not to just according to speculations of sort of lectures by – you know by Whatsername – by very good lectures by that expert whose name I forget [MI Timothy ?], yes] you see, or, I don't know [MI Ashley ?] your predecessor; but a rather sort of careful, actual anatomy of what goes on, who are these people, what do they believe, what is their strength, how do they differ from each other exactly, what are the differences of fears of [ ] – nobody's done that. You're in a unique position to do it.

MI No, I agree, I agree. I'm just feeling oppressed by ...

IB It's worth saying that, let's say Havel has no [ ], never has been so it should be made quite clear where he actually stands, it's no good supposing that it [ ] in any way, it is not.

MI Yes, I've been reading Havel's writings in imprisonment which are interesting, very influenced by [P?] obviously and ...

IB Who is [P?] Another Czech, some Czech?

MI Yes, great Czech philosopher, freedom and this and that ...

IB Not otherwise known, not widely known in the West.

MI Not widely known in the West. This led me to think that I should look at [P?]. I am in fact going to go to Prague at the end of May and do a whole series of programmes [IB For television?] yes, doing what I did in Israel but hopefully they're slightly more

informed level, so I will be doing some of that. I am tormented by the amount of journalism I do, however, I feel I do too much in a way, some of it's simply to earn my living, some of it ...

IB Do you do it three times a week for the Observer?

MI Yes, it's the chief source of my income but it encourages certain professional defamations of character of which I am keenly, sometimes agonisingly ...

IB A new reactionary has appeared in the present, a new monster of a minor kind – well I knew he was a monster before but I didn't know he was going to be promoted, he's been promoted by Scruton very strongly, that's a man called [Almond?] [MI Mark ?, yes] Yes, he's a fellow of Oriel I think. He was at Wolfson, he's a man who was responsible for the [ ] scandals because he invited him. [MI Oh really?] Yes, you see? He was a graduate student at Corpus.

MI Oh I see, because he's written a long piece in this week's Spectator excoriating the fellow travellers.

IB I've just read it. You see it's not quite clear what – he doesn't mind awfully about the Hitler fellow travellers, he minds much more about the dangerous fellow travellers of the Left, – Heath. [Laughter] No, but I'll tell you, I don't know him personally, I've never seen him. He was made a member of the Athenaeum by Scruton, I observed that from which I draw conclusions, but he was the valued student of Corpus who went to Wolfson and from there he invited Whatnot and he's a – he convinced Trevor – Roper that he acts in perfectly good faith and that when it was said that the College hadn't invited or [ ] anything correct, that isn't true; and he's a prot.g. of Trevor – Roper's great friend, Lord [Hill?] who is a man called – er – I'll tell you in a second – Catto, same name as the American Ambassador, who is the walker – Princess Margaret's walker, he takes her about, yes. [MI Laughs] He's a mild

young man, supposed to be very, very right wing, he's a medieval historian, perfectly polite but I can see that the, so to speak, gradual build up of what might be called the Right. You see Trevor –Roper is in a rather sharp state, he doesn't write very much, he's failed to become Chancellor of Oxford University which he wanted to be after he was told he would get four or five votes [ ] he would have got. And he's gasping about on the whole, he's ...

MI The other figure on the Right who I've been reading just in the last two weeks in which you're excoriated repeatedly is of course Maurice Cowling. [IB Oh yes, this is ...] The new edition of his 'Mill and Liberalism' contains ...

IB The third volume?

MI No, no, it's a re –edition of 'Mill and Liberalism' which he published in 1963.

IB Oh I knew I was in it but I never read it.

MI And in the preface [IB The new preface?] you and Noel Annan and other people are [IB Denounced in terrible ways] denounced as the kind of liberal establishment so that you're the continuation ...

IB This is a new essay, I mean new preface though?

MI It's a new preface on an old – and the preface is wildly amusing, tendentious to a degree [IB Well he is a little mad] and you become a sort of [IB Sinister] epitome – no, not sinister but foolish, no; his view is that you're not sinister but you're part of this kind of meddling, bien pensent, liberal establishment against which conservatives must fight back because you dominate all the intellectual space around you. You are the hegemonic figure against which this small, embattled conservative rump has to struggle. [IB Has to struggle] Which seems to me the most grotesque

sociological description of the state of [IB Absurd, yes] battle that I've ever seen. But you and Noel Annan and various other figures – I'm trying to think who you're linked with – at one point he even says that the student revolution of the sixties was an insurrection against the kind of liberal [IB Weak people, yes] moderate tyranny of people like Berlin [IB People like us] and therefore Cowling declares his sympathy for the students in the phoniest way possible because of course he had nothing to do with ...

IB But then he's also pro Marxist, Cowling, in that way because there are extremists on the other side [MI Yes, he likes extremists] who at least are militant instead of this weak, the wishy –washy, neither here nor there, semi atheist ...

MI Exactly. It's your semi atheism that's very troubling.

IB It is absolutely – Christianity.

MI Yes, he doesn't like that. He wants you to be a nice solid high Anglican, to keep certain things in reverence.

IB Yes, yes, yes, yes, but there weren't other villains, just us two?

MI You occupy – I think you should feel very proud of yourself, you occupy a pride of real – you really, [IB Yes, dominant figure] you really bother him.

IB I knew, I knew he thought that because I was told that by – who told me that? – by Perry Worthsome told me of it. I was partly responsible also for going to war in '39, did I tell you that? [MI Yes] That doesn't come into this does it? [MI No, no] People like me [ ] I pushed England into a most unfortunate episode of its history.

MI He does a wild bit of conflation in which, you know the Mill who defends minorities against the power [IB Of the fascist] of the



majorities becomes this kind of [IB Fascist] Beveridgian social, welfaring despot ...

IB No, despot, that's what he – on the contrary, I thought he was a semi fascist because he doesn't want to give equal votes to everybody because he wants to give a few more votes to intellectuals somewhere. He's an anti democrat.

MI Yes, he's anti democratic is the charge and he believes in [ ] There's certain aspects of his analysis of Mill however uncomfortable they may be that strike me as being right actually.

IB Well that may be true, yes [ ]

MI But then there's a historical conflation in which the kind of modern descendants of Mill are used in a way that seems to me ...

IB There's Noel Annan and me, who else are we? Two of us is not enough.

MI Well, I'm embarrassed that I can't remember who the other villains are – oh Jack [Plumb?] is mentioned [IB Put in with us?] oddly, yes.

IB He's not at all a nice man, I [ ] hate him in Cambridge; yes of course because he's a man who my colleague Jonathan Clark hates so much.

MI Yes, yes absolutely, with passion. But it's this conspiracy theory of the whole of the post war era in which you become a sort of [IB Symbol] symbol of everything that went wrong intellectually and that I find interesting and I can't ...

IB Who is more right? Who is more right though? Apart from the fellows of Peterhouse, presumably the ...

MI Well [ ] Charlton, Popper and Hayek and all the lonely [IB Popper, too?] yes, and all the – well Popper is mentioned rather little ...

IB Not too much. Now he's all right but he wasn't always.

MI What makes Cowling an interesting figure is that he has no time for Hayek's politics, that is he thinks [IB 'That he's too liberal, too old fashioned liberal] No, that he's too – er – he simply – there's a radicalism in Hayek in for example Hayek's distaste for any form of welfare state apparatus which Cowling admits is unrealistic for example: and Cowling is not stupid but the history that informs us, the historical vision of how post war opinion got set up seems to me to be ...

IB But the enemies are the liberals certainly, I realise that. Quite a lot of people feel that probably, they're the real enemy.

MI And much more so than the socialists, he's not interested in the socialists [IB Oh no, no, no] it's all very weak beer to him.

IB Nothing, no, no, the really people who really altered opinion in that horrible way are these mild New Deal –ish – I can see that, it's a kind of anti Roosevelt, anti that lot.

MI But how do you account for this kind of 'red in tooth and claw' conservatism in the eighties, I mean where does it come from?

IB It comes from him as well as from anyone, literally from him, he trained a whole generation. He really – and he in turn was then trounced by this rather sinister figure at some other College called – er – [MI Cranston] Oh no, Cranston's a mild weak liberal – no, but there are a few. Oakeshott is right as their ultimate inspiration you see? Their relation with Oakeshott was ruined at a very early stage – I'll tell you the story in a moment.

MI Yes, we mustn't forget that.

IB No, it was by pure accident, I knew nothing about him but I'll tell you, he wouldn't like me anyway I think but – quite, I'm thinking I ought to – I met him once at some Catholic funeral and he introduced himself, he wears a stiff collar and a stock tie, he's homosexual and extremely reactionary and racist as indeed whatsername is – er – he's exactly the same as Scruton, it's the same attitude, Scruton comes from Peterhouse, I mean they all do, I mean so does Perry Worthsome, there's a whole generation of them and [? Clark] yes. Quite benevolent towards me, shouldn't be, thinks I'm not too bad. Wait a moment, there are others – er – who else? There's somebody called, some colleague of mine in All Souls who has a similar hatred of me who's called [Greene?], you must have heard of who I think is the same climate – er – let me think, it's a kind of angry reaction.

MI Yes. There's the Dean of Peterhouse as well.

IB Ah yes, certainly, the Dean – you mean the Chaplain? He's a man called Norman [MI Yes, Edward Norman] Yes, he's a hero, yes, he once appeared in a swastika. Trevor – Roper hated all these people, he detested them, he turned out to be not what they wanted. [MI Yes exactly] Instead of being a high Tory [MI Yes and Cowling ...] turned out to be a cynical Whig.

MI Cowling is very amusing about how they thought they could install him and [IB Man of the Right] and capture him [IB And it didn't work] and it didn't work, yes. He's very good about – the one thing about Cowling is he's got quite a good sense of humour.

IB Well I read a piece by him, let me see I read something by him [ ] but it didn't say much about me, that was something else, no, I read an article in Encounter in which he explains the rise of the New Right and his own responsibility for it. That was the penultimate number I think of the Encounter.

MI This may be essentially the same if you've read that ...

IB I don't occur in it much, I occur very casually, he simply – Beloff and I are equally condemned that's if in so far as his students were against him and me there's something to be said for it.

MI Well I think then yes, you've caught the essential drift. The blows he strikes in this introduction are glancing ones but there seems no doubt in my mind that you're very important to what went wrong ...

IB I'm central, yes, I'm a central figure in the demonology, yes all this mild liberal stuff, [ ] no sign of traditionalism. Yes, certainly. I'm trying to think ...

MI But what's always struck me as central to your views is not that they're mild but that you are indeed struck more forcibly than most liberals are by the radical incompatibility of competing goods. [IB Certainly, certainly] Instead of being mild, I've always been struck by the fact that when I scrape you down to your barnacles [IB Quite true, quite true] you're quite aware that some choices are absolute hell.

IB Central idea I have, yes, quite right, and my extreme hatred of the radical right is as great as my hatred of the radical left, that's perfectly true. Leonard Woolf was the only person whose views roughly coincided with mine in the thirties, as anti Communist as anti Fascist which was not fashionable – *New Statesman*, if you see what I mean, for which he wrote. But I'm trying to think of [ ] letters which I had brought me but I'm trying to think where the man is in Cambridge. A man gave me this [ ] – he's a fellow of some other College but he was once at Peterhouse and I think he teaches at Oxford, English or a mixture of the two, and he is genuinely sinister when people refer to him. You see I have a friend much disapproved of by what might be called the even fated left,

called Gray who is a rather right wing [ ] but he's quite decent really. I think he goes too far, again he's written a book on Hayek, it must be an admiring work. He says this man in Cambridge, well he's genuinely sinister and detests Cowling, too, and he says that he's been to Poland, [ ] to Poland, is why Scruton should have written that article on me. I didn't know that he read the Times, well obviously we must be on the same side, how can it be you see? We're both anti Communist ...

MI Scruton is now a great hero in Czechoslovakia.

IB Oh in all those countries, absolutely, certainly. No, he did a job there.

MI Good for him. He did a job.

IB In the sense that went there, was imprisoned, or not imprisoned but got [ ] there, was actually put in jail and then happened to be a friend of – er – whatsername? – happened to be a friend of Mitterand who then sent stern messages – [MI Jolly good] I think the Minister of Foreign Affairs was a pupil, something.

MI That's how it would be done. Tell me about your meetings with Oakeshott.

**IB Oakeshott became a fellow of Nuffield for a short time after he left Cambridge, before he went to London – 1940s, lateish '40s – and I was asked to – I hadn't met him – I was asked to lunch with him by Richard Wollheim, who in those days liked him, and James Joll. They were the two hosts, and I went to what was then a smart restaurant called The George in Oxford and met Oakeshott – charming, amiable and talked about this and that, and it really went very well; and suddenly I said apropos of nothing, 'Somebody ought to write a book on Hegel'; to which Oakeshott said that Mure has written a book on Hegel – he was then the Warden of Merton – a**

certain philosophical work. I said, ‘No, I don’t mean just on his position or his views, I mean as a figure in the nineteenth century, his influence as a personality, as an intellectual power – a central figure in some ways.

MI The emphasis of your – your implication was as a historical figure, in his times?

IB Well, a historical and intellectual figure. Anyway – to which Oakeshott didn’t say anything. And then we talked about a lot of other things. And then towards the end of lunch – I’d forgotten that I’d said this, so I said, ‘I think somebody ought to write a book about Hegel.’ No, sorry! At the earlier part I said, ‘I think you *you* ought to write a book about Hegel,’ to Oakeshott. Towards the end of lunch I’d forgotten I’d done this and I said, ‘You know, somebody ought to write a book about Hegel; even a half-charlatan book about Hegel would be better than nothing.’ After that, we were not friends. [MI Ooh!] I didn’t mean him, I didn’t, at least consciously, you know, not at all, I just said that almost like that, meaning what I said. After that our relations ...

MI But do you think somewhere deep down you might have unconsciously ...?

IB Well, what, I mean, who can tell about one’s unconscious? Then when I delivered the Auguste Comte lecture on historical inevitability, he had to preside over me because he was the professor of political theory – succeeded Laski, if you remember. He delivered a talk of about a quarter of an hour about me which was enormously ironical, exceedingly unfriendly, quite well done, in which he described me as a kind of Paganini of the lecture platform and that kind of thing, if you see what I mean – looking forward to this splendid display which I was bound to produce and so on. I

was very rattled by that, I remember, in 1954<sup>9</sup> or whenever it happened, you see, a very long time ago, and the whole thing was a disaster because the lecture was too long, I realised I couldn't get through it, I read two sentences from every page and it was ghastly, a total disaster. That was a period when Podhoretz was a pupil of Oakeshott, the [magistrate?] [MI Oh my God] and he was with Oakeshott, one of his tutors, of all people. Anyway it was after that that my relations with Oakeshott became non-existent. Since when, I met him once or twice, he was always extremely polite and last time I met him, he was very drunk at [ ] at Cambridge – what College did he belong to – was it Caius? [MI That rings a bell, yes] Something like that, it's a minor College I mean but it's either Caius or – it's not the [Lady Hall?] , it's not Downing, no, Caius it could be, couldn't it? Anyway something I'll tell you. The Head of Caius you will remember was a man – lawyer called Wade, was he there at Caius? [MI I don't know who is there now] Well, he was at that time, this was twenty years ago [MI Yes, I don't know who] Anyhow he was frightfully affectionate and talked to me at great length and tried to make up and generally speaking was – er [MI But he was drunk] he was drunk; and he said to me, 'Who in your opinion is the greatest French thinker of the twentieth century?' [ ] I said, 'You can't mean [?] who [ ] thinker, I don't read French very much [ ] 'Who do you think?' 'Paul Valery of course.' It was very much that sort of line, you see? Thinker, deepest thinker which [ ] poetry and thought and aesthetics. No, I don't think he particularly hates me personally, but anyway he's a fellow of the British Academy and never been to a single meeting; and he refused titles, Oakeshott, probably offered a Knighthood or something, Mrs Thatcher bound to be, had it declined. Terrific womaniser [MI Was he?] in his day, tremendous, [MI Interesting] I mean, if I could mention names to you I mean, that number. They all hate him now. I mean he drops them, you see and [ ] in some way, Iris Murdoch who loathes him now; my friend Mrs Hart my old friend, hates him, oh and lots of other people, these are –

<sup>9</sup> 1953.

certainly. [MI Interesting] Maurice Bowra didn't like him, he said, 'Some man called Oakeshott came to dinner here in a little velvet jacket, looks like a photographer.' Didn't like him much. [MI Laughs. Wonderfully malicious remark!] He takes his part in the hostility, too I think, but I'm bound to incur that.

**MI What did you think of his work? Oakeshott's writing?**

**IB** I'll tell you, though I never read it properly, I couldn't, I couldn't understand a word. I read his introduction to Hobbes, which I thought was no good, it was a kind of evocation, a piece of fine writing, and didn't tell one very much. I didn't read the famous essays which are admired, probably rather good, on the idea of universities and all that [...]. I know his views, [...] because one discovers that – a certain amount of plausibility in that, not total nonsense, but he's very one-sided and exaggerated. Oakeshott's fundamental view is that science is no good, rationalism is no good, argument establishes nothing. If you want to know what the world is like, you can only do it by intimations, instinctive reactions, some kind of intuitive, what the Germans call [...], and – it's rather like Burke, who is somebody he admires; Hegel he admires too, he does – a sense of what it's like, no good [...]ing on documents, above all [...] theories to tell you what to do on a scientific basis of induction, innovation, [...] structure that comes with the advice of what might be called rational thinkers, lead to disaster, they don't capture reality at all. That's really what he thinks; a little bit like Hamann and those people in the eighteenth century, said much the same, for which I have some sympathy. He does think, for example, that the whole scientific apparatus, sociology of course, but nothing – but also economics is ridiculous as a science, you see? [...] anything with statistics, anything with numbers, anything with quantities – no good. Quality was always better, and then he gets into some kind of spiritual affinity, I don't know,



in that sort of poetical sense; in other words some kind of aesthetic approach to life and to politics; you have to have a sense of the contours. Well, I think I believed something of the sort at one time in the sense that I did write a rather obscure article<sup>10</sup> in the *Spectator* once thirty years ago in which I said the trouble about reformists, the reformist revolutionaries, is that they can only see the upper part of the iceberg or volcano for which they have certain cures, and these cures certainly destroy what is wrong – the evils or what it is that – the irrational, oppressive, wrong, cruel, wicked – that can be removed: but it stirs up depths which they don't know about at all, which one can't see, and that produces consequences which are not predictable: so that – that is why all revolutions in the end fail to produce what they intended to produce. They produce something, they destroy – they're effective, they destroy something all right, but the consequences are very different from what either party ever predicted. That was all really. Well, that's an Oakeshottian sort of thing. But his real view is stated – his big book I haven't read, I mean the – I saw a letter by his dedicated disciple is a girl called – er – great friend of Noel Annan – er – I know the name all right – er – Shirley Letwin, she's a devoted disciple, thinks he's a genius of the first order, and she sent me a pamphlet once quite well written, identifying Oakeshott and Hume, quite ingeniously done but not very convincing. And there was a letter by her – what was it? – er – typed, I think it's somewhere [ ] paper but the content is quite funny – er – about somebody who complained that they didn't get any light from reading such works, she wrote me an ironical letter saying, '[ ] in my pocket by reading the works, by reading the last work of Michael Oakeshott. Yours sincerely.' Don't know what it was written about or to.

MI But that is the letter of the true disciple.

<sup>10</sup> 'Realism in Politics'.

IB She is a true disciple.

MI But to revert to the *Spectator* article ...

IB But the [ ] see, you see, was made in this image, the present professor who was just retiring, whose name I can't – he was from New Zealand [MI Minogue?] Minogue was a faithful disciple; and up to a point the man you mentioned, too [ ] character who wrote the life of Locke – er – who had an Italian wife, you know the one I mean whom Hampshire failed to get a degree but later became a professor, I mean he was Oakeshott's immediate successor, Minogue was his successor. The whole tradition was a wonderful piece of anti Laski [ ] point of [ ] and so on.

**MI But the argument you make about revolutions in that *Spectator* piece is still a view that you hold essentially, and to that degree ...? [IB What? What? What view?] That the tip of the iceberg ... [IB Yes, yes, it is, it is.] What people control ...**

**IB That revolutionaries, on the whole – of course one tries to destroy forces that are hostile to society or whatever you regard as wrong or wicked or destructive of life; nevertheless, the notion that you can actually predict – if you do this and this and this, then things will undoubtedly immediately improve in certain ways, broadly speaking, is not borne out by events – something intervenes; and what this means you can't always tell. I mean, that political genius consists in understanding that, and understanding social life as artists understand their material, knowing what the [...], how people will react, how they won't. I think Bismarck is rather good at that, he knew how to shape things, Lenin not very good in that precise respect, you see? People manipulate, people have some – politicians are people who have certain artistic qualities; it doesn't necessarily make them either better or more desirable. But anyhow, that I do believe, yes.**

MI But you don't also simultaneously believe that – you don't buy the kind of anti-scientific, anti-rationalist implications of Oakeshottian ...

IB No, no. Whatever science can do, it should do, but the point is it can't do everything. But I disagree with Freud, who said, 'Science can't do everything, but whatever science can't do, nothing can.'<sup>11</sup> That I don't believe.

MI But where is the line?

IB Can't draw it. Wittgenstein once said about something, 'You will ask, where do we draw the line? You will find the line generally draws himself.' There's some element of that in Wittgenstein himself: very unscientific. I mean if you're going to talk about games and, so to speak, and rules and people having different views, and many different types of communication with each other, that rather works in an Oakeshottian direction. [MI Yes, I can see that.] There's something I read in Ryle. 'Knowing that and knowing how' – knowing that is science, knowing how is to know how to ride a bicycle, which is not about knowing that – knowing how to live, knowing what to do, you see? And that's what Oakeshott supposedly is about. Knowing how. And entering into a tradition of which you feel yourself to be a member and not pushing it too hard, or that famous thing about being on a ship in a sea without tides, moving in no particular direction, no goal, no shore; all you do is keep the show on

<sup>11</sup> 'Nein, unsere Wissenschaft ist keine Illusion. Eine Illusion aber wäre es zu glauben, daß wir anderswoher bekommen könnten, was sie uns nicht geben kann.' *Die Zukunft einer Illusion* (1927), closing words, *Gesammelte Werke* (London, 1940–52) xiv 380. 'No, science is no illusion. But it would be an illusion to suppose that we could get anywhere else what it cannot give us.' *The Future of an Illusion*, trans. W. D. Robson-Scott (London, 1928), 98.

the road, that's all you can do.<sup>12</sup> That I don't believe. [MI And why?] Do I not believe it? Because some things can be done, evils can be exterminated, better states of affairs can be promoted – not for long, perhaps, but they can.

**MI** There's that interventionist, despotic Mill in you again.

**IB** Yes, exactly; I'm afraid so. Yes, I think I believe in reform, the possibility of reform, that's exactly what's wrong. No, no it's when the Church of England became subverted that everything went wrong [ ]. When the great tradition – there was a great central tradition and anyone who was in any way sceptical of it [ ]. Well, that's what conservatism is I suppose in its extreme form.

MI I'm just puzzled on that topic [IB I think Newman(?) believed that] I always thought conservatism [IB I think Newman probably believed that] but I always thought modern British conservatism was entirely secular matter and had to do with class and privilege and order and continuity of a secular tradition. I've never understood why these people [IB What, the church?] had this particularly foaming religiosity.

IB The Church of England is the Conservative Party [MI At prayer] at prayer, yes. That's acting against the Church of England rather than against the Conservative Party is the remark. But I'll tell you, I think that the thing about the conservatives is – Amery was a Conservative, used to lecture the Cabinet on Tory doctrine, bored them stiff because the line was, the great thing about conservatism, it isn't an 'ism', the whole thing about the theory of conservatism is that it doesn't have a theory. That's what they all believed, that's what Baldwin believed; I'm sure it's what Mrs

<sup>12</sup> 'In political activity, then, men sail a boundless and bottomless sea; there is neither harbour for shelter nor floor for anchorage, neither starting-place nor appointed destination.' M. Oakeshott, 'Political Education' (1952), in *id.*, *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (Indianapolis, 1991), 60.

Thatcher also believes, so they all believe – the glory of conservatism is absence of theory, none of this intellectual [MI Claptrap] claptrap.

MI But that's what makes the ideological and theory-burdened and religious character of this right-wing conservatism puzzling, because it's precisely out of sympathy with that ...

IB I know, but they had to invent something [MI pragmatic ...] Yes, but what could they do? They had to invent something. I mean, the question was, why were we not doing better? I mean, what do we need? We need spiritual content; spiritual content can only be given by some kind of religious traditionalism; it's a very Catholic point of view. The Roman Catholics believed that much more often than anybody else, I tell you that. It's er – in the end I mean – God, I don't know, I suppose he is pious, well you know he is because [MI Where?] Columbia, in the Divinity department<sup>13</sup> [MI Oh really?] where he was not a success according to my spies.

MI The liberal spies are everywhere, are they?

IB I'm afraid so, [ ] like the Jews. He isn't actually formerly anti Semitic, Cowling, but he could be, he's not very distant from it. I keep trying to think of this other man, his name is – [ ] English name – they're all great friends of – this is what makes it funny – of Lady Antonia Pinter, in their day. The Pinters went to stay with this – I think with somebody like that, they all had affairs with her one by one.

MI Really? And now look at her. I mean now look at them, yes.

IB And her, as you know they have become symbols of the enemy. I really ought to look at this just to see what he does say.

<sup>13</sup> sc. Columbia's Department of Religion?

MI Yes, I'm happy to pass it on to you, I will do so just so you ...

IB It's just out, is it?

MI Yes, for your amusement. I'll put it in the mail to you this week. [IB Very good] You raised Wittgenstein a minute ago and I did want to – you told such a wonderful story about Wittgenstein and the clock hands being nailed and all that but I did want you to recall for me on tape in formal terms your meeting with Wittgenstein at – was it the Moral Sciences Club at Cambridge? [IB Yes, yes] Can you tell me about it again if you could stand to?

IB Oh gladly. It happened – I had to read a paper on about June 12th 1940 where it is fairly [MI The world is collapsing] well, that means that the Germans were not in Paris yet but they were two days later, certainly they had broken through all the lines. In Oxford you could tell that something not very pleasant was happening, even the philosophers had longish faces. I went to Cambridge because I had this paper on – can't remember what the subject was, I think other minds, well that's what really was the topic but it's called maybe something else, verification or something of other people's states of mind. The topic was how do I that know your headache is more violent than mine? Can this be verified? If so, how? In so far as I can't I mean is it done by telepathy or – how is it done? Can I feel your headache, can I compare it with mine? A sort of anti –positive paper really. And this was about the 12th, I say I went over to Cambridge from New College where I was and it was in [Broad's] rooms in Trinity where the event occurred and there was a complete turn –out of all the philosophers in Cambridge; and there you couldn't feel that anything was wrong at all, it was completely unworldly, it was absolutely, wonderfully insulated from the world, there were present – I talked to Braithwaite who was I think my host for the night whom I knew, who said, 'Oh well, my mother always said the French always forget to burn their bridges, it happened in the last war, there's nothing much in that.' It was remarkable to hear it.

Present were, Moore, Braithwaite, Wisdom, Ewing, all the philosophers at Cambridge at that period – er – oh, a lot of graduate students whom I didn't know of course [ ] who were their teachers of philosophy [ ]. I read my paper to complete [silence?] frightfully boring I thought to myself as I read it. There was no interval between the paper and the discussion, no coffee, nothing like that. There was a silence and then it begins, questions. First question was Wisdom who said in the style of those days, 'Supposing there's a clock and inside the clock there's a brownie, then something – the brownie does this or that inside the clock.' At that point a man whom I hadn't noticed who turned out to be the Master, interrupted and said, 'No, no, that is not the way to go about it at all, that is not the way to treat this, no, no. Let me, let me.' And then he said, 'Don't let's talk philosophy, let's talk business, ordinary business with each other. In ordinary [cirques?], in ordinary cirques I say to you, you see a clock?' 'Yes,' I said. 'The minute hand and the hour hand are both nailed to the clock face to certain ciphers. The whole face goes round but the time remains the same, no? That is solipsism.' I mean I think my paper was on solipsism perhaps, I think it may have been called that, I mean about how to refute it. Well, all right, then we had a discussion and he went on talking and he asked me questions on what I thought and I answered as best as I could, nobody else spoke, Broad was sitting there looking angry and sort of like a boiled lobster and Moore was sitting there open mouthed and absorbing all this. Braithwaite fell asleep at a certain point at which Wittgenstein said, 'Suppose I say Braithwaite has decaying teeth.' At this point Braithwaite woke up and said, 'Wittgenstein, you said something about me, what did you say?' 'I said supposing Braithwaite has decaying teeth.' [ ] to take it up or not, I decided not to and let it lapse. Then we went on for at least an hour, nobody else spoke, Wisdom once or twice put in a little statement but he was a favoured disciple, he was allowed to interrupt; again to which he got up and the disciples all got up, shook hands with me, said, 'Very interesting discussion, thank you.' People said 'How wonderful, he's never said that to anyone, I mean, great compliment, I mean

he doesn't usually do it,' and so on. I was surrounded and congratulated and I could feel exactly what he felt about me; he felt I wasn't very good at philosophy, I wasn't very clever and I'd been badly taught and I didn't really advance anything; but I was quite honest, I replied quite sincerely, I wasn't like Freddie Ayer, I wasn't clever, I wasn't a genius, I didn't show the desire to win, so I wasn't pugnacious, I was perfectly ordinary quite decent human being, morally decent which is all he cared about or thought he cared about.

[Long gap in tape]

IB ... the printed form [MI Oh really?] a book is about to appear of essays, collected by Hardy ...

*Side B*

IB ... worth publishing. It's eighty pages, I mean it's enormously – I've corrected it, done my best with it; Henry Hardy marvellously looked up all the passages and gave the – all the references are there and he removed a certain number of repetitions which I thought were there and that will be published as part of this book which is to be called 'The Crooked Timber of Humanity'.

MI Oh really? Why did you fix on that title?

IB Well, because it's my favourite quotation from Kant, I've told you I think? [MI No] Oh well there's a wonderful quotation in Kant which I've preserved in my bosom all these years. 'Out of the crooked timber of humanity, no straight thing can ever be made.' Very much what I believe. It really is – and he said it of all people, this severe rationalist thinker, you see? [IB repeats the quote in German] something like – it's not quite an exact translation, I've heard Collingwood, whenever [ ] lecture, that's where I got it from, none of the minor essays, one of Kant's smaller essays you see, this wonderful statement comes. [MI It is wonderful] You see? And



there's real truth in that; and my other favourite quotation which does not come into this book is – it comes somewhere from one of those things – ‘There is no reason to suppose that the truth when it is discovered, will prove interesting.’ That was said by C.I. Lewis who's an American pragmatist philosopher. [MI Laughs] Very good deflationary statement. It's enough if it's true. Pursuit of the truth must not depend on one supposing that it's interesting. [Lady B enters] Would you give us a little coffee or something? [Lady B Yes, certainly] It would be a kindness.

Slight pause in the tape.

IB ... but I mean it's something to do with the glands or whatever they are, I don't know.

MI Could I – I'm sorry to be tedious or thick [IB Go on, go on] but I genuinely – I've thought about that analogy about the clock's hands being nailed and I've not understood why – all I see is an exception, a sort of Kafkaesque and beautiful image [IB Let me tell you] but I don't understand what it means ...

IB No, no, it's very brilliant, he really has a meaning. You see, for a solipsist everything which happens is the product of himself, his own impressions, his own wishes, there's nothing else in the world. Everything which occurs is in some way generated by him or created by him even if he doesn't know it. But if you say, ‘What difference does that make? Supposing it were true, what does it actually come to, what is the cash values?’ as William James used to say [ ] of that, I mean what differences – you see, if you think that everything is your thoughts, then presumably by stopping to think, you destroy the universe. All right, anyone can tell that but it's not very verifiable. The point is that everything else remains the same, you simply put the whole world into a bracket, yourself outside the bracket because inside the bracket is unaltered, and that it comes to nothing. I'll tell you the analogy. Supposing you say there's an elephant in this room and you say I can't see it, it's

invisible, I can't touch it, it's untouchable [MI But it's there] but it's there, you see? And you say well, but I mean does it trumpet? Yes, but it's inaudible. Then you have to say, well what do you mean by elephant, it's perhaps not quite – I don't quite know what I mean by elephant – I think what you mean by elephant is what I call empty space, and I say no, no, it's an elephant. Well that's like solipsism; if there's no way, if the presence of the elephant makes no difference to anything at all, if everything remains totally unaltered, you see? You see, then it isn't a doctrine at all, then you're saying nothing, you just use the word elephant in a perfectly empty way, it's not clear that, you see, in other words supposing you said the elephant has gone from this room, what would the difference be? How would you know? How would anyone know? How would anyone be able to think of this room and so on? What would be – let alone verification – what would be, so to speak, what difference would it make to anything you can possibly see, hear, think, believe, religiously intuitive or anything else? If no difference is made, it's [], it's nothing, you're saying nothing, you're just uttering sounds. This is true about solipsism in a way, you see, you can't disprove it when you say everything – Fichte disproved it by something quite simple: He said, 'If you believe that everything is a product of your mind, if somebody insults you, I don't think you are under the impression that you are insulting yourself.' [MI It's rather good, yes] Yes, you see? But Wittgenstein's point is this: that the whole, the clock face is the world and time remains the same, in other words, nothing alters in the functioning of your clock, the purpose of the clock is to show the time. The fact that the face goes round makes no difference to the time, the fact that you think that everything is a product of your mind makes no difference to anything at all. Things remain exactly where they were before. You can't say because it's a product of your mind, I can tamper with it, I can stop it; all you can say is if I commit suicide, the world will disappear [] you can say that if you like, it means nothing because there is some sense in which, I mean it's not clear what you really mean by world because all you really mean is yourself again. Well you can identify yourself with the

world, you can, but it isn't meaningful. [MI [ ] ] That's what that's about. [MI It's a very clever image] I saw him once again in Oxford, he did finally come to talk, he never had before at all; I remember he said somewhere in the middle of something, 'I am on an ascending curve, I'd like to go on talking, where can I talk tomorrow morning?' I remember the 'ascending curve'. He was supposed to talk about cogito ergo sum, Descartes. Someone, [P Pritchard] then [ ] said, 'I wonder whether Wittgenstein minds saying whether he thinks that cogito ergo sum is true or false. Which is it?' [ ] honest. 'I didn't come here to talk about Descartes, honest I didn't!' [MI Laughs] talk. He then said 'I am on an ascending curve.'

[Lady B then serves coffee and says she will leave them]

MI You don't take yours with milk?

IB I do. A little milk I would like. Thank you. I'm trying to think – er ...

MI When you told this story before, you told me that Wittgenstein and his disciples were dressed in an extraordinary manner.

IB Yes they were, they had their leather on their elbows, used for [ ] and that kind of thing but they were dressed in a very simple fashion. He dressed like that and so did they.

MI Why do you think it was that in the Cambridge environment no notice was taken whatever [IB Of?] of the coming of war, of the debacle in France? Whereas in Oxford there was ...

IB Well because it was this – in some [ ] only philosophers, I can't tell you anything else, I can only testify by the philosophers. Cambridge as always is much more remote from the world and rather proud of it. Oxford is more worldly, Cambridge is more self contained and self absorbed, greater [ ] mutual admiration than

Cambridge, greater scepticism in Oxford. Oxford on the whole is rather worldly and as it were they kept in touch with society in London and this and that; Cambridge kept itself pure, high minded, puritanical and so on, there's an element of that. That's why Communism was so much more intense in Cambridge than in Oxford.

MI Yes, it's another kind of unworldliness, [IB Yes, ideological ...] another kind of Puritanism as well.

IB Yes, well, sort of – er – moulding with life according to the true ideas. I mean when Keynes and company said that Moore really gave them all their moral ideas, they all behaved in [ ]. It was the first true word said about ethics as it were, THE truth. Nobody in Oxford ever thought anything was THE truth and that's why I come from Oxford and not from Cambridge. I mean, that's got something to do with it. I think if I'd been in Cambridge I'd have believed in all kinds of things.

MI But how do you explain that difference, that sceptical temper of Oxford? What is it about the sociology of its ...

IB [ ] Cowling is quite right, conservative university, traditionally, not about science, some but nothing like Cambridge; no traditional sense of [ ], Tory, a Tory university, conservative, religious, and therefore in with the powers that be to some extent, you see, whether Whig or Tory. [MI And therefore worldly] and therefore worldly [MI And therefore sceptical]. Cambridge was always certainly undermining all that; there was a certain tradition of science and, I don't know, utilitarian science [ ] science versus humanities if you like, I mean but in the Oxford sense, Greek and Latin, the Classical world, being a Gentleman. It was never a Cambridge ideal. Cambridge produces poets and Oxford produces politicians, it can't be denied.

MI Another person, to change the subject [IB Who?] radically, just to fill out my roster of your acquaintances and things, is – er – is your friend David Cecil and what he – how you knew him and ...

**IB He was a very clever and er – very, very clever and a man of absolutely irresistible charm, personally; highly intelligent, full of charm, imagination and – er – a very good talker. Wait a moment and I'll tell you about him. He was very much in the tradition of his family ...**

MI You'll have to tell me what the tradition of his family was.

IB Well, the Cecils, I'll tell you. It only started with his Prime Minister and God knows, an Elizabethan Cecil is neither here nor there. They were always the centre of the English aristocracy since the sixteenth century and felt themselves to be in some way in charge of England, you see? The Prime Minister, Salisbury, was exactly conservative in the sense in which perhaps Oakeshott thinks it ought to be, that's why it's called The Salisbury Review. He was once asked under what circumstances one goes to war, to which he said, 'Well, we never can tell. You come out of your front door and you look, you wonder whether to take an umbrella or not; you look at the sky, it may rain it may not, you decide either to take an umbrella or not to take it. That's when one goes to war. You have to make up your mind, you have to plump.' That's a very socially point of view. Well, he also said something which Winston Churchill once repeated in my presence which I would never have heard otherwise; 'There are only two methods of government, bamboozle or bamboo.' [MI Laughs] Very funny.

MI What did he mean? Well I know what bamboozle is, but bamboo ...?

IB Bamboo means force, [,], sex. [MI Laughs] Bamboo means you use force, you – er – on the natives, beat them up, if they do something wrong, you whip them. Bamboozle, bamboo. Yes, but

nevertheless I'll tell you, David was like that, the point was he was **a sceptical conservative, but they were very patriotic**, they were anti Roman Catholic, they were Church of England, they were religious; he had these four uncles, one was the Bishop of Exeter, one was [ ] part of the League of Nations or at least one of it's early creators, with Gilbert Murray and people like that, one was Hugh Cecil who was extreme conservative [ ] think, who wrote a book on [ ] ideologist conservative who believed that – that er – now what did he believe? He believed – er – that something – wait a minute – he didn't think freedom was a right, he thought freedom was a privilege, that sort of thing you see – er – he thought virtue was – he had a conversation with his nephew David who's called uncle [?] I think. They went for a walk, he was ten, David, to which Hugh Cecil his uncle, Lord Hugh, said, 'Boy, what do you it is that makes a good man?' To which David Cecil said, 'I don't know, I suppose it's somebody who tries to make other people happy?' 'Nonsense, Boy! Any competent licensed vittler can do that.'

MI [Laughing] Wonderful, wonderful! Inspired remark! That is really the voice of a grandee. Yes!

IB Competent. Competent licensed vittler! That's what they used to be called, food merchants as you know, you see? What [ ] can make them more happy, that is not the point of being good, being good is obeying the law, obeying God I mean. Well here was this prominent political family and in the house, in what's it called in – er – [MI Hatfield House?] What? Hatfield, there were endless [ ] conversation, I mean they all interrupted each other, they all talked about politics very freely and the children were allowed to talk about it, it was complete freedom of conversation, nothing pompous, we could interrupt, we could tell jokes and politics was of the essence of their housework; and the old Prime Minister was not at all solemn or grand in that way, you see? And – er – that is the atmosphere in which he grew up; but he was aesthetically minded and took an interest in literature. He – I don't think he said anything very original as far as literature was concerned but he put

it extremely well, with great charm, precision of language and so on, you see? But he wasn't a contributor to – that's why he was despised by the Cambridge gurus – I mean Leavis thought he was nothing, and although he was just a chat, causerie, just sort of agreeable talk like his father-in-law, Desmond McCarthy, same sort of thing. He was a kind of fellow traveller of Bloomsbury, not quite. He thought Bloomsbury was a bit ridiculous. **But he was very sensible, had a lot of common sense and very tough.**

MI Why tough? Give me an example of where you suddenly felt he was very tough.

IB Well, no nonsense. If anyone said something which was obviously absurd, he had no patience with it, nevertheless he was very polite, he was very courteous but he brushed it aside in a very firm way. When – er – no, more than that – when the war came they were madly into Munich as a family, I mean there was no question, Hitler had to be stood up to, England had to be protected, defended, sort of tough, tough in the sense that he wasn't sentimental, that's all I meant by tough, I think, **in no way sentimental, nothing gooey**, he was a straight conservative. He wrote a letter to the Times agreeing with his friend, A.L.Rowse in the thirties, twenties more or less, that there was a class war but he was on the other side. Perfectly true, the classes were fighting each other, he was on the side of the Capitalists, quite firmly declared himself, that's what I mean, violently anti egalitarian.

MI But you got on, none the less, did you not?

IB Oh yes, he was my best friend in Oxford at one time, he was more delightful to talk to than anyone I ever met. We talked for hours, we could talk about anything, books, people ...

MI What was the nature of your bond, I mean why did you ...?

IB Just that, just ability to give each other pleasure of some sort; we could talk about books, about people, about situations and we were both quite – we amused each other; and we fundamentally agreed about what people were like, what made them attractive or unattractive, about ordinary so to speak – er – appreciation. Politically we weren't agreed, he knew that. There was one time when I quarrelled with him and it nearly broke our relationship. [MI And that was over?] That was over the appointment of a Fellow in English in New College, when he ceased to be. You see he was a very good tutor, quite a lot of, I mean English tutors [ ] pupils because he encouraged everybody because when they said anything he said, 'Oh that's very interesting you should say that,' when it wasn't at all, you see? 'Oh do develop this a little, oh I don't think I ever thought of that, oh do tell me, what do you mean, do you mean this or that, you are very interesting, that's quite original.' He said it to the stupidest pupils who were certainly encouraged. He was very good at that, bringing people out. John Bayley is his faithful devoted disciple. Well, when the question of the fellowship came up and the various candidates, and I had a friend called Humphrey House who was a rather heavy, left wing editor of Hopkins and Dickens' letters and believed in social aspects of which I read a book called 'Dickens' World' which was about the poor and the troubled so to speak and parliament of that time and the general so to speak condition of England of that period. David Cecil did not believe in the [ ] of English Literature at all; he believed that the purpose of being either a literary critic or a teacher of literature was to be like somebody in a conservatoire to understand how people created and to teach other people how to create. They ought to be rather like as I say, somebody teaching composition, it's rather like American creative writing almost. Virginia Woolf was his ideal critic because she understood the intuitive sense of what writer's were like or how they created, gave you the impression that she knew what the actual creative process was; but the idea of analysis, first of all the relation to social events, social background so called, or scholarship which was exact, knowledge of who said what when, whether so and so influenced



so and so, he didn't mind these people, he thought it was rather boring all these professors in Oxford who developed very elaborate – but he was quite a friend of C.S.Lewis. He said, 'The great thing about Lewis, I can tell you, he's a Pre –Raphaelite, what they like, he likes, quite easy to make him out.' And that was exactly the truth. They liked Dante, he liked Dante, they liked [?], he liked [?], they liked Chaucer, he liked Chaucer. He happened to be so to speak, after his time, happened to have lived in 1860, that's very true, nobody else ever said that. He was rather good at [MI Seeing things] seeing things in this very – I mean putting his finger on it.

MI Well you had a disagreement about ...

IB Our disagreement was one of the candidates. Now there were various candidates; there was him, there was somebody called Robson who was in fact a pupil of his afterwards, became quite an important professor of Literature, someone from Glasgow somewhere, came back to Oxford in the end, quite original and interesting; then there was – I don't know, there was John Waine, there was – who was then at Reading, who was a pupil of C.S.Lewis; there were various other people: but the man he wanted was the man who was appointed who was a man called Buxton who was an English gentleman, who did a bit of shooting, knew about Spenser I think and who struck him as somebody who had a natural taste for literature in an amateur sort of way. He hated professionalism and this [ ] really. So then he came to see me one morning and we began talking about what in his opinion were the qualities in this, you see? And then he developed this thing about the conservatoire and how they ought to be like teachers, the musical [ ] you see? And I said I totally disagreed, I thought Sam [?] was all right, Edmund Wilson who he dismissed totally, all this business about who they were, why they wrote as they wrote, what their social influences were, what their personal character was; well, he didn't go on to deny it entirely but I could see that this as unfriendly. He wanted only the aesthetic approach which ultimately comes to Oakeshott, it ultimately means some kind of

delicate tracing, [MI Intimation] delicate tracing of the actual creative, literary process. But it never – and so [ ] to anything really. His best book was on Thomas Hardy, [ ] rather good that way. But he was rather good, he was a clever man. I once asked him about Carlisle for example. He said, ‘Well, I’ll tell you about Carlisle, he was very interesting.’ You see he wrote this book on Frederick the Great because he thought he was a fine old German of a powerful kind, very much not a kind of feeble, liberal, encyclopaedist, rational sort of – one of these dry rational [ ] thinkers, but a master of men. Then he discovered that Frederick the Great didn’t talk German but had talked French, greatly admired Voltaire, greatly admired all the people whom Carlisle didn’t like at all, and that cracked the book a little and it doesn’t come off but it’s correct. Nobody ever said that. On this occasion we really had a row and I wanted Humphrey House and he didn’t like him and then I was away when the actual election occurred, went to America and somebody said, ‘What about Humphrey House’s rather interesting book on Dickens’ world?’ And David said apparently, I wasn’t there, ‘Oh I’ve read it with great interest, it’s a very interesting book of course, yes, but what I ask myself is where is the laughter and the tears?’ You see? And that is very typical and that was no good, that’s when the break occurred. We made friends all right, we continued in Oxford very happily, Buxton was a great failure – he was learned, he was hard working, but the great thing is he lived outside Oxford, he did a bit of shooting, he was a tremendous gent and old fashioned conservative of a rigid kind.

MI That’s almost choosing someone in his own image.

IB It was as near as you could get, he was a pupil of his I think, in some way, yes. He was pleased by anybody who had life or imagination but in the end he voted for the conservative party, couldn’t [ ] it.

MI Did that row damage your friendship or did it seem over?

IB For a bit, for a bit because I went to America then and when I came back we didn't talk about it [ ] I mean Buxton was there and he liked him. I never spoke to him, he was a pupil of mine, I knew he was no good, he tried to do philosophy.

MI When did David Cecil die?

IB When Stuart Hampshire [ ] elected. He was an adulterer technically because he went off with Mrs Ayer, Freddie Ayer's wife, who refused to marry him for a long time and they weren't married, so [ ] could re –elect a fellowship, a man who'd sinned in this all the way. He was then doing what? Civil Service or something – no, in London, London University [MI Stuart Hampshire?] yes, teaching. The question was – somebody made a speech against him on those grounds, Buxton did. After that a man called – two or three of the old fashioned, there was an organist who was a Northern Irishman, extreme, rigid, sort of – you can imagine – Ulster Protestant called Andrews whose cousin was the Prime Minister of Northern Ireland and so on. He said he couldn't see how [ ]. The question was – of course my lot were in favour and then David Cecil led the vote [ ]. David Cecil was violently anti divorce, thought divorced people ought not to be married in Chapel [ ] and all that you see? His marriage was the second and therefore he strongly protested against that sort of thing, he gave reasons for him and then dropped it and half raised it again, didn't want to be out with us; we were his friends, he didn't want to appear a terrible reactionary. On the other hand he accepted the Anglican position. The Chaplain was wonderful on that occasion; he was a man called – a descendent of somebody wrote famous memoirs, what was his name? Famous eighteenth century or early nineteenth century memoir – er – the Reverend Somebody, lived in the country, what was his name? Famous afterwards, was suddenly discovered by some – excellent accounts of life by a clergyman in the country [MI Yes, I know who you mean] You know who I mean? [MI I do know exactly] Woodford! Parson Woodford was this [ ] descendent who said, 'You know, I think

adultery is a sin, I think it's a sin no doubt, yes, but you know there are sins worse than that or at least equally bad,' he said, 'malice, cruelty, wickedness of every sort, but that doesn't stand in the way of people who have been made Fellows of Colleges, why should we pick on this?' Wonderful! [MI Well said, well said!] From a chaplain!

MI But that didn't stop Cecil in his vote?

IB In the end I think he didn't vote. [Lady B enters and asks IB a question] What? Electra? Not in the least, why do you ask?

A pause occurs in the tape.

IB ... you can't do anything on me about this business. I'm going to tell you two stories, one long and one extremely short. The long story is this: there's a man called [K?] who has written me letters with very large handwriting about Akhmatova, he's some sort of [ ] quite a [ ]. He has written an article, whether an answer to a letter I can't tell you. I have a friend called McCain who translates Akhmatova, translates Pasternak and knows Turkish and he commits suicide about twice a year, then has to be saved and sent to hospital because he's quite nice, he's very disturbed but he's quite a good translator and quite a nice man but he'll never come to [ ] very much. Anyway I have known him for years and he comes and talks to me about one thing and another, poetry, sends me all these translations; Turkish he really knows very well, there's a lot of Turkish poets, eccentric but harmless. He knows this man in Moscow – Leningrad, sorry. Now he's some kind of literary bloke and he has written an article called, 'Sir Isaiah Berlin and Anna Akhmatova,' which maintains, it hasn't been published, and I don't think I was meant to see it but he sent it to my friend to look at [MI Who passed it on]. My friend then showed it to me and I said, 'Look don't tell him that I've seen it because it's part of your relationship,' but I might as well tell you; in which he maintains the following: first of all I am described as – the question is why could

Akhmatova, how could she like me at all? How could this have happened, being what I am being and being what she is? And it begins rather rudely, it says, 'Well, I am a quite good talker, [ ]; [ ] means 'chatterbox', it's impolite. It's not quite as bad as [ ] which means also chatterbox, [ ] means 'talk', in the absurd sense, I mean it's contemptuous; and what I describe about my visits is this: he talked to a woman called [Sofia Kasimirnia Ovstroska? ] who is a Pole by origin who was apparently a friend of Akhmatova who's written a book about her, I mean conversation with her which I have never read, translated by a woman called Jesse Somebody who sent me something on Akhmatova which I vaguely wrote her a nice letter but – memoirs which are translated into English which I might have had [ ]. This woman says that when I arrived in Akhmatova's rooms – you remember the story – she was there because Akhmatova had asked her to come because she knew English and she thought that – you see I was described on the telephone as a professor from Oxford who was a sort of specialist on Russian Literature or some nonsense. Well this man says, 'Well he's not that, he's a sociologist of some – oh he's quite well known, well known sociologist in England [ ] you see? Anyway she said she was present in case an interpreter would be wanted; and that I report that Akhmatova was wearing a white shawl which was not true, she was wearing a tattered Chinese dress but she may be right, I wouldn't quarrel about that.

MI Do you remember her as being there?

IB I remember somebody was there. I say in my [ ] piece, there's a woman there [ ] appearance, I had no idea who she was. Yes, I report that, it could have been her, yes. Then I say I said to Akhmatova, 'I'm very glad you're alive and we've heard very much about you in the West, [ ] will be so glad ...' and she said, 'Oh, an article about me was written in the Dublin Review? And there's a thesis been written about me in Bologna,' which I report. She said that she said nothing of the kind. Well I couldn't have invented that, it was a little too strange, however mendacious I may be, the

Dublin Review and Bologna, [chuckles] it must have been said by somebody. So that's [ ]. Then came Randolph Churchill and this [ ] period, then I left. Then I came back in the evening, she was there she says with another woman called [Anta?] – there was another woman there who was a seriologist whom I describe who was a pupil of Akhmatova's second husband who was a man called Shileiko who [ ]. This woman was not present. She says she was there and the other woman was there and Gumilyov was there, the son, and we all had dinner together. We ate this, we ate that, we had sort of – I don't know – fish, potatoes, delicious bread and so on, mutton – there was no meal of any kind at that point. There was only one woman there throughout, I mean she claims all this and she keeps on saying to the man in this article, 'I didn't invent it, I was certainly there.' Then after we talked for a long time Anta thought she couldn't go home by herself, she was rather frightened of the empty streets, so I said I'd come with her and they then accompanied us to the gate of the Sheremetev Palace, then went back. I didn't accompany anyone to any gate; she wasn't there, the woman left, I had no idea where she was going, none of this, it's unimportant, none of it's true. Then he says the poem was written about our visit, it's called 'Cinque' in the – Cinque because he called on her five times; he squeezed that into two visits simply for the sake of literary – er – and so on. But of course he stayed a month in Leningrad. I stayed two days! The NKVD could testify to that if you see what I mean; he was there for a month and he certainly called on her five times, that's why it's called 'Cinque'. Well it's called 'Cinque because it's five poems, a good enough reason, no need to climb walls about that. Anyway, therefore he's an unreliable memoir writer and what he says cannot be – moreover he's clearly not very truthful because there's a verse in Akhmatova, apropos of me presumably, saying, 'You have imagined me; someone like me could never have existed. [Russian quote] You've invented me and you've imagined me [Russian quote] People like that don't exist in the world.' Well, it's very clear what that means but what he thinks it means is that I am just a liar, inventor, maker –up of things. What she means is the romantic vision of her and

so to speak, people like that don't exist, I had bemused eyes, I saw her in some ideal light, that's all that means. Very clear to any reader. However, it's an awful piece. He then goes on to say well I may be all right in my own job in Oxford but as a memoir writer [MI Useless] not much use. Then have I got anything to add to my piece because now bits of Poem Without a Hero have been – new fragments have been published and there is somebody who does call on her also five times, so the five is repeated which shows clearly that I spent a month in Leningrad. It's an absurd piece of a very hostile kind, not very good, hostile enough. I didn't know what to do so I told my friend, I told him, 'Look, you haven't shown it to me but if you're going there as he intended to do, you can tell him that all these things are inaccurate. He will list the inaccuracies which he probably didn't put down to exactly. Well he never did go to Leningrad; he was going but he is now going in April. I don't know what happens when the article [ ] appears but I would rather like to know [ ] so I've complained about it to the old [ ] in Moscow and she said he's no good man, he's – I said, 'Who is – ' no, I got a woman to ring her up, I said, 'What about – ' [ ] daughter it was, 'What about this woman [ ]. She said, 'Oh we called her Akhmatova's waste paper basket, she just flung things she didn't want in order to get rid of [ ]. She's dead,' before I wrote the memoirs. Well that's all. So sooner or later I could see something would have to be said to express some scepticism; this is some kind of jealousy on the part of Anna Akhmatovists. How could I remember all these things of forty years before? Well that's a reasonable question but the answer is as I told a lot of people about it in detail, the thing became learned by heart, frankly, as a version. Well that's my long story. My short story is because I received a letter about two weeks ago, little more, from somebody in Moscow which said in Russian: 'Greatly respected Sir Isaiah Berlin,' written to Sir Isaiah Berlin, Oxford University, Oxford. 'I am the daughter of your father's younger sister.' She then gives the details which are absolutely authentic. Her name is [A?] and it's quite true, I knew my – I never knew my father's younger sister but she lived in [ ] a town somewhere near Minsk, her husband may

have been [ ] no idea what he did, they're both long dead. 'I am in a state of considerable anxiety. Should this anxiety reach, become sharpened, may I rely upon your support? Yours sincerely.' Signed [A?] [Russian name] which is a very odd name. I mean [ ]. That's all. She's a genuine cousin of mine, perfectly good first cousin. It must mean anti Semitism, I can imagine it, nothing else. So I wrote her a letter saying of course she can and all that, it takes months to get there, I don't think she'll get it. What I'm going to ask you [ ], he's nothing like this [MI Yes I do] [ ] telephone, I don't know her telephone number [MI and look her up] her address I know, [ ] to look her up, to please talk to her, she only talks Russian of course, to get somebody [MI Yes] to talk to her and give her my telephone number, [MI Yes I will] You see [MI I'd be happy to] whoever she is. She must be seventy ...

MI In fact Grant [?] wants to send me to Moscow in May on the date of his expected pogrom on the 5th May [IB oh yes, the 5th you go there?] in order to investigate and report on it. As a great Grandson of all these frightful people, who could be better chosen?

IB Act for your great Grandfather, yes, exactly. Well I thought I'd tell you that story. [MI Well, thank you] You've seen the correspondence in the TLS, have you? [MI Yes, very well done] My [ ]? You saw the article? [MI No I didn't] Oh you should look for it. There's an answer by the victim, Joseph [P?] yes, and there's another letter by some lady who – er – wait a minute, there's an answer by him, there's a letter by somebody else rather supporting my position, a letter from [Gifford?] and there's a letter by Sasha [?], you wouldn't know who that is? [?] is the name, he is an [ ], he's at the London School of [?], he's Buddhist, he's a Jew, a Russian Jew, and it's a very passionate letter saying why shouldn't one renounce one's Nationality? What's wrong? Why does this man attack Pasternak? After all nobody complained about Joyce, denounced Ireland? and so on, you see and a poet is a poet and what does he do? I mean one can renounce one's religion, one's



country, one's race, I mean it's a perfectly good thing to do. I do, and I am a Jew too, and so holding up that flag is absurd to have something in his [ ] because he didn't, and so on, that kind of thing. Rather emotional ...

MI Are you going to reply to that one?

IB I know him, he's quite a nice man but he's rather eccentric. I thought I might send him a post card but I may not do even that. I think I'll do nothing.

MI I'm sorry, I've read your original [ ] but I haven't, I didn't place the reply but I will get the reply ...

IB Frank Kermode, who said that he himself thought it was a bit scandalous review. But [ ] is a very valuable man, one shouldn't be against him, we need him, he's an excellent critic, you see? So he's obviously no structuralist, something [ ]. He must be a disciple of someone, telling me not to be against him. [MI Back off he's saying] He's a professor in Sussex and he says in his letter that he told the editor that you know Russian, in spite of which he sent these books for review. I have complained to Richard [?] saying I am sure you couldn't have [ ] in Russian, I'm sure that's libel. There's quite an interesting piece by him in the last number.

MI I'm going to check them out. I have to run.

*End of tape*

## MI TAPE 16

Conversation date: 23 March 1989

Date transcribed: November 2002

Transcriber: Esther Johnson

Subjects covered:

Jewishness 1939–53

Zionism

Weizmann

Ben Gurion

Jewish Slavery and Emancipation

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*Side A is blank: interview begins on Side B*

*Side B*

IB It's – er – can't get anything from her.

MI No, I saw Renee and Alfred last night and they [IB You did?] and I recounted your astonishment that I had admitted any influence from the woman at all and I said [IB They knew she was sympathetic to you?] oh yes, she's always sympathetic – I said we played a sort of ghastly parlour game about this in which I was asked to name two propositions that I had taken from you and I said my arrangement was not of the propositional kind and then attempted to say – and then attempted with what I thought was a cunning rhetorical ploy, to turn it against you and say I could not name propositions that I have taken from you, Isaiah [IB Well you could] I could, I could, no that's true. [IB From my books certainly] But the style ...

IB The real matter is that I don't demand propositions any more than I demand them from Kafka, you see? No, no I just can't get – somebody who lingers – in my mind, no that's quite different,

no not propositions. I'm not saying what I adopted. But why did she make you think of a different – I just wanted some impressionist sketch. I'd have put at mind of, certainly for that.

MI [Laughing] You would not have settled for it!

IB I would, if you could have told me.

MI I wanted to ask you what I've been meaning to do for several weeks, is to ask you about '46, '47, '48 in your life, that period of your life and I was actually quite interested to know – we've not talked about, at all really, about Zionism, the gradual emergence of the State of Israel, emerging power of Bevin's policy towards Palestine, all that kind of stuff, can you tell me how you remember that?

IB Well, look. I was really a Zionist from the beginning, my parents. My father was an ordinary Jewish middle class Russian Jewish Merchant who was not particularly anti Zionist but wasn't Zionist. I mean he didn't think it awful, like Aline's father who thought more or less it was the same as Fascism, it was rather dreadful, thought Jewish Nationalism was frightful, it was a religion, nothing else. He was a Russian of the Jewish faith, the Jews weren't a people at all. [ ] But my mother was a very Jewish Jewess brought up under more ghetto –like conditions in Riga [ ] which was another ghetto but more – English speaking parents. My father, too. My father was [ ] of which the Lebanese might be, speaking French rather than Arabic. My mother was very, deeply very truthful, strong character, full of vitality and life; **disappointed in life because she didn't really want to marry my father at all, he was her first cousin, and did so in order to get out of her horrible father's house;** wanted to be a singer, had an extremely good voice, completely wasted, but I was brought up in an atmosphere of Verdi and Bizet and sort of Riga German opera and Italian German opera circa 1900 kind of music [chuckles] – not Beethoven. The first time I heard Bach I was

absolutely bowled over, I had no idea there was that sort of music in the world. Now, my mother was a Jewish Nationalist by temperament and there wasn't anything to fix it on to; there may have been Zionism but she wasn't attached to it but then the Balfour declaration which was published in 1917 when I was eight, she was in a very [ ] state, her family was not, neither her sisters nor my father's, but she suddenly thought something had happened [ ] all the Jews [ ]. Then we came to England, I joined the Young Zionist Society, quite naturally because from her I derived some realism about the Jews, that it was absurd to call them a religion really. They were, in the full sense of the word, something on their own, they were a people whatever that might mean. They weren't a state, they weren't a Nation but they were a community bound by a common past, common sentiments, common persecution, common religion certainly, common language of a kind, sacred language, common – something which made of them an anomaly in the world, whether you see a sort of mysterious dimension in the soil [ ] people were just Jews and not something else and they were Jews in the first place not in a second place. You couldn't say an Englishman [ ], a few perhaps but broadly speaking when I met Jews, the most obvious thing about them was they were Jews and therefore – I remember one more thing which a man called Joseph, can't remember the name, a Canadian Jewish lawyer, Governor of Jerusalem and they had to [besiege?] it and – er – I can't remember the first name [ ] and some Canadian Jews came to see him, Zionists, and he said, 'You will see me do this and that,' and he said, 'If we do this, I don't think we can because if we do this the Canadians won't like it.' To which he said, 'I thought you were Canadians?' It's what's called a shrewd hit. [MI Yes, a shrewd hit, right on the target] You see? Well, that's my point, I was never deceived about that and I've never been an Englishman or a Russian. A Russian Jew is what I am, was, perfectly different classification, I never thought I was anything else, as described for certain purposes, that's why I didn't protest. As far as I could see if I was asked what I was I would never say, 'I'm English.' British yes, maybe, like the old joke about

Czechoslovakia: if you ask a man to advise what he is, he says he's a Czech or alternatively you say he's a Slovak or even a Slovenian; if you ask a Jew he says, 'I'm a Czechoslovak.' [Laughter] There's a certain hideous truth in that particular joke. So I was brought up – I don't believe in Zionism as such for the reason I've given you, not for religious or hysterical – and of course I mean Jews are fixated in Zion, that's inevitable, this is what the most intimate typical experience for Jews is, bound to the bible, the Hebrew and all the rest of it, and that's why I didn't [avoid?] myself but because there's no good in being in a minority everywhere because that distorted people's natures; that's why I like Herder so much who said all this, about the Germans, he's always been [arraigned?] for it, wrongly. Then I joined the Young Zionist Society and I learned Hebrew and I found that quite natural; and then 1920 – I didn't follow events in Palestine all that much but at that time in 1929 I was in Dresden in the summer when there was a tremendous massacre of the Jews, or tremendous for that time in Palestine, by Arabs in Hebron in [Safed?] where a lot of religious Jews were slaughtered apropos of nothing very much [ ] I think; anyhow something fired at the Arab natives and then I remembered minding very much, and maybe all Jews did but I did particularly. Then there was a white paper from the senior [ ] of the political secretary, Labour government, and he decided to limit humiliation and there was a great outcry about that which I understood, sympathised with, etc. I didn't read any Zionist literature and I met none; I had an uncle other than my aunt who was but that didn't have much effect on me. Well then when I came up to Oxford, I was a fully fledged Zionist, there was a thing called the [ ] Society and the Zionist Society, the [ ] Society for what they were called, the Anglo English, because the Jews were called, Zionist for Zionism [ ] I used to address them by request because I was the only Don in Oxford who as it were had tenure, literally alone in 1932 or '33. I used to talk to them, address them [ ] Zionist [ ] and I remained one quite naturally and quite unselfconsciously, if you know what I mean, it seemed to me a perfectly normal thing to believe, I just happened to believe that it was something to believe

in rather than something else, anarchism or something. And then came 1933, the [Peel?] Commission and I hadn't met Weizmann then, I didn't follow that very closely, I felt partition [ ] ...

MI What was your circumstances of your meeting with Weizmann?

IB Perfectly accidental. I was made a member of a thing called 'The Friends of the Hebrew University' by a very idealistic man called Norman [Bentwich?] who was a sweet [ ] clever Liberal who was Attorney General in Palestine and earned the mandate and then – because no Arab could be given equal status because they weren't good enough, had to go; and they were shot even, of course in the groin or thigh, and they wanted him to give a [ ] one of these pure [ ] in our characters – touching rather, but silly: and he made me a member of this body and I was [ ] a Don by then and so quite well known academically and he asked me to propose a vote – second a vote of thanks to Mrs Sieff, the wife of Israel Sieff in whose most luxurious flat in Park Lane there was a meeting of the Friends of Hebrew University addressed by Herbert Samuel, by the High Commissioner of Palestine was called Field Marshall Walker, may have been the Attorney General, Sir Somebody Walker who was rather friendly to Jews and all [ ] of course, and Weizmann. And I had never met any of these persons before. I shook hands with Samuel which led to nothing at all and then was presented to Weizmann by Bentwich. Weizmann must have heard about my existence because he then – I can remember when I proposed the vote of thanks what I longed to say is, 'The first thing we think about when we think about Rebecca Sieff is that she's very, very, very rich!' I kept these things through my head, [MI Kind of insane things, you couldn't ...] I thought oh my God what if I said? [Laughter] Would I lose all control! What have I said! I didn't say it, I went off into some sort of platitude. And then he said to me, 'You speak Russian, my wife would like to talk to you, she likes to talk Russian. Will you come to tea?' That was 1938, not before, maybe in '39, I'm thinking when it would have been. I think it was something like early '39 even, as late as that. Then I went to tea.

He was a great flirt, Weizmann. If he wanted to capture people, he proceeded to do so. In a very velvety, extremely seductive voice, he began telling me stories about life. Of course I looked at him with awe, in a worshipful manner, anyway because of course I am a hero worshipper as I told you by nature anyway. He was head of the movement, *highly* intelligent, very amusing and a statesman. He was that, he was a sort of great man of a powerful kind and what he said was extremely interesting. Cosy he was not (he was with me, later). Quite jolly, not solemn, cynical [MI: Shrewd] and cynical about politics and so on, and funny, and not at all kind: [.....] if he didn't need people, [he] threw them in the gutter, rather like Winston. Well – and then I went to tea with [.....], I had tea [?with them] a second time, and then – er – maybe a third time, anyhow he recruited me in some way although I wasn't given anything to do. And then the war started and I used to go and see him in the Dorchester Hotel where by that time he lived; and I remember that when I came back from America in, I suppose, early September I went to the Dorchester, there was a tremendous air raid, I longed to go to the air raid shelter and he paid *no* attention to all this terrible noise going on, none. [MI: He just sat there] – what? – [MI: he just sat there in the hotel room] – went on talking. I was too ashamed to confess my fears; the anti aircraft guns in Hyde Park probably made more noise than the bombs but he carried on talking [MI Can you remember at any stage ...?] I was charmed by him.

MI You were charmed by him but can you remember at any stage a kind of concerted discussion by him about what would happen to European Jewry?

IB No, no, all I can tell you is that he never talked about it. In 1938 when the last Zionist Congress occurred, maybe in '39 in Basle or somewhere, a lot of people came from Eastern Europe. They said good-bye to each other very tearfully because they thought some of them might never see each other again, they had some

premonition, minded very badly, the Germans in '39. They did go back, Germany, Poland, Rumania, where they came from. The partings were very, apparently – I never went to a Zionist Congress in my life – their partings were very touching. Well Chaim charmed me and I thought he was a great man and I thought he was absolutely right about the Jews; sober, practical and balanced and very pro British, he thought they were the ...

MI And not an intellectual? Very much a man of [IB Not at all] action, strategies, plans.

IB Sometimes people think he was – I mean the wife, extremely angry with him would say something in some article in encyclopaedia which Chaim had written saying he was not at all intellectual. He wasn't. Poor Ben Gurion, who was a peasant type, because he imagined that Weizmann was intellectual, began to take an interest in Indian love poetry, Plato, but he also wanted to come up with – found an illusion. Weizmann was a [ ] inventor, I mean he may have read Nietzsche in his childhood, youth, never talked about books or what was inside books, never, never. No more than [ ] don't know the name for it, he was an absolutely totally practical man, an extremely good judge of character, knew what he was doing.

MI When did you renew contact with him after the war?

IB He had no sleepless nights I don't believe [MI Really?], well he may have done like Wordsworth, he entirely took an interest in people so far as I could they could help the Movement. He liked pretty women, that was not too serious; a bundle of letters began to appear after he died because the archive didn't want them to be sold. Then when the – 1939 in Oxford, when the white paper was published, early 1939, which stopped Zionism in effect. What it said was that immigration was to continue for another five years, limited scale, but not after that [ ] agreed, [ ] going to happen, which in effect was a kind of renunciation of the whole thing. My friend



Namier, I told, a man called MacDonald who was the author of the white paper in his office [ ] Oxford and he – have I told you this story? – he talked to me in Oxford and he said, ‘Malcolm said to me in the Athenaeum, Hello Lewis, how are you? I said, All right, how are you, Malcolm? Malcolm said, What are you doing, Lewis? I said I am writing a book. What is it called? It is called ‘The Two MacDonalds, a Study in Treachery.’ [Laughter] Let me tell you if he said he said it, he said it. Very rude, very arrogant but I mean – [MI And very right]. Anyway when that happened I remember talking to a man called – this is roughly when? This is really St James’ Palace Conference it’s called, I think it must have been late ‘39 this must be around, and the British were afraid of the Arabs [ ] for obvious reasons, war was coming and they didn’t want any trouble with the Arabs, perfectly intelligible what they did but it ruined the Jews. And a man called [Bealy?] who was the Chief anti Zionist in the Foreign Office he was , he was a lecturer in Southampton, taken on by Toynbee in the History of National Affairs which had been converted into a kind of think tank for the Foreign Office, and I used to talk to him about it. He was very anti Zionist but quite a nice man, not at all anti Semitic and we used to talk about what would happen and I would then become very concerned. And in America during the war I was simply a hundred per cent Zionist and nor did I conceal it and everyone in the British Embassy knew I was. I didn’t have to be – I saw after the war that the man who – er – the Minister who said I was really suitable to be employed by the British Government, said he was an Oxford Don and non Zionist Jew, very firmly one, so that’s a mistake. He wouldn’t have been employed otherwise. But – er – he never saw any Jews; and in America during the war I saw Felix Frankfurter who was a Zionist, I saw Weizmann when he was there but not many – no American Zionists much. [MI What about Stephen Wise or ...] No, I may have met him once or twice. But I met Ben Gurion on an occasion.

MI What was your impression? A peasant?

IB Balkan, not really able to read or write much, Balkan leader, peasant leader of a powerful kind.

MI That's what made him great in so many ways.

IB Red faced peasant leader of an energetic kind who knew what he represented, knew [ ] and jealous of and unfriendly to Weizmann, you see he was a sort of gentleman they thought. He wasn't. The point about Weizmann, he was never comfortable except among Yiddish speaking Jews, roughly speaking Eastern Europe. All right with me because I came of the right stock, I knew what they were like. I didn't speak Yiddish but ...

MI How comfortable was he with [ ], how comfortable was he with ...

IB He loved them, he adored them in a romantic way. He wanted them buried in a corner of the [ ] because their Aunt's father he knew came from – he thought they were marvellous; he was proud of them, pleased with them, sentimental about them, and that's why he felt happy in a kind of idealistic way; he wasn't cosy with them but he liked being there.

MI But you didn't speak Yiddish with him so you couldn't have been in his inner circle.

IB No, no, not quite, not quite; but I knew the form of life, I knew what these people were. He could talk quite freely to me, in English, yes. But so. It was he who cracked the famous joke: to be a Zionist one need not be mad but it helps. [Laughter] He also – er – oh yes ...

MI And when did you become active in Zionist questions – it began after the war?

IB Well not active before the war; except for these Friends of the Hebrew University, it was very marginal, nothing to do with – er – I mean I wasn't thought of as an active Zionist anyway, no, no. I became active – I never was active, I just was one. I never paid dues to a Zionist party, I never went to Congresses, I never went to meetings.

MI Did you take part in any meetings, discussions, about British policy towards Palestine in '47 '46, '47...?

IB Yes, yes – no, no I didn't. I used to go and see Weizmann in the Dorchester after the war and I used to meet I suppose with the Sieffs and people there, they were part of his entourage. The only time I ever went to a meeting about that was in 19 – the six day war – No! Sorry, not at all – when Jerusalem was besieged in '48 and there was a meeting of a thing called the Anglo Jewish Association which was by nature full of respectable British Jews, no Zionists at all [ ] they were also very worried. And I went to a meeting with one or two sort of, you know, respectable Jewish Members of Parliament who were not Zionists and – er – oh I don't know, sort of journalists and people, my distant cousin, Mr [ ] who wrote a life of George Orwell [ ] and there we questioned what to do; and I said I would write a letter to Amery who was a colleague of mine at All Souls, a hundred per cent Zionist always, and I would tell him come [ ] and rescue these people, say the massacre of these Jews in Jerusalem is really too much. That's all, well no such thing happened, well the Jews won but it didn't look like that. The only time I ever lifted a [MI A finger] – I've written articles on the subject when instructed but I never took part in political action, never.

MI Do you remember any article particularly?

IB Yes, people always want to – er – certainly. Before the war, nothing; after the war, during the war, nothing as you may imagine; then after the war I wrote an article called 'Jewish Slavery and

Emancipation', an article presented to a festschrift for the University of Jerusalem and printed in the Jewish Chronicle, which I dictated in two days uncorrected. I never had it reprinted because I thought it would cause too much fuss among the Jews – I've told you about it, surely? [MI No] Oh well, when we get our next meeting I will repeat it to you. It was translated into French for some odd reason and appeared in a volume of Jewish letters by me, only in French. Well I could see that – I showed it to Keith Joseph who said, 'You can say that kind of thing but you can't write it' – that I remember. No, I'll tell you, it was twenty years of the [ ] occasion, Hebrew University to which I was vaguely – I'd been to see it in '34, I went to Palestine as I told you. [MI Yes you did] Well all right. It's two theses – how much time have we? Six, I'd better go, you'd better go.

MI I think I should and we'd better ...

IB It's a quite a good subject.

MI Jewish Slavery and Emancipation will be our subject next time.

IB It's an article which compares the Jews to hunchbacks and I can tell you why, it's not in the article. It's because of [ ], you know who I mean? Once told me about Otto Kahn, father of my great friend Mrs Ryan and my other friend Lady – what was she called? – er – wife of a British General – er – Otto Kahn was once walking on Fifth Avenue with a hump backed inventor called Steinmetz, quite famous but not a Jew, not a Jew, I don't know what he invented but anyway, and they passed Temple Emanuel and Otto said – probably baptised by that time – said, 'Many years ago,' in a rather pincey way, 'many years ago I belonged to this community'. Steinmetz said, 'Many years ago I was a hunchback.' [Laughter] Well, I told [ ] who said that Otto Kahn paid his way into clubs and things, I mean there he was [ ] terrible debt, I mean I agreed with him, there's nothing like contempt which real bosses have for Jews who then creep into their world and there may be anti Semitism

but there's some justification for it. So long as Jews behave like, as long as Jews grovel, they're bound to be kicked. My thesis about Jews is simple; if you – first you get kicked because you are a Jew because of killing Christ, then you fidget; because you fidget you are kicked and because you're kicked, you fidget. No way out, so [ ] real [ ] quite an interesting kind. Who are you getting away from here?

*End of tape*

## MI TAPE 17

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Jewishness

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Let me begin with the most central point which Aline, more or less, told me about: my alleged feelings as an outsider in the world to which I came as a stranger etc. and its relevance to my view of the Jews as hunchbacks etc. This really is not the case. The thing about me, the thought of which occasionally embarrasses me, is that I adjust myself too rapidly and easily to almost any group of persons I am thrown together with. I have no recollection what happened when I was in Russia of course but let me tell you, thrown into a group of English schoolboys in Surbiton who were as remote from me as anyone could be, I felt no sense of alien – ness, I fitted in very quickly, became quite popular and felt totally at home among them all. I played cricket and football quite easily and naturally and accepted all their values – followed them whole uncritically. So too later: the only moment at which something unlike this happened was when [as I think I told you] having been accepted by Westminster, when my Latin coach told me that the name Isaiah might cause boys to tease me and mock me and would it not be better if I changed it to something ordinary English, like John or Robert or Henry – I then thought no, I don't wish to go to a school where this is liable to happen. That was the only moment of as it were a foreigner's self conscious resistance ever occurred in my life I think, and so boldly I chose St Paul's where there were plenty of Jews, some from abroad – no, some whose parents came from abroad. I was totally happy in St Paul's and fitted in from the beginning. I had only two Jewish friends, all the others were English Gentiles – the English Gentiles were a great

deal closer to me than the two Jews – one of them was only half Jewish and was killed as a pilot in the Battle of Britain; the other called Ettinghausen then became a Zionist, became called Etna and became a high Israeli official Ambassador in Paris etc – I still know him of course, he's my age but our relationship has become very, very remote. My friends in St Paul's were naturally English. I never felt alien, so far as I can recollect of course – for one second. After that, Oxford. Corpus Christi College had scarcely any Jews and no foreigners, mainly boys from the middle public schools from Winchester downwards, no Eton or Harrow. From the first week after some feeling of strangeness but immense relief at being free at last and not at my parents' home I made almost too many friends almost too easily and there is no doubt that during my entire period there I felt totally at ease, completely natural and nobody ever tried to embarrass me or talk to me about my strange origins or non-Christian religion, ever. Odd but true. There were Jews in Oxford then to the number of I think seventy or eighty and I was of course always a Zionist from the beginning but my Zionism entirely consisted in the general idea of getting a Jewish State going and had no relation to any particular Jews or my relations with them. Again this may sound odd but it is true. There was a Zionist Society in Oxford to which I regularly once a year addressed myself with Zionist propaganda. I met these people and was perfectly amiable to them and they to me but we did not belong to the same society, I did not make real friends with them.

There was indeed a Jew called Beddington at Corpus of a fairly old British Jewish family originally called Moses. He did come and see me very late at night and told me how awkward he felt about being a Jew, how he hated it and how he hoped that nobody was taking him for one. In fact nobody did. Incidentally there's a funny story: there was a perhaps a not very nice schoolmaster at Rugby where Roy Beddington [still alive, a painter] was, who used to say to the boys, 'And the Lord said unto Moses, Good morning Mr Beddington.'

I was very sorry for Roy B but felt this could never happen to me. Anyway I made friends in other Colleges, none from my old school

except the two I mentioned. I presumed that everyone knew I was a Jew – I have been one one hundred per cent from the very beginning as indeed any child of my parents couldn't help not be – I didn't go to Chapel, still – nobody ever brought it up in any connection however polite and friendly and yet I had very good and genuinely intimate friends at Corpus at this time. When I moved into digs it was with three Marlburians, one from Corpus, two from elsewhere, with one of whom, Bernard Spencer – quite a good poet – I remained on intimate terms for the rest of his life [he fell out of a train from Vienna while working for the British Council, nobody knows how, whether voluntarily or by accident]. The only Jew in Oxford I really knew was Herbert Hart who was a very marginal one and although we talked about how boring he found his Minister's sermons in Bradford we never talked about Judaism much, and very great people including the last Warden of New College and the last Master of [ ] of both of which he'd been a fellow had any idea that he was a Jew. I discovered that when I went to his funeral – he did not hide it but he was super English. After that, two months at New College and then All Souls. Again you might think that being the first Jew ever to be made a fellow this would somehow come up. He didn't. Again I felt all too much at home, particularly my contemporaries and made lifelong friends of John Sparrow, Douglas Jay, Goronwy Rees, he and Bowen, John Austin and to a certain extent, before our breach about Communism, with Christopher Hill who was violently anti Zionist in whose room I argued about this occasionally. I have to report that the important persons among the Senior Fellows who governed England, Halifax, Geoffrey Dawson editor of the Times, [S?] then not yet a Lord, Lionel Curtis the fanatical Imperialist, Dougal, Malcolm who succeeded Cecil Rhodes as Head of the South Africa Company and was a civilised and amiable old rogue; all these people loved being at All Souls, loved coming back as to the Old School, talked to the Junior Fellows easily and sometimes quite interestingly and tried to behave as if they were still at school, still Junior Fellows, relations with the old and young were very good. [?] later Master of the Rolls who made more money at the



English bar than anyone before him, even Simon, I think was probably a Roman Catholic anti Semite, and Hart, but none of this ever emerged. I only learned of it in connection with the blackballing of Hart from a Club in London as a Jew in which apparently he had played some part.

I think you will not find it easy to credit all this but it is the absolute truth.

Then New York, the war, New York and Washington, my friend Guy Burgess and all that. When I arrived in New York as an official I discovered that my post had been created for me by John Wheeler Bennett for he was extremely affectionate about me in his autobiography and Aubrey Morgan, a Welsh patriot, brother –in – law of Lindbergh. Then he decided that I was suitable for the Non U clans of the United Kingdom, other people would deal with the WASPS but I might be suitable for Catholics, Jews, Negroes, Mormons and other minor tribes without the law. In this connection they consulted Weizmann and Frankfurter, I had known Frankfurter from his Oxford visits in the thirties and of course I became a friend, an admirer of Weizmann since I'd known him in about 1938. They both testified that I could make it so I was told later that I would be suitable. But they certainly had nothing to do with the initiation of the appointment, nothing whatever, whatever you may have been told or read.

Anyway to go back. My friends in New York in 1941 such as they were, and there were not many, were my colleagues in the office, all English of course, no Jews, no foreigners except me; and one or two American friends I had somehow made. Then the Embassy and Washington, 1942. You might easily assume that the Foreign Office which was violently anti Zionist with few exceptions might form a group into which I didn't naturally fit as a Jew – they're always accused of anti Semitism, as a Zionist not altogether without reason. Again I felt totally at ease, not only John Foster and Tony Rumbold, my friends from earlier days who were in post there, but the other members of the Diplomatic Corps; and of course in the Information Service in which I worked, behaved to me as if I was one of them and I behaved to them in similar

fashion. My immediate assistant, Archie Mackenzie, a Buchmanite [Oxford Groups] later a British diplomat, was as close to me as anybody; somehow the fact that I was a Jew and a Russian which he announced to everybody, knew perfectly well never came up, or of it did, in a quite casual and natural fashion – you know me well enough to know that I'd be unlikely to conceal anything about my either origins or my opinions, e.g. my Zionist views were known to some of the Diplomatic Corps but they did not seem to mind. Now and then they would ask me to find out from 'your Zionist friends' what agitation was going on among them, but nothing beyond that.

The Americans – I made the best friends I ever had very quickly indeed. I met Joe Alsop – no! First the New Dealers; Benjamin V Cohen, a prominent New Deal lawyer who had high office under Roosevelt, wonderful noble figure whom I met quite early on in Washington as a friend of John Foster; Philip Graham and his wife Kay, now the famous Mrs Kay Graham, then a left wing couple who were very, very New Deal type, he very left wing, charming, brilliant and interesting with whom I immediately made friends; Donnie, Donald Hiss, brother of Alger; Edward Prichard who worked in the White House, again a life long friend; Rau, a really noble Jewish lawyer who in turn of all the principal New Dealers [he was never thought of as a Jew either oddly enough]. And then – and then the other end, the wicked Mrs Longworth, daughter of Theodore Roosevelt, a right wing hostess but a grande dame of the first order, brilliantly amusing and witty and charming and distinguished, politically extremely right wing; and then Joe Alsop the columnist who became a really intimate friend till his dying day. I think I was probably the best friend, the most intimate he ever had, with all his quirks. I was very close to him at all times. Then Charles Bohlen the diplomat with whom and with whose wife, Aline and I became very great friends – they remained life long friends also; and Johnny Walker, the Director of the Mellon Gallery, married to a Scottish noblewoman – daughter of Lord Perth, a catholic peer, Scottish catholic peer who had been Secretary to the League of Nations, an Ambassador in Rome –

when Johnny, who was sickly, at one time thought he really was dying of some disease, he told Margaret – his wife, that if he died she was to be sure to marry me for we would be very happy together. All this I am telling you in order to tell you how surprising it is that I was so cosy and utterly unselfconscious in these societies. The idea of being odd, different, watching them as it were from outside as Proust watched the French Aristocracy was totally not the case.

Then back to England, All Souls – no! New College, All Souls. I used to be thought of before the war as a very Donnish Don, more Don than anything else. I remember being accused by Lord Hailsham, my colleague at All Souls in the thirties, of being such a Don, such a terrifically typical Don, I have never met a Don as Donnish as you; still we all love you, etc. After the war I was not so Donnish. There were of course a few Fellows of All Souls who didn't like me, possible because I was a foreigner and a Jew though they never never let on – EL Woodward; Humphrey Sumner, the Historian, later Warden; Brierly, JL Brierly, professor of International law; but they thought of me as a talkative flibberty gibbet who would never do any serious work in his life and disapproved of me I think for that reason but maybe as a Jew as well for all I know. All I can tell you, after I became, after I was a success in Washington that attitude totally altered, they all became extremely friendly, very polite. So much for worldly values in Academia. It has been so for the rest of my Oxford life. The curious thing about me, that I knew very few Jews then or now; acquaintances, yes but friends, no. With all my Zionist passion I have friends among Israeli's but English Jews, American Jews, only Frankfurter, Ben Cohen; up to a very limited point, Keith Joseph at All Souls. I was the only Jew elected to All Souls, I was the only one who was a tutor and fellow of a College since the days of the late Professor Alexander in the nineties and yet it somehow wasn't commented on ...

A break occurs in the tape

... before now. No, the idea that I somehow felt an outsider ever in my life is simply not so. Not at all.

Now about the hunchbacks. The idea came as you know from that funny joke about Otto Kahn [ ] what was very pro British Ministers in the American Embassy in London who realised it was a bit anti Semitic as a story but safe to tell me – indeed as it was; that and Moses Hess who was the first to preach to the American Jews about the pathetic, useless efforts to become assimilated Germans – didn't have much effect on them as you know, some German Jews to the end felt one hundred and fifty per cent German; but Hess told them that it was their long noses, their curly hair which would never make the Germans accept them and so it has proved. These stories together produced the image of the hump which perhaps was an over violent metaphor but I like these metaphors like the hedgehog and the fox in concentrated things. And myself, I never felt in the least a bit hump ridden, not even the tiniest hump. I felt it about certain American Jews, the friends of the New York Times, Walter Lippmann who terribly didn't want to be Jews but knew they couldn't avoid it, and others like them. England but not very many, not many had prominent people. Hunchbacks are entirely confined to Jews who have what Diana Cooper once succinctly called to me, 'Jewish trouble' – her very clear formula – among those who did not suffer from it, the pious fundamentalists, the Zionists, Herbert Samuel, Hore-Belisha, politicians of that kind not at all; but the judge, Lord Cohen, my friend Victor Rothschild, David Pryce-Jones, those to some degree, yes.

When one is so complete a Jew as I am in my own consciousness, one is free from this and that is true of several Russian Jews. I knew it was not a universal Jewish characteristic, far from it, but a very widespread one all the same. To me the hump has nothing to do with being an outsider which according to Aline you somehow connect.

Now about my snobbery and clubs. I expect I am something of a snob, most people are and I am perfectly aware that I am pleased to be friends with people who are distinguished lineage, not very pleased but pleased. You say David Cecil; nobody who was at New

College with him could have failed to know him quite well; as for me, we became intimate friends. I was his best friend and he mine at any rate in Oxford and life long it was and his being a Lord may have had something to do with what attracted me in his character but was not a consciousness of his title if you see what I mean: so too Lord Oxford, a gentle, grey, catholic scholar of Balliol, brought up by priests and women, a friend of various friends of mine in Oxford at that time among the undergraduates – I was quite a popular Don among the ‘smart set’ I’m afraid, that is I used to be asked to lunch by Father D’Arcy or Ronnie Knox or Maurice Bowra or Roy Harrod or Freddie Ayer. Lord Oxford was a minor figure in that world but he took to me very warmly and told me about Archilochus, hence the hedgehog and the fox – his being a Lord really was irrelevant. [ ] the smart set of course partly sons of peers and I graduated from them to London Hostesses during my smart social period which undoubtedly occurred, but let me go back to clubs for a moment. I never tried to become a member of any club in my life. Before the war I lived with my parents when in London and if I met, wanted to meet people, met them in little Soho restaurants. After the war and some degree of public position where people wanted to see me whom I didn’t particularly want to give lunch to or spend more than an hour with. If I needed somewhere I didn’t look round for anything but suddenly my friend, Sylvester Gates a famous lawyer and banker asked if I’d like to become a member of the Reform Club, so I said yes and was elected and there I add it was a perfectly nice club except that whenever I went there I was invariably or almost invariably surrounded by terrible bores who fixed on me and I found it difficult to get time to write the letter. Some were indeed Jews, some were not. It was there I had a series of political rows with Anthony Blunt and Guy Burgess after the war but never mind that. Then I was asked by my friend Raimund von Hofmannsthal if I would like to become a member of his club at St James’s. I said I would like to become a member of any club where I didn’t know people, could go in, have lunch, read a newspaper, write two letters and go. I was then asked by my friend John Wheeler Bennett would

I like to become a member of his club [ ] so I said the same. Then the episode occurred of which you know in which I received an ambiguous letter from Oliver Lyttleton in which he said how wonderful it would be if you ever became a member of the St James's of which he was Chairman but that he'd heard a rumour from the secretary that there was 'a prejudice against members of pure race.' I won't bore you because I've told you already what I replied and what then happened but I withdrew my name immediately: so I was never formally blackballed because I never came up for election but apparently things were written on the page on which my name originally appeared which caused two members of the club to resign in indignation. Ten years later as you know I was offered Honorary Fellowship, Membership of the club and accepted but made it plain that I would never go there in my life. Then they went bankrupt, joined Brooks's and all the Jews in St James's now crowd the corridors of Brooks's – that just was funny outcome. But I never tried to become a member of a club I said yes if anyone suggested it or no as the case might be. I have refused at least four smart clubs, dining clubs in particular just because I thought I would be terribly bored and would have to go to London too much. The Garrick is another story. The second wife of Lord Rothschild said to my wife what a pity it was that one could never bring wives to any club but the Garrick, and she said wouldn't it be nice if I joined it and said so to her. Then she put up two of her friends to do it, I was rung up and asked if I was serious, I said oh yes, Aline would love it, became a member by some fast rate machinery – other people had to wait years I was told – and did use it for the purpose of inviting ladies and wives and so on and I am very happy in all of them. As for the Athenaeum, I complained to Lord Robins about my having time to myself in the Reform Club, he rapidly made me a member of the Athenaeum and I was duly grateful. But I never, never asked for it, so the idea that I aimed to become a member of clubs is not the case believe me.

Among the list of your peers comes Lord Halifax who was never a friend but because we used to chat at All Souls as all Junior

Fellows did and then, when he was Ambassador he quite enjoyed having me to meals, we did develop quite a friendly relation, Imperial man which in some ways he was, but a friend, no. The femme fatale who I loved, Lady Patricia, was a peer's daughter. You think I might not have fallen in love if she had been a commoner? A very unlikely hypothesis, besides which she was enormously ...

*Side B [sides A and B are combined in the digital recording]*

... and poverty. I am something of an example to some degree but not in the way I think, you think, that is my point. Jewishness did not have that dominant influence when all I was and did and thought and felt as according to Aline you think or you say. Whatever burden I ever carried and not an attribute however felt, made a difference to my philosophical opinions, to my friendships, to any form of life and where I lived. I felt a Jew exactly as I felt I had two legs, two arms, two eyes – nothing to be proud or ashamed of, just an attribute, something one was, something one couldn't help be. Some people didn't like it but I was perfectly comfortable with it always. Consciously it didn't make a difference to anything I was or did. To me it's odd that it should be so – a Jew born in Latvia, St Petersburg, then England, then Washington etc. etc. and yet believe me, really fitted in to every society I was ever a member of almost too comfortably, too frictionlessly. You could say that it indicated a certain failure of personality, of strengths of personality or the like, it is so. I forgot to add that among the factors which entered the notion of the hunchback was Namier's wonderful phrase used to me about English Jews as 'The order of trembling Israelites,' OTI, which Charles Bohlen and I – no, Chip Bohlen and I in Washington change into OTAG, order of trembling amateur Gentiles – Walter Lippmann and Co. He knew perfectly well what I meant and I was delighted to enjoy myself in talking about him and other Gentiles about it. They may have regarded it as a mild form of anti Semitism and I daresay it was and is.

These I think are the only points Aline made, there may be others, they may come up when she finishes the book which she is reading with evident enjoyment. Do you feel outside as half Canadian, half Russian? I don't believe it. The same is true for me. The case of Jews is often worse. I reply to this letter merely to convince you of the truth of what I say for the benefit of your estimate of me. I honestly don't think that I've exaggerated this or invented it to protect myself against some fearful dark inner complex which in fact threatens me. Now you know it. I don't believe that anyone who's ever known me ever doubted that I was a Jew but oddly enough I think half the Embassy in Washington and half All Souls did not think it. [ ]

Three post scripts. Number one.

Aline thinks that I ought not to have written to you at all about all this, that subjects of biographies have no right to tell their biographers how to interpret their lives. But I must say that I do not agree and I hope that you agree with me. If not what can I do but apologise for inflicting this upon you and ask you to ignore it, or at worst ask me a few new questions which might perhaps induce you to modify some of your ideas about me. Anyway I apologise for sending it to you, I do hope it doesn't irritate you, of course I don't mean it to do but one never knows the effect of one's words. Forgive me, forgive me, forgive me.

Post script two.

If there is one thing about my life which perhaps you haven't stressed sufficiently if Aline is right and that is the enormous part that music has played in it since say the age of fourteen or fifteen. My life has been lived against a background of indeed as part of a tissue of musical listening – I play no instrument but since my school days I have loved music to a very very high degree: listening to Schnabel playing Beethoven or the Busch Quartet transformed the limits of my experience, widened them, gave me a new sense of what art is, above all of course what music can be. They are not the only influences. I have listened to more soloists, chamber



music, opera, symphonies, choral works than almost I think anyone living – this may sound an extravagant claim. My only point is that it is an intrinsic part of my life, not just one of its great pleasures. If you want to know more about that, do talk to me about this as it wouldn't impinge on the general picture but might add to it. So next time we meet, bring it up if you want to or not, as you please.

Post script three.

I suddenly thought in this connection that while the BBC keep plying me for various interviews on TV and radio, all which I systematically refuse, a programme on what the part that music has played in my life might perhaps be something I could just do – without illustrations of course. I think I could talk about a succession of musical experiences and in this connection I should like to add, if I haven't already, that while snobbery may indeed [be] an element in me, hero worship is much more such: I've had such heroes as Stravinsky, Toscanini, Edmund Wilson, Weizmann, Pasternak, Akhmatova, not quite but nearly Brodsky, [ ] in whose presence I felt humble and whose every move I followed with dedicated admiration and fascination. I really am a hero worshipper, more than I suspect anyone else you've ever known. ... met Lord Halifax, Lord David Cecil and Lord Oxford and sundry other Lords, particularly Labour Lords have not been objects of worship – whatever made me like some of them was due to quite different motives. There now, I must stop. Once again, forgive me. This really is the end.

## MI TAPE 18

Conversation date: 5 April 1989

Date transcribed:

Transcriber: Esther Johnson

Subjects covered:

Israel, Jews, Palestine 1942-9

Anti-Semitism in the FO

Wartime Policy towards Palestine

Weizmann

Job offers in Israel

Yitzak Zadeh

Visit to Israel 1947

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IB Are you dining with a lady on Friday?

MI I am, yes, are you?

IB Yes, yes and Bob Silvers and his Countess ...

MI Oh, and his Countess.

IB The Countess of Dudley.

MI Oh, Countess of Dudley.

IB That's where they live, in effect but not quite, it's very odd, you have never met her?

MI No.

IB I wonder what your reaction will be. [MI laughs] I really do wonder. [ ] dentist, I'm brave for the moment. Now we were on [ ] an hour ago, a straight café society.

MI Straight café society. What does that mean?

IB Weidenfeld describes it as ‘Nescafé society’. [Laughter] Not even [ ] ...

MI [Laughing] That’s right! Good joke!

IB ... or Haag!

MI [Laughing] Decaffeinated society!

IB No café society means, that’s what it means, like coffee table, it means smart, not quite first rate, second class, frivolous [ ] corrupt, jolly, amusing but not very amusing.

MI And what you’re saying is it surprises you that a man of Mr Silvers’ depth should be seen with ....

IB Depth, it doesn’t matter, he has other qualities. I’ll tell you. She [ ], she was a rich [ ] who married [ ], sent away during the war to Italy, then to Switzerland, then married [Ludlow?] who then married [Jackie ?] Then to [ ], met Lord Dudley, one of the most horrible men that ever I met; he was tough, clever, terribly nasty and very amusing – and a real shit of the old fashioned kind. Not at all [ ] and very very rich and permanently bored [ ] Peter Brook and then she was with him for seventeen years and finally made the title of money(?). She had seen a great many pictures, heard a great many operas, very very musical, remembers all singers of all operas, her taste is not contemptible although [ ] the other two. She worked very hard at culture and that impresses Bob anyway. It was a partly physical relation, too, no doubt. She lived in [ ], she lived in New York, much together, originally a casual relation and later it became involved, totally. She’s a good sort, not bad, but seventeen years with Lord Dudley could hardly [ ] the coming Countess ...

MI She's earned it in your view? [Laughter]

IB More than. [ ] was quite fond of him. She was a friend of Mrs Simpson, so they had taken together with Bob, fall (?) of the paradox. 'Oh no, no, I'd rather see you without her.' I can put up with her, she was a tremendous self-adjuster.

MI What do you mean?

IB Adjusts herself to any company there is, very good at fitting in.

MI Which is a suspect virtue [ ]

IB Jews will try [ ] they aren't particular (?) [quote in Italian] and that's how it goes on. One of their great weaknesses is excessive adaptability, adaptable is what she is. But what I mean is that before she in effect married Bob, she lived in, I think maybe, the Bahamas where people used to come for Canasta parties, if you see what I mean, and then suddenly Bob. He went there too because he was a friend of the Heinz's, an element where Bob Silvers, which is [ ], brilliant. I adore him because there's an element of – he doesn't really notice much, who is who and what is what. I mean he knows [ ], terrible people, enjoys it and doesn't take it in, it all rubs off him; but his editorial and his intellectual and even his critical attitudes are quite impeccable.

MI He is a good editor.

IB Best there is, easily.

MI But he's very hard working.

IB Non stop, Saturday and Sunday.

MI Yes, what I am impressed by is, he's very hard working

IB He telephones you across five thousand miles, or ten thousand miles for a comma. And he doesn't brag about himself at all, he's very modest in a way, you see; and his knowledge, who is who and who is suitable for what, in those matters he is extremely skilful, very good indeed. Oh, I love him, no matter what you think of Grace – that is the name of the Countess.

MI Grace, Countess of Dudley – how wonderful. Well, I look forward to this.

IB Quite right. There won't be Alfred, who is in Paris.

MI Oh dear, that's a shame.

IB But I committed these crimes of going to the Richter concert, the last one was very odd. He was in an angry state, looked [ ], played ugly and wouldn't come out for a bow. He did once but that endless cheering, clapping, hysteria from the audience, ugh, awful. But something abnormal there.

MI What did he play?

IB Well, I'll tell you, he was going to – there were four concerts in all. The first concert was in St James', Piccadilly, it was a memorial concert for Walter Legge for which one didn't have to pay, by invitation of Scwarzkopf with his lady wife. The second one was the same programme in the Festival Hall. He played Schubert and – there must have been something else – er, I think it was [ ]. One of the odd Schubert sonatas, the G Major sonata, difficult, peculiar strange work and er, – what else did he play, did he play ....? No! You see, my memory! Aline, can't you remember? Then the same thing at the Fitzroy Hall. Then, I can't even remember what the encore was whatever – it wasn't Debussy? It wasn't Russian. Then there was going to be a concert – then he played at the National Gallery, it was a private gathering more or less for which you didn't

have to pay and there he played a rather severe programme to me of [Shimanovsky?] Prokofiev, Hindemith ...

MI Oh, my God.

IB ... and – Shostakovich. Then that was going to be repeated in The Barbican but he was obviously persuaded by his managers not to do it, so that was nothing but Mozart and Chopin. The Mozart was very beautifully ... the Chopin, rather curious, neurotic, difficult, that's remarkable. All the same he was a genius. [ ] He was very troubled, what the Russian's call, er ...

MI Not [Russian word]?

IB Which means, 'sombre'. No. There's a poem by Pushkin in which dark German genius comes in, it's called, it's missive or message – pathania(?) [ ] and it's about the eighteenth century, about Voltaire, Diderot, very local colour. His image of Voltaire is a skeleton wandering from cemetery to cemetery.

MI That's very good! Very good.

IB 'Dieser rot!' These were men who impassioned toward what a Pythian priest is on a tripod, mounted on a tripod preaching. Dieser rot. Something [Ermatsky ?] gave me. The French are lucid, the Germans are imaginatively (?) dark, the German ideal. But what were we talking about?

MI We should get back to ...

IB Your appearances, I was going to tell you something about them because I did see you with somebody. Was it John MacMillan (?)?

MI Or was it Susan Sontag?

IB No, no, that's .... way back ... you've had that. [Laughter]

MI I must get you back to finish about Israel ...

IB Come on, go on, go on.

MI ... because I wanted to get a sense, which I haven't got so far, of how you reacted to British policy in Palestine in '47, '48 ....

IB Well yes, of course yes.

MI ... to what degree it impinged upon your life ...

IB Even before, in the thirties.

MI Well I think we've talked a little bit about ...

IB About the white paper ...

MI I meant really post war when you get back from Washington. and Moscow ...

IB Well we'll go back, one of the reasons as I told you, one of my reasons for not remaining in the Foreign Office was A, that I didn't want to live two lives and B, because I chose to [ ] a Zionist. It was bound to come, create some conflict by which the Foreign Office's policy would bound to be something which I would feel very strongly about and this would trouble me and make them suspicious. I didn't want I mean to completely identify with them, with the British interests totally which I would be glad to do in a general way [ ] loyal, oddly enough. But I admired them very much, the English. I suppose you ought to look at some point at a speech I made when I got a degree in Jerusalem which is printed somewhere about the three strands of which my life is composed, the Russian, [ ], English.

MI Yes I know that speech.

IB You've read it? Anyway, now wait a minute, what happened to me? In Washington towards the end of the war I realised that – I read these despatches by British Agents, Intelligence Agents which were quite anti-Semitic and nonsensical.

MI Nonsensical in what sense?

IB They were talking about [ ] Jewish army [ ] in the end I think it was done and they warned, rightly, the Haganah had become very troublesome when in fact there was a secret army which might rise against the men in power [ ]. And then there's this idea of putting Jews under arms – it was absurd because they were no good at fighting, they were cowardly, they were town bred, they were useless as military material. That's the straight, the old fashioned British, Colonels anti Semitic line. It sprang entirely from the concept of the Jew, not from observation of any kind. You see there's quite a lot of that, there was a total, I mean useless, there was no point having regiments or arming quite apart from the danger this might cause afterwards which was perfectly reasonable ...

MI Slightly contradictory with the other premise, but be that as it may.

IB But it was said, maybe it was all the same Agent! [Laughter] I used to get these things in despatches which passed my hands but I took no notice of them, I thought they were unimportant to Washington [ ] and I then went to the Foreign Office in London and I could see that was it. Then I was affected by – well, it was quite amusing and that was this; I was asked because I was [ ] what advice I would give for interesting American opinion in the direction of the British Government's policy, not of Zionism, that sort of thing. Well, no doubt I could have said, 'I am a hundred percent Zionist and have no intention of forwarding British policy in any way,' that wouldn't be right. No, I was rather frightened of



some sort of explosion in Palestine, I realised that Weizmann was a moderate and Ben Gurion was not and there might really be frightful conflict whether the Jews are Jews, I thought. I think it really was [ ] the British [ ] happened with the Arabs, with the British one side but it was not what it looked like. So I then tried to say that the important thing was to get some moderate Jews, moderate pro Zionist Jews, though I didn't exactly call them that, to talk to moderate Americans who took some interest in Zionism like Morgenthau or Felix Frankfurter who were one hundred percent pro British but concerned about the future so that somehow they could work out some kind of common platform which would be a tolerable platform of discussion, some very sort of good, I mean sort of soft line I took of a wet kind! Do you see what I mean? The result of which was, many thanks, look at my [ ], jolly good idea, the result was that **they sent Freya Stark, who was the most ferocious Arabist you can imagine, to make propaganda against Zionism in the United States, which she did to no effect whatever. And I met her, and we got on very well, and in her despatches back home (which I read afterwards in the Ministry of Information) to her friend – oh, what's her name? she was also a pro-Arab lady [inaudible] – but she said, 'I met Isaiah Berlin. His conversation was very beguiling.' [laughter] It's a compliment – of sorts.**

MI [*laughing*] Of sorts!

IB But her views were not very effective – [*inaudible*] her propoganda. But she said she'd talked to a lot of Senators, who were immediately converted to her point of view – which turned out to be totally false. Maybe their motives were financial or corrupt, but all I can tell you is that they didn't vote in the direction she desired [or possibly 'deserved']. No, British anti-Israeli propoganda was quite real but totally ineffective.

MI You then came back to England, you were by this time friendly with Weizmann?

IB There was one thing during the war which shook me, I didn't quite tell you that, in '43. There was the British official in Cairo who decided that Zionist propaganda was a nuisance and a bore then because he hated its adherence and above all because the Americans appeared to be, not then, but anyhow to be incongruous of our [ ] supporters, they would lobby of a minor kind; and therefore they persuaded the State department in the Foreign Office to produce a joint resolution to be signed by Churchill and Roosevelt to say that Zionist propaganda was an obstacle to the war effort, you see, because it was seen to upset the Arabs and at the end of the war a just solution was found for all these problems. But in the meanwhile, it upset the Arabs to a degree, and that was on the whole obstructed in the Middle East, the war effort against the Germans who had promised the Arabs everything, naturally. And this document was signed by Roosevelt and Churchill, it was. It was never published. And it appeared, I read it and I thought that if that happened, the American Jews would be totally upset. Roosevelt was a hero whom they worshipped for obvious reasons; in fact he didn't like them nearly as much as they believed he did, far from it – I don't say he was anti Semitic – his attitude to the Jews was that of any other gentleman, any American of a WASP-ish kind or that kind of [ ] or that Mrs Roosevelt, was different: she knew and he knew that unless last year's woman from the ghetto voted for him, he might not be re-elected. So he knew perfectly well what to do. [ ] and Jews were mobilised but his opinions I think were socially somewhat different, in fact, very. Be that as it may. It then turned out to be true when even [ ] persuaded him not to [ ] in the family anyway, paid not much attention. And then ...

MI When was that declaration signed in '43?

IB Roosevelt and Churchill. It was a document.

MI And it was '43 that it was signed?

IB I think, roughly, I think summer '43. But what happened then was that somebody told somebody in the White House, I can't remember, Rosenman or somebody who used to write Roosevelt's speeches, who became upset, any Jew would become upset because it created a split; American Jews worshipped Roosevelt and that to be told that what some of them were doing was against the war effort could be deeply upsetting. Well, the [Zions(?)] were gone but half the Jews said, 'No, no you can't,' there'd be a frightful row and it would break into Semitism of an obvious kind – 'Jews Disloyal'; 'Jews Obstruct War Effort'. It wasn't said about the Poles, the Russians, it wasn't said about Ukrainians, why Jews? It centred them out as the only form of rationalist lobbying which America was full of. Every ethnic group had its own [ ].

MI Hideous, to say the least.

IB Selective, yes, very, and it meant splitting them all fundamentally.

MI Why did Churchill sign it?

IB Well he was brighter than he looked and [ ] Foreign Office and Lord North said, 'It's like a war, we can have all the Jews screaming can't we, break off at the end of the war?' And Eden was for it, you see, strongly, [ ] wasn't consulted, nor Wells I don't think one was there by then, they'd gone, sent to Middle Eastern departments and both Foreign ministries (?) And I remember talking about it to somebody who had seen it, I think a man in – I would say some Jew anyway – who also said [ ]. Then Morgenthau was told about it, probably by some Jew who had got wind of it and Morgenthau was very upset and he went to Hull and said 'What's all this?' Hull said he had no idea, hadn't seen it and knew nothing about it. So then he went to the President who said he was also rather vague

about it, hadn't really looked very much, did it more or less automatically, and then it was stopped. The Foreign Office was furious, so were the people in Egypt, in Cairo. Well it was averted at the last moment by what might be called Jewish traitors certainly, and enough about that. But I remember that [ ] was American ambassador in London, it all came round to him, you see, according to the Foreign Office he intended to go to Eden with it but he said he felt very badly about this. He didn't at all like it and he said to old Eden he didn't think it was a very good document, if he wanted to sign it he could, but he wasn't in favour. So it all came out rather odd [ ] what will happen? Will there be a ganging up against the Jews by everybody at the end of the war? I didn't particularly want a Jewish State any more than Weizmann did. I thought, Jewish Home Rule, yes, some kind of Jewish establishment, but State? I wasn't very sure they would govern themselves very successfully.

MI Why is that? Because they were so [ ] the law?

IB Yes, not a political nation, not sure that they could sort of function in a State. I don't know why, I felt dubious, I thought they would do better protected by some major power, against the Arabs really. To be in the sea of Arab hatred which I knew existed, on their own, would expose them to an unenviable fate. But I didn't do anything about that.

MI Was there in your attitude some vestigial sense of attachment to a British connection?

IB Yes, no doubt. There was Josiah Wedgewood, what has become the book called 'The Seventh Dominion' I think. Well, that can be done for the better; they had some kind of vague British/American blanket over them, tent, so that their foreign policy and therefore financial policy was governed as part of a larger entity. They would do better entirely on their own. I remember after it talking to the Speaker of the Israeli parliament who was a man called [Sprintakh

(?), very sweet, cosy little dwarf-like man and he said, 'You know, we're a tiny, tiny country; we're a tiny, tiny people; we ought to be quiet, not give trouble, not shout, not scream, just lie quiet. Why should Shertok make thundering speeches to the United Nations?'

[ ]

I sympathise with that point of view. I mean [ ] was a frivolous man, his private life was of course not very moral but his public and [ ] opinion was very intelligent. He thought that to treat Israel like Austria, no frontiers should be guaranteed and no seats in the United Nations. It should have been neutralised and I think that would have been much wiser. But of course they wanted to be a State, they wanted [ ], they wanted to thunder, they wanted – well, I'm very very antipathetic to all that. And then, that was '46, my mood in '46. I was offered a job by Mr [Shertok (?)]. I was sitting very quietly in Oxford talking with David Cecil in my room in Oxford. Telephone bell rang, then it said, 'This is Moshe Shertok' – there was no State yet, we are in '46 – no, nineteen forty-seven, there was no State, there was trouble going on, a lot of killings, and I had just come back from, I think, staying with Weizmann maybe, I think it was '47 – it may have been '46 – and he said, 'We wish to offer you a post. Would you like to take charge of the whole of Eastern and Central Europe for the Jewish Agency?' It was after it was a State and had become a foreign [ ]. So I said, 'No, no, no thank you, no.' (MI Immediately!) So then he said, 'But why not, it carries a very good pension!' (Laughter) So I said, 'No, no, that is not what I'm afraid of.' I had no money because I was rather in debt. I said, 'No I can't, I'm really terribly sorry.' 'But why not?' I didn't even think why.

MI Yes, you just knew.

IB I knew. I mean I knew that – sorry about this – anyhow 'The thing is an old friend of yours called Walter Ettinghausen [ ]' even that didn't please me all that much, but that wasn't it and I knew then, it was absurd, I didn't want a job in any possible government there for I thought I would be torn to pieces because I was too

mindful of what people said and people thought, rather too thin skinned in a sense; and given the very tense and extremely, so to speak, sort of, well, quarrelsome atmosphere obviously, I mean it wasn't exactly peaceful, Jews versus Jews, Jews versus English, English versus the Arabs, Jews versus everybody, that I couldn't survive in an atmosphere of that kind, couldn't function; and I needed solid institutions to preserve me from being idle and feckless.

MI And those institutions existed at Oxford but not in Jerusalem ...

IB In the Embassy in Washington and the like. '47 – anyhow then I went to Israel in '47 and stayed with Weizmann ...

MI So you went to Israel in '47?

IB Yes.

MI I didn't realise that.

IB Not Israel, Palestine. Now that's a story in itself, I will tell you, it's typical of me. Weizmann asked me to work for him, I mean he wanted me to be part of his personal staff. The fact that he had no staff and wasn't going to be given any was very plain but I said no, no I wouldn't, again for the same reasons. He was furious, he could not understand any Jew preferring to remain in Diaspora, he said, (imitating Weizmann's accent) 'Your friend Felix Frankfurter, he sits there among all those Gentiles every day for five days – what is he doing among them?' [Laughter]

MI [Laughing] Wonderful story! Impossible!

IB I tell you, a Jew sitting there! – he once told me a story about a very good, sort of typical story about a Russian, a joke about a Russian before the war, before the first world war, earlier in the

century. He said, a Russian came to Paris, some kind of minor official, talking to his friend and said, 'You know I went to a café, I sit there at a table, the next table, a Jew. He ordered coffee which was brought, he asked for a newspaper, it was given to him. Imagine, a Jew!' [Laughter] Quite a good story about watch out for yourself. [IB quotes in Russian] Not even a [ ] 'Treated like a human being! Like say a monkey or a chimpanzee, [ ], coffee ...

MI And it was given to him!

IB Strange things happen. [Laughter] Weizmann told me that story [ ]. Then one day, you know he wasn't allowed to live for the same night in Moscow or Ginsberg(?) because he had no Citizen of Pale and he was arrested for staying the night somewhere and the policeman said to him, 'What do you do?' He said, 'No, no I am extremely [ ]. I work for a Jewish organisation. The policeman said, 'You work for the Jews?' 'Yes.' 'Let me warn you, don't do it, they'll kill you one day!' [Laughter] He said it was absolutely true, said Weizmann, they certainly will! [Laughter]

MI What a story! Sorry, you go to – I'd like to hear about you going to Palestine with Weizmann.

IB He writes me a letter saying I'm lonely and miserable more or less, here I live in the [ ], it was before the State and he was still the Head of the [ ] organisation or whatever, he may have been driven off it by then, 'and do come and stay, I need your company, I must talk to you.' I wasn't terribly anxious [MI To go?] to go in '47 when there was an Anglo/Jewish war in progress and you couldn't go like that, you could only go if you'd got a visa from the Foreign Office; so anxious not to go, a very cowardly manner, I remembered meeting [ ] Stanley who was then, who was the ex Colonial secretary and quite well disposed to the Jews and I said, 'Do I really have to go?' And he said, 'No, I wouldn't go [ ] trouble, I don't think you'd feel comfortable.' So I wrote a letter on a kind of very inferior piece of writing paper to the Foreign Office, saying,

'Dear Sir,' to the visa department, 'I would like a visa in order to spend a holiday in Palestine, Yours Truly. [MI Isaiah Berlin] No, I. Berlin.' It was unofficial. I got a printed form saying nobody was allowed to go there now, except on very official business and therefore it can't be done. Relief! I sent a letter to Palestine, to Weizmann saying, 'Look, I've just been a British official, I've only just been demobbed, the last thing I want is to press for special permission,' and so on, in an embarrassing attempt to pull strings and this is what I got from the Foreign Office, I didn't want to pull rank; to which Weizmann didn't reply but about ten days later I received a letter from the High Commissioner in Palestine, General Cunningham, [MI Bang!] 'Most welcome any time,' [Laughter] which cut off my retreat! So I went.

MI Did Weizmann suss out you ...?

IB No, no I don't think he did. He went to the High Commissioner and said I have a friend, that's his name, would you kindly give him permission to come?' and he said 'Of course.' He was on very good terms with him, the British one, he was regarded as a quisling by the Ben Gurionites, not a quisling quite but a bit Pétaniste, too pro British. And I arrived, I remember very well my arrival. I went with my father who wanted to go to Palestine then.

MI How old was your father by this point?

IB My father in '47, was ...

MI Sixty?

IB Mm ... born in '83. In '43 he'd have been sixty. Sixty-four. [clever] I wonder when he got there? Er, why am I confusing things? – got another year, [ ]

MI You did not go with him?



IB Not that time, no. But what happened was that I got onto a very slow boat which was, I think, Panamanian with Cypriot sailors, which went from Marseilles to Genoa, from Genoa to Naples, from Naples through the Straits of [ ] to I think [ ] permission to go to, that's right.

MI So he did come?

IB He did come [ ] We went to, from there we went very slowly to, I think from Naples we went to...

MI Crete or Cyprus or ...?

IB [ ] in southern Crete, we went to Athens where we had two days because that's the sailors' week and they were given two day's off. There I went to party given by the British Chargé d'Affaires, my colleague Patrick Riley with whom I was [ ] at All Souls whom I knew to be there. Jolly time those two days with my father, it was very nice. Then we go onto the boat again and from there we went to Alexandria and from Alexandria we went to Cyprus and in Cyprus, another day because they were all Cypriots [ ] went to Beirut. But I was allowed to land because I was a British official on my passport, my father was not, they would not allow him to land, he was obviously a Jew. [ ] Beirut, [ ] Haifa. I talked to an American on board, one of these Zionist officials who was going back to Israel, not met, struck up an acquaintance with, one who was very left wing, very pro Soviet I remember at that time. Then ...

MI I'm getting into Palestine in 1947.

IB In Haifa I was met by my old friend Lord Oxford who was District Commissioner in Haifa, living in a place called [Beringrad (?)] which was a heavily protected area against terrorists, [Laughter] British Officials had protected him. Once he came to take me off the boat, it was clear that I was a spy, a double agent; he was an

enemy [ ] I clearly was a friend of his. He greeted me, I went off with him; after that, the shock was enormous.

MI The shock didn't do ...?

IB To the people on the boat! To the Zionists who talked to me as a friend and an ally, suddenly I was taken off by this monster [Laughter] with whom I was on very good terms. I didn't say that I went to tea with him, or [ ] what happened, I went in a car late in the evening with my father and off we went to [ ] where I stayed but my father didn't. When we got to [ ] I said to [ ], 'Could you tell me the way to Dr Weizmann's house?' The man said, 'What Weizmann?' So I said, 'Chaim Weizmann.' 'No, no,' he said, 'never heard of him.' Somewhat Nazi preposition, political answer. That was my first taste of the extreme hostility to Weizmann from the Beginites, and this man must have been one. When my father [ ] from Jerusalem I didn't see very much of him then, I stayed with Weizmann for over [a further(?)] a week and the General commanding southern district would come to dinner, for the [ ] were under a move, all the mines placed by the [ ]. The General would then go home to his whatever it was ...

MI The British General?

IB British General, you see would come to dinner with Weizmann and they would gradually remove the mines on the way. Well the General would go back and they would replace the mines, they were ready to replace them. That was very typical. [ ] Well I stayed with him and he – he had no idea I was coming, completely forgotten. It's part of being a great man, that you go – because they invite you, you know that you have to go because they asked you to but you know they would have forgotten by the time you come. They treat you quite well but they don't really need you, it's just a casual move.

MI By this time he's not blind but he's very ...?

IB Well, he's not ill but not well, not well, I mean semi-blind and stumbling about rather.

MI Alone, or assisted with a retinue of people ...?

IB No, no, no, assisted. This is what the Anglo American Commission [ ], no this was the United Nations Commission which recommended partition, it was called Unifil (?) I think – no Unifil is something else [ ] children. I think it was called Unscop, United Nations Special Commission on Palestine, headed by some, I don't know, Brazilian or Nicaraguan, that kind of thing, you see, there were various people on it. And Weizmann testified to them and so he was in the end, he was still somebody. People came to see him [ ] and visited him and I met one or two people then. That was when I met a man called [ ] who was a quite famous figure, that's exactly how I met him in his [ ]. We went for a little stroll around Palestine in a car, that was all right, there wasn't a lot of fighting then. And then I went to see my cousin, Yitzhak Sadeh, did I tell you about him?

MI No.

IB [ ] My father's sister [ ] my aunt, [ ] her first cousin, the son of my father's mother's sister  
[ ] first cousin [ ]

MI They were egging you on.

IB Yes.

MI When does he settle in Palestine?

IB Wait. He lives in Riga, his parents are quite rich, he is an art dealer. His name is Landoberg, he is a wrestler and a boxer and a football player which was rare in Russia in any case in 1905/6 for

Jews even more for [ ]. I go to his wedding in 1912 at the age of three [ ] and I remember being on a table, being dressed in a little silk, dress of white silk, I go to the wedding of my uncle, not my aunt rather, my aunt is – he is rather a handsome man and also a painters' model, obviously a bohemian type. My aunt is hideously ugly, has degrees from two universities, [chuckles] left wing intellectual, took part in the revolution of 1905, why he married her I have no idea, why she married him was all too clear! [more chuckles]. I arrive with my parents and there is sort of loud music playing – at that period I speak German because Russian at the age of four – apparently I said, 'Ich hasse diese Schreimusik!' 'Schreimusik' I invented, it's not a word in German,<sup>14</sup> it means 'screaming music'. I was removed, burst into tears and never got to the wedding. [Laughter] I've must tell you that my musical disabilities ...

MI Were acute even at that age ...

IB Because jazz, I hate jazz, every form of Rock, jazz and so on, I detest it to this day. I couldn't bear it in 1920 ...

### Side B

IB [*irrelevant music till 6:16*][...] uncle, my first cousin once removed, her uncle by marriage. That I can tell you, I've told nobody, he was concealed in Tel Aviv, are we allowed to see him? They said, 'Yes,' and then we go to some back part of a café and there he is in a frightfully gay mood. We had a long talk about relations, life, who he has married meanwhile, he had married [ ], married some tough Mediterranean, a female soldier or something. We chatted away and he said when it came to an end, 'One day we will meet again.' I spent three hours with him; it was the most agreeable talk which my family would have disapproved of most strongly. When I told

<sup>14</sup> According to Steffen Gross, in 2022 it 'is a quite common pejorative' in Germany. Email to HH, 20 July 2022.

my aunt in Jerusalem she [ ] ‘frightful scoundrel! He left Evgenia, how can you talk to him?’ [ ] really!

MI And did you mention it to your father?

IB When I came back, yes.

MI But I thought he was with you on that trip? No, he wasn’t with you on that trip, ‘47 ...

IB Yes he was but he’d left before me, I didn’t go back with him. I travelled back by – I think I travelled back on my own somehow. He went after a week, I went about a month later, maybe three weeks. Then, I didn’t mention it to my father at the time, no [ ] brother-in-law [ ]. Then I meet him again in, I suppose, ‘50 which I think was my next visit and by this time, he’s a national hero. He took part in the war against Egypt with two [ ] shouting loudly he runs and he attacks a fortress! [chuckles] The Egyptians flee immediately leaving their shoes behind. His house in Jaffa is full of trophies, from daggers, [ ], all kinds of leather goods, God knows what, and a goat which is illegal, that’s why he keeps it there. Weizmann loves him, Ben Gurion detests him as a dangerous man. There I meet [ ] the Israeli Ambassador who would only drink vodka, I said, ‘Why do you ... why do you prefer ...?’ ‘It’s perfectly simple,’ he says, he makes it plain, ‘The Americans will never bomb us, the Russians may, we’ve got the Americans anyway but we’ve got to keep in with the Russians, it’s perfectly simple’. He already had left wing views and his [ ] was there, too, a very tough lady, and I enjoyed my entertainment by ordeal. And then, after which he dies of cancer I think, and so does she about two years later. But he’s a National hero.

MI In ‘52 or ‘53?

IB Yes, he was a National hero, things were called after him, streets were called after him, he was buried with the greatest possible

honours, [MI And he's called ...?], he's a historical figure. Yitzhak Sadeh! [IB slaps his hands together for each syllable of the name]

MI Sadeh ...

IB S-a-d-e-h, [repeats the slapping on each syllable], Hebrew name ...

MI But his original name is Landoberg

IB Landoberg.

MI Landoberg. Extraordinary! [IB You see?] Absolutely extraordinary. I want to get back to ...

IB ... anyhow, when I say to Israelis now, 'Do you realise Yitzhak Sadeh is my cousin?', they faint!

MI Such a mild, inoffensive character ...

IB No, no, my whole relation of me, I mean Oxford and all the rest of it, you see? Sir Isaiah Berlin or whatever the image of me is; and now this revolutionary General – he became a General in the end you see, oh certainly, and he's a sort of National hero, Garibaldi. I said to him, 'You are just Garibaldi.' He used to send me postcards signed 'Garibaldi'. [Laughter]

MI But you liked him for his sense of humour, for his ...?

IB And for his vitality, vitality and irresponsibility, extreme good humour and – a good fellow. He obviously liked fighting but he had no – he was generous by nature, nothing mean or small. In all respects, except the leaving of wives, there was nothing really wrong with him except he wasn't a Zionist, not really.

MI Why do you say that?

IB Because he liked fighting; well of course he pretended he was a passionate – ‘for my country, Israel’ – and maybe he believed it but it was pretty superficial. What he liked was the excitement much more, he wasn’t a serious, no, he wasn’t a Zionist, he was just a jolly figure; if there was a fight, he liked getting into it, an Irish character, permanently, frivolous.

MI I want to get back ...

IB Bakunin, he was like that. [MI Who?] Bakunin was like that. If there was any fighting to be done, he was prepared, he didn’t like peace. [Laughter] Well, he was very comfortable, when I last saw him he was a National hero living in a handsome house in Jaffa confiscated from some Arab no doubt, with a house full of military trophies and a lot of vodka. [Laughter] Not a very normal Israeli spectacle.

MI What did Weizmann talk to you about during that visit in ‘47?

IB I can’t remember, I mean he talked about politics, he talked with us about the future of what would happen. By that time ...

MI Was he very bitter towards Ben Gurion and Begin?

IB Yes he always was. He was in favour of the State, totally after ‘46, after Begin got into power, he thought there was no alternative. Once it was clear – once the anti Zionist policy of the [ ] resumed ... you see, in 1944 the Cabinet decided on partition secretly.

MI I didn’t realise that.

IB No, it’s not widely known, the papers are not printed in books, I mean the papers are in the public record office. There was a meeting, there was a Palestine Committee of the Cabinet presided

over by, let us say, Morrison [there occurs a long gap in the tape] Foreign Office. [ ]

MI They thought you knew as well, so you would know what they were ...

IB Yes, but I never knew about this at all, this was dead secret. They didn't – it was a secret committee so as not to rock the boat, not to rock the Arab boat. And even the High Commissioner in Palestine, [McMichael?] whom the Jews loathed, and Moyne who was the [ ] in the Middle East who were anti Zionist, accepted this and said there is no other way [ ] contract together; unless you kill off the Jews it had to be. So they produced a plan which was more generous than the Peel (?) plan of '36/7. But this was kept under tremendous, er ...

MI Wraps.

IB Wraps: except that Dr Goldmann, Weizmann had told about it, he never told me [clap] any time. It was a total State secret, sworn to secrecy, it remained so but Dr Nahum Goldmann discovered it and told me about it [ ] it wasn't secrecy at all.

MI When? At the time?

IB In Washington in 1945.

MI Oh my God!

IB You see? Oh, of course the plan, we all know about it. Well, I was delighted to hear of it and sent a despatch to the Foreign Office in which I said, it is difficult to continue to, er, obey the directives of the office which are to rub into the Jews that the White Paper is unalterable when Dr Nahum Goldmann informs me [Laughter] that there is this plan from the Foreign Office. This may of course be merely gossip. But then there was a tremendous



moment following afterwards from the Public Records Office saying, "This is horrifying! We told Dr Weizmann in secrecy but if he has told his friends, this will get to the Arabs! What'll happen then? Mr Berlin's despatch is most worrying! [Laughter] But I knew then that all this stuff about the White Paper was dead because it was clear they didn't deny it. And I don't think Moyne would have been murdered [lest it had been known(?)] you see. But anyhow, that's there and that is why Bevin's policy which was the opposite of this, was a major disappointment to Zionists, they thought we've now gone back to 1939 – '38, '39. And that embittered Weizmann, he said no, no, there's no alternative now, there's got to be a State.

MI What's your sense of why Bevin took that course?

IB I don't know. Bevin, [ ] tried to defend him in his book on him. Bevin took that course for two main reasons: one was serious, namely that – er – the Arabs were worth more than the Jews, there were many more of them [ ] mainly because the Arabs [ ] but the British Empire needed the oil, they needed the Arabs which was the ordinary Foreign Office position. Secondly, he was rather anti Semitic although it was denied but not in any special way. He was about as anti Semitic as Khrushchev for the same kind of reasons – roughneck. Most Trade Unionists were that sort, you see, his image was, the country [ ] a lot of Bevin's, simple farmers, crude, not honest, now and then liable to blood letting but one couldn't blame them, full of [ ] [Laughter] whom he loathed, who absolutely drove them mad, just a lot of cigar chomping, rich Jewish, vulgar Jewish Mayor [ 's] in New York, hiring leaky boats to send a lot of [Laski's (?)] without going themselves. That was the image.

MI [Laughing] Right, I see.

IB You see? Believe me, there is some truth in that; and a lot of people were like that, any crude, sort of illiterate peasant type who would feel bad about Jews, intellectuals ... that sort of thing, you see? It was a natural reaction of a [ ] type, he's not one of us, and

the only thing Bevin cared about was Trade Unionism in England and all round the world. That was very – tremendous, it was an absolute and very near his heart. Thirdly, the Foreign Office [ ] persuaded him that the Arabs would hate it, there'd be a blow up and British interests would suffer. He was thought to be anti Arab to an extent when they appointed him to it, you see, the entire Foreign Office practically was anti Zionist. So it wasn't surprising, the only thing was that he could've, you see, attend to the war, well er, I mean it was difficult to impose partition, it would have led to [ ] the Arabs certainly, some kind of quasi civil war, but still it would probably cost less lives than it did in the end. And I think Bevin thought that the Jews were getting above themselves and someone said, 'It's rather like Ireland, isn't it, it's rather like Ulster?' He said, 'Yes, but Ulster, they are actually in Ulster, it's our country, it isn't the Jews country.' So there was that, [ ] official, just unnecessary, superfluous. I mean it's a terrible position, because he, I think people might feel that, nine people out of ten – officials – would probably take that line, It was difficult, it was embarrassing, it was dangerous, why should he bear the burden of it? And so then he got out of Palestine altogether but he always thought the United Nations would not favour the partition plan and then he headed back to England when he would then save the Jews from the Arabs by creating some little enclave for them. I think that was the purpose you see, roughly. But there is no doubt that he is one of the Founders of the State of Israel; absolutely. Without him I don't think – you see what happened is this: Truman asked Bevin to ask the English whether they would accept a plan to send one hundred thousand Jewish refugees to Palestine, that was obviously against Arabs. That was turned down. If it had been accepted, there would have been no Israel State. The Americans only became pro State because, to some extent, because of frustration when the British turned down their plan for refugees, you see? After that, they prepared to support something else. If they'd have accepted the plan, whatever it cost for the importation of a hundred thousand Jews, the Americans would have called that a day at that time, Truman and all, you see? That was a miscalculation. Then Bevin

went to New York and then he was asked to go to a baseball game or a football game and the Jews suddenly staged a demonstration against him. He was rather affected and very displeasing, had to leave early. But he was regarded [ ] Bevin [Grenadiers (?)] [Laughter] But, er, [ ] Lord Bevin whom Weizmann began talking about in '46, he developed a great hatred of them, personal hatred of them. Weizmann thought Bevin was not a possible [ ] in the room, it couldn't have worked.

MI Was '27 the last time you saw Weizmann, or did you see him again?

IB I saw him again, I stayed with him in '51, I think, he died '52/3. I stayed with him twice, I think after that when he was president ...

MI What was he like as president?

IB Embittered, ill, nothing to do. [ ] has a story that he called on him and he said to the president, 'What are you doing?' And he said, **'What I am doing? I am said to be a symbol of the state of Israel. What am I doing? I sit here and symbolise,'** he said. 'They tell me that Moses [this was Sharett] has three hundred secretaries now. What does he do with them all?' [Laughter] That was a joke. They called on him, the [ ] said, 'Dr Weizmann, we've all changed our names'; Sharett was Shertok; Dr Rosenblut had become Rosen [ ] that was a German name [ ] 'find some distinguished biblical name as President of the State.' But they definitely made use of Weizmann, they had something to lose! [clap! Laughter]

MI Wow! I begin to get the

IB You get the atmosphere. You see? No no, he was very bitter, bitter and quite interesting, but [paths?] to [the Russia?], all that, I could talk to him about his life, it was

quite interesting. But that was the time, 1947, when the two sergeants were abducted and ultimately hanged in Netanya, and that I remember being – I told you this – I was absolutely outraged by this, I thought it the most awful thing, and I knew that Begin was the man in charge, that's why I took against Begin and against terrorism in general. Before that I thought quite well of the Russian terrorists in the 1890s, I thought – well, they were brave revolutionaries, the regime was awful, the regime was oppressive, and these were brave, liberal revolutionaries, they weren't even socialists, some of them, I mean they had tsars[?] and Narodnaya Volya, God knows what their political programme was, anarchist if anything. They were just high-minded – I mean Vera Zasulich was only tried for trying to shoot some wicked Governor who had caused political prisoners to be flogged.

MI It was [Tropov?] wasn't it?

IB The chap who killed somebody, was it? Wait a minute, [A. Zulich?] ...

MI Who did he – I thought she shot ...

IB She shot but she may have missed, she certainly shot, the chap who –yes you're right [K...?] killed the Grand Duke, the Governor of Moscow and so on, the Tsar's uncle I think [MI I know exactly], the grand Duke Somebody – Dmitri – the Grand Duke, it's on the ... [MI Outside [ ] Could I have killed him, and then the Grand Duchess tried to convert him to some kind of [ ] but he was a hard man, he wouldn't listen to her, didn't want that [ ] preferred to be hanged. [ ] certainly killed somebody, you are right. This was a period of –er – who killed – er – the Minister of the Interior? It was in the twentieth century, what was his name? [names him and MI repeats it]. He was killed] by I think, [ ]. It doesn't matter, I mean that was a period, well these are monsters you see, these were

real Tsarist oppressors who sort of flogged political prisoners and they were obviously reactionary, anti Semites, anything you like. So therefore there were all those, rather sentimentally [ ] George Kennan, who thought they were terrible people, these people, all the revolutionaries were dreadful, you see and I used to try and defend them ...

MI This was during the war? Or in Moscow in forty ...

IB Mm, sort of – no, no, in Moscow in '45. But after '47, suddenly ...

MI And you were appalled because these were ordinary British sergeants?

IB Yes, and altogether they began shooting at the English just in general, in a haphazard way. It was revenge for some Jewish terrorist who was assassinated quietly by two British police officers who had to leave the country.

MI But isn't – it's not that I necessarily believe this argument myself – but isn't it precisely the use of terrorism and the creation of the State of Israel that's the most troubling example of a consequentialist justification of terrorism? It worked!

IB No, I've never believed that. I may be wrong. I have never believed that terrorism is what got the British out if that is what you were saying. But I didn't enjoy it. But when I saw the Colonial Office officials at lunch with Weizmann in '47, there was a little collection of high foreign Colonial Office officials who were inspecting, simply on tour [ ] Palestine, to know what to do. They came out quite nice people and they had lunch with Weizmann, I was staying. So I talked to them and I said there was a lot of talk about the possibility of abandonment in Palestine – and he said, 'There's no question of that. Forget it.' That was the Colonial Office. They fought against it to the end. It was decided upon

because the military thought that after the loss of India, there was absolutely no value in Palestine strategically, there was no point. Egypt had gone or was going and India had gone and the whole argument of having these fortified places – maybe Cyprus had to be kept for the sake of the Mediterranean fleet [ ] believed in defending Malta or believed in a Mediterranean fleet at all, which afterwards – you see, but there was no point in keeping Palestine [ ]

MI So it was geo-strategic, not ...

IB The Foreign Office was rather reluctant to leave because long period of protective sort of pro Arabism, but they were persuaded that the price was too high. But no doubt ...

MI Precisely wasn't it because the terror campaign made the price very high? Very high for British domestic opinion?

IB Getting the boys back, getting the boys back. I don't think it was material, in fact I think if India hadn't gone ...

MI They would have hung on.

IB Yes. And in the end they would have left, there was no point in hanging about, they had no interest in remaining there. It was not an outpost.

MI Whereas in the Northern Ireland case there was every conceivable ...

IB They left Cyprus in the end for the same reason but that they did leave presumably because of EOKA and terrorism and so on, because everyone was against them.

MI So it works sometimes, that's the trouble ...

IB In Cyprus I think it did work because there was Makarios and so on because they had no allies at all – in Cyprus, neither right nor left, nobody. The Turks were up to a point favourable but not enough. But in Palestine they had the Arabs who wanted them to stay and protect them against the Jews, you see, they were a majority numerically. So they could have been persuaded to stay, I think, and could have – I agree, I mean, of course terrorism, it wasn't, terrorism wasn't large scale – what did they do? They blew up the King David Hotel; they killed the two English sergeants; ...

MI [ ] Moyne.

IB They killed Moyne in Cairo; they killed ...

MI [ ]

IB [ ] in Jerusalem, quite right [ ]. This is not large scale terrorism. All right, that meant ...

MI Well then there's terrorism against the Arab villagers?

IB Surely. Well, [ ] that was '48, it was part of the civil war so to speak, yes, in '47, well it must have been, probably there were clashes with the Arabs, but it wasn't terrorism on a scale that one could hardly believe, a dozen people dead, fifty people dead, fifteen British officials killed, twenty five. So it isn't a mass thing, so I don't believe myself, it may have had a marginal influence. They thought they had done it. Begin's book [ ] a biography of course which [ ] and people like Teddy Kollek will tell you, it had no effect. The other side. Ben Gurion never admitted it, it had the [ ] effect on events. [ ] they were a large organised secret army pitted against you which has to be suppressed for you to stay. But not terrorism; resistance, yes.

MI What – I am going to have to leave in one minute so this is my final question – what sort of physical impression, and sort of

emotional impression as well, did the landscape, did the physical world of Palestine make on you, both in '36 and in '47?

IB In '34. [MI In '34] I thought what someone said which partially was true was that

Judaea was Old Testament and Galilee was New Testament. Judaea is full of high places because [] said, 'Half oranges beyond which you can't look.' It's savage and it's bleak and it's frightening and it's grand; and it's full of Old Testament grandeur and the prophet Isaiah and all that. While Galilee is gentle and so to speak green and sweet and pastoral [] [at which MI laughs] ...

MI Up to a point.

IB Up to a point. No I'll tell you what I, he made a deep impression on me because I went to look at these Kibbutzes between '47 and '51 [] and the Israeli's were people born, I thought this was [clap!] a new Nation, not at all like the Jews but exactly what we wanted. These were not Jews at all, these were Israeli's and the difference between the Israeli's and the Jews seemed to me very considerable, still is. And I thought, well, a new Nation is being born and the chasm between the Arabs and the Jews, the Diaspora, will become wider and wider and a very good thing, too, you see, because ...

MI What is it expressed that difference?

IB The Chasm? Mind you, the [] are brownish people, exactly, who when you find them on the shores of maybe it's Tel Aviv, are like Cypriots or Maltese. They're a native population living in a country which belongs to them and they're not particularly nice, they're not particularly intelligent, certainly not very educated; but they're a natural population who do not ask themselves what do people think of us? They are not self conscious. They are natives living in their own land; it may be an illusion, it may be a kind of what you would call, so to speak, self induced, auto suggestion it used to be called [] every day we are happier and happier and then ...



[Laughter] ... we're nicer and nicer and nicer [ ] doctrine, late twenties from a Doctor [ ], he taught that. But anyway – we ought to repeat that, three times a day – it's obviously very friendly but a general critic from Mannheim would suddenly come and sit under a palm tree and say, 'This is my country.' Totally exotic, nothing to do with two thousand years of his previous life. Nevertheless, they believed it; a huge piece of collective, self induced delusion, if you like. But the people who were born there felt at home and that was the first time the Jews felt at home anywhere. They think they do in New York now – it may be true, but not quite, maybe. And therefore they were quite different from the immigrants in England, America who still fidgeted. Did I tell you the story of [ ] a man called [P...Joseph?] He was a Canadian lawyer, I think lawyer, who went to the Governor of Jerusalem when it was besieged by the Arabs [ ] he was a rather tough, brave man. He told me that a Canadian/Jewish delegation came to call [ ] a Zionist, he called himself a Canadian Zionist. So he made suggestions about what they were to do when he got back to Canada and they said, 'You can't do that because the Canadians won't like it. He said, 'I thought you were Canadians!' [clap!] That brought it out. And that delighted me, that I thought was the one thing which was worth quite a high price; and I then believed, but I believed not so strongly, the Jews had wanted to assimilate, should assimilate and cannot assimilate because they had nothing of their own [ ], because they [ ] never [ ] nowhere, and that's why they were naturally treated as foreigners by everyone to some degree. But in their own country and those who want to be Jews will go there. But those who don't will find it easier, they won't feel guilty about laying down some burden, you see, because they're renegades, because not to want to be Israeli wouldn't be criminal.

MI And why do you believe that less now?

IB Because I think the Jews as a result of – partly the Jews because of their religion are partly still being regarded as [ ] by everybody else, Israel has become their religion. I mean, what makes them

different from their neighbours is their sort of [ ] of themselves and that again prevents them from assimilating. Slowly, in time maybe [ ] badly enough! Then they abandon it, that gives the fine detail.

MI Let's stop.

[End of recording]

## MI TAPE 19

Conversation date: 5 July 1994

Date transcribed: December 2002

Transcriber: Esther Johnson

Subjects covered:

The Weizmanns

Hannah Arendt

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IB ... said, 'Look you are the chief Jew, here you know all about the Jews, who they are and where they are, we need their names and address [ ] and telephone numbers. I realise you may not be eager to tell us but if you don't we'll find out anyway, it will just make our labour a little easier if you do tell us, as a reward for which we shall allow you and fifty seven other persons to escape. Let's assume the situation is occurring. Now, and you are in that position [ ], there are four alternatives, four choices you can make. You co'uld say I am not playing your game, nothing for me; they shoot you dead and that's the end of you, proper way out; or you commit suicide, same sort of thing, your conscience is clear; or you can warn the Jews of what's coming, say Yes I'll tell you, and tell them what's going on, hoping some of them might escape – not much likelihood because there's a ring round of soldiers, but still you do your best, you've told them which doesn't help them much; or you can escape with forty-seven or fifty-three people chosen by you, it's what's called playing God, including your family, friends, obviously you choose the one you want.' Now a man did do that called ...

AB That man in Hungary.

IB The man in Hungary, what's his name, papers this morning, it wasn't [ ] related, it was the other man who did it ...

AB The other one – er – it's all in the Sunday Telegraph, there's a story about that ...

IB Well I'll tell you what happened. He did get out and he went to Palestine with them and one of the relations of people whom he left behind who were exterminated accused him of murder, at least or conniving, condemning these people to die and he sued for libel.

MI Yes this famous case ...

AB And he was killed.

IB Exactly, and he sued for libel and the first court found against him but the second court – he appealed – found for him, and in the end they found for him. Then the original man who libelled him shot him dead, from [ ] that story.

AB ... so much strain, he took out nine hundred or a thousand people.

IB It could well be, whether it was a thousand or forty but I mean the principle is the same.

MI Casper?

IB Casper is right, Casper is the name, [AB [ ] the whole story. MI Recently? BI Yesterday] Casper, that's the man's name and he was shot dead. One understands all the details of that story [ ] it's all very clear what happened. Well [ ] would say he should have done, should not have done, she knows what they should have done, they should have died or not died whatever it is, I really thought that was absolutely monstrous. My solution if you ask me what should happen is that anything these people do is all right, [BI Yes] you can't condemn them for anything. [BI No absolutely] The alternatives are intolerable. [BI They are the victims] That's not what morality invented to solve, whatever they did is permissible,

you see it's permissible; we're in no position to condemn people in that situation for anything they do, you see? It's like condemning people who are tortured for giving names. If they do, they do. You may not respect them but under torture they might tell, you might do it yourself. The idea of condemning people like that is a form of intolerable moralism of a very arrogant kind and that's what she's guilty of throughout. And all the other works I looked at, there's one on the American Revolution which everyone agreed was no good at all, that's wrong. But then her philosophy, if you look at her writings, you see the thing about her is – I'll finish in one second, I won't go on [ ] – there's no logical connection within her sentences, there's no 'because' or 'therefore' at any point, there's just this free metaphysical meditations.

MI One damn thing after another.

IB Yes. Well that's my case. [MI Laughs] Well Mary McCarthy adored her in every way, I mean totally devoted to her, physically, morally, I mean worshipped her, I mean I concede that and I wrote [ ] one thing and the Times Literary Supplement ran a little competition about what is the most over estimated and underrated book in your opinion; so I said, Well the most underestimated is a book by Maurice Baring called 'Tinker's Leave' which is about the Manchurian war, nobody's heard of it but it's very very good, about a lot of journalists and Manchurians talking to each other, I thought it was wonderful, I mean nobody's read it since. As for the most overestimated I said – er – [MI The Human Condition] 'The Human Condition' [ ] by then although I might not have said it [ ]. I then received a letter from Mary McCarthy in Paris saying your opinion of her was reciprocated. So I then – all right – so then I replied and I said, Perhaps we're both right. [Laughter] She then asked permission to publish this; that I didn't want, it was a private communication. She wanted to [ ] from somewhere. I just gave her my proper answer [ ] you see? [MI Oh Isaiah!] She's a bit [ ] I agree. I don't know many. For some reason I thought, sort of lecturing people on how to behave, particularly ...

MI What I found interesting about this is an episode that you may have forgotten which is that where we first made contact more than ten years ago [IB You and I] was when I appeared on the BBC to denounce a play by Jim Allen [A Trotskyist ?] which was essentially about the same thing in which the Jews are lectured for not resisting their fate more energetically, [IB Yes, yes, yes, yes] and for collaborating with the Germans in their own destruction.

IB In the war the Anti Zionists were allowed to go and the non Zionists weren't and all that ...

MI Yes and at which point I said, you know, this just wouldn't do. [IB No, no] At which point you wrote me a letter at which point our friendship began, so I feel in some sense it became a certain ...

IB That I didn't know, that I felt, I remember that play, they made all the fuss and then in the end it wasn't put on, with Lord Goodman or somebody, it was the East Court Theatre [AB [ ] Royal Court] That's right. I thought they were wrong, I thought it ought to have been put on, all the Jews I talked to were very pleased but I thought the censorship wasn't right, I mean quite denounced but not suppressed. [MI Indeed, indeed]

[A very long gap occurs in the tape]

IB ... as Privates which is all they could be, [ ] wasn't going to promote them for thirty years instead of the usual conscription probably occurred for eight years, seven years, [BI For thirty years?] well that kind of period, forty and some enormous period, they had become rustified ...

*Side B [sides A and B are combined in the digital recording]*

IB He didn't want to baptise them, he thought somehow that was wrong, didn't want to force them, non Christians, for some reason

he held his hand about that. He might have tried that but he didn't and ...

MI This is the 1830's?

IB What? 30's, 40's [ ] Nicholas(?) may have gone after him but I mean that's where it began and if they could do that then they'd be given plots of land the Jews were not allowed to own, they'd be settled in little colonies and be retired soldiers, farmers, farmers.

MI And that's why they're called Cantonists.

IB And then the Cantons were the places where they were to be settled, and this was done. They were, see they weren't conscripted nor worked but concealed themselves, they didn't want that, they were kidnapped by, literally by Israeli soldiers and they would be seized ...

MI They were press ganged as it were?

IB They were press ganged, exactly so, actually what I mean but during the [ ] service non Jews were together, suddenly a door would open and the agents come in and seize them by force. They weren't mistreated.

MI But did they serve in separate units or were they assimilated?

IB No, no they were assimilated, no, no. The idea was to assimilate them, no, not separate units; they were scattered all round the place but they had to be in for a very long period at the end of which they would be treated much better than the Jews. The Jews in general had disabilities, they did not have disabilities, they were treated like ordinary retired Privates, they could be settled on any cultural settlements and be allowed to have farms and whatever it is you see, held their own farms and produce and live ordinary lives.

BI But only after they survived thirty years ...

IB After they survived, yes, you see I knew quite a lot of them, quite a lot did survive, they didn't commit suicide, they took it on the chin more or less. Now these families they knew were Jews, they knew some – they preserved their religion, they knew some, vaguely some [ ] but some less than the others, they were much more [Nazified?]. She is the daughter of one of these people in [Rostova on the Don?] which is otherwise not very Jewish neighbourhood you see? And that – when for example I used to go to this [ ] ceremony, you know, the Passover thing, the Last Supper in fact, that's what it is, relics of the Last Supper – er – with Weizmann which I did at least twice, three times, she was there, she didn't understand the Hebrew [ ], she was absolutely rigid, completely unlistening but now and then softened and sang a Russian song which these people did at [ ] because they had very little Hebrew. They remained Jews in a marginal way, they preserved something, they knew they were Jews, they weren't Christians, they knew each other but they were sort of – the only language they really knew was Russian, they didn't talk Yiddish, you see? That's her origin, I'm only giving you this lecturette to tell you ...

MI Does that then give you a special kind of – er – or does she then sense in you a special kind of affinity in the sense that you're a Russian Jew as well?

IB Oh certainly yes, oh it's almost absolutely – I'll tell you how that happened. The point about her was she was not interested in Jews in general, she was very snobbish; she wanted to get on with all the grand people we met and grand people in general. She was completely detached Zionist – well she couldn't help that because in life but she presently loved him physically as a man but she took no interest in Zionism as such; I mean she behaved respectably because she was his wife, she had to entertain the people he had to



entertain, go to the parties he had to organise but she did a minimum and the Zionists didn't like her. It was clear that she looked down on them, didn't really like them very much and what she liked was upper class English persons whom the political efforts of Weizmann brought her in touch with. They admired him but couldn't bear her, in fact she was not a success but she didn't know that.

MI Does that mean the Sieff's and the Samuel's looked down on her?

IB Well they didn't – no, no, she looked down on them, they didn't look down on her. She was very ladylike, very well dressed, she behaved like a sort of Princess; there's no question of popularism there. You see he was in his own Temple you see and he was just like a peasant leader or something. No, no, she dressed well and she had this sort of rather artificial English accent copied from such upper class persons as she met, whereas he talked a sort of a rather [ ] sort of English. But she remained in love with him throughout, that's what kept it together. And I remember Lady Salisbury – no, not Lady Salisbury – Lady Harlech who was one of David Cecil's sisters, she was a Cecil by birth, she was Salisbury's daughter, saying to me, 'You know Dr Weizmann don't you? I think he's a wonderful man, very very impressive isn't he? Extraordinary when I met him, I really was deeply impressed, something rather wonderful about him, I wish I knew him better. Do you know his wife at all?' So I said, 'Yes.' She said, 'I found her rather tiresome.'

MI [Laughing] In other words she was rejected by the very people she aspired to be accepted by.

IB Exactly so. But she got on perfectly well with these rich friends, I mean the Sieff's and all that, I mean she was on good terms with them all because you see after all they gave a lot of shares to Weizmann which was what he lived on. [MI Oh really?] He was

financially independent for two reasons, intellectual life: on was the patent of the thing he invented in the first world war. [MI Oh really?] In the first world war he was a chemist in Manchester and he – what was being looked for was ways of producing – I don't know – bombs or something, weapons of war of that sort – and he patented something which – out of fir cones I think – children were made to collect fir cones, maybe apples and pears as well but anyhow that kind of thing. These things were chemically treated in such a way as then to produce something like acetone if that's the right word. It could be the wrong word but that's what I mean, that was the substance which went into his process and made a phenomenal difference. So, and he had a patent and the patent yielded money you see? And there's a mythological story, that Weizmann did – which he never denied which didn't happen – which was that Lloyd George said to him at the end of the war '[ ] some singular services to the Government', which was true. He did know Lloyd George but he was taken up as an important inventor. He was known to have this political fad but that was prepared to be ignored you see? 'And you've done one great service; would you like a title? What kind of – er – we wish to honour you in some way.' He could have become a Knight quite easily or a [ ] He is alleged to have said, 'No, no, I want a land for my people.' [Laughter] It's a noble story and does him great credit except that I don't think it happened. [Laughter] But I think when it was put to him he didn't deny it. It's rather like my third cousin in New York who was called the Messiah by his followers, he didn't say he was but he didn't say he wasn't. [Laughter] The man who's just died, it was all in the papers, my third cousin but I wouldn't go and see him, he didn't like me, I hated the whole thing so much, I didn't want to have anything to do with all that.

MI Now there's correspondence ...

IB So Mrs Weizmann now, the point that I met her – now how did I meet Weizmann? I think I'd better tell you that. He lived not very far from a house in Kensington but I didn't know him, my parents

didn't know him, he was too grand I think for my family altogether and I was a Zionist; I became one quite early in life, quite spontaneously, my father wasn't. My mother is another story. But anyhow I decided that there was something to it, in some way I was self converted and was a schoolboy. I didn't do anything about it but I believed in it and I thought about Jews and the Jewish history, the Jews in general; I've always been obsessed a little bit about the status of the Jews and I talked too much about them in fact according to my present wife and she's a little bit ...

MI As opposed to his former wife!

BI Yes, yes! Or his future wives!

IB Or my future wife – well my present wife is a little bit like Mrs Weizmann, it bores her in the end to have all that much Jewish stuff stuffed on her. But at a certain point, after, no before the war I was picked up, I was a Don here at All Souls which slightly excited the Jewish community. They didn't know what it was but they thought it was very important. I was the first Jew there and that [ ] and made a certain impression. There was a man called Norman Bentwich who was a very worthy British Jew; he was a lawyer by profession, he became a Zionist or a very respectable, mild, liberal pro Arab of a kind. He became Attorney General in Palestine and was dismissed because no Arab was good enough to occupy a parallel position [ ] you couldn't have Jews who had positions to which Arabs couldn't attain. He was removed and sent to Cyprus as Attorney General. He was shot at by an Arab, I mean there was an attempt to assassinate him; it didn't make him – he was a noble, boring noble idealistic man. He remained pro Arab to the end, always used to stay in Arab hotels in a very deliberate sort of way.

MI Was he the one who introduced you to ...?

IB He made me a member of the Friends of the Hebrew University of which he became Professor of International Law and they had to have a – what’s called a function in the house of Mrs [MI Sieff] Sieff, that’s correct.

MI Which is in Park Lane.

IB In Park Lane. How do you know? I may have told you.

MI No, because this afternoon I tracked into correspondence in which this is described, it’s in ‘39. [The phone rings]

IB What? ‘38 or ‘39, ‘39 it is, yes. Will my wife, I wonder? Who can tell? Yes. ‘39 and I was asked to second a vote of thanks to Mrs Sieff for allowing us to use this splendid room; and speeches were made by [MI Weizmann?] [ ] who was the High Commissioner, Herbert Samuel [MI And Weizmann] and Weizmann, these three eminent persons. It didn’t matter what they said and I had to produce my second, and all I could think of saying was, ‘When we think of Mrs Sieff what do we think of? We think she’s very very rich!’

MI Did you say that?

IB No, no I didn’t. [Laughter] No I didn’t but that’s what I longed to say, it kept buzzing through my head because that’s what I’m going to say, ‘What do we think of her when her name crops up? What is the connection? Money! Well that was all right, I made my little speech to the best of my ability and then Bentwich introduced me to Weizmann in that drawing room, huge drawing room; and then he said to me that I was at All Souls and I was [ ] and Weizmann then thought well I might be of some interest to him. This is ‘39, you’re quite right, I hadn’t met him before then – he invited me to tea I think at the Dorchester Hotel where he lived and there I met his wife and to her I talked Russian and she was delighted about this; anyone who talked Russian was OK and she

took to me in a big way which helped. And then he talked to me and decided to recruit me into the Movement in some way, nothing much happened, but he then talked to me and I talked to him and we got on, and he was rather pleased by me and on the whole we became friends. The rest as they say is history.

MI One of the aspects of that history I wanted to ask you about, whether you have any memory of this at all, but in the Weizmann file ...

IB Just before we get to that, Weizmann's last moments, you know what actually did happen? What his last words were? [MI What, were ..?] Very different from anything Mrs Weizmann can have communicated to me. He was something, he was always, his lungs were always in – he sort of had to spit a lot and he died, I don't know what he died of, I think of some congestion of the lungs, something like that. And the doctor who looked after him, quite an eminent German Jewish doctor as you can imagine, said to him, 'Can you spit?' And Weizmann said, 'Nobody to spit at.'

MI And that was it!

IB Those were the last words!

MI That must be an apocryphal story!

IB No it isn't, it's a true story because I get it from the doctor and let me tell you – very typical Weizmann, he was very cynical. Wonderful, 'Nobody to spit at.' Spit? Nobody to spit at! Marvellous! He was rude you see and cynical and amusing and pretty crude in that way. He sang some Hebrew sort of melody, some kind of, I mean well he did do that and she had no idea what it was and said, 'Chaim [ ]' she called him, 'is this Beethoven do you think?' Inconceivable! I was present when that happened. 'Is this Beethoven?' The relation between Weizmann and Beethoven was remote.

MI [Laughing] Yes! Whereas the relation to the Psalms would be much closer.

IB Mm – not, just a tune, a tune, a Jewish pious tune which would probably be sung after grace at meals or several – well yes, could be a psalm; but it was some little Jewish tune which he remembered which came back to him after all these years, you see, from his father and so on.

MI ‘Cos all her letters to you in the late forties are saying, ‘Why don’t you come out? Why don’t you come and live here, why don’t you put – throw in your lot with the Jewish State?’

IB Well because that’s what he did, because he kept on demanding. He was not pleased with me because I wouldn’t.

MI And what did you say about that kind of stuff, because in your letters you say ...

IB I evaded it in some way.

MI Mm, you evade, yes, you evade.

IB I don’t know what I said.

MI Well you said you wanted to go back to Oxford and do what you do and ...

IB That’s the truth, this is the truth, what I mean I did. But – er – certainly, when I did go – that’s perfectly true, I was quite – you see what happened was I was sitting, apropos of this, I was sitting in the room in New College talking to David Cecil; the telephone rang and at the other end of the telephone was Mr – this is before the State so it must have been ‘47 before, just on the edge of things, Summer ‘47 which was probably during the height of the Anglo

Jewish war. I'd just been to stay with Weizmann, you know [MI Yes] I tried not to, did I tell you that?

MI Yes I know you didn't want to, the correspondence makes clear that you didn't want to, you kept falling sick and stuff ...

IB You know – no, no it wasn't that, I did – I used stratagems, the story is very discreditable to me. I came back, I had just come back ...

MI Oh you wanted to indicate that you'd not got a Visa, you'd not got...

IB Well you had to have a Visa, you couldn't without, that's exactly so and it was awkward for me to ask for one as a British Official and – no I'll tell you, I did worse than that. Weizmann asked me to go and see him. I knew that when I arrived, if I arrived, he would have no idea why I had come. It was part of great men to behave like that, they summon you and then they totally forget but you go all the same because they are who they are. Well I didn't terribly want to go, I think it would be Summer '47. I did go in the end and so then you had the war between the Jews and Egypt going on, you certainly couldn't get into Palestine without a Visa, quite difficult, there was a kind of temporary war time situation. And so then I wrote a letter to the Foreign Office on a not very clean piece of paper [chuckles] saying 'Dear Sir, I would like to spend a holiday in Palestine. Can I have a Visa? Yours sincerely,' then I put a tweeny hand, 'I. Berlin.' I knew what I'd get, I had not written on New College paper you see and naturally I got a printed notice saying nobody's allowed into Palestine now, would I give up all ideas of it. But it's what I wanted. I then wrote to Weizmann saying I've applied for a Visa and then the idea of trying to wheedle one because I'd been a British Official is rather embarrassing. But it would have been if I'd had to do that, it's the truth. Then a telegram arrived from the High Commissioner saying you are invited to Palestine, come whenever you like! [Laughter] That cut off my

retreat! And then I went in a ship which went very very slowly, Panamanian boat going [MI Marseilles] Marseilles with my father and we stopped in Athens and I stayed there for two days and went to a party of my colleague Patrick Riley who was Charg, d'Affairs in Athens, finally we arrived in what was still Palestine and ...

MI And then you saw him there.

IB And I saw him there, yes. That's right, '47.

MI And did he reproach you, did he reproach you vividly about not coming to throw your lot in or did he ...?

IB No, no, but I was telling you. After that when I went back, I received this telephone call and I was sitting in my room in New College with David Cecil and the man said, 'This is Moshe Sharet.' He was at that time the Foreign Minister, foreign [ ] of the Jewish Agency, there was no State, that was a kind of embryonic organisation with a view to a State and then offered me a job and I declined it there and then. And he said, 'Why look, I mean if it's a question of a pension, well you shall have a very good one.' So I said, 'No, it's not entirely – no I'm very sorry I can't.' And I knew I didn't want it because I thought, quite apart from my desire to stay in Oxford which was very strong, supposing – I mean I felt some guilt about this naturally – if I went I'd be torn to pieces. I could see the atmosphere in Jewish Palestine was of such a kind that I could not exist in, neither then nor at any other – it was too violent, too crude, too febrile and people always doing each other down, and doing each other in, Jewish competition if you see what I mean, not at all what I liked. I wanted to stay peacefully in Oxford. I knew I couldn't be able to do anything, I refused to be – just the Foreign Office offered me a job, too. I refused that, too, for different reasons.

MI On the subject of the Foreign Office, one of the things that's – there were two other questions I wanted to ask you about the



Weizmann file: one of them was during the war, whether when you saw him in '42 and '43 in Washington and New York whether you were essentially a conduit to him of the state of mind of the Foreign Office?

IB No, no.

MI Or did you kind of cut yourself in two, really?

IB No, I didn't cut myself in two but I didn't know what the Foreign Office felt about these things. I wasn't – I didn't feel that, I mean I saw telegrams like everybody else but I mean there was nothing in the Foreign Office which could be reported to him. If there had been I might have done for all I know.

MI It wasn't coming through Washington or you didn't ...?

IB No but there was nothing to tell him. What I mean is I wasn't, I was not tempted, I mean there was nothing during '42, '43, nothing, none of the telegrams in the Foreign Office had any relevance to Palestine.

MI And not in '44 and '45?

IB Well there was one, I think there was one particular moment at which I probably did tell – I never told him anything, no. He never asked me, never, never; never pumped me.

MI All right. Oh that's interesting. He didn't regard you essentially as his man inside?

IB No, no, oh certainly not, not a bit. No the Zionists tried to a bit – no. [Phone rings] I'm trying to think in that connection. Zionists used to come and see me occasionally, Sharet did towards the end, Naum Goldmann, those sort of people; but they chatted to me. I had nothing to tell them. There was nothing – there were no secret

negotiations between Jews and the Foreign Office or Zionists or Arabs which came my way. So there wasn't – er – torn to pieces by 'should I tell him?' [MI It didn't arise] 'should I leak?' It didn't arise.

MI The other thing that came up today which I thought was very interesting is that he ...

IB You see he talked to Halifax – if he came to the Foreign Office, well he occasionally went to the Embassy to see Halifax, even that I didn't arrange; he never told me what transpired between them. I didn't have to cut myself – I know what you mean by cutting yourself in half, but I didn't have to.

MI In '46 he gives a speech to the Zionist's Congress in Basel, an important speech which includes a very very strong denunciation of Jewish terrorism. [IB Yes, well?] And that paragraph he consciously attributes to your intervention in the speech. Do you have any memory of that?

IB None. But it's certainly my belief, I mean it's a correct interpretation, what I felt.

MI There's correspondence from Weizmann saying to someone else, 'Isaiah's put a very punchy paragraph about terrorism into the speech and it's a very good paragraph.'

IB I didn't know that I'd put in a paragraph, it's news to me. [MI You'd scribbled something in] News to me. He may have derived it from me but I never wrote a paragraph and gave it to him. I didn't say, 'Why don't you say this?'

MI You scribbled stuff in the margin of the texts that are found in the Weizmann archives, it's clearly in your hand ...

IB What, of the speech? [MI Yes] When I saw it afterwards, I don't think I was responsible. I don't mind having it attributed to me, if

you see what I mean? But in fact I don't think it happened. I mean it may well have. I began telling you, what shall I say, whereas I mean my views about terrorism are very strong. I became terribly anti terrorist by that time. You know the story about me and Begin?

MI Yes, you didn't shake hands with ...

IB Well exactly, for that reason for when in '47 I was with Weizmann, it was going on and I was very horrified, very, very, and I have been anti terrorist ever since, against all terrorists in all countries. I wasn't always; I was rather sympathetic with the Russian terrorists of the eighties and nineties but [MI (?)] and all those guys?] well not [?] that was too much [MI Laughs], no that was too much. [?] measures were horrible ...

MI [?] blew up Alexander the Second.

IB Well he – that sort of thing, and the revolutionaries, you see? But that ceased when I saw terrorism in action, my view was altered on that particular topic. No, in the case of Weizmann I don't think I've consciously ever supplied anything to him. I'll tell you what did happen which was quite amusing which is independent of this. All the telegrams which arrived at the Foreign Office apropos of Jews and Palestine were always same thing, saying, 'Will you rub into the Jews that the white paper which was the one excluding the Jews will not be altered, no good stating all these marches up and down Washington and tremendous amount of fuss and getting hold of the journalists. They were making quite a lot of successful propaganda, the Zionists in America at that time, and will not help them, our minds are made up. But this irritated me rather but I accepted it and that was so and I knew the Foreign Office was anti Semitic anyway; there wasn't a single Jew employed by the Foreign Office then or now as far as I know. The same is true in the State Department. I mean rich men become Ambassadors in America but that's a different thing you see? And then Dr Naum Goldmann who was a sort of Zionist gossip, quite an able interesting sort of

superior Zionist agitator and organiser, came to see me and chatted and said to me, 'You know ...

MI What, give me the dates on this?

IB About '45 round about, something, really towards the end of the war. It might have been '44 but I think really towards '45 and he said to me, 'By the way,' he didn't even say I have something amusing to tell you, he said, 'There is a committee of the Cabinet about Palestine, secret committee, not known to exist, the Chairman is Herbert Morrison and the members of the committee are Oliver Stanley who was the Secretary for the Colonies, Amery who was Secretary for India who was very pro Zionist, Somebody else and Somebody else and Dick Law the President of the Foreign Office. And they get reports from the High Commissioner in Palestine and they have decided that there will have to be partition. Partition you see was passed by parliament in '36 but then was sabotaged by the Foreign Office. I mean there was a vote in parliament which accepted the Peel Commission's report on it – and that reminds me of something I want to tell you in that connection, too, with Weizmann. Anyway he said they had decided that they can't publish it now because it was secret but they have to tell Weizmann. All right, then when more telegrams kept coming in saying the white paper will now be altered, so ... Aline?

AB Are you two working or talking or ...?

IB I'm talking, certainly.

MI We're sort of talking but not – I'm not going to torture him more than another five minutes.

IB No, no but I must tell you the end of this story.

AB No but I wondered if you wanted something – are you all right [whispers for a little while] oh dear me, would you like a little drink?

[MI I'm fine, it's sweet of you ...] A vodka, whisky? [MI Well I'm tempted by a vodka I must say] [IB I forgot this was on] [BI I'll have a little, too actually, that sounds lovely] Just neat with ice? [MI Please]

IB But suddenly, I need to tell you this story, I was very surprised but rather pleased, I was a Zionist and this was exactly what I wanted but I knew – and then the secret, committee secret decision [ ] paper of it, the Foreign Office protested against it, tried to stop it in every possible way but the majority was in favour and they finally decided that this would have to be the policy. All right. And then I thought, oh well I really must put a spike in the Foreign Office's gun quite innocently: out of pure malice I proceeded to report to the Foreign Office one of my messages saying, I hear [chuckles] from a Zionist source you see, that there is this committee and this is what they've decided, in other words they know, it's no use your going on saying 'rub into them' [Laughter] That's why I did it, out of pure malice on my part, I just thought it's an enjoyable thing to do. That produced an explosion, the result was a terrible telegram from Michael Hankey whom I knew saying we told this [MI Sir Maurice Hankey] – his son, we told this thing to Dr Weizmann in secret, we didn't expect him to tell his followers, but of course if people in Washington, Zionist gossip, it will go to the Arabs and everything will then blow up. Well that was all – I didn't know anything about that, it was just that I was rather pleased to perform this particular act of trying to convey to them that it's no good sending these formal telegrams when the other thing was already known. Weizmann no doubt told Goldmann, no doubt he shouldn't have, but still he did. That's what I mean. That I did quite legally I mean if one hears an interesting piece of gossip one reports it, it was my business. There was something else I was going to tell you before in that connection.

MI In connection with Peel? And '36?

IB Yes. One of the things Weizmann said to the Peel Commission is one of the arguments for Zionism which can be used to Jews who were rather against it by me; and that was in London when in 1946 he appeared before the Peel Commission in London, not in Palestine; and I was told about this by Coupland who was the one on that commission and my colleague at All Souls who was rather pro Zionist, the only one on that commission, I mean he wrote the report because he was the literate one, a rather good writer. [chuckles] He said that Weizmann told them – and there's an Irishman about two months before, he threw a pistol at the feet of a horse on which was seated King Edward V111, Prince of Wales. The pistol didn't go off, the horse didn't bolt, nothing happened, the man was arrested, the pistol was removed and it was an episode which led to nothing; just threw a pistol like that, a madman, all right. Weizmann said when this episode happened, it was an Irishman who did it, 'The Irish are those who are not nervous, nor were they anywhere. Supposing I say to you it had been a Jew who had thrown this pistol? Every Jew in England would have trembled.' That's what I mean, that's why they have to have a country. It's rather powerful, rather well done. True! What he said is entirely accurate. I mean they live on the edges of things, they always think they are being looked at and suspected and they're not quite trusted and therefore very – any Jew who does anything wrong, all the other Jews are guilty in some way, they feel responsible you see? That's what I mean, that's the story I remembered.

MI You always called him Mr Weizmann?

IB Dr Weizmann, never Chaim.

MI You never called The Chief?

IB Never. I hated that. They all called him The Chief, Chief even, not THE Chief, Chief says – Mrs Weizmann never used the clause

of assertion [MI She never used the THE] never used the THE; 'Chief says ...; 'Chief doesn't like this ...

MI And you never referred to her as Vera, you always referred to her as Mrs ...

IB Never. Never, never. I was very formal in that way, great friend that I was, I was perfectly formal. He was always Dr Weizmann to me, I didn't, I never called him Chaim and so on. I thought that was improper.

MI I wonder in the end of the day whether you like her much?

IB I got on with her. 'Like her' is too strong. She was a very artificial, rather false lady, false character in many ways: snobbish and wanted to show off and not very sincere and she was very much disliked in Israel to begin with until he died. Then she became Lenin's widow, then she became grand and so on and everyone looked up to her, she suddenly, really the only position she could have is as his widow, she didn't exist otherwise [ ] playing Bridge in London and that is what she did with the rich Jewish friends of others played Bridge and people like – no, I felt about her – she was like a Russian – I'll tell you what she was like, she was like a Russian Colonel's lady in Paris with a little dog and a new book from the lending library every week. That's what she was like. She was completely ...

MI Like a figure out of [Bunin?]

IB Yes but I mean totally unrelated to him and Zionism and the Jews, I mean she was stuck to him because she adored him.

MI [To AB] We're talking about Mrs W.

IB We're talking about Vera Weizmann.

MI We're talking about Vera Weizmann and ... [AB Oh yes!] What did you think about her?

IB Asked did I like her? I didn't exactly like her, I got on with her [AB She was knock about sort of fun sort of girl] so did you. She was very snobbish [AB Seriously], very snobbish and artificial and rather false. She wasn't very genuine. [AB Not very serious.

IB No, no I'll tell you. She was like a White Russian lady in Paris.

MI Would it be accurate to say, because your letters, both of your letters say this, that effectively your honeymoon was in [] [AB Yes] Yeah? But after you were married you went ...

AB It wasn't the day after the wedding but we're talking about – who are we talking about? I'm talking about the wrong person!

MI I meant Vera Weizmann.

AB You know what I was, oh I'm quite – [IB Who were you talking about?] but I don't want to tell you! [Laughter] I was thinking about somebody quite different, I'm nowhere near the name, I won't even tell you.

IB Isn't it awful? Well let's go back to Vera Weizmann. Now what did you think of her? [MI What was she like then?]

AB She was trying to pretend to be a grand lady but she wasn't really...

IB That's what I mean, you see? But then I talked Russian to her and things were very easy, we chatted along very happily.

AB And I'm thinking of somebody utterly ...

IB Who can you have been thinking of? Mrs Solomon.



AB No, no it's quite mad because I don't know why I was thinking of her, I didn't really – it's Stravinsky!

IB Oh, Vera, Vera, because of Vera. They're both called Vera, both were called Vera. [AB And she was quite jolly] She was, very jolly, a large [ ] crook.

MI [Laughing] Was she?

IB Yes, very jolly, very nice, but she liked – certainly. [AB Actually I'm right because you did say Vera] That's quite right. We were on very cosy terms but not exactly intimate and I had this – he was certainly the greatest man I ever knew well. He was pretty ruthless and pretty tough as a character but he forgave me for not coming to Israel, he didn't really persecute me about that, no.

MI Now I'm being very rude, can I use your phone to call a cab?

IB Please do anything you like. We have a man who might drive you?

MI No, no.

IB We have you know, he won't mind. Casimir will take you. [MI No, let's -] Where do you want to go?

MI I've got to go back towards St Anthony's..

IB The time is seven. I think he'll take you. [MI No, not to dine at seven] It'll take time for taxi to arrive, it'll take time. Where is my wife? Well she's the person to approach on this subject.

MI Would it be possible for Casimir to – no, I'll get a cab, it's ridiculous.

IB Well I'm sure you would but if he's doing nothing else, he won't mind.

MI I'll do it this way. [IB All right]

Mrs I Why didn't you write Weizmann's biography?

IB What? Because it's too difficult, too much of a job.

MI Which is what I say about once a week!

IB [Laughing] No, no, I thought it was too much of a job. I mean going into his Russian past, a million documents would have to be read, all those horrible archives in Israel and I didn't know a great deal. I knew him from page nine onwards, everything else would have to be judged, whatever he had done, on the basis of papers because I didn't know him before that and I don't know that he did influence on me, no. I think all the things I believed about.

AB What's going on?

IB Can you call Casimir?

AB What are you doing?

IB He wants to go to St Anthony's.

MI I need to go to St Anthony's. [AB Yes.] [IB Much easier] [AB Casimir will take you, of course] [AB Well I can take you anyway] No, you're not.

IB When do you have to be there by?

MI Well I have to somewhere for seven thirty.

IB If you leave at seven fifteen that'll be all right.

MI Did you ever seriously contemplate a biography of ...

IB No. I knew that I'd be approached, I was a natural person to approach. Crossman was going to write one; that never materialised. There's a conversation between Crossman and Weizmann which I know to be false. Crossman's a terrible inventor. [MI Yes, about Weizmann asking him 'Are you an anti Semite?'] Are you an anti Semite, yes. Inconceivable. Ben Gurion ...

MI Inconceivable that Weizmann would have asked the question. Not that Crossman would have denied ...

IB Oh Crossman would certainly say yes. He'd have enjoyed doing that. No, no. Ben Gurion could have asked it, Weizmann never. Weizmann was always accused of being too pro English, you see? The trouble with him is he became a kind of [ ] because the quislings they looked on him. I mean they tried to not show him documents and circumnavigate him and so on, he wasn't one of us, too pro English and not reliable. He did like the English very much, certainly.

Mrs I Who's the person about two or three days ago who said that you'd never – hadn't been contacted by you to ask ...?

MI Michael Brock.

IB We've done that. Jean was the person, Jean expressed horror at the thought of Michael Brock had not been asked, Jean [?]

MI Well the only thing that I can plead in my defence is that my neglect is completely consistent in general. I've not interviewed many people, I'm still struggling with these files.

IB No, no quite. No, no but he would like to be interviewed.

MI Yes, well I would like to talk to him.

IB Ten years with me, think of that, we got on very well. He was a very very nice man. [MI He adores you] He's a very nice man. [ ] in general, and his wife who's a very nice Scots lady.

MI What are your plans in the Summer, are you here until September? [AB We're here till 14th August] And then you go to Salzburg?

AB We go to Salzburg and we're back the last week in August [ ] come?

MI Do you think I could?

IB Easily. Certainly. [To BI] Why don't you come too? Why don't you?

MI Meeting you is poor Bryony's reward for six months of utter total and complete slavery.

BI Slavery, me in the London Library. I have a very intimate relationship with the photocopier and of many of the shelves.

MI There's an endless amount of biographical reference to Isaiah in the memoirs of others, things like that. There are endless numbers of secondary sources, books that I simply need dug up and Bryony's been great, good at it, very good.

IB I had no idea of any of this. I am very sorry to hear it. [Laughter] How awful for you.

BI Well it's been an education, I've learned a lot about you.

IB Well it's a very nice place, I'm devoted to the London Library, I love it, it's a wonderful Institution.

BI And I had a wonderful few days up at the Jews College and Library.

IB What have they got? Something on me!?

BI They have a lot on you – well, no not that much – well they have a lot on you, they have a file. I was looking up Riga and Latvian history and Jewish history in Latvia and that was fascinating. They have some wonderful books.

IB When I got the Agnelli Prize in Italy I was described in the newspapers as a leading Latvian philosopher. [MI Laughs] I am! There are no others. [MI Laughs] I was described as a leading Latvian philosopher which I was. [He quotes the Italian]

AB Much better than the Daily Telegraph where he 's a leading [?]

MI That makes you really incomprehensible. I was talking about you last night to [IB You don't say] to Marty [Peretz]. [IB Yes I know him] And Peretz and I were discussing the question about why you so heartily despise Hannah Arendt.

IB It's a well known problem.

MI And he surmised that it was partly because she was associated with a kind of, sort of a Dwight MacDonald Partisan Review circle that had, that was very very anti – and I thought that was too complex.

IB No, no, the opposite is the truth. I was very much in with that particular circle. They were of course anti, yes, but that didn't disturb me in the least. No, no, this is just false. I mean the point is that I knew Dwight MacDonald not all that well, but certainly Meyer Schapiro and [Freddie B?] and whatsername, Mary McCarthy, although I knew them all in 1940, '41 in New York. I

met them through somebody and I got on very well with them all. No, no I, the Partisan Review ...

AB I don't think [Parets?] would know much about your reason for ...

IB No he wouldn't, he wouldn't, no he knows nothing.

AB He's one of my worst men ... [MI You don't like him?] Ugh!

IB What? Oh you loathe him, yes. He's not a terribly nice man.

MI I've known him for twenty five years, he was my, initially my tutor at Harvard.

IB I'm glad you call him Parets, ParETS is what he likes to be called but Parets is his name. I know it very well because his great uncle was the one writer of genius in Hebrew and Yiddish, the only one. The rest are all inferior [ ] means nothing, he's very remarkable as a writer and he is a great uncle of some sort. He's certainly called Parets.

MI What about Arendt though?

IB Well how can I explain it? It's always coming up. I met her originally – both for personal reasons and intellectual reasons – I met her I think in New York in '41. She was then conducting an affair with the Zionist, German Zionist called – oh dear, he was the leader of the German Zionists – forgotten his name but I can remember it – and she was then [ ], getting children to Israel and all that in Palestine and she appeared to be a Zionist. He certainly was, I mean he was a prominent Zionist, I mean he was a lifeless sort of Zionist leader and she became on very intimate terms with him and in fact as I later discovered, they did have a jolly affair. I didn't form any opinion of her then but I have a natural prejudice

against German Jews I have to tell you unless they're particularly nice or particularly good ...

AB Don't record that!

MI Very incriminating stuff!

IB I regard them as pompous, pedantic, humourless, heavy and very usually not at all anxious to be Jews. I have always believed that if Hitler had not been anti Semitic, he would have won the war because all those scientists would have worked for him and all the German Jews would have become pro Nazi even if a couple of Communists might not [ ]. Anyway that was that. Then about two years later during the war I don't think I saw her again.

AB We saw her with Bob Silvers in that coffee shop.

IB Much later, that was much later, by that time I already hated her. Then the next time I saw her was when I was having 'flu at Harvard in '49 or '51, one of those – when Arthur Schlesinger brought her up to see me, he wanted to call when she lived with her and she then began saying, she then made a violent attack on Israel, Zionism, the whole thing, violent attack on the grounds that they were oppressing Arabs. There was something in what she said but she said, I think it was a particular ...

## MI TAPE 20

Conversation date: 30 January 1989

Date transcribed:

Transcriber:

Subjects covered:

Oxford 1930s

New York, Washington 1941–6

Churchill

Irving Berlin

Jews and the Holocaust

Contacts with the Soviets

(see also Oxford conversations for more on Washington)

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### *Side A*

IB ... what I did and didn't do, what I felt and what people liked. I did explain that at school I was very happy, I mean I was – except for one rather xenophobic and somewhat homosexual Master, it was then that I felt rather early in my career who plainly didn't like me; but even then it wasn't [ ] anybody else persecuted, it was obvious that he despised me in some way. Apart from that I had a perfectly peaceful time because of naturally anxiety to please I think on my part, natural amiable disposition and capacity for adjusting myself, so that was all right. The only agonising moments were that I couldn't remember Latin verse try to recite in the morning or did rather badly or, I don't know, thought I was going to fail, but that every schoolboy has. But I wasn't very ambitious, I mean I didn't want to go below the eighth or ninth in the form, as I've told you I was never top. Now in Oxford I really had a very good time as an undergraduate because there were people I knew who were gay, agreeable, full of life, affectionate, amusing and I can't complain: both my contemporaries at Corpus, none of whom



I now remember, or few that I remember and people like, I don't know, Bernard Spencer was at Corpus and his poet; Goronwy Rees, Stephen Spender, Martin Cooper, all these people I was brought up with in Oxford. Then Dons like Maurice Bowra were all – it was a very intellectually stimulating milieu and I felt, so to speak, in a state of fairly continuous vitality and that really was extremely nice and I can't complain. I've no painful memories at all, too few. Women meant nothing to me as I told you so that it was not a possible source of agony and anyway there were very few at Oxford and I opted out of that world, the early life.

MI What about intellectual agony, intellectual anxiety? [MI By which you mean what?] Well I remember my own twenties at Harvard for example as a time of discovering painfully my limits, [IB Yes] discovering what I didn't know, discovering that I was not the kind of clever chap I thought I was, coming against people much more talented than myself, [IB Well that happened to me all right] discovering my weaknesses.

IB I discovered that all right, I discovered that I was nothing like as good as some people. How about a piece of nut which [ ], have a nut, those are walnuts but Brazil [MI Brazils and walnuts] Yes [ ] nuts. No, no when I was aware of people being cleverer than myself, I didn't mind, I was under ambitious, I had no desire, no wish to shine, I may have shone in my life but out of ebullience or unrestraint, but not from – it wasn't planned so to speak, I wasn't like Noel Coward who when he went to stay with the Asquiths in the Wharf House not very far from Oxford and they all talked with pretty great brilliance and then the other guests arrived, Asquith and his family left rather gloomy, and was asked what they were like, he said, 'I came to shine, not to be shone upon.' [laughter] Well I didn't mind being shone upon, no that didn't bother me, I didn't think I was very clever.

MI But you did describe having a hard time writing the Marx book, it was testing ...

IB When I went to St Paul's, I mean All Souls, there was New College first, I think I told you, was a very gloomy period, two awful months because I felt I wasn't much liked in the Common Room, pompous, [], disapproving, heavy, hideous, conventional, I couldn't swim at all in those waters, like treacle, I couldn't move, it was viscous. Then I went to All Souls where again I came to life among a lot of contemporaries, there were many more young men and old men, there was a constant recruitment below. But then I was conscious of two things, first of all that I was idle; secondly I taught but still I didn't write anything, on the whole I wasted my time in talking or seeing people. But then I felt there were certain people there, let us say between the ages of thirty-five and forty-five, roughly people who'd been about in the first world war, I'm speaking now of 1932 onwards, who strongly disapproved of me. [MI Why?] They thought I was a chatterbox, idle chatterbox, time waster, wasted my own time and that of a lot of others, would never come to anything, never write any more writing, talks philosophy; on the whole it struck as a quick talker, didn't have any solid flesh, it wasn't a pillar of society; people like the historian Woodward and Sumner and there was a [] called Brierley, all very eminent and honourable men. Well there was one rather nasty man called [Crutchwell?] who's Principal of Harvard who was rather severe with himself; there was Rowse who was nearer to me in age. There was – who else was there about in All Souls in those days who either were fellows or ex fellows?

MI But didn't that sense of you as an idle chatterbox tap into a certain image of yourself that you had at times?

IB Indeed and I felt a wave of disapproval, I realised what happened but it didn't cure me of it, I didn't feel I wanted to please these people. And when I managed to write a book on Karl Marx which was not a terrific book, not very long, the astonishment

amongst these [ ] that I had generated anything was very great and I could see therefore how I was viewed. Then I went to the war – certainly the Warden who was **a thoroughly nice man called Adams who was like an old farmer; he was by nature kindly and courteous but I could see that he too couldn't quite make out what I was about and what I was doing and had been told by others that really I wasn't of much use, I was maybe quite a jolly talker, I was amusing and all that ...**

MI But by the eve of the war, surely that reputation is now ...

IB No, no, it went till the war. Then I started [ ] Walker [ ]. When I came back because I had acquired a certain reputation among Civil Servants and even Ministers for doing, contributing these despatches which were well thought of, the attitude towards me of these same people totally changed and for that I despised them, quite genuinely, quite genuinely you see?

MI You suddenly become an important person.

IB Well yes, I was partly sanctioned. All these important people talked about me as if I was all right, my value had gone up, neither for personal nor for academic reasons, that's why I despised them and then [ ] quite pleased to be well thought of but when Sumner was Warden, much worshipped by other people but not by me, Rowse the Historian as you know, when he got me back at All Souls, at least allowed me to come back, various intrigues were afoot, well in 1950 I could see that the reason was I was OK and the certificate was issued by Ambassadors, high Civil Servants, all of them quite respectful to me, attacked me and so on, people like Macmillan you see turned up as I don't know what, young sort of in All Souls, as peoples' friends and they were quite pleased to meet me and chatted to me and looked on me as a kind of perfectly all right and that made a total difference to the others. That was very bad and I realised that the values of these people, although they

were quite good scholars, were corrupt to some extent. They were not pure hearted scholars.

MI Yes, that's interesting. And what was it that made you a success in the war?

IB That's impossible to tell, absolutely impossible to tell. I wasn't a success in 1941; I was in New York, I was neither a success nor failure. I just sat in an office and got on with my colleagues but no achievements to – what made me a success in the war was being liked by important persons personally, Keynes would appear and then I had a very good time with him because he thought I was amusing, clever, I don't know, [ ] thought, intelligent, just personal meeting, sort of the outside person, outside world and getting on with it quite happily, partly that; and partly that I was given a task which suited my talents which is that of journalism, that's what I was. There's something journalistic about me, I've never been a journalist professionally, never could be I think. To write sort of pieces about people, about situations comes fairly easily to me and I do it with a certain degree of pleasure and amusement and this communicates itself to the readers and the fact that I wrote about quite serious issues fairly accurately but in a lively manner, pleased these persons and so it was a task which intrinsically fitted me.

MI You did that from '42 in the American Embassy in Washington? [IB Yes] Until '45?

IB Yes, I went to Moscow you see which is neither here nor there, there I had a wonderful time but that's [MI That's for later, we'll talk about that] well anyhow it had nothing to do with the English and then I came back in January '46 and left again in April '46.

MI What was your title at the Embassy?

IB I was the First Secretary, quite normal, on the diplomatic list.

MI Did you write a despatch every week, every day?

IB [ ] weekly political summary, that went by code or cipher every week and then I wrote long hand pieces too. [MI Who read that?] The Cabinet, all British Ambassadors to whom it was sent, keep them in touch you know in America, high Civil Servants. Each had a circulation I should think of a hundred, but not more. The rest of the Cabinet read it but it was circulated to them; certainly Churchill will tell you, there's a legend in that I wrote for Churchill's admiration so that I was sort of sent him, totally untrue, he never knew it. I met him after the war, well no I met him, physically I met him because I was sent to the White House to give him a letter because nobody else could be found at that moment, it was rather urgent and he emerged in dressing gown and he said, 'What do you do?' and I mumbled something. He said, 'Splendid, good work, carry on, carry on, carry on, very good thing, yes with all your energy, carry on.' In other words if there's any process he liked to encourage it. It's called [French quote], anything which was going on has to be encouraged to go on; the opposite of stopping things. Well that was his great gift, pushing things forward whatever they might be, you see? Well he had no idea who or what I was. Then I met him at dinner in London with Oliver Lyttelton whom I knew, then I met him at Hatfield with assistants where we spent the night but we didn't talk. Frighteningly I was asked to lunch by him. That's that famous story about Irving Berlin which you must know. [MI No] In that case, the whole world knows but I might as well tell you, it will amuse you and be part of the material I suppose. In 1944, February let's say, Irving Berlin was in London. Mrs Churchill said to Winston, 'Irving Berlin is in London and he's being very generous,' I don't know what charity she was head of, anything you like, 'I think we ought to tell him that we are grateful.' Winston said, 'I want him to come to lunch.' She said, 'I didn't mean that, I mean you could meet him at the Churchill Club,' which existed in those days, I don't know what it was, 'just pat him on the shoulder and say we're very pleased with him, that's all you need do.' 'No, no, I want him to come to lunch because I want to

talk to him about certain things.’ She had no idea why Irving Berlin should be invited, I don’t [ ] lunch, she told me this bit of the story herself. Small lunch that meant – well Irving Berlin was delighted, sharing a suite in the Savoy with Sir Alexander Korda and absolutely over the moon. Winston vaguely knew of my existence I think because probably Eden who did not like Halifax sent all these despatches signed ‘Halifax’ – they were not you know written by Halifax, they were written by a hack called Berlin in the back room [MI Which was true?] It was true but the point is that anyhow he wouldn’t have heard of my name normally, Prime Ministers don’t require what persons in Embassies [ ] sort of wrote drafts so somebody must have done it for not particularly benevolent reasons perhaps. Anyway, so he thought I was an expert in America supposedly and therefore wanted that if I was in Town he thought he might want to talk to me about it, very interested in American matters, all right. I think he may have mentioned that I exist, somehow I came to his notice. Anyhow Irving Berlin was invited. He came; the party consisted of Winston Churchill, Mrs Churchill, Clementine; his daughter Mary; two Private Secretaries, the real Private Secretary was a man called Martin who is still alive; and Jock, what’s his name, Col Colville; the Chief Whip who was a man called James Stuart in parliament; I don’t think there was any more; the Duchess of [?] insists she was there but that’s not absolutely clear. Anyway that was all it was. Well he put Irving Berlin next to him and he said things like – I’ve pieced things together from various accounts because there’s a floating mass of [ ], there are plenty of versions in circulation all of which are true no doubt in their various ways – and he said to him, chatted to him, said to him, ‘Do you think Roosevelt will be re-elected this year?’ In ‘44 you see? To which Irving Berlin said, ‘Well, in the past I voted for him myself, this year I’m not so sure.’ He had this Brooklyn accent. He said, ‘Are you American?’ Everybody was very surprised extremely surprised but obviously Winston thought, well America and England, they’re the two streams flow together, didn’t say anything, let that pass and then I don’t know, they didn’t, conversation didn’t go so well because Winston had no small talk.

He said, rather a little bit frustrated, 'What do you think is the most important thing you've written for us lately, in your opinion? What ought we to take notice of?' Well Irving Berlin had no idea what this could mean and said, 'It'll be White Christmas,' something rather like that. Winston thought he was brash, mad, couldn't understand what was happening at all, fell into a gloomy silence, sullen silence. Mrs Churchill said, 'You know we ought to be very grateful to Mr Berlin, he's been very generous to [ ]. Churchill said 'I don't understand.' More silence. However Berlin by this time must have been sweating with embarrassment. Then finally he said, 'Mr Berlin, when do you think the European war is going to end?' just for the sake of saying something. Irving Berlin said, 'Sir, I shall never forget this moment. I shall tell my children and my children's children that in the Spring of 1944, the Prime Minister of Great Britain asked ME [laughter, MI That's rather good!] well, he's a – what do you expect him to say? At this point he was getting cross, didn't know what had been going on, he said 'I'm afraid I must be off.' Got up, disrupted the lunch a bit. Irving Berlin left, went back to Korda and said, 'Mrs Churchill was wonderful, she was very nice, she was wonderful to talk to; maybe Winston Churchill is the greatest man living I should think. I don't know what it was, I felt we somehow didn't click.' [laughter] He said that to Korda, told me. Then you see his wife immediately said to Winston, 'Fool, I mean, the wrong man, I told you.' He was delighted and told the entire Cabinet the entire thing that afternoon. [MI Oh really] Absolutely, the whole story and they all giggled like anything you see? And then Korda came to New York and told somebody in the Embassy who told me, I learned of it within about ten days. [MI That was wonderful] It was all right for me because it's rather like – but Irving Berlin denied it always, denied it ever happened, at least it was denied by mistake. It's rather as though Beethoven was asked by mistake for some obscure hack also called Beethoven [MI laughs] And then finally as a result of all this, Winston became aware of me and after the war when he was in opposition, Bill Deakin who was – sort of wrote his books before the war, took me along because he wanted to talk about the first volume of his

memoirs in which he talks about the Russian trials, Soviet trials. For some reason, he thought I was an expert in Russian affairs at least, Bill Deakin was the representative, though I wasn't at all, all I knew was what the newspapers had said and showed it to me, I mean, we had lunch. First he propped up the book on a kind of vase but then he thought it was rather impolite to read during lunch, there were three or four other people there, his daughter and the secretary or something and Bill, and we chatted. He said to me, 'Who did you work under in Washington?' I said, 'Lord Halifax.' 'Ah!' he said, 'Edward, he is a man compounded of charm. In his presence, I melt. But there's something that goes through him like a yellow streak; grovel, grovel, grovel. Grovel to the Germans, grovel to the Americans, grovel to the Indians, grovel to everybody.' I didn't know what to say so I said, 'Well he's probably had a – don't you think he's had a rather narrow education in some ways?' 'If you can believe that,' he said, 'you'll believe anything.' [MI laughs] After that – like the Duke of Wellington – after that he sang songs and delivered a violent attack on the Astor family who he said were nothing but the source of total damage and harm to England, the whole damn lot. [MI Really?] Yes [MI What were the grounds for his attack?] He didn't really specify, it was just vituperation, I didn't really examine him. [MI But what was the casus belli?] Well Lady Astor was an appeaser and pro Hitler, all right, at least – all right. Lord Astor was a feeble old thing, just a rag of a man who went along with her. David Astor was a silly Leftist who was no good either, you see he was told he was a feeble Leftist – what other Astor? There was a cousin, other Astors were all, I mean they were a part of English society which went along with the Germans, which were feeble, they didn't stand up, they were the wrong part of the Conservative Party. The Observer, which was their newspaper, was an appeasement paper I mean long before the crisis, I mean it was always wanting to make peace with the Germans; so that on the whole they were the enemy, part of – Halifax belonged to the same, Chamberlain, that was all part of that. They were friends you see and Lindbergh and ... I can see he wouldn't like them; then there were the Right Wing, there



were no Leftists except for poor old David , there were the sons who shouldn't once even be aware of: Michael Astor, Bill Astor, Jake Astor all of whom I met in my day, I don't think, they were very young or meant nothing to him. What he meant was Lady Astor and her husband [MI And that set] That set exactly, you see? [MI Did he listen to you?] No, nor did I have much to say; well I did yes, to this extent: that he said to me that he was convinced that Tukhachevsky and the other Marshals were traitors [MI They weren't traitors!] they were rightly executed, rightly executed. [MI Isn't that interesting ...] One moment. I demurred at this point and said, 'You know it's not very likely because if they had been, we don't know the facts of course, if they had been there would be German documents in Berlin which we captured, which were looked at. There's not the faintest scintilla of evidence amongst them of any contact, well I don't know if this is true, that's what I have been told; have you looked at them?' [MI And what did he say to that?] He said, 'Well, you say that but I trust Benesch. Now the charges against these people, the charges were laundered by the NKVD through Prague [MI Indeed, through Benesch] Well Benesch may have believed it, Benesch could have believed it. His Secret Service co-operated, he's pro Soviet anyway, and this is the thirties presumably. Well he may or may not have known what was happening but let's be charitable and assume that he was taken in.

MI I always thought it was the dreadful White Russians who got in touch with Heydrich [IB Who did what though? Who told Heydrich about?] Well Tukhachevsky had contact with the German Army under Weimar ...

IB Inevitably yes because they trained there, Colonel von Seckt and all that.

MI Yes, and then in the late thirties the White Russians, General [S?], General [M?], all these frightful people had contacts with Heydrich, the SS, fabricated some stories about Tukhachevsky which were then passed to Benesch and passed to Stalin.

IB When you say fabricated them, you mean just as misinformation? [MI Yes] Just to make trouble? [MI Yes] It's perfectly possible. But I think, no I think it's probably, it must have been NKVD operation; I mean Stalin must have ordered that sort of thing to happen.

MI Well, oh it was, it starts with the NKVD, the White Russians are just the couriers of the NKVD. [IB It could be, it could be] It's one of the most disgraceful aspects of the White Russian emigration.

IB Well of course yes, it could well be, but the point is that he trusted Benesch who assured him – why should he disbelieve him? – so he went on believing this. What he put in his novel, volume I can't remember, I argued about that a bit and denied it you see? But I can't remember what came out in the end because I never read the volume he pressed me to read I think, it did not deserve attention. I don't think I came across, I don't know whether he actually put that in. I doubt it, it would have been terribly attacked if he had done it and people would have noticed. That was the only thing; and then in the end he said to me, 'And now Mr Berlin, what kind of honorarium, honorarium [chuckles] would you want?' So I said, 'Oh I don't know [ ] , that's very Monkish of you.' He said, 'Oh I can't have that.' And I left and I did get the honorarium which I remember, I didn't know what to do with it and thought I can't send it back, too insulting; I can give it to a charity but no, that's all right, I did a certain amount of work for him, I did read his first volume, I wrote him a long letter. I remember noticing something that I took exception to: he talks about going to Munich in 19 – I would say '32, when Hitler was already about in [ ] and he wanted to meet Hitler, that was the point of the journey because, why, he was still anti Russian, it might be all right, I don't think he had any anti Hitler feelings, by 1932 he had no anti Hitler feelings I suspect. And he went to Lindemann and they were entertained by a man called Putzi Hanfstaengl. He was the son of those famous

art – not art dealers but art people who reproduced those wonderful reproductions of art from the Kunstschilder in Munich; he was at Harvard, he was polite, he knew – he'd been in America, he was elegant, he played the piano. For eminent foreigners he was the go-between; he was the man who used to arrange – he was the obvious person to look after well-mannered foreigners [ ] of a very important kind. Well they all dined together and he played the piano as always happened and then Winston said, according to himself, this is in his volume, he said, 'The Führer of the Party, the leader of the Party, Hitler, I can conceive, I rather admire what he did. When a country is down I admire any man who pulls it up and gives it pride', or whatever it is, and 'So I've got respect for this sort of achievement, that he has made a difference. But what's all this about the Jews?' he said. 'Of course,' he said, 'if the Jews are **against the country**, one has to do something, but the German Jews, so far as I know, are totally loyal to the regime.' At this point Putzi Hanfstaengl realised that he might bring this up with Hitler, in which case [ ], so no interview took place, it was abolished. Hitler was busy and couldn't see [ ] meeting. [MI Interesting] And I wrote to him and said, well **this business about Jews being against the country might be taken rather ill**, might be [ ] of certain of his own friends like Mr [Barouk?] and the like who stayed in New York. **I don't know what he did with it, he may have excluded it or not.** [MI Yes, it's an interesting story] But I did write to him, to North Africa I think, he was by this time in Casablanca having pneumonia I think or recovering from it. It must have been sort of late-ish forties under the Labour government. Sorry, this is just an anecdote.

MI No, it's wonderful. I want to get back to Washington '42–5 and how you ...

IB: I can tell you what happened to me there ...

MI: Tell me.

IB: I knew a John Foster, who was ... legal adviser, who had been a Fellow of my College; he was a very agreeable, remarkable, very odd man, not worth describing to you really, who – he was a very free spirit, lacked certain human qualities, benevolent, amusing, not exactly an adventurer but sort of full of vitality and fun, couldn't understand why poetry was written, why words were put in this funny way together; had never read a novel in his life because he didn't want to read false statements about reality when you could read history and newspapers, and he couldn't imagine living in a world that didn't have telephones, for example; he didn't smoke, didn't drink; he went to bed with more ladies than anybody in the twentieth century. His promiscuity was total. He didn't know the meaning of the word 'love', I think. He was like a very nice dog, a very frisky dog who didn't happen to have a human soul. He had a heart, a nervous system and a very good quick brain. And terribly benevolent. He was a pure Benthamite utilitarian. He believed in maximising human pleasure. He was altruistic. But pleasure to him meant physical pleasure. Therefore medicine he was prepared to back because that minimised pain. But research – he was a Fellow of All Souls – research into, I don't know what, crusaders of Malta, seemed to him to be mad, absolute rubbish. But, since people enjoyed it, he didn't want to stop them, because pleasure was all right and they took their pleasure in these funny ways. His natural friends were the rather, sort of, slightly, slightly dubious Jewish lawyers in Brooklyn, those sort of people.

MI: He was legal adviser to the State Department?

IB: To the British Embassy. No no, he was an Englishman. And he happened to be on the other side at the beginning of the War, so he offered himself for the job – legal adviser. All right, he was first cousin of the Head of Chancery or something. He went to Eton, but was expelled. He was expelled for ....

MI: And was it to him that you got seconded?

IB: No, no, no. The point was – ultimately, yes. What happened was that, I was going to Moscow as I told you [?]. Well, I stayed with him while I was in this limbo and then – and he was the man who kept inventing jobs for me because he thought I mustn't go back and be killed by the Nazis. But then, when I got back to America, the job I had in New York had nothing to do with him. But when I – at the end of my job in '41, it was he who thought that I might do this particular job which I did do, and got me the job. That he did.

MI: He was a friend. No, no, no I'll tell you why. He had about three thousand intimate American friends, he was the most popular Englishman that ever was in America because he was amusing, he was agreeable, he was gay and full of life, adored Americans; didn't like being with one or two people in the room, liked being with fifty. I once asked him at All Souls when he was going to bed what would keep him in the room. He said, 'Well if two or three people came in it wouldn't, but if thirty people came in, I'd stay.' So he was odd you see? He lacked certain human qualities as you perceive, I mean all these girls he used to – he used to go to bed with ugly girls because he did them good, he didn't mind who he did it with and it set them up because nobody else would. He did it purely as an act of kindness [laughing]. That was my friend Sir John Foster. He became a Conservative MP and he became Under Secretary of the Ministry, Office of Commonwealth Relations and he said, 'Do what I might, I couldn't get the work of the Office to last more than twelve hours a week.' [laughter] [MI Who else was in that team?] Well he then met the new various social Americans and introduced me to them when I stayed with him; and then I had a friend called Rumbold as I told you who was the Second Secretary who I'd known at Oxford and perhaps certain other friends. Through them I met other Americans and through them yet other Americans and I began, I mean I began my

own set. The set consisted of, I'll tell you exactly because I've still kept up with them, well partly Felix Frankfurter, too who I knew. There was first of all the Left Wing, Philip Graham who was the law clerk to Frankfurter, his wife Kay now this rather well known lady; a man called Edward Pritchard who I don't think I've told you about him [MI Yes you've told me about him, Tennessee] Kentucky [MI Went to jail] That's true, he was a friend of ours; various – Donald Hiss, brother of Alger Hiss, in the State Department; [MI John Ferguson?] John Ferguson, same thing: so you see that was one lot.

MI And they all lived in a house didn't they?

IB They originally lived in a house called – I've forgotten the name of the house – yes they did, but then when they married they didn't but I mean they did live in the house and Johnnie and what's his name? Ochs who wrote for the Times afterwards, he lived in the house. It was called Hockley and it was in Washington [MI In Georgetown or?] No, no, not Georgetown, it was called Hockley and I used to go and dine there you see, they were very good company, very nice and all New Dealers which was my natural so to speak political climate so that I found no difficulty in talking to them at all, I found myself in total harmony with all – that's one lot.

MI You sound as if you were closer in harmony to American New Deal liberalism than you were to British Socialism?

IB Oh certainly, oh yes, oh Lord yes, and closer to American politics than I was to English politics because I like, I judge things in tremendously personal terms which may be an exaggeration. In England politics were made by Institutions, Ministries of a regular kind, groups of let's say conservatives who met in country houses, in other words certain persons of a certain sort as it were groups and sets of people, Parties, the Labour Party or whatever it is and groups in that: in America, everything was entirely personal. The

State Department was Institutional, the Treasury up to a point [MI But the White House] not only the White House; if you asked any American in the war, 'What do you do?' he said, 'I work for Mr Nelson, I work for Henry Morgenthau,' not 'I work in the Treasury'. The State Department was just the State Department, they didn't say, 'I work for Mr Hull,' they didn't say that, you see? They were really diplomats, they were regular [ ]. The New Deal upheaved all the other departments, they didn't say I work in the Department of Justice, I work for Mr Biddle,' you see? That was the normal answer and the relations, politics, were to a large extent fashioned by relationships of both officials but above all, whether Ministers or Secretaries or the Cabinet members, to each other. So it was in Oxford, between Colleges and between Dons. So I understood how that worked without difficulty, it was much more like Oxford than like England.

MI And you didn't find America repulsively vulgar, coarse, crass, all those things?

IB I was very unhappy in New York when I didn't know very many people and I think I told you, I used to stand on the 44th Floor in the Roxburgh building looking at the street and had a sudden desire to commit suicide, suddenly throw myself out. I thought of all these little ants running about, one more, one less couldn't make a difference. I felt somehow in the – we're just a cipher, a number, had no individual personality at all. But In Washington it was quite different. No, no I did not find it vulgar, no; Washington was not very vulgar either, I mean other towns would have been more but I didn't mind, no; the coarseness, vulgarity, no, no. The warmth compensated for everything, for everything. I didn't know many Jews, very few: my life was entirely spent among WASPS as far as I could see. Now my other lot of friends were the State Department Russian experts who I must have met through somebody, I can't remember, I think John Russell who had served in Moscow and made friends with me in the Embassy, so Chip Bohlen who was the famous – who became an intimate friend; and

who were the others – there was a man called Freddie Reinhardt, there was a man called [D?]; there was George Kennan after all, went to Moscow afterwards, but still it was part of the same world, you see? And I met – in Washington, parties were given by, oh American, British; there was Hiss in Washington who always asked people of Diplomatic rank as such. In London the Embassies don't count all that much; the French Ambassador, the American Ambassador are all right but it isn't a tremendous feather in your cap to get the American Ambassador to your table. But in Washington, Ambassadors counted far more, they were the sort of social tops of at least all the important – but even the Brazilian Ambassador was OK.

MI And you enjoyed that kind of diplomatic ...?

IB Yes, I met people there and through them met others and I had a very rich social life, I was invited out by Americans, by Frenchmen, by Brazilians, by Swedes, all kinds of things and I had a very agreeable diplomatic social life in a fascinating town where of course everything, well it was the centre of the world and everything was going well, anyone of importance came.

MI Did you have a sense immediately that ...?

IB There were also thirty Dons there, from Oxford, in various government departments and they formed a Mafia. When you wanted something done with some other government department represented in Washington, you rang up somebody you knew quite well and they told you everything. It was an underground Mafia of Dons. There were three thousand British officials in Washington during the war, that sort of number. So I had a very good time, I fear. I was ashamed [ ] of the war. [MI Why ashamed?] Well I mean people were suffering and dying and doing all kinds of things and sleeping in Tubes, Tube Stations. Here I was, in the most, with excellent food, more money than I was ever given in Oxford, far more, untaxed, [MI Having a wonderful time] having a wonderful



time! And above all, very little work. By nature I am idle; writing these telegrams was not very hard work. You had to read through [MI Halifax didn't work you very hard] Halifax worked nobody very hard, Halifax had nothing to do with the Embassy much, he was a Viceroy by nature, he looked with contempt upon these pen pushers who came from Winchester and other inferior schools and they answered in kind, they didn't like him. [MI Well who did the work then?] Well the, there were the pen pushers, there were all these some of who hated it, I mean, the [ ] of the Diplomatic Corps did work; but the point of my job was just producing this weekly telegram. All I had to do was to read precisés of the newspapers which had done In New York with the propaganda office, anyway as an observation, go to the Press Club, have lunch with people, talk to people at the White House like Pritchard, talk to people at the State Department who knew what I was doing and get the sort of hang of things which you could do in Washington, and would be very stupid not. It wasn't a question of cocktail parties, you never learned anything at them, but it was a question in general, well you read the Times and knew very well that if Arthur Krock made an attack on the Navy Department he was put up to it by the War Department. If you knew the basic relationships you see, the code was plain, I mean if you leak it [ ] – I knew nothing about, in real sequence, I mean I knew nothing about Defence sequence of the Army or Navy, that wasn't about politics, it was fairly open.

MI Did you travel much in the States?

IB Well I was sent round the States to talk to British Consuls in order to get the hang of the States, very enjoyable, quite useless. All that happened was that I was entertained by Consuls who wanted to be praised by me for their help; and I always met the Americans at their tables who were very pro them and said how marvellous they were [laughter] [MI That was useless] I learned nothing, no, but I did go round. I went to the Middle West, I went to – well the other thing is that – have I told you my story about the – my knowledge of the Labour Movement? [MI No, tell me]

When I was in New York as a propagandist, one of my assignments was as I told you, the non smart elements of society which meant Negroes, Jews, Catholics, Labour, Mormons and generally speaking persons on the wrong sides of the tracks, non WASP [ ] the Establishment still to an enormous extent in war time, the number of important gatherings was not great. I mean there were some but nothing like what I'd thought. Well the [ ] was in alliance with the TUC, that was the [ ], they were well disposed, war effort; but the CIL which was anti [ ] came from Catholic countries in Europe, poor, they were unskilled workers, they came from Italy, the Balkans, central Europe. They were on bad terms with [ ], the Church was violently isolationist and so were they therefore. Moreover, all the other Empires had gone to pieces because there was no Russian Empire, no Austro Hungarian Empire ...

*Side B*

IB ... nation with which they felt socially uncomfortable. So they were on the whole not well disposed. Now there was a great effort in England to do something about them. The United Engineering Workers – were they called UEA or something? Yes, well they had a Convention in Buffalo. The arrangement in London was somehow, somebody persuaded them or somebody, to get a broadcast for the Convention by Herbert Morrison who was not a Trade Unionist and therefore all right. That was accepted [ ] the President of the Head of the Union whose name I can't remember, a rather colourless personality who was elected simply because the powerful ones were all at loggerheads with each other, there was [Luther?], there was [Frankenstein?], there were all these Ford Motor, I mean Ford and General Motors, they were old buffs and as they all hated each other some middle, some [ ] guardians which was all right. Suddenly – and I was the person responsible for getting the tape across or whatever to headquarters – suddenly I got a telephone call from somebody in that Union who said, 'I'm afraid we can't have Herbert Morrison's speech; no good, I'm afraid it just can't be done,' some man who was Head of the

Department, some Jewish name, public relations man; said, 'Why not?' He said, 'Well I'm afraid I can't tell you but it's no good, it's off.' So I said, 'But why? I have to say something to Mr Morrison, I mean he won't understand.' And somebody said, 'Well I certainly can't tell you on the telephone.' So I said, 'But if I come and see you?' 'Well maybe.' I flew off with my assistant Mr Bathurst who is now Sir Maurice Bathurst QC, to Buffalo. We stayed at the [Book Cadillac?] hotel to which came this man who tried to pull the telephone out of the wall; that was impractical so we went into the street to talk. He thought it might be bugged, it was possible. It was my first contact with the Labour Movement, face to face. He then said, 'Look, now let me explain. One of our fraternal delegates is John N Lewis. Now you know what he is, he plays with the Commies, he's very anti British and he's a pretty powerful fella, he's the most powerful of all our bosses in the CIL. Now he's not going to have Morrison talk because he hates the British.' I said, 'How can he stop it?' He said, 'Well I can tell you. There's a man called [Lovestone, J. Lovestone?] – is that a name to you? [MI Yes it is vaguely] Wait and I'll tell you this story in a moment about him, too. 'Now he's been mixed up in our affairs, he was a Commie, he was originally a main Communist who broke away and formed his own Communist Breakaway but he remained a Communist.' Very clever and curious man about whom I shall tell you in a second, comes into my life too. 'Now when Homer Martin was the Head of this Union', whoever he was, 'he was mixed up with him and then Homer Martin lost the job, awful things went on, I can't tell you what happened, it wouldn't be of interest to you. Now J. Lovestone is in Dubinsky's Union. Now you know that Dubinsky went back to the [ ] visit. Now he's been made something like – Dubinsky doesn't know what to do with him because he's a pretty dangerous fella, so he made him Head of the Ladies' Garment Makers section, 'Bundles for Britain' [chuckles] which gives him a salary [chuckles] and meaningless post, keeps him safe. If John N Lewis mentions the name of J Lovestone here and the British, there'll be an uproar; everybody will get up and shout and that'll be the end of that and the man we want, the

present Head of the Union, will not be re-elected. So we just can't do it.' [MI This is 1941?] '41 yes, middle, Summer. Well I understood all this so I said, 'Yes I see, I don't see how it can be done.' But I was very happy to learn all this, it was fascinating. So then I said, 'Well who's the CIL, who else do you have here beside your ...' 'Well I've got this CIL secretary, he's a nice fella called Jim Carey, he belongs to the Electrical Workers.' So I said, 'Is he responsible for contact for the whole Convention?' 'Yes he is.' 'Do you think I might meet him, just out of interest?' I met Jim Carey and verified the facts with him and he, we became friends, and I remember meeting him afterwards in Washington when I asked him about a man called [Lee Pressman?] who was the Editor of the serial news group it was called, and I said, 'They say he's a Communist. Is he a member of the Party?' Jim Carey said, 'He cheats the Party of its dues.' It's a formula I've always remembered about certain people. [laughter] Anyway we became great friends. And then I learned a lot about the Labour Movement and then I met Phil Murray who was Head of the [CIO?] and he invited me to the Convention in Kansas City or somewhere but I couldn't go to it because the British Consul wouldn't let me go, he said if I was seen from the gallery, there'd be people who'd say the British were manipulating and I decided all right, I wouldn't take the risk.

MI It's fascinating, it's like the Benesch history of the kind of isolationism that hasn't, that ...

IB No longer exists [MI Yes] at least in that movement it doesn't, but that was part of the Church, partly the Church and partly the fact as I say they were non classy. I once travelled in a cab, he said, 'Where do you come from?' I said, 'I come from England.' 'That's a classy country.' I said, 'Well which is non classy?' 'Oh well you know, Germany is classy, Sweden's kinda classy. I come,' he said from wherever it was, 'from Poland, that's not classy.' So I could see the Catholic countries of the South and centre of Europe were not classy, the Protestant countries of the North were. It is, was so, though American society was in a sense divided into that but

these were the real proletariat of an unskilled kind and their attitude to the English would be oppressors of Indians and enemies of the church and all that. I mean they had no contact with it. I always thought that about America, that in the Middle West if you were a Czech and somebody else was a Swede and somebody else was I don't know what, a Latin American, and you were all living in wherever it was, Columbus, Ohio; the only way to get together was through [Kiwani's?] [MI Rotary] various types of Rotary where you all wore funny hats and you sang songs and that made you crazy; then you were no longer afraid of each other. But if I was a Czech, provided you were an Irishman, hated the Austrians, I was prepared to hate the British. There's a certain common cause of the victims of the class countries, you see? Or classes, not class countries but classes, upper classes, common cause against what they had fled from Europe from.

MI Did you think at any point, say '41, that the Americans wouldn't come in under the British in the war?

IB Yes I did. I thought the following and I still think it but it's not very plausible perhaps. I don't think it but I wonder if it's possible, I wouldn't say probable: that Roosevelt thought he would win the war without fighting it; he'd be on top then, economically and in every way. He thought somehow that by supplying the British, quite heavily – he was entirely on their side, of course, and his whole administration was, including the two Republican Cabinet members, who were Stimson and Knox – that he would supply them with help, so he would do everything possible, but not actually declare war. So no American boys would actually get killed, and then at the end he'd be in the neutral position of being able to dictate the kind of world he wanted – you see – in a way, more powerful than [Wilson?] you see? The Japanese felt that, yes, but he did do, he provoked the Japanese in a sense, I mean he took risks. I can tell you what happened; when people were interventionists like [Herbert Agar?], Dorothy Thompson in those days who were interventionist American journalists would go and

see him because they were famous enough and important enough to be seen and would try and urge him to go to war, help England, he would say, 'Look, if you can get public opinion moving in that direction, all right, but I can't. It's not about America, it will divide the country, it just can't be done.' And he was prepared for that, he didn't push. Still if there was a great wave of something, he wouldn't mind as indeed happened because of the Japanese, or anything else which would as it were give America a shove in that direction. But I think he hoped, so that when he made all those speeches about not a single American boy would go to the Front [MI He meant (Inaudible comment)] Could have done, I wouldn't say he didn't, there's no reason to think he did.

MI And had he – and therefore there was in '41 really quite a good chance that the British would have lost the war.

IB It seems to me that if Hitler had invaded, he could have invaded successfully, all right the Air Force was marvellous and all that; but still if they were prepared to lose people and just send ship after ship to land in England, they'd have lost, I don't know, half a million people; but they could have done [MI They could have won] They could have won and what would have happened, I think America would have been neutral and England would have been invaded. And there was a very terrible game that one used to play in England during the war which I used to enjoy about who would have collaborated. It's a very cruel and malicious game because there was no positive evidence except that people were obviously pro Nazi but still it was an amusing game to play: would he or would he not? There was this famous black list, famous list, who the Nazi's were going to arrest or exterminate. There was a list which I think the Intelligence had, MI5 got hold of it. I never saw it but various people were rather proud to be on it.

MI [laughing] to be on it. What should we talk about next? I want to get more ...

IB So that in Washington at least I was a member of these two American sets, I was treated like a brother, that's my point; and no other British official that I knew of quite was.

MI Why's that? Just because of your Oxford connections because you're an amusing man or was that ...?

IB Whatever the reason, I fitted into the particular set, both – and they never met each other. It was only after the war that I brought them together to some extent, New Dealers on my left and rather conventional, somewhat anti Semitic I should think State Department diplomats, I mean traditional absolutely career men on the other with whom I got on. But they didn't know each other. [MI All very WASP] Totally WASP.

MI What was the climate for a Jew at that point?

IB There was plenty of anti-Semitism. The Jews in America did not make enough fuss about immigration because from their point of view rightly, they were afraid of annoying Congress which would have increased anti-Semitism so they behaved in a cowardly but intelligible manner, you see, they did not, they didn't scream in the thirties, they didn't bring pressure to bear [MI Whereby Stephen Wise couldn't ...] obviously Wise couldn't do anything about them on his own, didn't have enough clout but the people who really counted you see were all these millionaires and people. Oh there were some, I mean there was Eugene Meyer, the Head of the Federal Reserve under Hoover, [?], those sort of people, Mr Strauss, Admiral [Straws?], the American Jewish Committee which was a respectable committee of rich Jews of a careful kind. These people were aware of the strength of anti-Semitism and were rather leery of provoking it. They might have done, but still I don't think it would have done them any direct harm if they had, so it wasn't very grave. Look, what I mean is this: Chip Bohlen and I invented a term which really comes from [?], historian, mainly used to talk to me about the Order of Trembling Amateur Gentiles – no,

Trembling Israelites, Order of Trembling Israelites that meant the situation of the Jews who were terrified of annoying the Gentiles. I changed that into Order of Trembling Amateur Gentiles which was according to – I used to talk to everybody about it. The Head of that movement, of that Party was the Editor of the Times, Mr Sulzberger, Cyrus, who once said to me – not Cyrus, no, Arthur; Arthur Hays Sulzberger who said, ‘Mr Berlin, don’t you think the term ‘Jew’ could be taken out of circulation, neither radio nor Press would ever use the word at all for say twenty years, it would do a very great deal of good?’ It really was contemptible, you see? It really was. Well Arthur Krock was a Jew but denied it; Walter Lippmann [MI Denied that he was a Jew?] Yes, firmly, said he wasn’t. [MI Walter Lippmann?] Walter Lippmann trembled, didn’t deny it but hated it, a source of tremendous weakness, a source of terrific weakness, it debilitated him, it was a skeleton as it were in an open cupboard you see? Hated being one. [MI Did you meet him much in the war?] Oh yes, apropos, I used to see him about once a month, used to ask me to lunch because he thought I knew about what was going on, he was mistaken; and we used to do tour [?]. We talked about Japan, then we’d talk about China, then we’d talk about India, then we talked about the Soviet Union, then we talked about Persia, then we talked about Turkey, then by [santa mortale?] we’d be in Italy. Palestine could not be mentioned, just couldn’t. He never wrote about it, it was a sensitive area which could never be touched you see? There were a lot of people like that. Mr [?] Straws?] wasn’t like that, Admiral Straws – I said to him to try to persuade him to do something about some British cause and he said, ‘No, no, the Jews have to be very careful because you see we don’t want to seem warmongers.’ I said, ‘Look Mr Straws, if Hitler wins the war the opposition will not be very easy. If Hitler loses the war nobody is going to blame you for premature anti Nazism. [chuckles] [short break in tape] ... was a Zionist, a life long Zionist I think. In the Embassy, I don’t think it was known very widely because I didn’t conceal it, I used to talk about it to anyone I knew well, like John Russell or Gore Booth or some of these officials whom I knew. I think it was being English and because I



was quite popular he felt this vaguely eccentric fact about me but not dangerous.

MI An eccentric fact that you were a Jew or that you were a Zionist?

IB Both; and you see now the Jews really did tremble, the upper class Jews. I will now tell you a story just to get it on to the record but [ ] divulged till I'm dead. When I was in New York I met one of the Warburgs, Eddie Warburg who was the only son of old Felix who was a great millionaire who's still alive; and he said he wanted to talk to me about something. He told me the following which is this story. The Summer of '41 Henry Morgenthau went for a Summer holiday in the Caribbean. He landed, or was made to land, in other places in the Dominican Republic where there was a little colony of Jewish refugees under [ ] prearranged by Michael Rosenberg who was some sort of professional Jewish Charity sort of organiser, refugee, as an alternative to Zionism which they all hated. Well there may have been three hundred people there, four hundred. He visited them because Mr Rosenberg was anxious for him to do it and instead of thinking how marvellous found they were in such squalid conditions, such broken human beings, so awful, that he was tremendously upset, came back – he was a simple man – he came back to Washington and sent for the Elders of Zion. The Elders of Zion for these purposes were Eugene Meyer, Felix Frankfurter, Eddie Warburg, Bernard Baruch, Herbert [S?] Baruch, Ben Cohen, eminent Jews of a partly rich, partly politically important and Herbert Lehman. [MI Oh he really did get the whole lot] And he said to them, 'Look, what is happening to the Jews in Europe is appalling. The British have shut the gates of Palestine, something must be done. We're giving them all this money.' He was terrific [ ], Morgenthau, I mean at least this was part of his doing and he really did supply the English. 'We've got certain influence on them, we must make them open to get them to do something, at least [ ] going to be killed,' [ ] slightly hysterical talk. Then Eddie Warburg got hold of me and said,

‘Look, Hank Morgenthau,’ as he called him, ‘Hank Morgenthau has gone mad. At the end of the war justice will be done and adequate social and economic arrangements will doubtly be made which people will be well treated and just probably will be much alleviated and even solved. But to make the English who are fighting alone is [ ], bullying into doing something of this kind just because we’re a main source of thought will be most unfair; and if they knew about it and if America knew about it, anti Semitism would rise by leaps and bounds.’ I said, ‘I don’t agree but why are you telling me all this?’ He said, ‘You’re a British official. Would you write to Lord Halifax and say that if Hank Morgenthau goes to him and talks to him about it which he well may, that he’s talking entirely on his own behalf, that he has not got the American Jewish Establishment behind him?’ Well my position was rather awkward. I was a British Official, I was given a message to the Ambassador, it would have been improper to suppress it and fatal to deliver it, so it seemed to me. I did write him a letter of a somewhat non committal kind, I have to admit. Of course I cheated. I wrote him a letter saying that I’d been visited by an eminent member of the Trade Banking Community who was Edward M Warburg. He told me that the Secretary of the Treasury was deeply exercised about the fate of the Jews in Europe and might very well talk to you about it. This is naturally something which was a source of deep anxiety to a number of Jews in this country. Nevertheless I do not think that the Heads of the organisation which is at present concerned with it, but there is no doubt it reflects the views of a good many people though perhaps not of some of the leaders. But nothing ever happened, he never went to see him, nothing happened at all, so nothing occurred. But I was terribly shocked.

MI Yes. And when does this conversation occur?

IB In about I should think after Hank’s summer holiday, so it must have been probably July, I should think August, September ‘41. Very decent of Morgenthau to do this, he behaved in a perfectly human manner. It didn’t lead to anything because Roosevelt

wouldn't have done anything. If he did talk to him he would have got a blank because Roosevelt knew perfectly well that Congress wouldn't be in favour of doing anything much, above all not opening gates. Lots of people could have got away, all much easier by then.

MI You'll have to remind me, what British policy towards immigration [IB Ah yes, I'll tell you] I mean day by date because '38 they ...

IB The White Paper. Broadly speaking the Jewish National [ ] entailed the possibility of Jewish Immigration. It was severely curtailed, it was never as many people as wanted to come, in order not to irritate the Arabs. The British Officials, certainly in Palestine and the Western ones Colonial Office as it were, steadily anti Zionist from beginning to end and still are as far as the Foreign Office is concerned, so [ ] exactly that. Now – but they did let them in because they couldn't not and didn't know what it had come to, they were puzzled. It's what's called a confused policy of limiting immigration but not showing it off. Then came the Arab riots which led to [MI That's '36] Oh '39, '29. A lot of Jews were killed in Hebron. The Colonial Secretary was Lord [?] who's a thousand per cent anti Zionist, pro native, rather anti Semitic if anything and he then further limited immigration so as not to stir things up. Then [ ] when the German Jews had come out with money, rather more were let in; it went up and down, it was – Weizmann's entire business was haggling with the Colonial Office about certificates of immigration, this went on and continued, sometimes more, sometimes less. The officials in Palestine said what can we do with all these people, Arabs are giving no rest, I can sort of understand that too. Then when the war was looming, there was a big Arab riot, rebellion in '37 in which people like Wingate was put down. The Arabs were shocked and all the rest of it, that's when [ ] which co-operated with the British at that stage. And then the war began to loom and it's clear that the Arabs had to be kept in line. The German were very active in Iraq, they were fairly active in Egypt

and so then a conference was called for Jews and Arabs to see what could be done at the end of '38, called the St James' Palace Conference or something. The Jews and Arabs – the Arabs wouldn't sit with the Jews, they couldn't be in the same room so there was an Arab room and a Jewish room, officials went to and fro. Nothing happened, it came to no particular conclusion. But then the famous White Paper was generated by Malcolm MacDonald who was then the Colonial Secretary which said: that It view of these difficulties, Jewish Immigration will continue on a limited basis for another five years. After that it would cease altogether unless the Arabs agreed to it. That was the end of the whole business [ ] after that it would cease altogether. That was the end of the story as far as Zionists were concerned. So the normal fuss was made in America and everywhere. I forgot to tell you, I'm running ahead. In 1936 a Commission was sent out after the big Arab riots, Peel. Peel wanted to publish, Parliament accepted it and the Foreign Office sabotaged it by writing to all the Arab Ambassadors and Arab countries saying how do your people look on it? Well not surprisingly they said they don't like it very much: and then a man called Woodhead was sent out to make the Frontier, partition. He came back and said it was not possible, it couldn't be done. Winston made a fiery speech, 'the rightly so-called Sir John Woodhead' [laughter] And then the White Paper. The White Paper put an end to Zionist hopes ...

MI I think my question was the extent to which ...

IB ... therefore, wait a minute, therefore the British policy was suppression. Ben Gurion said, 'This war we shall support Britain as if the White Paper didn't exist, fight for the British as if the White Paper didn't exist and fight the White Paper' – no, sorry, 'Support the British as if the White Paper didn't exist and fight the White Paper as if the war didn't exist.' That was the line and that produced its volunteers and things. The British were very uninterested to arm the Jews because they thought the price was too high, political price might be a little bit too high. The [ ] was, I

mean it was complete sell out to the Arabs, some point to the Jews. I can understand it, I mean they wanted to keep, they thought they would be unable to move the Egypt/Iraq [ ]. There was in fact a rebellion in Iraq by [?].

MI Moving forward though I wanted to talk about two things before we stop; but moving forward to '43, '44, '45, does extermination only become evident to you when the camps get liberated?

IB Just before but must be very late. I've told you that, every other Jew seemed to know but I did not. I think I only learned of it, I wouldn't say in the Summer of '45 no, I think I already must have known about it in January, February I think, it was pretty widely known about the extermination camps, the gas ovens. The gas ovens were known I think towards the – before the end of the war. It became widely – well the photographs began to appear of all the corpses and things and the ovens and all the rest of it but I think I knew about it in February '45, yes, but that's much later than everybody else. [MI Why do you think that is?] I can't tell you, I lived with the British in [ ] but why did the Jews not tell me? There was a man who called on Felix Frankfurter to tell him what was going on. He didn't believe it; like the first world war it was just propaganda and no doubt the Jews were being badly treated, some were killed. But mass extermination, no, he rejected it. It wasn't talked about in Washington by anybody.

MI What about your contact with the ...?

IB There were demonstrations by revisionists, by extreme Zionists called the Martyr of the Rabbis which infuriated Roosevelt in 1944 or something but they didn't talk about extermination, I mean just, I mean they talked yes about the suffering of the Jews in Europe and the frightful things, didn't think they had complete, these people did not produce [MI Evidence] not all that complete. I mean I never read any newspapers about the gas ovens.

MI Yes. What about – on another subject – your contact with heroic Soviet ally during the war in Washington?

IB None. My only contact was – well look, I'll tell you, all right. Yes I did I think, thought I went there after. My old Soviet ally, the first contact I had was perfectly irrelevant and amusing which was this: in 1941 [?] Curie, the daughter of Madame Curie and the Mistress of [?] Bernstein, the French playwright, who wished to go and make a propaganda tour of France, England [ ] and so on in Turkey, India, etc. Anyhow – in Japan, probably not Japan but other countries, I think China – and she needed a Soviet Visa as it was thought that nobody in the Soviet Embassy spoke any English and so I was sent to get the Visa and the Second Secretary who received me had the name of Gromyko, in '41. He was shy, gentle, rather nice, he produced a huge map and then we traced her journey with his finger, 'Ah yes, she lives here. What's here?' quite nice and I said to him – he gave me the Visa – and I said to him, 'How did you become a member of the ...' He said, 'I can tell you. I'm really an economist. I was in some Northern town in Russia, suddenly had a telephone call and I was summoned to the Foreign Office and I was told I was to Head the American Desk. I knew nothing about it but I learned.' He was rather sweet then, rather naive in a way. I can tell you something a little before. I can tell you a little bit now, it's perhaps a little more amusing [ ]. In 1940 when I was supposedly going to Soviet Union I was told to get a Visa out of the Soviet Ambassador who was a man called [MI Before (Mysky?)] No, Mysky was in London; his name was, the first Ambassador at the beginning in the thirties called [Trianovsky?] was his successor, a great friend of Lilian Hellman?), he was an NKVD man and he was killed in an aeroplane accident when he was Ambassador in Mexico, whether deliberately or not, who can tell? Very, very nasty fellow. And I knew, had met through Frankfurter, Ben Cohen who worked in the Department of the Interior and the Department of the Interior had dealings with Russia, they were Big Diomedes and Little Diomedes which were

Islands in the Aleutians, the Aleutian Islands, some of them in Canada and Alaska and I mean [MI Yes I know where you mean] Vladivostok or wherever it is, you know that corner. And they negotiated about that and so he knew the Soviet Ambassador and he said he would get me to lunch with him. So we were both asked to lunch by this man – what was his name? Terrible to get a sudden name block. And that was all right and we had lunch and Ben – oh yes Oscar [Chapman?] was there, he was Under Secretary to the Interior; and he said, ‘Now Mr Ambassador, what’s all this about Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia?’ It was exactly then. And he said, ‘I do not understand why you object. It is the New Deal for Latvia, New Deal for Estonia, New Deal for Lithuania.’ [laughter] And then afterwards Ben Cohen said, ‘Don’t you think you’re in some danger from the Germans, do you think? The Germans will never attack you?’ ‘They would not dare.’ At that point a waiter came in and he said, ‘This fish is a very rare fish, it comes from Canada [ ], in special leaden boxes. My Government knows that I am gourmet and they send me ...’ never in the articles you know, Russian gourmet, ‘and they send me fish from Black Sea, from Caspian, and it is a rare Russian fish.’ At this point the waiter with long black sideburns who must have been an NKVD man said, ‘It is Bass.’ [laughter] It was frightful, I’ve never forgotten, very humiliated. We got on to another subject.

MI Did you have more substantial contacts with the Soviet allies during the war?

IB No, no, no. Towards the end of the war, no, well I’ll tell you a story, yes I’ll tell you about foreign contacts. I was asked to dinner by a man called George Washington Oakes who I knew at Oxford was a graduate of Queen’s who was the brother of Johnnie Oakes who was in G2 which was the Army Intelligence. He invited me with a Soviet Embassy official whom I [ ] but there he was and the Soviet Embassy official asked me to dinner and I went, I didn’t [ ] very much, this must have been ‘44 I should think. First I was offered a cigar from out of which dropped – he said, ‘Cuba or

America?' I said, 'Cuba.' 'Cubinska,' he gave me the [ ], said, 'Cubinska.' Out of this cigar dropped a tiny little worm. I could see this was a pre war Tsarist cigar, no doubt supplied in boxes of a certain age and I bravely smoked it. And then he played records by Shostakovitch and that kind of thing and he said to me did I think that the Secretary of State who by this time was Stettinius, don't think he was Secretary then, he may have become Secretary, this would have been – can't remember when [?] who died or retired or something. You see he said he was using his [ ] in the hands of Wall Street so I said, 'No I don't, I don't. I think as an appointee of Harry Hopkins, he's perfectly loyal, I don't think he's the voice of Wall Street at all.' That was obviously very ill received. After that [ ] and finished dinner but I could see that that was an attempt to see how [MI How warm you were] Yes, how sympathetic. He then talked about Lady Astor whom he knew in London when he was there as the Second Secretary and how nice she was, how kind she was to Soviet officials in the thirties so he told me; and then he turned out to be one of the people in the Canadian Spy trial [MI Oh really, M?] Same man. And then nothing happened, they just – they never reported this, this was [ ] this was in [ ] years, treated like a dinner party. It wasn't very interesting, I never saw him again. Then a lady called Sue Rosenberg who is now called Sue [R?] who lives in Washington I think, [Lady B corrects] New York, apparently denounced me as an old friend and so on to the MPI as being seen with sinister Soviet agents, I think I told her as it happened. And that was investigated in London; fortunately I was exonerated, I was told by somebody in MI5 that I was defended because he was what he turned out to be a sinister figure. But then they had their National Day, I mean [ ], I was invited and this man was there. He gave me the widest berth you can imagine, didn't want talk to me, went to the other side of the room, I was obviously a failed contact, no good, didn't want to chat, well that was marvellous [ ], Sir Bernard Pares who's the only [ ] to Russian you see at that time was originally violently anti Soviet and then went to the Soviet Union, was worked over, became terribly sympathetic, made a speech and he said how wonderful the



Russians were, how wonderful we were, what we loved and honourable people. 'But there's one thing which we do not like and that is the Secret Police, NKVD. We detest that.' There were these NKVD of course, little burks, standing smiling which I enjoyed very much, this silly old man. They were my only contacts.

*End of tape*

## MI TAPE 21

Conversation date: 30 January 1989

Date transcribed: 1 April 2003

Transcriber: Esther Johnson

Subjects covered: good work

Washington Despatches

Oxford 1930s

New York, Washington 1941-6

Churchill

Irving Berlin

Jews and the Holocaust

Contacts with the Soviets

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MI ... what is it like to re-read them again or look at them again?

IB A nightmare to me; boredom of the most acute kind, they seem totally trivial to me now, not trivial but completely local. They belong to their own time, maybe, they describe events which occurred – important at the time or at least interesting at the time, which I don't think anyone would now – many of which they would now remember. There's only one reviewer who does them justice and that was a man called – oh dear, the man who wrote the life of Montgomery in three volumes who said that he yawned from page to page [ ] to go on; extraordinary that this man who obviously has some reputation produced this work of [ ] tedium containing nothing of interest at all. I sympathise with him, a man called Hamilton.

MI All right. [IB The London Review of Books] Let's capture a little of this false modesty. If they were such an enormous bore to read forty years ...

IB They were all right in their time.

MI They were all right in their time. How can you account for their success?

IB Because they were written with a certain liveliness and I was much interested in what I was writing, I did it with great pleasure and a certain amount of malice and interest, non partisanship, there is a sort of partisan of rather a concealed kind though we were told to be neutral in word and thought and deed [ ] not to be true; and I don't think many people in my Embassy were as un-neutral as I.

MI You said nice things about Willkie?

IB He was a perfectly nice man, I had lunch with him and I described it. [MI I can't remember] I did when I was in New York, yes, John Foster or somebody knew him, it's [ ] terribly interesting, we talked about El Alamein to which I think he knew something about, either he was there or he ...

MI Yes he was there, he went there at Easter ...

IB He was there, he was actually there and described it. He was a thoroughly nice man, simple, hearty, dull, decent kind, like a good German which was roughly what he was.

MI Well how would you account, once more, for the extraordinary interest that they do seem to have awakened in the hundred or so people who read them attentively in Whitehall during the war?

IB Simply because they were in contrast to what went on before. You see, I didn't invent the genre; it was done from the Embassy by the Third Secretary who knew nothing very much but had his own job to do, and all that happened was that there was some kind of press cutting, agencies to the Embassy of a minor kind, and they stuck little bits of newspaper onto large sheets and a black man

carried them around from room to room and when people read them, the black man took them away again. That's all that was known. This man hadn't much more to go on but I knew one of those people who did it, my immediate predecessor, who was a man called [ ? Smith], later Ambassador to Mongolia, and he said that all he was told to do by R? Butler who was the Minister under [?] was simply to read the summary of the news in the New York Times and condense it. [Chuckles] [That feels – condensed some, anyway]

MI So though you didn't invent the genre, you vastly extended the range of sources and references ...?

IB I sort of enlivened it, I enlivened it, I made it a bit more pertinent. You see, first of all I got all the clippings in New York; secondly I knew people, I knew people in the White House, I knew people in the State Department and I knew journalists. I was made a member of the Press Club for some reason, that was very nice for me, I didn't go there very often, but they tended to palm off stories on to me which they couldn't print and therefore I couldn't use them because they were [chuckles] too speculative, however the Minister listened to them. And I had friends among the journalists, not very many. My greatest friend in Washington was the correspondent of the Times who was a man called ... [MI Brandon? No] Long before that. No, 1941 er '42, he was called Wilmott Lewis, Bill Lewis, he was a great friend of [?] he'd been there for a long time, he was a cynical, clever old man who used to invite several of us to dinner and cooked our meals in the kitchen and they told him everything. He was very much of their type, shrewd old journalist who had worked in Seoul in Korea before he came to [ ], he was far the most famous British journalist in Washington, well known, you see, I am official Ambassador from [ ], that's what it was called. And as I said, he was a jolly old man who was pompous but extremely entertaining. 'You went to Oxford, my dear boy; as for me I had to enjoy the inferior benefits of Heidelberg and the Sorbonne!' [Laughter] That was [ ] you see

but he knew an awful lot because people talked to him very freely because he was so sympathetic to them and understood and – well, for example, when the [ ] whatever it was – er – the famous book by the man who rightly thought he ought not to have won the Nobel prize, think of an American novelist who wrote about the people who were ruined by the erosion of their soil – er – ...

MI Oh yes. You don't mean Faulkner?

IB No, no not so good as Faulkner, very nice man but – when he got the Nobel prize he said he didn't really think his work was worthy of it, nor was he. Edmund Wilson once described as the exact line between literature and journalism.

MI Steinbeck.

IB Steinbeck. Well now, Steinbeck wrote about the [ ] people, [ ] they were called I think who had to leave the State because they were ruined and so on. Well, Wilmott Lewis gave quite a lot of money to these people, of his own, so it was part of the American scene in some genuine way which none of his successors were. [clap!] That's what got me going, I saw exactly how ...

MI ... it was done. Why did you take like a duck to water to journalism? Here you are, this extremely studious and highly intellectual Don of central European culture and you absolutely – the reports are extraordinarily convincing imitations of the cleverest American Press men. I find this a kind of almost like as if you were engaged in a kind of – er – ventriloquism of an extraordinary kind.

IB There was a graphologist, Austrian graphologist, who once looked at my handwriting and he said, 'Your m,tier is that of a journalist.' [MI laughs] And it is. I am by nature probably meant to be a journalist, I think I would have made quite a good one. I applied for a job on the Manchester Guardian very early in life, in

1931 in my third year in Oxford but I was rejected without examination. Well I was asked by CP Scott, a most famous editor, 'Have you a great facility of writing?' 'None', I said. [Laughter] I didn't blame him.

MI But you mean you should have been a journalist, this is part of your rich vernacular and ironic self criticism ...?

IB No, I don't mean that. I mean **I have a natural tendency to gossip, to describing things, to noticing things, to interest in human beings and their characters, to interplay between human beings, which is completely independent of my intellectual pursuits.** But even when I am writing about the history of ideas, which ultimately was more congenial to me than philosophy, I either do, or pretend to myself that I do, possess some degree of insight into both the motives of individual thinkers or of the general tendency and character of the milieu in which and for which they write. And that I think is the gift that journalists want to possess. And that I think I have by nature.

MI Did it teach you anything – this is a sort of foolish question in it's generality – but did the experience of, as they say being where history was being made or where history was being witnessed, and then producing these reports which in the distance of time often seem too close to the events, [IB Certainly they do] teach you anything about history – about how it's – as a historian?

IB Not directly, no, people always think it does. Yes; it gave me – it didn't teach me anything – it probably gave me some sort of views of it, rightly or wrongly, it teaches me that it was the truth. I am not so sure that the impression I got was justly valued.

**MI One of the things it seems to have taught you is that – which you already knew – is that men matter.**

**IB Mainly that; and circumstances matter, and crises matter, and things can go either way; great distrust of great impersonal forces, great distrust of ...**

MI What do you mean about 'crises'? What are you trying to say ...?

IB Critical moments of history when things are on the brink, either 'there's going to be a war' or 'there's not going to be war'; either there's going to be a crucial vote in some democratic assembly or a decision of a very, very crucial kind by a dictator – what this matters, what this depends on, are not circumstances accounted for where the broad horizons of someone like – er – I don't know, er – what's the name of the great French historian of our time? [MI ?] [?] yes [MI quotes French] No good. What I mean is that if Hitler had not attacked Russia, things would have gone differently. If a brick had fallen on Lenin before 1917, it's no use saying 'climate' and 'economic factors' and 'human habits' and 'health' and 'mortality,' ...

MI Kominsky might have won through.

IB I don't think he would but someone else would. Well about Russian history, it's clear to me that the Russian revolution, the second, – the first revolution happened almost in person – I don't think anyone ...

MI But the second was contingent.

IB The second was – maybe it wasn't contingent as a revolution but it was contingent as a Bolshevik revolution. If Lenin had not lived there is nobody in the communist politbureau who could have dominated the country, just nobody. I mean Trotsky was the only person of certain gifts – he was a Jew, out of the question for that period. It couldn't have happened. [ ] was nothing, [ ] nothing, Stalin non existent. And therefore what would have happened

would have been a civil war between Kerensky plus the Bolsheviks plus the Left and [K?] and the rise of the White armies. All right, the White armies might have won, if the White armies had won, we'd have had something like Alexander of Yugoslavia, I mean there might have been a military dictatorship or maybe a new Tsar, several radical differences maybe because the peasants wouldn't have given up the land quite so easily, they don't say 'But!' the communist regime, Marxism would not have won.

MI And similarly in the second war, had the Japanese not attacked Pearl Harbour ...

IB ... the Americans might not have entered the war. I always thought, as I think I told you, that Roosevelt believed that he could win the war without fighting it, certainly. And I never knew what happened, the Americans declared war on the Japanese, didn't they? Not vice versa? [MI That's right] [ ] well, obviously after Pearl Harbour, not even by the Germans ...

MI And they then followed ...

IB Who? Who declared war on whom? [MI That I don't know] I have a feeling that the Americans declared war on Germany because they realised the Japanese ...

[ In fact, four days after the attack on Pearl Harbour, Germany & Italy declared war on the USA. (MJ) ]

MI Yes I think that's right. The declaration of war doesn't follow immediately, it follows an almost ...

IB A day or two later, very very soon, it happened, yes. But supposing the Americans had not declared war on the Germans, just thought the Pacific war was what would have happened? Not impossible, unlikely but not impossible. There you are an



American – you would have like it, there was what we used to call the Iso/Pacific movement.

MI One of the things in those despatches that did strike me as genuinely perceptive was not, you know, predictions of future affairs but [IB No, no.] you did seem to me to be very perceptive indeed about the volatility of American opinion, [IB Yes.] the basic self-congratulatory character of American opinion, the self-centredness of American opinion ...

IB Well, the American way of life – I mean in fact somebody once said that religion in America is America; there's a certain truth about that. I did invent one bogus despatch which I did not reprint. [MI Really?] Yes, but I don't know what happened to it, I don't think they could find it afterwards, maybe it was just exposed; about a man called, Elmer P. Peabody, some such name of the Middle West – it wasn't Peabody – who was a candidate for the Presidency; he didn't get very many votes, it was a rather odd programme. [Chuckling] I followed his fortunes for about three despatches and then had to kill him off just to see if anyone would jump, would find out it wasn't true.

MI And nobody did?

IB No, no.

MI Really? [IB No] But these went through the Ambassador, that's playing a rather dangerous joke ...

IB Well, he signed these things, I don't think he read them. People at Chancery read them, [ ] thought I'd discovered some middle western maverick, he would have been in newspapers but I don't think they read newspapers much. The British Embassy was not the diplomatic part of it as it were, the Foreign Office who was part of it was not in touch with American events and opinion; the food mission was, the raw materials mission was, the financial

mission – all these other term missions consisting of non Foreign Office types – but the diplomatic mission was not exactly responsive. I mean, I was more or less an instrument of its purpose. I noticed, they were extremely self-contained, they had their American friends but people were involved in themselves. President – er – Bush is a great friend of the present British Ambassador. And that is exactly as it should be, they could both be members of the ...

MI ... of the same Club, yes. Was there – I was wondering whether British government policy towards Palestine was one of the issues that strained your loyalty as a – servant of Her Majesty's government there ...?

IB Yes, yes. It didn't strain my loyalty, that it did not do because we were at war and so nothing arose. I was a [ ] Zionist – how widely this was known, I can't tell you. All I can tell you is that when I was appointed I discovered a despatch from [Neville?] Butler saying that I was suitable for the post on the grounds that I was a respectable fellow of All Souls, non Zionist Jew. Why he said that, I can't tell you that, I don't know, I wasn't asked because I never knew it was said until well after the war.

MI That's about as accurate as their vetting of Anthony Blunt.

IB [ ] Despatch Office, I saw it among the – in the sort of Public Record Office. No, no, the fact that I was Zionist was known to people, it was known to my friend Anthony Rumbold who was my friend at the Embassy; it was known to Michael Wright was a violent anti Zionist of the most ferocious kind who knew me to be that but – and that's why despatches specifically to do with Zionism and that sort of thing probably weren't forwarded to me. Quite possible. [ ] and I used to see Zionists and sort of report what they said so it wasn't – I mean for a Jew Zionist all the others were concealed, I didn't see very many and there were very few Jews and not many Zionists; but still my opinions weren't regarded

as extreme nor were they. No, it didn't strain my loyalty but when I was offered a job at the Foreign Office after the war, I didn't accept it: one of the two reasons; the first reason was I was very amused by my work and I wasn't all that raring to go back to Academic life, it is pleasure but I could have been seduced for two reasons, one was I didn't want to be too discreet, I didn't want to live two lives which, when I discovered of course the documents could not be spoken about and would then have to be – I was deeply impressed by something which David Cecil once said to me. He said, 'There are two professions which dehydrate people, kill them: one is the Law and the other is Diplomacy, because one has to defend positions which one doesn't believe.' The duty of a Foreign Office official is to prevent things from boiling over, prevent war if you like, and defend natives of their country and its citizens abroad, which was very proper, they should do, these things are necessary, just as spying is necessary; but it does mean that in the course of time, their sense of right and wrong becomes extremely petrified.

MI So there was that general objection and then there was a specific objection about Zionist ...

IB About being a Jew, Zionist. So I thought, well the Foreign Office is anti Zionist to – not quite to a man – the State department was. I mean all my friends at the State department, I made intimate friends there, they were all anti Zionist and they knew me to be a Zionist. I used to argue with them but I wasn't part of their remit because it was a very peaceful argument. They were partly convinced by what I said but not very much, the ones I talked to. They weren't anti Semitic but anti Zionist they certainly were; most of them were anti Semitic too but probably not the sort I made friends with. But because I thought that this was ultimately full of problems, it would mean I would obviously have to be sent to Ecuador [ ] I was kept away from the Eastern department if you see what I mean. The fact that special treatment, just like the German/Americans during the First World War who couldn't be

conscripted properly – that sort of thing, it's what's called 'special interest'.

MI But '45, '46, '47, the Foreign Office's policy, Bevin's policy towards Palestine really does become very, very hard to take for anybody of Zionist convictions ...

IB Bevin was one of the Founders of Israel, Weizmann and Bevin between them were the twin pillars on which the Israel State rests, without Bevin there would have been no pillars – no Jewish State. It's rather a violent thing to say, [MI It is] maybe there would have been though I can't say. In the end, maybe, yes. But the point was that when Truman had agreed to being offered Bevin's prospect of – or Attlee was equally in design in a quiet, sort of stony way – from the beginning, he hated the Balfour declaration in '17 from the very beginning, Bevin appeared on Zionist platforms before the war, [ ] it must have been a sort of gradual process. But anyway, supposing they had accepted Truman's offer of a hundred thousand Jews immigration or a hundred thousand Jews into Palestine in '36, no I mean '46, '47, supposing they had accepted that, that would have been America's contribution, they wouldn't have gone further. They would not have accepted the Jewish State, you see, because America recognised it, that it came to be or could come to be. But the fact that the British refused this because of the Arabs and so on had arisen, you see? All kinds of things [ ] on that. No, Bevin really was an architect of the Jewish State.

MI An unintended architect? An ironic architect?

IB Well now they say on documents, all the documents, I can't remember who, there's a man called Shlaim at St Anthony's you see, Iraqi Jew, [MI ?] I don't know him, yes, but he's a reader in International Relations, he's an Iraqi Jew, he's a sort of revisionist historian of those days, I think he's probably quite reliable, I don't know. According to him Bevin was prepared for a Jewish State, much smaller than what had happened, but had directed himself

to the idea of having [ ] But it never emerged, he never said that, nobody other than the Jews had known it; but he said there was extreme violence. The climax was when he insisted on, remember there was an exodus and they were forced back into the camps, back into the camps, that was something which the whole world was horrified by. That was Bevin; so it showed a very violent, anti Semitic feeling, it wasn't just a piece of political anti Zionism.

MI And it's one aspect, incidentally, if it's relevant to this, why nostalgia for the Labour Party of 1945 has always been one thing I've been rather impervious to, precisely because of that, it seemed to me that, in another area would ...

IB ... not an exception; you see, the Zionists were more shocked by Bevin's policy than you could imagine. You see, their relations with the Labour Party were extremely, as they thought, intimate. Once the Labour Party came to power, there was no doubt they would get what they wanted, quite a lot of it. The fact they didn't was an absolute – they could be knocked out – er – down with a feather. It was more astonishing that a Labour – you see, look, I mean Dalton was a friend, yes I am sure he was anti Semitic privately but he was a friend, he wanted exchange of populations and was literally in favour of moving the Arabs out. Er – let me see, what's the Labour Minister's – Morrison was not [ ], – er – Attlee didn't [ ], Attlee was but that's concealed, er who were the Ministers ...? [The telephone rings] Creech-Jones [?] very pro ...

[Break in the tape]

MI Labour politicians ...

IB Well I mean, it's extraordinary, Creech-Jones is a friend – who were the Labour Ministers of that period? Er ...

MI Cripps?

IB Cripps was anti, on sort of web-like lines, pro native, anti White roughly I mean, you see? Anti nationalist. Cripps was anti. Er – Bevin, yes, well Bevin was taken into – well I'll tell you because Bevin was complex, partly the Foreign Office a bit anti from start to finish, partly anti Semitism, partly friendship with the Arabs, probably necessary. There's quite a decent article about this, about a fortnight ago, by of all people, Lord Beloff in the Times which I recommend to you; quiet, decent, not a man I greatly admire – whose politics I greatly admire; decent, quite respectable, criticising – not by name – Walter Graves' recent journey, you see? Quite a good article; there's a speech by him in the House of Lords also, quite decent – I mean not wonderful but certainly the most moderate and convincing thing written by anybody – couldn't make views of [ ] as prejudice. And so I recommend it oddly enough. Now! Wait a moment. Partly that and partly Bevin's imagination, one could see. You see Bevin [ ] Khrushchev really of the type, didn't like intellectuals, didn't like clever Jews, was kept out of the Fabian Society by Laski I should think; somebody said he was greatly ambitious, wanted to be part of the movement. He thought of Palestine as filled with Arab peasants, decent people, normally like himself, like peasants anywhere, typical of Trade Unionists which is all he cared for; hanging there, sort of bedevilled, driven mad by a lot of Laski's, financed by cigar chomping rich American Jews sitting in New York – [MI Capitalists] – Capitalists who had no intention of going there themselves. That's the image. I am sure. There's some truth in it, too. [MI Laughs] It wasn't totally false! [chuckles] You see? But I'm sure that's what he thought.

MI To get back to Washington in the war ...

IB But it's true, I would have felt uncomfortable at moments in the Foreign Office, I thought there was no point in – er – [ ] for some, because the policy was so hundred per cent anti as I could see from telegrams.

MI Did you ... shifting gear slightly, did you feel more comfortable or less comfortable as a Jew in the United States?

IB Neither one or the other. I wasn't a Jew in the United States, I was a Jew in the British Embassy, in British circles. I was part of the British establishment quite genuinely. I mean I wasn't a Jew in the British establishment exactly; maybe subjectively I was that but rather objectively. Subjectively I sort of circulated as a kind of Englishman and not as a sort of cosy, another Jew in America who got along with American Jews – of course I got on with them more naturally than an Englishman would. Nevertheless they saw me as a British Official all the same, and I really was, I so behaved. No, you see, was I more comfortable? No, no, no, no – er – don't think so, no – er – what I did feel was more comfortable politically in America than I was in England, that is true because the New Deal was exactly what I believed. About the Labour Party I wasn't sure. The New Deal was exactly the right mix for me between capitalism and socialism, it still is, you see. And as I told you before, Washington was more like Oxford, it was rather like England, did I tell you that? [MI Yes] I mean the relationships were so personal, that I could understand, hence my journalism again.

MI I see, I see. Now you went back to England – I cannot remember what the footnotes in the despatches say but – '42, '43 something like that? [IB '42 and '44] Yes. I was just wondering, the contrast between even the wartime austerity of Washington, the wartime austerity of Britain must have been fairly staggering.

IB There was no wartime austerity in Washington at all, there just wasn't any.

MI What was it like to go back and forth between these two capitals?

IB Well I went back first in '40 you see? And of course the first thing as I think I told you, I landed in Bristol in this sea plane from

Portugal and there was immediately a blitz in Bristol that day! I felt very well, I thought that's what I'd come back for, I felt better for not being in America at that moment.

MI When is that – November '40?

IB This is October '40, early October.

MI Incidentally did you fly direct by sea plane from Lisbon?

IB Certainly, it was the only way. I think why we went to Bristol – I think that could have been the only reason. We didn't go to some inland port. The first sea plane was by clipper you see from New York to Lisbon, I think sea planes [were] what went in '40, I don't think ordinary aeroplanes, apart from war time, when the military ones, whether they operated civilian ones, I'm not sure, at least not ...

MI And the sea plane was a military plane, this was an RAF plane?

IB No, no, ordinary sea plane.

MI So you came back in '40 and you felt better because you were part of the crisis ...

IB Well because my position in America was very ambivalent, as I told you I didn't mean to be there, did I tell you about that story? [MI Yes] Because what was I doing in America? As I told you, I had something in Oxford, something in Moscow but I just happened to be stuck in Washington and New York because I didn't get to Moscow; and I felt that I was [ ] myself on [ ], not at all where I wanted to be. I felt very – I felt particularly Jews shouldn't behave like that, you see?

MI And then '42, you came back ...



IB I came back in '40 the first time, went straight to Oxford from Bristol and then – then '42, yes. In '42 I came back in a sea plane again, a ...

MI You flew to Lisbon again and then ...

IB No, no, no. Wait. [He pauses and thinks] I came to Lymgne, the south coast ...

MI [Lym] on the south coast of Portugal?

IB No, no, of England. L-y-m-p-n-e. [MI Ah!] I think there was an airport there and the sea, along the channel. Er – now how did we fly?

MI A direct flight from New York?

IB I can tell you, yes [MI Canada?] that sort of thing. We may have stopped in Newfoundland or something, I don't know, that might have happened but – no! Now I remember. In 1940 we stopped in Horta in the Azores; in 1942 we stopped for a moment I think somewhere in between, like Newfoundland or Canada as you say.

MI What were those journeys like by 'plane? Bloody awful I would have thought.

IB They took about eight hours, yes, they took eight or nine hours, nine hours. They were – no, they were all right, we always flew at night and I don't know, one didn't sleep but one could read. No I don't think I minded them very much.

MI But you came back in '42, the question I was going to ask ...

IB I talked to a mad physicist on my journey in '42. Very evil man – what was his name? He committed suicide in Switzerland later. [ ]. Very dotty, he came from Prague, was a very eminent nuclear

physicist who was flying from somewhere, I don't know, in America back to Cambridge and looked very eccentric with straws through his hair and he said to me, 'You'll see what will happen when we arrive in England, everyone will be passed and I shall be held up for half an hour.' And it was so. What was his name – yes ...

MI Anyway, you came back and what was your impression ...

IB [Names him]. I had a very good time with him; he told me all about his progress with physics and everything else.

MI What was your impression of Britain in '42 in the war? It must have been very grim.

IB Mm, yes it was grim but I expected it. I went – now where did I stay? I must have stayed in London for a bit. I went to Oxford, I found my parents there who were evacuated to Oxford in part from London, I saw old friends, I went to London, I went around various Ministries because I was supposed to be an informant about what went on in America; I talked to people in the Foreign Office. Eden was not in the least interested in anything I had to say, he was the most bored of the all the officials I saw, he could hardly listen.

MI Why?

IB Can't tell you, just that he was bored, didn't – wasn't interested at all, just terribly bored. I didn't see Churchill, I saw everyone in the Ministry of Information to which I was attached, man by man. I saw Dick Law, he was number two, who was fascinated and on the way contracted a life long friendship ...

MI Number two in the MOI?

IB No, no in the Foreign Office. [MI In the Foreign Office, oh] brother or son, [MI Oh right] you see? He's called Richard Law and he was supposed to be rather liberal minded, only later became violently Tory although Eden was madly jealous and he practically drove out of politics. Made an MP and became a Lord – I don't know what he was called, frightfully nice man, rather neurotic. Er

–

MI How long were you there in England?

IB Then I went and stayed a night with – er – was in '42? No it was later. I went to dinner with Beaverbrook in '42.

MI What was that like?

IB I can tell you. My master was Brendan Bracken who was Minister of Information. He worked for two masters, one was Churchill, the other was Beaverbrook. They were quite separate masters. For some reason he told Beaverbrook he wanted to see me. I was asked to dinner at some hotel in London, 'for Mr Berle' who was number three in the State Department who'd come to discuss something like airspace after the war, the idea of – some kind of negotiation. I can't believe that it was done – airspace during the war but it may have been, lots [ ] was for him, attended by five or six members of parliament. Beaverbrook looked at the list, Berle was guest of honour and one or two officials, about fourteen people in all. I had never met Beaverbrook before. I sat next to him, he asked the usual questions, 'Who is your father? Who is your mother? Where were you educated? What do you do?' and so on. That was all right, I told him all right. He then turned his attention ...

MI Very rough, very aggressive, abrasive ...

IB Rather rough, yes, staccato questions. And then he said, turned to Berle and he said, 'Now! Talk to Berle!' to which [ ] took an

instant dislike; Berle was madly Anglophobe [MI Phobe!] from way beyond – his father was a German missionary in Persia; he was of German extraction, father or grandfather sort of came to America, his father was an American missionary, was very German, a Lutheran missionary in Persia; and he was a New Dealer and he loathed the British Empire, the English and he was an awfully nasty little man but that's just by the way – very cultivated, interested in the [], married a Cabot and they were taught on Freud, they used to pursue each other through the house and call each other 'lover' and this was apparently according to prescription, behaving like young lovers, it was all very odd. Anyway, it's a crooked smile of a peculiarly repellent nature! But anyway, he said, 'Now, Dr Berle, waiter! Take some more wine, Dr Berle. Dr Berle is a very well known gourmet, he is known over the world as a gourmet; he likes good food and wine. He wouldn't have come here if he didn't think we had marvellous food and wine.' Well, Berle to began to shiver, as he was meant to. The waiters appeared and served him and Berle said, 'I don't want to, I'm afraid I drink very little wine.' 'Oh come, Dr Berle, you're just being shy, you're just trying to deceive us, Dr Berle. We all know you [] invitation as a []. Dr Berle, your fame is world wide, don't try and conceal yourself! You're a great friend of this country, you can't behave ...' [laughing] The persecution was absolutely continuous, continuous. I've never seen anything so politically rather odd. At this point Berle got up, he had two labels and [], 'Ah! how do you spell your name?' He said 'B-e-r-l-e.' 'It should be B-u-r-l-e-y. You did that to every one of us, ridiculous [ ] the German way! You change your name!' A good deal of this ribbing, chaffing. He contracted himself to frog-like, I can't tell you, he shivered with a very sort of thin, pale, rather mean looking little man. Anyway he then came to make his speech and said, 'My father was a missionary in Persia and his task was to try and give spiritual and if possible some degree of material comfort to the victims of Imperialism, more particularly British Imperialism, the misdeeds of which, in Persia, ate into my father's soul. We all know the dreadful conduct of the oppressive British boot crushing totally unarmed and obedient natives.' He went on like this ...

MI Oh my God!

IB Oh yes!

MI This is a revenge for ...

IB Yes. Dinner – then we all dispersed after that. I rather enjoyed it, you see? Unusual scene! [MI Laughs] His Anglophobia was not improved by this. But I enjoyed it because it was so odd, so out of this world. Well, Beaverbrook didn't mind that in the least. "Ah! Why is Dr Berle cracking jokes at our expense? He's just being funny really! He really loves us. Come on, waiter, serve Dr Berle! Never mind about the rest of us!" He only asked about my family, what I was doing, and that was that, he didn't – but later when I met him of course, I was offered a job by him.

MI When was this?

IB '45; and then he came back on my way to going to Moscow. I was summoned by him at the top of Arlington House in Arlington Street where he lived, the penthouse – and this was after I had done all these, my despatches had caught a certain measure of fame and he offered me a job, I'd been recommended by his journalists, Daily Express journalists and he offered me a job on the Evening Standard to write a weekly political article [ ]. Of course I should have said, 'I'm very complimented, Lord Beaverbrook, I really must think it over,' instead of which I behaved very badly, I behaved like a Swiss Governess whose virtue was being attempted. [MI Laughs] I said, 'No, no, no, no, it's not at all the sort of thing I can do.' He looked frightfully cross obviously and said, 'Why not?' I said, 'Well you know I'm [ ] at that kind of thing, I'm not really a very good journalist and I'd find it a very difficult thing to do, I don't think it's my sort of thing at all, I really wouldn't be any good to you.' At this point he said, 'Where are you going?' I said, 'I'm going to Moscow.' 'There you'll sit in some back room, you'll

be doing nothing, you'll have no job, you were in Washington, you did all that stuff, my goodness me, you had this awful man over you, Lord Halifax, I expect you liked him, let me tell you about him.' He then told me the story which Churchill tells in his book about how Churchill became Prime Minister, you know the famous scene in Downing Street ...

MI No I can't ...

IB Oh well, it's [ ] was when Chamberlain realised he had to go, he and Halifax and Churchill were summoned by Chamberlain to 10 Downing Street and Chamberlain said, 'I am afraid I can't continue and one of you will have to replace me. I think Edward would do it very well' and so on. And Edward said, 'No, no, Winston would do it far better [ ].' Winston didn't say anything, he said silence is golden, he didn't say, '[ ] to Edward.' Not at all, he was silent. At this point Chamberlain went back to Edward Halifax who again, I think quite sincerely, said he thought that Winston would be rather more suitable and [ ] to Winston and he said, 'Yes, I agree.' That was the end of that. Well Beaverbrook said, 'When I discovered that, I asked Churchill whether he would mind my telling Halifax' – no, I'm sorry, no, no, it wasn't that – 'how very pleased, the country was saved he said, the country escaped. I've omitted something. 'Then when Winston decided to send Halifax to America, not long after, it wasn't very long, six months or so, I just asked for the privilege of being able to tell him myself. I went to the Foreign Office, he was out. I waited for three hours and I was able to tell Halifax that he'd been sacked! I enjoyed that very much. You know, he played it quite well, didn't bat an eyelid, accepted it, I tell you the Prime Minister wishes me to tell you you've been appointed Ambassador to Washington.' [MI Ooh!] His wife went round and saw Winston that night and said, 'Why are you exiling poor Edward?' 'He didn't say anything to me.' What I forgot to say though is that 1944 – this is forty ...

MI '45 when the story is being told.

IB Yes, in 1944 I was asked for a weekend by Beaverbrook and no doubt again – well I did go because I had no [ ] and Bracken ordered me to go, so I went. I think it was '44, let me get it right. Yes. Well I went to [ ] there were there Dr Dalton who was President of the Board of Trade; Fulbright, who was in London [MI JW] Yes. A man called Sir Somebody Somebody who was Head of the Hayes – the owner of Hayes Wharf who was a Minister in Dalton's Ministry, some kind of high up official at that time, this was war time, he was called something, he was one of Beaverbrook's friends; and his secretary who was a poor thing, who was a sort of intellectual [ ]. I arrived at about six o'clock, at seven o'clock we all went to a film in Beaverbrook's house and it lasted for about two and a half hours: he fell asleep, snored, went off for drinks and then went to dinner. I tried to be charmed by him, everybody else was [ ] but failed. No good.

MI What was it that repelled you?

IB Extreme coarseness, er – sort of coarse jokes, nastiness, sheer nastiness of character. I couldn't help it. I thought he was **one of the nastiest men**, bad men, nastiest men **I had ever met**; and the jokes which I just didn't think funny, couldn't laugh at them, either one does or one doesn't. The conversation took the following line; I stayed two nights, the third night we disbanded after about three quarters of an hour because it was quite late, nothing happened that evening much to talk about. Next day I hardly saw him and then at dinner, either he was out for lunch or had it by himself, I wandered around the house in a [ ] way, talked to Fulbright, talked to Dalton a bit who was an equally awful man to talk to, loud voice, coarse, noisy, the patron of all these Crosland's and Crossman's, nobody else – [MI [Ben ?]] Everybody, yes. I didn't think you knew Pimlott

MI Well Pimlott then went on to write his biography(?)

IB I know but he was homosexual you see, Dalton ... fundamentally, but he was great patron of [ ] intellectuals, Gaitskell and Crosland and I think Jenkins

*Side B*

IB ... Dalton. 'Now! President!' he kept on saying because he was President of the Board of Trade, 'Now listen, about that the President knows everything you know, the President is omniscient! Come on President, tell us what you think about the conduct of the war! Don't hesitate President, we are all ears, come on President no holding back.' The President said, 'Well I don't really know anything about it, but it would be better if my Ministry ...' 'Nonsense President, you can talk on any subject, everybody knows that, you're a kind of know-all, go on!' [ ] Well he answered back because he ended by saying, 'No, no Max, I'm not going to obey your orders, come on Max [ ], oh no I'm not going to made fun of.' 'Come on, President!' Caused a lot of rough stuff. Then Beaverbrook, then whatsername turned to him – er – Fulbright and said, 'Lord Beaverbrook, who is really responsible for Munich?' And Beaverbrook said, 'Everybody knows that; Halifax, Geoffrey Dawson, Sam [Hoare?] and the dead Chamberlain.' Curiously brutal. To which Fulbright said, 'What is the opposition, Lord Beaverbrook?' [ ] Remember that film, 'In Which We Serve' and so on, copies of the Daily Express on the wall saying that there would be no war? He said, 'I am a man of peace! I'm not a man of war, I prefer peace to war! I am a man of peace!' Well there's a fine difference drawn between peace=good, appeasement=no good. He then said, 'I can tell you about the British; they're brave, they're very brave, they're a wonderful people, they're the best people in the world: but they don't like me and I don't like them, and they never will. Every penny I've dragged out of them, I've dragged out of them by the most appalling endeavours.' Quite interesting, that, certainly. Then Fulbright said, 'Well, what is your opinion of Lord Salisbury – er – Lord Cranbourne?' who was then, he may have been number two in the Ministry, Foreign Office by the end [ ] ...



MI Why would he ask that question?

IB I don't know, he just asked about British statesmen. 'Ah! He's a Cecil, they're the most wonderful family we have, they're wonderful people. They're noble, they're brave, they're distinguished, everybody looks up to them. They wouldn't talk to people like you and me, we have to doff our caps to them, we have to bow low, they're of no use, people like me. But their proudest possession are the British people, who are marvellous!' With fury. That's the only aristocratic [ ] made. They wouldn't speak to him, Beaverbrook, he was a bit out, no kind of [ ], you see the nearest he came to it was by – one of the Cecil daughters was the wife of a man called Campbell, Robin Campbell who was a Commander and he used to ask Commander's wives and people like Aneurin Bevan and Michael Foot to dinner. And she was a daughter of Ormsby-Gore who was married to Cecil; and he thought via her, he would get into Cecil's world but it didn't work. And so this aroused Beaverbrook's fury. 'What do you think of Mr Law?' 'He's her son, my greatest friend, none I admired more than any other man in all my life. [ ] never heard of him. Wonderful man! Integrity itself, wonderful man, my greatest friend, I was devoted to him. His son is just a traitor, that's all he is, he's a traitor, he's not a Conservative at all. Nor am I. I've never joined the Party, but he's a traitor, he's turned to the Left, he's no good and he'll fail!' He loathed Dick Law because – somebody else, you see? He wasn't a good [ ].

MI Why is it that Alan Taylor loved Beaverbrook, so why did he awaken love ...?

IB Why indeed? And why did Michael Foot say he was my second father? Alan Taylor liked any kind of anti establishment figures; he liked rudeness, he was very – look: Beaverbrook's business to get to intellectuals, hire intellectuals of a lively kind, and corrupt. He did that to Tom Driberg who then turned on him and wrote a nasty

life of him. He did it to Michael Foot, he did it to Taylor, he liked taking up Left wing – Lowe, the cartoonist – Left wing people and then making them instruments of his will. Sometimes they failed, sometimes it worked but he liked twisting around – his weapons, his horrible British establishment but he deeply hated it.

MI And deeply wanted to belong to it.

IB Of course. Look, he belonged to – well I'll tell you. His history is this: he, in about 1906/7/8 ...

MI Comes to New Brunswick.

IB What? Came to New Brunswick. There's a group of, as it were, young Turks who – you see, the anti Victorian movement took two forms, one was the Bloomsbury, hated success, hated vulgarity, I mean idealism of a certain kind, and extreme anti establishment and anti religion []; as against success, conventionality, conformity, riches. The other was tough, people would say 'the world is my oyster', against respectability from their point of view, rather like the Kaiser, the same period. They were Winston and Lord Carson and – er – Duff-Cooper a little later and Bracken he had and Beaverbrook. They were tough, adventurous, were prepared to defy the establishment and so to speak reek their own adventure as well upon it, and fight their way upwards and not do it by conventional flattery and ability, tactfulness, you see? And that was a kind of 'Cad's Party'. And that's what Beaverbrook found extremely congenial. He was a very fresh cup of tea from Canada. He was rich, he had a lot of money, he paid for them in part, paid Winston quite large sums throughout his life and I dare say others too, and they found him just exactly what they liked. Well he was liked by my great friend James de Rothschild, another Polo playing semi-adventurer, he moved over to France. I mean, well he was – he was full of temperament, he was jolly, he was prepared to fight conventions, he was what's called good company. But they were the Boys and they came to power with Lloyd George who was their

creation as Prime Minister, you see, because Lloyd George was all right because he was a cad too in their sense. In a way, Roosevelt was not quite of that breed. He was also aristocrat [who betrayed?] but these are not – the only aristocrat who [ ] was Winston himself who was different from the others, he kept his connections with Ducal families from which he was descended. But nevertheless what he liked was cigars, drink, racing and obscenity, you see? That didn't go with polite Edwardian bourgeoisie. King Edward VII was a bit like that but they weren't friends of his, too young, died in 1910. George V was exactly what they didn't like. MI Now ...] They slightly overlapped with the rich Jewish millionaires all the same. You know there's a famous Max Beerbohm cartoon which I have never ceased to like, anti Semitic cartoon, which is cartoon of the gates of Buckingham Palace outside of which stand four men, four or five, in top hats with very long noses and they are Sir Edward Stern, Sir Ernest Castle, Sir Otto Bite(?), Lord Rothschild, maybe, I don't know, Sir somebody else of that sort [ ]; and what they are saying to each other – 1910 the date, the death of King Edward – what they are saying is, 'Are we as welcome as before?' [chuckles] Well, they weren't. [more chuckles] [MI What other dealings ...?] Very funny cartoon!

MI Yes it's good. What other dealings did you have with Beaverbrook after turning him down over the Evening Standard ...?

IB Well, then he took me back to London, took me to his office, the Lord Privy Seal; he said, 'Ah! I've got a sinecure from the British government, no duties you know, wonderful thing the British government, it pays you money for doing nothing at all if you're important, that's how I've lived.' There was lots of that, though on that occasion I got on technically quite well, I didn't insult him and I was quite polite and I was rather cowed. I didn't like him at all but I was rather fascinated by this extraordinary spectacle.

MI Did you see him subsequently in the '50's and '60's?

IB Never again, no, because after refusing the job he took against me, I mean he was very insulted, so in 1950 or so, I wrote – I was commissioned to do a piece by the Observer who finally cancelled it because they had some other piece from somebody else – and here I was with my piece on Anglo/American relations, and somebody at the BBC discovered about this and asked me if it could be broadcast, it was quite short. So I read it and then it was printed in *The Listener*. It wasn't very interesting, it said that England and America were married to each other; it might be an unhappy marriage, it might go through terrible ... but there would never be a divorce. An article appeared in the *Evening Standard* three days later called 'Mr Berlin' which the Editor was ordered to write by Beaverbrook, and what it said was – it was an attack – it said, 'Who is this Mr Berlin? He is an unmarried bachelor of forty – '49 – that is why his thoughts no doubt constantly turn to marriage.' That was the metaphor they used. 'He is pro American, evidently, nothing wrong with that. But! He has nothing to do with the Empire, what does a man like that know about it's triumphs and it's agonies?'

MI Oh, that's [IB Oh yes!] very unpleasant stuff!

IB Certainly, certainly, certainly, and it went on in this style, not so much about me but – straight anti Semitic attack, that's what it was. Nothing happened, I didn't respond. I met [ ] afterwards and I asked him why he'd written it and he said, 'Well you know, orders is orders, it's what the Boss wanted.' That's a man called – became quite well known afterwards [ ] I've forgotten the name, not a very nice man.

MI OK. When you came back in '42, it was to consult, when you came back in '44 it was to consult as well ...?

IB Yes, yes, yes, yes.

MI When did you leave Washington – what I want to get us to is Moscow. When did you leave, when did you conclude your business in Washington?

IB '46. April.

MI April '46. When did the Moscow trip – when did the Moscow experience begin and can you tell me how ...

IB September '45. It went on until January 5th 1946. That date I remember because I called on Madame Akhmatova on that day in Leningrad and microphones were conspicuously put in her ceiling the day after, she was under observation, not as a spying measure but as a [ ], just to frighten her. [ ] I left for Finland.

MI Can you tell me how the trip generated itself? We've got ahead of ourselves in the sense that I have not re-read your wonderful memoir in the ... I can't remember how it came about.

IB No it doesn't describe it, you can ask me. That came about because, for two reasons really, because I made friends with the Russian officials in the State Department – 'Chip' Bohlen, the famous – became an intimate friend, a man called Freddie Reinhardt was there, he may not be alive, a man called [Durbrow?], they were all Russian section. They – I met them through John Russell who'd been in the British Embassy in Washington during the war – been in Moscow I mean – then they came to Washington and made friends with me, he introduced me to them and we made friends rather rapidly and there was a little White Russian salon in Washington kept by a woman called Mrs Wylie, who was the wife of a State Department ex Ambassador called John Wylie, who was a Polish Jewish countess – where we used to meet. They took the line that I was the only man they had ever met in their lives who had never been to Moscow who nevertheless understood the situation as they understood it. Nobody else who had not been to

Moscow could, but by some intuitive genius I entered into what the Soviet Union was like in detail. Very good. So we were all very cosy together and I was part of all that. **And then Clark Kerr, who was the British Ambassador in Moscow, rather a card,**

MI What do you mean by that?

IB A card – adventurer, amusing rather – er – I don't think he had much conscience – er – cavalier-ly type, extremely amusing, very clever, didn't mind what he did, not pompous and manipulated people; and was obviously much more proletariat than Ambassadors had any business to be; but a lot of – sense of adventure and pleasure. No particular views, just what he thought fun. The Russians liked him very much. Stalin gave him two presents: he gave him a gun and he gave him a [ ], a German [ ] which he asked for. He was not a homosexual [ ] but it's another story. Anyway he came to **Washington en route to San Francisco, to which he was summoned – part of the general entourage – and we had lunch together. For some reason he had heard about me from the Americans, and so I was asked to lunch [by] the Ambassador – Halifax – to meet him. I sat next to him, we chatted, and we got on, and he said, 'Look, I'm told you speak Russian like a native, in fact you are a native,** he said. **Nobody in my Embassy talks much Russian. Would you like to come and work for me for a bit? – because I'd like nothing better. I'll see if I can fix it'.** Then he went off ...

MI Why did you say so immediately 'I'd like to ...'?

IB Because I longed to go to Moscow because I was curious. Pure curiosity drove me there, for no other reason.

MI It didn't awaken what it awakened in my father when he was first asked – a deep anxiety about being an exile ...?

IB No, no, no not at all. [MI My God, I'll be kidnapped ...] No, no, I thought if I went to an Embassy I'd be all right, you see? I thought

well if I had a diplomatic passport – by this time we are now in ‘45, relations were presumably rather good, realised for years you see and we were on the edge of – Germany had been defeated. So our relations were ostensibly rather good. Er – no, no I wasn’t very frightened. So then he went to San Francisco and I went to San Francisco too in the end and we met there again, he said he’d do it and duly I received a summons to be his temporary First Secretary. I arrived in Moscow from roughly September onwards for a limited period which was not specified, about three or four months, I had no idea. War was coming to an end and I was anyhow not going to go on [ ]. Then – that’s why it happened – then, I can now tell you, **on the way back from San Francisco, Mr Bohlen travelled in an aeroplane with Halifax – same plane – and he told Halifax that I was the only person who really understood the American point of view on Russia and many other things, and that at the Potsdam conference<sup>15</sup> I’d be invaluable as the link.**

[The phone rings and there is a break in the tape]

MI So Bohlen says to Halifax you should go to Potsdam.

IB Yes. **So, Halifax said, when I came back to Washington, he said, ‘It’s a jolly good idea, I’ll see what I can do.’ And then I suddenly received a summons from the Foreign Office, saying would I act as interpreter for Eden at Potsdam? It was the only way in which I could be got to Potsdam. I accepted with alacrity. Then I had most frightful ‘flu, and I was in bed – quite high temperature – and I thought, ‘No, shall I really go? I don’t think I can, quite.’ The doctor came and saw me; and then Halifax called at my bedside and said, ‘Look, do go. If you don’t go to Potsdam, we’ll never know what happened there, we’ll never be told: we need you to go as a spy for the British Embassy.’ I saw what he meant; and so I picked myself up and took an enormous number of antibiotics, and**

<sup>15</sup> The conference held at Potsdam (near Berlin) between 17 July and 2 August 1945, at which Truman, Stalin and Churchill (replaced during the conference by Attlee, the new Prime Minister) negotiated the terms of the peace conditions to be imposed on Germany.

got put on to a plane and flew to London; and I was interviewed by the head of the American Department,<sup>16</sup> and by a man called David Scott, who is still alive, and said this and that, where I was to go; I was to come back to the Foreign Office and be fitted out with certain documents next day. So I appeared on the second day. I was living in the Ritz Hotel, I think, by this time; I came the second day and David Scott, who was an awfully nice man, said, 'I'm very sorry, I'm afraid you're not going to Potsdam.' I said, 'Oh?' He said, 'Well you know, it's difficult to explain –' Mrs Gibbs was a [ ] lady, a sort of well-known receptionist at the British Embassy in Washington, she became – er – Billie [?] – 'says there is no logic.' So I said, 'I am terribly sorry to hear this, I'm very sorry to hear you say this at the last moment.' I said, 'You know, no doubt what you are telling me is true, but if anyone asks me why I didn't go to Potsdam, it's very difficult to say there's no bed! [chuckles] You must give me a better story to tell.' He said, 'Oh well, I know what you mean, the Foreign Office is a very bad employer [chuckles] but I'm afraid it's [ ], I'm afraid it's been decided.' So then I said, 'Well I don't really mind very much, I've really got nothing more to say.' He said, 'You say you don't mind. Tomorrow, you'll mind like hell,' he said. [laughing] It was rather sweet. 'You'll mind frightfully, I can tell you that! No question of your not minding but there's absolutely nothing I can tell you.' Well I had no idea what was happening and so I remember going to tea in the Foreign Office that day and sitting next to – er – who did I sit next to? – er – whatsisname – er – damn! you know the Foreign Minister, the Prime Minister, he was Chamberlain's – [MI Home, Alec Douglas-Home] – Home, who was in the Foreign Office, some sort of – and I told him about this and he said, 'Yes [ ] they drop people, they're ghastly, I don't like them much and you won't like them after this.' Then came Potsdam, then came the collapse of the Conservative government. Then everybody in the Foreign Office was only too pleased to tell me what happened! It was Eden that stopped it for no reason at all, just took against me in some way,

<sup>16</sup> Philip Mainwaring Broadmead (1893–1977), head in 1945 of what since 1941 had been called 'North American Dept'.



didn't like me and he said, 'No, no, we don't think Stalin likes Latvians,' some such thing as that, 'Can't have a Latvian, I think that would be a bad thing.' Just simply – it was purely personal I am sure. So I didn't go to Potsdam and I went complaining to various people who knew him and they kept on bringing it up to him. He got into a state of absolute fury, he thought he'd never hear about it again and he kept on socially hearing about it from various ladies whom he knew. 'These Dons think they can do anything! These Dons keep getting above themselves you know.' [MI Laughs] When we next met he was extremely polite, not to say obsequious – Eden. But that's why I never went to Potsdam.

MI How disappointed were you?

IB I was – mm, bitterly. I longed to go; and then I wrote to Clark Kerr saying the Foreign Office doesn't want me to go to Potsdam, perhaps I am altogether untrustworthy, I'd better not come to Moscow either. And he wrote back saying, 'Don't be a bloody fool, the plane goes on September 4th.' So I flew to Moscow via Berlin, **which was a lunar spectacle,**

MI: I bet.

IB: Nothing was recognisable ...

MI You landed in Templehof, sort of...

IB Somewhere, I don't know where we landed, in '40 – in '45, September, early September '45.

MI Nothing standing. Did you see – did you go into the city at all or just change planes?

IB Where I walked [...], no, not very much, nothing, **You couldn't walk along the streets because the paving blocks were ruined.** I mean, people, **the Germans were running about like frightened**

**rabbits – I mean, sort of looking humble and frightened; and the waiters in the hotel where we were put up were, I mean, trembled before everybody and brought things and shivered. I had never seen such a terrified lot of people. There I met the present Lord Annan, my old friend Goronwy Rees, and other characters of the British Intelligence, because there was a kind of British canteen at which we all ate.**

MI Was that your first encounter with Noel?

IB I think so. I don't think I knew him before the war. He thinks we did meet but I have no recollection of it.

*[Break in the tape]*

MI We are in Berlin and it's a ...

**IB In Berlin. It's a lunar spectacle, the Germans are terrified, terrified little animals running about – people with sort of things on their backs and not dressed and carrying parcels.**

MI Did that give you a certain gratification?

IB Yes, I didn't feel the least sympathetic, not in the least. I think I'd known Noel before, I may have done. Anyway then we – I came with a man called Ashton-Bodkin (?) who was a man who was on the [ ] commission to Prague in 1900 and – presumably '38 out of which came Munich in the end, a Foreign Office official who wrote novels under an assumed name, a rather snobbish official, talked about [ ], talked about a knighthood which I didn't rate so. [MI Laughs] He was an inspector for the Foreign Office, to inspect the Embassy to see if it could save some money [ ] . Anyway we flew together, a very agreeable man, talked – er – of a rather bohemian kind]. We arrived in Moscow, were duly met by some Second Secretary I think, taken to the Embassy. I was then planted in a house with [ ], turning off [ ] I remember was the Soviet Ambassador assassinated in Lausanne fairly soon after the war by

some Swiss White Russian, a literary figure, writer [], a Jew I think; and there my companions were a man called [Sir Ponsonby Moore Crosthwaite] who was at College with me at Corpus, **who was a great, great friend**, and a man called Eddie – Eddie – Eddie – Tompkins who was straight Foreign Office and therefore later became Ambassador in Paris, most of whom I still know and love. We lived in a flat in a house which had belonged to the Italian Military Mission before the war; and below us lived the Head Minister who was Roberts, and underneath was somebody else.

MI What impression did the City of Moscow make when you first arrived?

IB Well, I am not very visual you know, yet I'd never seen it before. It was war time, it had a war time air ...

MI What does war time air mean?

IB It hadn't been bombed, there were no destroyed buildings that I could see. The streets were dirty, the inhabitants wore very poor, extremely – rags to some extent. Shops contained no goods; the only shops of interest were the second hand book shops, the antiquari(?) where you could pick up things, particularly then because some people died during the war and their books found their way to these shops. The Bolshoi was booming, particularly for the benefit of foreigners anyway, theatres were functioning, they were full and the Ambassador was Clark Kerr as I told you who was a favourite of the Russians, no doubt about that. He was called Partisan by the Russians because they said you could – Molotov said to him, 'You're a fine type, you could have been a partisan.' And they were all drunk at the Kremlin that night and he pushed him in the chest, Molotov, he didn't do it to many people, and he collapsed into a huge fish bowl, a very huge fish salad and had to be fished out and dried; and the Japanese Ambassador sent a cable which was intercepted which said, 'The Prime Minister of the Soviet Union knocked down the British Ambassador [and

trampled upon him?]' [loud noise] giving all sorts of impressions to the Japanese what was happening. [MI Laughs] That telegram was intercepted – 'trampled upon him' ...

MI But rather surprisingly you're not conveying an impression of a country staggering to its feet after the war. You're conveying the impression of a Capital that for the Party [Brass,?] is actually quite bearable.

IB It was. By '45 everything had been restored, I mean I think it was restored after '44. Once Soviet troops began to fight abroad, the old bureaucracy and everything was more or less restored and I think you would find that in the memoirs of other people, too, at that time. You don't get the impression of a devastated city in any way, not like London. You see I don't think it's ever been shelled, I don't think it was bombed much and it was never taken; and so – er – there must have been quite a lot of destruction but slave labour restores things rather fast. [Tea is being served and there are pauses and much clinking of crockery] I am trying to remember what happened. On the third day I wanted to know where my brother's – my father's relations lived. He had three brothers and a sister, that I knew, because my father had been there on business in '34 and 5, a timber merchant. So I went to a – one of those little – er – kiosks who gave out addresses on payment of two roubles, there was no telephone book because that had been destroyed, well anyhow because the Germans [ ] there'd been no telephones for years [ ] even addresses. Now I paid them roubles and they looked up things in some document they had if you told them, given them the name. So I said, 'Doctor – Professor Berlin, [dietetics?] Professor Lev [ ] Berlin but they didn't give it to me at once, [ ] contact in two hours. It was clear that I was followed by some sinister figure which made it clear that I couldn't be served in the ordinary way. However I did come back in about two hours and then they gave it to me. My father had it, I said that I didn't bother to ask him, it was foolish. I came back with a little fiche containing their names and addresses in my pocket. The next day I had an

attack of 'flu so I didn't go out for two days. When I got up everything was there except this little bit of paper, that had gone. Unwise, I mean I could have Xeroxed it, photographed it, but the fact that they took it away, I don't know what that meant. However I remembered it and I said well, I've got it, yes, and the cook – everybody who served us was – er – [MI KGB] – yes, absolutely, NKVD as it was in those days I think, even the chauffeur, car. I said well they know what I'm doing, they know I've got the address, what should be wiser, to go or not to go? I thought well, I suppose they know I've got it, it would be unwise not to go because then they would think – I saw it in some other way, maybe it's better to be naive here in such a case. And I didn't do anything for a while. The woman who brought me my cup of tea in the morning was a cook, said – er – 'They say that Stalin's very ill.' I said, 'Oh, I haven't heard that. The American Ambassador called on him at [ ] quite a short time ago, he found him in perfectly good health' 'Oh I am glad to hear it, it's only good people who fall ill.' And she said, 'Have you ever heard the name Trotsky?' I said yes I had. 'He was a good man wasn't he?' 'I don't know, I don't think he was a particularly a good man.' 'Oh yes, he was a good man.' 'No, no,' I said, 'no, there's no reason for thinking that.' 'You don't think he was a good man?' I said no. This was a sort of crude provocation of some kind, you see? I realised what was happening, you see, and then she went away. That was the third day, fourth day. Then on the fifth day or so, it may have been a little later, I thought I would go and see these people, my relations, and I thought I won't go just directly, like that – no wait! I'm getting it wrong. I kept their address, I wrote it down in the end somewhere in my note book. The next thing which happened was the dinner given by the British Ally, which was a periodical legally produced by the British Embassy of a [phone rings – propagandist(?)] nature. [Break in the tape] And – er – Russian writers were invited. Priestley was there. Priestley at that point was a very favourite fellow in the Soviet Union because he said, 'Soviet literature is the consciousness of the world.' Two of his plays were therefore put on. I went to the dinner, that I do describe in the piece you have [

], he was in a very bad temper because he couldn't get roubles out of the country and because he was led around by a lot of [ ] that he didn't want to see, I mean he was in a very – [ ] I was led up to a man called Chukovsky who was there, marvellous writer of children's verse and a great literary historian [ ] 'You are some kind of translator, aren't you?' He was very offended and his eyes reeled up to make him better, I made friends with him, he was very nice, remained so. Then I sat next to a man called Tairov who was a producer, famous Moscow Art Theatre. I chatted to him, he said, 'You know, you are at the British Embassy?' I said, 'Yes.' 'Not only do you speak Russian perfectly but the order of your thoughts is Russian.' [Russian term]

MI [Repeats the Russian term] It must have felt wonderful.

IB Yes, yes. He was liquidated about two years later though I never knew what for but he was, 47, 48. Very nice man. And I talked very freely to these people. Pasternak was not there. And there I met Prokofiev's widow, who had just died in Paris. She was half Catalan, half Polish I think.

MI And by that time they were long separated anyway.

IB Yes. [ ] She would [ ] person, they put a Communist lady on to him to make him write [ ] pieces, it was their doing, really; and I mentioned Pasternak and she said, 'Oh, I know him quite well.' I said, 'I've got a pair of boots from his sisters for him.' She said, 'Well, we'll go and see him together.' And she took me.

MI Now, tell me how you knew about Pasternak.

IB Because his two sisters – I knew the name –

MI Yes, because of the two sisters ...

IB There are two sisters in Oxford and when I said I was going to Moscow, she asked me to take these boots to him which I took with me. [Lady B makes a comment] Oh, yes, yes.

MI Now what had you read?

IB Three or four poems, nothing very much ...

MI But none of the short fiction or ...

IB No, no, no, didn't know it existed. I wasn't a student of Soviet literature at all. Then I went to Peredelkino, overnight stop.

*End of tape*

## MI TAPE 22

Conversation date: 11 October 1989, Albany

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### *Side A*

IB ... virtue can be implemented, that all you need is to have the right ideas, everything can be settled, then you can love each other and you can have a nice, tidy, decent world, is mistaken. The hero is [P], rather surprisingly, it's something to do with the collapse of socialism [ ]. He's a lifelong socialist, still is. Something's gone wrong with that; that the idea that a beautiful world can be created by believing in the right principles won't do and he thinks Aristotle is right because practical virtues are not simply attributes of certain types of conduct – good, bad, right, wrong, which is what Hume or, I don't know, or Kant because that's what they think about is practical reason, let's say it's entirely to do with people behaving in certain circumstances to other people and therefore it's something entirely to do with negotiation with people, attempt to create a decent life out of conflicting values and that different people can – except in the case of the Nazis he says there is such a thing as absolute evil and it's absolute evil because he thinks Nazism is an [idolism?], he accepts – remember [R?] read a book called, what was it called, [ ] something like that; he thinks that Hitler and his followers, what they disliked was an entire universe of promises, fulfilment, virtue, decency, negotiation, truth, promises, all that has to be removed for naked power asserting itself in a free fashion, you clear the universe of all this liberal rubbish, if you see what I mean, of the whole accumulation of liberal values and arrangements and beliefs and everything people construct their lives round; mainly the heritage of the French Revolution, equality, liberty and all those sort of things, and virtue and, I don't know, kindness, goodness and generosity; all that's to be thrown out and instead of that you have – you clear it out, then you have a vacuum



then you just go forward, you do what you like, any obstacle must be swept out. I think that's quite a good thing to say but I don't think it's true, I mean I think that – he says more than any racism is an ideology, that is a belief, the rest is not you see? But I suggest [ ]; but the racism he thinks maybe is in a sense some sort of doctrine, it has principles, I mean it's some kind of theory, the rest is not.

MI I think that's where the problem is surely? I mean that the opposition or hatred of the Jews was quite principled?

IB But wait a bit, wait a bit, now about Jews is wrong because he says, it comes from Renee, his first wife entirely. She never believed, she didn't even use the word Jew either; Israeli or the Juda religion, otherwise Jews didn't exist, either you were a Jew in the sense that you were Catholics or there are citizens in the State of Israel, but in between, what is there? What do you mean, Jew? It's rather racist, I mean you see there's either religion or politics which denied that the word Jew could have any meaning outside that, that's a very extreme position of a somewhat Marxist kind. I can't tell you how easy but anyhow that's what she believed and it rather infected him and I dare say Nancy is not very different in that respect, new wife who's also a kind of blind Leftism of a very dramatic sort.

MI But clear up for me [IB Where he's wrong about the Jews] where he's wrong about the Jews.

IB He says the following: he says because the Jews weren't allowed their own land – it's a well known simple doctrine – they had to go into trade. So far it's true. Because they had to go into trade they had to calculate, they had to sharpen their brains, they had to be genius, they developed habits of complicated thought, had to account and calculate and predict and analyse and all this is a kind of use of the intellect. So the intellect [ ] by this. The result was that they stood for intellectualism, for liberalism, for combinations of

various thoughts, for theories, for ideas. That the Nazi's hated, they wanted [ ] set out which is true and there's something in that; I mean they didn't want clever Jews, I mean the whole idea of sort of clever sort of calculation, analysis, clever cleverness, thinkers, I mean theorists, it's true though against all that; they wanted Siegfrieds about, sort of wielding clubs or swords or something [chuckles], it's true enough, that's the image. What one didn't want was a lot of sort of cunning calculators or people devoted to books, intellect, the whole of what might be called the world of thought or ideas, in any form applied or pure, you see? And criticism and so on – no, we want none of that. Well hence the violent anti-Semitism: but that isn't true, there was violent anti-Semitism earlier than that and it's racist, they really did believe in race, they did believe the Jews were sub men and they believed the Russians were too [ ], not to do with – I can see that if you're going to be under the influence of Marxism, that kind of thing, you have to work out some kind of sociological doctrine which can't be found on something so meaningless as racism, but that's weak of him, that a relic of some kind of liberal socialism. My view is that the whole thing [MI It makes it too rational?] Well yes – look, he really thinks the Jews stand for nineteenth century sort of culture and that they hated. It's true they do and they did hate it and that's why T. S. Eliot didn't like them, that's why Toynbee didn't like them; but it doesn't account for Hitler if you see what I mean, it accounts for – I don't know – even Ezra Pound perhaps, it accounts for conservative if you like of Jews, sort of pious, I mean dislike of the Jews who – Ruskin probably was not anti-Semitic but he could be. You see Carlyle was because the haters of the nineteenth century and all it stood for, the head of the – what Burke said if you remember, '[ ], the word is chivalry.' You see all right, well Jews came off in the nineteenth century which is the age of trade, civilisation, thought, cleverness, use of the intellect, criticism, doctrines, theories, science ...

MI Yes and you were reproached in the late twentieth century by Roger Scruton for being dry and cold and deaf to the deeper emotions ...

IB Well that's the same thing, it's the same thing, the same thing, you see where is sex? Where is eroticism? The Jews would have plenty to say about that [laughter] anyway there's more about Scruton, I'll tell you in a minute. [MI Yes I derailed you, I derailed you] You know about Cowling do you? [MI Yes] I'm about to tell you. Wait. So then the root of anti Semitism let me inform you and – then to the machine – is the Gospels, that is the ember. You see you are a child at school and you learn about people killed the Lord, killed God, now called Jews, you've no idea what that meant to you, it was nothing real in your life, you are living in the deep Canadian countryside, I mean anything you like, it may have been somewhere at the back of Saskatchewan or you live in the middle of Iowa [MI Wherever you are you learn that the Jews killed ...] there is something called Jews, they're a sinister group – a long time ago but still there is a sort of penumbra of sinisterness which covers the word and that is transmitted; so when the word Jew is used it already has some pejorative flavour. That's not enough to create pogroms by itself; and then you intense the ember, then you need winds that blow it, then you get all this anti intellectualism, economic scapegoats, anything you like you see? But these are factors which blow the ember into flame. But even when the flame is extinguished, the ember glows on. That's my view. I once talked to a Catholic priest about that who agreed, if you are really are a catholic you know that to be true or you believe it. I mean so long as the Gospels are read, there will be the roots of anti Semitism. They needn't be active, they needn't and so on, you can overcome it, you can say, 'These are not the same people and the Pope says the Romans and Jews aren't to blame anyway, those views have descended and heaven knows what happened two thousand years ago, what more can be said?' But nevertheless the word carries the degree of implications, through the Middle Ages, that's where it comes from. That's why Jews poison wells, that's why they burn

hosts in their stoves and that's why, if they're converted, they're OK, Middle Ages now racism, converted Jews absolutely OK. Jessica, who is Shylock's daughter, is in order. She's a Christian, she's all right. It doesn't cling to, nor did it in the Middle Ages. That you were a convert, well there might be some suspicion that you weren't completely lapsed – in Spain you get the Inquisition, tends to smoke you out because they think you aren't a complete Christian. But if you are [MI Bingo] it's all right, there's no sense of blood or soil, none of that you see? That's later.

MI Yes, I find this thought troubling, it may take us away from our subject, but I entirely agree that the roots of anti-Semitism are Christian, I don't have any difficulty with that [ ]; the difficulty I have is that the Christian doctrine or the Christian interpretation of the Gospels has so many possible paths that it was possible for instance in my childhood, to grow up not receiving the message that Jews crucified Christ, or to the degree that they did, Christ was also a Jew. It happened in a ...

IB It doesn't say that [MI It happened in a place called Palestine] If you read the Gospels simply, if you read the Gospels in a naive fashion, never mind what your schoolmasters told you, just read it, it just says, 'The Jews crucified Christ.' And they wanted Barabbas, Pilot said, 'Which do you want?' The [ ] as in the Matthew Passion, that's a kind of simple Bach is a very good example of what I mean. [MI Crucify him, crucify him, yes] Ba-ra-bbas, crucify him, crucify him, you see? All that, well that's quite normal, the normal impression is – well then you – it's more sophisticated to say, 'After all you must remember Christ was a Jew himself.' He wasn't a Jew, he was a God. If you are a God you are not a Jew or anything else, you see, if you happen to be called a Jew was – Joseph was a Jew, yes, the Virgin Mary was a Jewess, all right. But that's a rather – if you say that it comes – in fact it's surprising that she should be.

MI I just think there's a historical puzzle about how anti-Semitism passes through the various Christian traditions because I don't think it passes through the Catholics in the same way ...

IB Well that's probably [ ] to Christianity. In early Christianity you have hatred of the Jews immediately because their enemy – Jewish sects, one of which hates the other. I mean the early Christians were all Jews, or very nearly all and then they hate the other – the Jews hate them as heretics and frightful sort of apostates and they all hate the Jews for killing Christ and so on, that gets going in the second century, third century and after that it doesn't cease. The Jews aren't popular anyway because they keep themselves to themselves, they're funny. But to the Germans, didn't like the Jews before Christ. I mean Cicero makes nasty remarks about them because they're kind of sinister, God knows what they're at; they won't inter marry, they don't talk to us, I mean the [ ] themselves are all right to some extent but still he just says – who is it, either he or [?] says they're enemies of the human race [ ] give us some money because they hate everybody else [ ] violently opposed to the whole world round them and that doesn't make them popular – but you don't actually massacre them. And the Emperor Claudius you see produces a [ ] against them because there's a pogrom, Jews and Greeks have a frightful fight in Alexandria and he more or less told the Jews, 'Shut up,' not to go on until they were punished. That's just race or riots, I mean they just want to squash, they're not interested in the details of it because they're bent on disorder, all right. But the real anti-Semitism I think begins with the fact that the Jews are in some ways a criminal element, they're sinister, they're so to speak wicked, wicked lot [ ] and it comes direct from the fathers, all of them anti-Semitic, [ ] fathers all are, Augustine thought that the whole lot are you see?

MI Does this – this account strikes me as plausible – I wanted to ...

IB It's very sophisticated. Not until the Renaissance do you get people like Mirandola associating with Jews, trying Jewish businesses in the Kabbala, pottering about – that's very elaborate and [ ].

MI Do you feel that Stuart just doesn't – the fact that Stuart Hampshire just doesn't understand?

IB Doesn't want to understand. He knows perfectly well what it is. When he says, 'This is Jewish, it's just kind of anti intellectual, anti civilised, just the Jewish civilisation [ ] try and get rid of it, there's a fact that there's something in it, I mean the Nazis did think all that; but it doesn't account for Russian anti Semitism which is just as violent in it's own way.

MI But is it true that Gentiles just basically don't understand this? Can't? [IB Don't understand what?] Anti Semitism.

IB What, it's roots you mean? [MI Yes] Yes I think Jews are seen as funny, sinister, odd they don't associate with us, something funny, dishonest, thieves, crooks ...

MI No, but I meant your friends. [IB No but I mean the concept of anti Semitism is people don't think about] Well I meant Gentile friends not Jewish friends, people as close to you as Stuart, do you feel a kind of gulf with them over this issue, that they simply don't get it in their guts?

IB They don't want to realise that there are irrational factors which cannot be explained on ultimately socio economic or socio political grounds. I mean the whole idea that there is a thing as religion, there's the very powerful fact is willing to admit sexes – religion? No, it's just ultimately nonsense for him. He's a rational socialist, religion is just ridiculous, false beliefs of a primitive kind, that's all it is you see? If you believe that then it's rather, I mean up to [ ] Europe, here is Germany, one of the most civilised countries [ ] it

says high civilisation; and yet. Well you can't attribute it to primitivism or religious feelings because the Lutherans didn't like that, I mean [ ] didn't find these primitive peasants who do as a matter of fact but of course Oberammergau is a tremendous source of it locally and so on. Of course, why not?

MI I'm glad we've raised this subject because I was reading these marvellous and very touching memoirs by your Dad, your father.

IB Oh yes, which I never read, I've never read a single line. [MI Really?] No, I always thought it might be embarrassing and he said he was doing it and I thought he oughtn't to and he'll probably write a lot of nonsense and might write anything, I've never read a single line. [MI Well I can assure you] I was trying to get Hardy to return the original to me, just to have a look.

MI Good, well I hope you will because it says [MI What does it say? The English must be very imperfect too] The English? No, no, quite wrong, the English is [IB Quite good?] flavoured with certain unmistakable Russian word orders, it's very precise [IB I see] and very [IB What does he talk about?] nicely expressed. He talks about ...

IB I've never read a single line, I simply just stuffed it away in a drawer and in this way it went to Hardy.

MI Well what it says is this, it says since we have discovered that the Nazis have exterminated our people [IB Our family, yes] we must know [IB Who they are] who they are and so it goes back to the eighteenth century, it goes back to [IB The Hasidim] to the Hasidim [IB That's correct] it goes back to the Jewish teacher from whom you are descended [IB Well the original, the founder of the Lubavich sect] yes exactly, it goes back to that ...

IB it's the most tremendously, it's the richest of all the Jewish sects. [Lady Berlin enters and greets MI] Their descent comes from a

man called Schneer Zalman who was the founder of the Lubavich sect, that's where he lived and that is the best, most richest and most proselytising sect of all the Jews at present, it's grown enormously and the centre is Brooklyn, it's Washington Heights and they knock people about in the streets in Jerusalem, they use physical violence, they do that in New York too. [MI This is where you come from] This is where I come from [MI Obviously with a sense of recoil] When I see them in the street, I spit. [MI Really] Yes. [MI Why?] Because I think they're hateful. [MI Why?] Because I think they're everything that's awful; they're fanatical, anti rational, fanatical, anti Arab, anti Gentile, they're exactly what Cicero thought; they're hateful, a frightful hateful sect of bigots. They're extremely imaginative because they're sort of fundamentally, they're like the Quakers or the Methodists. I mean the revolt was against ecclesiasticism, rationalism, learning, in the favour of union with God, mysticism, emotion, direct inspiration by God, like the German Pietists, about the same period, too, you see? The whole thing had started in the eighteenth century, my man happens to be the leader in Russia but it begins in the [The phone rings and there is a short break] [MI ... sect] exactly, well why not hit them now? Because originally why I knew them as a child. [MI In what way did you know them as a child?] In Riga where I was born, there was a man who was the millionaire about whom I have told you who my father probably mentions from the name Berlin comes; he was a Hasid and that's why there is a relationship because he married the grand daughter of one of the notable – the number three teacher, in the dynasty, number three – and the grand ... that was [ ] I told you, the only way of status among the Pale settlement among the pious Jews of Russia and Poland, not among the emancipated ones but among the bulk which was ninety per cent at least of the sort of religious Jews, only two ways to achieve status: one was by wealth and one was by learning, not piety, learning. Therefore the rich men always wanted their daughters to marry sons of the great scholars and the great scholars wanted their daughters to marry sons of rich men; and there was a genetic effect of all this which produced I suppose a certain amount of ability on



the part of certain families because they all descended, the genes, means the descent from people that achieved some kind of prominence, somehow in so to speak human activities. Well, all right. Now this rich man was the son of this millionaire, the son of the original man who built railways as I think I told you, and he went once a year, once every two years, to Lubavich to see the Rebbe who is the guru who said sacred things. The women used to ask, pray for having children or the merchants used to say how am I to avoid bankruptcy or whatever – he was the Delphic oracle, he was the Delphic oracle. Now since he was that, my father was his favourite pseudo grandson, in other words he was married to my father's grandmother, married to the sister of my father's grandmother and therefore he was the great nephew by marriage. Now he had a Synagogue of his own, he built one entirely to which he could go and these people could go there, he dominated, he owned it and it was like having a Church built for your own personal use, Chapel, and that was filled with Hasidim and that's where I was taken by my parents from time to time, not every Saturday, not every Sabbath but I mean from time to time on high holidays at the age of three, four, five, and that I remembered dimly. [MI What do you remember?] Well just this room and bearded men and the sounds of prayer which I have since various contexts, that's all I remember you see? I didn't really know him personally but I remember being taken, some man, some beadle, some servant of his would say, the Master roughly speaking or somebody or other wants you all to be there by ten, so everyone would be there by ten, and that I vaguely remember. Then in Petrograd again we went to the proper Synagogue which was not specific at all, it was sort of ordinal but next door to it there was a little Hasidic stible as they were called which comes from stube which means as you know, German stube, the German stube means room and therefore stube, stuble, stuble, stible, the stible being a little attachment where these pious Hasidics were together. From time to time my father used to drop in to see how they were getting on, very vaguely I remember that. Then we came back to Riga in 1919 [ ] to the Synagogue which still existed; it was the

called The Berlin Synagogue you see? That's exactly what it was called. So I remember these things. I had nothing against them, on the contrary, my sense was they were jollier than the other Jews, they were full of vitality but that's what they were, I mean they were not dried up.

MI In what respect did their services or their gatherings differ from ...?

IB Not much, not much. They were not heretics, they were not dissident anyway, they were not a sect, they were ...

MI They were more exuberant in their devotions?

IB They were, they were, they were like early [?] or like early [?] or Quakers or Shakers or – yes they were, that is to say they were more passionate, yes, and that rather attracted me and the people of mine used to occasionally come to our house I suppose were much more full of beans, vitality, a general optimism about life, not dried up, pale, sort of learned, sort of dry biscuits which is what the others were if you see what I mean [chuckles]. In that sense I was rather for them; I felt there was a lot of life there and the religion was genuine, it was not hypocritical, not mechanical.

MI So when did this hatred or dislike begin?

IB Oh the last ten years, I mean, since I became political, I mean since they began misbehaving in Israel, you see, and misbehaving here and denouncing everybody and being a sort of intolerant persecutors and going about the streets fully dressed in uniform which was not necessary, I mean aggressively dressed in sort of you know with long side locks and black hats, you've seen them you see? And stopping people on the streets of New York as a kind of holy wagon which they roll along which dispenses phylacteries and prayer books; they stop Jews on the streets and say, 'When have you last prayed? What about? Here's a prayer book, tomorrow

morning, why don't you do it? It will make you feel better.' [ ] That's when I began hating them. I began hating them when they became black and just became sort of black reactionaries which they weren't before because nothing to be reactionary about, you just think about the other Jew, persecuted under living under Jewish disabilities and rather more jolly, much jollier, than the others. They were also accused by the great majority, they were a small sect, of drinking vodka in order to get themselves into a holy state, not just by prayer but the use of stimulants, that's kind of charge put against them you see?

MI Now your father's – what I want to get more precise is your father and your mother's relations to that Hasidic tradition [IB They were first cousins remember] Yes. What comes through very powerfully in your father is just one hundred per cent sense of Jewish tradition, tremendously strong and it came slightly as a surprise because the portrait you painted of him to me is of a very [IB Of him?] of him ...

IB No, no, he didn't belong to that tradition, that's worked up in his old age. [MI Do you think so?] He was totally emancipated, I mean he didn't eat kosher, he didn't have anything to do with it, he was bored by going to the Synagogue, I mean this I think is recidivity.

MI Full of little Hebrew quotations [IB Exactly] slight statements to the effect that what's slightly a shame about you Isaiah is that you neglected your Talmud [IB Exactly] you know; and you think this is kind of assembled in retrospect?

IB He certainly didn't remember about Talmud at all, he didn't know it, he may have been taught it. I mean of course he had certain Hebrew or even Aramaic expressions which were inculcated into him in his childhood. He was brought up in total piety, my father, but I think towards the end of his life as sometimes happens, there is a certain, there is a sentimental return

to roots of some kind. It's true that when Israel was declared, my father was not a Zionist, but he did go to Israel in 1950 or something soon after it became a State and was terribly moved as all Jews are and then began saying, 'They're wonderful ... what I remember is each sitting under his [?] and under his olive tree,' it was a [?] you see, sitting, sort of peasant, an idealised peasant life, each sitting under his individual tree you see in the country. Well, that moved him because he remembered all these texts and so towards the end of his life he was moved by all of this but this is sentimental return; the whole point, he broke away from it completely, I mean there was no question of trying to make me more Jewish than I was, he may have regretted it but I was never urged by him.

MI Oh no, he's clearly – the pages are full of the most touching forms of pride in your achievements but it is the dominant note of this piece from beginning to end is, we come from a certain Jewish tradition, we remained within that tradition, I remained within that tradition ...

IB Oh yes, he read Talmud simply because it was the real thing because it was sectarian; he wouldn't have done that as a Jew simply; simple because this was a particular sect and he belonged to a kind of Royal family, he belonged to the central branch of the Founder and therefore in the genealogies which they publish in Israel – there are two books and Pa was dedicated to the genealogies, Yehudi Menuhin and I both occur, we are sixth cousins, descended [ ] not even once removed, exactly six, [MI Incredible] you see and he knows all about it, too you see? But as it was a kind of terribly admired – I mean he enormously worshipped – the whole idea of the Hasidim is the thought the Rebbe was in touch with God, I mean he was mystical union, what he said came directly from the Godhead which the other, the majority of Jews thought was superstition and disapproved of very strongly, thought it was just a lot of rot and could see that megalomaniac superstition was disgusting; the German Jews

thought it was absolutely dreadful, lapse to barbarism of the most terrible kind.

MI It has one extremely funny moment is that when he makes a tour of Germany and says all kinds of extremely amusing things about [IB After the war?] No, no, before the first world war on a business trip, habits of the German Jews who are so pretentious that they won't even put up their umbrellas when they go to Synagogue [IB Yes quite] because it's labour, it's pitching a tent or something [IB You are not allowed to carry because carrying is labour] so they had a Gentile porter at the gates, doors of these Synagogues [IB With a tent] no, to open the thing and bring them down [IB With a tent, yes] and he regarded that as the most ridiculous thing he'd ever seen in his life; [IB Quite] but with a very strong sense that he came from Eastern European Jewry ...

IB My father went to Germany again after the war, he went on a timber mission with the rank of I think Major, Major's uniform [chuckles] very surprising thing for him to do and he confiscated the estates of Prince Bismarck [laughs] has he told that? [MI And richly enjoyed greeting ...] Oh gigantic. He was a megalomaniac, my father, [ ] generation of England were absolutely phenomenal, everything in this country was wonderful [MI Yes and some of that's rubbed off on you] Yes, it has, certainly.

MI Has any of that sentimental return occurred in you? [IB To the Jews?] No, no not to the Jews since it seems to me, that seems to me in a certain way, I meant to the religious elements?

IB No. No. I go to Synagogue, I went yesterday to – I didn't go actually because I had a frightful cold – but the night before I went to the Yom Kippur service. If you ask me why, for sentimental reasons; because I had done and because I believe in self identification, nothing else. The prayers bore me [MI Self identification meaning?] with the Jews [MI You're willed] No, there is a body called the Jews; no use denying that the Jewish Nation in

some sense, tribe, Nation, community is very difficult to identify because the ordinary criteria don't apply [MI But you identify with it?] Yes, absolutely, absolutely. If I am asked what I am – I think I've told you – 'Are you English?' as so many people think me to be, I say, 'No, I'm a Russian Jew.' [clap] That's what I am and that's indisputable, anything else is disputable, anything else is disputable [MI Thank God!] [laughter] No, a straight Canadian, that came as part of [], you're of Canadian/Russian origin, OK. No, no but you are to think of authentic Canadian.

MI Yes and you were saying to me last week which I found touching and also true [IB You're a half cast, yes] Yes I'm a half cast but forget about me; [IB Yes] what I found touching is when you said there were things that made you weep, one of them was the recollection of Jewish songs heard in that place near Pskov and ...

IB Yes, yes, yes, yes, [MI What was that story ...?] where the battle was fought? The [] class? Yes.

MI How did that song go? Because it had a wonderful ...

IB Oh yes, about in the front of the stove or whatever it is, in the – it's called, what they called [lipetchik?] or something, petch being stove, the pre stove bit, yes the metal bit comes out, the stove is there but in front of the stove there is a little fire, the stove itself has sort of pots on it, in a Village you see? You have this huge thing made into a wall because you stuff timber, logs into it and you fry things or you boil them on the actual surface of whatever it's made of. But in front, the front is all right because that's where the logs burn and if you open it, that's the thing that gives warmth to the single room in which the peasant family lives. And that is the thing and that also occurs in this [] class room and it says, 'The little fire burns in this and in the room that's hot. In der stube,' it's almost German, 'ist heiss.' It's straight German you see? [quotes] That's very German, a little fire, 'In stube,' in der stube, 'ist heiss.' It's hot.

‘Und der [rebbe?] und der kleine kinderlich,’ the little children, ‘lehrt,’ which means teaches, ‘[?]’ is alphabet. And then there is this very moving song which always reduces me to tears: ‘Dear children, so when you get older you will realise – ‘no, it’s all this business about [?], I told you, [Alef?] was a stroke under his [?], ‘bet’ was another stroke under his [?], what it is, you learn the syllables because [ ] to the vowels, [ ] consonants and then you have little points underneath which indicate what the accent is and you have to read without points, that’s only done for children so once you’re grown up you do without that, [ ] in Arabic, same thing. But anyway, and then the [?] or whatever it is and then he’d say, ‘When you will get older dear children, you will realise how much blood and tears are embodied in these letters.’ That’s all right, but that is the history of the Jews, [clap] that’s what Namier said when – it’s a wonderful typical Namier remark, ‘Lord Darby said to me,’ I’ve told you that. [MI Tell me again, I love this story] it’s wonderful. ‘Lord Darby said to me, ‘Namier, you are a Jew. Why do you write Jewish history – English history? Why don’t you write Jewish history?’ I said to him, ‘Darby,’ which is the at that point of the story, ‘I said to him, Darby, there is no Jewish history, there is only a Jewish martyrology and that is not amusing enough for me.’ [laughter] [clap] That gets the whole of Namier, the rudeness, the certain grim wit, the – he called Darby Darby, the pride, the rejection of this sort of patronising attitude, you see? He called him Darby and the contempt for Jewish history – the boredom of Jewish history and the pleasure in English history, the history of a successful Nation, sort of total failure [laughter] you see? Anyway, what I think is true about me and this is what is true about my father’s thing and so on, is that I know so much about the life of these people and their values and the expression of their views, it’s all – but when anyone writes anything or anyone talks about it, I can correct them and I’m interested in almost anthropologically in my origins as everybody is, just as you are in your Ignatieff ...

MI You don’t recognise those pages do you? [IB You’re talking to me exactly as] I know, as if you were in a court you poor man.

IB As a court – I never told you this story of the younger brother of the First President of the USSR whom I met? [MI No] with the French Ambassador and his [ ]. [MI No I'm baffled but tell me] and rightly, I mean you to be. [MI History of Hasidism] [?] is misspelled [MI Doesn't sound quite like you] No, no it's not me, no, it's nothing to do with me. [MI Could it be your father?] I didn't write it, no, where does this come from? [MI Hardy provided it and doesn't know where it came from] Nothing to do with him or me, I never wrote it. Someone must have given it to me and I must have stuffed it into a cupboard with the rest. [MI Fine, OK, it's all I wanted to know] It's about – wait a minute [MI It's unsigned and unfinished] You see where the man says, "The [?] movement which has nearly disappeared still exists in backwaters, some parts of Poland and South Eastern Europe, in Ruthenia for example, shaped very differently [ ] into a form rather than a very degenerative form [ ] ignorant hysterical [ ], rather divine, New York [ ] ... [MI It seems pre second world war] Oh sure, because I mean Nazism is booming, booming so much that the Roman Community, the Community of the Jews of Rome which has existed for eighteen centuries has been broken up by these people, broken up by them and they managed to split it, get a lot of young men to join them and the thing was disrupted, was polite, the ancient rather half dead, perfectly if you can imagine, very respectable sort of Hugeno like, you see which is what they were. The Chief Rabbi of Rome was in despair. They make more converts than anybody does in the world now because they find these sad young men, but I mean take [Salman Kahn?] you see who became the General of Australia; his two sons are frantically pious. They've grown beards, long side curls and sit in the [ ] of Jerusalem hating the government. I mean I ask you, he's in despair, how did this happen? I met his son in Australia, he was a good student at Canberra, perfectly ordinary person [ ], history of ideas. Suddenly, all this, it's rather like, it's some kind of spiritual revival for people in some way from their parents and they're empty.



MI Wasteful. It's where all that Godless, desiccated, liberalism practised by people like Isaiah Berlin will get you.

IB Of course, of course, perfectly true. Now let me tell you. There is a man called Cowling as you know [MI Yes, Maurice Cowling in Peterhouse] You see he's the father of the whole thing; his Grandfather is Oakeshott, and Butterfield, that's where it begins but Cowling is the main inspirer at the moment and what's his name absolutely worships him, Worsthorne. He comes from Peterhouse, they all do, like my colleague [?]. Well he's written a book as you know, [ ] a book about [?], *Spiritual Evolution in Modern Society*. Trevor Roper who he made Master and then quarrelled with because he thought it was a terrible mistake, turned out not to be as conservative as was hoped and he reviewed the first volume quite favourably, said there were profound things in it; after the quarrel, the second volume with extreme irony and contempt. The third volume was about to appear about [ ] it was mainly about the war and after, however there was a chapter devoted to me. I am the instigator of the second world war which was a ghastly mistake, the thing is we should never have gone to war; all that happened was that we lost an Empire and all our property and it was not in the interests of the United Kingdom to go to war against Hitler, that's the thesis and presumably the people mainly responsible were liberals and intelligentsia and God knows who if you see what I mean – Churchill, I don't know quite what part he played in this anyhow but for some reason, I am responsible according to Worsthorne who's read the chapter. I was what, thirty years at the time and was not politically involved anyway, I was writing, so far as I was doing anything else, thinking about theory of knowledge; I had written on Karl Marx and that was not sufficiently anti Marxist in character, but still, you see? But for some reason I could see in my symbol for him, everything in shades. It doesn't matter socially so much because they're fervent but he doesn't want his liberal, atheist liberal intellectuals, polite, quite amiable persons who disrupt the whole religious pieces, spiritual bases for which every society [MI Inaudible] quite well

that's the heart of England; and if that is desiccated the thing falls to pieces, you see? That must be the thesis [MI You've got a lot to answer for, Isaiah] I know. His hero you see I think is Manning who in spite of being Catholic, he knew [ ] right idea which is Catholic Theocracy, a lot of ignorant Irish peasants at the top of the hierarchy, culminating in them.

MI How do you explain this kind of virulent, stupid conservatism, it does seem very peculiar?

IB He must have been – he's an eccentric figure I think from the very beginning, I mean I know him you see? I've seen him. It's partly because he – rather he and Oakeshott planted all their friends – there was a thing called the Carlisle Club – that was not Thomas Carlyle, the founder was a very sweet man called Canon Carlisle who was the Chaplain of University College, friend of William Morris I think, who was a sort of mild, sweet old liberal; he and his brother wrote the History of Political Ideas in the Middle Ages, famous book, six volumes. He was a very sweet liberal clergyman, extreme holiness, a very nice man and he had a little discussion club on political issues and when I first became a member after the war, I was almost the youngest member of it, people in the room when you entered were [?] Professor [P?] who was not young, a mediaeval historian [MI Maurice P?] famous [ ]; Lord Samuel not in his bloom of youth; Sir David Ross, famous Aristotelian scholar, Provost of Oriel; R.C.K. Ensor, the sort of journalist historian; Beveridge; wait a moment, [Tournay?]; so you see there were these noble liberal figures, really; Webster, historian; noble, sort of honourable liberal figures of a sort of Establishment kind. And then, after all these people died off – Oakeshott was the Treasurer I think, planted, managed to get elected to it – oh, Cowling; there was a man at London University succeeded Popper, no [?] succeeded Popper, the man who succeeded Oakeshott, Minogue – and so on, you see what I mean? And that Jewish lady, extreme conservative, pupil of Oakeshott, you know who I mean, what was her name? Letwin, Shirley Letwin; her husband; Trevor

Roper; Blake; it became too much so Herbert Hart, Stuart Hampshire and I couldn't take it. We left. But Bernard Williams remained a member ... [Short break in tape] ... sort of Lib Lab establishment of the thirties ...

MI Which they feel led the country into an unnecessary war?

IB Well no, that's Cowling particularly; I don't think you need to believe that to be a follower, I don't think that Worsthorne believed that, that particularly, extreme form of it. But ...

MI How odd. Let me move you to just one other thing your father says rather touchingly about you, the memoir ...

IB Well deep Judaism may have been there in the lurking form but never emerged in my lifetime, it didn't emerge in my education, never.

MI He says one of the things which struck him very much is seeing you at the end of the war, coming back from Washington, how much confidence, self assurance you gained, how much polish you'd acquired, you were suddenly [IB Possible] an adult and things to him [IB Well I wasn't that before the war funnily enough] well I think that's what he's intimating, that you acquire your adult form only in Washington, maybe I'm adumbrating what he ...

IB Well what he could really mean, I think it's the – there's something in that. Before the war I was a don among dons, straight Oxford don, very much more donnish than I became and I lived a don's life. I lived in College, I lunched and dined there every day so to speak on the whole, I knew a few people I suppose outside like Stephen Spender or whoever I was brought up with and I don't perhaps – broadly I lived in Oxford and I always love Oxford and learned to love Oxford, not uncharacteristic of the whole thing you see? I had no London life except staying with my parents occasionally. But everything was like anything, all [ ] and [ ], para

academic; but Washington of course, I was pitched into socially a wider world, not just at the Embassy but everywhere and when I came to England in '42 because my despatches were well thought of, I went to stay at Ditchley which was, I was then at Ronnie Tree's house which was Duff Cooper and various conservative Ministers all of whom asked you questionnaires, suddenly began to expand and I dare say I'm not unsnobbish by nature probably, I have a certain primitive snobbery which meant that I probably enjoyed it very much and suddenly felt this wider world and after the war, immediately after the war and before I married, I went about society very easily and went to country houses and knew a lot of upper class persons and got on very well with them. [MI And that changed you in some way?] It must have done. [MI In the way your father observed] After I married one never quite gets out of it but after I married it stopped because Aline doesn't really like it, you see, fundamentally we live at home. But before I married I was what's called r,pandu. [MI laughs, r,pandu] Yes, r,pandu, I could be found in all kinds of sort of Mayfair-ish society which I enjoyed, they were very clever and amusing and I don't think it changed my character in any way; I went on teaching quite peacefully and I lived in Oxford three days a week or four days and would occasionally go up to London or I'd spend weekends in the country houses. I became quite a familiar figure in that particular world and was quite popular among them. I was faintly ashamed because I felt was I really just a sort of social fool? That I just amused them? Was I a clown who just tickled their palates, was that my function? But then maybe up to a point there was some truth – but on the whole not, on the whole I was treated respectfully, just sort of quite good company and why not? You see? But I went to people, I'll tell you the sort of people I knew; I mean there was Anthony Head who became Minister of War and his wife; there was the whole Cecil gang, I mean – what's it called, the house? Where does he live in – you know in Hertfordshire? [MI Clivedon] No, no, the Cecil house is not Clivedon. I went to Clivedon too. [MI Yes you've mentioned the Cecil house and I just can't think] Yes exactly you see? Well, well it's called Hatfield, Hatfield, there the Queen Mother was and

she asked me to go to Church with her on Sunday morning, so oddly enough there we were, arm in arm entering the Church on Sunday morning, it was absurd. Finally Lord Salisbury sorted the thing proper and just as we were about to enter the Church I was made to stand aside and he took her in, sort of ludicrous that she would want to do that but you see what I mean? It's a life very different from what I lead now; and people like Oliver Lyttleton that I knew were just great big hearty tough old conservative who was quite amusing to talk to; Duff Cooper I knew, Diana Cooper I knew very well; it was a short period in my life but it existed.

MI What was your impression of Diana Cooper?

IB I liked her very much indeed, she was extraordinary; her guts were something unbelievable, sheer guts, capacity for going on. She was extremely handsome and very witty and very non sexy [MI Non sexy?] No, she didn't have – she may have had two love affairs in her life, people were obviously in love with her because she looked so beautiful. No, she was like a very clever school boy who was top of the form and could do crossword puzzles – quick, clever, amusing, sharp, by the time I came to know her she was rather like an ageing actress, no savoir vivre, she didn't know how to behave, she didn't quite know how to treat people, she made mistakes. But she was extremely witty and amusing and her vitality was unbelievable and she was very good company. Her stories were wonderful, her language was extraordinary.

MI When did you meet her first?

IB During the war in an air raid shelter [MI In London?] in London. I knew a man called Raimund von Hoffmanshtal, he was the son of the librettist of Strauss, the poet and him I met in Washington – that was the kind of smart society which I abhorred in the thirties. I remember going to Salzburg to which I went almost every year from 1930 onwards. I went there in '37, '36 and 7, I went there in '37, maybe '36 with Stuart Hampshire, with

Elizabeth Bowen my great friend and a lady called Sally Greaves, Sally Chilver [ ] who was the Head of the [?], Virginia Woolf's friend; and we took a little flat which belonged to Schoenberg's brother and then there arrived Cyril Connolly with Randolph Churchill, Lady Julia Duff and various people, I mean smart persons and they stayed in the Castle which Raimund [ ] his American wife had bought him. He was a very good looking son of Hugo who went to America, went to Hollywood and married various rich ladies. First he married an Astor who sort of bought the castle, and after that he married this very beautiful daughter of Lord Anglesey and he was sort of heart of [ ] society. When I arrived in Salzburg there was nobody I wanted to meet less and I shied away from – and of course Elizabeth knew Connolly who came with them and he asked her to come and join them and she loyally didn't. But I was horrified by the mere thought of these awful people in leder hosen if you see what I mean, the sort of British aristocracy living in a nearby castle coming to one or two of the performances of Toscanini but otherwise, you see? That was to me an absolute damned world. I knew Kenneth Clarke because he had been Keeper of the Ashmolean and people like that and Maurice Bowra could have known some of these people and occasionally – David Cecil became a friend of mine in 1938. Broadly speaking this was a world which I regarded with genuine horror. But then in 1941, 2, my friend Jeremy Hutchinson, now Lord Hutchinson who was at Oxford whom I knew, came on a ship commanded by Mountbatten and came to see me in New York and he said, 'I know what you're doing tomorrow, you're going to stay a night with the Rumbolds,' they were, he was an old friend of mine from the Embassy, 'and you're going to meet two people who you will simply hate, there's nobody you will hate more, they're everything you dislike. They're smart, they're glossy, they're pure pillars of society, they're tremendously – they're absolute sort of totally sort of social and shiny and smart and glossy and God knows it's what you hate most in the world,' said Jeremy to me. So I went and I – there were four people to lunch, one was Prince and Princess Hohenloe whom I didn't take in and the other

was Mr Raimund and Lady Elizabeth von Hoffmanshtal whom I took to immediately [ ] being warned. That always happens, I was told I would hate them, one's told one loves them or hates them and after that I became a friend of his. He was amusing, Austrian, full of charm and a wonderful flatterer. In his presence you felt better dressed, you felt you talked better you were better looking, you were everything possible; he was extremely skilful, he was a man who had endless affairs with ladies and many marriages, oh at least three, and ...

MI It was through him that you met Diana Cooper?

IB He was a great friend. He was – his father sent him to America [ ] and he – there was [ ] who introduced him. Diana Cooper was then acting in a play called 'The Miracle' which went down in America, produced by [Rheinhardt?] and when he saw her he was overcome. All he could say was, 'Madame, Madame.' And she took him under her wing and brought him up and he became an intimate friend and he married her niece, you see, the Anglesey was her niece except that she was illegitimate but that's not the point. And [ ] I made friends with because she was intellectually extremely responsive. She read books, she was intelligent, she wasn't sort of hostess, sort of silly hostess, she wasn't a society hostess, she was a sharp wit and vitality, that's why I liked her. Duff Cooper her husband I never liked [MI Why?] rather frightened of him, he was too choleric, too easily stirred to rage, too red faced and drunken, too Guard's Officer for my taste. We got on officially perfectly well but fundamentally not.

MI Now what happened down in this air raid shelter? [IB What?] You're down in an air raid shelter with ...

IB During the war in 1942 and I [ ] on what's called eve, I saw Raimund and he invited me to supper somewhere, it must have been in a hotel or something. Anyway there was an air raid and I came down into the air raid shelter with him and she was there and

then we spent about two hours together and that's where our friendship matured and she took to me and when I came back to England she asked me [ ], she did and we became what's called fast friends, I never quite understood it but it was so.

MI And that remained until the end of her life?

IB I was very guilty, I didn't go and see her in the last year or two which is [ ], I blame myself, yes it remained, it lasted. She used to come and see us in Oxford sometimes. I can tell you a story about her which is very typical in which you'll see, I mean, there was a man called Sir Robert Meyer who was a musical patron who died at the age of a hundred and five. When he was a hundred a concert was given in his honour in the Royal Festival Hall. The Queen appeared and we all went, this concert was – he made a speech, we all made speeches from the stage and then there was a reception afterwards upstairs and Diana Cooper said, 'A terrible thing's just happened to me.' 'What?' 'I went up to a lady, I knew her face but I couldn't think who she was. She said to me, "How are you Lady Diana?"' And I said, 'I'm old and not at all well, I'm reaching the end you know, don't feel very well but still I cope, I'm quite resilient, I go on. And she went on talking and suddenly I realised it was the Queen [chuckles] so I said to her, Ma'am, I'm terribly sorry I'm afraid I didn't recognise you at first but I'm old and mad and blind, you must forgive me but you see you weren't wearing your crown. And the Queen said, "No, I thought I wouldn't, I thought it was rather Sir Robert's evening.' That's very typical of Diana Cooper and not bad of the Queen [MI And not bad of the Queen indeed] exactly you see? Suddenly realised, Hockney told me, the painter, who once drew me. He said he went to a party and there was somebody there exactly like a face on a five pound note, couldn't think who it was [MI laughs, and it was] you see? So I did move in society at that period and was mocked by my father.

End of *Side A*



Interview with IB by MI 11. 10. 89

*Side B*

IB ... no good worrying about one or two in the morning, I was still awake. Lady Cunard, Lady Colefax, all these ladies I used to go to dinner with and he would say to me, 'How has your evening been tonight? Did you see Bip and Puff? Muff? Dip?' He invented a lot of nicknames for all these terrible ladies, many of them did have those names you see? 'How was Nip?'

MI Did you take well to that teasing?

IB Oh no it didn't matter, I don't think I did, I didn't mind. 'How was Nip tonight?'

MI I have a rather affectionate image of your father I must say from reading this ...

IB Oh he was an awfully nice man, a very innocent sort of man I told you, the trouble with him was he never lived his life, never had his life really but ...

MI And his account of his marriage is rather poignant in places. [IB Oh really?] Well poignant in the sense that he proposed to her and she turned him down, [IB Certainly] she then accepted him later and he had the very clear feeling that she'd decided he was the best that was on offer but [IB Absolutely correct] she knew from the beginning that she didn't love him. I mean it's as clear as clear can be [IB She never loved him] but felt tremendous and sustained admiration for her through his life, felt that she was a sort of force of nature in a way.

IB [ ] Maman,' that's what King Philip says in the opera about his wife, she never loved me. No it's quite true. He loved her, yes, to the end; she not, no. She thought he was rather weak sort of feeble

old thing, not much good, all right but I mean [MI But you took his part in a way] I had to inevitably. She bullied him and he was perfectly innocent; he meant no harm at all, he was entirely sweet; **a sweet, innocent, and nice and quite amusing rather ungrown up sort of man, you see?**

MI We're drawing almost to a close and I have to change the subject radically because last week [IB Freud] you left [IB Let me tell you] tell me about going to Maresfield Gardens.

IB Well I knew a man who lived near my parents who was a very rich metal merchant called Oscar Phillip who was the head of a firm called Phillip Brothers which continues to be a very famous firm, rich firm in America, Japan and elsewhere. He lived four or five doors away and he knew my parents and probably went to the same Synagogue or something, quite nice German Jew from Hamburg or somewhere and he met me in the street as I was going to see my parents and he greeted me affably and said, 'Oh I have a thought, would you like to meet Dr Freud?' This is 1938. I'd never read a line of Freud then and not much since and so I said yes, I was perfectly willing. He said, 'You see his wife is my first cousin so I think I can arrange it.' Her name was Bernays and very nice, rich German Jew. So I was ordered to go by Mr Phillip on Friday afternoon at about five. I repaired to Maresfield Gardens, rang the bell, he answered the door himself: I suppose we must have talked German, I don't think his English was any good, my German was very poor but still we managed and he said to me, 'What do you do?' and I said I tried to teach philosophy. He said, **'In that case you must think I'm a complete charlatan.'** **'No, Dr Freud, how can you?'** He then said, 'Won't you sit down? Do you see the figurine on that mantelpiece? [IB quotes in German] **Do you know where it comes from?'** I said no. **'You can't guess?'** 'No.' **'You're quite sure you don't know? Well, it comes from Megara. I see you are not pretentious.'** Then he said, 'You know I must tell you I'm very glad to be here because of course I was under house arrest in Vienna and the personal helper was my

old friend and pupil Marie Bonaparte who was the daughter of King Andrew, Prince Andrew of Greece. Do you know Marie Bonaparte? Did you know Prince Andrew of Greece?’ ‘No.’ **‘I see you are not a snob,’ he said.** I kept getting negative marks, negative virtues, absence of vices. He then said, ‘Well, Prince Andrew of Greece, I never knew him either, he went round the world with the Tsar of Russia; there was an attempt on his life in India you know, pity they didn’t get him, it would have saved us a lot of trouble actually.’ So then he said, ‘So you come from Oxford?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘I’ve never been there, do you think if I went there I could do business with the – there would be something for me to do?’ In my mind’s eye I saw a little plate saying ‘Dr Freud receives from two till four’, nine miles of people – I thought he could be. He said, ‘Well maybe I’ll come.’ Then, what else did he talk about? A bit about the discomfort in Vienna towards the end or something. Then his wife came in and she said, ‘You know my cousin?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘He is an observant Jew,’ ‘Yes he is.’ This is Friday afternoon; ‘Every Jewess who is any good,’ she said, ‘on Friday late afternoon wants to light the Sabbath candles and I wanted to do that all my life. But this monster,’ she said pointing to Sigmund, ‘forbids it; he says all religion is superstition.’ He gravely nodded and said, ‘Ja. [German quote]’ which was the German for superstition and this joke possibly exchanged every Friday I should think for sixty years. So that was all right, I ...

MI He said it with what tone of voice?

IB Faint irony. [German] This monster says that religion is superstition and must not give in to. [MI And what did you say then? Did you keep silent?] No, no, no I didn’t come between husband and wife, nothing at all. Then her grandson came in, I can’t tell you whether it was Lucian or the other one, his brother and Freud said, ‘Where have you been?’ And he said, ‘I’ve been to a play by Shakespeare.’ What was it called?’ ‘It was called Romeo and Juliet.’ ‘I thought you were your own Romeo,’ said Freud and that was thought terribly funny. At this point his son-in-law who

was a man called Hollitscher who was a fashion predictor, he wasn't a designer; he told firms what fashions were likely to be fashionable next year and made money that way, fashion prediction, forecasting.

MI Who explained that to you parenthetically, Freud or ...?

IB Neither of them, neither of them, I [MI Later] I think I discovered that later, yes. Then we all sat on the terrace, we were all given coffee, it was like Vienna in 1912, I mean small talk, nothing at all, he didn't talk very much, he had this awful cancer of the jaw.

MI Did you notice that, did you feel it?

IB Oh yes I did, yes. When asked what sort of impression he made on me, because I told this story to some man who was collecting Freudiana in New York, he was a psychoanalyst there, I can't remember he wrote a book on, [ ] book on Goethe, who was Lowell's psychoanalyst; he said, 'Did he make an impression of genius upon you?' I said, 'No.' 'What did you think he was like?' Oh maybe scientists don't impress you,' he said. 'No it's not that,' I said, 'no, no, he looked like a rather stern old Jewish doctor,' not stern Jewish doctor, I didn't say nasty [MI Stern] yes, severe.

MI Did his jaw seem clenched, did he seem in pain, did he talk like this?

IB No, no, it was quite natural, he talked quite easily, no his face didn't register pain in any way, no. It was perfectly all right. Still I was privileged because in the 'Life of Freud' by Jones which I've never read, this is recorded as the only person in England who was allowed to call on him at all apart from anyone he knew well [ ].

MI On what terms did you part or how did you leave?

IB Nothing, just that coffee was over, I thanked them very much, very kind of him to see me and we all shook hands all round and then departed.

MI In what time of the year did you go, do you remember when ...?

IB Late summer, he looked all right then, maybe September, October, I don't know. He must have come from the – he was arrested you see in '38, the Anschluss was [MI March] March and he probably remained [MI It was in April or May] it came later than that I think, maybe not. Anyhow this was later than that, autumn, yes, early autumn or late summer, I can't remember exactly when [MI He lives another year] he lived another year, yes.

MI Was he smaller than you, taller? Do you have an impression of his ...?

IB Mm – he was not tall, he was not very tall as I remember him, thick set, exactly as you see him in photographs.

MI He didn't seem shrunken inside his clothes? [IB No] Well what impression did his wife make on you?

IB Charming, nice old lady, sweet old lady, I don't know, very nice, old fashioned, 19th century wife, a very, very well brought up, kindly and courteous and very sweet, very nice to meet and sort of humorous and so on you see? Obviously sort of came of a civilised world [ ] in a way [MI There's something rough about [ ]] Certain [ ] professor, rather nasty professor, like a man who's rather nasty to the class, [ ] with people in corners [ ] Auschwitz, unkind.

*End of tape*

## MI TAPE 23

Conversation date: 29 April 1989

Date transcribed: 10 March 2003

Transcriber: Esther Johnson

Subjects covered:

Steiner

Sontag

Carr, Deutscher

*Historical Inevitability*

*Two Concepts of Liberty*

Arthur Schlesinger

Kennedy and The White House

Ayer and Hickory Hill

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IB ... nothing at all.

MI George Steiner said that of you, that you ...

IB To Aline, yes. Then I came down to breakfast, he said it before I came down, couldn't have been more flattering, he was very, very [ ] that's what he is, you see?

MI Well he always says to me without failure, 'You used to be a promising young academic and why did you throw it away to go on television?' [IB Who? You?] Yes, exactly at the moment that we prepared to go on television together [IB Exactly] at which point I say, 'You can't exactly have it both ways, George.' He so despised the media ...

IB I'll tell you, he was certainly crushed by Mary McCarthy on that famous occasion when he appeared with – who was it? – Brodsky, and Mary McCarthy, there may have been somebody else, when

she said that the best art was produced under censorship, under heavy persecution, that's why East European art is vastly inferior to West European art and went on. Brodsky said, 'If I had to choose between freedom and art, I'd choose freedom,' he said. No doubt about that, kind of freedom I like there, if I choose free life and so on, there's no question which I'd choose or any other decent human being. And Mary McCarthy said, 'The trouble about writers, what they most need is quiet. You make so much noise, George, so much noise, in your presence nobody could produce anything.' [MI Laughs] He really did [ ], he was really humiliated, they knocked into him, they really did, I think they saw through him all right. Of course he's a monster but if you were a 'monstre sacré' you wouldn't mind so much. He doesn't – he's a clever, quite interesting man who has sacrificed everything on the altar of wanting to be brilliant and it can't be done deliberately, like wanting to be an artist, or wanting to be a Saint. Did I tell you that story? About wanting to be a Saint? [MI No] [Mauriac?], when he was living in Oxford, he told us the following story: some friend of his came to see him and Mauriac said, 'What are you doing these days?' and he said, 'I'm trying to be a Saint.' Mauriac said, 'What do you do towards it?' He said, 'Well I pray a great deal, I give money to the poor, I work in a hospital, I humiliate myself in many ways, [MI Laughs] I attend religious services, I look after my relations with my parents [ ] I try [ ].' Mauriac said, 'Perhaps that's not quite the way that one becomes a Saint.' The man drew back, smiled and said, 'I forgive you for what you have just said.' [MI Laughs] Very funny story. [MI That's good] Now, to business.

MI To business, to business. Well I take your reproaches about Steiner seriously; I think in the context I was trying to [IB You see what's ...] I was trying to overcome my own intent ...

IB The man who really praised him was Alan Bennett who said, 'What I like about him, he's so un-English and I like about him that he's angry and he says things other people don't say, I like his indignation, I like his fury, I like his enunciations; and anyway he's

a critic, he doesn't live like the other critics, for example Isaiah Berlin, [MI Did he say that?] at the heart of the Establishment.

MI Is that what Bennett said? [IB Yes] Oh God, I can see why you're angry now! Oh my God!

IB No, but not about Steiner, I can be angry with Bennett. I don't mind him saying that, there's some truth in it, there is some truth, I'm not a rebel, I'm not a crusader, it's quite true, it's the only thing I do count as some part of some kind of establishment from my knighthood and whatever I got. Well he'd like to say it again, that I deserve. I mean if anyone's beaten me on that flat, I must take it. []

MI No but you can't like being beaten for that and then have the great independent free spirit George Steiner plays disguise – yes I can see that, and then the offence is compounded by me singing his praises as well, I can see the context as being very bad. The context of my remark [IB I didn't mind it] well the context of my remark is that I really dislike him personally, Steiner, and what I was then struggling to do was to say on the record [IB Nobody thinks he's a nice man] yes, that despite the fact that I dislike him intensely, I did have to confess that I had learned things from his books again in the seventies but [IB Well maybe you have] so there we are. It seemed unfair not to say that but I think ...

IB If you have, you have. Sooner or later he's bound to say something interesting but I have never come across it.

MI But as to whether he's a charlatan or not, on that absolutely no debate between us. I would argue with you a little over Susan but not very long.

IB On no, I agree, no there's no comparison, Susan is perfectly honest. It's not that, I mean she may talk nonsense or not very clever but it's quite serious, she means quite well. Steiner is an



operator. [MI On that we're agreed] Exactly. But I'm trying to think ...

MI Well I'll try and find this disagreeable piece.

IB Don't. I didn't mind it very much, I didn't mind what Alan Bennett said. I could see he said well Steiner was a good and furious man, pleased he shouts and curses, but I like that, that's all it was, all right, makes a noise. One likes that, one likes that. [MI Don't see why one should] Well that's what Bennett is obviously about; he wants to be left wing, anti society, doesn't see anything wrong with Blunt or Burgess and so on, there's nothing wrong with him at all. I was very shocked – by Blunt, not by Burgess.

MI Yes I know you were. Now we should get down to business. I wanted to talk to you about the fifties; we've talked about your marriage in the fifties, we've talked about your knighthood, we've talked about a lot of things that occurred [IB Washington we've talked about, yes] we've talked about Washington but we've not talked about Oxford life after the war and I don't think we've talked about Wolfson College for example [IB No, true] Perhaps we should talk about Wolfson and you should tell me that story – oh we've also talked about Nuffield, you've told me about being offered the Headship of Nuffield and turning it down because it was in a – academically it was terrain foreign to yours [IB No good to me, no good to me] Let's talk about Wolfson.

IB All right, I'll tell you what happened. I became professor [MI This is 1957 you become professor?] Yes, and then – why did I become professor? I applied. I'd written a little [ ] book on Karl Marx before the war and a lecture on Historical Inevitability, nothing to do with political theory, theory and another one on – nothing else much, sort of something on Mill, really, well I'll tell you. What got me my job were I think my lectures called Freedom and it's Betrayal on television – on the radio which was a kind of rather reactionary [ ] of the lumišre of the eighteenth century. Well

they were all right, the application that I made was led to Stalin, roughly, that was the area, Marx and Stalin and so on. Once you begin manipulating people, the whole idea being that what these people said was Don't preach, you must – the only way of getting people better was by sticks and carrots, legislation, education, it doesn't matter what they want, provided you tempt them in that direction you can get a good society. So no good telling people to be virtuous because they won't listen, you go towards altering society such a way that every time you perform a worthy deed, you are rewarded by the State, that will [ ] matters, exactly what [ ] against; there are people of freedom but treated as manipulable objects for their own good.

MI When did you do those lectures?

IB Fifty – four I think. '53? No, I did them in '53 I think. I did them originally in Bryn Mawr and then came back with them so to speak and then dear Miss Kallin our [ ] with a Russian lady from Moscow was creating third programme talks almost single handed, tremendously highbrow lady friend and she put all kinds of people, marvellous in her day, real piece of intelligentsia festival it was and the extraordinary thing was that I talked for more than an hour for six hours. Such a thing had never happened before.

MI Are those talks still extant?

IB They're on tape, I mean they've got some sort of – [MI Delivered in '54] three or four, three perhaps. The point is that I did two – you see I'm a nervous talker, I did two sittings of three and a half hours each; three lectures one go, the other three lectures – extraordinary thing to have done but I'd rather do that. I started at two and ended up at about five each day talking continuously.

MI I may just snip them up.

IB Yes, well I mean, I made gaps – no, no I allow it [ ]. I remember [ ] I thought I couldn't do it six times, too much, six visits to the BBC so it was all made on tape and done as delivered. Not great though; I think one I had to do again, one half I had to do again, otherwise it all went off like that, without a text. [MI And was there a (?)] In some, some. There was an angry letter about Rousseau in the Times and a defending of my hideous lectures, I got a fan post card from Eliot – T.S. who strongly approved of the lecture on Rousseau. Otherwise ...

MI [ ] would have been bound to go down well in 1953 and 4 wouldn't it?

IB Well I don't think people [ ] it very much You see I was asked to do them by Miss Anna Kallin [MI A figure whom you've described described in times past, you've mentioned her] Yes, and then I did these two big sittings and they – I'll tell you who listened to them; Dons did, but I got no response from the either Right or Left, not really.

MI But you attribute to their success your appointment to ...

IB Well I'll tell you. One of the people I asked to sponsor me, I mean to write a testimonial for me in 1956 I think when I got my chair – 1956? or 7? I think it was '57 when I got my chair was dear Richard Pares who listened to them and thought they were all right. And that's all, he approved and he was a very stern judge. He was able to say that he thought I was all right. Can't quite remember, three people I had to ask; Sir Charles Webster who generally thought about me; Pares who was a very severe judge; and Herbert Hart I think or maybe he was an elector. Anyway – no! – Ryle, who generally thought about me you see? And what I want to say is this that – this is apropos of something, apropos of applying for things – I wish I could remember what it is about. Never mind; anyway I got my chair on the strength of those lectures I think.

MI Is that where the work on liberty, concepts of liberty begins?

IB It was delivered next year, that was done in '58 [MI After you got the chair] well a year later and then there was a lecture on Historical Inevitability which was disastrous in a way. [MI Why?] Well for very good reasons. First [ ] begin. **I met Oakeshott, whom you've heard of, in Oxford when he was at Nuffield. He was a friend of James Joll and Richard Wollheim, believe it or not; not for long. They asked me to lunch with him. I thought he was very nice, amiable, charming, beguiling, as people said, and I said to him, 'You know, somebody ought to write a book on Hegel.' He said, 'But Mure has written a book on Hegel.' I said, 'I don't mean an exposition of his philosophy, I mean as a figure, what he stood for as an intellectual force, as an influence, as an impact on European culture, as well as his views. Even a half-charlatan book on Hegel would be better than nothing.'** We then talked about other matters. An hour and a half later, I'd forgotten that I'd said any of this, and I said to him, 'You know, I think somebody ought to write a book on Hegel – *you* ought to write a book on Hegel.' He put two and two together and decided he was a half charlatan. After that our relations cooled. At a certain point I was invited to deliver the Auguste Comte Lecture in the London School of Economics. Now Auguste Comte's church, positivist church, the last positivist church in England, closed its doors in Liverpool some time ago,<sup>17</sup> and the money was given to the LSE as being more like what Comte wanted than any other institution. [MI Yes, a rather clever choice.] So they established the Auguste Comte Lectures: I was the first person to be invited. The man who presided over me was Oakeshott, whom I hadn't seen from that day to this. He introduced me in the most ironical, hostile manner imaginable. He said, 'Here we have the Paganini of the lecture platform' – that sort of thing, went on

<sup>17</sup> 1914.

in this style; I mean mocking me, a lot of irony, for something like twelve minutes, a real revenge. This sort of rattled me. I was nervous anyway, I had forty pages, I couldn't begin to get through them, and half way I got myself into a total tizzy; I saw Popper, Robbins, all kinds of people, Hayek, all these persons sitting there and began reading one sentence from each page and the whole thing ended in total disaster. [MI *Chuckles.*] That was my lecture on historical inevitability as an event. I was given tea and people said, 'Afraid you got a little bit confused towards the end.' [MI *Laughs.* Oh God.] So, that was that; so I've never forgiven Oakeshott nor he me. We meet once in ten years; he's perfectly polite, and doesn't think ill of me. He thinks he got his chair at LSE against me, because I was defeated. It's true that my name was suggested by Popper, who thought that Oakeshott was a horrible, clerical reactionary, and a member of the enemy, the Jesuits, and therefore thought I was better, but I never wanted to go there; I said on no account would I leave Oxford, so I was never really a candidate. But I was obviously discussed, and Oakeshott was told that he was elected against the possibility of my being approached. That did happen, I think, because he turned the LSE round; it was Laski territory, and then he de-Laskified it, though that was intended. No, my historical inevitability was attacked in an article by E.H.Carr of course, anonymous article in the [MI TLS] TLS, yes. I didn't answer that. It was called '[?] through to Zen' I suppose from my – adds up to. True enough. Anyway the row and I had a literary altercation with Carr. [MI Tell me about that] Oh yes. I was invited to deliver something called the Trevelyan lectures in Cambridge, it was at Trinity, series, which I had nothing special to say about history so I didn't and he was then invited instead. His lectures were mainly devoted to me, it's a book called 'What is History?' in which I was very salutary attacked. Well it appeared originally in The Listener as the Trevelyan lectures; so after about the second lecture I began to answer it in The Listener and accused him of both misrepresenting me and being wrong about the facts in general I'd

applied. Our personal relations remained perfectly good throughout it all, mysteriously enough. I had a class with him in Oxford when he was there. I've got to go back. My meeting with E.H.Carr occurred on the following – he was my great enemy you see, intellectually, and all the Carr followers thought very ill of me and vice versa; they got into trouble in the end. He wrote a book on Bakunin which I reviewed in *The Spectator* in 1937 roundabouts. He wrote me a letter saying that I was the only reviewer who appeared to be 'en connaissance la cause'. I accused him of not using some obscure Russian bibliographer [ ]; I was writing about Marx so inevitably I knew a certain amount about Bakunin but – and said could we meet? So one of my colleagues, Michael [Ralph?] went and – he may still be alive – asked him to dinner. Anyway we got on very well. He was then just left the Foreign Office and was Professor of International Relations in Aberystwyth; and before the war, well we saw each other once or twice, talked about Russian topics, very amiable to me. Then – you know what happened to him, he was sacked by Aberystwyth for going off with the wife of the professor of social anthropology. Professor Zimmermann, his predecessor also went with the wife of the professor of French history and was also sacked. In between there was Webster who did not go off with anybody's wife but somehow it's part of the habit of that chair. Then he went on to I think the – he didn't do anything much in '38/9, I think he wrote reviews and things, then he went to the Ministry of Information. [MI He worked for the Times, didn't he?] quarrelled and then he went to the Times in the war and wrote a series of – he wrote this famous book called the *Twenty Years' Crisis*. It was a very well written book the pinpoint of which was ideals of interest disguised, [ ] the British of free trade is the free trade which suited them, not to save the Yugoslavs. Therefore in fact you must realise where the power lies and adjust oneself accordingly and therefore the Germans were going to win, so pro Nazi. Then in the middle of the war he said Oh well maybe the Russians will, so pro Soviet. That was a big switch. [MI Unattractive stuff] Well he believed in what's called realism. When other people say – I think I said that

once – I think I am a realist, what they rather realist they mean I am about to tell a lie or do something very shabby. [MI Laughs] That's what that means because those words [MI Or I am about to bow to force majeure] well that's more candid. I'm rather a realist means I'm about to do something awful. [MI That's Kissingerian talk] Yes exactly. [MI OK so pursue your relations with Carr] Carr. Well I didn't see him during the war, I knew he'd quarrelled, didn't get on in the Ministry of Information which he obviously did, went on The Times and wrote a series of leading articles, very well written, saying we must make friends with Russia which the editor then didn't mind. [?] it was. Then he left The Times, don't quite know why, suppose the – next editor – and became in effect the unofficial editor of the TLS under Michael Stanley Morrison who was a printer of The Times who became editor for a short while, remarkable man, very anti appeasement, Carr was very pro appeasement; and then totally dominated Alan Price-Jones. All Russian books were reviewed by either Deutscher or Carr, they were great allies. So anything faintly anti Soviet was damned. I'll never forget Deutscher's review of Dr Zhivago which said the descriptions of nature are very good but the rest, nothing but a third party congress, what we used to call Parnassian stuff. Real condemnation on the grounds of politically unsound. [ ] loathed [ ] which was then duly attacked by that man, the editor of Dissent in New York – I've forgotten his name [MI Howe?] Howe. He was very furious, rather splendid article about that. Deutscher was a real shit, that I can tell you, another person I'll tell you any moment [MI Finish about Carr though] about my difference with him. Carr: quite right. Carr then subsisted in London, lived in Heath Drive about five minutes away from my parents' house and he used to ask them to tea and they used to go; he was then living with the wife of the ex professor of social anthropology, couldn't marry because his wife, his original wife, wouldn't divorce him. They lived in a house called Honeypots near the Woking Mosque, but still she wouldn't divorce him so he couldn't marry her and then he went – as he did in London he lived by his pen as far as he could, I think he was – then he began his history of the Russian

revolution, was paid vast sums by, I suppose Macmillans, and then got a lectureship in Balliol and the Head of all the Welsh Universities was a man called Tom Jones who was Lloyd George's and Baldwin's secretary, wrote a letter to the Master of Balliol asking, 'Don't give him a fellowship, he's an adulterer,' so he's now a mere fellow of Balliol and a lecturer and I had a class with him on the anticipators of the Russian revolution. We got on perfectly well, we disagreed about everything but our relations were perfectly polite and we got on personally. And then ...

MI What kind of man was he? Trenchant, incisive?

IB No, no, no, no, no. Difficult, thin skinned, ironical, sardonic, cynical, contemptuous, weak not strong [MI Weak? That doesn't fit with the previous ...] yes, dominable by wives or other people, he was very dependent on the person he was living with, in some way ...

MI And politically dominable in some sense too, that he changed his tune in a rather alarming way.

IB But not by people, by this – well I'll tell you, you want to talk about Carr but that's not part of my life, I can do you a turn about Carr which I did to Norman Stone with disastrous results. Carr was the son of – was an ordinary middle class boy, went I don't know to what school, let us say Merchant Taylor's, and then during the war he was put into the Foreign Office and was in 1918/19 was attached to a peace conference and got into the Foreign Office that way. Socially he was not quite up to the ordinary level of the pre first world war, public school – he wasn't of that class but he was the son of a clergyman I should think, doctor. Well, he wasn't liked, he wasn't liked probably because he was edgy. I asked the editor of the Foreign Office once, Sir [R?] Sargent, he said, 'We didn't like him, he was a difficult man but not one of us roughly, took offence, I don't know, funny fellow.' He said he was an odd character ...



MI In theory that might have made you sympathetic to him?

IB Well I wasn't unsympathetic, that didn't bother me at all, I only learned about it later.

MI I don't need the full turn on Carr because I remember the Norman Stone piece and you feel you're the source of it?

IB Not of the horrible things in it, not of all that stuff about his dying and – only the bit of when he came to be what kind of writer he was which I will tell you. Well he was in a way formed by the Foreign Office and so he had a Foreign Office point of view about history, namely one doesn't believe in ideals, realist realism, toughness; and that's when he wrote a book on Dostoevsky which was quite good, book on Karl Marx which was called 'Karl Marx, a study in fanaticism' which every chapter ended, 'but worse was to come.' That was not reprinted, ever so not. I once got my friend Hardy to write to him saying wouldn't it be a good thing [MI Laughs] to do it in paperback. The reaction was extremely strong; he said well he didn't think it really quite good enough or something, somebody [has to?] answer, he wasn't going to be caught on that. Quite a good book, I learned from it as you would say. [MI (Laughs) with heavy irony!] I did, no I did, I did. When I wrote my book I did learn from it, some things I hadn't known. Well then he wrote the – what was it called? – about Herzen, what was the book called? Very amusing but very contemptuous, I mean the Russian revolution is just a lot of silly asses, amusing, agreeable, romantic, romantic exiles.

MI But your interests, your intellectual interests are running on a very parallel track but he's a very different guy, you worked now – you had a common class together ...

IB We were interested in Russia but his point is he takes a rather ironical Foreign Office line about all these nineteenth century

lunatics who couldn't possibly have made it. Amusing and eccentric.

MI Whereas you put much more emphasis on the integrity of their ideas?

IB I was deeply moved by them so that doesn't quite gel. The book on Bakunin, I complained though not in the review [ ], it's the best book on Bakunin written. It's a classical work, all the facts are there. The only trouble is there is not one word about anarchism. The whole point of Bakunin, we wouldn't have heard of him if he hadn't been the father, you see? [MI No] But because – compliments about ideas is nil but he didn't think so, he regards himself as a historian of ideas; that's why the history of the Russian revolution has nothing about ideas. [MI Yes, it's terrible as a result] Terrible for many reasons, terrible because it might have been written in the Soviet Union on official documents, the sort of thing the Foreign Office, a Foreign Office could order. It's the only thing which is not that, Trotsky does write about.

MI When does the break come? The break comes subsequent to the Trevelyan lectures in the fall out over their reprinting ...?

IB With Carr or my relations? [MI Between the two of you] Ah, wait, yes. The break comes after I wrote a book, after I wrote *Historical Inevitability* which went straight against everything he believed because he believed in causality, he believed in inevitability, he believed in history moving in a certain direction, what's called vulgar Marxism by that time. [MI By that time being fifty –?] Well, fifties, late forties, fifties [ ]. Then he decided he was going to attack me and did and then I answered and we had a row, not a row but a real controversy but I pointed out various mistakes. He said, 'You're quite right but I'm afraid the book is already in proof, I don't think I can correct it.' He was a man of no integrity whatever, that he wasn't, that I'm willing to testify to. He was

highly intelligent, he was a good writer and he hated the Foreign Office with a blind hatred because they ...

MI But you just said he's a product of the ... [IB Yes he is] But they didn't accept him, they didn't love him, they didn't take him to it's bosom?

IB He was a product of the Foreign Office who turned against them with the instruments borrowed from them, that's my point. The concepts, the Foreign Office concepts, he turned it against them; he hated America, he hated the Establishment, he hated the aristocracy, he hated the entire body which in some awful way had humiliated him.

MI And he regarded you as a liberal cold warrior of the worst kind?

IB Mm yes but not of the worst because he liked me rather and he didn't like me. He regarded me as perverse, mistaken but certainly a cold warrior, yes – not a cold warrior but silly; I mean denies causality, free will, one damned thing after another, historically impossible, I mean just silly views of a semi idealistic liberal kind. Liberal, yes, not the worst kind, Leonard Schapiro was worse. Leonard Schapiro was a real enemy.

MI Yes, but in the context of the fifties he could think here's a man, Berlin, who is saying basically nasty things about the Russians and so is everybody else ...

IB No I didn't, I didn't very much, I didn't very much. I was regarded – I didn't, I wrote nothing about Russia, I mean I wrote one or two articles, one anonymous article on foreign affairs ...

MI When you came back in '57 didn't you? Didn't you write things in Encounter? On Russian culture?

IB The Signs of Russian Culture, yes but that, he wouldn't have minded that. He didn't care what happened in Russia very much, he just believed that power was everything and that kind of [ ] come on top [ ] was the line. It's exactly [ ] Hobsbawm, I mean you like it, you don't like it, it's idiotic but that's the way the world is going, it's absurd to buck against it, I mean it's frivolous to try and change the world in an impossible way.

MI There is a strong – yes the analogy to Hobsbawm is absolutely right.

IB You see? There is a great historical force at work and there's nothing we can do about it; it shapes us and it shapes everything else and the idea of nostalgia for some impossible past is not a serious attitude. It's exactly the same with Sartre if you ask me, if you see what I mean. You see it wasn't ...

MI In your view that's all just ruthlessness in the end?

IB He wasn't interested in the poor, he wasn't interested in social justice, nothing to do with that, he was interested in the big sort of as it were the autobahn in history, the big roads, autostrada [MI Not the little meandering tracks on which might be found or ...] Well he said that to me. I said to him, 'Look, when you wrote your –' I reviewed his first volume in The Sunday Times and said if this is the way history is going to go, history in England is going to alter entirely in character. He didn't mind that at all. It was an attack, didn't mind that ever, didn't mind being attacked by me; he minded being attacked by Trevor Roper; he minded being attacked by Leonard Schapiro; by me not at all, we remained friends. [MI Why?] Because he thought I was right from my point of view, I wasn't personally nasty, I didn't accuse him of bad faith or [ ] and so on, it's just a [MI Why was Schapiro an enemy?] Because he was a thousand per cent anti communism, well there's a long story in that because they had a row; he tried to stop Schapiro's first book, tried to suppress it. I did tell Norman Stone that. He was a man of

fanatical, as it were, pro power, he was pro power, he didn't want nonsense to be written and nonsense meant resisting what can't be avoided. [MI OK, that's Carr] But really what he wanted was Elisha, wanted little children [insulting Elisha?], he got bears out of the woods, story in the Old Testament, little children mocked the prophet Elisha. He clapped his hands, bears came out of the woods and ate the little children. Well he wanted the Russians to eat the Americans. America and the Foreign Office stood for the world which was humiliating. [MI Why America specifically?] Because it stood on the wrong side of [ ] sort of establishment area. He went there in the end, he did – spent three or four months in some establishment. [MI And what about Deutscher? We got around ...] Well let's go on about Carr. Then he wrote the great attack in which he said really I was too foolish; still he said Berlin has something rather attractive, beguiling about him, his disciples are worse. Who my disciples are, I asked him. He said Leonard Schapiro; Schapiro is two year's older and would have died [MI To be called a disciple!] to be called a disciple of mine in any respect. Anyhow you see, Deutscher: well Deutscher was different. Deutscher was – he approached me in the British Museum when I was working there and said [MI In the thirties?] No fifties, and said 'I think you are a friend of Edward Hallett Carr?' I said, 'Yes.' 'Shall we have a cup of tea in Lyons Corner House?' Tottenham Court Road [very greasy?] and we did and he made up to me rather, sent me some books, thought I was perfectly all right and then I wrote Historical Inevitability. He wrote a violent attack on it in The Observer which I was defended by of all people Richard Wollheim who said he got it all wrong. And then I remember before that he came to Oxford to stay with Carr and Christopher Hill who was by this time Master of Balliol I think and delivered a paper on Marx – no, Trotsky. I went to it; strange paper, he was very – well I won't go on about that – and somebody, I said to him I think, he said, 'Saint Simon said Isaiah Berlin; Trotsky said Isaiah Berlin,' he kept on addressing me in the vocative and I could see that I was in some way, stood in his way, this was before the review: and then someone said to him, [K?] or somebody, 'Why do Marxists have to talk in this rather

contorted language? Why can't they talk –?' 'Young man, a movement which is believed by four hundred million people from Indonesia to Peru can allow itself to use any language it pleases. If Einstein could write in scientific language, so could Marx.' [MI Wonderful] Then I realised he was a fanatic who was not interested in the West, he'd written it off. The only thing which he was interested in was the East, or the East of Europe, yes. But I thought he was a nasty fellow, personally.

MI Did you ever see any – here I go again, I'm sounding like what I said about [?], [IB I must go on about this] I found the life of Trotsky however as a piece of literature ...

IB Very well done, he was a marvellous writer.

MI Extraordinarily powerful in places and I detest Trotsky [IB So do I] I loathe Trotsky but I found it as a piece of literature, gripping.

IB He was a marvellous writer but it's rather like Trotsky's History of the Russian Revolution, it's an epic poem to Trotsky but it doesn't tell the facts. There's a much duller book by a pupil [Knapaz?] in Jerusalem which is a long, rather dull thesis but it's first class, tells the truth [MI About Trotsky] about Trotsky. This one doesn't. The book on Lenin is even worse in that way; the book on Stalin is no good because he thought Stalin was Napoleon. You see Trotsky was Robespierre, Stalin didn't quite – half betrayed the revolution, not entirely. Now I'll tell you more, all right [ ] Deutscher. Then I was rung up by a man called Martin Wight in Sussex, head of some politics and said could I come and talk to you. Yes. He said the idea of getting Deutscher Head professor at Sussex, professor of Russian History, would you support that? No, not just would you – I was one of three people who was supposed to – a committee – who was supposed to testify to the essential standards of this newly created university – [?] and I and somebody else and I said, 'Well, I'll tell you,' and then I think

I wrote him a letter. I said the thing about Deutscher is this: he's an extremely able man and if it is a question of a research fellowship, I would have nothing against it, neither here, in Sussex or Oxford or anywhere else. I'd be in favour. He's a very clever man, interesting writer. But, if you are going to make him a professor and therefore talk to students, it's quite all right if you have somebody else who could give some other view of the subject. But to leave him alone, he wants to proselytise, his interest is not in teaching, he's interested in conversion. Therefore I will not as an outsider go on the committee, I will not take part in the electoral committee, I don't wish to vote against him but neither do I think could I vote for him. Then some typist must have sent it to some Leftists in Sussex and an article appeared about me in the *Black Dwarf* or the *Red Mole* or those things saying what a terrible thing it was that I'd turned him down, that I'd prevented this greatest of all historians in England from holding a job just because he was a Marxist. And then a man called Hutchins – not Hutchins, Hitchens [MI Christopher Hitchens] who I know write a piece denouncing me and I did write to him telling him the facts and he apologised in the end, wrote another article saying he was mistaken; it was years afterwards. But it was firmly believed by his friends that I had naturally said, 'He's a Marxist. Don't have him.' If he was being professor of Marxism, I wouldn't mind, Russian History is a bit much. I never voted against him and I never told them not to have him, I merely said that exposing him to undergraduates you need somebody else. They then offered it to Leonard Schapiro which was wonderful too, just the opposite. He also turned it down [MI Why?] He did turn it down, what's his name would have accepted it. Both of them together I wouldn't have minded in the least. But the widow Deutscher took against me for that reason, thought I was a great enemy and wrote letters complaining and all that, Tamara. [MI You also have a sense of him as a ...] I was asked to write an introduction to his book called *The Unjewish Jew*. That I refused. Why me? Yes, his wife wanted it. [MI Really? But she'd taken against you] I know, just because

she wanted it to sell? I can't think why. I don't know who published it.

MI Did you have the feeling he was not merely a fanatic but he was also an untrustworthy person?

IB Yes I do, he was tricky, tricky.

MI Why did you feel that?

IB Just felt it immediately, in his writings, cutting corners, some kind of pieces, I mean I don't know, it wasn't straight; and he turned everything to grist, I mean he was only interested in as it were conversion, propaganda. He saw himself as Lenin I think, he saw himself as an active revolutionary of a rather fanatical kind; also he gave himself out to be the great authority on the area of the communist party. He only went to Moscow once as a representative of a Yiddish newspaper; that was suppressed. I didn't like the concealment of his early life. He and Captain Ian Robert Maxwell didn't want their roots examined too closely. Deutscher didn't want it known he was in Poland but the Poles wouldn't have him back. I asked the Polish Ambassador here who was the son of the conductor, famous Polish conductor who went to New York, conducted the [MI New York Philharmonic] yes soon after the war, not [?] no, – [MI You asked him anyway] His son was an American airman during the war then converted to Polish communism and became a Far Eastern expert and came here. He said, 'No we will never let him back, we do not trust him.' Something in that.

MI These encounters over Historical Inevitability were obviously a very formative moment in your ...?

IB People like David Astor adored Deutscher, probably admired him not just as a writer which he used to be admired, but gifted. The review of Zhivago really was a piece of monstrous ...



MI Yes [ ], that is [ ]. But I get the feeling that the battles over Historical Inevitability were a very very important moment in your personal and intellectual development.

IB Well I didn't awfully liked being attacked by everybody. Nobody had a kind word to say. I realised that I ...

MI What does that have to say about the state of intellectual affairs of that period?

IB Well I'll tell you, well it's not that so much, well liberalism was not exactly a fashionable doctrine. You see Marxists didn't like it for Marxist reasons, Conservatives didn't like it for conservative reasons because it didn't pay enough tribute to tradition and slow progress and so on, not [Burkeian?] enough, Catholics didn't like it because it denied predestination and the fact that God was a divine plan [ ] you see? [MI They didn't have many fans] That document wasn't reviewed favourably in England by anybody at all as far as I knew, didn't have to- even [ ] thought very poorly ...

*Side B*

IB ... they were rather a disastrous version, I read it afterwards but it was very poor stuff [ ], not much good, weaker [ ].

MI And in the following year he have the two types of liberty. Is that '58?

IB That was Two Concepts of Liberty, that was the inaugural lecture as professor, actually produced a storm of abuse. [MI From whom, again?] Same lot, same people, I don't think anybody favoured it. Later people said things – it became very famous, it circulated ...

MI Yes, it's the most famous thing you ever wrote except for *The Hedgehog and the Fox* I know it was quite famous and it's in America and [R?] told me that it's in constant use and we were discussing as to why, but it had no friends. [MI No I'm sure you're exaggerating] No I think not. No, I can't think of anybody who came to it's defence.

MI Yes I have some – I may be working on some very simplistic kind of intellectual history according to which in the kind of reaction of loathing towards Stalin, the onset of the cold war, the kind of rebirth of liberalism, perhaps Stevensonian type liberalism in the fifties which has a heyday, kind of '54 through to the Kennedy era [IB Yes] '54 to '63 is to me the kind of heyday of a certain kind of American post war liberalism for which therefore, which then provides for you an audience for *Two Concepts of Liberty*, the historical inevitability paper [IB Yes could be but nobody wrote about it at all] nobody, no, and that it's ...

IB It may have had sympathetic treatment but so far as I know, nobody ever said anything in print; the Arthur Schlesinger period? [MI Yes] Yes.

MI Yes; but it's in the late sixties and early seventies as the kind of Marxist ascendancy re-emerges, particularly in the British campus [IB Yes] that your kind of liberalism runs into much more heavy weather, much more ...

IB [ ] yes, but even during the period you speak of, I mean someone like George [Kennan?] wouldn't have anything against it but he wouldn't have been prepared to review it. Who were the reviewers? Political [ ], political philosophers as well, mainly professional philosophers; I remember a very hostile review by I think Lovejoy of all people in [ ] paper; I simply can't remember. I think the younger philosophers probably were tending to the Left and they all sort of – all my friends on – who were sort of – Mary McCarthy world would not have liked it. There's a very conservative

tendency, there's no doubt that the sermon of it was that [ ] ad hoc solution is the best and that fanaticism, historical fanaticism, reliance on impersonal forces. That's the trouble for being a spokesman of history or whatever it is. I can't think of anybody in England who could have been in favour of it – Stuart Hampshire [ ] came to it. Some people thought it was just a lot of old fashioned stuff and other people thought [MI Old fashioned in what sense?] well liberty in some rather nineteenth century sense, just a lot of Stuart Mill again. I'm trying to think.

MI In what sense is that inaugural lecture a direct derivation from the original radio lectures or is it a very substantial ...?

IB Entirely independent. I composed it in Italy entirely as an inaugural lecture and had it typed out and read it, that's all that happened. Then I wrote another – I didn't write – yes I wrote the introduction, a collection of essays in which I tried to answer [MI Some of the criticisms, yes] But I couldn't acknowledge any debt to anyone I'm afraid, couldn't say that anyone agreed with it or [ ] had been said. That's true of every book I've written so far I think – not *The Hedgehog and the Fox*, that wasn't [ ], it had no political content.

MI Yes I'm always meeting people who describe themselves either as one or the other, use it as a psychological typology ... [IB Which? Two Concepts?] No, no *The Hedgehog and the Fox*.

IB Oh that, yes. It was a joke you know, I never meant it seriously. It's just a thing which came – there was a man called Lord Oxford who is alive and a pious Catholic living in the country whom I knew in Oxford on the thirties. He suddenly quoted the line from Archilochus which said that and then we played games, late thirties, about hedgehogs and foxes and that's how it came into my head, purely as a *jeux d'esprit*.

MI It's a terribly good *jeux d'esprit*, there's a certain kind of life to it.

IB It did, yes, certainly and then I suddenly thought in Tolstoy's case how he was a very good case of both. Why do I call him Tolstoy to you? Tolstoy not Tolstoy [he corrects the pronunciation of the name].

MI [laughing] So where have we got to, we've got you inaugurated as a professor in 1958 and 1959, we've had you fighting with Carr and ...

IB I was inaugurated in '57 when I'd become in '57 – I delivered the lecture in '58.

MI We've had you quarrelling with Deutscher and Carr at various times ...

IB I didn't quarrel with Deutscher. He reviewed me in a nasty fashion but I never answered. I had no altercation with him [MI But you did have a direct altercation with Carr] Yes and a clear conflict which can be seen in the pages of – there's also a letter by Gombrich defending Popper against Carr and a letter by Veronica Wedgwood defending herself and various other victims of those lectures. Then we start when I am professor at All Souls as I said before, I continue, I deliver lectures on the state of [ ] and I go to New York about once in three years and teach at City University, graduate centre which I enjoy very much. [MI Why?] The graduates were quite bright, it wasn't one of the high up New York institutions; it wasn't Columbia, it wasn't Harvard or Yale, no, but still they were quite eager; one was a taxi driver aged about fifty who loved doing it and I had quite a happy time. Arthur Schlesinger [ ] and I was very well paid and I lived in New York.

MI What impression did Schlesinger make on you?

IB I met him in Washington in 1943. I liked him very much, I know exactly what's said against him. It's true that he's rather superficial, it's true that he's ambitious, critically in love with the Kennedy's, violently anti communist, I mean during the McCarthy period, never pro McCarthy anyway but so to speak [ ] about Marx and [ ], anti communist to a fanatical degree. Fundamentally he's an extremely nice man; the point is he has a kind heart and is perfectly decent, upright and honest. What he is, is dazzled by [MI By power] No, no [MI And haunted by a [ ] as well] well not by power, by brilliance, by charm, by a court, by beautiful women, by delightful wonderful dinner parties, by marvellous sort of White House goings-on. Not by power, not at all by power. [MI He doesn't want to exercise power?] No, no. [MI He just likes the penumbra of it in a sense?] Well he's simple, you know, he's simple, rather naive, easily [ ], I remember he was married to a wife, a rather strong character, she was his first wife who was a very good girl, taught with a famous physiologist at Harvard called [Cannon?] and he said to me, 'You know, I've got an awful house. If I come home, the ice cubes have melted, there's nothing in the fridge much, she's out and when she comes she's tired, God knows what I get to eat,' What he dreamt about was [MI Comfort, home] No! Luxury, exquisite meals served by a very beautiful wife, delightful, witty friends making agreeable conversation, cigars, glass of wine, a very simple idea of gracious living, gracious living is all it was about. And the Kennedy's supplied a kind of golden world, great friend of Bobby's, always quite nice, much nicer than Jack, yes. I knew about both of them in a sense. Well I used to go to New York in the fifties and the sixties, that's where I met Bob Silvers [MI When he was at ( )?] Just when he started, [MI '62, '63] maybe, the newspaper strike, the Times didn't appear, there was a Times strike in New York and that's when the New York Review of Books began to appear, might be '63 yes, could be, '64 I think. I very well remember, extraordinary scene in the Carlisle Hotel in which we lived because my mother-in-law had a suite there, she was a rich woman and she lived there so she paid for us and Aline and I lived there too at that time and we moved up later or maybe we just –

no, we weren't living there, just visiting her I think. Suddenly Kennedy arrived and so all the lifts were stopped and we couldn't go up and down; Stuart Hampshire was with us on some secret mission. Suddenly Kennedy came down, followed by his entourage, saw me, crossed the room, shook hands and said, 'What are you doing here?' I said, 'I'm a fan of yours, I was waiting to see you, can't you see? That's all, I've been waiting for hours.' Well that was all right, he laughed. [MI This is Jack?] Jack, yes, the President. He laughed and everyone else was frightfully excited that I should have known him. They all said, 'You know, you've been touched by history!' [MI Laughs] Stuart however was slightly annoyed at my not introducing him because he greatly admired him. It didn't occur to me, I just rather nervously talked to him.

MI How did he know – how did he recognise you physically?

IB Because there was a thing in Washington called – no, no, go back to the beginning. I had a great friend called Chip Bohlen. He was appointed Ambassador to Paris. There was a dinner for him in Washington before he went. I was invited to dinner – who was going to have a dinner for him? Wait a bit [MI Harriman] No it wasn't, no, no, no. It could have been, no, no, no. It was a dinner given by Phil Graham who telephoned me [ ] and said would I come to dinner because Chip Bohlen will be there and Kennedy will be there and his wife and other people I know. [MI This is when he's President?] Yes, yes when he's President and this is sixty – when was the first Cuba? [MI '61, very early on] '61. I am at Harvard. Was it really '61? [MI Yes, early] Or late '61? Autumn '61, Cuba number two early '62. I think it was September, October '62. [MI is the second Cuba] is '63. [MI No the second Cuba is October '62, the first Cuba is April '61 I think, it's very early on.] Not April. [MI Bay of Pigs?] The whole thing was over within four months; what I mean is first of all there was a crisis, then it was resolved, the whole thing took what, two months, three months? So it wasn't at that distance.

MI The distance between the first Bay of Pigs and the Cuban missile crisis is more than a year I think. [IB Oh yes, no, no] That's what I ...

IB I'm not talking about the missile crisis, I'm talking about the second, Bay of Pigs – not Bay of Pigs ...

MI You mean the Cuban missile crisis, that is '62, October, and it's ten days long.

IB Exactly, October '62. I was invited to dinner on October '62 to meet the Kennedy's, before ...

MI Just before the crisis starts.

IB By Phil Graham who arranged the Vice Presidency of Johnson at the [ ] Convention, Patron of the Kennedy's. I found that the same night as that which [ ] invited me to dinner in Harvard, a very [ ]. I rang up Phil Graham's secretary and said I'm very sorry, I couldn't come. She said, 'But the President will be there you know, you can put off anything to see the President.' I said, 'No, I'm terribly sorry, I'm afraid I can't.' I should have died sooner than do that [ ] giving a party for me, ten people, better invitation. In the end Kennedy couldn't come, that party was off. Well it happened again ten days later [MI After the crisis?] No [MI No, still before] On the night that I went there was the crisis; nobody knew at that dinner but that morning Kennedy had seen the photographs. [MI Oh my God!] The dinner was given by the Grahams; present were Kennedy, Jackie, Phil Graham and his wife, hosts, Joe Alsop, some pretty woman who Kennedy of course took an interest in [MI Whose identity you can't remember?] Oh yes I can, I saw her about two months ago in – she was the wife of a journalist and notoriously – she's been about, what's his name? Still married to him I think. Anyhow [ ], oh Lord! [MI Let's not get hung up on ...] He was the man who worked on the Washington Post and she was his wife, one of those – pretty girl of the period, always had to be

[imported?] ... [MI Not Bradlee is it?] Not Bradlee, no, not Bradlee, no, no, no. [MI Let's not get – it's all right] Doesn't matter very much. [MI Who else?] French Ambassador because he was going to Paris. [MI And Aline or just you?] And – not Aline I think, I can't remember if she was there or not, she certainly wouldn't have been there the first time. Second time – she wasn't at Harvard the week before. Had she arrived in time? I rather doubt it. Aline, not.

MI For the dinner's in the Georgetown house, in the Graham's Georgetown house?

IB Yes and he takes Chip Bohlen into the garden and tells him about the photographs. Nobody else in the room knows. Behaves marvellously given that I mean – not a sign of any degree of tension or worry. At table he's like what you always think, well ribbing and joking goes on, shouting across and jokes and so on, the sort of thing I can't take at all. [MI To whom? Directed at whom?] Everybody, towards friends, naturally the Grahams, friend of Joe Alsop, friend of this woman; the French Ambassador is quite a well known amusing fellow, I've forgotten his name, [ ] never liked – [A?] [MI (A?) with the beautiful wife] rather beautiful wife, she was there, that was the – he was the Ambassador [ ], exactly that, you see? So it's a jolly party, perhaps that I'm not really terribly amused ...

MI Any sallies directed at you?

IB No. Then we – I was put next to him in the so called study when the men were left alone in the other room. Then he talks to me and he's very tense and tries to talk about Russia. We don't really get on at all and then he says, 'You know seeing what Russia is, somebody ought to write a book about Stalin's philosophy. That's about the most important subject there is in the world now.' But it wasn't a subject, topic which I could easily agree with. I didn't exactly mark it down, I didn't know what to do with it. Stalin's philosophy, my God! Can you imagine?



MI He's tense with you because he doesn't really know what to say? [IB Exactly] And because you're a prof. ...

IB Because I was a prof., professional Don, well known Russian expert, didn't know who I am or what to talk to me about, doesn't work too well. And poor Phil Graham who was a great friend, was watching me, said afterwards, 'Didn't think you got on,' and finally ends up by saying, 'Go talk to Jackie, she'll bring you out,' which she did. I talked much more easily to her; about Rome, Paris, Mona Lisa, Art and so on, her life in France and so on, all that.

MI And you detect an intelligence there, I mean a ...?

IB I detected a character there, a certain sort of brightness, I made friends with her that evening, certainly but I was not blamed afterwards by the more severer people. And then the dinner went on and then on the strength of that, he – next thing that happened was the following: there was a thing called Hickory Hill, Hickory Hill was the house in which Bobby lived. He used to invite what's called interesting people to talk to a selective group. The British Ambassador who was a man I knew quite well who was [Ormsby-Gore's?] great friend called Harlech said to me – no Schlesinger said to me, he was the talent scout, said to me, 'Bobby would like you to talk to Hickory Hill about some Russian topic.' So I said, 'Please not, I couldn't.' All these Senators and I don't know, friends and sort of Washington sort of Kennedy Intelligentsia, Russian topic, I can't do a thing like that, I could only refuse. Then the British Ambassador, when we went to dinner, said, 'I hear you won't talk to us,' he was one of the [], 'I fully understand that of course, busman's holiday, I mean you do plenty of that elsewhere. I don't want to try and persuade you but I don't quite understand why you don't want to do it, but still if you'd rather not ...' Then I thought oh my God, I'll probably regret it for the rest of my life, I'll probably feel guilty about not doing it; the British Ambassador wants me to, [] wants me to and people will think why didn't I, so

after all a lot of agonising being a weak character, I said OK, I'll talk about the Russian novel, it can't have any interest for them. The meeting occurred in the White House, not in Hickory Hill and we dined with Kennedy, the President, and Aline got on beautifully with him, sat on his right and he was very nice to women you see? I sat at the other end and chatted away to whoever it was and I did do my talk and there were present – on the Russian novel by God! Difference [between] French and Russian novels which is one of my topics which I've never published which I could, which my papers contain and which no doubt – posthumous work; and there were present I can tell you exactly what: Schlesinger, Harlech, Bobby, Walt Rostow, Walt Rostow's wife, Head of the CIA in case something wrong was said, [McCone?] at that time, Secretary of the Interior who was a man – quite a nice man, can't remember – no journalists, Joe Alsop couldn't come. The room was very full – who else might have been there?

MI You read a text? [IB No, I talked] You were the Pagannini of the ...

IB I was the Pagannini, yes, that's right, Jackie of course – oh Lord – Bobby asked a few questions, perfectly intelligent, various people asked questions. It went off quite well. Then the third time ...

MI Did any of it strike you – did it seem slightly odd to be lecturing on the Russian novel in the White House?

IB Very, quite deliberately. I knew it was odd and they all thought it odd but somehow it worked, it wasn't thought ill of. Mrs Rostow said, 'May I say to you, you've saved the honour of England.' I said, 'Why?' 'Freddie Ayer talked to us two months ago, it was appalling.' [MI (Laughs) That must have given you schadenfreude!] Well I'll tell you happened, he talked about philosophy and poor old Bobby's wife, you know Ethel said, began to talk about God and Catholicism and all that you see? 'And what about St Thomas?' 'Oh, neo Thomism you mean?' said Freddie Ayer, 'I'm not going

to talk about that.’ At that point Bobby said, ‘Drop it, Ethel.’ [MI gasps] ‘Drop it, Ethel.’ [MI They were tough boys those Kennedy’s] Anyway all I can tell you is Mrs Walt Rostow – what’s her name? – Elspeth, was very tough too, not very nice, said to me – I think I know how very well, this happened, so there I was, same [ ]. British Ambassador was – said she was quite all right. [MI And this is again in October ‘62?] We talked about, not just about the novel, we talked about commitment and the whole idea of novelists as preachers and the deep commitment to left wing liberal ideas and the fact that novels contained political content, all that. Well that was more or less acceptable. It could be regarded as – some of the more intelligent – the President didn’t talk much. Then we were asked to dinner, quite simply, at the White House as such. Aline and I went, second time. Nothing happened, we just had dinner and there was constant musak at the back, some vague music [MI A live thing or ...?] No. [MI Piped. Just the four of you?] Piped music – no, no. There was Sonny [Saltzburger?] and his wife and somebody else and Jackie as usual was very agreeable to me and said, ‘I’ve just been to see the Council on National Defence’ – , what’s it called, that thing Kissinger was Head of? [MI Council of Foreign Relations] No, I mean the government, not – [MI Security Council] Head of the Security Council; ‘And they were all there, smiling. There was one man with a red face, glowering.’ ‘You know who that was?’ She said no. ‘Stevenson of course.’ They hated him, the Kennedy’s, absolutely loathed him. Thought he was weak and wet and no good in any way.

MI And you thought it prudent to say nothing at that point?

IB No, I defended him. I said I’d met him more than once, didn’t like him awfully, thought he was weak, well he was weak, thought on the whole that he would not have made a very good President; but he was a man of very good character, great integrity, intelligence, a lot of very good ideas which could well be used.

MI What happened when you said that?

IB She smiled and said, 'Oh well, I suppose people do talk like that.' No I didn't – not happily, no [ ]. I'm rather ashamed of not doing it. Sometimes I pass things because I'm afraid of a great public row and I avoid it. This occasion was no probability. So I met Kennedy three times. After that he obviously [ ] [MI In the Carlisle?] In the Carlisle, that was quite natural, that's the answer to your question. [ ] I met ...

MI On the President, did you have any sense of intellectual depth?

IB None. I felt that he was like Lenin, either small talk, ribbing, jokes, just a rich bum sitting at a swimming pool with a lot of naked beauties; either that or dense, serious cross examination. Nothing between. I was obviously wrong and probably there was a relaxed element but it seemed to me that those were the two gears I detected. He was very, very uneasy, [MI Was he?] Yes, uneasy [MI Tense] Yes, and recessive. [MI What do you mean, recessive?] Opposite of outgoing, inhibited and inhabited, I mean not outgoing at all. Tense and amusing on the inside, of a curious kind.

MI By your third meeting were you by then aware of the missile crisis?

IB Oh we talked about NATO, we talked about Europe, we talked about policy, we had a perfectly ordinary political talk of about half an hour.

MI Can you remember its substance?

IB No because I mean to name his views, Europeans ought to do more for themselves, they just can't kick off Europe entirely and something must be done, the Germans must produce some troops, the English must put in more troops to Germany, can't just look to America. A lot of that sort of fairly obvious stuff [MI To which you said?] To which I said I agreed, I think. I think I agreed and ...

MI Did he convey a sense of being interested and engaged by Europe or was it just a kind of problem a long way away?

IB Chatted, just chat. The chat was in some way intense, every sentence was meant to mean something. Now what do I remember of that conversation? Not very much [ ]. She flirted a bit and talked about her youth and talked about [ ], talked about Paris, talked about music, talked about books; she tried to – she did this mildly highbrow turn suddenly in [lieu?] of a lot of actors and actresses, rather like that. I've met her since but not for about twenty years, in New York, Arthur Schlesinger used to ask us together and I've been to see her. I don't mind her, she's quite nice, odd, she's quite nice [MI Odd? Why do you think odd?] Well because this whispering voice and this marriage to Onassis and passion for rich adventurers, rich scoundrels. You see [MI Including the President] I think so, yes. My feeling about the President is this: Joseph Kennedy was obviously a very bad hat, a very bad man indeed. His sons knew it, couldn't but; but the President of the United States could not act as a crook and so Kennedy's instincts were I think in favour of doing things by not entirely pure means and the Senator gave no impression of impeccable integrity, decided that as President he had to behave well. But it was [... contre coeur?], it was not easy but he forced himself; that was part of the reason of tension. He was not going to be like his father, he was going to behave honourably.

MI What impression did you form of Bobby Kennedy?

IB That he was rather humane, kind, he wasn't a little football tyke which he was described as being. His only great blunder was being on the McCarthy committee and what not. He really did mean to go to South Africa to see the blacks there because he felt for them. He was rather sweet, friendly, sentimental and meant well. Tough no doubt, tough as hell in fact and all of that. But ... [MI A warmer heart?] not nasty. What? [MI A warmer heart, more outgoing?]

Much, much, oh sort of joking of the Kennedy type but otherwise all right. I've just seen David Cecil; he thinks he'd like to have lunch with you some time as a kind of joke. Came to see us in Oxford, Bobby. [MI When?] Not long before his death, 1960 something, after his brother was dead.

MI What impression did he form on you then at that lunch for that meeting? [IB Who?] Bobby, after his brother's death, at Oxford, '67, '66?

IB Didn't have lunch with him, just dropped in I think, I think we went for dinner in London with that Washington Post liberal correspondent who I don't terribly like, you know who I mean? Somebody Lewis [MI Andy Lewis] not Andy, certainly not Andy [MI Anthony] Anthony, yes quite right, yes, a professional liberal. He gave a lunch party in somewhere in London to which I went with Lord Harlech to meet him. He asked to meet me. I made no [ ] I don't know what Aline thought. What did you think of Bobby?

AB Who? [IB Kennedy]

MI We're doing a tour of the Stars. We've done Carr, Deutscher, the Kennedy's ...

AB Well I didn't like him very much [ ] I liked him better when we saw him [IB In Oxford] No, on the contrary, [IB I said in Oxford] yes, we saw him in London.

MI Why didn't you like him when you saw him in London?

AB I didn't like the – sort of cold in a way, I don't know I couldn't ...

IB I liked him all right

AB And then the next time when we saw him in Washington I think. He was rather [ ] but I was rather taken with [Jackie?] she had style and really there was something special ...

MI Let's stop there.

*End of tape*

## MI TAPE 24-1

Conversation date: 5 June 1994, All Souls

Transcribed: 29 December 1994

Subjects covered:

Riga

Pale of Settlement

Yiddish, Russian, German: the languages of the family

Mother

Keynes and anti-Semitism

Meetings with Keynes in Washington 1943

The creative burst, 1951-58

Wolfson and the book he never wrote

Akhmatova

Begins with a discussion of the ghetto in Riga: the red Dvina.

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MI You have no memory of ever going to the red Dvina ghetto?

IB Never saw it. Never taken there.

MI Did your mother's parents live there?

IB I think so. My mother certainly knew all about it. They were kosher, pious Jews. Riga was outside the Pale of Settlement. Their right to live there was slightly dubious.

MI I didn't realise. Riga was outside the Pale.

IB Oh, absolutely. The whole of the Baltic was. The Pale consisted of Russian Poland, the Western guberni, and bits of Ukraine. Vilna was in the Pale. But not Tallin or Riga. Kiev must have been within the Pale. Odessa too.



MI Pale legislation did not impinge on Riga, and if there was a ghetto it was self-created.

IB absolutely. They just lived huddled together. Like the East End of London, or East Side New York, or Montreal. The thing about the Pale were that certain professions were not confined. Those who were not were tradesmen, electrical engineers, pen knife makers, toymakers, anything you like. So could lawyers, doctors, merchants of the first guild.

MI Of whom your father was one.

IB Certainly.

MI That exemption was not purchased in demeaning conditions.

IB No, no. There were plenty of Jews who should not have been in Riga. If you were a dentist, you could live there. But if you had 35 assistants, you could bribe someone, and they would be allowed to live there. Prostitutes were exempt. A lot of girls who wanted to study comparative philology at the University of Petersburg inscribed themselves as prostitutes and got a yellow ticket. Meant you had to be visited at regular intervals by a doctor. These humiliations they went through in order to study.

MI Jews have to have permission to live in Riga, and they have to bribe policemen.

IB There are two kinds of policemen. Good ones took bribes; bad ones were uncorrupt. The inversion of normal morality of an absolutely neat kind.

MI In your father's memoirs, it is almost oblivious of the police.

IB Merchants of the first guild had no trouble. My so called great grandfather was an honorary hereditary citizen. He could live anywhere. The bulk of Jews lived in the ghetto. The Russian

government created the State of Israel. Without that it couldn't have happened, by squeezing the Jews, by creating a national minority, surrounded by peasants who were illiterate and didn't speak their language. The Jews feared the peasants, and the priests. A church procession might end in a pogrom. When these people went to Palestine, they took this ideology with them. Arabs were Russian peasants to them. They took no notice of them. Had no relation with them.

MI Did you ever speak Yiddish?

IB Hebrew words appear on my postcards. My Hebrew I learned in Petersburg in 1919 from a Zionist student. I used to be able to read the Bible very clearly. I can't be in a room of Hebrew speakers and understand them very well.

MI What about Yiddish?

IB My parents talked Yiddish to their parents, never to me. I didn't speak it. They might have spoken it but not in my presence. Even the great grandfather spoke Yiddish.

MI Your mother's diaries were in English, German, Russian, Hebrew...

IB I had no idea... Her natural languages were German and Russian.

MI Her English was good and grammatical.

IB Still, quite civilised.

MI She pours herself out in diaries especially during the period of your marriage.

IB They were against my marriage, but not at all strongly. My father was dead by the time I married. I was already on terms, and he knew I was attached to her. They thought it was awkward to marry a woman with three children of her own. Then my mother didn't find my wife very cosy. Very warm. Nor is she.

MI Cosiness is not what Aline is about.

IB My mother's aunt liked her much better. Aunt Ida, they got on very well. They respected each other, but there was never any intimacy.

MI Getting back to language.

IB She learned some Hebrew after the age of 70, because of Israel and Zionism. It wasn't a language she spoke. Her chief thing was her terrible Jewishness. She was a 100 percent Jewish.

MI Why terrible?

IB Because it insulated her from the rest of the world. She really felt they were all Gentiles, not us. My father was not at all like that.

MI Why weren't you like that?

IB Because I grew up in England. Already my father had Russian friends in Petersburg. Jewishness did insulate me to a certain extent when I was a child. I met nobody but Jews. I had no Jewish friends, except the daughter of the deputy minister of Finnish affairs, Ivanov, who lived in the same house.

MI Petersburg was a Jewish world for you.

IB Yes.

MI There you were subject to Pale legislation.

IB No, because we were merchants of the first guild. There were more Jews in Petersburg than in Moscow. Very few in Moscow. When Weizman went there, he stayed a night and was betrayed and arrested. The policeman asked him what do you do? He said I work for Jews. What? You work for the Jews. Yes, be very careful. They they will kill you, you know. And he was right. Absolutely right. They have. (*Laughs*)

*IB launches into a discussion of Keynes' anti-Semitism, which he says was of a purely social kind. He was a liberal and would have defended them if there had been a pogrom.*

MI Was Washington the only time you knew Keynes?

IB I met him before the war when I went to read a paper in Cambridge. In 1934-5. I stayed with Braithwaite, fellow of King's, had dinner before and had dinner between Keynes and an unknown mathematician. Keynes turned to me and said What do you do?

Ah yes, you're at Oxford. Reading a paper. Moral Sciences Club. On what? Pleasure. We've just eaten crème garbure, some soup, just as good a subject. Why don't you talk about that? I felt rather offended. Do you read Whitehead? He was my tutor, Keynes said. I never read anything, he just brooded at one, you know, that's all he ever did. Then he turned away. I turned to the mathematician, tried to break the ice, he said gloomily, I do not agree with what you have just said. Silence, The rest of the meal was passed in silence. My first evening in King's.

Then I met him in Washington. He was very affable.

MI What was he doing?

IB Head of the British treasure delegation, organising Bretton Woods. The New Dealers worshipped him.

MI Can you remember more details of meeting him?

IB I was befriended by Bob Brand, of the food mission. Keynes used to say Brand was the only banker he could ever get on with. He said, "I always bring Brand a little lolly pop to suck," some proposition or other. When it came to being a candidate for the wardenship he couldn't have voted for me, for the same anti-semitic reasons. Whenever Keynes came, Brand would invite me and we would have dinner just the three of us. Keynes would tell stories.

He was very easy with me. I don't attract anti-semitism or anti-semites.

**No, when I was in my first term in the preparatory school in Surbiton, a boy came up to me and said 'You dirty German', because of my name. And the other boys set on him and beat him up. It was unheard of. The opposite should normally happen. I was defended, collectively defended. So I saw that I was quite well liked. I wasn't conscious of that, now that I think of it.**

MI A crucial incident. Could have gone the other way, Isaiah.

IB Exactly. Usually did.

MI Back to Keynes.

IB Have I told you the story of the election of Roosevelt. In November 1944, I was invited to dinner by Lord Halifax. He knew me and liked me, because of All Souls. That's what gave me status. (For years I was the only Jew here. The next one was Keith Joseph after the war. Between 1932 and 1947.) I was supposed to know about American politics and to bring the Washington Post Map of the districts. Present were Lord and Lady Halifax, Lord and Lady Keynes, a very stiff snobbish lady –social secretary – with whom I got on shamefully well; all columnists are fifth columnists, a lot of that went on; David Bowes Lyon, Queen's brother and his wife.

That was all. I talked to Lydia in Russian, who was delighted. Keynes didn't like that much, didn't like to be excluded.

MI Was she dotty?

IB Dotty, she was not. She babbled like a child of nature. But I stopped after a bit because I could see that Keynes was frowning. Then Lord Halifax asked Keynes, we're about the produce a Conservative party document for the next election. Would you look through it, because we don't want to talk rot. They flirted with each other rather openly. Quite amusing to see.

I was introduced to Keynes as Professor Berlin, though we had met before. I said no no I'm not a professor. Keynes said, (quietly) that he was often introduced as a professor, though he wasn't one either, and what he said on such occasions was that he rejected the indignity without the emolument. Very typical.

He terribly wanted to be professor and was terribly disappointed when he wasn't made one – Pigou got it instead. He was terribly disappointed not to have been made Provost – because he was living in sin with Lydia.

After dinner we went into Halifax's study to listen to the results on the radio . 490 districts for Roosevelt, 10 for Dewey, somewhere in Mississippi. Lydia got bored. So she said "Do you like Archie MacLeish." Not now, Lydia, said Maynard. More results came in. Again she looked bored. Do you like Roosevelt? People like him very much. Rosie. I like Rosie very much. Maynard then said, Not now, Lydia, not now." Another half hour passed, Halifax was sitting roughly where you're sitting now. She said. "Do you like Lord Halifax?" I produced a neighing sound. Keynes did not stop her. She said You know I have talked about him, he is quite popular, but it was not always so. Do you remember appeasement? It was terrible. (Mimics accent) Munich, appeasement, it was terrible. Nothing from Maynard, Halifax looked embarrassed and got up and patted his dog. "Now now Frankie enough of this politics." He went away and phoned Harry Hopkins. He came back

and said, I've talked to Harry and he says it's in the bag. After that we left.

Naughtiness, Keynes rather liked, especially against the pompous.

MI I have the impression of Halifax as a tremendously tall cold glass of water.

IB He wasn't cold. He was idle, and quick and very clever. Slow spoken, but I was ordered to produce a vignette of Truman when he was elected. I said he will probably get on better with Congress than his more imperious predecessor. Halifax's arm shot out like a snake and crossed out imperious. Saying Winston will take that as a personal remark.

MI Very shrewd.

IB Very. Never wrote a despatch in his own hand. He looked on all these Wykemists as hacks, pen pushers. Foreign Office officials were never included in dinners.

MI So why did you get included in dinners like the one with Keynes?

IB Because I was at All Souls. And he talked to me at other times too. Whenever I took him a despatch, he would keep me behind for a little chat. Say about Herbert Morrison, Home Secretary, detaining Moseley, and whether it was a good idea, and whether Moseley would have let in Germans. And after the war, when he came to all Souls, I used to go and talk to him, and Stuart Hampshire would say how could you talk to such a ghastly man. But he was very interesting, politically.

MI Why interesting politically?

IB (38:04) **Well, he talked freely about himself, about Winston, about the government, about what they did and didn't do.** No, I'll tell you more about Keynes. When I met him at one of

these dinners he said: **'Have you noticed? Congress always passes the most idiotic legislation in July and August. It's far too hot. Much too hot for white men, you know. No good to you and me. All right for niggers.'**

MI Did he really say that?

IB Oh yes. We saw a lot in the corridors of the Embassy and he would say to me, don't you think we should send a copy of *The Times* to some of these ghastly southern senators, it would make a difference. It would make no difference at all. I assure you. I would reply. He had no sense of politics. He was an innocent. He didn't know about propaganda, anything. Rather unworldly.

MI I thought he was a great fixer.

IB No. Lionel Robbins told me about a Anglo-American meeting in 1941. Kingsley Wood, colourful Kingsley, the dreariest man imaginable. The head of the American delegation Harry Dexter White made a speech on the death of Kingsley Wood, chancellor of the exchequer. Keynes made a speech in reply. "Myself, I never had the pleasure of knowing the chancellor, but my work in the Treasury brought me in contact with him. But, no matter how obscure, how tortuous, how dark, how complicated a proposition in economics might seem to be, the late chancellor had the gift of turning it into a platitude intelligible to the nearest child. Everyone was shocked, the corpse was hardly cold. Typically clever, cold, and amusing. Lytton Strachey would have said it.

He was delightful to be with. Cleverest man imaginable. He knew what you were going to say before you said it. Witty, full of life, exhilarating, terribly alive. In very good pure English.

MI Are such characters over?

IB He was a personality of the first order. Bowra, C S Lewis, Keynes, Collingwood, Sir John Reith, Halifax up to a point.



MI You.

IB I wasn't in that league at all. I was an agreeable rattle, that's all. Not one of the formidable people.

MI Ayer?

IB Clever, amusing, but not a major personality. A presence in the room, whether you liked them or not . Fisher, at New College. No scientists known to me. Rutherford but I never met him.

MI Is that charisma passing?

IB I'll tell you if I'm asked to recommend an OM, I can't. No great novelists, painters, composers. Good ones, great? I mean by great only what other people call great.

SIDE ONE ENDS

MI I went to talk to Bill Hayter about you.

IB He thought the knighthood and the OM were ridiculous.

MI He was flattering.

IB He shouldn't have been. He's a diplomat by training.

MI They showed you a lot of affection. Was I taken in?

IB A bit. He thought I didn't come up to Herbert Hart's knee.

MI There's a bit in his memoirs about asking you whether your despatches from Washington were true, and you replied True, at a deeper level.

IB That was a reference to Bosanquet, which he didn't get. A philosophical joke.

MI Can you explain the great period of creativity between 1951 and 1965.

IB It's shorter than that. I wrote a paper on mind for the Aristotelian society before the war. Quite decent, obvious papers. Then as a result of learning to dictate in Washington, I began dictating here, and I found that infinitely easier. The first thing I did on return was Political Ideas in the twentieth century. It was commissioned by Foreign Affairs, Ham Armstrong. An ordinary anti-Soviet article. Then there was Hedgehog the Fox, dictated in two States, a lecture for Konovalov, which I wrote out for Oxford Slavonic Studies, which he rejected. It was then published as Notes on Tolstoy's Historical Scepticism. Never read by anybody in that form. Then Weidenfeld saw it and thought it publishable. Then he said, it's not quite long enough. So I made it a little longer, and that was that.

After that I delivered Auguste Comte – Historical Inevitability. Then my inaugural lecture: 57-8. That's my creative period.

MI But the Mellon lectures are in 1965.

IB I was invited to give the Reith by Kallin. I thought I would talk about romanticism, then they withdrew the offer.

MI Why?

IB I never knew.

Then there was Freedom and its Betrayal, a rehearsal for Bryn Mawr.

MI How do you account for this period of creativity? Does the war give you maturity?

IB No.

MI Marriage?

IB It's all pre-marriage.

Especially the essays in *Encounter on Russian Thinkers*.

Change of subject, abandonment of philosophy, liberation. That was what did it. I never thought I was terribly good at philosophy. I knew I was not in the front rank.

MI I thought you'd done most of your reading for Marx before the war.

IB Everything I knew about the Enlightenment came from Plekhanov, a series of lectures on the forerunners. It's always accidental. I just happened to come across these volumes of Herzen in the London Library and fell in love.

MI This stuff about being a cab is not exactly true. You keep nagging at the same bones.

IB Russian intellectuals, historiography; same section of the market.

MI Doesn't falling in love and marriage have something to do with your creative life?

IB No doubt I was excited. I was in love with the wife of another man whom I thought I would never marry and that tortured me. But this had no effect on my intellectual life.

I did it because I was a research fellow, university teacher. I had duties. I had to get it up. That's all it really was. To justify my existence. I was ashamed not to. If I could have been paid not to do it, I'd have been relieved. As soon as I stopped being a professor, it stopped. In 1965, it stopped.

MI Was the getting involved in Wolfson a self conscious decision to stop doing intellectual work?

IB I was bored being a professor. In Perry Anderson's survey of my work, he says, he's not really interested in politics. I'm not. There I was professor of political and social theory, and I couldn't go on. I did my stint. Wolfson gave me an opportunity to do something else. That's why I wrote a piece on the Vietnam War because I thought it would be shameful not to have an opinion. But it got me into trouble. Both sides fell on me like a ton of bricks. Perry Anderson attacked for not being on the left. Conor Cruise O'Brien thought I was sitting on the fence.

I've written two pieces which I'm relieved to tell you have been lost. The first on poets of my time, Auden, Spender, MacNeice, commissioned by the London Mercury, rejected, and then I threw it away. The other was a paper on Other Minds, which was the one which Wittgenstein said was alright, refuting certain logical positivist positions. How do I know that my headache is more violent than yours. A singular proposition which can be verified by some act of inspection. But this couldn't be because I couldn't enter your mind. It had meaning, but it could be verified. Whereas they believed that only what could be verified had no meaning.

He was very good looking, short, thin, blue eyes, of a piercing kind, delicate features, brownish, wearing a jacket with leather on the elbows and sleeves, rather intense. That's all, slightly visionary look, wasn't ordinary. Not a man who smiled normally or talked normally. I saw him walking in the street in Holywell; then he came and talked to the philosophical society. I am on an ascending curve and I wish to go on talking. He never wanted to prepare papers, he was prepared to talk or lead discussion.

T S Eliot on one of the few occasions on which I met him said he had been in Scotland. I asked him how he liked it and he said I went to the Highlands and looked at the hills and I thought they are the kind of thing which makes you give up all sense of endeavour.

We end up reminiscing about when we met and I recall how he corrected my pronunciation of the word Duma in All Souls

common room, and how I wanted the carpet to swallow me up like a stain.

Then we got talking about the meeting with Akhmatova, and how far apart they are. “She sat in one corner. I in another. I did not touch her physically at any point.” Everyone assumes I had an affair with her. I wasn’t.

I smoked thin Swiss cigars with mouth pieces.

She didn’t stride about. She got up in the middle of the night to offer me something to eat: she produced a dish of three boiled potatoes. Then her son came in. She was convinced because I met him that he was sent into exile.

I’ve been to the rooms. One room and a kitchen was what it was. The museum is three or four. She lived in one room. The room looked out into the interior courtyard.

Like all devotees of the cult. I looked down half expecting Randolph Churchill’s corpulent face to look up at me.

Fontanyi Dom Sheremetev Palace.

Says he is returning in the evening for a dinner of The Club, founded in the eighteenth century, with 12 members. It meets twice a term.

Fuller transcript:

## **MI TAPE 24-2**

Conversation date: 5 June 1994

Date transcribed: 23 June 2004

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### *Side A*

IB ... Red Dvina, wherever the Jews congregated and other people too, no doubt.

MI But you have no memory of having gone to the...

IB Never been, never been, never taken there, not likely to have been. I was never – by the age of five, I was never taken to [ ] by my grandparents.

MI And they – no, I've missed you there, did they live in the ghetto? No.

IB Yes, they did. [MI They did] My grandparents, certainly. [MI Your mother's parents] [ ] and I think so, I can't guarantee, I think so. Maybe they didn't. My mother certainly knew all about it, part of it, yes [MI Yes] part of it, part of that world. They were kosher, pious Jews, on very cosy terms with each other. None of these you see – you must remember, Riga was outside the Pale of Settlement [MI Yes] and therefore their right to live there was always rather dubious. My parents were all right because...

MI Oh, I didn't realise Riga was outside the Pale.

IB Oh yes, absolutely, the whole of the Baltic was, the whole of the Baltic, not only Riga. The Pale of Settlement consisted of

Eastern Poland, that is the Russian part of Poland, and some of the western guberni. There were some parts of Russia including – and presumably bits of the Ukraine.

MI Aha. Bits of Ukraine were – the most western parts?

IB Well, Odessa.

MI Odessa was not in the Pale.

IB I can't tell you where the Pale was. I think Odessa was – all those Jews from Odessa, all those[ ]. There was [?] and that's why I assume they must be in the Pale. Riga was outside, so was Tallin so was – Vilna was in the Pale.

MI Yes, that would make sense.

IB It's really within the Pale and Poland was in the Pale and certain parts of western Russia were in the Pale, but that was all. Ukraine, as I say, must have been, it must have been. Kiev must have been.

MI Yes. Pale legislation didn't impinge on Riga directly and if there was a ghetto, it was self-created...

IB Absolutely. They just lived huddled together, they were just huddled together very much like the [MI Speaking Yiddish] well, East End of London [ ], East Side of New York. There must be places like that in Montreal. [MI Yes, absolutely] Now, the thing about Riga is this; people were allowed to get out of the Pale, not all Jews [ ]. The Jews were not but those who led professions [ ] trades, I mean electrical engineers as it were, toy makers, anything you like, pen knife cleaners; those people could live outside. So could lawyers, doctors, etc.

MI And the Merchants of the First Guild.

IB And Merchants of the First Guild.

MI Of whom your parents, your father, was one.

IB Certainly, certainly.

MI And that exemption was not purchased – was automatically granted. It was not purchased in demeaning conditions?

IB No, no.

MI You didn't apply at a Police station and say...?

IB You may have done but they couldn't refuse.

MI And in any case, you didn't in Riga because you were outside that legislation anyway?

IB But wait. Let me acquaint you. There were plenty of Jews who should not have been there.

MI Should not have been in Riga?

IB No, no, for the following reason. If you were a dentist, you could live there. If you turned out to have twenty-five assistants, none of whom were dentists, all of them were described as dentists. You gave a bribe to the policeman and it was a mystery how it was overlooked. Described as dentists, it's clear to everyone they weren't. So a number of Jews could live and I'll tell you, lots of Jews were exempt [MI Oh really?] profession. Now let me tell you [MI A noble and useful profession] Well let me tell you. A lot of girls who wanted to study comparative phrenology [MI *laughs*] in the university of Petersburg, described themselves as prostitutes, were given the yellow ticket; and a yellow ticket meant that you were visited by a doctor [MI Oh really?] at regular intervals, to



check their health for venereal diseases. These humiliations they went through [MI In order to study] in order to study.[ ]

[Short diversion on the tape]

MI Jews have to have permission to be there [IB Oh yes] and on occasion have to bribe officials in order to bring people in? [IB Undoubtedly] The population is under constraint.

IB There are two kinds of policemen, good policemen, bad policemen. Good policemen took bribes, bad policemen were uncorrupt. Good governors, bad governors; good governors took bribes, bad governors didn't – the inversion of normal morality of an absolutely neat kind. That's what [I?] comes out of, all organisations of that type, the forms of protection against some kind of persecuting majority, arranged for [married passes?], you see? You bribe your way – but they had protection organisations which allowed them to breathe.

MI Yes. In your father's memoirs...

IB The Mafia must have been like that once, in Sicily.

MI Yes. In your father's memoirs though of that early period, it's almost oblivious of the police. In fact the only time the police are ever mentioned is when he had to buy them off because of your Mum, crossing the Latvian border in 1921 in another area.

IB Oh that's not Russia, that was Latvia.

MI But in the Tsarist period, completely oblivious to...

IB He didn't have the power of the police but it was offered [MI Yes, that's true] to be false witnesses. No, no, no I'll tell you, quite different. No, the Merchants of the First Guild had no trouble, didn't meet the [ ] described, besides which my so-called great

grandfather was an honorary hereditary citizen to [ ] for the rich bourgeoisie. They had the right to [ ] and privileges. There were Jews with privileges, of course there were, but the bulk of the Jews lived in ghettos. By 'ghetto' I mean the Russian government created the State of Israel. Without that, it would not have happened, it couldn't have happened. I think I told you this. By squeezing the Jews [MI Pressure] they created a National minority, physically, because they [ ] themselves next door, surrounded by peasants who were illiterate and didn't speak their language, didn't have their religion, as long as there's no social contract. With the result that when they – they didn't hate the peasants, they feared them because of the physical danger; and the Priests you see – might be, there might be some church procession, might end in a Pogrom. Now, when these people went to Palestine, they took the ideology with them. The ideology means Arabs were Russian peasants to them, same phenomenon, took no notice of them, had no association – no relationship to them and couldn't have. They were simply [a] part of the world where Jews could have no association. This was not true anywhere outside the Pale. Also, they were scattered.

MI Let me pick up something else though. Some of your post cards to your Mum, or to your parents, appear to use Yiddish. [IB Never] Never. What script are you writing in then?

IB Hebrew, perhaps. Maybe Hebrew words which I sort of just drew off. I was a schoolboy or something. What date were these?

MI No, this is later. This is actually in Palestine. [IB Hebrew words] But that would be Hebrew.

IB I have to mention things with – and people and names, I wrote them down in Hebrew.

MI You can write them down in Hebrew. How is your Hebrew?

IB Not very bad. I learnt it in Petersburg from a Zionist student in 1916 and I can read the alphabet [ ]. I was able to read the Bible fairly clearly, I don't think I could now. I can't be in a room with Hebrew speakers and understand much.

MI Was that always the case or when you were in Palestine, did you..?

IB Always. But nobody ever talked Hebrew outside Palestine [MI It's all English] you see? No, wherever they were.

MI But what about Yiddish? Never Yiddish?

IB My grandparents talked Yiddish. [MI But not to you] My parents talked Yiddish with their parents, never to me, and I didn't speak it.

MI And they didn't speak Yiddish to each other?

IB They might have done but not in my presence. I can't guarantee that but I was certainly brought up in Yiddish, I couldn't not have been. It was my grandparent's natural language; even the great grandfather, the multi-millionaire, he talked Yiddish. It's rather like being an Indian or something, talk Hindu. English was [ ] but it's an artificial thing but it began [ ].

MI Your mother is so interesting, linguistically. When you look at her diary which – one of her diaries is preserved [IB I didn't know that]. Oh astonishing, yes. I come out of this enormous pile of research with great admiration for your mother, it must be said.

IB She wrote in English?

MI Well, this is what's interesting. She writes in English and she slips into a little German; then it seems to me, for the most intimate

and personal things, she goes into Russian; and then it seems to me she's going into...

IB Where are all these notes? What are they left [ ]?

MI They're in the few little note books I've...

IB They're left by me but not noticed? [MI yes] I had no idea.

MI Would you like me to bring them by so that you could read them?

IB I wouldn't mind, yes, out of curiosity. No, her natural languages were German and Russian, those she knew perfectly. English, very limited.

MI It's late but it's very good you know when she writes you in English, her English is terribly good.

IB Surprising. I thought she made mistakes. Surprising.

MI It seems very grammatical and I mean it's clearly the English of a foreign person but it's...

IB But still, quite civilised.

MI I mean compared to my grandmother's English, it's quite – pretty jolly good, [IB Quite civilised. I see] and the writing's a lot clearer as well.

IB I didn't know she kept a – what? A little description of what? What are the things about?

MI Of her inner state of mind. Inconstantly, there are diaries for the war and there are diaries covering the period of your engagement – of your marriage, in fact. [IB Ah, that's interesting]

Quite a lot of – she pours herself out and I think has possibly some unflattering things to say about Aline, but expressed in Russian, [IB I'm sure] and then therefore I can't read it. I think she goes into Russian as a kind of code, disguise.

IB They were against my marriage [but] not at all strongly. [MI Sorry?] They were against my marriage, not strongly. They didn't really mind. My father was dead by the time I married her. I married her – what? – two or three years after he died. But still, I was already on terms with her and he knew that I was attached to her in some way. They couldn't – adjust [ ] – couldn't not recognise – no, that's too strong. They thought it was rather awkward to marry a woman with three children of her own. That was the main objection, you see? One can't marry sort of women with children, they were [ ] from a different household, it made it rather awful to inherit all these step children and so on. And then my mother didn't find my wife very cosy, she didn't find her very warm. Nor is she. My aunt...

MI Cosiness is not what Aline is about. She is about other virtues.

IB Not that; wasn't warm to her own friends. My aunt, my mother's sister, decided she was all right and liked her much, much better, and that was...

MI Which aunt was this?

IB My Aunt Ida who died at the age of 96 or 7 she was, in Jerusalem. They got on very well, she had no barrier at all. My mother – all right, she liked her, she was fond of her. They met. They were perfectly nice to each other, they respected each other but never any intimacy, and there couldn't have been.

MI So, getting back to your mother's language, there's – German and Russian are the natural ones; there is some Yiddish...

IB And Yiddish, too. Yiddish was just as natural, it was rather unused.

MI And never Hebrew.

IB Never. Well, she knew some, she learned some Hebrew after the age of seventy because of Zionism and Israel and all that, learnt it, I mean, as one learns things, but it wasn't the language she spoke. She could understand it; rather proud when she was in Israel, went to hospital and was able to communicate with some kind of Oriental Jews who looked after her, in Hebrew. I don't know what it was, Moroccan nurses and that kind of thing; and even repeated what they said in Hebrew, and much amused by what they did say. In fact they called her 'Thou' not 'You'. That pleased her, [MI *laughs*] found it amusing. Her chief thing was her terrible Jewishness; she was a hundred per cent Jewish.

MI Why 'terrible'?

IB Because it insulated her from the rest of the world. She really felt [ ] of the Gentiles, not us. Terrible – my father was not at all like that.

MI But why didn't it insulate you in the same way?

IB Because I was brought up in England; because in Petersburg, my father had perfectly good Russian friends who were not Jews. He didn't speak with these people. My mother did and that – in my childhood, it did insulate me to some extent. I met nobody but Jews. I had no Gentile friends except you know the girl I used to go for walks with, I told you, the daughter of the Deputy Minister for Finnish Affairs. They lived in the same house as ours, name was Ivanov.

MI But it was a Jewish world in Petersburg for you?

IB Yes, more for me, yes.

MI But there, you were subject to...

IB Not a religious Jewish world, but a Jewish world.

MI But there, you were subject to Pale legislation and restriction and...

IB No, no, [MI No change] oh no, we were Merchants of the First Guild [MI It didn't apply]. It applied nowhere.

MI Was there effectively a Jewish ghetto in Petersburg?

IB No, [MI I didn't think there was] nor in Moscow. Moscow, there were not many Jews, [ ] business there, the number of Jews in Moscow was very limited. But then I told you, when Weizmann, I mean when he became President of Israel, stayed the night in Moscow without permission, he was arrested next morning by the police, betrayed and arrested.

MI Another contribution by the Great Russian Empire to the founding of the State of Israel.

IB Well, no doubt. And then the policeman said to him, 'What do you do?' 'I work for the Jewish [?]' 'You work for Jews?' 'Yes.' 'Be very careful. They'll kill you one day, they are bound to kill you.' Weizmann said, 'That was absolutely right. They have.' [laughs] 'They have.' That is the truth. [laughter]

MI Oh, these are my favourite stories. I love that story.

IB Very funny. It was quite right, it was absolutely right. It's like a story I told you, here in England. I knew a man called Terence Pretty, who was the son of an Irish Peer, was a *Manchester Guardian* correspondent in [Bonn?], wrote a book about Adenauer. Quite a

nice man, went to Trinity College, Oxford. A gentleman[ ]. He suddenly took an interest in Jews, I don't know why. He was after the Nazis; he felt these terrible things had happened and something must be done and he became a sort of secretary of an organisation for promoting friendship between Jews and the English, Anglo-Jewish something. I met him that way, with the Rothschilds, all kinds of grand Jews. He was employed by them. Not very much a [ ] but still, he wrote a kind of letter to be sent to Members of Parliament to give them news about the Jews or about Israel. He went to see his father who was a dim old Irish Peer. His father said, 'Are you still writing for *The Guardian*?' He said, 'No, no, I gave that up.' 'Oh, what do you do now?' He said, 'I work for Jewish [ ]. 'You – know – Jews?' [*laughter*] He told me that story. Some [ ] old Irish Peer, I've forgotten his name. It's quite normal. Keynes, the Rothschilds – someone wrote me a letter, some Indian, wrote me quite a long letter from a rather civilised learned Indian who was Emeritus Professor of something or other in America [ ] subject, for some reason wanted to write an article about Keynes and the article was about Keynes' anti-Semitism, subject is not of very grave importance, and he wrote and sent me obvious quotations from Keynes, indicating. And I replied and I said, 'If you want some more, if look at Robert Skidelski's *Life of Keynes*, volume I and volume 2, I think you might find some more quotations.' I tell you, you can't call him an anti-Semite in the full sense. He didn't like being with Jews, it's true, I mean he found them – I don't know, unsympathetic; he didn't enjoy being in their company, some kind of social embarrassment and so on. I mean if anything – I mean a Pogrom – of course he was a friend of them, I mean he wouldn't [MI Because he was a liberal] yes, and he would have had relations with them very freely and so on. And he had Jewish friends. Leonard Woolf was an intimate friend, and he didn't mind me, oddly enough, in Washington. I didn't feel – but I did suddenly come across that – he said, 'And how is our dear old friend, Professor Felix Frankfurter?' So I [ ] foreign origin, none the worse than that. But there are things in his writings which



indicate prejudice against them of a purely social kind, meaning he didn't really like them much. That's all. But one didn't dislike.

MI Was Washington the only period that you knew..?

IB It's rather like not being Indians or not wanting – not liking Frenchmen.

MI Was Washington the only period in which you knew him at all?

IB Yes. I met him in England before but he was very snubby to me. [MI Snubby?] I'll tell you. I went to read a paper in Cambridge on philosophy, 1934, quite early on, '35. I stayed with Braithwaite who was a fellow of King's and a friend, and had dinner before this paper at Kings. I sat between Keynes and an unknown mathematician. For some reason, Braithwaite thought I'd better not sit next to him because I knew him, and meet these important people. Lord Keynes turned to me and said, 'And who are you?' I told him. 'And what do you do?' I told him that, too. 'Ah, you're at Oxford, you're a philosopher. What are you doing here?' 'I'm reading a paper.' 'To whom?' 'Moral Sciences Club.' 'On what?' It sounded so [patriotic?]. I said, 'Pleasure.' It sounded frightfully silly. He then said, 'You've just eaten crème [g?],' some soup, 'just as good a subject. I don't know why you should take that for example – why don't you talk about that?' I felt rather offended. And then he said, to put me slightly at ease, he said, 'Do you read Whitehead?' I said, 'I have read him.' 'He was my tutor,' said Keynes, 'I never read him, I couldn't. He just brooded at one, you know, that's all he ever did,' [MI *laughs*] and then turned away. Then I [ ] the mathematician, silent, rather grim figure, no idea of his name. I said something to him to break the ice, just to make conversation. He turned to me slowly and said, 'I do not agree with what you have just said.' Silence. End of conversation with either neighbour. [MI *laughs*] The rest of the meal was consumed in silence. My first evening at Kings. It was better later. But that's the first meeting with Keynes. Then I met him in Washington and he

was very affable. I didn't meet him often, but three or four times at most.

MI What's he doing in Washington? Remind me.

IB He was the Head of the Treasury Delegation, the British Treasury Delegation. He used to come at regular intervals. He organised Bretton Woods. He was *the* financial official. The New Dealers worshipped him, I mean he was the origin of everything, you see? But...

MI Can you remember actual meetings with him and what was said, what happened?

IB No, no. I met him only – because I was befriended by a fellow of my college called Bob Brand, Lord Brand. He was the Head of the Food Commission, later of the Treasury Commission, and Keynes liked him. He said, 'Bob Brand is the only banker I can get on with at all. I always bring him a lollypop of some sort, to suck.' Some little proposition or something you like. And he was – quite liked me. But when it came to be a candidate for the Wardenship of the college, he could not have brought himself to do it, he was anti-Semitic in the same way as all the people of that generation were. But he got on very well; he used to stay weekends with him in the country. So they were friends. When Keynes arrived, he always asked me to dinner because he saw that Keynes and I got on. We had quite jolly tripartite talk, just us three, nobody else, and that I enjoyed very much. I cannot tell you what it was about. Keynes told stories.

MI But those were not evenings where he would talk about Bretton Woods, etc. etc. he would be...

IB Be relaxed. No, there was no formal talking. No, and he would tell stories about Bloomsbury, talk about [ ] to me because I was a philosopher, but he was very easy with me, as most people have

been. The point is I don't attract anti-Semitism, anti-Semitism and anti-Semites very much. I just don't. There are only two cases of encounter with anti-Semitism, I think I may have told you.

MI Yes, one about the Club.

IB One was at school, preparatory school.

MI Oh that's right. 'Don't go to Westminster.'

IB No, that wasn't anti-Semitism, it was just the coach saying to me, 'Maybe they won't like your name.' But I didn't come across anything, I mean it was just a warning about not being so un-English. Nothing to do with Jews, that was entirely with being a foreigner. No, no, that all happened. **No, when I was in my first term in the preparatory school in Surbiton, a boy came up to me and said 'You dirty German', because of my name. And the other boys set on him and beat him up. It was unheard of. The opposite should normally happen. I was defended, collectively defended. So I saw that I was quite well liked. I wasn't conscious of that, now that I think of it.**

MI A crucial incident, if we look back.

IB No doubt.

MI It could have gone either way, Isaiah.

IB Exactly. It usually did, should always tell the story the other way, bullying of some sort. That was the opposite, you see?

MI To get back to Keynes though, can you remember other..?

IB The other thing is the Club, yes, I've told you that story.

MI Can you recall other occasions with Keynes, either in Washington or after the war?

IB Never after the war. He died in '46 you see? [ ]. No, only in Washington. Well, I told you the story about the election of President Roosevelt?

MI I don't think you have.

IB Well, all right. It's in Roy Harrod's *The Life of Keynes*, not accurately told. In 1944, November, fourth election of President Roosevelt. I was invited to dinner by Lord Halifax, his reason being though he knew me and quite liked me – again All Souls, that's really what gave me my status – because I was the first and almost only Jew here for years. The next Jew was Keith Joseph, after the war, nobody in between.

MI Really? Between you and Keith Joseph?

IB In '32 and '47. I don't know any candidates but it didn't happen. I don't think they went in for it much, I think they didn't think they'd be welcomed. Anyway, now where were we? Yes, I was asked to dinner because I was supposed to know about American politics, so I had to bring copies of the *Washington Post* which had all these districts to be ticked off from the radio, announced the results after dinner.

MI This is now back in London?

IB November '44, Washington, British Embassy [MI Ah yes, sorry] *Washington Post*, Halifax. I had to bring these documents to distribute them. Present were: Lord and Lady Halifax; Lord and Lady Keynes, as he already was; the Social Secretary who was a very, very snobbish lady with whom I got on shamefully well. I've forgotten her name, she was engaged to be married to the horrible Neville Henderson, who was Ambassador in Germany you

remember, the last British Ambassador in Berlin. She was called – I’ve forgotten her name. All columnists were fifth columnists as far as that went on. [*laughter*] Now wait a minute. I got on beautifully with her; stiff, snobbish, grand lady, who looked after Halifax’s – had looked after Lindsay’s and people like [?] the Ambassadors. Then there was, I think, David Bowes Lyon, who was the Queen’s brother, who was engaged on, I don’t know, American warfare or something as a job of a semi intelligent kind, and his wife who I don’t remember at all. That was all. [ ]. And we had dinner, Keynes was there. I talked to Lydia in Russian. She was delighted, great performance. Keynes didn’t like that much and rather kept out of it. It wasn’t very usual, she didn’t come across a lot of Russian speakers.

MI Was she as dotty as..?

IB No, no, she was sweet, she was a child of nature. She babbled. Dotty she was not. Who thinks she was dotty? Bloomsbury probably did. It was very hard to dislike Bloomsbury, despised, peasant, I mean sort of crude, not intellectual, no good.

MI So Keynes doesn’t like you talking to his wife in Russian?

IB Well I’m sure he didn’t show it but frowned a bit. So I rather stopped after a bit. She was delighted, she responded with eagerness and surprise. Then Halifax said to Lord Keynes, ‘There’s something of a favour I’d like to ask of you. We are about to produce a programme for the Conservative Party. I know you’re not a Conservative, I know you’re a member of the Liberal Party, but I wonder if you’d be – do us a favour of looking through this piece of ours, because you see, we don’t want to talk rot.’ It was quite clever of him. Keynes agreed. They flirted with each other, he and Halifax, rather openly, quite amusing to see. Well then I was introduced to him but nobody knew that I’d met him, and the Social Secretary said, ‘It’s Professor Berlin.’ And I said, ‘No, no, I’m not a professor.’ Keynes said, ‘No, neither am I. As you may

imagine, I'm sometimes introduced as 'professor', in fact more often than not. On such occasions, there's only one thing I say and that is, "I reject the indignity without the emolument." [MI *laughs*] That's very typical, you see?

MI Yes, that's a very famous story.

IB Is it famous? Have you heard it?

MI I mean the line has become famous.

IB 'Reject the indignity without the emolument'?

MI I think that's become famous.

IB About being a professor? [MI Yes] Anyway, he terribly wanted to be a professor at Cambridge, he was bitterly disappointed when [Pigou?] was appointed; and then he was disappointed he wasn't made Provost, which he terribly wanted.

MI Yes, he was never made Provost was he? He was Bursar but never Provost.

IB He was, yes. He wasn't made Provost because of Lydia. He lived 'in sin' with her which made it impossible. Homosexuality was all right, living 'in sin' with a woman was not.

MI What else do you remember of that dinner?

IB Well, I'll tell you. Finished dinner, went to the Ambassador's little study and then the results began coming in. As I remember it was nine hundred districts; four hundred and ninety for Roosevelt, ten for Dewey, somewhere in [ ] Mississippi. Nothing happened. Lydia got bored, so she said to me, [*mimics accent*] 'Do you like Archie MacLeish?' I said, 'Yes I do, quite.' 'Sh! Lydia. Not now,' said Maynard. She lapsed into reluctant silence. More results came

in. Again she looked bored. She said to me, 'Do you like Roosevelt? President Roosevelt? You know, people like him very much. Rosie, do you like Rosie? I like Rosie.' 'Sh! Lydia.' Again receded. Another half-hour passed and Halifax was sitting roughly where you are sitting now, about as far away. She said, 'Do you like Lord Halifax?' [MI *laughs*] I produced a neighing sound and Keynes did not stop her. She said, 'You know, I have talked about him, he's quite popular, but it was not always so. Do you remember appeasement? It was terrible, and Munich. [MI *Loud laughter*] Munich? Appeasement? It was terrible.' Nothing from Maynard. Halifax looked embarrassed, got up and patted his dog and said, 'Now Frankie, you're not interested in politics, are you? I'll go find out how things are.' Came back and telephoned Harry Hopkins, came back and said, 'I talked to Harry. He says it's in the bag.' After that we left. That was that evening. But you see, naughtiness he rather liked.

MI Yes, that was very good.

IB Yes, you see? Particularly against the pompous.

MI And was Halifax terribly pompous?

IB No, not terribly, but still he was a Lord and he was a Conservative and the fact that she made this ridiculous remark, he found quite amusing.

MI I get an impression of Halifax being a tremendously tall, cold glass of water.

IB He was a bit. He wasn't very cold; he was idle and very clever and quick. He was slow spoken and when I produced – I was ordered to produce a vignette of Truman when he was elected for the benefit of *The Times* [ ] telegrams, [ ] if you like, and I said something about him, and I said, 'He will probably get on better with congress than his more imperious predecessor.' Halifax's arm

shot out like a snake. He crossed that out, thinking Winston will take that as a personal remark about himself. Very quick. [MI Very shrewd] He was; and never wrote a single despatch with his own hand, nothing.

MI Everything prepared by people like you.

IB Hacks. He looked on all these Wykehamists as no good at all. I mean he didn't ask them to meals. Pen pushers. Foreign Office officials meant nothing to him.

MI So how did you get included in dinners like those?

IB Because I was here, I was at All Souls, you see? And I was amusing and also I was needed for the evening. But I remember he talked to me at other times, too, he did. He said, 'Do you think Herbert Morrison did right to Moseley? I don't think he ought to have arrested him, you know.' I said, 'I think he did quite right.' 'Do you think Moseley would have let in Germans?' I said, 'Yes.' 'I don't.' I said, 'No I'm glad he's out, it's a good thing. Morrison is quite a decent chap.' That was that, I also said to him – I was on those terms and I used to take despatches with me occasionally. It was always kept for a little conversation. And then he talked a lot to me when he came back. He lived not very far – he used to come and stay with Alexander Metcalfe who was in All Souls, they'd go for walks with me, who I strongly approved of. [MI After the war?] Stuart Hampshire didn't see how I could. This horrible man, how can you talk to him? Ghastly! Contemptible! He was quite interesting politically.

MI Why interesting politically?

IB He talked freely about himself, about Winston, about the government, about what they did and didn't do. Now I'll tell you more about Keynes though. He said, 'Have you noticed,' when we met at one of these dinners, 'have you noticed, Congress always



passes the most idiotic legislation in July and August? It's far too hot. Much too hot for white men, you know. No good to you and me, all right for Niggers.

MI Is that what he said?

IB Yes, in those words, you see?

MI Would that have occurred at the same dinner table as...?

IB No, oh no, no. That occurred at a private dinner with Bob Brand. I used to meet him sometimes in the Embassy when he came to see somebody, in the corridors and so on. We were on sort of quite friendly, external terms. 'And how are you? What do you find about the American scene? Don't you think, if we sent an India paper copy of *The Times* every morning to the southern Senators and other difficult people like that, it would do a great deal of good?' I said, 'No, I assure you, they would not read *The Times*. I don't see one of these ghastly, sort of reactionary Senators down in the south, reading copies of *The Times*. No. He had no sense of politics, Keynes. [MI Really?] He was politically innocent. I mean he didn't know how to treat people politically, he didn't believe in propaganda, he didn't know about propaganda and who anything was. He and Robertson, the other economist, who was also anti-Semitic – a pure liberal in outlook, very much an Apostle, like Keynes – no, he was funnily enough rather worldly, politically. I mean, why all this propaganda? Reading *The Times* pages, let's find out.

MI Because I always thought he was tremendously astute, politically, and a great fixer.

IB No, he was not. [M?] was, he was not.

MI Very astute as a psychologist, then as a...

IB Oh I'll tell you a story he told me. No, no he didn't. A story about him, told me by Robbins [MI Lionel Robbins] a great friend of mine, yes. There was a meeting of the British and American Finance delegations in '41, at which I would not have been present, but Robbins was. He was part of the delegation. The Chancellor of the Exchequer was a man called Kingsley Wood, known as 'Colourful Kingsley'. He was the most boring man you could imagine, I mean a dreary – appeasement, Chamberlain – he was quite useful, a kind of family solicitor for the Conservative Party. I mean, people would come with ideas; 'Oh no, our people wouldn't wear that.' 'Oh no, I don't think you can get that.' 'Oh no, our people, it's no good to our people.' That was his sort of value. He died. The Head of the American delegation was a man called Harry Dexter White who was afterwards sort of being a Communist, called [?], made a very polite speech [ ] but less than Johnson. Keynes had the reply and he thanked Mr White whom he liked very much. He had no sense of politics either, didn't see why communists shouldn't collaborate. He said the British delegation was very sensible of the sympathy shown them and grateful for the good, kind, nice words spoken and so on. He said, 'Myself, I did not have the opportunity of knowing the late Chancellor at all well. Nevertheless, my work at the Treasury inevitably brought me some degree of contact, and I can tell you one thing about him, which the people round this table, the very able people sitting here, indeed might well not only to note, but perhaps even to emulate.' He said, 'No matter how obscure, how tortuous, how dark, how complicated a proposition in economics might seem to be, the late Chancellor had the gift, the art of turning it into a platitude intelligible to the nearest child. That is a great political gift.' They were inexpressibly shocked. I mean the corpse was hardly cold. It was an almost cynical joke, but very typical. Amusing, clever, funny and rather cruel. I was very [ ] with it. Lytton Strachey couldn't have said it. Leonard Woolf may have said it...

MI Yes, I suppose I assumed that he was the kind of person who said that kind of thing in private but never in public and this was an example of something he said in public.

IB Oh no, I don't think he refrained from doing anything in public, whatever he wanted, completely loose-tongued. No, I don't think [ ] Keynes that much. He wasn't a friend, I mean, I didn't come into real contact with him, purely casual. Delightful to be with, the cleverest man you could ever have met. He knew what you were going to say before you said anything. He was very witty in answers and exhilarating and agreeable and terribly alive, told stories extremely well in very, very pure, good English.

MI Do you think those kind of characters have died? I mean, is there a history to that kind of charisma? I sometimes feel that you are part of the generation, you know, Bowra – Bowra had a very different way, much less intellectually able but...

IB Also somebody with personality of the first order. I agree with you. There's Bowra, C.S.Lewis, I mean you see, but persons [MI Keynes] oh Keynes, oh yes, certainly. [MI Collingwood] Mm, yes, yes. [MI You] Sir John Reith [MI You] No. Who? [MI You!] No, I don't count that being at all, I wasn't like that. It was quite agreeable rattle, which I was. Now wait a bit. No, I'll tell you more. Sort of formidable people. [pause] Sir John Reith, certainly. [pause] Halifax, up to a point. Other [ ] of that kind. [MI Ayer?] Not as clever, amusing, no. Not personality, he didn't – no weight. Wait a minute. People with presence in a room you'd immediately noticed, you see whether you liked them or not. In Oxford itself. [pause] Fisher was a bit like that, New College. Geniuses – that's a different category. No scientists known to me like that. Rutherford may have been but I never met him.

MI I just wondered whether that charisma is passing?

IB I'll tell you. If I'm asked, which I am occasionally, who ought to get the OM, I can think of nobody. Terrible to say that. If I'm asked whether a great novelist alive – none. No great novelists, no great poets, no great painters, no great composers. Good ones, yes, distinguished, interesting. Great? I don't mean by great, 'Great'. Anybody who other people think is great, they're good enough. I mean Trevelyan was not a great historian but some people might call him great.

*Pause in Tape*

MI I went to see William Hayter today, and his wife.

*Side B*

MI Really?

IB [ ] particularly, and they were only sort of [ ]. Why, how is he?

MI Well, he's got what you've got. He's got a paralysed vocal chord.

IB I mean he's got worse than that. He's got cancer or something. He's just been in hospital. He's just had an operation.

MI He looked OK to me.

IB Well, he may have recovered from it but I mean I don't think – but then he's older than me, he must be eighty-eight. You asked about me did you? [MI Oh yes] What happened?

MI Well in confidence he was tremendously flattering.

IB Oh really? He shouldn't have been. I have known him have different views. [MI Really?] Oh, perfectly good company and quite all right to know, he wasn't a diplomat by training [ ] something

ironical. No, when I got a Knighthood, he expressed extreme surprise. [MI Did he?] 'What for?'

MI That's rather ungenerous of him.

IB He was a Knight already, himself [ ]. Oh maybe, but I mean it's very difficult to say what I did get it for. I got it very early [ ] for that reason [ ] enjoyed talking to me [MI Yes] and through negligence of the present [ ]. Nobody could say 'for political services' or 'for [ ]'. I mean there's no quotation to get one of these. The *Manchester Guardian* was quite ironical.

MI I don't know, I thought both of them showed genuine affection for you. Maybe I was just being taken in.

IB I think a bit, but why not? She's a bit [ ] a very left wing, wrote a very left wing book, who lives with them now, in part, wrote a book, very left wing [ ] kind of Communist and she wrote a book called *Eight Thousand Bourgeoisie*, violent attack on Capitalist [ ]. She's clever I thought I said, no doubt of it. Oh no, they're friends, they come to meals with us and all that. I always thought [ ] likely. The man he most worships in Oxford, is Herbert Hart. He thought he was perfect.

MI Yes. Many people did worship him.

IB Oh certainly, but I didn't come up to his knee [ ]. Yes, [ ] were perfectly planned [ ] aesthetic, cultivated man, likes music, likes painting; not a very good purposeful Warden of New College.[MI Really?] Idle, he rather despised his colleagues, too grand for them.

MI Yes, in his published memoirs, there's a rather amusing story about him asking you whether the despatches that you wrote in Washington, were true. You said, 'True at a deeper level.'

IB Yes, well I said that [ ]. That was a joke. ‘Deeper level’ comes from Bosanquet. That’s a philosophical joke which he didn’t get, you see? People remember it as a wonderful joke. Bosanquet and Bradley, they gave themselves – ‘There is truth and there is truth at a deeper level.’ [MI *laughs*] Of course I meant it as a joke.

MI Well, it was obvious to me it was a joke but I hadn’t caught the Bosanquet reference.

IB Nor would he have done. Frank told me once that there’s the truth at a deeper level and therefore[ ]. He’d read these people.

MI One of the things I wanted to ask you about which – I’m wandering all over the shop. If you don’t mind just picking up bits and pieces of things that – which is whether you can give an account for what Henry Hardy and I often notice, which is the great explosion or the great period of your intellectual and most creative period; or in terms of publication, your most creative period is to me – what? ‘50/’51 and about 1965.

IB I think that’s too late. It’s shorter than that. I wrote a paper for the Aristotelian Society, on mind or something, before the war because I sort of felt I had to, two or three philosophical papers. They are not particularly interesting, of a quite decent kind. That’s part of my profession, part of being a tutor, which often I felt I had to do something. Then as a result of learning to dictate in Washington – I’ve always found it very painful to write – I began dictating here and I found that infinitely easier and so *The Hedgehog and the Fox*. The first thing I did on return was a thing called *Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century* which was commissioned by – you know, I’ve said this to you once, I’m a taxi cab, without commission I don’t produce. I was commissioned to do it by Foreign Affairs [ ] kept pressing me to do it. I said, ‘All right, I’ll do something. That I dictated in no time at all. It was anti-Soviet, ordinary anti-Soviet article. Then, there was *The Hedgehog and the Fox*, dictated in two days. That was because the Oxford Slavonic

studies – no, I had to deliver a lecture on a Slavonic subject, made to me by the Head of Russian, whom I knew, [Klovanov?]. It was at New College and that was all right. I delivered the lecture. He said, ‘Well, if you could write that, I’d like to publish it.’ So I wrote it out, then he rejected it. It was not in time. And then somebody intervened and it was saved. It was then published as *Notes about the Historical Scepticism of Lev Tolstoy*. It was never read by anybody in that form. Somebody picked it up.

MI Weidenfeld picked it up? Who picked it up?

IB Well, somebody must have told Weidenfeld. He looked at it and thought it was publishable. [ ] years [ ] for him and that’s how it works. Easy. And then I wrote it and then Weidenfeld said, ‘It’s not quite long enough. It doesn’t quite – you now, a pamphlet. Can you make it a little longer?’ So I made it longer. I wrote some more and that was that. After that, I delivered the Auguste Comte lecture. That was *Historical Inevitability*. Then there was my inaugural lecture as professor. That was *Two Concepts of Liberty*. That’s it. That’s the creative period, ended in ‘56/7.

MI But then there’s Vico, Herder, all that other stuff comes later and then there’s Romanticism that comes after.

IB Oh, but that’s much later. That was the Mellon Lectures in Washington.

MI ‘65, yes, that’s the end of your...

IB Yes, quite. I was invited to do it – I had the idea as a result of the Mellon Lectures, which I would have done, on that; and then they took it back again, the offer, you see? Then I did give a long piece, but not a Mellon Lecture, – no, I beg your pardon, the Reith Lectures. I was invited to do that by a lady called Anuta Kallin, a Russian who was responsible for lectures, and so I accepted that. I

thought I would talk about romanticism, I thought then, and then they withdrew the offer and gave it to someone else.

MI Why?

IB I never knew. So then – and they did of course produce these lectures in the end but not as Reith lectures. [MI As Mellon Lectures] As Mellon Lectures. And then there were lectures called *Freedom and its Betrayal*, six lectures. They were really a kind of rehearsal, as written by me, for lectures in Bryn Mawr, which I had to do. It's always that sort of thing, called upon.

MI How do you account for the fact that there is this period, from say, *Hedgehog* right through to the Mellon Lectures, stretching the period out, when you do a lot of the work for which you're famous, and it's concentrated in this period? What's happening to you that makes it possible? You come out of the war, a sort of mature soul? Marriage? What is it?

IB Nothing to do with the war, nothing to do with the war. No, *Hedgehog* is more or less pre-marriage. No, no, the first three essays are pre-marriage, Russian stuff, the four essays on – which appeared in *Encounter, Russian Thinkers*, that's pre-marriage, and they're [.]. No. I don't know, change of subject, abandonment of philosophy, liberation, that's what it is. I never thought I was terribly good at philosophy. I did my best but it was rather torture and I admired other people much more than myself and I knew I was not of the front rank. Never was.

MI And I get also, the impression that you'd done most of the reading that would sustain you for the rest of your life [IB Before the war] in Oxford in the thirties [IB Before the war], reading for Marx.

IB Well, yes. I had to read Marx...



MI I mean reading *for* Marx, I said.

IB Well, that's why I took an interest in the eighteenth century. Everything I knew about the Enlightenment comes from that, because that's pre-Marxist. I even read a book on Plekhanov called *From [?] to History* or something, that is a separate series of essays of the forerunners and he's a wonderful writer and I loved reading Russian; and I had to read him for Marx and I became interested, you see? It's always accidental, accident as you know. I just happened to come across volumes in the London Library. I never had a vague idea as to who he was, and I fell in love more or less. There are always [?d'occasion]. I never – I'm not fond of [ ].

MI They are[?d'occasion] but there is a period of tremendous creative work, where you just do one interesting thing after another, and you think it's because you changed disciplines?

IB Well, philosophy of history, that's Vico and Herder, they're both about that. **And there is an article in a thing called, I think, something like *History and Theory*, on the – no doubt it was reprinted somewhere – on the categories employed in, I think, history: difference between history and science. Rather Oakeshottian, I'm afraid, if only I knew that he had done it, you see?** That comes from an interest, yes, because I was a research fellow of All Souls, I was meant to research Russian ideas. The Russians had ideas about the nature of history and that led me to these people.

MI You're not really a cab. That's why all this stuff about being a taxi is true in one sense and absolutely false on the other. There's a continuity, there's a – you keep nagging at the same rather small set of bones.

IB Oh absolutely, yes. The same territory really; philosophy and history [MI History of ideas], history of ideas, Russian revolutionaries, ideas of Russians through the nineteenth century,

Russian revolutionaries, same market, same book, same section of the market.

MI In times past when I've said that some of your creative life appears to me to be related to falling in love and then eventually later marrying, you always rather bridle at that.

IB Well, I think it's nothing to do with my intellectual life.

MI You sure? Why are you so sure? I've always felt my own – when I've ever done creative things, it had to do with the fact that I was in love or I was feeling good or I was...

IB I'm not conscious of it. I was excited, no doubt I was excited when I was I love with the wife of another man who I never thought I would marry and that tortured me and no doubt had an effect on me, but that had no effect on the lectures I have given. One did it because I was a research fellow, I was a university lecturer, I had duties. Since I had to do it, I had to get it done. That's all it really was, just to confirm my existence, I was ashamed not to. That's all it comes to. By nature, I am indolent. If I could have been paid not to do it, I would have been relieved. As soon as I stopped being a professor, stop! I stopped being a professor – when? In '65/6. [MI You stopped?] Yes, I didn't finish much after that. I did, but I mean nothing – well, I mean I did a piece on Akhmatova and all this, so [], but nothing solid. You see, Hamann and all the – that's still the relics of that. But I never shot away into something new or original or something of that kind. That's how it happened. I remained totally involved with ideas and action.

MI And was going and becoming very involved in the founding of Wolfson, a sort of self conscious – did you think, 'I really want to stop lecturing, I want to stop doing this stuff.'

IB Yes but more than that. I was bored with being a professor and more than that – there was a true thing said about me by my enemy

– it’s enemies who tell the truth – my enemy Perry Anderson, in a rather unfriendly survey of my work. You know the thing I mean? [MI Yes] He says, ‘The thing about Berlin is he’s not really interested in politics.’ That’s true. I’m not, not as people who *are* interested in politics are; and there I was, professor of social and political theory and that I was ashamed of. I’m not interested in politics, I can’t go on. I [ ] a historical subject. All my lectures are about previous thinkers; but fundamentally, I’m nothing to do with politics, and such a person ought not to be professor. So I did my stint, nine years or so. Then I wasn’t made an Emeritus Professor because the Warden of Nuffield, who I think was the Chairman of the Social Studies Board said ten years is a minimum. I hadn’t done my ten years, I couldn’t. Not allowed to be called professor, like Keynes. In other universities, yes, not in this one. Deep wound.

MI A deep wound you’ve never recovered from.

IB What more can I tell you about my intellectual life? I became also [ ] because I thought, yes, time to change, I’d rather like to do something else. That’s because I really didn’t want to go on, it became a burden. That’s why I wrote a piece on the Vietnam War, which I would never have written if I weren’t professor and thought, shameful not to have a view. It got me into immediate trouble on both sides. Have you read it ever? [MI Yes] Can’t remember where it appeared, some book, about pro and anti Vietnam. Both sides fell upon me like a tons of bricks, particularly – well, Perry Anderson for not being right wing enough, not being pro Vietnam; and Connor Cruise O’Brien for sitting on the fence.

MI Well, that answers some of my questions. I had no more.

IB I wrote a piece, two pieces which were lost forever, you’ll be relieved to know. The first piece is a piece on poets of my time; Auden, Spender, MacNeice, and their attitude to war.

MI Oh really? When did you write them?

IB I wrote that for the *London Mercury*. It was commissioned, it was rejected and I threw it away. I felt it was rather like a time bomb, the war was, and the whole attitude was in some way galvanised by that. It may or may not have been true but the editor said he didn't think it was good enough. The other paper on other minds, which was what Wittgenstein...

MI Yes, that's the great loss! You don't know where it is? [IB I don't know] Biographically it would be very interesting.

IB It's just an ordinary, mechanical, philosophical paper of its time, refuting certain positivist propositions; ordinary criticism of logical positivism, more positive in general. 'How do I know that my headache is more violent than yours?' It's a singular proposition, which according to these people, can be verified by some act of inspection, by saying, 'This is red.' Because this couldn't be, because I couldn't enter your mind, your head, compare your headache with mine. Yet it undoubtedly had a meaning. The meaning was not the means of its verification because I couldn't verify it, not as they wanted to verify. I could verify and produce evidence for it but not verify it. That's all it was about, not [personal?]. A reply to their wisdom in a series of articles on mind. [pause] Not really a very good paper, it lasted an hour, [ ] very bored, except for old Witters, suddenly got going.

MI 'Let's do some business,' he said.

IB 'Ordinary business'. 'In ordinary circs... you and I, we will talk.' We did talk. I didn't even [ ] impression upon him, meeting him did and what we talked about, completely forgotten by me.

MI You didn't describe him to me very much. How did he look to you?

IB Very good looking, extremely handsome. Short, thin, not very short, thin, with blue eyes of a rather piercing kind and penetrating eyes; very delicate features, brownish kind; wearing a jacket with leather things at the elbows and sleeves, which all the followers had to do: and he was rather intense, I thought. But unforgettable appearance, at least unforgettable by me. I met him[ ]. I mean, rather strange, rather – slightly visionary look, slightly visionary look. It wasn't ordinary; not a man who smiles normally or talks normally, not like anybody else, something special.

MI And that was the only meeting you had with him?

IB Yes. I saw him afterwards but – I saw him twice. I saw him walking in the street in Holywell, he was living near, stopping every twenty yards or so and talking to whoever was present and then moving on. And he gave a paper, or rather talked to the Philosophical Society [ ]. 'I am on an ascending curve, I wish to go on talking.'

MI Is that what he said?

IB 'Ascending curve,' yes, and then he read the paper. He never wanted to read papers, he was prepared to talk and lead discussion but not produce a paper. The man who'd read the papers was Oscar Wood, to whose memorial service I'll have to go, [?] and Descartes, and I've forgotten. Not so intelligible, either. And then he began talking, extremely well. [ ] was all right, difficult to say why [ ], bit unusual in that.

MI What's the time, Isaiah? I'm going to have to go in a minute.  
[IB The time? Ten minutes to four] I have to go down to London.  
[IB Back to London?] Back to London. [IB What happens then?] I go and talk to my wife, have conversations with my wife.

IB Honourable, yes.[MI *laughs*] And then?.

MI Well, I wish it was less honourable than that. That's about all. I have to go back and see my wife.

IB And then? You dine at home.

MI I dine at home. And then next week, I'm away in Scotland.

IB What are you doing in Scotland?

MI Making a little film about Scotland. I made all these films about Nationalism in the autumn, and the Scots asked me to make a film about them, so I'm going to listen and talk to Scots.

IB Scot Nats.

MI Scot Nats and other forms of life, and then I'm going to Canada...

IB T.S.Eliot, on one of the few occasions when I met him, said to me, 'I've just been to Scotland.' I said, 'Do you like it?' He said, 'I'm really not sure. I went to the Highlands and I looked at all the stones, and looking at all the Highlands and the hills, you know they're the kind of thing which makes one give up all sense of endeavour,' [MI *laughs*] which I [rather?/didn't?] expect[ed] him to say. He said it. I always remember that as a kind of...

MI Yes, it's good.

IB Then what happens after you've done the Scotch?

MI And then I go to Canada.

IB Will you talk also to the Head of the Movement?

MI Probably, yes. I don't think very highly of them but I am puzzled by – I'm rather interested in the Scots. They think a lot

about Nationalism and they think... They're very incensed of course because the series I made was so much about the carnivores. They keep telling me they're herbivores, as nationalist, nice, civic minded, gentle souls. After that, I go to Canada to give some lectures.[IB On?] Well, I'm giving one – the only lecture I've ever given and I will ever give, about television, because I've done all this television and people want to hear what I think about the future of public broadcasting. That's what I'm going to talk about.

IB In Toronto?

MI Yes.

IB I'm getting a degree from the university.

MI Really? In June?

IB No. In the autumn.

MI Oh really?

IB Yes.

MI You've accepted?

IB Well, my wife keeps saying she wants to go to New York. She persuaded me that one of the ways of going to New York – if I go to Toronto, I'd love to come to New York.

MI When will that be? October?

IB Mm yes. October/November.

MI Oh I'll come and sit in the audience. It's my university.

IB But there's nothing to see.

MI And we can have a talk.

IB No, no. That's the condition of accepting the degree.

MI Mum's the word.

IB Mum's the word.

MI Well, good for you!

IB It's a surprise; and I've had to wait eighty-five years to get two degrees this year: in Dublin

MI Dublin's fair city. Oh good for you. [IB ...and Toronto, Dublin in July] But you must have Honorary Degrees up your arm.

IB I do. I do. I'm always suitable for Honorary Degrees. When two candidates have taken – and people can't decide between them because there are two battling parties, I am the[ ], I am the compromise candidate. I'm very harmless. I'm not hated.

MI Well, you've perfected a certain kind of modesty on these questions which you know perfectly well why you can get honorary degrees and it's not because you're [ ].

IB No, because I'm quite well liked. If I have a reputation, quite well liked, nobody protests. Nobody's envious of them, you see? I haven't read Galipeau's book but the picture on it, I was told by – first I was told by Hampshire. He thought it was actionable.

MI It's not!

IB I do, yes. [MI No, Isaiah!] Then I met a lawyer in London, a great lawyer in London whom I know, called Lord Hutchinson, who is an eminent member of the House of Lords and a very, very



good criminal lawyer. He said he was prepared to take it up and make money against the University Press. I said, 'How much do you think?' He said, 'Well, given your reputation, you're quite well known, very well known indeed.' He said between eight and ten thousand pounds. Worth it! Wait a moment. Then who else? There were one or two other people who thought it was dreadful. I think it's dreadful, and then you see, Henry Hardy tried to defend it, saying some friend of his did it. He said well, it's the Press, not him; and Bob [B?] kept saying don't be so hard on us. But I think it was not of service to me. I haven't very much vanity but to look at that, I can't bear it. You like it?

MI Well, no, I don't have a view of it. I think it's merely silly. I don't think it's...

IB It's just a caricature but I think not a very good one.

MI No, it's not good.

IB It's perfectly recognisable, of that there's no doubt. But Henry likes it and I kept teasing him about that.

MI Well, I think you should go easy on the teasing. He's very distraught. He thinks he's been consigned to outer darkness.

IB Because of that? Because of the caricature?

MI Yes, he feels – he's in a wretched state about it. He feels you...

IB I don't mind a bit. For a little while, let him simmer.

MI Let him rotate on the spit?

IB Let him simmer, yes.

MI It's very funny. No, he said to me – I popped in, I popped my head around the door of his office today and he said he was in a terrible old funk about this.

IB The terrible thing – another happening happened. I told him it was actionable and all that. I repeated to him that King's lawyer was prepared to make money out of it, and he said, 'Well, it'll be amusing to see how much money you make,' and so on. And then there's a man called Wokler [MI Yes, Robert] who I keep writing testimonials for; he can't get a proper job. [MI He's from Manchester, isn't he?] Yes, and he's a very learned man with no ideas. [MI Specialist none the so] Yes, but nothing of interest to say. He does manuscripts, he knows everything Rousseau means by this and by that but nothing about that. I mean, he's a pure [?] of a curious kind. He rather liked it and wrote to Henry saying he rather liked it and the letter by Henry about something else, was given to me: 'PS. Wokler told me and[.]' I said, 'No, no, I'm really pleased. I promised Henry I wouldn't show you.' He said, 'Oh, Wokler, too [.]' I then read the review by Wokler of Galipeau [MI Saying what?] silly – I mean it's friendly but pedantic and [ ], uninteresting. The Galipeau book seems all right to me in the original version of it. I haven't read any comments.

MI I haven't read it myself. The one I have read is the Gray book, which I think is very good, [IB That I've not even seen] takes you very, very seriously indeed, which is as it should...

IB I've done my best – I thought I would put him up for the British Academy, then I discovered he was writing this book and I thought I couldn't because it looked like quid pro quo, and I told them that. Nobody wanted to vote for him. The liberals were all against him.

MI I think that's scandalous, I think he's a very [IB So do I] clever and able, difficult man.

IB All these things I think, too.

MI He's the kind of man who should be promoted.

IB I approve of him absolutely but I just can't get any allies for this.

MI I mean, he's an interesting Tory radical, I think.

IB That's right. I know. I said all that to them; no takers. Great bore, very bad section, I'm going to resign from it as soon as I can.

MI Good. You can't do any favours to me. I'm a kind of – its terrible. I couldn't ask you to write a letter if my life depended on it. It would be an inside job. [IB I would write it] I'm teasing you. I don't think I've asked you to write a letter on my behalf. I propose to get through my life without having to make such a request.

IB Wonderful. Of anybody? Or just from me? You asked me to support you in getting money for your book about [?]

MI Yes, you did, yes that's true, [IB I was very happy to do it] and it was very kind of you.

IB Not at all. I did it with enthusiasm. I remember when we met in Cambridge and – who else was there?

MI It wasn't in Cambridge. [IB I think so] The first time [IB Kings], yes we met in Kings.

IB And I was staying with probably the Rothschilds. I was invited to dinner by Aileen Kelly and present – it was a sort of party, people appeared. There was yourself, there was a Hungarian, [MI [names him]] was there. Who else might have been there?

MI I can't remember. I remember something else. I remember much more distinctly coming here to All Souls to have lunch with

you, and absolutely unaccountably saying – you asked me where did my grandparents live, and I said they lived near the [T?] Gardens near the – and then I said – I heard myself make the error, aware that it was an error – I said near the *Duma*, at which point, [IB *Duma*] like a sort of gasp, and like a gun dog you bristled and said, ‘Duma’ so loud that, you know, papers dropped and I wanted the carpet to absorb me like a stain.

IB Let me tell you, I do it all the time. Aline says it’s unbearable. I did it with Ezra Pound when I met him.

MI Really? He mispronounced something?

IB A Russian name. It’s always the same, I do it in the middle with everybody. Aline says it’s the worst manners, don’t. I do it all the time. If I don’t do it then I must do it under my breath. Russian names are constantly mispronounced. Ivanov – Ivanov, Ivanov – both – Ivanov is ‘u’, Ivanov is ‘non-u’. That’s the chief difference. They both occur but Ivanov would be very offended at being called Ivanov.

MI Yes, well I remember that correction. And what about you, what are you doing next?

IB I met a lady from Moscow yesterday, for a quarter of an hour literally, and she said she would want to meet me in here and because of Akhmatova and so on. She told me I was a hero, sort of wherever books were written of course. Everyone knew who I was. The hero, the poem, who obviously had a love affair with her, I was an immortal figure in Russian literature. ‘Extraordinary,’ she said. ‘I went to Oxford, I talked to one or two teachers in Russian and nobody had heard of you! In Russia, everybody’s heard but in Oxford, nobody. I can’t understand.’

MI Did you enjoy that?

IB Yes, more than anything in the world. Minor teachers, as you can imagine, [ ]. I couldn't have told them. They said, 'Who?'

MI I've been reading Amanda Haight's book.

IB It's not a bad book. It was denounced by [S?] who was the [ ], said it's no good at all, some kind of jealousy, I don't know. It's dullish, very truthful...

MI Yes, it's dull but it's truthful. One of the things I...

IB Truthful and she came with her to England. When she visited England, Amanda was the part of the entourage. She liked her.

MI When you talked to Akhmatova, I never quite have a sense of the distance...

IB Poor Amanda. She was an unhappy American girl who died in Australia in poverty. Sorry, go on.

MI When you were talking to Akhmatova, I don't have a sense of the distance between you. Are you sitting very close in the cold Stygian gloom?

IB Not at all. No gloom [MI She's across the room?] It was an empty room, had furniture in it perhaps once, immediately after the war, '45. There was one wooden box, table, two or three chairs, nothing else.

MI Nothing else. And quite far apart?

IB She sat in one corner, I sat in the other. I did not touch her physically at any point.

MI That wasn't the purpose of my question but...

IB I'm telling you. Everyone assumes I must have had an affair with her, she was clearly in love with me. However I was not really in love with her. If I am asked, 'Were you in love with her?' I said, 'No.' 'You weren't?' How could you not be?

MI And were you smoking cigars?

IB Yes. Little thin Swiss cigars [], bogus, false cigars of a thin kind which had mouthpieces. [].

MI It's a very wonderful scene.

IB I was here and she was in the other corner, reading her verse and talking. I was not married yet.

MI She didn't stride about, or did she sit?

IB Sat all night in a rigid position. No, she did get up. In the middle of the night, she suddenly thought she ought to offer me something to eat and all she had to offer was potatoes. She had no luxuries. She was terribly ashamed of me having to eat these potatoes. She produced a dish of boiled, three boiled or four boiled potatoes. Then her son came in. She was always convinced, because I'd met him, that he was sent into exile. It could be. But [ ] she went to the equivalent of a kitchen where the potatoes were boiled.

MI I've been to the rooms.

IB You've been to the rooms? Which are presumably different now?

MI Now a museum.

IB Quite. It's full of books and full of objects.

MI Yes, including her Oxford degree gown.

IB How many rooms?

MI Well, that's what's slightly confusing. I think in your memoir and in your memory, it appears to be sort of nothing more than two rooms...

IB One room and a kitchen.

MI But the museum itself is – one room and a kitchen – but the museum itself is many rooms, possibly four or five.

IB There are four possibly, it's on the entire floor you mean? She didn't live in that. She lived in one room.

MI And the room that you were in looked out on the interior courtyard, two big windows.

IB That's right, whatever, yes. That's where Randolph Churchill's voice was heard from below, looked...

MI And like all devotees of the cult, I looked out, down into the courtyard, half expecting a rather corpulent face to be staring up at me [*laughs*].

IB There it was. That's right, exactly that. Right hand corner of the Palace, the Scheremetev. Called Fontany Dom, Scheremetev[?], Fountain House, Fontany Dom. There was no Fontan by the time I arrived. There must have been a big Fontan once. The gate's still all right, the Iron Gate?

MI Except that they were swung back rather ominously in January '46.

IB About three hundred people must have lived there, in that[ ].

MI Extraordinary story. What are you doing later today, are you going back home?

IB I'm coming back here in order to take part in a dinner of 'The Club'.

MI What's 'The Club'?

IB What indeed! 'The Club' is an old Oxford club, founded in the eighteenth century, which contains twelve members. Now we're expanded to fourteen. Founded by I don't know who, some lady and some man in the 1770's, so it's a smart, Oxford Academic Club. My election made it absurd, not at all what was meant. I became elected to the club – we meet twice a term – and I was...

*End of tape*



## MI TAPE 25

Conversation date: 21 February 1989

Date transcribed:

Transcriber: Esther Johnson

Subjects covered:

Akhmatova Tape

Pasternak

Moscow 1945

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IB ... to come to London and I went to see her in London, we had about two hours in the hotel. It was exactly as before, it wasn't quite so – er – romantic [ ] as one was at the first meeting. She talked very freely ...

MI This is '65.

IB '65, talked about going to Taormina, getting the Taormina prize and she told me that the reporters are saying that the [ ] and so on, talked very nicely about Moscow, she talked about her life in – er – in – er – what's it called, that village near Moscow – no near Leningrad where she lived? [MI I don't know] Where she died in fact. I've forgotten its name – what the house was like, she talked about her friends, she talked about difficulties of life, she talked about [Stanhov?], she talked about not getting enough to eat in the forties, how loyal some people were, she knew who her friends and enemies were after that, it was very very clear; some people were brave enough to come, for example [G?sky], who had already been in Siberia by then, nevertheless continued to call. She was very touched by that. So did various other people whose names she mentioned; other people gave her a wide berth, wouldn't speak to her and so. All that she talked about very – it was quite interesting, all that. And then – er –

MI How had she aged?

IB She had aged. She looked old. Of course it may run ...

MI How much older is – was she than you, you're not ...?

IB Twenty years.

MI As much as that? She was born in 1890.

IB She was born in '89. Exactly twenty years older. In '65 she was seventy-six and I was fifty-six. No! I was forty – forty, yes forty-six, that's right, certainly, sixty-five is the year [ ]

MI And you were – she was seventy-six but hale? Physically well, or frail ...?

IB No, no, no, fat, plump, pale – er – rather ill looking, looked not well, moved with difficulty [MI A stick, no?] I don't think so. The heroism with which she sat on her chair with a great effort.

MI Did she dress nevertheless with style or was she in ...?

IB No, she just – not great elegance, prison black with a shawl which was always there and – er – ...

MI Her queenliness was entirely in her personality.

IB Still there, still there, certainly not in her clothes: manner, voice, style, stoicism of utterance, no small talk, every sentence weighted, every sentence meant something, no chatter, nothing light, no little stories, nothing else ...

MI What hotel did she stay in here?

IB No prattling, no. Where they put her, where they – er – where they put her? [MI 'They being?'] 'They' being, I think probably British Council somebody, that kind of thing; somewhere next door to the BBC. I think it was something called The President Hotel, I think it was, something like that; a sort of third class hotel next door to the BBC.

MI Next door to Broadcasting House?

IB To Broadcasting House I mean, near Broadcasting House at the back as you go towards the – on the right as you approach it, Regent Street. Some hotel at the back there. Bombed out part of London. They built a hotel. One is called the President and one is called something else, one or the other of those. And then there appeared soon her step-granddaughter who came with her and was called Anya. And then came a man called, from the School of Slavonic Studies, there was the interpreter called [ ] and they were with her, more or less indissolubly, all day. And so I spent two hours – she said, 'Why am I getting this degree in Oxford? Is it you?' I said, 'You could say that, yes, you might say that.' [Russian expression, a query]

MI [Laughing] That must have given you pleasure?

IB Mm – yes, some. But she was very gloomy [ ]. She didn't talk about her past, didn't talk about Byron, didn't talk about books; depressed, heavy, old and rather more tragic than queenly even. I'll tell you a story about that in a moment. Well, then she came to Oxford and she said, she would have liked to have stayed with us, she said that, at the Embassy and they made it clear that this would not be well received. So she stayed in the Randolph where everybody came to see her in Oxford. A painter called [Annenkov?] from Paris who'd painted her in Leningrad, [S?] from California, an Editor from New York called [?], Soviet [ ] characters from Paris of various kinds – er – nobody much from England, can't think of anyone very much ... In Oxford [N?] came, in fact

she dined with us; dear [?]’s furious about [ ] a friend in Moscow, a poet. And then – she was tremendously cold to Aline, chilly to a degree, very very cold indeed and Aline remembers that – absolutely! You see? And then she said to Naiman after ...

MI What, what was all that about?

IB I was her guest in heaven, I was uniquely attached to her, mythologically, it was a vulgarity to get married. I had no right, no right.

MI You should have been a kind of slave in perpetuity, a kind of mythological slave ...

IB Not a slave, no, no, part of a myth, the lover from afar, some kind of unique figure in her life, far, far – towards a nostalgic – to a certain extent; sort of – er – some kind of figure in a myth to whom she was forever connected in eternity.

MI Did you feel that connection had been broken as a result of the marriage?

IB Oh, well no, I’m not sensitive enough. I didn’t feel that she was somehow distancing herself. Not – it’s perfectly true that she was surrounded by people all the time. When she came to dinner there was [ ], there was Aline. She sat stiff and dignified and regal. She talked perfectly well, she spoke no English anyway, so there was no communication with my wife anyhow. But [ ] tell you. She said to Naiman, who told me this this year; he lives in a – have you been to her house in Oxford? [MI No, no never] It’s a kind of little manor house outside Oxford, Governor’s mansion Nabokov used to call it rather ironically. She said, ‘He lives in a palace, he lives in a golden palace. I do not approve of intellectuals living in palaces.’ Then I knew a lady called Salome Halpern, I haven’t talked to you about them either. Got to go back, this is all very ...

MI I think it's in the memory. There's a reference to Halpern in the memoir?

IB Might be, but anyway I can tell you who he was and what he was. Halpern was a Russian Jew who belonged to a family which had been adopted into the gentry because there weren't very many. His father was a prosperous lawyer who worked – who used to appear before the Senate [ ] and also was the Chief Legal Adviser to the British Embassy, so he was obviously a prominent figure. He suddenly left [ ] and – er – lawyer but a member of the Intelligentsia [ ] Petersburg and met, perhaps not very much, people like – Akhmatova I don't thin he did know – but he met somebody called Princess Andronikov, called Salomeya Andronikov from Tiflis who was a famous belle who the entire Intelligentsia of Leningrad [ ] fell deeply in love with her, wrote her a marvellous poem called [ ] which means 'little straw', it has the name of Salome so it is a pun. She was a friend of Stravinsky's, she was a friend of Stravinsky and Stravinsky's future wife and his then wife, friend of the Intelligentsia of St Petersburg about whom Akhmatova wrote. She was – this man called – er – , the first man to whom Poem Without a Hero is dedicated who was a man who committed suicide in 1913, he is a minor poet. Let me explain. Poem Without a Hero is dedicated to three persons [MI I see] – tell you who they are. I've forgotten the first name, I may remember it, I don't know, not been heard of otherwise, who was in love with her, who did commit suicide in 1913, minor poet; to a lady called Somebody Sudeikina, dancer, famous actress and dancer; and to me. She began writing it in the thirties I suppose, in the Soviet Union my name is not mentioned, not even in the last edition which appeared I suppose last year. In America, it is, so it's recorded to some degree, in the Soviet Union it couldn't be. Perfectly clear; but it certainly appears in the manuscript. And – er – the first one is called [Akhlivov?] or something rather like it, maybe [?]. Anyway, Halpern. Here was this Jewish lawyer, very assimilated, but a Jew and when the revolution came, he went on working at the British Embassy but when the British Military

Attach, was killed in the British Embassy in Petrograd, he thought it was time to go, so he emigrated. He went to London where he became an International lawyer. I never knew anything about him, or his life, but in the course of time – though she, Salome, who was this toast of the poets, also left; went to, I think, the Caucasus and then to Paris where she lived. And he had worshipped her, got married to her. She was a friend of Alexia Tolstoy who was an émigré, in Paris, of [?] of, I should think of [MI ?] [ ] certainly. All those people, you see? And then he married her, on condition – she made a condition he lived in London, she lived in Paris. They saw each other perhaps once in two months. Then when the war started, they did meet in New York. He went to New York ostensibly for some Jewish charity, actually I think he was a British Intelligence Agent. He worked in the British office in New York. I met him through Bill Deakin who I knew at Oxford, who was one of these people. And there he was, married to this extraordinary lady who's brilliant, amusing, clever, rather malicious, was very exceptional. I made friends with them, I used to go and dine with them in New York fairly frequently and then in London. She became – so then he died – she became immensely pro Soviet and so did he, not quite as much as she. She wouldn't hear a word ...

MI In the course of the war?

IB What? No, in the late forties in London. [MI God!] Soviet writers could freely visit her, it was perfectly allowed at the Embassy and she used to denounce anti Soviet talk, particularly me, to my face, which I quite enjoyed, it made no difference to our friendship whatever. She lived in the same house, her companion was Anna Kallin who was a Moscow-Jewish lady who created talks on the Third Programme, though that isn't referred to in the books about it. She was a typical Moscow intellectual, high grade, high brow, who was a friend of Harold Price-Jones, Nabokov, everybody. She produced every talker from the Third Programme including all the – er – researchers. She's a brilliant and interesting

woman. [MI Anna Kallin?] Kallina – Kallina, Kallin in English, K-a-l-l-i-n but Kallina in Russian. She was a sort of Trotskyite to begin with but ceased to be any of these things [ ] was anti Soviet and they had terrible rows every day but nevertheless adored each other. She died – [?] Kallin she was called, [?] – she died I should think about six years ago. I went to her little funeral. Anyway, there they were in a little house in Chelsea which Aline's husband bought, her second husband, he left them a million, and she used to receive, was visited from all these characters and when he died, she corresponded with one of his nieces who remained in Leningrad, and in the course of this, she grandly mentioned my name, to which the niece replied saying, 'He must be a very bad man.' Then she wrote back to say 'Why do you think he's a very bad man?' 'Because he abandoned Akhmatova.' So that was obviously known. Then I talked to Naiman, the poet Naiman who lives in Moscow and I said 'What is it all about?' He said, 'Dido and Aeneas.' [MI Laughs] [IB repeats in Russian] So you see that was the myth; she was the tragic queen and burned herself on a pyre. I offended her, no doubt I disavowed my duties, but I did abandon her. And so Dido, as you remember, was not very kind about Aeneas after he left her, pretending that he had a [ ].

MI Well I shouldn't be laughing but ...

IB But it is the Myth. That's what I mean by mythology.

MI What do you remember of the rest of her visit? Do you remember the Honorary Degree and the ...

IB Oh of course – [MI And her speech ...] She made no speech, you don't have to in Oxford. All I can tell you, she was there – Siegfried Sassoon got it at the same time and the Vice Chancellor, very nicely, sort of making her go up the steps, went down the steps to her, she obviously could hardly move; she moved with the greatest difficulty, shambled in, she didn't limp exactly but walked very slowly. Then I gave a party for her in New College because

there was a room and everybody came and we [ ] each other. She enjoyed that very much. She sat in a huge armchair and people were presented, you see? That went all right.

MI Why did you seek to get her a degree? Was there some element of kind of reparation in it? Some kind of ...?

IB No, none, it was I thought she deserved it. I would have got one for Pasternak [ ] well I tried to. In 1946 I met the Vice Chancellor of Oxford who was a man called Sir Richard Livingstone, a Classical scholar on the platform at Oxford Station and I said to him, 'Two persons ought to get Honorary Degrees.' 'Who?' 'One is a Russian poet called Pasternak, the other General de Gaulle.' Neither got it. [MI Interesting] All the other Generals got it.

MI Obviously on Foreign Office advice.

IB [ ] Pasternak couldn't because nobody had ever heard of him. And Maurice Bowra ...

MI Well that raises the question of how you knew Akhmatova's poetry, how you knew Pasternak's poetry ...

IB Because of Maurice Bowra.

MI Because of Bowra?

IB Yes, talked to me about [it] in the thirties, otherwise I would have had no contact with the Soviet Union at all. I read Blok on my own, but – [ ] ...

MI What do you remember of your parting from Akhmatova at – when she left Oxford or left England?

IB Nothing. Nothing. Nothing.



MI Did you feel then that it was the last time you would see her? Were you aware of ...

IB No, no. No I didn't think necessarily she was going to die, I didn't think I'd never go back, I don't think I had any thoughts. I think I have rather a superficial nature. I don't think I was overcome by any cosmic emotions.

MI Because she died the following year?

IB The following year, in great honour. She was laid out in State in the cathedral in Leningrad, you see, the only person of her kind who was.

MI What do you know of Brodsky's relationship with her? It began in sort of the early sixties ...?

IB She never mentioned him to me. Poets – I remember what – I think I told you – she received a telegram from [?] who was in England at the time. She crumpled it in a little ball and threw it in the waste paper basket. I told that story in her memoir but didn't mention his name; and she said, 'Yevtushenko and [?], they're just little bandits, that's all they are, worthless.' [IB repeats 'bandits' in Russian]. Now let me tell you the following story in this time; this time in – er – Leningrad ...

MI 1988?

IB '88, last year, yes, that's what I was really meaning, yes. I went to see a lady in Leningrad who was a friend of Brodsky – now what was her name, I always forget it – daughter of a famous [ ] critic. I'll look it up, it must be somewhere, I've got her address, some peculiar fate makes me forget that particularly. [He finds it and gives her three names] [MI Tomashevskaja?] She told me the following story, great friend of Akhmatova. She said that Pasternak

quite liked his birthday celebrated, not every ... One day this special festival – all the friends decided to celebrate it properly in Peredelkino and rather shyly he said, ‘I know I don’t like them but you know [ ] and’ – er – whatsisname – er – the other fellow – er – [MI Yevtushenko] Yevtushenko, yes, ‘have been very kind to me and you know, they have done things for me and they write me letters and they read my poetry. They’re very nice to me. Do you think they could be invited?’ Well, I don’t think his friends liked that much but they accepted it. So they came; and the dinner was on the upper floor in the house in either Moscow at the other place or the dacha whichever it was, Peredelkino and they [ ] Akhmatova – they were terrified of her. She was a great woman who was a myth who never met anybody; and of course they worshipped her; and out of pure nervousness both got blind drunk. Then she rose rather earlier than she intended, decided to go away. [ ] were sitting opposite, a great friend of both, and they offered to accompany her. Reeling slightly, they accompanied her to the top of the stairs. Then suddenly, said [?], a mighty hand sent them both absolutely rolling down the stairs, knocked downstairs, they simply rolled over and over [ ]. The mighty hand was that of [Richter?] she said, and serve them right! Akhmatova was delighted and so was everybody.

MI Incredible story.

IB That is the relationship whatever they may say [ ]. Anyway, don’t know, I knew that Brodsky was close to her, she didn’t talk about him to me, no. I knew that he was one of her poets and so on, but I don’t think she did, didn’t talk to anybody really.

MI But you’ve talked to Brodsky since about her?

IB Must have done. He knew all about her and me and all that, certainly, yes.

MI When was the last time you saw Pasternak?

IB '56. He died in ... [MI '62] ... I think '60. Denounced. Nobel Prize and all that. '60 I think.

MI Let's pause.

[Short break in tape]

IB What does 'stamina' mean? What kind of word is it? 'Stamen' means 'seed'.

MI Yes, I don't know. Stamina.

IB Means 'seed' that's the plural.

MI No, I don't think 'stamina' comes from that at all.

IB You don't? You may be right.

MI [Laughs] I wonder what, whether – your memoir conveys some of the atmosphere, the slightly vile atmosphere of Moscow of '45, I wonder whether there are other stories? Did you meet any of the kind of [K?] 's of the world?

IB Well I met [K?] himself.

MI What was he like?

IB Oh I will tell you. I met him in '56.

MI Ah, just before the [?]

IB Just before the [?] There was a party given by the Indian Ambassador. Like all Indians he was either called Mehta or Singh or something like that [chuckles]. And he had read my book on Karl Marx for some reason, had some respect for me; so he asked

– er – I suppose Hayter to ring me. [K?] was then in charge of Russia, Soviet Union, because [Khrushchev and Bulgarin?] were in England, I met them in New College in fact. That's another story. And I was introduced to him by the Indian. He said to me – first of all what he looked like; great big, tough, bull-necked, coarse-faced gangster, Jewish gangster or American Trade Union leader, Teamster, you know, Teamster's union; powerful, sort of fleshy face with huge neck and Soviet uniform, I imagine a sort of tunic and all the rest of it. And he said to me, 'What are you?' I said, 'I teach philosophy.' 'Idealist or Materialist?' I said, 'These distinctions become rather blurred in the West.' 'Now, now! Don't [Russian word] Don't – er –

MI Wiggle about.

IB ... 'wiggle about, don't run away,' this kind of thing. 'Materialist or Idealist?' I said, 'Well – ' he interrupted me and he said, 'What do they read in your university? Kant?' 'Yes.' 'Idealist.' '[Hegel?]' [MI Laughs, 'Yegel!'] I said, 'Not much.' 'Idealist. Hume?' I said, 'Yes, they do read – ' No. 'What else?' I said, 'Hume.' 'He was not a philosopher, he was a historian.'

MI Rather good.

IB 'What else?' God knows but I said, 'Mill.' 'Stuart Mill? He was not a philosopher, he was an economist. I know what you are, you're a creeping Empiricist,' [Russian term] [MI Laughs]. That was a phrase used in 'Communiste' which was a Party journal, about logical positivism, that very month, that's where he got it from [Repeats the Russian] I said, 'Well, I expect I am.' He said, 'Would you like to talk to our philosophers? Would you like to have a debate?' I said, 'Well you know, it's August, they're all sitting in the country, it would be awful to have to whip them up to come to Moscow.' 'No, no, no, that's easy, how many do you want? Forty? Fifty? Thirty? What kind of number would you like?' With great difficulty I persuaded him ...

MI What a nightmare!

IB ... not to; but he saw a sort of mediaeval disputation between me and them which he would have enjoyed. I then said – what else did I say to him? ‘I am told that Jews find it rather difficult to leave this country. Is it true?’ ‘That’s what the Israeli Ambassador said to me.’ He was Mr [Waswar?] then, you see? ‘But it’s an absolute lie, anybody can leave this country who wishes. I don’t know what you mean. The Jews always go on like this,’ and then turned away because my interview was at an end. Then, the same year, I went – by this time I had migrated to the American Embassy, and they were invited to meet [Sukharno?] by the Indonesian Ambassador. Well I was taken along as a guest. The entire Politburo was present, other than Molotov who was on holiday. They marched in – first of all we milled about in the garden and I was introduced to [Shapiro?] who was Foreign Minister but not Politburo. We had a conversation about Oxford, England, meaningless conversation, people who stood round us, people thought we were talking about terribly important things, I was asked by everybody, ‘What did he say?’ What do you say? It was about nothing at all. [MI Laughs] Then Politburo came in marching in formation, two by two, sort of, you see? And they all sat in little gold chairs, they all drank orange juice because Indonesia is a Moslem country, even though it was communist. And then, Khrushchev who I met in New College when they visited, said, ‘Aha! They’ve let you in have they?’ [MI Laughs] I said, ‘Yes. Now that they’ve done it there are easier visits,’ and then we talked about something else. And then – there I met at this party, Tom Driberg who was visiting Burgess, apparently wrote a book, and he asked me whether he [ ] a communist; Church of England, very pious, high church, Chairman of the Labour Party, Member of Parliament and – er –

MI Practising homosexual.

IB Notorious, yes. And William Hayter the Ambassador said to me, 'There's a man coming to Moscow whom I think they want me to see. He is a correspondent of the New Statesman. His name is Thomas Driberg. [ ]' I told him about Tom Driberg, rather shocked, he was asked to lunch, we met, very very courteous ...

[Break occurs in the tape]

MI ... stories that are not [IB Recorded] in my record, that for posterity you wanted to record?

IB Mm – I really don't think so. I could add something about Akhmatova's extreme anger at my marriage.

MI Yes, I detected that, yes.

IB That happened all right. You see, I left her – I saw her twice in 1945. I saw her on that famous day in November and then again I deliberately left through Finland and not by air in order to go and see [ ] in Leningrad. Leningrad was wonderful; there's a marvellous Soviet piece about Peter the Great which says he died in 1725 in Leningrad. [MI Laughs] That's where he died! [Laughter] Anyway I went to see [ ] spent two hours with her then, we talked about this and that, poetry, there was nothing in particular, people abroad, exactly as before – less tense but still there she was and I said good-bye to her. Then I remember very well what happened. I had to wait at the station and there was an incurious(?) man who had to accompany me into the train for Helsinki; and just as I was getting into the train the man said, 'Is there much anti Semitism in England?' I said, 'No, not very much.' 'What about America? Are you going to America?' I said, 'I am going to America as a matter of fact, there's rather more there.' 'Here, it's appalling,' he said and disappeared into the crowd. It was already '45, we're talking '46, January five, four or five, 1946. Then ...

MI So the Doctor's plot is in preparation as it were?

IB Never ceased. Never [ ] upon it. Never ceased, for other people [ ] ...

MI Well, it never ceased but ...

IB It was never discouraged.

MI It was the only thing about Lenin for which one could have any sympathy really ...

IB Lenin was not in the least, not the least ...

MI And the old Bolsheviks were rather resolute on that one thing and I think attracted a lot of support ...

IB No, not all. [MI Not all] The [ ] were absolutely pure, the lot, there were no anti Semites known among ... [MI ? and all these people] [?] etc, [MI Molotov] Molotov was a Jew but there were non Jewish [ ] but not very many but they did exist. [?] was one, – er – [?] another, [?] – [?] used to make anti Semitic jokes for which reason Leonard Shapiro thought he was, [ ] married to a Jewess. Anyway, certainly.

MI The old Bolsheviks not, but then it comes back to ...

IB Stalin was, even before the war, known to be. And the other was a man, one of the people who turned out to be a police spy, who was a Bolshevik Deputy – er – not Mayakovsky(?), it was something like – that kind of name. Lenin wouldn't believe him you know, [ ] agent.

MI So it never stopped?

IB No butchery [ ] was rather more frequent because perhaps they were tougher, I don't know, and maybe they were more non-intellectual than [ ]. [?] was very intelligent.

MI So it never stopped, it was current. I am wondering, I want to get you back to Akhmatova though, how do you remember that parting on 5th January?

IB I don't very clearly, I can't tell you that. All I remember was I kissed her hand and departed, that's all I did. I bent down but I didn't quite touch it, there was right and left.

MI Was she the same height as you or higher ...?

IB No she was higher, plump. She was very thin when she was young, lithe, athletic looking. She could bend over backwards and touch her toes, I think. By the time I knew her she was, plump or fat rather, tired, rather old, due to eating potatoes and bread and all the rest of it, like all these wives of Soviet ...

MI But still regal?

IB Very, very, extremely regal, yes, very majestic.

MI Did she have other languages?

IB French.

MI And so when she read Don Juan, it was incomprehensible.

IB Totally. Totally.

MI And as you stand back from it, some of the reasons why the meeting is of tremendous resonance to her are obvious, given that you were a kind of foreign – not merely a foreign visitor but a kind of – her re-connection to the world of European matters ...



IB Foreign and Russian at the same time.

MI Ah, and Russian at the same time?

IB Yes. Because my Russian was sufficiently good, I was born there and I knew what had happened to the Soviet Union. I was ultimately a Russian Jew, which I am indeed. But what I mean is she couldn't but see me in that light. I wasn't a foreigner to her. I was not, that was very clear.

MI So all that is plain but when you stand back from it all now ... [IB Mysterious, because] ... why is it such a resonant encounter for both of you do you think?

IB Well in her case because she was a tremendous mythologiser; her whole life was lived in mythological terms, hence all these references to me there are – these four poems which I was made to read aloud, some lady in Switzerland appearing on some programme about us called 'Cinque' that was entirely about my visit. There's this tremendous figure, 'Guest From the Future' who brings her nothing but disaster. He will not be a dear husband, he will not be a companion, disaster you see, he brings with him and so on. Tremendous, fateful, fatalistic, sinister overtones. Her whole life was lived in some kind of mythological dream. She knew it was, too, but she – er ...

MI She knew it was; that implies a very complicated kind of knowing ...

IB Well it is, it is, she was very sensible, perfectly shrewd, [] realistic and yet somehow worked out her life into some kind of long string of mythological events and images. That's what Poem Without a Hero is about. It's no good saying like Chukovsky, just part of Petersburg, that's all it's about. No, no all these mysterious people come in and out.

MI She had this self mythologising character rather like Tsvetaeva but unlike Tsvetaeva had it under some degree of [IB Control] control.

IB Yes, Tsvetaeva was hysterical, her musings were rather scattered and disrupt in a way. In her case it was rigid control, she was extremely conscious of forms. She was very, very – er – I mean she was – she organised her words, her life in very strict formal way in accordance with the rules and laws in which she believed. [ ] lady she was and wished to remain one. I knew what it was and wished to be so.

MI I wonder how that instantiated itself to you when you were with her, I mean in the way she behaved?

IB Well because I was in the Soviet Union and people I met in Moscow were Soviet citizens of one kind or another. I told you about my Russian accent, did I? I met a girl – I don't think I did – there's a man called Scott who was Times correspondent, he'd been an American communist [ ] and so on, married a simple Russian peasant girl called Masha Scott. By this time he was working for Time, he wasn't communist, nor was she. I talked to her, she moved freely in a foreign colony of course. She said, 'You know, you speak Russian very well, you've no real accent, you talk it very correctly, like one of us in a way. There's something funny about it though, I don't know how to put it.' So I said, 'Well what?' She said, 'Something about your accent' she said. 'I think the only way I can put it is you've got a kind of [Menshevik?] accent.' I knew what that meant; it meant an Intelligentsia accent [?] accent of course. [Russian quote] But I knew what she meant. I did notice, when I came across Akhmatova, this was the old Russian which I was used to and all our friends talked in that way.

MI So part of her response to you was just the language that came out of your mouth?

IB Undoubtedly; and so there was no difficulty, everything went directly, she didn't have to adjust herself. She knew who I was to begin with, when I came to see her a second time and began chatting she had a friend there, the friend was also an Intelligentsia lady who was a Serologist(?) and we talked about Asian universities, Russian universities, it flowed without any let or hindrance and she then realised there was absolutely no obstacle; she could talk to me, she could talk to anybody in Leningrad- and did. But! Because I was what I was, because I came from far away and because I talked to her about my life and described what happened to me, in her verse she says, talks about me smoking thin cigars which had a blue smoke in the cigar and 'he talked of other loves' which was not at all what she wanted. I was then much in love with the lady Patricia, still, and I talked to her about that inevitably without mentioning names. But then ...

MI But how did you reach such a confessional level so quickly?

IB Because she told me, because she began to confess, she began to talk about her life, her childhood in the Crimea and her life in Tashkent, the people she knew, what Gumilev was like, what [?] was like without – and then would read poetry, then would come back to this. Obviously she was in a state of high excitement, well there's community itself and I made her very easy to talk to about that kind of thing, no less than I talk very freely about myself and my life. I'm very unsecretive anyway. But really, but she began asking me questions and I began answering at vast length as I do to you.

MI I detect in your memoir on her side a kind of erotic twinkle in all this, a kind of erotic resonance.

IB On her side, there may be. Everybody in Russia who knows anything about this, is convinced we had an affair. Nothing is less true. I mean, couldn't be less true ...

MI Why are they convinced of that?

IB Because obviously she – because obviously meant something to her, because she was a very amorous lady, she did have all these lovers; she had four husbands – four? [MI Three] Three, three husbands and intermediate characters, whereas this final lover rejected her and so on. And there was Punin who thought she was already divorced the last time, who then mocked her about the famous night spent with me, very disagreeable jokes, told me that in '46. Punin was also sent to Siberia and wrote her a tremendously moving letter about what she had meant to him, there she was his life, about a fortnight before he died, which she [sent?] him – [MI Oh really?] yes, edited, you see? Or she'd signed and sent it, showed it to me, somebody gave it to me.

MI But on your side?

IB From my side I was very excited, deeply moved, in love I was not. Nothing remotely that, I just was tremendously, I mean – turned over, I mean most completely, I thought this was a unique moment, extraordinary night. I thought she was a wonderful person, I was – I mean her poetry was wonderful, in fact she talked wonderfully and I had a sort of experience of being in the presence of a person of genius with whom I developed an unusual, strange intimate relation which was completely outside and different from anything else in my life. The whole thing was like something in a play or a dream, strong dreamlike quality about it.

MI Dreamlike in the sense that it also ...

IB Detached from everything else, not part of reality.

MI But dreamlike in another sense in that it bonded you to that Petersburg culture from which you had been exiled?

IB No, no. I wish I could say that. [MI I'm trying too hard] I wish I could say that. It wouldn't be true. Petersburg meant a lot, the streets meant a lot and of course the building meant a lot; and of course, being there is different from being in Moscow, but not all that part of my early life. It wasn't continuous with something I was torn away from. I didn't feel – in some way, I'd never been anywhere else, in some way I'd returned to some kind of roots – not when I was with her [MI Not?] when I was with her; when I walked the streets, yes. But as a result, the whole thing was out of this world, a bubble, a balloon, you see, not connected with the ordinary chronology. And I walked home at eleven in the morning, I was in a kind of dream, extraordinary, I mean it was half – I could think of nothing else, honestly, for days. That's why I went to see her again. And then, it was just like being completely – er – totally – I don't know what the word is, I was impressed very deeply – er – transformed is what I felt when I was with her, perhaps that's the word. Anyway, ...

MI Did you then – this is a slightly cruel question but [IB Go on] did you then in the course of time begin to revise your impression of that experience?

IB No, no, I didn't revise it but it faded away, I mean it wasn't with me every day of every hour as it had been to begin with, you see?

MI What was it about her that impressed you particularly; was it her voice, her whole [], was it ...?

IB The manner, the dramatic utterance, the sort of queen in exile ...

*Side B [sides A and B are combined in the digital recording]*

IB ... her voice was special as when she talked, even in Oxford. When I would ask a question, she would answer, then she would hang her head in a very, very melancholy and dignified way and

say, 'Da, da, da, Da! da da,' that wasn't natural at all. I mean it was obvious that she was a poet and wished to be a poet, wished to be a queen, tragic queen is what she saw herself as, in all her poetry.

MI But fate confirmed her in that role.

IB Oh yes! She wasn't groundless, she wasn't fantasy but she made something of it, she fitted into it most consciously and somewhat exaggerated it and somewhat framed herself into it.

MI What I'm then surprised at is that you could see somehow behind the mask to a much shrewder ...

IB I couldn't help it because in the course of conversation she made very shock remarks which a tragic queen would not have made.

MI Shock remarks about other people, or envious ones, competitive ones ...?

IB Mm, no, competitive certainly [MI About whom?] and – er – ironical ones. Pasternak, she loved him but she was funny about him.

MI In what ways?

IB Well, I think I told you, where I think – I don't know if I said it in my piece or not. She said, 'You know, he came back from England when he went to Paris to that anti Fascist Congress. And he came, he was terribly pale and worn out, not ill when he came to see me in Leningrad, and he said, "I don't want to leave you, I want to stay here. I want to stay here, I don't feel well, I want to stay here." And then his wife came and collected him and took him away,' she said, collected him. And then she said, 'He only wants – he always said whenever he felt unwell, he said, "I want to see Akhmatova."' When he felt low, depressed, that's when he wanted

to see me.’ All that was said with some irony. And then, that story which I do tell about the fact that when she came to Tashkent and saw him in Peredelkino, he said, ‘Have you arranged some – her collection of poems?’ of which she was ashamed in some way and she said, ‘No.’ The relief she said, was enormous. I realised afterwards. Well, so she talked about him in this rather poor, friendly, affectionate, but nevertheless slightly ironical, comical way. But she talked about other people too in that sort of way.

MI Did she have similar ...?

IB She made jokes, you see, which wasn’t – didn’t fit as the tragic queen. I told you what she said about Chukovsky? [MI No] Well, she didn’t like him, a great friend of his daughter whose existence I didn’t know, I’d never heard of [?] Mandelstam, I’d never heard of Mandelstam’s wife, not a word.

MI Never read any of the poems ...

IB Didn’t know she existed. When would I? It wasn’t possible, he wasn’t much read in the West at that period, you see? Maybe there were a few translations of poems, not much but then she talked to me about him of course. No, no, she didn’t. She began to talking about the insult delivered by [ ] the historian which was the beginning of his misfortunes, because he insulted Tolstoy and Tolstoy avenged himself in some way.

MI Mandelstam slapped Tolstoy’s face.

IB He did. She never explained why. But when I said to her, ‘What happened to him?’ – I didn’t even know – she burst into tears, wouldn’t talk. From her, I didn’t know that he had been killed, that he had been taken to a camp, it was too much. He was terribly in love with her. [MI Oh yes] Even, I dare say, after the marriage to some degree. She was the [ ] I should think to some extent. So was Pasternak, but nothing to the same degree because he was a much

more self protective character and much vainer than Mandelstam, you see?

MI You started off in your Scheherezadean manner to tell me why she didn't like Chukovsky.

IB I did indeed. She said she didn't like him mainly because he was – I think what she didn't like was that he was a Bolshevik in 1905, that sort of thing, left wing. Chukovsky was a bastard, I mean he was illegitimate and he was left wing. He was a most interesting man, came to England three times; first 1901 I think or 2, as a house painter and bought a little penny copy of Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* which he carried in his pocket ever after and went to the poetry book shop, [?] he met [?] who was Oscar Wilde's great friend who made indecent proposals to him in a taxi cab. Second time, 1915 I think as an eminent Russian journalist with somebody else, to report on the British war effort. The Russians stayed with Lord Derby. [chuckles] Very different! [MI Incredible] Third time he got a degree in Oxford. Anyway, she said, 'You know I never really liked him, he was one of those, he was I don't know, he was not really a very nice man; too envious, too double-faced in some ways. Still, he was a very good literary historian, gifted and I mean, he'd suffered. So when we were going to Tashkent together, flew on the same plane or went on the same train, plane I decided to forgive him. I was going to be queenly, I was going to give him a regal pardon,' she said.

MI She said in those words?

IB By herself. [Russian term] So then she said, ' [?] what was the best time in your life. When [ ] most?' He said, "Oh no question, the early twenties, one could do anything, one could write anything, things were free and very exciting." After that, I decided not to forgive him.'



MI Oh really? Because all her best times would have been prior ...?

IB She was no part of the Bolshevik regime.

MI Yes, and all her best times were prior to ...?

IB Prior, during, but she was no part of the Bolshevik regime in the [ ] hundreds. She was insulated, she never made critical remarks about it but she lived this muddled life, cut off. That's what gave her this pride, this queenliness and this extreme sense of alienation and isolation.

MI Did she have things on her conscience? It was sometimes reproached of her that she had written poems in celebration of the Party or of Stalin during the war to save her son.

IB Certainly. She wrote – not during the war, no, never. She wrote poems about Russia, about sort of – er – bombs on London.

MI This rather touching poem ...

IB Well that's all right, oh no, she did that. She wrote poems about suffering Russia called My Country. She said to me, I did quote that, that she would never leave Russia because she wished to die with her country, unlike some people who emigrated to the [ ], about two years, she felt herself to be an intrinsic part – Russia was her and she was Russia, that was part of the tragic queen. But when her son was exiled for the third time which was in the forties, she was told that if she wrote something in honour of Stalin, she might be able to regain him, so it would be easier. So she wrote these two poems to Stalin which she was terribly ashamed of. It did no good; her son did not come back until quite late – '56 I think. And then she met [S?] in Oxford who told her that he was punishing them, and she was furious with him and said, 'If people had pistols pressed against their heads, what they say on such occasions cannot

be regarded as part of their normal speech.’ He said, ‘You wrote it, it’s part of your works and it’ll be printed,’ and he did. She never forgave him and was ashamed, angry and I remember having a letter from Amanda Haight who wrote her biography, lives in Australia, saying couldn’t I join with her in begging that some new edition of her poems which somebody called, something called [H?], some American lady with a German name, was about to publish. I did write and begged them not to, or if they did, put in an appendix to explain in what circumstances it was written. They could have done so had they wished. I’d rather they didn’t write them at all, they’re nothing, they’re very bad poems anyway. Anyway, that preyed on her; and her son nevertheless was still angry because he thought she might have done more for him. He never forgave her and you know, wasn’t allowed to go and see her when she was dying. [MI Oh really?] Nobody is clear what happened. Some people say she wanted to see him but he was kept away by mistake. Some people said he came to the hospital, advanced a certain way and then turned back. He was on bad terms with her because she was too close to Punin’s granddaughter and that part of the family, not to him. It was jealousy, the quarrels about the Will, the archive afterwards.

MI And he was the son by ...?

IB By Gumilev.

MI And bore his name?

IB Oh yes. He may be coming to – er – what’s it called? – to Nottingham, there’s going to be an Akhmatova Festival in July of this year. Think you might go perhaps? I might. If all the eminent Russians they’re asking are going to be there, I will go, [MI Then you’ll go] oh yes, just to meet them. And then they can all come to Oxford to lunch, apparently to see the sacred sights [MI Laughs] on which her feet once walked.

MI All of this hero worship, heroine worship, you regard with a certain ironic detachment?

IB I can't help it, I can't help it, certainly. I mean she would have been extremely pleased. Her son may be coming [ ] I don't know, I'm not expecting him. But anyway, after that nothing happened except that ...

MI Did you have any correspondence with her after you left?

IB Not a word, not a word, no. I thought it wouldn't be – I knew, well immediately after I left I didn't. Then she was denounced, I think later, I think only in '47 maybe, by Zhdanov, she and Pasternak and Zoshchenko who I met and – in the book shop where I talked to the little man who took me to see Akhmatova ...

MI Who was the man ...

IB Who took me? Vladimir Orlov; he may still be alive. He is a critic, he wrote about [?] and Blok, and like all Russians said to me in a lowered voice, 'You know, if you push, Blok was – and the word Blok was the wife, did indeed memoirs which cannot be published; the sexual relationship was very peculiar. His own sexual behaviour can't be real,' he said in a whisper practically because it was all very very prudish. I don't know what's happened to the diaries, maybe the diaries are published. He was a kind of sex maniac in some ways, Blok. And she didn't like Blok, Blok didn't like her, Akhmatova. Nor did Brodsky like him nor did Mandelstam. Pasternak I don't know.

MI You don't correspond – what I'd like to do is I think, now that we've started on Akhmatova, follow the story ...

IB When I came in '56.

MI You were by that time married.

IB I took my – yes. I saw Pasternak. That was the year in which I was married; married in February and went to the Soviet Union and Moscow in August.

MI And what was the occasion – an entirely private visit?

IB I stayed – I knew two Ambassadors. [MI Chip Bohlen?] Chip Bohlen and William Hayter who was the British Ambassador [MI Who were both there] Great friends, they were great friends. With William Hayter I became a friend of him [ ] and Bohlen also, I saw them afterwards and so on. And so I thought, well I've never known two Ambassadors before, why not? So I got the Foreign Office to send me, more or less officially, and I stayed first in the British Embassy, then the American Embassy, and that's where I met – oh well I can tell you about that – where I met the Politburo. And then we went to see, I went to see Pasternak in Moscow in the building – he had a Duplex flat opposite the [?], exactly where he lived. I took my wife, he talked French beautifully, and flirted by nature with all ladies. She was very good looking and this went very well. He charmed, she was charmed, his wife was there who was quite pretty, still, I mean [ ] by then but still good looking. And so that went on, and he said, 'By the way, Anna Andreevna is in Moscow.' I said, 'Oh really?' 'But she can't see you. I have told her you were here, she can't see you because her son has only just arrived and she thinks it's dangerous to see foreigners.' I said, 'I quite understand.' 'But she wouldn't mind talking to you on the telephone.'

[Here the tape ends]

## MI TAPE 26

Conversation date: 29 November 1989

Date transcribed: November 2002

Transcriber: Esther Johnson

Subjects covered:

Russian Liberalism v. Western Liberalism

Slavophiles and Westernisers

Dangers of revolutionary change

Milukov

Chekhov

Turgenev

Herzen

Chicherin

Intellectuals, Church and State

Gorbachev

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*There is a long gap in the middle of side A: continues on side B*

MI ... in the Gorbachev future some – you seem more serene about the future, about society than I am ...

IB The danger of course is that he'll fail, there'll be a putsch by the army or something [ ] I wonder, I wonder? The old Party revives as a relic [ ], I mean tidy up, nobody's going on along similar lines. Well it could happen, it could happen. It will not happen in Eastern Europe even if it happens in Russia; Czechoslovakia is too prosperous for that to happen, so is Hungary. Poland is not but they're so rebellious that it won't happen there either. Russia might subside into some sort of semi dictatorship, it might but I think [ ] will never in our lifetime, not even yours, completely lie under. I don't think the revolution will come back to the old pre Gorbachev system, don't think so for my reasons: because the depths have

been stirred up and I don't know what that will produce, but not that, it would quiet down, it will go on fermenting, the nationalities will go on rebelling, the peasants will go on demanding, the army will go on jostling and so on, and something – what I mean is turmoil will continue for a long time. Think of the War Lords in China, quite a long [ ]. I don't build up hopes of a peaceful democratic Russia but I do – don't think you'll get a freezing up in the end.

MI Is there any danger of Civil war?

IB In '48 there was a freezing up, in the end not quite. What?

MI Can you see a danger of Civil war?

IB Yes that could happen, that could happen – er – not absolutely clear who the sides would be. [MI Yes that's right] I mean who leads the [MI The Whites] who leads the Whites and what do the Whites want? Suppression. [MI Russian term] and so on. Did I tell you about this? [MI Yes] Well the official theory now is that it's the Secret Police who are behind them. Not impossible. [MI Not impossible] No, no I don't think I'm too pessimistic about Russia because I think once you have a long tyranny and then an explosion, the ferment begins; it may be uncomfortable, it may lead to disasters here and there but don't think it will simmer down. I don't think it will even happen in China that, even though there's something that will go stirring it up. At worst, Russia – if suddenly a very powerful body of soldiers and economists come into power, they might become a Japan, a sort of totalitarian capitalist regime, organised, an organised capitalist regime of a very disciplined kind. Not possible in Russia. [MI Laughs] That too I read in an article: [MI Too big] too big and with not enough of a constitutional tradition.

MI Or a tradition of obedience.

IB Well that they do have, that they do have.

MI They have a tradition of obedience but they don't have a tradition of efficiency, so it doesn't ...

IB The important thing about Russia is the main body of nineteenth century revolutionaries were Russians, they were not Germans despite Bismarck or his predecessors, nor were they really French – there were some people in France but they weren't [ ]; the Russian revolutionaries made the revolution in the end; in other words, there's enough romantic indignation in that country and enough readiness to make sacrifices I would think in Russia and in Eastern Europe for me to be reasonably optimistic that they will not sink down into the original slough – not the bog! [MI Not the bog] No, not the bog.

MI Good, good. Your wife said something to me interesting last week and I thought very perceptively, which seems confirmed by this discussion: she said, 'You know, he's so Eastern European. I'm Western European, he's the East,' she said.

IB Correct. Certainly. It means that I have feelings about Russia in about East of the Elbe, not even East of the Rhine I think even in some sense, whereas she's not but I don't like the French, she knows that and that's very bad you see? I don't really – I like the Italians but I couldn't live there, I'm not part of their culture, whereas towards the Germans I have a certain sympathy in spite of everything, I understand German poetry, German literature much better than I – or I like it more, I get more from it than I get from the French; and I get a certain amount from America which is not in that sense, in my wife's sense, all that Western. There are elements in America of East European Jews, and New York of Germans of the Middle West, do you see what I mean? The WASP ascendancy in my time has not been all that ascendant. Well she's right, she's right I mean, what she feels about me is a certain [ ] you see? [MI Laughs] certain White Russian roots are not dead and

when I meet Russians I become excited and interested. This is even true of Latvian Germans and I think I – she's right. And when I'm in Salzburg the food I like to eat is Austro-Hungarian, not French. She's right, I'm not part of some kind of – er – funny, she's right, I'd never thought of that but it's true.

MI That's rather a perceptive thing to say.

IB My political views are terribly Western, I mean my mild Liberalism which I've been hit on the head, this doctrine I've enunciated to you about the fact you never know to what you are appealing; there's a lot of stuff under the surface which you can't possibly guarantee. That was – Crossman said, 'In that case you can't reform it, it's against all reform,' [ ] can't say that and yet I think there is that much to be said in favour of a certain kind of conservatism. But it's true, I think probably I'm affected by the horrors of the Russian revolution but I've not talked about it consciously more than [ ] about the distraction of human life and human decency, about its movement to make everything which is not like it, nicer.

MI Yes, well I'm sure. I'm affected by it in the same way. [IB Surely, surely] Completely affected by it. The dominant event of my life was the Russian revolution. [IB Of course, of course] I have thirty years before I was born ...

IB Why have my parents come to England? I mean yes, though they weren't, I never felt [Yiddish?] in the least, I don't now, I never have. [ ] I do feel but that at least, you see? But the ideals, the ideals which I have come from reading nineteenth century Russian writers and that's a very terrible thing to say.

MI Why terrible?

IB Because it's unwestern. [Laughter] Turgenev or Belinsky, Herzen – er – not Chekhov so much – [MI Why not Chekhov?]



Because he's a little bit too un-idealistic, because he describes life exactly as it is, because he's extremely realistic and deeply pessimistic because it depresses him too much. You can't ...

MI But I do feel as a prose writer he's [IB Marvellous!] absolutely unbelievable.

IB He was a genius no doubt and also he does describe life as it is, the most realistic writer there ever has been is Chekhov, exactly what life is like, when you read him you know this is it, this is it, it corresponds to everything.

MI Terrible. Ward Six is the most depressing – [ ] short story in any language ...

IB If you think of *The Cherry Orchard*, take the plays, *The Cherry Orchard*, *The Three Sisters*, *The Seagull* and all the rest of it – nobody in any of them is any good; some characters are more sympathetic than others, none of them will succeed, can't, well if they do they're awful.

MI And you want – and you feel spiritually you want an escape from that kind of closure, you feel hemmed in by it?

IB I'm sufficiently – mm, yes, I believe there's a possibility for improvement but not the possibility of transformation, that's all.

*(A long gap occurs in the tape towards the end of which ...)*

MI It's November 1989. Isaiah I want to ask you about ...

*Side B [sides A and B are combined in the digital recording]*

MI ... and then I thought well the only person I know in the world who will know with real precision what a Russian Liberal is and more precisely what distinguishes a Russian Liberal of the early

twentieth century particularly from any other kind of liberalism on offer, obviously the British one; if you had to distinguish between Russian Liberalism and European Liberalism and more specifically British Liberalism, what would you say?

IB Conditions are very different in Russia and that you can't quite draw an analogy – you can: you can say for example that Miliukov is the absolute classical Russian liberal. Well when I said this to my friend Leonard Schapiro, he said, 'He opened the door to the revolution, he's a traitor,' roughly speaking. Dr Katkov my Russian friend thought the same but I said, 'Look, Miliukov's ideas were more or less identical with those of Mr Asquith.' [chuckles] No good saying that he was a revolutionary; all right, he wanted the end of the Tsarist regime, that's the general view you see? Our world conditions are different – well, there's something in that, not enough. But Miliukov of course he was a very boring man [chuckles] very boring [MI Famously] famously boring, you see? I can tell you a story which will mean something to you for you have a sensibility of the Russian language. I heard him deliver a lecture, the only time I ever saw him was in Paris, I saw – what was I then? A schoolboy I think, I may have been an undergraduate in my first year and in the Russian paper called [ ] a novelist, he was the editor. It was an excellent paper, the people who wrote for him were liberals, intellectuals, not many advertisements and written for other liberals and intellectuals, therefore it was absolutely clear that everything was disfigured, other papers you see, it was a kind of ,migr, paper of a high intellectual, artistic order and all kinds of interesting people wrote about Stravinsky, about Prokofiev, about Nietzsche, about – you see? Daily paper and yet highbrow, inevitably highbrow which was what the Russian liberals inevitably were. Well he was delivering a lecture and he said, 'There is a movement here in Paris normally called the Eurasian Movement' – you know about that? – 'Now Asiatic Russia is far larger than European Russia, why is it called [ ], why shouldn't it be called [ ].' [Laughter] Because [ ] sounds like [Ethiop?] which is Ethiopian which is the Russian for barbarian, monster. Ethiop is an insult,

Ethiop – it means that sort of, I mean ‘nigger’ not even that cruel African barbarian. Ethiop. The official country was called Abyssinia in those days. However this is just by the way, just about what a bore he was. No, Russian liberalism grew up under very different conditions. English liberalism is a result of Whiggery, roughly speaking, it’s a form of what they believe in, who is a central figure in British liberalism? John Stuart Mill, Morley, Gladstone in a way; what they wanted was or what they believed in, individual liberty, democracy, parliamentary government – er – now this is true roughly of French liberals, too. In Russia everybody, I mean all the freedom seekers were united against the Tsarist regime. Now there are various wings of that but they all grew up with a common enemy; it was not true that English liberals – conservatives of course were the enemy but they weren’t an enemy in that sense, you could be a conservative if you were a liberal like Gladstone, he wasn’t a traitor, it wasn’t a tremendous ideological move of a certain critical kind which would attract indignant cries; it wasn’t like Paul Johnson going right wing [chuckles] if you see what I mean: since in Russia there was a common enemy there was a certain united front of what might be called roughly the Intelligentsia and its followers. You could say that liberals were simply an element in this fan-like structure, particular rib, that particular fan but they were on terms with [people’s?] writers to the right and to the left of them of a fairly – I wouldn’t say noble – but tolerant kind. Now the same is true of liberals elsewhere too but not – the point is nevertheless there are various varieties of it. A Russian liberal, roughly speaking, was a Western liberal, they simply believed in what Western liberals believed and believed to be applicable to Russia, that’s what liberals were now. There were people who did not believe that on both sides; there were so called liberals on the right who are not like this, [?] whose uncle the Soviet Minister for Foreign Affairs; he thought that only by very gradual degrees could Constitutionalism be established in Russia, meanwhile we cling to the Tsar. Well it’s not a liberal point of view. He was regarded as a liberal because he believed in the rule of law, he believed in the Constitution as such,

he believed in progress towards it but in very small steps if you see what I mean, and therefore Herzen, when he went to see him in London said, 'When he came in I felt he was an enemy, I sensed he was an enemy.' And he was an enemy because that sort of thing, Herzen wanted a revolution. Did the liberals want a revolution? Some did, some didn't but the chief difference is that although they were devoted to Western models, which is what qualified, the question of means was an acute one in Russia as it would be under any tyranny and broadly speaking they were divided into those who wanted a revolution and those who thought it could be achieved by easier means. If you took a vote on what's called Russian liberals of the nineteenth century – well take Turgenev, he's the best example, [ ] a liberal [ ], nevertheless he was a gradualist. Why was he a gradualist? Because he thought the revolution would admit the mob and the mob was as grave a danger as the Tsar. In England there was no danger of a mob in that sense, in France more of one but nothing like Russia. So the Russians liberals, roughly, were persons who wanted to destroy the Tsarist regime by parliamentary methods, that's roughly it.

MI To pick you up on something you said earlier though – I'm interested in the relationship between Russian liberals and culture and the life of the mind in what more general terms – I mean I'm interested that they're so high minded for example and that they're so cultured and that they often have an association with, in the twentieth century what could be defined as Modernism.

IB And even now, when you meet even these people from the Soviet Union, I think I told you I thought the Intelligentsia was dead. It's not. It has survived. When you meet them now, they're exactly as they were; they're extremely high minded, they're very cultivated, they know what they're talking – highly sensitive and altogether superior members of a civilised society of a very so to speak – not only civilised but morally decent, and the combination – moral decency was a very central factor in being a liberal because the government was indecent. And so you see more stress was put

on moral purity and decent behaviour than on knowledge, culture, although theoretically knowledge and culture were the things.

MI But I suppose the question I'm raising is why there isn't more philistinism in Russian liberalism because philistinism is a tremendous feature of British liberalism. [IB Sure] I mean Pushkin and poetry and Bentham and some of Mill's, John Stuart Mill's autobiography talking about how completely deaf he was to poetry for example, James Mill rendered him deaf to poetry; and all that strand – and then the kind of Manchester liberalism, very aggressively kind of grab grind in style and in cultural tone – all of that seems missing in the Russian case or is it? I mean ...

IB Well it probably existed all right but we don't know about it because they weren't written about very much. I'm trying to think of the Russian novels, not of the first class none of which a little bit rise above their age, but of second class novels which give you a much more vivid picture of the old society. I think I told you, there's a book by, written by a man who has a pseudonym [Martin Gello?], I think Gello is an eighteenth century play by some violent German storm and stress writer and that's about – I've forgotten the real name – about Russian society in Switzerland in the nineteenth century, revolutionaries. It's badly written, it's not a good novel, it gives you an absolutely authentic – you can feel it's exactly how it was, you see, with a Russian Prince who is on the left if you see what I mean and he's discovered by the people round him and has to admit to being a revolutionary and all these other Russian exiles split into various – no, it doesn't answer your question. I think there was probably philistinism – er – I'm trying to think of Turgenev's novels which is where they would emerge if anywhere – er – no, you don't get pictures of philistine culture – for example EM Forster in I think 'The Celestial Omnibus' has a picture of a man who's read a great deal of poetry and he talks about Keats, he talks about Shelley, and is a howling philistine [ ] for the enemy in that particular story. Well now were there people like that in Russia? Schoolmasters must have been like that, some

schoolmasters must have been like that, there must have been cultivated persons whose opinions were very conventional and were rather shocked by any form of Modernism and so on, that's true but because – I'll tell you, the whole thing arises in the following at least according to me. The Russian Intelligentsia which was what we were talking about is a movement which arose in opposition to ninety five per cent of the population, the State, the State and the peasants and everything else. Because they were not many, because they were persecuted, because there was censorship, because they were attempting to create a new image, a new culture in Russia which was modelled on the West but which nevertheless so to speak was a dangerous enterprise, they became what Annenkov says about them, they became a band of brothers and they felt connected with each other, maybe like the Encyclopaedists in France in the eighteenth century. And the enemy was the Church, Church and State: countries where the Church and State are not enemies don't produce Intelligentsias. In England the Church was not the enemy nor was the State the enemy. It's no good saying that in France – Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church were genuine enemies.

MI And that produces an Intelligentsia.

IB You have to have an enemy: black, reactionary, oppressive, [chuckles] obscurantist, or so conceived you see? It doesn't matter whether it's genuine or not, so conceived. That happens in Spain, in Italy, in France, in Russia, Poland. Nobody can say the Church of England [chuckles] is oppressive. False you see at any time of its existence and nobody can say the British State is something – well under Pitt it provoked people like Paine and Godwin [ ] what happened and they're a kind of pro Intelligentsia: but I don't think Mill was struggling against the terrible conservative Tory Whig governments. It wasn't that; against philistinism, against pressure of unenlightened public opinion, against ignorance, against prejudice, that's rather different if you see what I mean. There weren't massed forces of a dangerous or powerful kind which

could quite literally [ ] jail which they could struggle against, whereas in France of course – you see? Now that's why the Russian – once you get going in that way then you'll begin developing certain qualities: first of all moral courage. If you don't have that, you are not a member, real member of Intelligentsia; secondly rejection of tradition, prejudice, religion probably to some extent [ ] the Church and conventional views which is what the enemy holds. You become embattled, that's what I want to say. And that is why I think these people so to speak were formed what my friend Maurice Bowra once called The Immoral Front. [Laughs] The Immoral Front was a wonderful expression; what he meant by it was Jews, homosexuals, [Laughs] protesters, minorities [MI The excluded] the aggressively excluded, not just the excluded, excluded with – and every time someone like that was elected to a Fellowship or a job, vective of the Immoral Front. The Immoral Front were minorities against whom what is called philistine public opinion could normally be [arraigned?] you see? Bloomsbury was part of Immoral Front, pacifists part of the Immoral Front, anything like that, oppositional groups. Now in Russia this was the united movement; some people were much more milder than others and some were terrified of the revolution and some wanted it, that was the chief dividing line but they were all united in some kind of respect for an ideal personality, the ideal personality being brave, honest, enlightened, in favour of science, in favour of what's called social progress, in favour of equality, in favour of liberty, all that you see? That's the order. Now it just isn't true for free countries, you have to have a despotic country for that to grow, and of course in a sense if you think of the Soviet Union if you take as an example, people under it and even to some extent under Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, there were men purer, people were oppositional, they were purer, nobler and better than similar characters in freer countries, not necessarily more creative. But the Italian films after the Fascist regime was over had a splendid triumph because there was an outburst of cultural talent and a certain kind of moral quality if you see what I mean, integrity and

moral sensitiveness. The same thing is true about these Russians one could meet now.

MI I wonder – one of the, I mean this is a – eternal question and a ...

IB Each does it – let me give you human examples: Michelet is a French liberal. Now he doesn't want the revolution but he's violently anti clerical, he's violently anti English because conservative; he's pro Polish, he's anti Russian, he's pro German rather because of 1848, something of that sort you see, romanticism too, well that's a French liberal and he's a man with whom Herzen can correspond in writing letters and get answers from him.

MI What does the Soviet experience do to that liberal inheritance? Does it simply destroy it without any trace?

IB It hasn't, it hasn't, it just hasn't. I thought it would and I thought it had. It just hasn't done it; the people re-emerged from underneath the ashes, preserved some of the qualities of the old Russian opposition to despotism: Sakharov – he's a genuine Russian liberal, can't call him anything else. He says he's a Bolshevik, Communist. He can say that until the cows come home, he's in fact a liberal; he's the voice of some of these, most of these people who make speeches in the new Soviet Assembly who cry for this and cry for that. It's very difficult to say that they are actually socialists; their main concern is not for the public ownership or the means of production and distribution of [ ], it just isn't.

MI Their concern is with the truth after the lies and ...

IB Individual liberty, truth; truth, individual liberty, the idea of human relations and people.



MI But I'm always struck in the debate between the Slavophiles and the Westernisers that self evidently my heart is with the Westernisers but I've always felt that the Slavophiles had a much truer and more accurate understanding of what Russia was actually like to govern [IB This is so] and that as a consequence it's not at all clear to me what roots of say parliamentarianism or multi Party rule could possibly spring in such soil.

IB It couldn't. It couldn't, it is just – I'll tell you. True and false what you are saying, I mean there's a lot of truth in it but it's not entirely true. Two things I want to say: one about the Slavophiles, one about the possibility of parliamentary rule. There were more – the liberals in 1900 were more numerous, better organised and more influential body than they are now given credit for. The theory is that first Russia is a Tsarist despotism, that it has six months of rather bogus liberty and then come the Bolsheviks. This is not just. The state of mind – I say it's done magically, how can I prove it? – I did know one person who agreed with me and that was Professor [Karpovich?] at Harvard who started life as a Leftist and ended up on the right, he voted for Eisenhower with great enthusiasm; but you see he told me the same, that the number of enlightened and civilised people who wanted a liberal regime of a Western type, Miliukov like persons around 1902,3,4,5,6,7,8, and around that revolution both ways, were far more numerous and placed in far more prominent positions in some ways and could in theory have succeeded in creating something quite decent if they hadn't been destroyed by Lenin.

MI Or by the first world war really.

IB Well the first world war all right but the first world war was just a war but they weren't destroyed themselves, physically, they were there. No Russia was a chaos towards the end of the war but and something drastic probably had to be done. But if these people had not been liquidated which is what happened, they could have created some kind of quasi constitutional Russia say like – what

example can we take of a rather reactionary constitutional, of an imperfect constitutional state? It would not have been as good as Czechoslovakia. [MI [K?]'s Poland] Yes which was better than – it became I mean all right, it was right wing, it was not uncivilised as a country, people weren't suddenly clapped in jail for nothing. Yes, [K?]'s Poland – er – I don't know about Alexander [], I don't know anything about that but probably Hungary in the late twenties of thirties under, even under [?] didn't appear to be a bitter tyranny, I mean it was a one Party State, it was a dictatorship but it preserved – no, I think Russia would have been better than that, it would have been better than that, it could have been – what would the analogy have been? – conservatives wanted it to be like England and liberals wanted it to be like France, that's roughly the position you see? But the point is these people weren't the feeble, if you see what I mean, feckless, feeble intellectual sort of weak intellectuals who couldn't get anything done. Namir would have told you that because he thought 1848 failed because it's called the revolution, intellectuals have called it, that's why []. I think we have a better chance, it could have been. I think ...

MI But isn't the question – my grandfather to the degree that, and his class, couldn't cut the umbilical cord of Russia's obligations to it's Allies in the first world war [IB Certainly true] and Lenin could [IB Nor the liberals] and the liberals couldn't [IB No] and that was as much as anything what did them in? [IB Yes certainly] I mean in other words that kind of Westernising set of commitments [IB I agree, I agree] proved to be fatal.

IB Fatal; quite true, quite true. There was a certain body of the Russian people who did not want to go on fighting clearly and Lenin, by promising peace, [] the revolution. Perfectly true.

MI That's why I feel that the Westernisers are – it's where my heart is – [IB No, no I understand what you mean] but their sense of – they're often tragically out of touch with what was really

happening. [IB This is so] and with what ordinary peasant Russia wanted.

IB This is so. Now let's go back to the Slavophiles, you're perfectly right. The Slavophiles were gentry, well born, there were no lower middle class liberals, people among them. They were far closer to the peasants as such people always are. The [? Squire]archy for better or for worse, understood the feelings of the Yeomen or of the people who lived on their estates better, even if they were nasty to them, than professors. That's clear. It may not be a good thing because it had conservative consequences of a rather undesirable kind, but it is true. And people like Burke who are quite clear that the [Squirearchy?] of England was a much more solid affair, that they commanded the loyalty of the people, unconscious loyalty if you like much more than all these ideologists with their silly ideas who imitated the French, were probably sociologically correct. And that is true of Russia and I'm sure that from the [ ] and the [ ] and so on understood what Russia was like. You see what the people – they didn't like were doctors, dentists, lawyers, [ ]; there's a letter by [?] written in 18 – could have been written late 40's early 50's saying, 'You know our doctors aren't getting through at all; all the trouble with these doctors, all these sort of [ ] they all need Belinsky, they all need the left, our stuff isn't getting through.' Well that was true about the Intelligentsia. You get that mockery of that in Turgenev who because he was attacked for 'Fathers and Children' which was regarded as insufficiently left wing and producing – and Bazarov was regarded as a parody by some of them; then you got frightfully irritated and began to make caricatures of them in for example the – in 'Smoke' and also even in – er – 'Torrents of Spring' and certainly in ['Perjured Soul?'] where you do get – not even in – oh yes even in 'Fathers and Sons' there are liberals; you remember when he goes to see Madame Odintsova with whom he falls in love so unfortunately, there is a couple there of radicals, a man and a woman who are absolute caricatures, they produce mechanical nonsense and are totally despised by the author. Now what does that mean? That means on

the whole that people brought up on the land, the Squires, had a sense of these people as producing mechanical formulae who did not hang on to the reality of Russian life. That's absolutely true. And therefore when you say liberals, I think probably the people who didn't want revolution were wise because the revolution was bound to produce and consequently did produce – but nevertheless the temptation to have a revolution must have been very strong to people who groan and are particularly disagreeable kind of obscurantist despotism. So in the end the people who were wise were moderate liberals of a Turgenev type. Even Herzen didn't want the revolution all that much in the 1860's. There's a correspondence between him and Bakunin which is called 'Letters to an Old Comrade' [ ] took an interest in, in which he says, 'Look it's no good, History has it's own tempo. It's no good trying to be Peter the Great, not now.' Petrograndism he talks about, no good. It's no good being Attila. These things ...

MI That's very prescient stuff.

IB You see – to Bakunin – 'You wanted the whole thing to blow up, you want total destruction, blow up the whole world so to speak and start from fresh, destroy everything, universities, institutions, no good. All that will happen if you do that is more or less that the new institutions will be built out of the stones of the old prisons,' or something or other like that. 'Unless you educate, unless you get a [ ], unless you get a body of men who are capable of doing it, the idea of blowing things up simply means that the old philistinism will enter the new.' And that's exactly what happened under the Bolsheviki in a way, quite apart from the horrors. The tastes of the Bolshevik leaders were lower middle class, they were not, like Trotsky they were not highbrow revolutionary for about two years in a way and then it all subsided into Lenin-like tastes. Lenin was a straight middle class philistine in his literary and artistic tastes and that's not irrelevant.

MI No absolutely, it's crucial.

IB You see and I think he was in a way you see probably closer to the Russians in some ways – he might have been, he will now learn, he had no Russian blood in him. [MI His mother was a German] Well, I was travelling in the Soviet Union – did I not tell you this story? Well [MI Yes you ...] I did. I was going in a plane from Leningrad to Moscow and I parked myself next to a man – I don't know who he was – and we got into amiable conversation. He turned out to be an electronic expert in Leningrad, he hated Moscow, he thought he was a composer, he couldn't get any commissions – no, his son was, his daughter taught the piano and was rather ill paid, complained. Well that was very human and ordinary. Then he asked me where I came from, I said I came from England. That was all right, where in England? Oxford, yes, yes, he had some relations in Oxford. We went on like this. The next time you come, do ring me up and so on [ ] something was wrong, it couldn't happen before. But I said to him at this point, 'They say things are easier now, is that true?' 'Yes.' So I said, 'In what way, for example?' in a rather provocative manner. He said, 'I can tell you. This is the first year in which we are allowed to know Lenin's mother's name [ ].' What is it? 'Blank,' he said. I said, 'Well there are some fascist beasts in New York [chuckles] that had already written this.' Mr [Schoob?], David Schoob wrote a book in which – but the argument was, was she German, Volga German or was she a baptised Jew from Odessa? There's some disagreement about that. He said, 'No, what we've been told we know is the truth – half German, half Swedish.' Possible? Very hard to think of Swedes on the Volga, but it was highly possible. And I said, 'But Lenin, her husband was all right, a [Volgarov?], he was obviously Russian.' 'Russian? Pure [Kalmac?]' You see? So much for the [ ]. Anyway but you're right, I think there was a genuine lack of realism but inevitably so because it's entirely true about the French revolutionaries or true about the Encyclopaedists, the kind of France which Voltaire wanted or which Condorcet wanted was not feasible in the conditions of the eighteenth or even the early nineteenth century.

MI They're simply ignoring backwardness?

IB They're ignoring the – no, they're not ignoring backwardness, they're ignoring the effectiveness of methods of curing it, they're ignoring how this backwardness must be made to come to an end, they think you can wave a wand of some sort: change the law, change the educational system and you get a new society in quite a short time. You cure these evils by appealing to reason, everybody has some reason in them. I mean all right, you may have to have a dictatorship of an enlightened kind but in ten, twenty years time, you see? Saint-Simon thought if you give all power to the bankers and to poets and to mathematicians and to scientists, you get a rational society. It ignores a very – well I'll tell you what the truth about [ ] is, it's something I've always been beaten on the head with for dealing and that is this, it's one of my basic doctrines of a deeply reactionary kind which I'm about to acquaint you with.

MI I'm ready now, sitting back in my chair in a horrified and stunned silence.

IB Please look a little pale, expect the worst. Normally reformers want to reform abuses which they recognise to be abuses and those who want to reform by radical means wish to use some kind of strong measures for changing the nature of society because they think that what is wrong with it is A, B and C. The French revolutionaries tried it and everybody in the nineteenth century afterwards engaged in asking, 'Why did the revolution go wrong?' Some people say because the mob thought [ ], why should they have killed Lavoissier? or the poet [?]. It wasn't necessary to kill all these scientists and kill a lot of worthy – just because the French revolution doesn't need scientists, the people doesn't need, etc. Others said they didn't pay attention to economics, that's Marx [ ]; other people said because they wandered from the word of God, they split off [ ] couldn't understand the nature, slow nature of tradition like Burke. This all may be true but what it leads to – and

there is some truth in this – when you upheave a society what you upheave is not merely the bit you can see, which is the top of the iceberg, but also the bottom of it, and that produces consequences which you can't predict, and could not have predicted. But you must realise that if you use violent methods the result will almost invariably be totally different from what you intend. Why? Because too much is unknown – not because you are wrong. The abuses are abuses, the tyranny is a tyranny, it should be stopped, it can be stopped; but if the measures are too violent – that's to say, if you believe in the possibility of a total or even three-quarters transformation of society by organised means, if need be by violence, you will find that you've heaved up forces of whose existence you were probably not aware, which will in some way frustrate your designs and produce something maybe better than there was before, but not what you wanted. That's what the French revolution did. I mean the peasants probably were better off at the end of it, somewhat. The bourgeoisie certainly was but people were not freer, they weren't happier in 1820 than they were in 1760, that can't be said, exploitation went on on a big scale, what Marx was against.

MI And as Talleyrand said, [*Que la vie est belle ... mon revolution?*?]

IB No what he said was, no, no. [*Qui a n'as pas connu. N'as pas connu le douceur de vivre.*?] Or something like that [ ] he did say that, yes. But the point is not only that, that in a sense you see you can only see the top bit and therefore all radical movements are in danger of producing a new kind of horror or anyway new kind of disasters. And that's why liberalism is the doctrine which I support. Now what do I mean? I once had to argue this against Hobsbawm of all places before I knew him and I thought very little of him. Now I can tell you – er – that is this: because you can't predict the future because we don't know enough, because sociology and psychology are not sciences with serious predictive powers, unlike chemistry, we try and cure the problems of the present, we try and

answer them. But these answers will produce problems of their own which we cannot foretell and therefore any attempt – that’s the point, that’s what is called the final solution, something which really will produce a society in which all the shortcomings will be overcome and in which the rational pattern of life can be set up on granite foundations for ever – must be wrong because the mere solution of a problem destroys it in the end because it raises problems to which there is not a solution. That’s not the reason for not solving the problem but it is reason for saying that we should look again. That promised too much. I mean in a way it’s what Popper says, I mean it is a kind of social engineering, it’s little more than that because there are terrible abuses which perhaps need some kind of strong means to stop them. If you have slavery, you have to stop that; if you have drug abuse, something has to be done; if you have a Pol Pot, something has to be done to stop him you see? And that may entail a certain amount of physical force. But if you think that after that so to speak, you’ll live happily forever, it’s always false and liberalism is only true because it doesn’t offer, it doesn’t pretend to offer final solutions. It assumes that what you have to have is a method of solving problems by discussion, by compromise, by looking at all the sides of the case, by some kind of variety of views which must be, mustn’t be suppressed; the only way which at any rate you alleviate the present discontents; any attempt totally to crush them which is very tempting to the young will invariably lead to intolerable results.

MI But is that a justification of liberalism as a doctrine or is it merely a justification of caution in politics? Because there are many forms of liberalism in politics which envisage quite radical reform and are willing therefore to live with the unintended consequences of that radical reform.

IB If the evils which they are trying to reform are bad enough, then you risk it and that’s the difference with the conservatives. The conservatives then thought don’t touch anything at all, they say be careful, don’t touch, anything may happen, for God’s sake keep the



show on the road. [chuckles] Don't shake the – er – [MI Apple cart] apple cart, yes, don't rock the boat. That's no good. That's no good because it perpetuates evils. So when there is an evil you must try and cure it but in the course of curing it keep a weather eye open to what other evils this may produce which again you must work against. So what my doctrine is – the uninspiring doctrine as you know of the uneasy equilibrium which its concepts kept from [] which is always collapsing but you must never be substituted for something rigid. Conservatives don't want equilibrium, they want [MI Order] yes, something much stronger, they want some kind of solid guarantee of not much change. I don't believe in that; constant pottering, constant adjustment ...

MI Do you think there's any future for that kind of liberalism in Russia?

IB Well apart from what's happened in the last three months how could one deny what can and cannot happen? No, I think it's possible even in Russia, even in Russia. After the experience of Communism the desire for a decent form of life is stronger than it's ever been in a wider swathe of people. But of course you're right, our journalists never talk about how the peasants or workers – God knows what they feel, God knows what they want; they want food, they want stockings you see?

MI I've always thought that the greatest chance for liberalism, what distinguishes the end of the century from the beginning of the century is – that liberals at the beginning of the century had to face constant competition from an untried [Milenarian?] alternative which has now been tried with catastrophic consequences [IB Yes] and because that happened that alternative has foreclosed; and in a sense the other alternative – a kind of [Caeserism?] of various kinds of the Stalinist kind has been foreclosed. There isn't anything else.

IB Yes there is. There's an attempt to create a minimally decent society, not maximum, minimally; you want to work out what you regard as the thing philosophically, what you regard as minimal conditions for a decent society. That can be cautiously but firmly pressed forward. I mean I think Attlee's Welfare State was that. [MI Yes, minimal decency] Well a little more even than that but still – I mean the fact that the present conservative government is against it because they think that presumably it doesn't make enough money, I don't know or this country will not economically or politically have enough power if it goes on doing it, is mistaken. I think that was the best period of English social life which I know in my lifetime – immediate post war period which was not revolution, it wasn't flagrant socialism, it was a mixed economy, it was roughly what Healey was in favour of, a right wing Labour Party was in power roughly, it's what disappointed the Labour left, it's what disappointed the conservatives, some kind of [p?kellism] it was called, remember, not like under Gaitskell. That's a minimally decent society. It exists in Sweden, it probably exists in Denmark and Norway, it exists in New Zealand, it might even exist in Australia for all I know – or Canada probably is all right, it's a decent society. Even America with all its horrors, it's got frightful things in it, still there's a greater chance of it becoming that than of other countries. It does not exist in certain countries, it doesn't exist in Italy where the [ ] are poor and the rich are too rich; it doesn't exist in ...

MI It certainly doesn't exist in the Soviet Union and I can't help feeling that the history is so ...

*End of tape*

## MI TAPE 27

Conversation date: 18 May 1989

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*Side A*

IB ...muscle. [MI Ooh!] And that...

MI And that hurts where? Down in your shoulder blade area?

IB There, in the right shoulder.

MI How did you do that?

IB Therefore, any movement you see – it's not quite frozen shoulder which is worse but it's on the way to it. And so, in Oxford nothing happened, everybody knew what to do. But I did get an x-ray and I got injections which helped for two days, but not longer than two, and various exercises which I do. [MI Oh dear!] Then I asked her how long it would last. A year and a half? She said yes. Aline had that for a year.

MI How did you do it, Isaiah?

IB I think by catching – getting onto a moving 'bus.

MI Oh, really, and you pulled the..?

IB Yes, yes. I also went into a tube to which the doors slammed together and that hit me on the shoulder, too, couldn't have done it much good. That I've concealed from my wife. At first, I couldn't because she was in the 'bus and it was stationery – I mean it was caught in a traffic jam. I was just about to get on when it suddenly took – moved two yards or whatever it was. I could have walked,

and I hoisted myself and it'll take a year and half, quite long; and that means one gets used to it. That's the part of one's permanent condition. Then I'm suffering from – you asked me questions – I'm suffering from dermatitis, which is a rough, raw skin on my behind, which is why I'm sitting on an air cushion.

MI [*laughing*] Oh really? Yes, you are in a particularly exalted and grand position and now I see why. Are you sore?

IB Yes. [MI Both spots] Heaven knows why. No spots but nobody can tell why. He thinks because I wear nylon shorts, which I sometimes do. Could be. That's the only possible motive. 'What kind of lavatory paper do you use?' [MI Yes, oh God!]

MI Well, that's not very agreeable at all.

IB Those two things certainly. Now, what more can I complain to you about? Well, I have something to do with my back, which gives pain to my left hip, something's wrong there, too. I mean, some muscle which pinches a nerve...

MI You don't look particularly drawn, you look rather...

IB No, no, no, [MI You look rather well] it doesn't do that to one. These external aches and pains, anything which draws one is something along one's stomach or head or some internal thing; or blood.

MI You don't have any portion of the grand old Russian hypochondria, do you? My father has vast, [IB Enormously] ancestral hypochondria.

IB No, no, no, I don't think – no, no. From time to time, either I have a temperature or I don't. If I have a fever, I go to bed immediately. If I have no fever, I behave as if I was completely well; absence of rigid criteria is the only thing to follow. I must

have criteria, so however tired and ill one feels, I ignore it. As soon as fever begins, [*clap*].

MI Yes. Tell me the story of your throat, though, now that we've got on to illness.

IB It happened very suddenly. I went to – I had a cold, cough, thing on my chest. I've had it before; I've had pneumonia twice. Well, I went to New York with this as I had to go to Princeton, I think...

MI When are – what year are we talking?

IB About seven years ago, or what? '79? It might have been '82 or 3. And I had this awful cold, and I lost my voice. That's happened before, too. Extinction de voix [MI *laughs*] in French, I love that.

MI Yes, it's much grander in French.

IB It sounds better. That's what Aline calls it, extinction de voix. That was all right. Then I went to Princeton and did my stuff on some visiting committee at the Institute; and I really couldn't talk very well and I felt it was something – I said, 'I've got a terrible programme, so sorry. I'm afraid something's gone wrong with my throat.' I just croaked away, so it was all right. And then when I came back to New York, I thought I'd better go and have it looked at because it didn't go away. My voice didn't come back. So I went to a man, recommended by the Countess of Dudley of course, and the man put me against an x-ray machine. I saw my own throat on a sort of mirror-like thing. One sees it. Things go through it and you see it, see inside. He said, 'Nothing wrong with your voice except your right vocal chord's paralysed, that's all,' said the man and then sent me to somebody in England who said, 'Normally these things come back but I suppose over a certain age, they don't.' Mine didn't and then there was a great business about should one put some stuff, some – what's it called? – putty-like

stuff which stimulates. [ ] thought not. And nothing happened at all. I was from time to time looked at, it was perfectly still, it doesn't move. But the other side's – I mean the other chord has come to its aid, so it isn't too bad. It was very bad to start with.

MI You really couldn't speak or you couldn't..?

IB I could speak but people couldn't quite understand. I had to talk in a low voice and it was a kind of croak.

MI How long did that go on?

IB For about three or four months. But of course it was a great relief; no more lectures, no more after dinner speeches, and this year, unfortunately, I have to do these things. I wish I could get up and say [*gasp*]. [MI *laughs*] If one realises that if I can talk to them, I can talk to – slightly more loudly perhaps.

MI So your bluff has been called?

IB Well, unfortunately I've got to make three speeches.

MI Do you feel a physical strain when you project?

IB Nothing at all. No, the only thing – no, I don't. Yes, it gets tired in the evenings, because weak if I talk too much, it does get weak and it gets weak and rather feeble and starts to give. It doesn't actually become completely extinct. Once or twice it has rather frightened me, but that was just an ordinary cold which came back. No, and I spit a lot and I accumulate saliva and my nose runs and all kinds of things like that happen. So you really have before you a broken old invalid, no question of that. [MI *laughs*] What do you expect at my age? But considering all that, the spirit moves on.

MI Yes, oh the spirit definitely moves on. You seem to me in extraordinarily good shape after – despite this catalogue.

IB But it is true. What else did I complain of? My eyes, yes. I've got to wear these special spectacles, otherwise I can't – everything becomes double, even treble. [MI Really?] That's to do with the sockets which can't focus, not to the eyes, but these things, something to do with the gland.

MI Oh really? Now, what do you use the little..?

IB They're to read. [MI Just to read] If I take this off, I see two of you.

MI Oh really? [laughing] How disagreeable! How disagreeable. Is one over here?

IB No, one overlaps with the other at the moment.

MI Oh God! How terrible! Put your glasses back on, quickly. I can't have this.

IB That's right. I see two lots of hands and [MI Dreadful] it's rather as if one isn't focusing, something's gone wrong with the...

MI And you put those glasses, the other glasses, on top of your..?

IB On top of, yes, because I can't read through these, but if I do this, then it works. It's all prismatic in some way.

MI Right. Can you read for a long time now?

IB Oh, yes, yes, yes, that's what it is.

MI So there we are. OK. That's the medical story. I wanted to talk a little – I think we've not talked about Wolfson and Oxford and all that stuff. If you can stand it, I would like to know about Wolfson.

IB I'll tell you that story, how it happened, yes. It's open, your machine, is it? [MI It is open] And my medical symptoms are all recorded?

MI They're all there in perpetuity, yes. Your secret is safe with me.

IB [*chuckles*] I'll tell you how that happened. Let me begin chronologically, which is not the order in which the important events it all seems. In about 1964, Isaac Wolfson suddenly asked Aline and me to dinner. I'd never met him in my life, I don't know why I was asked, but I thought as he was this notorious Jewish millionaire, quite famous and [ ], I thought pure curiosity drove us to dinner.

MI Parenthetically, can you tell me what he made his money in?

IB Shops. Great Universal Stores. GUS. There are shares called Gus's. He owns Waring and Gillow; he owns that shop in Regent Street, the clothes shop, quite well known; he owns Scotch House; he owns any number of things, a lot of property by now. It's a vast department store – not a department store, it's a whatnot. What is it called, sales [ ], catalogues to order things, and he does own something like seven famous big shops as well that he's taken over. What is the shop called, down Regent Street? By Mackintoshes, there.

MI Burberry's.

IB Burberry's. He owns that. And so on, and things in Scotland. He comes from Glasgow, son of a costermonger.

MI And Jaeger. Do you mean Jaeger?

IB I don't know whether he owns Jaeger or not. Burberrys is what he owns. He may own Jaeger for all I know but I don't [ ].



MI Anyway, you're invited to dinner, you accept.

IB Out of curiosity. Who else is at dinner? The late Sir Philip de Zelueta, whose memorial service is on Monday; his wife; the man called Boyd Hart, a banker and cousin of Herbert Hart, an awful man; his wife; the head of the English Speaking Union, some kind of Air Vice Marshall, an awful man; and finally, Leonard Wolfson and his wife. Well, we arrive at his house in Portland Place where they all live, and it's all right and he's very jolly and has a certain amount of charm. She's very nice, Edith, his wife, and I sit next to – I don't know whom. I think I sit next to Leonard. I don't think I sat next to a woman, I don't think there were enough of them. During dinner I noticed only one thing, which is that the head of the English Speaking Union was obviously there for a purpose because he kept saying, 'Now Isaac, don't forget about my son-in-law. Hutchinson is the name. You did say you would give him a job.' Every half-hour, he went back to his son-in-law called Hutchinson, that's entirely what – but openly and shamelessly, rich Jew. Oh, it was too awful. Zelueta was there because it was obvious that Isaac wanted a peerage and I think negotiations were going on. He was then Macmillan's Principle Private Secretary. Macmillan said, 'You know, Isaac Wolfson, he's a very generous man and all that. He gave us that marvellous Goya, *The Duke of Wellington*, in the National Gallery. That fool has directly got it stolen, but still [ ] matter, there's something for him. Before we looked up the record, it just wasn't possible,' he said. He was a Baronet by then, [ ]. There are obviously crimes which baronetcy is all right, a peerage ain't. I think he was involved in the famous scandal called the Stanley case which you wouldn't know about I should think. His brother, I think, was probably involved in some kind of arson, probably in Glasgow. That kind of insurance scandal, that sort of thing that I would guess. I don't know.

MI Having checked him out.

IB Something. I don't know, I may be wrong, it may be unjust, but something went wrong, certainly.

MI Well if they were, they were being especially scrupulous about him because they weren't very scrupulous about Lord Gannex and various other of Wilson's crooks.

IB But that's Wilson. This was Macmillan. Under Wilson, he did get his peerage finally – no, I think Mrs Thatcher – but Leonard is innocent. He'd done nothing wrong. Anyway I sat next to Leonard, who seemed to be rather pathetic: quite nice, polite, low voice, but rather crushed by his father and in some way, rather anxious to please and pale and under the weather. I rather took to him, I thought poor boy. He talked about Gibbon, all of which he'd read, and Macaulay. He'd read Wheeler Bennett; he'd read Namier, all of which touched me rather; self-educated son. He'd obviously never been to proper university [ ]. Anyhow I chatted to him, I thought he was quite nice, in some vague way, about half an hour, that was all right. Then when everybody got up, Isaac took Lady de Zelucta and me into another room and read us all the speeches he made on getting honorary degrees, to show what a good speechwriter he had as he put it. And then told me, 'You know, when I was poor, I took my wife dancing at the Dorchester. I said to her, "Edith, if ever we make any money, I'll build you a room just like this one." And I have.' His dining room was a small replica [MI Oh no!] of the pre war Dorchester Hotel – no, it's sweet. But he said, 'It's no good, my children want it changed now, it's going on, we're all [ ]. It won't last. I'm very sorry, they just won't have it you know.' [MI *laughing* That's wonderful] All right. That was that. I quite enjoyed dinner...

MI What impression did he make on you?

IB He was a – who, Isaac? [MI Isaac Wolfson] Jolly, full of vitality, quite amusing, optimistic, [MI Small?] small, fat but full of beans and energy and smiling all the time, endless jokes and quite a lot of

benevolence. In fact, I can tell you, he's probably an awful crook but he has charm and a promise by him is the beginning of the negotiation, counts for nothing. [MI Really?] Leonard is the exact opposite; promises nothing, gloomy, impatient, awful to his Staff, disagreeable, charmless, dry, highly intelligent, and if he makes a promise, keeps it. Absolutely dependable, totally, and I mean – but the great motto of the family is, 'Nothing on Paper.' [MI *laughs*] One of Isaac's great gifts is being able to read letters upside down. He does quite well looking in people's desks. He told me he had that gift. He comes from Glasgow and has a Scotch accent; his son, no. His son is deeply patriotic, violently conservative, a great admirer of Enoch Powell, Macmillan even much more, Wheeler Bennett, Rab Butler, anyone you like in the Conservative Party. Socialism is just silly, they're just idiots. Some of them are nasty, some of them are nice but they're all very stupid. Liberals don't exist. Jewish, not very Zionist. Father is totally pious, gets up at six in the morning, yes, and lays phylacteries and prays for three-quarters of an hour. Having done that, he cheats the world. I mean it's like a medieval merchant; fourteen Ave Maria's and four hundred Pater Nosters and he'll do anything. But he's totally devoted. I mean super pious and superstitious and he worships the memory of his father and all that. Leonard is sort of betwixt and between, not really but occasionally pretends to be. But anyway it's a long story. Now, go back. After that, nothing happened for a year. Then I have to go back to Oxford. It's a long story, mind you. In Oxford before the war there were fellows of colleges who governed these colleges, and there were lecturers who were not fellows. I think you must have had that in Cambridge. [MI Yes] Two classes of citizens. Now, who were the non-fellows? Professors, you couldn't avoid because it goes with a chair in Oxford automatically and you go to them. But readers, lecturers, scientists, they never come here, they don't see undergraduates, they're very boring, why give it to them?

MI Why give them fellowships?

IB Yes. They're not very good company and anyhow they're are in the labs all day. Small subjects which we don't teach; Persian, Chinese, linguistics, some modern languages, yes, mostly not. Now, who were the fellows? Classics, history, law, the Chaplain, the Bursar. What other subjects did you teach? [MI Philosophy] Philosophy, yes, philosophy. These are big subjects, Greats, large subjects and basic to Oxford. Politics? Not necessarily. Economics, not many, some yes, some not. That's the pre war situation. I became a lecturer in New College for two months before I went to All Souls. I might or might not have been a better fellow. As I told you, the two most miserable years – two months of my life. I told you that. [MI Yes, absolutely] Might have, Senior Common Room. Positive boredom. The philistinism was – could be cut with a knife. Then they rebelled during the war, these pariahs, and they began to agitate to a better state. Well, nothing happened. At the end of the war, the brain drain began, mainly of scientists, and they managed to elect one of themselves to the [H?] Council, which was like the Senate. That frightened me the most because there was a now tribune of the people making thunderous speeches saying, if nothing was done for them, half would go to America and half would block legislation here in the popular assembly, in the congregation, like the Irish Party. Well, all right. So then, then they sent round somebody around the colleges[ ] to give a few more fellowships to people. They managed to settle about thirty people like that, leaving two hundred and fifty in the camps. Then – All Souls took two – then – they did quite well and one came very badly on the other – then, the university finally had to take a step. The thing was getting out of hand of these who were agitating and blocking legislation and making speeches on irrelevant subjects and generally misbehaving, particularly under their leader in council. Then they did what universities do under the influence of fear: they passed a bill as it were, they passed a statute by which all persons more than five years standing, in either academically or in certain categories, plus Bodleian and I don't know, other things like that, other libraries and so on, were entitled to a fellowship of a college, entitled. No college was obliged to give

them one. So they had passport but no visa. They then said, 'What is a college? A college is an association of persons who recognise each other as fellows.' It doesn't follow that you have to have money or a building or – just a college, [ ] college. Well, they did get it and they gave it two buildings. One was a rectory called St Cross, which had a little bit of dry rot in it, in Holywell Street – no, not in Holywell, no – yes, Holywell, next to Holywell Manor; and the other was a place called Court Place in Iffley, near Oxford, and they gave them, I think, nine thousand pounds for ten years, nine thousand pounds a year. And the richer colleges were asked to give them more, so they – the richer colleges, which were seven or so, gave them another ten thousand pounds, maybe twenty. But even with twenty-nine thousand pounds, very difficult to build a college. So that was that. I vaguely heard all about this, but I didn't go into it, it was only very marginal, what was going on in All Souls, it didn't reach us much. Then I went to Princeton to teach at the university and suddenly got a telegram from the Vice Chancellor, who was my colleague [Weir? Weare?] whom I knew very well, saying would I like to be the President of Iffley College? I had no idea what it was, I'd been professor for nine years, but I said to Aline, 'Maybe I don't know what it is, but don't let's say no. It might be rather fun. Marvellous not to have to lecture again.' And I felt certain guilt about my chair because I felt I ought to be telling them truths about politics. All I did was tell them the history of political doctrines, of course, because that's what I was interested in. So I didn't do what Plamenatz or somebody, saying, 'This is right and this is wrong, there are fourteen arguments, and these utilitarians and there are three arguments for this and that,' or 'Communism is this or whatever it is,' you see? So I felt I wasn't really being a proper professor of political theory, mainly the history of political ideas, which was not quite right, perhaps. Anyway, we came back...

MI Are you serious about that, just parenthetically?

IB Oh yes, yes. I vaguely felt that a professor of political theory ought to take a great interest in political theory. Well, I'd written about it. *Two Concepts of Liberty* is certainly about political theory [ ] not; and even *Historical Inevitability* has implications of this kind, at least for Marxism or Catholicism. But, I felt no, these were hungry sheep, they wanted to be told about the modern world in some way; racism, nationalism, and I could do it but I wouldn't enjoy it, it isn't the thing my heart was in. I loved knowing about other people's views and what they were like and how they resembled other things and one thing. But the idea of having a doctrine of my own, which I felt like Cole I ought to have – I did not preach exactly, but at least have some basic doctrine from which the rest followed whether they noticed it or not. No, I never did that. I was fundamentally uninterested in politics and still am. I'm not interested in political life in this country or in France or in Italy. America, yes because I was there during the war and the whole thing is much more amusing and much more personal.

MI But a person might be interested in politics and not interested in political theory.

IB Yes, but if he's interested in political theory, he ought to be interested in politics.

MI And you were interested in neither.

IB Well, political theory up to a point, as you know, you see? I mean, when I lecture on Hobbes or Locke, it wasn't historical. I mean it was an analysis of doctrines all right and objections to them and what other people said and so on. But fundamentally I felt one ought to be involved, yes, one ought to be involved in political thought oneself. One ought to think in terms of political theory. One ought to be dedicated to it as a subject. I wasn't. I was more interested in Belinsky, Herzen or John Stuart Mill or somebody. But not really. I don't know. I have a feeling that professors of political theory ought to be – the centre of their lives ought to be

political problems but it wasn't so with me. I didn't really think, what is wrong with the conservatives, am I a socialist? Am I liberal, am I conservative? Why not? It didn't bother me. And...

MI Can you explain why politics touched you [IB So little?] rather little? Is it that your temperament is artistic in some way?

IB No, I think it's artistic. I think it's interest in ideas and mainly – I like intellectuals more than I like artists. I don't really like the society of painters. I know some, extremely nice, but fundamentally I like people of ideas; and an intellectual is somebody who wants ideas to be as interesting as possible, not as true as possible, but as interesting as possible. And an aesthete is somebody who wants things to be as beautiful as possible. I don't wish for that particularly. So that fundamentally, I like people who have ideas, have interesting ideas, written ideas, amusing ideas, ideas, thoughts, attitudes, views about people, anything you like. I mean some sense of the society in which they live and thoughts about – but not poetry and so on. I happen to adore music, but that's just by the way.

MI Yes, that's what I'm led to, some sense that your passion for music affected quite a lot of other things, or more accurately was part of the general temperament which...

IB Probably. But I think I'm mainly interested in music because I'm not really very aware of the external world. I'm not very visual. I'm auditory. I'm not what's called – what I think is called – I'm an [auromensch?] not an [argomensch?] and therefore music is not only that, but every other art has something to do with the outside world. Painting is something to do with colours and shapes and lines; architecture obviously. Even literature has something to do with – or poetry has to do with words, which we use as long as we talk of people's characters which we meet, not interested in nature but anyhow, three dimensional objects in space. Music has to do with none of these things. It's not founded on [ ] of bird song.

Maybe rhythm or something, but that isn't something which is given in nature, maybe the rhythm of our blood or something. But it doesn't come from the eyes of the external world, whether people or things.

MI We must talk about music...

IB Anyway, yes all right, well I can talk about that...

MI Back to Iffley College.

IB Well, I suddenly thought, well, we'll have a look. I then thought, well now, what is the position? So I wrote a letter to the Vice Chancellor saying, what is all this about? He then said, well there are now two colleges of entitled persons: one is called Iffley, the other is called St Cross: and St Cross has a – the head of the college will get a salary, the rest don't because they're all university officials, otherwise they wouldn't need the fellowship. There'd be no need to pay them because they're paid already. Still, they need something, some centre to which to move. And then he said that – I must get the chronology right. [*pause*] The main thing which they needed was money. I think I must have known that on the telephone somehow, and I thought, well – no, I think I must have gone home, I must have been interviewed by these people. I thought they were awfully nice, not very – the only thing which was common to them was that they were despised and maltreated by the rest; though why I should become the head of a college obviously, any common quality is to be victims. But when I met them, I found there was at least one fellow of the Royal Society there; there were some quite eminent scientists, they were quite nice people. They were rather dim but there wasn't a nasty man among them. They were perfectly amiable and I thought, well I'll see. So I went back to America, to complete Princeton really, and then I thought, well money is what they need, now who do I know who has money? I said to them, 'You've been cheated. It's a fraud the university has perpetrated. You are not a college, you never will



be.’ They said, ‘We agree.’ I said, ‘How much money do you think you need?’ They said, ‘Two million pounds,’ I think. I said, ‘That’s about right. You’ll need a building and you need graduate students, and if you don’t have students, you’ll have a cheap All Souls, which is no good, you can’t do that.’

[*Phone rings*] That’ll be Rene, I think. This is a party in Oxford.

[Pause in tape]

MI Right, let’s resume.

IB Nobody’s refused, it’s disastrous. [MI *laughs*] And Jenkins of course has asked smart persons who mean nothing to me. Why should Mrs Bruce come?

MI That’s disagreeable, yes.

IB You know her? Quite nice, perfectly irrelevant. Now, yes all right. I then went back to America and I thought, well, the Ford Foundation. Here is McGeorge Bundy, he’s just become head of it, I’ll date it for you. I don’t think I want to ask him for money because it’s embarrassing. I know him, before Harvard, still, if he’d rather not, I won’t. So I went to Joe Alsop to find out whether he’d like to talk about money to me, because if not, if he’d rather not, I’d be glad not to. To my extreme surprise, he expressed a wish to do so. So I went to Washington and talked to him and he said, ‘You know, there’s a brain drain going on, we don’t want England to continue with it, of scientists, because they’re badly treated in Oxford, as they must be if the story is true. They will be. The Cavendish Laboratory has asked for money. If the British government can’t keep the Cavendish Laboratory going, there’s no point in giving them any money at all. This is shameful. But do you think you’ll get some scientists to stay?’ I said, ‘Well, yes, the whole point is to make their lives socially better. They feel pariahs.’ ‘In that case, I think there’s a chance,’ he said, ‘I’ll talk to my people,’ etc. About two days later – in his first year as head of the

foundation, he can do what he likes – he said, ‘Yes. We can’t do it alone. We want to have a matching grant in England, otherwise England must do something, can’t just create a college.’ So I said, ‘I understand that.’ Then I thought about Wolfson. I asked him to lunch at the Ritz. He came, I put this to him, and I said, ‘Look, people – if you want your name immortalised, a college will do it better than a hospital. A ward in a hospital is very nice and lots of other things you do, all these doctors you have there; but Wolfson College really will be forever. And the Ford Foundation is willing to do it if you someone like you are.’ That tickled him immensely. The idea of partners with Ford excited him. Right? So he went back and talked to his circle of people. Meanwhile, that was that, so I rested the case. On his Board, just put on, was my old friend Lord Zuckerman. Lord Zuckerman’s hatred of Oxford is pathological for a perfectly good reason. He’s not a nice man anyway and not a very good scientist anyway, and he’s a great bicyclist, you know what that is? It’s a German joke: bicyclist people bend their head for those above and kick those below. [MI *laughs*] It’s an image, it’s a very good image. He’s a tremendous cyclist; he sucks off the Royal Family no end. I mean, Prince Philip, Mountbatten are great friends, you see? Anyone below – he’s horrible to people below him. Well, I can go on at length about him, but anyway Leonard has put him on to his Foundation, Lord Zuckerman, famous scientist, sucked up to him like anything. And he came to Oxford in the thirties, was never made a fellow of a college. By sheer dint of quantity of articles, he’s indefatigable, he’s got enormous vitality. At the end of a long day in the labs, he would still go to a nightclub for three or four hours. He produced four hundred articles on apes, monkeys, whatever it was, and got into the Royal Society, that he did, quite a general push. No scientist thinks he’s first class that I have spoken to. But no fellowship. He was a member of the common room at Christ Church; he used to play bridge with the Dean, very popular, very amusing. No question of a studentship as they’re called there, so gradually became embittered. Then came the war. He married the daughter of Lord Reading. Still nothing. And then came the war and he knew about the effect of blast on

monkeys, therefore on human beings, got attached to the Air Force – Tedder, with whom he got on very well. From Tedder he graduated to Mountbatten; Mountbatten to Prince Philip. He became a tremendous backroom boy of a very powerful kind, chairman of various committees. Frightfully good with the government and common things; was [an] extremely able operator. Came back to Oxford quite famous. No fellowship, nothing at all, remained a lecturer, not even a reader because as a professor of anatomy, a man called – I've forgotten his name, who was a near Communist. So he couldn't be regarded as having prejudice either politically or racially, because he was left wing in theory – just said he wasn't good enough, didn't care about the Royal Society, perfectly honest man. What was his name? Doesn't matter. And so grinding his teeth, he went as professor to Birmingham, consequently hatred of Oxford, with some reason. I mean he's not a first class scientist but good enough to be a fellow of a college. There is no doubt that he was treated unjustly, and so were they all; but he being ambitious, thin-skinned and ruthless – and he hates Cambridge, too, by osmosis. So he went to Birmingham, all right. He was hardly there; he was in every government committee until he finally got the Ministry of Supply as the chief scientist who was sacked by Healey. But that's a long story. And he got on to the Ford Foundation and at a certain point, he said to me he wanted to talk to me about this plan. So we dined at the Athanaeum. He was quite nice, quite amiable. He doesn't like me much at all, nor I him, though we're old friends.

MI Why doesn't he like you?

IB Envy. I'm a thinker, philosopher. Here I am at All Souls, it's the grandest of all colleges, fellowship; and he's hardworking, a lot of results, a lot of hard work, no fellowship. What do I do? I just talk a lot. I don't publish books, who am I? What does this mean? Mainly that, and somehow – I don't know – mainly that, a certain [ ], and I symbolised being sort of at ease in Zion. I was there in Oxford, rolling about in this comfortable college, and here was he,

a pariah, you see? A second class citizen. How could this be? I think that's why his reason – but he's a generous envious man. Anyway I don't think likes many people. But he only likes the important. I couldn't do much for him. He was a friend of Freddie Ayer but I'll tell you what sort of man he is and you'll see what kind of man he is and then I'll rest my case. He said to me, 'You and I and Freddie Ayer started about even, didn't we, in the sort of early thirties? Freddie hasn't made it, has he?' That's all. I just rest my case.

MI Well, that's a terrible remark and a stupid remark.

IB No, but you see what I mean? It's enough to describe him to you. [MI I see exactly] I mean quite apart from being stupid, it indicates the sort of sense of jealousy, rating people. Now, what happened then was that Solly, of course without telling me, was bitterly against this. No money for Oxford and...

MI Did you sense that was the game?

IB No. No, no. I sensed he wasn't too friendly. He said, 'Look, let's begin again, what about meeting in – next week. I'll bring my medical colleague here along.' He came without any medical colleagues, so I felt, well, I didn't understand. He didn't say a word about it to me.

MI But he was screaming behind your back.

IB I don't know why he wanted – 'Would you like to be Vice Chancellor?' That he could manage, get me made Vice Chancellor of some provincial university by some committee which appointed those people. I didn't, no, not in the least. 'Why do you want to waste your time in Oxford?' and so on. Part of that. Then Leonard rang up and said, 'You know, it's very difficult. Solly is dead against it and without converting people, I don't know what quite to do.' And then he said, 'I'll send my man,' who was General Redman, Governor of Gibraltar, Deputy of CIGS, an old fashioned British

General, very typical of Leonard and Isaac to employ him. 'I'll send him to see some people.' He went to see Crossland, the Minister of Education. Crossland said, 'Well, I'm not a politician, I'm not an educationalist. Ridiculous to give it to Oxford. It's over-capitalised. Why not Herriot Watt? Why not Hull?' It was just an ordinary Labour Party line. So the General didn't believe there were such universities, [MI *laughs*] came back and reported that the Minister was not in favour, but I think Solly did talk to him in fact. Then Leonard said, 'Things are going very badly.' I didn't quite know what to do. Leonard, vaguely was not very keen on it but it tickled him. He rather liked the idea but with Solly ramping about...

MI Yes, he was backing off.

IB Well he said, 'You know the Minister of Education is against it.' He said, 'Can we have lunch?' All right. He said, 'Well you know, it's very difficult. I've asked my colleagues. They're not all hostile but there's no great enthusiasm.' I said, 'All right. Call it a day. I don't mind. I'll just go on being a professor in All Souls. I don't mind a bit.' He then said, 'Can you get me a letter from the Prime Minister to trump these people?' you see, because what he wanted was a peerage of course. What he didn't want to do was something which would annoy the government in some way, and if Crossland was against it...

MI He wouldn't get it.

IB Well, that's how I interpreted it. I said, 'No, I can't. I don't know Wilson, I'm not going to go to him, it's no use. Let's stop the whole thing, I mean I don't really mind, rather a pity but it's all right.' Then I met Weidenfeld about two days later. He said, 'I hear you're trying to get a college. Quite a challenge.' I said, 'Yes, but it's not going very well because Solly Zuckerman is making trouble and has told various people to stop it,' by then [ ]. And he said, 'Do you know -?' I said, 'What I need is a letter from Wilson.' He said, 'Well

of course I know Wilson quite well. Tell me, do you know Balogh?' I said, 'Yes, as a matter of fact, nobody likes him but I do, we're friends.' He thinks that I got him a Readership. I didn't actually but I didn't vote against him, but he's grateful. 'Yes, we're on very good terms.' 'Well Wilson adores him, he's an absolute mascot in 10 Downing Street. Shall I talk to him about it?' I said, 'Yes, very nice.' I then got a telephone call from Balogh who said, [*imitating his accent*] 'I hear you want to create a new college in Oxford?' I said, 'Yes.' 'And you want money from Mr Wolfson?' I said, 'Yes.' 'I think the Prime Minister would not be against it. Can I talk to Mr Wolfson?' And Balogh, you see, after being a fellow of Balliol, tried to become a fellow of Nuffield and was rejected, and so he thought well, new college and so I said certainly. I then got a call from Wolfson, saying, 'A man called Balogh called. What did you want to put a Hungarian Communist on to me for?' [MI *laughs*] I said, 'Look, he's a great friend of Wilson's. If you want something out of Wilson, he can do it. If you'd rather not, not.' 'Oh, I didn't know that.' Balogh then rang me up and said, [*imitates again*] 'You're friend, Mr Wolfson, was extremely rude to me.' [MI *laughs*] At this point, I told the only lie in the whole business. I said, 'He didn't know it was you, he thought it was Beloff.' [MI *laughs again*] I thought it was rather brilliant.

MI It *was* good!

IB [*laughing*] So then, he rang him back and this time, Wolfson was very polite and Isaac and he asked me to go and see them. He came in a government chauffeured car, I think he was a Minister, I don't think he was a peer yet, I mean Balogh. And Isaac said, 'Now Mr Balogh, if you are doing this, you have the money to do it, would you do it?' 'Yes I would.' 'Why?' 'Because the new college will combine quality with democracy.' More brilliant than I could have done! Splendid. They were very taken with that. So, things were on again. Then Wilson didn't write but he telephoned and said he was in favour.

MI He telephoned Wolfson?

IB Mm, did something anyhow to indicate, and when I met him sometime afterwards, said, 'You realise a lot of arm twisting has been done on your behalf in 10 Downing Street?' [*laughs*] So then...

MI So Balogh had done his job?

IB So then, nothing happened for a bit and then Bundy telephoned me and he said he was coming to England on such and such and the thing was on, could we meet some sort of Wolfson? All right. We made an arrangement. Then I went to Israel and got pneumonia and came back and had double pneumonia and was recovering and had a frightful rash all over me for some reason; and then I was rung up by Leonard who said there's a meeting of the Board with Bundy there, would I come? [MI Oh my God!] And Aline said, 'Look, it's now or never, if you don't go, you won't get it. I don't know how much you want it.' I wasn't ill. By this time, I didn't know – I was in bed but I felt lousy. I said, 'All right, I'll go.' I went, it was the third time [ ] and I was a client. Nobody much was there; Cockroft was there, was on the Board; Solly and his secretary; the General; Bundy; me; Wolfson, Leonard. No Isaac. This was talked about and Solly made his speech and said, 'Oxford is the graveyard of science. By the time they go to Oxford they cease to be productive.' This was too much, even for Cockroft. He said, 'Solly, you go too far...

*Side B*

IB Well, then you see, Solly delivered his broadsides, saying it was a very bad idea and a total waste of money.

MI Did you say anything?

IB Not a word. Not a word. I wasn't asked and for once, silence was golden. Then – I was very ill anyhow. 'I'm not against Isaiah

in any way,' said Solly. 'Well, we've had our ups and downs,' I said. 'Yes we have, but still.' At that point, Bundy made a speech, much more eloquent, coherent than Solly, and not a good speaker on committees, and Leonard was very taken with that. My good luck was this: that Bundy was at Bermuda when that famous Macmillan/Kennedy meeting occurred. Solly was the scientific adviser to Macmillan and Jerry Weisner was to [Kennedy], and Bundy was convinced that Solly, who had pulled the wool over the eyes of the American scientists; was a crook, you see? Pure accident. So the entire story is a story of coincidences, and so then he made this speech in favour and at that point, Leonard became more and more excited. Cockroft said nothing. And he said, 'Mr Bundy, are you in favour of this?' Bundy said, 'Yes, I am.' 'Are you strongly in favour of it?' 'Yes I am.' 'So am I,' said Leonard. At that point, Solly said, 'I'm very sorry, I've got to go to another meeting, I'm not staying here a moment.' 'Oh Solly, don't go away, come back, we want to ask...' 'No, no, no, if you're going to talk that way...' He went away twirling his moustachio like a villain in a melodrama. Then I knew I'd won and that was the end of that, you see? And that's how it happened. And then of course, St Antony's became very angry because they'd been fishing for money for years from the Ford Foundation and got nothing from them, and how could I, in half an hour? So I had to – I remember asking Franks what I ought to do about that. They said, 'No, no, you can't do anything. You do your thing and they'll do theirs. You can't help them.' But I did. I did write a letter to Bundy saying it's awkward for me to accept this large sum if something's not done for my brother Deakin. So they got quite a lot of money, too, that was all right, thought that I was a benefactor in fact. That's why I'm an honorary fellow, though they might not know it. Well, the next thing was that Bundy came to Oxford, had dinner with us, cased the joint, then he sent the late President of Yale – what's the name of the man who died – the American Ambassador. [MI I know who you mean] And a friend of his, a very nice businessman whose name I've forgotten, from the Middle West, on the Ford Foundation, still alive. And they came to breakfast, asked



questions. He went away; and then the Wolfson Foundation met and they decided to do it and that was rather a triumphant day. And they agreed to build the building; Ford Foundation wanted to pay for the upkeep, they weren't interested in building, so that's how it went through and two months I think it all took.

MI Oh my God. How much money was involved?

IB I'll tell you. They produced I think about four million dollars, two million dollars each. It was the biggest sum – biggest grant ever made by Ford anywhere in England, certainly, in Europe I think. The nice businessman said to the Ford Foundation, 'If this college isn't a success, I shan't be able to bear it.' [*laughter*] Anyway, that's the story of the foundation of Wolfson, financially speaking.

MI What then happened?

IB What then happened was that as Wolfson was entirely created in order to mop up all the pariahs that the other colleges wouldn't have – you see, the argument against them was exactly like those of any country against immigration. The High Table is too short, the Common Room is too – there's not quite room enough, they're not interested in undergraduates [MI They'll lower the tone] they didn't quite say that but they're not [ ], they're not to be received as one of us, they'll never be there, they won't know anything about the college business, they won't be the sort of people who really take an interest in college life. Every college behaves exactly like a country under the threat of immigration, some better than others. Pressure was put upon them to take people, and I should think about thirty – Wolfson was created out of half the relics. The relics were about eighty and then we had forty, or thirty-five, some of who were all right. There was not a nasty man among them, that was the least – there were awful people, yes, but nasty ones not. Well, the difficulty was that there was no way of stopping them becoming two hundred strong because if they had to, by law, to absorb anybody who came, they were created through wastepaper

baskets. Wastepaper baskets can't refuse waste, so I had to do something in order to prevent this because I thought the college can't exist unless it has a limited size. So that was very difficult and then elaborate intrigues went on with the university, and the only card I could play was that the donors had been told that there would not be an indefinite entrance, otherwise they wouldn't have given them the money. Maybe we had no right to tell them that, but we did tell them that; and if the rest insisted on the pound of flesh, then the whole thing would be over. No money; would they be willing to turn down three million pounds? Even at that time, it was a large sum of money, twenty years ago. [MI Yes, indeed] So then there was a lot of to-ing and fro-ing a lot of debate in congregation about not doing it. The college was so terrified that it would force people onto them. But in the end, they agreed to limit the numbers to sixty or something, which I agreed to. But it was very painful. A lot of very elaborate, sort of manoeuvre had to occur. Then...

MI Did you enjoy manoeuvring? Did you discover that you were a good politician?

IB I didn't enjoy manoeuvring very much. Vice Chancellor Weir, who was the President of the chairman of a thing called the Conference of Colleges, which talked about these matters, did it himself, really. But I mean – yes, I enjoyed talking to him and the registrar. I never made speeches. I didn't have to because I didn't have to go and lobby people. But it sort of hung on a sort of thread; sometimes it went forward, sometimes backwards and finally established. And we had a little body of Trustees for Wolfson while it was not independent and to see it through, it wasn't a free college; on the other hand, it didn't have to give money to the university, no taxation. We were rich slaves and not poor freed men. And then the question arose of making it rather better, and I managed to lure various people into Wolfson who would not normally have come, like Gombrich's son, who is now Professor of Sanskrit, being a man of sort of liberal views. Didn't mind. He

was, I don't know, a lecturer in some – I don't know what – in Hindu or something. I got a rather good Italian scholar. I got a man called Tinbergen, the ethologist, who was one of the hostages to the Nazis in Holland. His wife told me how they were all prepared to commit suicide if anything happened to him. Then, a year later, reappeared in Oxford, could he look at the list? No, he rang me up and he said, 'I've got to go to Magdalen, frightful bore, old Sinclair has asked me three times so I suppose I have to go. Could I come and have a drink with you?' I said, 'Yes.' 'If you're free, could I come to tea?' 'Yes' 'I'm afraid, maybe it's too much to ask, would you be free for lunch?' 'Yes.' He came to Headington, we had lunch. He said could he look at the list of Wolfson? I produced the college list. He said he'd never seen so many distinguished names in his life, it was marvellous, a most brilliant election. I knew perfectly well that – they were nice people and four or five of them were all right, maybe six or seven. The rest were decent hacks, or not even that. I mean, they were university lecturers, there were minor pathologists and microbiologists; you can imagine that sort of thing. All right, except for the distinguished people I managed to lure in, with two or three others of the same sort. And then he said, 'There is only one man who is absolutely no good. That's Tinbergen, he's useless.' [MI *laughs*] He had a Nobel Prize among other things. But still, obviously there was some disagreement among them, they didn't get on. I said, 'Oh well, that's a pity, can't think why he got a Nobel Prize, I know nothing about these things.' [MI *laughs*] I then asked myself why did he do this? What did he want? I realised that he had to be re-elected to the foundation, the original term had come to an end. He thought then he might consult me, he thought I might remember about the harm he'd done before, because I might – he never did consult me. I didn't do anything. I mean he *was* re-elected. Now of course, after twenty-five years, Leonard Wolfson says he's the most awful man he knows; a bully, cheat, horrible man, because when he finally got rid of him, he was certain to sue, in the law court, yes. I don't know what the legal position of Trustees is of charitable foundations or their dismissal, but [*laughs*]

that didn't please [ ] much. Anyhow, I said I couldn't understand why he kept him there for so long altogether. Now he absolutely hates him [MI Hm, interesting] [ ] from that point of view. He liked him because he was a dog that bit everyone else; he did his homework and could always manage to put in a poisoned dart. And yet Leonard wanted somebody like that. He didn't want everything to go through, he wanted one watchdog who said nasty things, cleared matters up. The other man was Jack Plum, who he now hates, too. Plum sucked up to him like anything and talked to him about stocks and shares and asked him to dinners, champagne lunches in Cambridge and all that. Now, can't mention his name because he was offering to sue with Solly. [MI Oh no] They both said – extraordinary. Aren't some people odd, as somebody once said to me? The last time someone said it to me, it was Lady Salisbury. She came to see her brother-in-law, David Cecil, and she said to me afterwards, 'You know, I've been to see David and Rachel. They've only got two bathrooms in the house. Aren't some people odd?' [MI *laughs*] It's a classical...

MI That's a great remark. [*pause*] Why, to get back to basics, did you want to be President of..?

IB Because I thought it was a new – partly to get away from being a professor, I can't deny; partly because I hated All Souls [MI Really?] for one reason only, by then. I've come round to it; but because they turned down a man called [Kreisel?]. It was a crisis, which I can tell you about. We gave kind of research fellowships then, as we do now but not so many. And there was a man who applied for one of the – I was on the Research Fellowships Committee – called George Kreisel. Kreisel was something of a mathematical logician of very great powers. He was a pupil of Wittgenstein for a year and Wittgenstein admired him. They never quarrelled, he thought he was very clever. He is a logician, he is, up to a point, a philosopher, an extremely clever and amusing man; but rude, snobbish; Viennese in short, but of very superior quality. The Research Fellowships Committee said he was easily top,

there's no doubt about his merits. Unfortunately, the man who was closest to him, which was Dummett, the logician, got him to All Souls for a term as a visitor, in the course of which he managed to be very rude to various people. So when we had our meeting in college, the technique, which has now been altered I think, was that you first of all had to vote for each person, each of the candidates in turn, and they each had to get a simple majority, more than one. That created the short list. It was like saying if he was the only candidate, would you take him? That's how these majorities – nobody else in the field. Then when each of you has voted, someone's knocked out at that stage. Then you had the proper debate between those who were left and then two thirds was needed. At that point, we had a letter from Professor [Selznik?]. He couldn't explain why but Kreisel had done things which couldn't be put on paper, it was so awful. It turned out that he had been rude to the servants, I think, in the end. And other people said he was difficult man and in some ways rather, not very – and people said he was very clever no doubt but some people say that he's rather – not very polite to people, looks down on them if they're not as clever as he is. After which we had a vote, and he didn't even get a simple majority, and that I thought was disgraceful. We exist for this purpose. Here was a man [?], heads above anyone, still is, you see? He became professor in the Sorbonne, Princeton, everywhere. I mean, California, I mean he's now back in Oxford at Magdalen [ ]. And I thought they were no good. I didn't want to be in a college which turned down people of great – enormous intellectual merit...

MI Simply because they were difficult.

IB Yes, but not even all that difficult, just because people hinted that some people didn't like them and so on, and so all the London voters felt, oh well, socially a rather difficult man, no, no. You see? Really outrageous it was. There was a protest meeting – none of us could do anything – to consider whether it all had to be changed and so on. And so I was browned off in a serious way, and

Sparrow, my friend, didn't see anything was wrong at all, couldn't understand why anyone minded. He liked Kreisel; it didn't seem to matter in the least. I can't remember whom we elected. We had quite a good archaeologist who was what's her name's husband, the woman who writes detective stories, Agatha Christie's husband we elected. Nobody had anything against him. And...

MI So you're browned off with All Souls, you didn't want to teach any more?

IB I first thought I'd go – I didn't want to teach and I thought the fellows were too awful. I thought if they do that. The philistinism was too great.

MI I'm still a bit puzzled as why you were attracted to what was a kind of fund raising business, a political business and a...

IB No, the fund raising was done, that was done in two months and finished. No more, After that, I wasn't interested. But I thought to build a new college, build a building, [MI That would be rather exciting] rather fun, and a brand new set of fellows, quite a new body of persons; and above all to have people who are – three quarters of them were scientists, and to do something for science in Oxford, I thought, was quite a good thing to do, which I was perfectly willing to help with. And the remainder were sort of Persian, Chinese, quite interesting subjects, Hebrew – I don't know, odd characters, but brilliant rather, only rather marginal, which suited me very well. I thought they were interesting people. Then I had to have somebody who had to manage it. Well, there were both [], a widow, a wife, my old colleague Margaret Dick who was a very pretty woman and needed something to do. And I got hold of a man called Brock, who was a senior tutor of Corpus I couldn't think why he would accept but he did. And we worked very well together; extremely charming, good historian. Proper don, I mean, been there for years and he was willing to come as number two, and we had very great fun. It was very enjoyable.

MI The whole time was a good experience?

IB Well, there were occasional moments, not really. We had a thing called the college meeting. That meant that everybody – the servants, graduate students, anybody connected. They had no executive powers but they could make recommendations on the governing body. The governing body always accepted it, it went perfectly smoothly. During the riots, during great student unrest, they were completely [*clap*] free from it. Their chief leader was at Wolfson. He said as far as this college was concerned, he had nothing against it if everyone like that. Not a criticism. We were the ideal democratic college. Imagine it, under me of all people! Surprising, I think.

MI Yes, interesting. Tell me a little about the building of the building.

IB Well, we had an architectural committee, and then we had of course the Trustees, in which Leonard had to sit on in London; and we took a ‘bus, and the committee went up and down England looking at new academic buildings to choose an architect. They were of a hideousness which cannot be exaggerated; and it’s not just money. It needn’t be ugly, so we were rather depressed. Then we invited six or seven of the best-known architects. Philip Johnson and Pei and all these people, longed to do it. I was in America at the time. Pei asked me to an enormous Chinese lunch, dinner; and Philip Johnson was terribly keen on Oxford, new building you see? But I realised that the Wolfson Foundation wasn’t prepared for foreigners. They cost too much money, they’d have to open a separate office. It’s not on, and patriotism, too, chauvinism almost, by Leonard. Then, we simply chose an architect who had done the St John’s building in Cambridge – you know, the new building – who somebody called Cripps had paid for, because it’s the least ugly building. You know it? [MI Yes] Quite nice. That was Powell and Moya. We did very well with

them. The building is not marvellous but it's very un-ugly. You've never seen Wolfson, have you? [MI I've been once] It's all right. [MI Yes, fine] And you see then we had these new institutions and people could be married and live on the spot, residential college for graduates; and with the result, it was given a tremendous success from the word go, particularly after me, I mean, under my two successors. The point is that the application list for junior research fellowships, which carry no emoluments, are longer than that for St Antonys or Nuffield which are – Nuffield is rich. St Antonys has some money.

MI Well, people just liked the community and they liked...

IB They liked this, yes. No high table, none of that old thing, wives and children about the place and they liked that. It is perfectly cosy. And just academically – it's got no particular quality, flavour, it isn't dedicated to any particular subject, but still, made like a college. People liked being there very much.

MI You're obviously proud of that?

IB Well, it's come out like that. I never thought it would. It's come out like that.

MI How long did you run it?

IB From 1966 – 7, officially, that's when I ceased to be professor. [MI 1967] 1967 to 1975, '76, because Harry Fisher was elected after me, wanted to come rather earlier than the summer. He asked me to leave about a term earlier. '75 I think I left. I think, '66 to '75, something like that, I mean '66 approximately, '66 to '75. No, I'm wrong. '67 to '78, much more like that – no, not '78, I'm wrong, '75; I'm wandering, I'm thinking of the British Academy, which was '74 to '78. That's a separate story. [MI Well, we'll get to that one, too] No, no, we were in Princeton in '65 I think. I think the



whole thing was over in two months, so it must have been from '66 to '75. That'd be right, nine years.

MI Final question: was – two final questions...

IB Aline adored it. [MI Did she?] Absolutely adored it. A boat was called after her. She used to go – there were wives there, you see if the wives were there she felt it was all right, yes. She liked the wives and she played some part and she organised parties and did the art part, art committee.

MI Yes, so it was good? [IB Very good indeed] and made a quite marked contrast with...

IB She wanted me to stay longer. I could have stayed another year or two if I'd wanted to, I think.

MI It made a contrast with All Souls from her point of view?

IB Total, total. When I take her to dinner at All Souls, which I do very occasionally, she finds it hideously boring. And so it is. [MI *laughs*] It's not the college I was elected to, that I can tell you. It really is not. Intellectually, too.

MI When did the decline begin?

IB In the sixties, under John Sparrow, who couldn't care less about the intellectual quality of the college, not in the least. He liked clever people. He was an extremely clever man himself, high intellectual standards, but the sort of things in history and philosophy, couldn't care less, he just wanted people he rather liked who amused him or could be good company for him and so on. Oh, he let it down to a very major degree.

MI have you had it out with him, about that?

IB No. No, I never have. He wouldn't understand what I meant. He complained to me non-stop, while he was Warden, about how awful they were, the fellows, how little he wanted it. He wanted it more than anything else in his life. Some time, I ought to tell you the story of the election of the Warden of All Souls. It was quite a business. I was a candidate for about a fortnight. [MI Yes, when?] We didn't elect Sparrow then. We elected a man called Hubert Henderson who died about six months later. He was an economist and had been editor of a thing called *The Nation*, a Cambridge economist, father of Nico Henderson.

MI When is – when are we..? [IB '51] And you were a candidate for two weeks? Why do you drop out?

IB Because it was quite clear that I wasn't going to be elected. The Warden was Sumner. Died rather suddenly in hospital, so an election had to occur, followed as quickly. There were about seven candidates then. And the way in which it's done is, you have a straw – you have all various people who nominate possible Wardens. And I was at that meeting and I don't know who I nominated I think. I think probably Sparrow probably. And then, anyone who gets more than seven or eight votes, is then sent away, because they then become candidates and they don't vote again. Then you have a series of meetings to discuss them. Well, I got about seven votes on that occasion, I was extremely surprised, gratified, but I thought all right, I'm no worse than the others; some got ten, some got eleven. Then in the end, after about two weeks, I realised I couldn't conceivably get a majority for every possible reason. [MI Why?] Didn't have the gravitas which they wanted; some degree of concealed anti-Semitism among the older fellows [MI Really?] It isn't that they didn't like *me* but they didn't want a Jew. Some people like Bob Brand or – I don't know – Geoffrey Dawson – was he there? He might have been dead by then, I don't know, maybe he was there – Lionel Curtis, these people were enough. They wanted a Church of England – some solid and dignified figure, if you see what I mean? I was obviously a foreigner, really,

in a sense. No, my voters were the riff raff. In the ultimate – and also I thought it was mad, I mean I could never be Warden, it would be awful if I was. I didn't really want it. I didn't know how I would run it and I thought I'd quarrel with them because they always quarrel among themselves. In the end, there was a man called Beckett, who was the legal adviser to the Foreign Office, who got a large number of votes on the straw vote. But I got fourteen, which wasn't bad; Sparrow got four on that occasion; Beckett got about twenty-seven; Geoffrey Faber, the publisher, got about ten; and Rowse wasn't there. He was Sub-Warden but he came back too late to be a candidate himself. And somebody else I think was a possible candidate, too, Weir, got about... And Henderson of course, who got it in the end, he had about five votes, and when I saw I had twelve and I needed thirty or something, it was absurd. But so is the [ ] too. I thought I'd better come in and try and stop Rowse's candidate, who was this awful man – not awful but meaningless man called Beckett, who was a sort of pro-Franco lawyer from the Foreign Office, [MI *laughs*] if you see what I mean. I think that was the idea.

MI You wanted to stop Beckett and Rowse?

IB Well, Rowse had just come back and Beckett was his candidate, he thought he'd run him. And so I pitched in and I forced all my supporters, all these – God knows – Raymond Carr, Plamenatz, I mean all the riff raff of that time, all the junior fellows. Not Wilberforce perhaps but – '51, I think very nearly all of that lot who did vote for me. I was the most extremely – I was what the left could put up with – I was the least right wing figure that the left could take although I wasn't exactly left by then myself. But I was tolerable. The rest were not. And then after much to-ing and fro-ing, we elected the very honourable figure of Henderson, who then died of a heart attack very soon after. And then Sparrow versus Rowse. I was in America by then. I didn't come back to vote.

MI And Sparrow had it for twenty..?

IB From '52 to '77.

MI Who's had it since?

IB A man called Neill, Pat Neill, he's a lawyer, very nice. Not exactly first rate but just, honest, decent. I voted against him. I voted for Bernard Williams, who was crushed by his non-election.

MI Why did he not make it, do you think?

IB Because nobody over fifty, except me, voted for him, for precisely the reason which I wouldn't have been made one; because he was a philosopher, because he wore a duffel coat...

MI And because he lacked gravitas.

IB The entire body of people over fifty were a majority. Some junior fellows, probably too, were probably jealous and so on, voted for Neill who was neither here nor there; nice man but essentially a kind of compromise candidate. No, he was told by Parfitt, who was his friend in All Souls, that he was home and dry [MI Oh, God!] Oh, yes, he calculated the votes. Some people did vote for Neill who promised to vote for Bernard, they didn't want to vote for somebody else – Michael Howard or – I can't think of another rival [] – who were the chief rivals? – can't quite remember – before Neill was in the field.

MI Well, it doesn't matter.

IB No, it doesn't. I'm trying to think who would even have been a candidate at that stage. But he was very, very upset by it.

MI When did you begin to play less and less – when did you begin to – when did your role in All Souls begin to fall off?

IB When I went to Wolfson. I ceased to be a fellow automatically. I didn't go there very much. I came back when I was re-elected, which was 1970 I think, round about then. I was sixty-nine [] – no, '77, about two years later. Twelve years ago.

MI But do you play an active role in the college now? Do you sit on committees?

IB More so – well, I sit on only one committee, I'm now eighty so that you see I gradually – I sit on every committee twice, so gradually I drop off and I can't be put on a third time. Nobody can, by the rules. So I am on one committee only. But still, I can make speeches at college meetings. I don't do it very often but in the case of the famous Parfitt scandal...

M What's the Parfitt scandal?

IB Parfitt is a philosopher who was turned down for a permanent fellowship, for a research fellowship on the first occasion, but unfortunately I wasn't there because I went to get a degree at Harvard. But I blame myself because I was the only one to get a campaign to get him back; and we won. I made a very tear-jerking speech.

MI Yes. He's a very brilliant man.

IB Very. And I made a speech for him and more or less said that there was absolutely no possible reason not to elect him – nobody would be able to face anybody with it or after I'd unburdened my speech. And that produced tremendous upheaval, with the result of having been defeated – well he was given two years – but after that, he was going to be dropped. And we were defeated by something like thirty to fifteen. He had now won by fifty to four. And that was my last public appearance. Next Saturday, I have to go – Saturday week, when I come back from America – [MI

Really?] Yes, about how to spend our money. We're getting quite a lot of money, it's rather a good investment, what to do with it. I won't get my wish.

MI What do you want to have?

IB To elect very clever people, even if they cost more than our senior research fellows, from time to time, if they're very, very, very good. Just to lure them there, otherwise the level of the college won't go up. I can't say that, you see, but the fellows – it's the last thing people want is to have people who are conspicuously clever than themselves. It was to a separate top category. They all say, 'Well, we've got senior research fellows, which is quite good enough. People won't come for that. We don't want them.' That'll be the line. I would say real stars of a rare kind, you see? Not many. Four or five would be enough, over ten years.

MI Yes, I'm sure that's a good idea.

IB Well, nothing else will ever save that college. Like College de France.

MI They're a kind of fertilising influence; it would have a great effect on them.

IB At the moment, it's rather dim.

MI Yes, I met one of your fellows, Jonathan Clark, who I thought was...

IB Ah well, he's a sort of maverick. He – put him on one of your shows...

MI He was on one, I think.

IB It's the [radio?] I think who hated him so much. Don't think I'll wait till the end of that. I thought they weren't much good, your people.

MI No, sorry, the Thatcher people, the Thatcher show wasn't very good...

IB No, that's what I mean.

MI Jonathan Clark was on it.

IB He sure was. I thought the Thatcher people were better than the anti-Thatcher people, which shouldn't have been. And that nice man, nice black man, who was a very nice man, [MI Terribly nice] wasn't at his best. He was meant to be gentle and sensible, mild, but then the other man wasn't much good. Who was it?

MI Colin McCabe.

IB Well, he's very – he's the man about whom all the fuss was in Cambridge. Well, Bernard said to me, 'A very good thing we didn't...' Actually he's done no good at all. [MI *laughs*] I think there's some truth in that. After I heard him...

## MI TAPE 28

Conversation date: 13 April 1989

Date transcribed:

Transcriber: Esther Johnson

Subjects covered:

Knighthood

OM

Peerage declined

Mother's later years and death

Gorbachev

Mrs Thatcher

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IB ... 'I may see you again,' and she [ ]. Then we mingled and scattered, then they came back with the [ ]. We were then told that we reoccupy our four positions in the [ ] went back to, next to whoever it was. I stood next to the Head of the Foreign Office on my right; and on my left was Peter H(?)

MI Another legendary figure of our time [ ]

IB I remember the names, which I suppose is what they learned to do; and when [ ] drew up with me, boldly I said, [speaks in Russian] 'Very happy to meet you.'. He said, 'Ha! You're the one!' he said, 'I have heard a great deal about you. I know all about you,' he said and marched on. Then [ ] followed, he said, 'Remember our conversation about culture? Have you – why haven't you written?' So I said, 'I'm still thinking.' Think, think, [MI laughs and they exchange some talk which is not clear]. When I mentioned his name to the two ladies in the [ ] horror figure, yes [ ] Ambassador(?)

MI He's also very er, he looks very ...



IB Pale faced, well he's got this sort of white hair and thin and er [ ]

MI What was your impression of Gorbachev face to face? I mean, because physically ...

IB He looked exactly as you would imagine – fresh faced, smiling, full of beans; his speech that I went to, not one, he said nothing at all, nor did Mrs T say anything at all.

MI It was a holding operation, I felt.

IB Well [ ] took it more seriously, the Germans because that's what it means [ ] I mean I think the Germans can probably [ ] Munich or something, they'd got something to offer [ ] The withdrawal of Soviet troops was a tremendous act [ ]

MI How about [ ]? Do you think he got out?

IB Well, he [ ] of Germany against us, [ ] the Germans could want it. But I think he really, it's the weakest link, there were a lot of German who think he's wonderful and we need him [ ] afraid the officials will never take anyone again [ ] England, France and America, there's a lot of [ ]

MI There's a lot of rubbish in that direction.

IB I mean, yes [ ] Certainly, pure rubbish but it is going on. Our friend –er [ ]

MI I know, we've talked about it.

IB As you'd expect. [MI Do you have cordial relations ...?] He was very impressed by the article in, by Conor Cruise O'Brien in the latest copy of the New York Review which I haven't read yet, about

the Pope – I haven't read it – by saying the Pope could have saved the Jews. Did you read it?

MI Yes, I thought it was rather a weak article for some ...

IB He didn't, he was very impressed.

MI I think it would be impressive to a German because it does make an important claim which is that the only conceivable opposition to Hitler ...

IB Was Catholic.

MI ...was Catholic and Christian and also ... particularly ...

IB But if he'd really made a point of that, there would have been, er, well that means that he did yield to Hitler on some point. He stopped doing the, er, those, er, killings ... the eugenic ...

MI Yes, the eugenic side directed at Christians and Catholics ...

IB ... was stopped because he thought that too many members of the army and the Party were, in some sense Catholic. It troubled him and so this might also have created some kind of, some sort of disturbance in those quarters that might have saved people. I don't agree.

MI But I think what's facile about that, surely, is that the roots of European anti-Semitism are Catholic for God's sake, I mean ...

IB They know and that's why they wouldn't have minded all that much.

MI Absolutely!

IB Exactly and the point about it – if the Pope had spoken forcibly, it would have had some effect on some of the officials. Of course the roots were Catholic but, er, what I means is, I didn't mean it would de-anti-Semites them, but what I mean is that some of them would be troubled if the Pope warned them that they would go to hell if they did this.

MI If the Pope had then [ ] we'd be in a different situation.

IB [Johns?] said this earlier, I think, [MI Yes, wonderful man] it's what we really need for this purpose. You met Khrushchev's son-in-law – what was his name?

MI [sounds like Adjubeh]

IB [clap!] Adjubeh! He got into trouble [ ] Adjubeh! Adjubeh! [ ] after he was arrested, yes. Anyway [ ] lunch, it's too late, suddenly realised here they were, purest Russian citizens, unreconstructed intelligentsia. They could have talked like that in 1890. It does persist.

MI What are the characteristics of that form of speech? Unremitting seriousness.

IB No, no they're amusable, they laugh, they like jokes, not unremitting seriousness.

MI It's the frame of cultural reference then?

IB Yes, and their moral approach, moral shock at bad behaviour, lack of cynicism; irony yes but cynicism not. And er ...

MI But you think of yourself as one, [IB Oh yes] I mean that's your primary cultural [ ]

IB I feel comfortable, yes. [ ] these people, they said how very gloomy [ ] son was and they agreed and I said, [ ] ‘Very nice woman.’ And [ ] said, ‘She has a sort of inner cosiness.’ ‘Inner cosiness’ couldn’t have been said by anyone in the West.

MI And what’s the Russian for ‘inner cosiness’?

IB [Gives the Russian] [ ] is ‘inner’ and [ ] is ‘comfort’. [ ] ‘is cosiness’. [ ] – ‘cosy man’.

MI Why is the word – you use the word ‘cosy’ very often as a value of yours. I wonder why it is so important to ...?

IB Because of that sort of thing.

MI Because it’s such a comfortless society ...

IB I know, but it is – [ ] yes, I like, er collapse of the restraint, non solemnity. I think I hate solemnity very much indeed as a quality. I’m trying to think of [ ] German, [ ] means sinister and non pleasant, something awful; you can’t say [ ], the German for you to be – no, ‘bequem’ is comfortable, that’s not it ... [long pause] ... Anyway, Hegel’s definition of liberty [ ] – to be at home. Jolly good! No external factors can obtrude, as long as you’ve conquered the world, you’ll be all right. Same with everything, [ ] outside.

MI I’ve always thought quite seriously, that any association between ‘freedom’ and ‘home’ is quite sinister, in fact. The sinister definition of freedom, to me, be that as it may ...

IB Why?

MI Er [pause] because it then suggests the kind of being unreconciled to being ‘not at home’, it implies a kind of – it’s associated with a certain kind of [ ] you know, a certain kind of,

you know, 'I can only be at home among my own, I can only be free among my own.'

IB [ ] it too. He has done, he is my hero. His definition of freedom is when [ ] my colleague [ ] at the [ ] said to the Yugoslav in Montenegro, he said, 'Solitude doesn't mean being alone', not having anybody else in the room, he means that everybody understands what you are saying. That's what solitude is, you see? And therefore the opposite is when everything is unintelligible, when you speak a language which nobody understands; I mean, communication is the point, easy communication, natural communication [ ]. That's the kind of thing but I agree ...

MI Do you have any memory in your mind, now it's so long ago and you're so at home here, of when you suddenly thought, 'Aha, I no longer think in Russian, I no longer feel [IB No] in Russian, [IB No] I am now – Bingo! – [IB No, no, no] we're here, we're home.

IB No, no. No such moment occurred. I am very unselfconscious by nature but after it happened – but there wasn't a moment in which I wasn't aware of, suddenly, this change of feeling, 'Good now I think in English' [ ].

MI Perhaps that's to say that you don't entirely think in English?

IB Yes, I do. But that's on my death bed, if I had to say something spontaneously I might suddenly erupt into Russian, but it's not likely to occur.

MI As my uncle did as he lay dying last month, he suddenly ...

IB Suddenly? He's dead you mean?

MI Suddenly, he just died recently, he just died after being in the kind of lost world of Alzheimer's and Parkinson's and God knows

what afflictions of the ages and not saying anything in any language, suddenly on his death bed began to speak [IB Russian] Russian.

IB My mother spoke German, [MI On her death bed?], surprised me, yes. Surprised me.

MI What would you have expected her to speak-

IB It was either Russian or even Yiddish I suppose which must have been the language of her childhood, but she spoke pure German. She went to a German school in Riga, pure, middle class, old fashioned German.

MI And could you make out what she said?

IB I could make out a little bit yes, it was nothing very notable, but it was pure, very Riga German, very clearly enunciated Northern German. It's a surprising thing because she didn't talk it, however she did to her maid who was a German from [ ]. You see? But otherwise she never had occasion to talk it. She had a stroke you see and after the stroke she fell into second childhood and became very jolly – like when I used to come and see her, she was extremely affectionate, delighted to see me and began telling me stories about [ ] all of which were imagined – a man who was covered with a long beard, I read that story when I was a child. No man with a long beard [ ]. I mean everything was entirely – it was quite clear that it was her second, real second childhood with a lot of day dreams.

MI Was she affected, I mean some strokes give a paralysis or ...

IB No, no, no. She talked really very clearly; but she was found by her maid on the floor, she fell out of bed, nothing happened, she just stayed there.

MI How long did this period extend?

IB This period was about two years. Then she became a vegetable and gradually became silent and then [ ] she didn't speak at all. No sound. [ ]

MI And then at the end she spoke ...

IB No, her German was before the final phase, during the cheerful phase when she suddenly [ ] suddenly began to talk in German [ ].

MI When did she die?

IB She died in – I'll tell you exactly – in '73. She was – or '74 – she was ninety, about ninety and a half, well over ninety.

MI And she'd survived her husband by ...?

IB By twenty-three years.

MI What were those years like – was she lonesome?

IB Yes, she certainly was and every time I came to see her, she was very pleased, every time I left she could hardly bear it and used to – I used to hate it because she would accompany me to the gate, of the house I mean, little front garden, you see, to the gate of the house and while I sort of walked away, I had no car, I would have walked away you see, she stood there, a picture of – er – abandonment. She just stood and looked at me with sad eyes, a form of blackmail, ...

MI Did you feel resentment against her?

IB On my part – there was no doubt I was being blackmailed. She wasn't resentful, she was terribly sad, she didn't want me to go, she

didn't beg me to stay because the result was that – but every time I went, tears leapt to her eyes, it was too awful.

MI Did you speak Russian with her?

IB No, I talked English with her.

MI Always?

IB Always, except when I used to lose my temper and suddenly I would cross into Russian. She would say, 'No, no, go on talking in English, none of that, none of that.'

MI Why do you think you crossed into Russian when you got angry?

IB I think [ ] language she would have understood better, somehow it was more directly offensive. [MI laughs] More directly aggressive. I didn't do it very often but I never knew what the end result was, temper [ ] with my nearest and dearest, [ ] and with Aline, nobody else.

MI What happens when you lose your temper?

IB I tend to rant around the room, I start shouting I think, I start shouting, I can't go on, [ ]

MI Do you blow over quickly?

IB Yes, I do. It's very – more difficult to cure the wounds which my explosions cause if it doesn't blow over quickly.

MI Do you bear grudges?

IB No, by nature not, very few grudges I've had to bear, I don't know that I've ever been offended. I'm so – er – accommodating,



you know, not so much at home, the reverse, – er – that’s my trouble I mean, I’m by nature – er – adapt myself, a little too easily perhaps, to whatever [ ] I am in.

MI Was seeing your mother – getting back to your mother – a duty or a pleasure or a combination of both or what was it like?

IB Duty, duty. I mean I was obviously attached to her and when she was in a good mood I’ve had perfectly good times with her of course; but she was full of temperament and spirit, she was anything but flat, anything but dull. She was not puritanical either and she was full of wit which was a [ ], very opposite, wanted to have things her own way; and escape from my parents’ house to Oxford was total liberation in 1938. I felt [ ] was wonderful, on my own. My father never oppressed me in any way.

MI But your Mum did.

IB Very strongly; and him, too. She bullied us both.

MI What form did the bullying take?

IB Well, [ ] not just telling you what to do and – er ...

MI And you recreate a scene ...

IB I’m just trying to think. Well it used to annoy me, scene, no, but it used to annoy me when she came into my room in the morning – I was allowed to sleep as late as I wanted – it was a mistake as I was given breakfast in bed when I was a child, always, but she used to bring it, sometimes the maid did, and then she would sort of arrive and say, ‘What is the plan for the day?’ I didn’t want a plan for the day, I believed it was spontaneous, I didn’t want any sort of pre arrangements or some frightful – er – straightjackets of that kind. [ ] ‘There is no plan. I will do what I like.’ Oh, she would look without saying a thing [ ]. And – er – what else? I used to be [ ] by

her meanness, [clap!] by her economy about money, [clap!] the constant saving of money, really, collecting pennies, collecting candle ends [ ]. My father tended to be spendthrift, he was convinced that she literally extracted money from him which she didn't spend, one day we'd be bankrupt and she alone would be able to keep going, you see?

MI Did you find large sort of stashes of things in her house?

IB She had no friends really. I mean people admired her, used to come and see her and she told them how to live, but there was no intimate – I am sure she [ ] very equal, very intimate when she poured herself out to me ...

MI Did you pour yourself up to her in later life?

IB No, no I'm not a pourer-out, by nature not I think. I'm trying to ...

MI I remember you saying when you were as it were courting Aline, that there was a period in which you went to the South of France with them, for example, that they're kind of in the scenes of some of the crucial moments of your life and how do you talk to them and ...?

IB They were always there, they were never not there. What they existed for was each other and me. They were the most closely tied trio which ever existed since they had no other friends and no other concerns. They never left each other or thought of it; my mother wasn't in any degree in love with my father from the beginning, I suspect. That's why she wanted me to be born, to have somebody to live for, and nevertheless they were together continuously, there was no question of not. In that sense a kind of Victorian married to an absolutely – connected to that time, like peasants who don't think of leaving each other whatever they may feel. There they are fixed within the hut together so to speak around the fire.

MI But during – there were some periods of misery connected with your courtship of Aline and your ...

IB Ah Aline, no, yes there were some periods of misery for me but they knew nothing of it, they certainly confessed none. My father, who didn't see how I could possibly – I wasn't yet, I hadn't proposed to Aline certainly before my father died but he saw that I was obviously rather keen on her as you might say, said, 'How can you? You are thinking of marriage,' he said, 'here is a woman with three children. Absurd!'

MI That's what he said?

IB Yes. 'You can't marry yourself to a woman with three children – take on this huge burden,' he thought it was a very [ ] thing to do. My mother on the other hand never got on entirely with Aline, she was never totally cosy with her [ ] they came from [ ] too different from each other. My mother fundamentally was lower middle class which Aline is anything but. But there was a sort of an unbridgeable sort of gap between the two, still they tried to be nice to each other. What pleased my mother was she thought Aline was in love with me, decided that. She informed me and as it was the case she was therefore prepared to forgive anything.

MI Because it was good for you.

IB No doubt because it was good for me. And the proper thing to feel! [Laughter] Most people didn't feel it and that was serious, because they were constrained! And she did so it was a natural sentiment [ ].

MI When you were up at Oxford – we're talking now the fifties, the sixties ...

IB She was rather a liar, my mother [MI Really?] Yes and she used to conceal things or try and make out that things weren't what they were in order to get me to do something; and I would say, 'That's not true.' 'Your mother is a liar,' she would say irritably, 'all right? Your mother is very common, very vulgar, very ordinary and a terrible liar,' she would say in an unnatural voice [ ] she lost her temper quite easily, she used to go white in the face; and then you could see it [ ] she could say terrible things.

IB And did she?

IB Yes.

MI Frightful things?

IB Yes, I can't – if you ask what I can't remember a thing.

MI Did you visit her once a week or once a month?

IB Nothing like that, at irregular intervals. Towards the end, rather more often than before. I think the last five years of her life, I must have done that, at least once a week. And really boring it was too, going all that way up to Hampstead to the house which I knew – was terribly bored by sort of going there and terribly bored with the sort of scene because I knew after half an hour there was nothing to say. Some days it was better than that but on the whole it was pure duty and I'd be ashamed not to do it and if I could have been liberated from it, I would have been.

MI And you had a kind of dreary tea and kept her company, and then, God!

IB That sort of thing, that sort of thing. I'd be given a cup of coffee or something and then she would tell about her life, what was going on and all that sort of thing, I used to listen patiently and then the time would come, I stayed an hour or two [ ]. I wasn't exactly

unhappy with her but faintly [ ] bored. There was no emotional relationship by then, I mean there wasn't, I didn't lose my temper, didn't say anything and so on, but it was just [filio?]. I was always thought to be a terribly good son which I was not and mother fixated which I never was – but looked as if I was because I was constantly concerned about her.

MI Who said you were mother fixated?

IB People, her friends.

MI Her friends did?

IB Yes. She talked about me of course continuously to her friends, endlessly and that was very great bore. They used to say to me, 'Ah well, your mother told me about you, your mother talked about you last night, your mother has always talked to me about you.' I knew it was true and rather frightful, I used to reproach her for that and say it doesn't really matter but why must you go on and on and on? It isn't really of interest to all these people, who must think [ ]

MI Well she talked about you, not only because you were her son, but you were becoming a grand public man.

IB Yes, that was the idea following the causes, she was very proud of me, yes. Nothing like that had ever happened in her family. Did I tell you when I became a Knight? [MI No] Oh I did, why not? Well, I was offered a Knighthood by Macmillan [MI By ...?] Macmillan and I got a very [ ] letter, I got suddenly out of the blue, the year of 1956 which is when I think the year I got married maybe? I was married to Aline, I married I think in February '56. About April '56 – we'd been to Sicily for our honeymoon and came back and there was a letter lying for me saying, 'Dear Isaiah Berlin,' which was a curious thing to do, you have to make up your mind, either Mr Berlin, or Berlin or Isaiah or anything you like, Isaiah

Berlin means you're not quite sure where you stand with him. I'd met him two or three times, not very close with him, but you see what I mean but Dear Isaiah Berlin. Then there's a formula which says 'I have it in mind to recommend to Her Majesty the Queen that she confer upon you the honour of – and then there's a blank. The blank is put in in ink, dubitable [MI Laughs] MBE or whatever it might be, VD, MBE, OBE, Victoria Cross anything you like, you see? And [laughing] you see, blank. And it said, Knighthood. And it went on, 'Kindly if you are minded to accept this honour as I very much hope that you will, will you please write to my secretary at Downing Street.' [ ] Well I got this letter and plunged into tremendous gloom because I thought, well, not for me. I thought being a Knight was rather like wearing a paper hat, there's no harm in it but it's ridiculous. But I didn't even feel a Knight but I thought my colleagues would be rather envious and they would wonder why, I hadn't done anything. I wasn't a philosopher of the front rank, here I was at All Souls, I was all right, I had performed in the government service during the war but no – not to that extent, you see? It was years after anyway, I'd stopped being in government services for six and it's now ten years later. Certainly [ ] the Dons didn't get Knighthood's much, I mean elderly professors who had served the government who [ ] would choose to be a Knight – er – who were Knight's once? I can't think of anybody, I mean – er – [ ] was a Lord because of Churchill, [ ] physics in '85 [ ] got rid of with [ ]

MI Why did you get Knighted?

IB Well it's not very clear, I think it was because Macmillan rather liked me, that's all, it was just a tip [ ] [MI A [ ] ] that's what it was, yes.

MI When had you met him?

IB Anyhow, I met him first in All Souls when he came to stay with Sumner who was the Warden of All Souls and was a contemporary

of his at Balliol, they were old friends and they'd served in the war and so on; and they got on quite well and then he made my acquaintance, he said he wanted to meet me and we had a talk about my despatches during the war which had given him pleasure, etc ...

MI This was when he was a Minister?

IB No, he was then in the opposition I think under the Labour government I think ...

MI This was '48, '49 ...

IB That sort of date yes, it would be, that was the first time I met him. Then I went for lunch with Lord Cholmondely, Marquis of, because Lady Cholmondely was still alive, she was eighty-four, there was [ ] Sassoon, and she had met me at tea with Lady Waverley whom I knew and came to, and suddenly developed and sort of became a fan, she used to come to lectures I would give in London. In the front row there was always this rather stiff lady, the Marchioness of Cholmondely, sister of Philip Sassoon, would be there [ ]. Well she gave a party in some enormous house in Kensington Palace Gardens in which they lived and in the house was the Lord High Chamberlain, a very very handsome man, did nothing in his life, functioned at Coronations and established a prize for calligraphy, Eton, Winchester and Harrow, and had women looking after him, he [ ], the thing was that he loved physical fitness, he used to take exercise at a gym which was at the bottom of the house, and his son, the present Marquis was entirely interested in toy soldiers and putting them in battle order, people would come and see it, that was a marvellous country house called [ ] which belonged to [ ] other people [ ] wonderful objects in it. Well she gave lunch and the others went home and he said, 'Who shall I make Regius Professor of History in succession to [P?] ?' No – in succession to Galbraith. And he said, 'I don't know what to do, I mean you know, one doesn't want to make a mistake.'

‘Maybe,’ I said ‘but he’s 73 and therefore over age for anything.’ I mean he was far the greatest historian of our time, a long [ ], he used to publish them too, they were available together. And I said, ‘I don’t know what I would do,’ I said it wasn’t for me to recommend anyone, so I said, ‘I think the best thing you could do, Prime Minister, would be to appoint, if you can find her, a catholic, lesbian, communist Negress, that would go down very well in a great many circles!’

MI [Laughs] And he liked that, he thought that was good?

IB He liked that very much, yes, the sort of thing he would like, wonderful idea, Taylor tried not to talk, Taylor thought I would have said him. I was wrong to make jokes, someone reported this to Taylor you see, I ought to have said, ‘AJP Taylor is the only man.’

MI And you did not [IB What?] – you did not because of his relations with Beaverbrook, because of your sense that it ...

IB No, no, it was because I didn’t think he deserved it, in fact, no more than that. I mean he was a very bright and interesting writer but truth wasn’t in him, he hadn’t done anything [ ] No, I think [ ] he was just a nice man but a very poor historian and not truthful although on one occasion, more [ ]. Taylor would just talk off the top of his [head?] so to speak, just to annoy people and so on. He loved history, knew a great many facts and was a very good writer; but fundamentally the purposes were always polemical, rather like Macaulay if you like. Anyhow, but I mean it wouldn’t have been disastrous if he had got it; and his famous [ ] but [ ] no, no, I had no feeling against him, it wasn’t that ...

MI So he consulted you over the Regius Professor?

IB Well in a rather jokey way. Then I met him – I think – some social occasion, with his secretary, Philip [ ] whom I taught at



Oxford, the son of a professor at All Souls who was very [authoritative?] a catholic and [ ] he knew me and gave a party for him and for some reason he liked me and I went to it and I had a long talk to him, about everything, about the war. That was all really. [ ] But then he suddenly offered me this, as a kind of – I think he just thought it would be fun to do it, that's all. Well as I was telling you, I didn't really want it and I said, well shall I or shall I not? I was rather agonised over it because I agonise over everything, if I need to make a speech or if I've been to [ ] to everything [ ] a thousand people [ ]. When I was offered the, did I tell you, the [ ] of Nuffield I was, did I tell you that? I did tell you.

MI No you didn't.

IB Oh well all right we'll go back to that in a moment. You see I agonised and I talked with David Cecil who said, 'Of course you must accept it.' And I asked John Sparrow and he said, 'No, no, it doesn't suit you at all, not [ ] but Sir Isaiah is absurd.' Then I talked to – and then I gradually became neurotic on the subject, and became neurotic and couldn't make up my mind and my mother-in-law who was living in town said, 'I know exactly what you are going to do, you are going to refuse, there is no doubt, you won't accept, you just won't.' And I can see [ ] hate the idea ...

[Lady B has entered and IB continues ... What? We were talking about my Knighthood, I was obviously very worried, well – you can corroborate this. Do you remember when I got into a neurotic state? [MI Was he in a state about it? Lady B Oh yes, not as bad as the OM then] I said to you, 'What do I do?' and you said you were indifferent, take it or don't take it, I don't mind either way, that's what you said, either way, [MI Good advice] it didn't make the slightest difference. [Lady B There wasn't any gain for me, I didn't believe in saying [ ] much] No, no exactly but the general thing was, 'I don't mind, do what you like, [Lady B laughs] do exactly what you please, it's very unimportant.' [Lady B But my mother didn't get very far with you ...] Your mother said to me, 'You're going to refuse it.' She said, 'I know what you are going to do, you're going

to refuse it [Lady B Laughs] I could see from what you are saying you're going to refuse it.' Well Sparrow told me not to, David Cecil told me to do it, impolite to refuse [Lady B That's what I felt]

MI It became a neurotic subject, it then came to represent something for you ...

IB Neurotic; and then my eyelid began to tremble after that as a result of this psychosomatic condition, it continued to tremble for a year and a half. I had to go to the doctor about it. He said it was all right, it wasn't the brain which was affected but it did, I remember it trembling, a kind of – tick! tick!

MI But doesn't all this add up to you saying you very badly wanted something you thought was faintly ridiculous and you couldn't resolve the conflict?

IB I didn't want it at all but neither did I not want it ...

MI Ah, but isn't that the same thing?

IB But I decided finally, not. In fact I found I made the decision quite easily, I wrote a letter to Macmillan refusing, but I didn't send it off. I then went to see my mother, not in order to consult her at all, and I said to her, because why shouldn't I, I said, 'I've been offered Knighthood.' She knew what 'Sir' meant [ ] and she said, she was most frightfully pleased, 'how wonderful' etc and then I said, 'But I am going to refuse it.'

Lady B Did you really?

IB I did, yes of course, 'I am going to refuse it,' and she said, there was silence, and she said, 'You must do exactly what you like. I mean, I don't know about these things roughly, you must do what you please.' But then I suddenly realised – and more or less burst – tears in her eyes. I then knew that if I Raymond took it, it would

give her pleasure every hour of every day of every month of her life; an old Jewish woman if you see what I mean, not quite from the ghetto, but I mean from what might be called humble conditions [ ] Riga and all the rest of it, and 'Sir' was wonderful, it was sort of top, you couldn't – Lord was better still, you see? And I could see it would give her intense pleasure; and I thought well I don't really mind either way, I can't be so selfish. If I refuse, she'll regret it, she'll from time to time tell me, 'Why not?' and it would cause her pain, cause her deep, deep regret. I was right about that because the pleasure she got from it was infinite, I mean continuous, from all her friends, all the letters she got, in fact she would address me in letters, 'Sir Isaiah', gave her terrific pleasure. And so I then went back and tore up the letter and accepted immediately. When I told this story it sounds like an improbable piece of sentimentality but it's exactly what happened, exactly what happened. Then of course, the OM was the next thing – that was a nightmare, even worse!

MI Well tell me about that.

Lady B That was a much worse one.

IB A year has passed, a year has passed. When I was given a Knighthood somebody [ ] said [ ] got it, usually say, 'Political services' or 'Literature' or 'Philosophy', nothing about me at all, blank, for no reason.

MI Did you mother come to the investiture?

IB Yes, she did, certainly [Lady B [ ] boys ...] One of your boys, yes, it would have been Philippe or Peter, very likely, Peter my mother [ ] to Buckingham Palace, certainly she did, it was the second time, I got this CBE before that you see, then I got – I was informed about that in Sweden, I was coming back from Leningrad – and I got that entirely for one reason and one reason only, for being snubbed by Eden ...

MI At Potsdam or ...

IB Probably, not that I ever wanted to go to Potsdam but Halifax fixed it as a kind of reward for an appalling insult.

Lady B Clarissa [ ] it

IB Absolutely! She said she suggested it.

Lady B [ ] I know she wasn't married to Eden then.

IB She was not married to Eden in '46, I mean these things are in '45, although she knew him then, [ ] the impossible, I mean she was just Churchill's niece, she was working [ ] Weidenfeld [ ] Korda. I don't think Eden would have consulted her.

Lady B [ ] It's possible that she suggested it.

IB Over the Knighthood she [ ] did.

MI Tell me about this – when does the OM come up?

IB Oh much later, that was when I was President of Wolfson [Lady B [ ] about 1970 ...] Oh before that. I was sitting in the Banbury Road – Woodstock Road [Lady B That's right, yes] in the second office, not at Number 15 [Lady B Forty seven] 47, I was sitting in the office and I suddenly received a letter from the Queen's Private Secretary whose name was Adeane and he said, [MI Sir Michael Adeane] Sir Michael Adeane, 'I am instructed by Her Majesty' and so on, not 'I have it in mind' but he wasn't the Prime Minister – and she gives it, you see, not the government, the Prime Minister doesn't recommend [MI Oh really?] There are three orders, the Knight of the Garter and the OM possibly do, in fact, influence but they can't say [ ] suggest and I believe Knight of the Thistle which is the Scottish equivalent, you see that's what the Queen is

supposed to do entirely on her own and half a dozen [ ] in fact because the Secretary writes to me occasionally from the – what not, the Secretary of the Order who was a pupil of mine many years ago and then if I recommend somebody and they get it, which has happened, and I ask him afterwards, ‘Did you ask the Prime Minister?’ he says, ‘Oh no. No, no the Queen likes not to consult.’ She receives recommendations but she doesn’t consult, you see. She’s consultable but not consulting. Anyway I received this letter and I telephoned Aline and I said, ‘Disaster has occurred!’ [Laughter] And you said, ‘What?’

Lady B I don’t know, I remember what I said [ ] I realised it was that kind of thing and I said, ‘Well it can’t be [ ], you can refuse that, and then I said, ‘If it’s a big one ... [Laughter]

MI If it’s a big one!

IB I didn’t say I had received a letter from the Secretary, I didn’t say that, just a disaster, knew what I could have meant, not that somebody has died or something dreadful, [ ] of cancer, I told her I had cancer [ ] , disaster. And then I came home and again the question was should I – and I knew why I had been given it this time.

MI Why?

IB Because I had a great friend called Wheeler-Bennett. Wheeler-Bennett was a very – Court circles, he was historical adviser to the Queen ...

MI ... and he’d written a biography of Queen Mary [ ] ...

IB ... and he was a very nice man but dazzled [ ] and what he liked was beautiful women, I mean spies, brilliant politicians. He was Macmillan’s best friend, he was literally his best friend, you see?

MI And how did you know Wheeler-Bennett?

IB Because – well, he was in my office in New York [ ] – thank you, I never told you Aline but, yes I did, I got into the British [ ] Service. Well he was one of the two Heads, three Heads of the British Invasion Services in nineteen hundred and forty-one.

MI So nominally your boss in New York?

IB Certainly he was and not very nominally, he was one of the three bosses you see?

MI And it's Wheeler-Bennett who talks to whom to get your – to the Queen?

IB Well, Wheeler-Bennett went after the war, you see, he was an expert in Germany, he was a [ ] in Germany, it saved him from being shot by the Nazi's; and he worked there in the government departments, particularly in Intelligence and things like that, he was a very good writer I think, in some ways they are rather good books; and he adored, not only royalty, but sort of Ruritanian royalty, I mean ceremonies and mysterious characters and intrigue in Central Europe, that sort of – very amiable, rather sort of disarming sort of way, but the point was he was a very nice man, a good character and – snob, yes but really – er – kind and generous. We lived near Oxford by then in the [ ] which once occupied Garsington, we saw him a certain amount, we were friends, he was very nice about me in his autobiography about which he would consult and he – I occur in a lot in autobiographies and er [MI I know] Laski once said to me about them, he didn't like me, **'Well, they all talk about him, he may occur in people's autobiographies, but nothing of substance will be left.'** Anyhow, and er [chuckle]

MI Well you've had the last laugh on that one haven't you?

IB More or less, yes. Anyway, he once said, we were going talking of OM's as a class and he said, 'You ought to get an OM' and I said, 'Don't be silly, ridiculous!' My conception of OM was geniuses, I mean Bertrand Russell – yes, and he was, certainly, TS Eliot certainly – er – which I think may have confused it but it may not have done – oh er sort of er – who else – Hardy, that class of person, class politicians would give it to themselves like Lloyd George or Attlee, but not people like me at all; and the [ ] is, Mr Fisher, yes, one is a Statesman and one's Academic and so on and a cultural figure of the first order. But then I thought, oh dear, then I looked at the list which was supplied with the letter. I saw that on it were Rod Zukerman and Veronica Wedgwood so I thought that maybe [laughing] it wasn't quite so bad! Let's say it what swayed me. And then I thought, oh God! Maurice Bowra once said more than anything, my great friend, he will never forgive me ...

MI He would never forgive you?

IB ... for getting it ...

MI Had he been alive.

IB [& Lady B] He was alive and he longed for it, but there wasn't a chance I don't think, it would have been exactly what he wanted. [Lady B Like Freddie Ayer, every time we ...] What? Freddie Ayer was very very angry [ ]. How Freddie Ayer became a Knight is another story. And – er – then after a bit Aline and I talked about it and we decided on the whole, I [ ], I was very surprised that I had been offered it but affected to be very pleased. [MI Laughs]

Lady B I don't think one can refuse it.

IB One can! I'll tell you one who did now. Housman refused, AE Housman. He wrote a marvellous letter, I have to tell you because it's so funny, it's in his letters, 'Esteemed Secretary' in the twenties, he said, 'Dear Sir, I would not want to be thought wanting in [ ]

with His Majesty because this is a very high honour which he has been good enough to confer upon me, to wish to confer upon me, but I cannot explain my position better than by quoting the following letter' which then said, 'Dear Sir,' – it was written by some soldier in 1860 who was offered the KCMG or something – 'I would not be thought wanting in courtesy to Her Majesty who wishes to confer this [ ] upon me and I wish to thank her most deeply from my heart for the kindness to think of me in this connection; but to accept it would be for me very unpleasant. Yours sincerely,' – whatever name you like – JS Ferguson. [Laughter] Housman quoted this in full and then said, 'Yours sincerely, AE Housman.'

*Side B*

MI ... and you mother was rather the same ...

IB A bit. Oh it meant nothing, it doesn't mean anything ...

MI You were being made Consul, now you were being made Ambassador.

IB Half the people in England don't know what the OM is, believe me, now it's everyone knows. That I finally refused it is a secret which I have to tell you, my Peerage ...

MI When did this occur ...?

IB ... because I was offered it twice – Mrs Thatcher.

MI Really?

IB Yes, about two months after she was in office, I suddenly received one of these famous letters saying 'Dear Professor Berlin' I think, said that which I wasn't at the time, 'I have it in my mind to inform Her Majesty' and all the rest of it, it said – er – Life



Peerage I suppose [ ] Baron [ ] and well that was marvellous because it arrived, my secretary opened the letter and said, 'You're being offered a Peerage.' I said, 'Well, am I?' I said, 'No question about that, would you mind taking a letter? Dear Prime Minister,' [MI Immediately?] No, no, immediately, no thought, no consultation ...

MI Because you didn't want to Baron Berlin or ...

IB No, no, no, I'll tell you the whole thing, well I'll tell you, I thought somehow [ ] by then for partly snobbish reasons and partly [ ] and I can tell you why. The snobbish reason ...

MI Well, Annan has one. [IB What?] Annan has one.

IB Almost everybody has one but I didn't [ ], I mean Bullock has one, who doesn't? You see? No, no, first of all I thought all these, the result of Wilson [ ] a lot of Jews who were [ ] terrible time, I mean, [ ] a lot of them committed suicide, a lot of them went to jail; I thought, What, to add to the number of Jewish Peers in the House of Lords? The company was really rather ...

MI Ropy.

IB Yes, and I thought not only they but everybody, Lord Lever, Lord – I don't know – Seifert ...

MI Lord Lever's very distinguished, what are you talking about?

IB Nonsense. He's quite a nice man but – quite clever, quite funny but ...

MI Not distinguished.

IB Well he was a perfectly good Labour Minister but not intelligent but I really – there's no harm in that – and then I suddenly thought,

well I don't know, everyone is being made a Lord these – and on the whole, I don't know, it's felt it was, the company was getting rather undistinguished. That's the snobbish reason. Then the other reason was that if I was in the House of Lords, if I took it, I would probably have to go there, I'd feel some conscience about that because obviously that's why she gave it. I mean the idea was that I would function and it's quite clear why she wanted to give to me because Wilson had given it to all these extremely ropy Jews. At last she wanted to give it to a respectable one who in her opinion was politically not too bad, you see? I think that must have been the motive, I can't see what other motive – she didn't know me. And then I met her once at the British Academy – and then the other motive was, supposing Palestine comes up as usual? Well, I wouldn't want to speak and I'd have to, and people would write me a letter saying, 'You must! You must say something, do say something,' and I would then have three sleepless nights because on the one hand, I would feel I had to offend them and on the other hand they behaved very badly as usual and I couldn't say these things sincerely and I would get into trouble for not being – praising enough or again get into trouble for not being blaming enough and so [ ]. And I knew I'd have a conscience, I wouldn't just not go as people usually do, you see, just not go. So I thought well, if I took particularly – I don't like talking in public, the whole thing would be ultimately a nightmare to me. I wouldn't want to be criticised for not doing it and so on, you see? Told what to do and so on, drafted onto committees for this and that, lots of fine letters and so on. So there's no doubt I mean, that's what went through my head, I had no doubt at all within ten minutes of the letter being read to me which – I never even read it, I said, 'No' and dictated an answer very rapidly, and I got a letter from ...

MI But then it happened again?

IB Well, then about three months later she wrote to me again saying how distressed she was that I hadn't accepted, the House of

Lords needed people exactly like me, etc, would I reconsider? So I reconsidered.

MI And [ ]

IB Mm. It's true. [MI Interesting] I was amused to be offered it. People generally asked me, why I [ ] with a Peerage? Because I can't think why not.

MI [Laughing] That must be amusing.

IB The point is, say, of course I would have been, naturally I am very offended! I must be in her bad books, she must know [ ] [chuckling] I'll tell you, I'll go back to the earlier story ...

MI I want to know about the OM though, I want to know what it – who was ...

IB I left Oxford [ ] to the Press because I thought they would ring me up, they didn't in fact and nor was my mother much bothered but I remember a letter to Maurice Bowra apologising for accepting it, of course you deserve it far better and so on [ ]

MI And what did he say in reply?

IB He didn't say anything in reply but he talked to several other people, 'Oh well,' he said, 'it's a rich man's CH.' He got the CH himself in the end because he'd kept saying to me, 'I want something to put round my neck, you know.' Too awful, he really [ ]. He was a kind of great man but had faults – of taste.

Lady B offers MI more tea; he says, 'Oh thank you, that's very sweet of you.'

IB I'm in favour of the honours system, it's just not for me, that's my position but I'm not against it [MI Why?] because I don't see

why not. People like them, there can be honours for public service, I don't think – it's pedantic to object, I don't think it makes a lot of difference, but not for me, I just felt I didn't enjoy it at all.

MI What do you mean, 'not for me', you've enjoyed two great honours.

IB Enjoyed! Philip Toynbee said to me, 'In ten year's time you won't mind being a Knight in the least.' I still mind it. I'd much rather not be, so there. It's useful in restaurants and that's about all. One of Aline's aunts is rather pleased that I got it.

MI [to Aline] But you must be pleased he's a Knight, aren't you?  
[Lady B very [ ]]

IB Nobody's not, nobody's not. Some people were indignant about the – the Warden of Nuffield, Chester, the Warden of Nuffield, he couldn't understand why I should have got the OM, he complained high and wide.

MI Really?

IB Well partly because he had a certain reason for resenting me. In 1953 Nuffield College in it's beginnings had proper fellows and also [ ] fellows which meant you were a fellow of another College but you were allowed to be a kind of external fellow while they were being sort of nurtured. And I was one of these because I was a friend of Cole, my predecessor, who was a natural fellow from Nuffield because he – library resided to work there.

MI Was he man you liked, Cole?

IB I liked him very much; and he made me – some people thought he was a terrible man ...

MI Why?

IB I don't know, he must have offended them in some way and he was a rather childish man but he was a good character. And anyway he made me [ ] fellow and then we all had to write letter about who we wanted to be made Warden, and I wrote a letter and recommended Roy Harrod, I remember. He got exactly one vote and that was mine. And then I was invited to Harvard, suddenly I received a telegram saying that unanimously I was elected Warden of Nuffield if I wanted it. Well I was delighted because I had never been offered anything in an open market in my life before, everything I had had before I applied for, you see? I was never offered a Chair or anything like that, so I wasn't a professor then anyway in '63 and I didn't know what to do and I thought, well – [Lady B '53] '53 I mean, yes – I then wondered what to do, I was at Harvard. Well again I consulted everybody of course ...

MI Were you there for a year at Harvard or ...?

IB I was there for a term. This was roughly speaking the Autumn, I mean September to February or whatever it is, and I wondered if I would [ ] and I thought well, in a way it would be rather nice to stop being a professor because it's much easier to be [ ] like that on this work, quite agreeable; on the other hand economics and their sort of politics wasn't my top thing at all, you know you can [ ] and [ ] politics ...

Lady B I thought it was [ ]. We weren't married then. I wrote him a long letter [ ] ...

IB Telling me not to.

MI Why did you think it was a bad idea?

Lady B I didn't think it was the right [ ] ...

IB Well it was rather, it was sort of functional; functional, ugly and not a real College, a sort of Institute, Institute really, Head of Institute.

MI It would have been right for him to be offered New College or Balliol ...

IB Well then I remember meeting [Fillard?] who was the physicist, Leo, whom I knew and I said to him apropos of nothing [ ] consulted him and I said, 'I've been offered Nuffield but it's got no money, so I wonder whether I ought to take it? He said, 'Oh, that's quite easy, you go to Lord Nuffield and you say to him, [ ] a bunch of Reds and he'll give you as much as you like.' [Laughter] He was an amusing man.

MI That's a good story!

IB Then I travelled back to Oxford and I was visited by the Senior fellow who was called [ ] who was a Colonial Historian who tried to persuade me to take it; and then I received a letter eventually from MacDougall, professor, who tried to persuade me to take it. The present Lord Beloff was a bit displeased because he wanted it and then I knew I wasn't going to do it. I consulted Sparrow who said, 'If you want to be near the station, the prison is even nearer. Why don't you want Governor of the prison?' [Laughter] My father was dying, I came back before time, he was dying of leukaemia, I called in at the hospital, the cancer hospital. He said, 'No, no, no, on no account, don't take it, it's not right for you at all.' He was quite firm.

MI Really? [IB Yes] Why do you think he knew that?

IB He'd been in Oxford you see during the war, I don't know he had some sense of what it was, that it was a kind of economic [ ] not a real College. No, no I don't know why, he was absolutely clear in his mind. So then I received a letter from Chester who was

one of the senior fellows who said, 'All my life I have wanted to be Warden of All Souls, it has been the ambition of all my life so I am deeply disappointed not to be chosen. I wish to assure you, if you accept and I hope you will, I shall not resign, [ ] I shall be loyal, I shall collaborate, I shall co-operate,' something like that to which I replied saying, 'Things change in the world you know, one never can tell what'll happen,' and two day's later, refused. He was then elected. He knew he had it in my hands, that's something which one resents for the rest of one's life – that someone should have – you only get it because somebody else didn't after him, you see? Still that's my [ ] of Nuffield.

MI And he was resentful of your getting the OM?

IB He was very resentful; and Mrs Hart said to me, 'Are you knocking about Buckingham Palace much these days? Do you see the Queen a lot?' She couldn't see it either, lots of people couldn't, it's a very curious thing to have been given to me. Well, he was, but I don't mind it, but er ...

MI What does it involve?

IB Nothing. Er, lunch in either Windsor or Buckingham Palace once in – five years.

MI Any contact, informal or otherwise, with other members?

IB Nothing, no, no, nothing, no meetings. The lunches were for the members who were all geriatric, who would come on two sticks, [ ] mortis. There was a very very old man at the club ...

MI Who are the OM now?

IB At the moment? [ ] old, er, funnily enough. Right, I'll tell you. They are ...

MI Conrad Lorenz – no, not Lorenz but ...

IB Frank? [MI Yes] GK Clark was, he was after me, er – Henry Moore was, er – I can tell you now, Graham Greene is ...

MI Dorothy Hodgkin?

IB Quite right, Dorothy Hodgkin certainly and Veronica Wedgwood as I told you, er – the man who invented, oh commercialised [ ] engineer called Edwards, the man who invented, what was that called?

MI Jet propulsion.

IB Yes – No, no, nothing to do with that, no, no, that was a man called Whittle, no he was years before [ ] jet engines No, no I mean – er – I mean Concorde who was given it by Prince Philip, Bletchley, you see? He got it – I'll tell you who got it with me – er – the Prime Minister of Canada, what's his name? Er – Lester Pearson.

MI Yes, very good man.

IB Very good man. I knew him, he was in the Embassy in Washington during the war. [MI Yes] What did we call him, we didn't call him Lester? [MI Mike] Mike [ ] he got it with me and Edwards and who else –er – Lord Zuckerman, he's there with me – er – [ ] by and large, a man called [ ], he got two Nobel prizes [MI Incredible!], two Nobel prizes, yes; Hodgkin – not Dorothy, the other Hodgkin, her cousin, he has it – er – er, wait a bit [long pause] I'm trying to think, not [ ] ...

MI William Golding?

IB No – [ ] kind of thing.



MI Does Conrad Lorenz not come – er the other one, I was confused ...

IB Tinbergen? No. What do you mean, what? Ethology? [MI Yes, the ethologist] Well that was a Tinbergen yes because Conrad Lorenz was his pupil I think; no, you mean ...?

MI Prince Charles kind of – sort of mentor.

IB No, no he hasn't got it, no. No you mean [ ] Laurens van der Post [MI Yes, van der Post] He was a friend of Mrs Thatcher. Er, no, [MI Carl Popper?] he had something ... what?

MI Was Carl Popper?

IB Popper – Gombrich I think had it – no – Gombrich I think does, Gombrich does, Popper not. Whether Popper does, I can't remember – no I don't think he does.

MI Do you recall your relations with Gombrich now?

IB Perfectly.

MI But not intimately?

IB No, no, he's not an intimate sort of man; no we get on, I mean, we always go to the same concerts, Alfred, and at his concerts we always meet there. Well, we chat away, I got his son to come to Wolfson College in my day and so on [ ]. I like him; now I'm trying to think, the last lunch was in Buckingham Palace [MI And the Queen?] [Fine?] got it for, the Roman historian [MI Ronald Fine (?), yes] from New Zealand, they wanted to give it to somebody, Empire. Never knew much about him but he was a man who deserved it, best historian living I think. Nobody's better in his field than he is in his, he's a literary, most distinguished historian in any language in any country which shows mainly how low history had

fallen, but it is true; you can't think of anybody who's a sort of historical genius now or thought to be, [ ] isn't.

MI Is he a stylist?

IB No he writes very well, he writes very well and I can read three or four books about Roman, about Roman [ ] completely [ ] so to speak. He is one, yes – er – Yehudi Menuhin [ ] it, adore it, my cousin [MI [ ] Yes, Yehudi did, yes, a kind of icon, yes. Er – who else?

MI And you meet with the Queen when you meet?

IB Yes, she's in care of the Order.

MI And what's that like?

IB Well, the Duke is also in care of the Order but not the Prince of Wales, who's not. Oh, it's just lunch, we all meet in a room, she walks down us, shakes hands, we are then put in the order of seniority I think and then we have lunch, no speeches are made, I don't know if anyone drinks a toast, perhaps they do perhaps they don't, Mountbatten used to, nobody else did and then we just [ ]. And then photographs, paintings have been ordered, drawings and that's all.

MI Oh really, each individually?

IB Yes. Well I didn't mind, a man called Ward who was perfectly good, decent, super hack painter! [MI Laughs] Quite good, he took three hours over it, perfectly all right.

MI And do you have small talk with the Queen?

IB She wanders around the room a bit, can't talk very much. But er – not much, only she does, she talks with the women mainly, the

Colonials. There's no black member of it, can't remember, maybe there are, there's half military, half civilian, there are very few soldiers now if any indeed. [ ] Yemen or Commander in Chief.

MI And your Mum lived to see that investiture as well? [IB Mm?]  
Your investiture in the OM?

IB One goes alone to [ ] the Queen, private audience. She talked about the student troubles, didn't Richard tell you when it was, it must have been in '67 or '68, I think then, '68/9 that sort of date. Maybe '72, I can't tell you but it was round about then.

MI I can find out.

IB Easily. It says so in 'Who's Who'. The real shame is that there are ordinary degrees which I have [ ] plenty, which is absurd.

MI Why absurd? Why have you ...? [IB Because I'm the ...] You put on a certain show of self deprecation which is rather complicated, I can never quite understand it.

IB Quite genuine, I really don't think I deserve them. I have great respect for real thinkers and real scholars ...

[Here Lady Berlin says something about a Countess to which he replies, 'Certainly Countess of [ ], absolutely, why not? She won't mind if you don't and we can also call her Gorrie or whatever she was before, G-o-rr-i-e' he spells the name for Lady Berlin.]

MI Twenty honorary degrees!

IB I've just received the offer, I am just about to go to receive one in Yale. [MI Oh!] Jenkins is very excited about this, he said, 'You've got Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard and Yale! Nobody's ever had all these before.'

MI Nobody has.

IB Well, I don't know, how can I tell?

MI And you don't have to give speeches happily at any of them ...?

IB I make it a condition that I don't, 'I would be very happy to receive it, provided ...' So I go to Yale at the end of May.

MI Have you had any citation, any honour in which the citation made you laugh, or seem wildly implausible – describing another person, or ...?

IB I think so, I don't think I ever listened to them but I think they are absurd, nearly all. Usually it comes [ ] the historian which I am obviously not.

MI But why not? You're a good historian.

IB No, I'm not an historian at all. I have ideas at the most, I mean most historians don't recognise the history of ideas in history, like being a restorer of furniture, I don't know, [ ] I wouldn't mind – er – yes, think!

MI Sage!

IB That wonderful moment when – you know what I mean by the [ ], James, the [ ] James who told the ghost stories; when he left being Provost of Eton to become Provost of King's; one of the old fellows of King's said – you know this story, you must – in Nathaniel [ ] people, said, 'That's the end of thinking at King's.' [Laughter] It was, too! Absolutely right. He was a very – so elegant, snobbish classical figure, thinking was not the thing. [ ] at King's, oh yes.

MI I've wanted to – we've talked about your mother, we've talked about many of the things I've wanted to talk about this time but – I'm wondering whether perhaps we should stop now, you have to go out to ...

IB We're going to a party [ ] ...

MI Well I will withdraw when – amazing ... [Lady B No, don't go yet]

IB I didn't admit that to the ladies I had lunch with, they'd have been too shocked, [Lady B says something] I know, they would have been too shocked. A very nice lunch it was, dead, diabetic chocolate, but they were charming to the ladies.

MI I am extremely naughty, Isaiah and I sit here munching [ ] which I hear is not very good for his teeth and things.

IB [ ] now; no, no, it's all right [Lady B unintelligible] Very good for him, well the [ ] 's excellent for him.

MI Oh it's very good ...

IB No, no let me tell you ...

MI Diabetic chocolate – you aren't diabetic are you?

Lady B Not diabetic but he thinks it's less fattening.

IB No but I think it's less fattening, it is too. Well, I'm rather maniac about that sort of thing, I take lots of vitamins in the morning – they do no good at all. [MI But you take them?] The [ ] but I believe that they do, no good, I do take them, like being at morning prayer. [MI laughs]

MI Speaking of morning prayer, I've just been in Bradford all week talking to the Moslems about Bradford ...

IB Oh yes! Go on.

Lady B Oh really, oh, are you broadcasting it?

MI I'm doing a whole programme about it which I'll tell you about when it comes up.

IB What about them? Did you find any of them at all sympathetic?

MI Oh deeply sympathetic, deeply, that's what was puzzling ... [IB they are nice people] ... People who said publicly that they were prepared to kill Salman Rushdie [ ] shouting match and so on, as a matter of principle, would invite me into their homes, had adorable children, had these kind of incredibly plain, bare, slightly depressing semi-detached houses with kind of, you know, settees bought from rather bad furniture stores; but the kind of sweetness about them and kindness – and I found it rather fascinating what they're going through, and I find it truly fascinating to see people who on the one hand, want their children to go to Moslem schools, wear Moslem dress, beautiful Moslem dress, and then allow them to come home and turn on the television and watch 'Neighbours' [IB Quite so] and extremely developed Moslem's saying [IB Simple people] yes, simple people but very devout people saying – er you know and talking about various religious duties that happen in Ramadan and then driving you out to their restaurant where they say, 'Would you like a beer?' it suddenly dawns on you it's exceedingly odd for a Moslem to be selling alcohol. So you say, 'Why are you selling alcohol?' And he says, 'Oh well, we have a major problem, we have a little ambiguity, a contradiction in my ethics.' I say, 'Well can you go on?' 'Well if I don't sell alcohol I lose my business and so you see my Koran and my business are not compatible' – they use other words but that's what it comes down to. [IB That's what they mean] They are rather charming;

and the other thing that struck me powerfully and I suppose this is the kind of Russian side, is the family structure has to be seen to be believed. [IB So close] Indescribable, I mean but much more so than any possible Russian context, but it has somehow faintly eastern European echoes because it's arranged marriages and people marry their first cousins and God knows what; the arranged marriages are absolutely baffling, you see these husband and wives couples who seem to me perfectly good marriages, you see if you're around a family for a day, you see whether there's tension, you see – they seem to get on fine; [IB Beautifully] they have not met each other until the day of their marriage ...

IB And then they get on beautifully, they know each other, they know what the others want.

MI And I say, yes and it's a case where the roles are so clearly defined by the culture that they just put the Individuals within them ...

IB Same thing with [ ] Jews in the Pale settlement, arranged marriages, absolutely. There were these marriage brokers ...

Lady B Yes but that was a hundred years ago, I doubt that it should be ... [ ] [IB What?] That was a hundred years ago.

IB Well it was a hundred years go but I dare say they're still living under it maybe – people still do [ ] hundred years ago.

Lady B And it's whether they know each other ...?

MI They won't know each other. I mean occasionally they will meet on their engagement party and then they will be separated and then meet again at their marriage. But then you come across that [ ] where it's all very strange and you talk to the wife and you say, 'I suppose you want many children?' assuming that birth control is not what the Koran ...'Oh' she says, 'Oh no, no, just

two.’ So that must assume some form of family limitation. They go to the clinics, you know she has a good NHS doctor who happens to be an Asian doctor but she wants all the latest medical stuff, I say, ‘How’s your pregnancy [ ]?’ She says, ‘Oh [ ]’ You have a sense of a culture that on the one hand is decided very much in response to the Rushdie affair I think, among other things and all the other currents in Islam to become more separate, to become more fundamentalist, to withdraw, to put the [ ] on the children; and on the other hand interpenetrated at every point, a Western society so that they live a kind of – it’s as if they cross time zones from one century to the other within seconds of each other in the same house. I found it very interesting.

IB But do they have English friends or not? [MI Mm ...] Not much interracial, natural ...

MI But again, it surprises. I go into one of these Moslem, separatist Moslem schools where everybody wears the veil and where they don’t want men in at all, they have to get special permission, it’s quite a story, and who do I find in the middle of the courtyard but an old English schoolmarm, white, you know severe, strict, very middle class, very nicely dressed, not at all someone in the multicultural ...

IB No, no, no, an old fashioned school mistress ...

MI Teaching ‘Kes’, a rather mediocre British novel about the working class, to these kids. You ask her – she says, ‘I don’t know anything about Islam, I just wanted a part-time job and it’s a good job and these are lovely kids and they work hard,’ and when you talk to the kids they all have broad Yorkshire accents; but they’re wearing this kind of Islamic veil. It’s all very complicated!

Lady B But do they mix with other children apart from ...?



MI No, you have a sense – I watched this, the school clothes. You saw a bunch of cars drive up and turbaned gentlemen who obviously chop onions in restaurants at night, coming out and standing there – very solemn – and then the women come out, put not only the veil up over their head but over their face so that their faces are completely masked, scuttle out of the school into these cars with [ ] and Daddy driving back to the other enclosure. They simply don't venture out into the public world. But in the schools themselves, they're learning chemistry, you know they're learning basic physics, they're learning 'Kes'; I say, 'What do you want the girls to be?' She said, 'I would be happy if one of them became an industrial chemist' and you wonder – like Mrs Thatcher? And you wonder how could such a life be possible for someone raised like that? I say, 'Do you teach the Darwinian theory?' and they say, 'We expose our children to the Darwinian theory and we expose them to the Koran and we allow them to choose, of course.'

IB Control, it sounds like [ ] But we tell them what the Darwin thing is.

Lady B And where do they come from, India, Bangladesh?

MI Mostly Pakistan and [ ]

IB No, no I understand that, I understand it perfectly. It's perfectly compatible, the idea of having a narrow, culturally, completely insulated – East inside the West exists on the one hand and there are techniques which they just acquire for practical purposes – how to make a scientific apparatus, how to cure itself, I see that, I see that very clearly but it doesn't trouble me; and Western [ ] would not be likely to penetrate, articles they don't want because they're not attractive enough either, to them; why should they be tempted?

MI No, I was very struck by that as well, I suppose this is kind of more banal and less interesting; it was just the simple fact that each Moslem in Bradford, be he ever so humble, working in a mill or

shop or restaurant and I went back into the kitchens in these restaurants, they just feel they are part of the world's largest, strongest, most militant religion. They really feel a sort of Messianic sense that the tide of religious [IB A genuine [ ] direction] is flying in their direction and they feel – and Bradford is an important place in that, it's part of the largest Moslem community in the Western world so it feel very grand; and they have contacts with the Moslem community in Kenya, the Moslem community in Saudi Arabia, the Moslem community here and there and they feel – and they regard the Ayatollah not as a kind of crazed lunatic but as a man who stood up and said, 'Tout haut, ce que pensait tu pas'(?), you know? And I think you went a little far if you pushed them, so basically they feel rather ...

IB They said what they all felt.

MI Slightly the way the British Dockers felt about Enoch Powell in a way, they know it's extreme but they actually ...

IB It's terrible but it's what they already feel. [ ]

Lady B [ asks something about the Pope]

MI No. no. He has no spiritual authority over them directly but a lot of them frankly admire him.

IB [ ] it's also what they really believe themselves and he's just spoken it out aloud in rather over strong language.

[Lady B asks a question which I can't quite make out]

MI Well I've had some sort of slightly spine tingling conversations and since all my conversations now are recorded, you'll see what it was like, I mean they just face to face with these people, it will come out in early May. I gave them no quarter, they seemed to – it

*MI Tape 28 / 44*

will be on one of these late night things and I'll send you a tape if it's on too late ...

## MI TAPE 29

Conversation date: 8 November 1989

Date transcribed: November 2002

Transcriber: Esther Johnson

Subjects covered:

The revolutions of 1989

Prospects for Eastern Europe

Pluralism, relativism and ethics

Kant

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IB ... on the other hand, to tell a man faced with death that he's not going to be killed, so that his last thought in a way when they're about to [ ] is that he's lied to is not a thing which is comfortable to carry in that sort of life. What should a man do, that's what moral philosophy is about. Of course you can answer, you can say 'Three lives are going to be saved, I am a British Officer, my duty is exactly like Lord [?], I have given orders, I have got to return these people so that I can't help it. I am a soldier, I am on duty, I can't suddenly start hesitating and waffling about, anyway to win the war is my discipline, accept your orders as they are given and not to question.' That's one way out. Well if you really believe that, you're happy, you've done it and it's OK but if you are somebody rather sensitive you don't know what to do. What this man did I cannot tell you for I wasn't told. I don't know what to do, what would you have done? What would I have done? I know what I would have done. [MI Which was?] I would not have cross examined him, I wouldn't, I would have done my best, I would have said, 'Look I'll try to help you, I'll try and persuade them but I can't be guaranteed that your life is saved, no I can't promise that, I cannot. You may be shot, well I'll talk to them which could do [ ] but let's say it's not enough. Unless you promise, you get from them a promise that I shall survive, then I think probably you

ought to die; and you ought to die because you're saving the lives of innocent people. This man is not innocent, he's got a lot a lot of crimes on his conscience. We may not succeed but unless this is done [MI Other people may die] Yes. And you're really doing the other thing because you are uncomfortable, you're trying to save yourself from nightmares.' [MI And squeamishness] Nightmares afterwards, have awful nightmares afterwards about doing this horrible thing, you see? All right ...

MI So you've got to get your hands dirty.

IB Otherwise don't go to war at all if you see what I mean, shoot yourself, commit suicide rather than that. It's like – look, same problem about these Jewish, leaders of these Jewish communities if you remember in Gestapo held territory. A Gestapo Officer appears before you and he says, 'Look, you know the names and addresses of all the Jews here. We need to know them because we're going to send them to productive labour in Poland.' You would know that this isn't true, they're probably being sent – let's assume it, you're not deceived. 'Now if you tell us you can escape yourself with your life and take out forty-seven other people with you, or a hundred and twenty, whatever you like. If you don't tell us we'll find them all duly ourself in the end, obviously, we will discover them and they'll all die, we'll arrest them all – we won't say die -we'll arrest them all at the end. It's very difficult to escape from these [ ].' What do you do? There are four [?servations]. One is that you say, 'No, I'm not playing your game. Do whatever you want, I'm not giving you the names and addresses, whatever you want I'm not collaborating.' The second – that I knew probably shot yourself in the end, you are finished, the probability is: the second alternative is you go and tell them, 'Look,' you say, 'Yes all right, I'll give you these names and addresses,' you do and then you go and tell them quickly that they're in grave danger and they must flee. They flee on their own but they're found quite soon, not a possibility of flight from the heart of Lithuania. Somebody may escape but broadly they would be going to their own deaths most

of them. The third possibility, you commit suicide, 'I can't face this.' Fourth is, what you do, you give them the names of these people and you get off with your hundred and forty-seven. There: what should you do? Miss Arendt was quite clever about that, she thought they ought not to collaborate at any level. I asked a pious Jew who looks after the [Rostrov?] Foundation. He said, 'I'm quite clear. Because of the Jewish Law you are not allowed to participate in something that leads to the murder of innocent men. Therefore you can't, you must die, you must just refuse. That is the law, that's the Talmud, the laws of God ordained by God, I have no problem.' Now what do you do? The answer to that problem is whatever you do is going to be condemned and praised. In such a situation ordinary rules of morality don't apply because it's an abnormal situation, so abnormal that whatever you do will lead to bad and good results. Just do what you do, do what you are moved to do, there's no way of retrospective – well one of these people did do that, he did give these names and some relation of one of these people was killed; and then this man went to Israel, the Head of the Community, and the other man then attacked him, libelled him as it were, attacked him for conniving with the Nazi's, and this man brought a suit of libel and the lower court found that he was innocent and the next court found him guilty and the court after that found he was innocent again. And then he was assassinated by this man who originally [ ], killed. Right, OK, in this situation there's absolutely no solution and it's no good looking for one and the idea that all the old questions have rational solutions just aint true.

MI Well I mean – and to lower – that's why perdition's such a vile play because it assumes that there is a possible right answer to ...

IB Oh no of course, they shouldn't have done it, yes. Well perdition told lies to some extent apart from the real problem which you say, of course, that's what it turned on. They say the Zionists ...

MI I think what I find so heart rending about those dilemmas in a curious way is that the one option that is foreclosed and so cruelly foreclosed would be to refuse in such circumstances that people would know why you had refused. I mean if you have the option to commit suicide or to tear up the note or to defy the Nazi Officer and then leave some message [IB That you'd done it] which allowed the world to understand your actions; I think one of the things that I find always makes me weep when I think about the Holocaust is not merely that people were placed in excruciating moral circumstances and then killed in the most unspeakable ways but that, you know, along with six million lives there were just countless acts of courage, defiance, bravery [IB Which were not known about] excruciating forms of – [IB Which have perished, nobody knows] perished without a trace so that men would make this choice that you and I are discussing [IB They can't learn from it] in safety. Yes and human life has lost all that choosing ...

IB Not even some moral arises from it, nothing left in the world to illuminate moral behaviour of people placed in a terrible situation.

MI Which is why you know everybody has certain things that move them terribly about these things but I suppose the things that move me so much are the little pieces of paper dropped from the trains, you know people trying to write to tell someone, anyone ...

IB Of course, what's going on, Save us, save us, save us, oh they're terrible those bits of paper, We are going to our death, save us, do something. Well of course the moral guilt is very great but everyone always blames themselves for not perhaps doing enough and they are right too, to reproach themselves, they could have done more. Almost everybody in such situations can do more than they do, they're very very ...

[AB enters. Your taxi's here]

IB I must go.

*Side B*

IB ... something was published by, I don't know, one of the Academicians I was in touch with, and he began by saying [ ] that I was and so on, he paid me a compliment, he said something about there's a shock to reading a venomous revue in the Times, how that gets to them [ ] rather sensitive and he called him [velenoso?] which is venomous, veleno is poison in Italian, it's the Italian for poison, means venomous, velinoso vele, that's all right and something else, contemptible or something. He then went on saying one of the criticisms of me was that I frittered away such abilities as I had in social life. This might be true but after all, Proust and Saint-Simon also had ...

MI [Laughing] Also frittered away their ...

IB And yet they wrote quite well, the answer is of course they used it in their writings whereas I can't be said to have done that and that made a difference but still he didn't stress that. [quotes Italian] I thought it was extraordinary that some Italian man in Turin should find that.

MI But obviously a man after you own heart if he should regard it as velenosa ...

IB [Castaldo?] don't forget his name, splendid fellow.

MI Good for you, good for you. I did want to talk to you a little bit about Europe in fact because given that you know we're talking at a moment when they're absolutely streaming out of East Germany as fast as their legs can carry them and the Hungarians are talking about a multi Party system and all that, we are in the sort of Springtime of Nations, it feels like the Spring time of 1848;



whether the Tsar autocrat is now going to saddle his horse and ride down upon us ...

IB Yes I think I've just told you, though my memory goes immediately, about the two banners in the counter demonstration in Moscow reported by the [MI Oh no, no, tell me] reported in the whatnot, in the Independent. [MI Yes, saying?] Well one of them says, 'Our 78 journey into nothing.' The other says, 'Proletarians of all Nations, we apologise.' [Laughter] The Russian for that would be 'Forgive us'. [quotes the Russian] Wonderful, terribly witty. [Laughter] That kind of wit really is beautifully Russian; the English and the Russians are wittier in their own way than anybody else in that way. You wouldn't have that sort of thing in Germany, France, Italy just possibly.

MI So what happens Isaiah, where are we going, where are we headed?

IB Well, I'll tell you. We're not going into world Capitalism which is what that idiotic Japanese – [MI Fukiyama, yes, the idiot yes] – some kind of Hegelian synthesis is obviously going to happen but we can't begin to say what it's going to look like. These people on the whole are not anti socialist, they're certainly anti despotism and oppression and so on but I don't think [ ] capitalist system, that's what they're after; and yet all the Poles who come to All Souls, three of them one by one call on me and then they say, 'People say you are against the present government?' I say 'I am rather': 'But I don't understand, it is freedom; the capitalist system is the system which produces the greatest number of free alternatives for the individual. How can you be? You are in favour of liberty. Capitalism is the most libertarian movement in history, what have you against it?' That is said by these people.

MI Yes, and Mrs Thatcher's speeches circulate in Samizdat at [?] or meetings in Warsaw, so she – and Hayek too and Popper and [IB I'm sure that's true] this is the great liberating tonic ...

IB Well, the Sakharov's too, heroes as I told you were Mrs Thatcher and Reagan, heroic figures for them. [MI This gives one pause] Well the word 'right' and 'left' has lost its meaning, [?] is right wing but he's a orthodox Marxist, where are we?

MI Now I would like to interview those Eastern Europeans because I feel that the whole ...

IB Individually you can. Some of them are highly intelligent, they come to England now in enormous quantities. My man went back and said, 'You know, can I explain to you about these things?' I said, 'Yes.' 'It is a question of genes; you know there are dominant genes and recessive genes. Dominant genes of course we know but the recessive genes sometimes come out in the third generation. These Intelligentsia, they are a product of recessive genes.' [MI That's very good] Sweet. Anyway, what is going to happen? Well I'll tell you. I think there's enormous vitality in the Soviet Union, sheer human vitality, it's an actual moral, physical – which can go in any direction good and bad; but the energy, the accumulated energy and the blocked, the absolutely suppressed creativity is there and it can burst out. It hasn't yet because the Communist Party to some degree is still in control. I don't think that's true of the Western [ ] which circulates so much. But I don't think there's an enormous creativity really in – that's my great Russian point of view, my chauvinism, yes. [MI Poles aren't like that much] Poles I think might. I don't think Hungarians [ ] suppressed, all right I mean but I don't think, people have never been able to put out what they wanted to put out; Czechs – I don't believe in Czech genius, ever since [Jacobsen?] my late friend the linguist introduced me to a Czech novelist in Harvard, [K?] who used to come to my lectures; he said to me, 'You know she's studying a Czech novelist, there are one hundred and ten novelists, none of them any good.'

MI [Laughs] Oh but come on, don't you have a soft spot for Czech inter war democracy, for the [M?] ... [IB Oh yes, Bush-?] defending

the Jews against [K?] as a kind of central European liberalism which he incarnated which ...

IB Oh of course it must have been wonderful, no, no he must have been a very brave and good man, he really was. I mean the mere fact that he is Slovak should have exposed the forgery of the Slovak ethic which somebody invented; it took some doing and this is the thing which all Slovaks began to pray to, some pseudo medieval ethic which was meant to be a great Slovak work. Well he exposed it as a forgery and the straight act about that is that it was an extremely good thing [MI Heroic work, yes] Yes and he was a man of unimpeachable integrity. The whole Czechoslovakia at that period was absolutely OK. Well they were said to have oppressed some Carpathian Slovenians but I don't know about that, I heard round the corner that ...

MI I was just looking again at a biography of [?] and she's getting a pension from the Czechs and the [?] and they're paying her the pension even when she's in the [?] even when she's in misery in [?]. [IB Still getting money from?] Yes, that's a good government it seems to me, getting it from the Czechs.

[AB enters with news she has just heard on the radio]

IB Oh the [Politico?] has gone? Not only the government? [AB Politico] [MI The dam's bursting] But what about the Leader? Well he's part of it, he's Head of the Politico. He did survive? It came very fast. [MI Too fast do you think?] In a way. Sacked? A member of the Communist Party, well he could have resigned and that means they're leaders of the Communist Party, they must have been ordered to do it by – what's his name? [MI Kranz?] Kranz(?), yes, Kranz(?). [AB Yes he's going to form a government] Thank you thank you, thank you, thank you very much. No I don't know what's going to happen. The West Germans are going to try and block the entrance at some point, already they are beginning, they're thinking of their jobs and no doubt we will hear ...

MI But don't you think, stepping back from all this, that you might at the end of your life return to an absolutely unforeseen historical result which is that the Europe that you were born in, a Europe in which there was really no cultural frontier between Petersburg and Liverpool say, in which there will be states and there will be divisions and contradictions but in which there will be one Europe, will return.

IB One Europe. I think it will, yes. I think it will, perhaps not quite in my lifetime but I think it will.

MI Well that's rather touching don't you think?

IB Very, very, very good. Everything good and bad will float up. There'll be civil wars. [MI Really?] Well [ ] there's bound to be but our reaction is there are liberals, there are socialists, sooner or later more coagulation will occur between these parties and there'll be scraps of some kind, the old [ ] is too strong, but some kind of collisions about to occur. It can't all become a peaceful, social democratic, enlightened liberal state. [MI From the Urals to the Atlantic] From the Urals to the Atlantic.

MI Where do you think the trouble will be worst or where will it come first?

IB Very difficult. [Long pause] Really difficult. I wonder? [Long pause] You see I don't see an actual symbiosis for example between the Russians and Poles even now. I don't see an actual symbiosis between Poles and Germans even now: so there's bound to be friction on those borders; wars, no. In Russia there could be a Nationalist reaction movement, I don't see it'll succeed but I think there'll be a wave of it at some point. It's a touch and go situation which they might make alliances with the nationalities and even so to speak to some extent put up with some degree of integration of the Soviet Union providing they can keep what might be called

ethnic Russian frontiers, Ukranian Russian frontiers, all that could happen. The Jews of course will suffer as always; any [ ] will be the first to be hit naturally enough, but ...

MI I suppose if one means that there's a possibility of a kind of reunified Europe along the lines of – that almost began to exist in your childhood and also came to an end in your childhood, I suppose that also implies something about the possibilities of political change in the Soviet Union, the possibility ...

IB Well no doubt. Look I think that the cultural unity will arrive much earlier than any kind of political and economic unity, that I'm sure of because the Intelligentsia likes, I mean connects, there's some degree of – I have this passionate, old fashioned belief in the solidarity of the real Intelligentsia, not the people around *The Spectator*. [MI Laughs] I don't mean them and I don't mean *Private Eye*. I mean more or less the sort of ...

MI Or the people that run the European Common Market for God's sake!

IB Not that either. No. But the contributors to ordinary highbrow journals, even the *TLS*, everything of that sort. These people will come into some sort of contact with, will due to be influenced by, will have some kind of relationship with. You see, take Russia now; the fact that Surrealist poetry is being written now, I mean it's called, I don't know [Conceptualism?] but it's quite mad. A man came and recited it in Oxford the other day, one of them. The fact that that should be happening is the best symptom of the fact that Russia as it was in 1910 when Marinetti arrived on [?], Marinetti arrived and planted a lot of theories of his on Russia which went over, extremely Pagant, Mayakovsky was the result you see? In other words cultural contact is bound to occur; [MI Oh absolutely] and the only thing I'm afraid of is that quite a lot of bogus stuff may find itself formed upon the central European model, I don't know, do you know what I mean [ ] I don't know what [MI They'll

drink at those wells] Yes they'll drink at those wells. I don't know whether they will or not, I don't think the Russians are very liable to drink – I said to my Russian friend, no my Hungarian friend, came to see me at least, friend that is but only the half of it, he's a Hungarian philosopher, one of the best. 'Well the Russians are now interested in – ' 'Yes, yes a lot is going on in Russia about philosophy, Marxism is out and they are really being quite serious.' He thought they were much freer. So I said, 'Who are the philosophers worth dealing with?' He said, 'Oh [ ], [Mendyev?] these theologians.' I've nothing against them, 'But you realise' I said, 'the Russians haven't produced a single philosopher in the academic sense; thinkers, yes of course – Herzen is a thinker, Nietzsche is a thinker but he wouldn't have had a Chair in Philosophy exactly, Chair in the Classics, yes.' You see? In that sense the Russians were simply rather dreary Provinces of Germany. There were professors but they were just third rate Kantians, neo Kantians and they all went to listen to [ ] lectures, quite all right, they knew the stuff: but not a spark of original thought made any impression anywhere, any words of philosophy, well no, no point I thought. He was rather troubled by this; he said, 'But you know we in Hungary too had no philosophers apart from Luk cs.' I said, 'Well, ' [ ] I forgot to ask him about the [ ] theory of language, he's such a man. [Laughter] Well I think it will happen all right and I think, I don't think Logical Positivism will – never get there, Western empiricism will ever get there; if it does it'll go forward by leaps and bounds, they'll be very good at it, they will.

MI But liberalism and all the kind of philosophical apparatus that goes with liberalism, the kind of liberal scepticism, the kind of [histomolgy?] of doubt, all the kind of stuff that underpins liberalism, I ever thought would travel very well at all in Russia.

IB This is true. I can't think of anybody – well in a sense Herzen was a rather sceptical liberal in many ways.

MI But my grandfather – when I look deeply at my grandfather who was always described as a liberal and I get right down inside him, what I see in fact is not scepticism and irony at all [IB But decency] but the pious kind of Tolstoyan earnestness you can imagine: and full of rubbish, I mean to my way of thinking but rather moving rubbish about the peasants ...

IB But connected to a certain decency, the decency which makes him called liberal, there were no decent conservatives in a certain sense. Decent Tsarist, I mean decent right wing Tsarist is not possible. I don't think ...

MI A decency that had rather little to do with the kind of liberal procedural virtues of due process and this and that ...

IB It's a very un-German thing, too; there are not many sceptical liberals in Deutschland; there are not very many – scepticism in France, yes, sceptical liberalism [ ] view. It's a purely Anglo American thing, it comes from long period of prosperity [MI And social tranquillity] and social tranquillity, exactly and security which then makes it possible to throw doubts without much danger.

MI Yes, there are no social conflicts so radical that they risk the fabric.

IB Exactly, you see? I mean Carlyle could say what he liked and Mill could say what he liked but – this man asked me, 'Who are the philosophers you are drawn towards?' I found it quite awkward to answer. [MI Living ones or contemporary ones?] I would have said Aristotle if it had been true but it isn't for me, or Plato but it isn't. No.

MI But I don't think you're drawn to philosophers are you? You're drawn to thinkers.

IB Well, I'm rather drawn to the Greek sceptics. There are a few who really said some very clever things. [MI Which ones in particular?] I wish I could remember his name, there's a Head of the [ ] Academy, of the Platonic Academy in the third century, now what was his name? I might remember later this evening. He went to Rome, he was quite well received and then he said to the Romans, he went to the Senate and all that and he said to the Senate, so that was the legend anyway, 'You pretend to be virtuous, you pretend to believe in certain rights and so on; in that case you must go back to your log cabins. What are you doing about all this oppression, all this domination, what right have you got to that? You pretend to all kinds of legal this and that,' he ordered them to dissolve themselves if they really believed what they said. Quite good. Now what was his name? There are a few people so I can't say that they had an influence on me. Who did have an influence on me? Kant, quite genuine. [MI What?] The ethics, the ethics [William the Tenth?], above everybody and so do a lot of people, all the pragmatists and liberals and so on. Why? Because it seems to me that the idea of right and wrong was invented by him, couldn't [ ], duty, yes, I'll tell you what it's according to, according to the Church or according to whatever it is, the Wise Men or according to the majorities, according to whatever it is, that's why good and bad couldn't [ ], differently interpreted; different ideals, different rules of life, all right. But right and wrong is absolute values which you mustn't transgress, not because God ordered you to but because of something intrinsic. Well of course there were a few English [ ] always mentioned that Doctor Pryce who was a non conformist, but whoever wrote Pryce, you see? Kant I think was the first person to distinguish good and bad, right and wrong; and that to me was an absolutely central idea because I accept that, I think people – what Kant said is true, most people know what they mean by right and wrong. It's not an obscure concept. I mean people may not recognise it because they choose not to, some of them, the more sophisticated ones: but the natives of anywhere, if you see that some things are absolutely taboo and some things are all right, and that's different from seeking out the happiness of life,



liberty, the pursuit of happiness, justice, mercy, that's not the point. Right and wrong are certain things which ...

MI They're not the point in the sense that over those there can be debate and conflict and disagreement; but over right and wrong there's something ...

IB We know, conscience speaks, there's a bell inside one, clock inside one says 'don't'. That's an absolutely crude way of putting it, something like that was started by Kant. It led to the Prussian Army, rather disciplined, never mind what it led to, the Germans in the nineteenth century, all the Nationalists and Conservatives loved that because absolute values and so on, no deviation. That made a permanent impression on me. Then the idea that there were certain permanent categories of human thought which are not perhaps part of our objective world but which we cannot possibly alter and that, what he didn't say, which is that these categories are of different orders of flexibility, they're not all as firm as all that. But, for example, take the most – right and wrong is one of them as far as morals are concerned, so is good and bad and so is true and false; without that also nothing happens, communication becomes impossible. Now take for example space and time. It's obvious that we don't really believe that we ourselves could tell what it would be like to live in four dimensional space. We can work it out mathematically, we can produce analogies, for example supposing there was a man who saw things in four dimensions; that would be like yourself if you met a man who only saw things in two dimensions and you suddenly said, he said 'What's happened to that thing?' You said, 'Why it's above this.' 'Above? I don't know what that means, I can't see it. Right and left, yes; forward and backward, yes; above and below? I[] it,' you see? Well you can imagine the four dimensional people would have the same relation to you. Well that's purely abstract, that's my analogy, we don't really have – whereas there are categories like I don't know what, lumps of stuff; you can imagine what it would be like if everything became gaseous but not so difficult. So that the world

is arranged in a series of firm, rigid frameworks of different sorts of flexibility, some are for all purposes absolute but these things are not bolted to reality, they are how we live and how we think and how we always will think, that's being a human being, it's seeing the world in that light and that's [ ]. I mean all right he did it, no doubt he was merely entirely interested in stating the truth of physics but whatever it is that's what got that going. Well William James had an effect on me, certainly, because he was the first person who said that people – the second person – who judge philosophy in terms of temperament, in terms of what people wanted things to be, what people wanted – I mean the kind of people they were and how the world appeared to them. That hadn't been said – Fichte said it but didn't follow it up. Well, the romantic thinkers, I didn't say this to this man because he was [ ] too much. [MI Who? Which romantic figure?] Well the romantic movement in general which is what I'm – I think I'm interested in. The idea that values, unlike Kant, are not discovered by some kind of intellectual, strenuous intellectual search but in some sense are created by us, as one thing which we cannot help following because we are, as Mrs Thatcher says, 'I am what I am.' [ ] you see? But we – it's thought – there are things which in a sense make life living, there are things which are ends of life for me and a great many other people in my culture, that's why I can deal with it. If it's only for me then I'm mad but if it's something in terms of which I can explain to others. Pluralism is what I believe in which is different from relativism; I gave a lecture about that.

MI Well make that distinction clearer for me.

IB Well I'll tell you. Relativism is a very simple dogma, it says I like my coffee black and you like your coffee with milk, there's no conflict between us. I believe that this is good and you believe something else is good. We are conditioned by education, by environment, by all kinds of physiological things to believe what we believe and so on but we have different views and part of our values differ and when you come to that point no argument can

occur but we both believe what we believe, no conflict because there's no objective criteria. I believe there's no objective criteria, that part I accept but I think on the whole that to be human means that there aren't any definite number of possible goals but only a hundred and fifty-seven or a hundred and thirteen. Now when you judge people who differ from you, cultures which appear to have different values from your own, you claim to maybe not understand them. To understand a culture is to say to yourself, If I'd been living then I could conceive that I could have believed that and remained rational and been quite a decent sort of person. I don't happen to believe it but I can see how it could be, rational, decent and believed that. These are values which are objective in the sense that they're among the values which human beings as such are bound to choose among, if not choose then chosen for perhaps. Choosing values is – which I use constantly is a mistake on my part. If I were to choose you as much as you choose them, they are born with them and education does give them – you find yourself pursuing them. You can change them by being converted; when you are converted it means that some new constellation appears which to the non convert must be intelligible even if they don't follow it. Now [intent or?] intelligibility but in different sorts of values which may in fact conflict, is different from relativism because I don't say you like this and I like that and there is nothing to choose between us. No, no, I understand that that's a particular value which you pursue and I'm against it but I fully understand how, in your circumstances, being what you are, you could honourably resume it. I may even have to war with you but I don't deny it fits status as a perfectly intelligible value which I could imagine myself to pursue. That's the point you see? Whereas in the other cases I don't bother at all about the other things I do, they just are what they are. But there are some theories which I deny that you see? There are certain points which I reject even the possibility and [ ] the sense of these finite collection of values: for example, if a man comes to see me – I've always used this example – and I see that he is – sticks – he says his favourite occupation is to as it were stick pins into people, causing them pain, and I say,

‘Why do you do it?’ And the man says, ‘Because it gives me pleasure, it’s perfectly pleasurable,’ and then you say, ‘You mean causing pain gives you pleasure?’ He says, ‘No, no, it’s not pain, I just rather like the sensation of pricking.’ I say, ‘But supposing I produced an elastic ball, would that be just as good?’ ‘Just as good.’ Then the man says he can see no difference between going into rubber balls and going into people to whom you would cause them pain and he says, ‘What do you mean? I don’t follow you, why should it make a difference?’ Then he’s outside my moral realm and I can’t communicate, you see? In other words that’s no longer either relative or anything. When you say no, he’s sort of mad, when I say mad I mean outside my universal discourse, I can’t communicate at all, he’s not like an ordinary human being, there’s something wrong, something has broken down you see; and therefore his values are, I don’t know, totally unintelligible. It’s like you could say of a man, ‘What are you collecting?’ ‘Green objects.’ ‘Why?’ ‘Because they’re green.’ ‘Green probably gives you pleasure?’ ‘No.’ ‘Then why do you collect them?’ ‘Because they’re green.’ And you say, ‘Well what is it about green?’ ‘Nothing about green.’ Again something goes wrong.

MI But surely – I’m not a philosopher – but surely the primary difficulty with the pluralist position is how you adjudicate claims which are intelligent, humane [IB And conflict] that conflict. I mean the case of the pricking the ball is not so hard really, I mean I can see that it drops off the end of a scale but I find it ...

IB There are two things, the answer’s very dull, the answer’s very boring to this. If you find yourself in a situation with people of different values and you don’t know what to do, [ ] ‘Do we go to war?’ Then the first thing you do is what Trade Union conciliators try to do: first of all you try and find certain common values between yourself and them and say, ‘Look, do you want the world to collapse? If you go on doing this and I do it, you realise that your losses will be very great, so will mine.’ In other words you want to break these eggs to make an omelette but let me try and

persuade you that the likelihood of an omelette is not very great. Are you sure about breaking these eggs, you argue with them about the actual factual nature of so to speak the situation of the – analyse it. Then you try and find that and you try and say that look, damage may be done if I do this and you do that which we will both recognise as fatal to the preservation of the kind of society which we both want. Now are you sure that you want to risk endangering society to that degree? That is your argument. If that doesn't work, in the end you plump and then you have to say No, I am for this and you're for that and [ ] war.

MI Let me present another dilemma to you which is obviously autobiographical and quite real where you're faced with competing values, not between opposing parties but within your head, within one consciousness and those are the one's I find troubling; I mean take the following problem: my mother is in very poor health; maintaining her at home requires my brother to stand an enormous amount of mental psychological and moral energy keeping the nursing arrangements in place and he now wants to put my mother in a Nursing Home. And I see that as a choice between my brother, my brother's interests and my mother's interests and between the two of them I find myself in a tremendous difficulty as to how to choose because I sometimes think this is a choice between the young and the old, between the living and the – frankly – nearly dead. Sometimes I think of it however in very different terms, as a case where in one instance if she stays at home her care is infinitely better and in another case her care declines in order to make all of our lives more convenient. Now I'm raising this question genuinely not to seek your advice but as a paradigm of why I find it agonisingly difficult.

IB Yes it is agonisingly difficult and if you say 'How do I decide?' – well there is no way of deciding that because there never will be, that's why Weizmann said, 'The whole centre of my moral philosophy is the incompatibility of values,' which have no solution because there's no overriding criterion which settles them. Then

what do we do when they collide, why you plump, and whatever we do, we mind, whatever we do we suffer shame and loss in such a case. That's not avoidable. All choices imply some degree of sacrifice or loss, that's unusually not a very great sacrifice perhaps of the most critical kind but when it's as acute as that, then you decide and you think maybe I was wrong and that's all there is to it, there's nothing that can be done unless you try and – happy are those who have some kind of religious dogmata which tell them what to do.

MI But you see I find – what I find even more chilling about conflicts of that sort is that because of the kind of temperament I have because I'm moderately decisive of temperament, that is I know what I want, what I find myself doing is that faced with what on a certain construction is a clear violation of my mother's rights, I simply sweep those objections away under the impulsion of my absolute conviction that this deed, putting her in a hospital, has to be done, it just has to be done. It's so obviously ...

IB Well if you think of your mother's rights – your brother has no rights?

MI Well he does, he does: but in the conflict between those rights I find my – the trump card that seems to win is not higher religious values or deep human respect for my mother or anything but just a kind of gut conviction.

IB That is right, and then you can go on agonising afterwards about whether you're right and that means you try and think of it in terms of some kind of way of life which you lead or which you wish to lead, in some way some kind of moral horizon of which this doesn't quite fit. The question is how much of a misfit is it? How much would the other thing be a misfit? You cannot decide. I mean justice or mercy, we know that there are collisions of an inescapable kind.

MI But I feel in this case I simply will choose to live with a certain amount of shame and because I'm of a certain kind of temperament I will live with it better than other people.

IB Yes and then you say to yourself, All right supposing you say no, I will feel more comfortable if I sacrifice my brother? Then you will say what right have I got to prefer my own comfort to my brother's needs? It's all very well, morally more comfortable. What would that mean, you see?

MI Well there's shame either way.

IB Shame whatever you do but the question is where is the greater shame? No telling. You wake up one morning and you have decided. There is no other way out except for – there is no other way out. I mean this constantly happens in war time, you know these [ ] examples, do I save my family or do I fight the Germans? What do I do? What do I commit myself to? What do I do? There's no table of values which tells you; you can't look it up at the end of the book, say, well, which is the right answer? That's why I think it's correct to say that we are perpetually in a kind of [...] someone said or what the awful Oakeshott says is right, I mean there's no harbour, we go on floating. Happy those who know the answers; they usually lead to frightful blood in the end.

MI But I'm interested in the way in which I know the answer ...

IB You know what you think, the actual effect on it, you simply have two alternative courses of action each of which entails some kind of sacrifice of somebody else's values and then there's yourself, and you see, how much are you? Why shouldn't you go and live with your mother? Now you see, let's leave your mother out, just give up everything you're doing, give up your wife, give up your children, go and live with your mother or take your wife, take your children and torture them by forcing them to live in a country that they don't want to live in.

MI Or fly my mother over here and torture the rest of family ...

IB Fly her over and plant her in the house you see and torture them. Well the question is have you a right to torture your wife, how much? [ ] was always, she was always asking the Russians to stay with her, they drove him off his head, he put up with it. Well it may be all right to put up with it but have you a right to force her to sacrifice half her life to this intolerable nuisance? Well how do you decide? You say she has her rights, your children have their rights, your mother has her rights but you say well, certainly clench your teeth and you decide. You do clench your teeth, you take yourself and you say it's no good.

MI And the shame when one looks at it clearly is that one simply judges the worth of one's mother's life in all the senses for it to be worth less than the momentum of your own life and the momentum of your brothers.

IB But what right have you to judge it, what right have you? To play with lives like this? You can say to yourself, by what right am I the authority on these degrees of worth of all these characters?

MI And everything I've always written privately and publicly has been to the effect that it's precisely when someone is radically impaired that their rights should be most stringently guarded and protected.

IB Quite so. Well but not only do you believe that but also if you say to yourself Well that's what I believe in, that people should be protected, but in this case is the price too high? Who am I to establish prices? You see? And yet you can't [ ] , you can do nothing, that's always the alternative, you can do nothing but then you'll blame yourself for doing nothing. So no matter what you do, you lose. The question is, why do you decide as you do? Because you decide that way, that's what I believe, that's what – nobody



will agree with me about, that's quite wicked on my part, real piece of so to speak sort of capricious immoralism: but in the end you do plump, that's when people try and criticise me and say, no there is a rational solution, there must be. We may not be perfect but there is such a thing as arriving at a rational solution, you weigh the factors and in some way you can establish some kind of solution that can be defended by argument. Well you are strongly defended by argument because each argument would collapse in the face of a counter argument, you see? I know that and that's the only thing I've been able to contribute to moral philosophy. Not a very happy ...

MI Not a very happy outcome but true.

IB [ ] Oh it happens all the time. Let me give you this story which ...

MI But all of that hangs together with where we started this conversation with your Kantian belief that right and wrong really are discernible. [IB They are discernible] If we get back to that, you can choose.

IB You can because some things are right and some things are wrong. In this particular case all these courses of action are three quarters right and a quarter wrong but you are judging in terms of right and wrong, not good and bad, not happiness and misery, not really that. Any talk about rights implies in the end the notion of right; it is right that; just, right, anything you like to call it and these are absolute values which collide. They are absolute but you can't decide in the light of any one of them and sweep off the rest. Being a fanatic helps because then you know what to do and [ ]. Telling you a story which Stuart Hampshire told me whether or not it happened to him, he never said it did, certainly it must have done, I always suspected. He said that a British Intelligence Officer found himself in France towards the end of the war and he went to the Free French group, the Resistance group and they had in their

keeping a French traitor who worked for the Gestapo who they captured: and this Intelligence Officer was allowed to question him for whatever he wanted to know, and they said, 'There's only one thing we have to tell you, whatever happens he's going to be shot tomorrow morning. That is unavoidable, he is a traitor, a Frenchman, no question, he can't go free [ ]. Final.' So the Englishman went and interviewed this boy, eighteen, nineteen, and said, began asking him questions and the boy said, 'Look, let's get this straight, if you can save my life I'll answer your questions; but if you can't save my life why should I answer any of your questions, why should I?' Now what does he do? On the one hand he's a British Intelligence Officer and the answers may help to save the lives of British prisoners, I don't know, of victims of the Gestapo, I mean that's the whole point of ...

*End of tape (frustratingly!)*

## MI TAPE 30-1

Conversation date: 8 June 1989, Albany

Date transcribed: 28 December 1994

Subjects covered:

80<sup>th</sup> birthday

Publicity

Reputation

Romanticism

Scruton

Begins with discussion of his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday.

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MI I don't know why you like the attention.

IB I hate personal publicity more than anything. I shrink and shrivel.

MI Why?

IB Favourable or not, I hate seeing my name in newspapers.

MI Why?

IB Because I'm on view. I see myself as an entirely private person. I'd be quite pleased if you told me that no one will ever mention my name again. So far from being Stephen Spender who said that whenever he opened a newspaper and did not see his name in it he felt annoyed, I am the exact opposite.

MI I find that hard to understand?

IB What? Dislike of personal publicity.

MI Isn't it all unimportant, innocent?

IB Yes, it's vanity of some sort. I don't want to be exposed to people who I do not know who will think of me. It's a nuisance to have a character foisted upon one, to be always misrepresented, even favourably. There must be some psychoanalytic explanation for all I know.

MI It could also be the case...

IB I hate reviews. If my books were never reviewed I'd be must happier.

MI I don't believe that.

IB It's true. I don't want to be taken notice of in the wider public. All I care about are personal relationships of a wide kind. I like college life, lecturing; I like being mentioned in learned works; I don't mind my views being discussed in intellectually respectable ways. What I don't like is being treated like an actor or a politician.

MI He's a humble, home-loving sort of man...

IB Mock me all you like. I'm not a public person to myself. I'm not a public character. For some reason it has a crushing effect on me. I become paralysed by it.

MI What was your reaction to Scruton's piece on Saturday?

IB Irritation, depression, shame; complicated emotions, like the pleasure that people would take on seeing this; their secret pleasure that I should be taken down a peg or two.

MI So it awakens your anxieties about the treachery of public relations.

IB I think so. And finally, extreme annoyance and embarrassment which after  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an hour disappeared completely. I decided I wouldn't take a subscription to the Salisbury Review.

I have a semi-disciple at Oxford called Grey, who writes intelligently about me. John Grey Fellow of Jesus. Quite a clever man.

MI Isn't your problem that you get set up as a public spokesman.

IB I don't want to be a spokesman for anything. That's why I gave up my chair. Here I was a professor of political theory and my lectures were largely analyses of other people's doctrines. Maybe a professor of political theory ought to emit a clarion call. I didn't want to. I knew what I believed, but to see me trumpeting forth certain sentiments, as my predecessor Cole did.

MI Isn't there a contradiction there? The core of what you write has a moral purpose.

IB Oh yes, but I don't want to preach. The only movement where I'm prepared to stand up and be counted is Zionism, because it's such a minority movement, it's so unpopular, and there I'm all right. I've committed myself fully, I know that this entails hostility and criticism.

MI What about liberalism?

IB I don't quite know what liberalism is. Nobody does.

MI But you're it.

IB Me and Dr Owen?

MI You're a passionate liberal.

IB I wouldn't deny that. I wouldn't mind it if they talked about my doctrines. But that's not what they write about. My talk, my alleged

conversation, which I hate seeing, jokes about me. I'm always written about frivolously.

MI So it's the frivolousness which bothers you.

IB The social gossip element, yes.

MI Which touches fear in you that...

IB No, no.

MI That you are frivolous.

IB That I'm just a social fool, how awful, professional jester. I need more gravitas.

MI But it's difficult to separate men from their doctrines and liberalism requires a certain kind of temper or character which you in one way or other instantiate. Were I to write a biography of you, I would talk about your character.

IB Fichte said, If you want to understand a man's philosophy, the thing to understand what kind of person he is. His philosophy follows from his character and not vice versa.

MI And do you believe that?

IB Yes.

MI So do I. So we're stuck with talking about your personality.

IB But the aspects of my personality that are talked about are the trivial ones.

MI Indeed.

IB If I were written about in a grave and solemn fashion.. (Laughs). Other liberals – say Popper – are not talked about like that. Sakharov is not talked about like that. I'm written about as a performer. People have no respect for performers, they enjoy them for capable performance, and that's roughly what I mind.

MI You may resent having a sunny and unheroic temperament.

IB Non-crusading.

MI It's not a romantic temperament. An enlightenment temperament, and that is out of fashion.

IB Glad to hear it. I'm not. I take an interest in romanticism in the abstract, but I'm not one. I think the trouble about me is that I am systematically over-estimated and don't wish this to be exposed. And fundamentally I think I am too anxious to please and that I don't like that about myself. So I'm represented as a bit of a rattle. That's a caricature, but it has an element of truth in it. Too talkative.

MI Then the only thing you can do is to make yourself more indifferent to what people say about you.

IB Impossible to make oneself do that. I'm a colossal minder. I mind everything. If anything is mindable, I mind it.

MI But you're not a neurotic character.

IB Not at all, but I mind. I keep on staunching non-existent wounds.

I'm astonished I have enemies.

MI What disturbs you is that you are esteemed for your person and wish you were esteemed for more substantial works.

IB That's right. I don't think very highly of my own work or of anyone else's. My criticism goes both ways. I'm very critical of other people's work, but no more critical than I am of my own.

MI Why is that?

IB God knows, because I expect the impossible. No doubt. I want to be illuminated.

MI It's the source of your authority as a human being. There are lots of people I know who live in a sort of anxiety of your opinion.

IB Well, my opinions are unduly critical. The standard people don't usually attain, but it's a standard I apply to my own. That's why I despise my own work. If anyone praises me, I'm very grateful, but I don't believe them.

MI Isn't despise too strong?

IB Yes it is, but disregard. But I think they've been taken in. My career as I said is based on a systematic over-estimation of my achievements in a large number of places by a larger number of people. Long may it continue. (Laughter)

MI What is most over-estimated?

IB (Pause) I'm thought to be a brilliant writer. I'm not. No brilliancies, I haven't got it. Too many words. Too many notes, said Mozart. Evelyn Waugh said so. Too verbose.

MI Of you.

IB Yes. Wait a moment. What is over-estimated? My impact on what might be called the culture of our time. **I don't feel myself to have made any impact at all. I feel myself a balloon bumping on the surface of the water. The idea of attributing**



**some kind of weightiness to me seems absurd.** (Pause) I think I'm ashamed of minding too.

MI Of minding that you haven't the impact?

IB No, no, of minding the nasty things that people have said. I minded that everything I ever published in politics was attacked by both sides. Nobody ever came to its defence. It stirred things up I write more vehemently than I think, or certainly than I am. Displease the left rather more. Normally I'm attacked by E H Carr, Marshall Cohen, some Marxist in Salamagundi.

MI The aspect of your Marx book that I admired was that you put yourself into the mind and heart of a man you had no sympathy for.

IB Perfectly true.

MI An achievement possible only to a certain kind of liberal character.

IB I'm a symbol of the kind of people who block his light, who he wants out of the way. He knows I refuse to meet him. I'm everything he hates; bland, amiable, carry on regardless, totally superficial, know nothing about sex, love, God, deeper darker themes.

MI What things are under-estimated in your work?

IB I've got a thesis on the romantic movement which I think is under-estimated.

I can go on for hours, six and a half hours in fact. (Laughs)  
Briefly, European philosophy is a three-legged stool on which the philosophic enterprise rests. One proposition is that to any true question there must be one true answer only, because if there isn't an answer, how can it be a true question? Secondly, that there must

be some way to answer the question. We may not be able to attain it because we are too stupid or too unfortunate or original sin, or we knew it once and disaster happened. Adam in Paradise knew it, or God knew or the Angels, somebody must know it.

Different methods have been suggested: in sacred writings, or inspired utterances of prophets; or rational investigation in the laboratory; or in the heart of an innocent peasant, as in Rousseau; or in the *vox populi*. On the subject of truth, bloody wars have been fought because salvation depends on it, so it is perfectly reasonable to exterminate people, because that's what matters. Number three is that if you could discover all the answers and put all the answers to all the questions together, they would cohere. Because one true proposition cannot contradict another true proposition. And if we put them all together, we would know how to live. That would be perfection. That is true of Plato, Aristotle, Christianity, the Jews, true of the Enlightenment. It's true of any rationalist philosophy. Therefore the idea of perfection or the perfect solution comes from that. In principle it must exist.

That the romantic movement cracked. In the sense that they conceived the idea that the truth was not to be discovered but created or invented in the world of values. When Herzen said Where is the song before it is sung? Not anywhere. For Joshua Reynolds, there were Platonic universals. If you paint David you mustn't paint him with a hare-lip, although he may have had one because he is a king. Royalness is an objective thing.

Reality is not an object, but a subject of which you are a part; the other thing is the incompatibility of values, the fact that there are certain contradictions in reality which nothing can reconcile, which means that there can be more than one answer to certain question, none of which is truer than the other.

MI Why do you think that last proposition is new to the romantics?

IB It had never been said before. I think I'm the first person to say it. Everybody must have thought that values are incompatible Not all things can be had at the same time. I can't discover who had

said that. For rationalists this is a soluble. It can't be a permanent state of affairs: there must be somewhere a solution where everything coheres.

MI Doesn't the idea of the incompatibility of values arise out of the wars of religion? Hence the rise of toleration.

IB No, toleration is simply exhaustion. They thought the expense of fighting the war was too great. They never thought there might be something in what the other said.

MI In Locke's Letters of toleration...

IB You oughtn't to interfere with people's views.

MI People's views may be incorrigible to persuasion...  
You cannot use compulsion. Which implies a radical antimony in religious belief.

IB Why? That simply means you can't force people, but you might persuade them. (taps his hand) The truth is one and you might persuade them of it. You can't use force because that might disrupt society. It breaks the social contract. It's expensive. It leads to blood and social disorder and is to be avoided at all costs.

Mill after all believed in objective truth. Unless you allow opinions to clash, you will not arrive at it.

MI That's what the romantics called into question.

IB They don't talk about the truth very much. For a romantic, a duel over belief is better than a co promise. That is treason to the light within you. The light within me is not the light within you. And this is not just individuals. There are politicised versions of it: my country, my class, my history. I do this because it is German. It doesn't lay claim to universality. They never thought the Peruvians should believe it. Same with class.

MI The Marxist view of class incarnates the romantic view of the incompatibility of truths or inner lights.

IB Absolutely.

MI But Marxists do say there is a truth.

IB the body which generates the truth is the class. Some kind of creativity occurs. There isn't a truth immanent, nailed in the heavens, as with Kant. A moral law within is the starry heaven without, as Kant says. You see, Well alright. (slaps his hand) With the result, you get nationalism, existentialism. Which clashes with common sense rationalism by which most people live, and neither side can claim a victory.

For example, the idea of sincerity does not exist before the eighteenth century. Thus, the idea of martyrdom only makes sense for Christians (Since the truth inheres in Christian religion). But for Moslems, it's pathetic. To die for nonsense? And you can't respect the sincerity of those who die for what are held to be false beliefs.

If you're a Catholics you don't say that the Protestants lead souls to perdition and ought to be eliminated, but you should respect them at least because they were sincere and did not do it for money.

MI In a post romantic world, you accord them the compliment of sincerity.

IB Now you do. Even about Hitler they said, he's certainly sincere. (Laughter) It can go rather far.

MI This is why conservatism puts such stress on having privileged access to the inner recesses of the soul, while liberals are just sophisters and calculators, as Burke said.

IB Yes: they have access to the light within by which you live.

MI That means surely the stronger your feeling, the more you will believe it to be true.

IB No not feeling, conscience. It starts with the pietists, you reject the church, hierarchy, learning. Just like the Hassidim among the Jews, analogous movement starting at the same time.

Pietism says look within. Fundamentally it's a reaction to the French. It's francophobia.

In 1500, suppose you travel across Europe from Bordeaux to Vienna. You discover a somewhat similar culture all along. In Germany, Grunewald, Durer, quite a lot going on.

Take the same journey in 1600. England is in full bloom. Spain too. France is pretty good, la Pleiade. In Germany damn all, and before the 30 years war. In Holland, marvellous. Sweden things are beginning to stir. This is when the humiliation of the Germans begins. By the middle of the seventeenth century the French are on top of everything. The Germans are regarded as yokels.

One begins by imitating. Then one decides to do it oneself. So Thomasius in 1710 begins to give his lectures in German, not Latin, which was original. Then the Pietists say, let them have it all, it's just the external world. They're superficial. It's all material. Compare Bach to the world of the courts of Paris. It begins with bitter Francophone resentment which takes inner spiritual form. It's a very sublime form of sour grapes the whole thing. Then you get Herder. Better be a third rate German than a ninth rate Frenchman. Kant is Enlightenment but also hatred of the utilitarian, hatred of the manipulation of men in the philosophes.

If I ask you which you prefer Frederick the Great or Torquemada. T. burned a lot of people but he believed in what he was doing. Frederick was a nasty person, hypocritical, but doubtless he raised the standard of German life. Which is preferable.

MI Why is that a question?

IB Until the nineteenth century, sincerity was not an issue. Thus Frederick the Great would have been the unquestioned choice. Because success and achievement was what mattered. Since then, what matters is sincerity as well, and motive. We ought to admire those who fail – naturally this comes from Christianity.

The same thing with pluralism. Before a certain time, truth is one. One good, many bad, that's what Plato taught. The idea that a society is good if there are a clash of opinions, that was brand new. Variety is a new ideal. It doesn't exist before. And they dominate us, these new ideals (sincerity and variety).

MI The market philosophers continued to believe that from the many to one (invisible hand).

IB Unified field theory. In the sciences, this can work. No good saying there are two answers. Pluralism only applies to men's inner world.

The first man who talked about the plurality of values was a perfectly obscure German pietist called Arnold, in the late seventeenth century.

*Side B*

I begin talking about Bayle, and suggesting that he has a sense of religious pluralism and hence of values.

MI What about the French Revolution?

IB The values in terms of which the French Revolution is made are eternal truths. It was entirely classical.

MI David.

IB Not just David.

MI The making of a new world.

IB But they believed they were discovering or restoring an ancient truth. Jefferson believed he was right.

The fundamental model in Hegel is aesthetic. It's a description of symphonic music: theme, counter theme, they blend and produce something higher.

Tonight I propose to go to an opera by Donizetti called Viva la Mama.

What's the time? Twenty to six.

You have a raft of tickets there. Life is a perpetual theatre of pleasure. It's all in a bag of 5 pound notes. Otherwise I would have had to go to a party by Weidenfeld for the American Ambassador.

MI Why has it taken you so long to put these thoughts about romanticism in order?

IB As soon as I put anything down, I think it's no good. I told you, I'm a great disparager of my own work.

MI But you just said your thesis is underestimated.

IB I haven't written it as it should. There must be more footnotes. How can I be so dogmatic? How can I assert this? Do I know enough? What authority do I have?

MI The hour is late.

IB In so far as I'm doing anything, I'm reading the romantics. My voice is much better then, than now. Much higher, screaming, in the National Gallery in Washington. I need a new transcript of those tapes.

## MI TAPE 30-2

Conversation date: 8 June 1989, Albany

Date transcribed: 26 June 2004

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*Side A*

MI I don't quite know why you dislike it so much.

IB I dislike personal publicity more than anything. I shrink and shrivel.

MI Why?

IB Favourable or not. I hate seeing my name in newspapers [MI Why?] even if it's entirely favourable.

MI I don't understand it.

IB Because I feel that I am being sort of on view, on a stage. I see myself as an entirely private person. I don't want to be talked about at all. I mean, I hope – I would be quite pleased if you told me that nobody ever mentioned my name again. It's not likely to happen but if you did tell me that, so far from being – like Stephen Spender once said, whenever he opened the newspaper and didn't see his name in it, he was annoyed. [MI *laughs*] I am the exact opposite.

MI I do find that hard to understand, genuinely hard to understand.

IB Why? What, dislike of personal publicity?

MI Yes. Why don't you take the view that could be taken, which is that's it's all basically rather innocuous? [IB No] I mean, given that



it's all [], that it all fades away, that Andy Warhol is right, that we're famous for fifteen minutes? It's all right, it's innocent.

IB I agree, I agree. It's vanity of some sort. I just feel I don't want to be exposed to view to a lot of people who don't know me, who will think about me in this way, and this is therefore a piece of vanity. I don't want the public to think about me at all; I think they're bound to get me wrong. It's a nuisance to have a character foisted on one, suddenly to be always misrepresented in some way, sometimes even favourably, and it – I don't know, it causes me – no doubt there is some kind of psychoanalytic explanation about, for all I know. But...

MI It could be, it could also be the case that you don't like...

IB I hate reviews, you see? If they're favourable, I like them quite well, how can I not? But broadly, if my books were never reviewed, I'd be more content.

MI I simply don't believe that.

IB I don't want – yes, it's true – I don't want to be taken notice of in the wider public. I like personal relations, that's all I really care about, of quite a wide kind. I like being in a college, I like having pupils, I quite like the thought of lecturing though I don't enjoy it very much, I like being mentioned in learned works, as every help with the author, the introduction, thank me for this and that, I quite like that. I don't mind my views being discussed, I mean in sort of intellectual, respectable ways. What I mind about is being sort of like an actor or a politician.

MI Yes. 'He's a home loving man, lives in a humble little place in Headington...'

IB It's not that, no, no, no, no. No, no, you can mock me as much as you like [MI *laughs*] but it isn't that. I am not a public figure to

myself. I am not an actor, I'm not a politician, I'm not a sort of – I don't know – a public personality, not a public character, in my own view. There are people who are, I think dear Stephen, but for some reason it has a crushing effect on me which Aline also can't quite understand, nobody can, quite. But it's known. I become paralysed by this.

MI When Scruton wrote that piece about you on Saturday, what was your initial reaction to it? What happened when you read it? Fury? Depression? Rage? Irritation? Anger? What?

IB Oh, irritation of course, not anger, no. Irritation, depression, shame at being exposed in some sort of way, being written about in that way; and I thought, then various complicated emotions. I thought of the pleasure which some people would take which they would pretend not to take, in seeing this. I mean they would be very sympathetic on the surface but in fact they would be secretly pleased that I was taken down a peg or two and people thought I might have gone too far and so on you see? And so you thought, well, just about time he was deflated a bit.

MI So it awakens your anxieties about the treachery of social relations?

IB I think so, that certainly. And finally, not rage but extreme annoyance, annoyance and embarrassment. After three quarters of an hour, it disappeared, for once. He was such a horrible man, the piece was so violent that I thought, oh well, I mean nobody – obviously it was quite clear what it is, then let it be. Let it be. I decided I wouldn't take a contribution to the *Salisbury Review*. [MI *laughs*]

MI Yes, even like they do in the first instance but definitely not now.

IB But I reproach people who do. I have a semi-disciple called Gray in Oxford, who is a political theorist. Well, he's a very right wing – much more than I am, but still... He's written quite intelligently about me, critically and intelligently. He contributes to that review, or has done.

MI Alistair Gray?

IB No. John Gray, John Gray, a fellow of Jesus. Quite a clever man.

MI Is part of your resistance to all this, the sense that you then get set up, as it were [IB Yes] you don't want to be a large public spokesman for liberalism but you get set up as such and then that leads you open to exactly this kind of piece?

IB Yes, I don't want to be a public spokesman for anything, that's why I resigned my Chair in the end. I felt here I was, professor of political theory. My lectures were largely a result of the past, analyses of other people's doctrines. Maybe a professor of political theory ought to emit a clarion call, maybe he ought to stand for something and, so to speak...

MI And you didn't.

IB And I didn't want to. I knew what I believed, but to see myself trumpeting forth certain sentiments as my predecessor, Cole, did...

MI I find that – it seems to me there's a contradiction there because it seems to me you've also said time and again that the core of what you write has a kind of moral [IB Oh yes] purpose to it, [IB Yes, well] and it's obvious that all of your public work...

IB I don't want to preach, I don't want to convert. The only movement where I am prepared to be – stand up and be counted

– is Zionism, because it's so unpopular, it's a minority movement and there I am all right. Since I am, I'm not going to deny it or say I like people who describe me as that, or write me in that connection, I must take that. I've committed myself fully to this particular thing and I know this entails criticism and a certain amount of hostility in certain circles. That's all right.

MI But what about liberalism?

IB Well, I don't know what liberalism is quite, nobody does. I mean[] yes.

MI But you're it!

IB All right, if I'm it, I'm it. But I'm it and nobody else is. Me and Dr Owen? [MI *laughs*] Dr Owen's rather a fan of...

MI Well, I'm it! I mean I believe I'm a passionate liberal. It seems to me you're a quite passionate liberal.

IB If you say. Where are the passionate liberals?

MI Don't know, but that wasn't the question. You are a liberal...

IB Without doubt, I wouldn't deny that.

MI And you stood for it.

IB I wouldn't deny that but that's not how – that is not what is written about me. If my doctrines were written about, I would have less objection because if they're printed, they're in public, what can I do with them? But what is written about is my talk, my sort of [] sort of the coruscating nature of my conversation which I hate seeing; jokes about me and so on. I've always somehow – feel, so to speak, written about frivolously, quite friendly sometimes, but always some sort of...

MI Ah, it's the frivolousness that bothers you.

IB The social gossip element, yes.

MI Which then touches fears in you that you are frivolous.

IB No, not fears, perhaps I'm just a social fool, just amuse a lot of social people. How awful. Professional jester, you see?

MI That does tap into anxieties you have.

IB That could be, yes. If anyone[ ] grave, more gravitas, go about things in a, so to speak, more solid way.

MI I don't see why you have such a problem with this though, Isaiah, because it does seem to me that, speaking seriously, it's very difficult to separate men from their doctrines and that liberalism in particular requires a certain kind of temper, a certain kind of character, which you, one way or the other, instantiate. And therefore, if I were as – wrote a biography of you, one of the things that I would talk about, is your character because it seems to me to be...

IB Well, Fichte said [MI to be a political question] Fichte said that if you want to understand a man's philosophy, the thing to understand is what kind of person he is. His philosophy follows from his character and not vice versa.

MI And do you believe that? [IB Yes] Well, so do I, so there you are, so we're stuck with talking about your personality.

IB Yes, but I mean personality – I feel that the aspects of my personality which are talked about are the trivial ones.

MI Yes, oh indeed.

IB That I mind about. If I was written about in a grave and [MI *laughs*] so to speak, solemn fashion, you see? I feel that other liberals, let's say Popper, is not talked about like that; or – I don't know – who is the other? Sakharov would not be talked about like that. There are special reasons for that. Who are the other liberals of our time? Not so many of us – I don't know, Dukakis is a liberal...

MI But he has no character at all.

IB No, no, no, I know. Well take the people in England. Noel Annan always calls himself a liberal, I suppose, I suppose. He might be written about a little like that for the same sorts of reasons. I'm written about as a performer. That I resent because I have no respect for performers. I may enjoy them but I've no respect for capable performers and that's roughly what I mind.

MI But I think also, one of the things that you may resent as well, is that you have in certain respects, a sunny and unheroic temperament [IB True] and a temperament that is not...

IB Non-crusading too.

MI Well, it's non-crusading but in a more subtle way, it's not a very romantic temperament. [IB Not the least, no] It's an enlightenment temperament [IB Yes] and that's out of fashion to some extent.

IB Well, you'll be glad to hear that Professor [A?] professor of American history in Jerusalem – there was a meeting about my works on the 5th June which I didn't attend, though pressed to do so. He said I was a – wait a bit, how was I described? – I think a kind of enlightenment romantic I'm glad to hear, but that's not a very profound judgement. You are right, I'm not. I take an interest in it simply in the abstract because I think it's important, but I'm not one. I think the trouble about me is I think that I'm really

systematically over-estimated and don't wish this to be exposed. And fundamentally, I think that I am too anxious to please and that I don't like in myself. And that leads, you see, to a certain kind of being represented as a bit of a rattle in some ways. That's a caricature, slightly, but it's got just enough truth, if anyone said that about me, I would feel there's a certain element of truth in it. I'd rather they didn't [ ] Scruton said.

MI I think the only disappointment that I would feel about that...

IB I'm too talkative, too...

MI Indeed. But if the problem is you're too anxious to please, then the only way morally that you can struggle against that weakness in oneself, is to be more indifferent than you are to what people say about you.

IB Impossible to make oneself that. It's a weakness to mind as much as I do. I'm a colossal minder. That is very much at the root of the matter. It's a capacity for – I think I mind everything, not just that. I mean if anything is mindable, I mind it.

MI But you're also not a neurotic character.

IB No, not at all [MI But you mind] I mind. I mind of course – look, I mind if I think if I think I've hurt somebody's feelings, I go to great lengths to apologise. Then I discovered that I haven't hurt them in the least, they're rather imaginary slights which I have perpetrated, you see? And I find there's nothing in it. I mean I keep on staunching non-existent wounds of people's skins.

MI When you say you feel that the problem is a systematic over estimation, is it – it's another way of...

IB I'm astonished to have enemies, I'm astonished to have enemies.

MI I thought there's another way you can take that, which is to say what disturbs you is that you are esteemed in fact for your person and wish you were esteemed for a more substantial body of work.

IB I think that's right. The trouble about me is I don't think very highly of my own work, nor of anybody else's. The trouble is my criticism goes both ways. I'm very critical of people's books and things. [MI You are?] Oh, very. I don't fall in admiration.

MI Why is that, why are you so critical? It is a character...

IB God knows, because I think – I don't know, because I think I always expect the impossible, no doubt. I mean I want to be illuminated, I want...

MI But it's a source of your authority as a human being, there's no doubt of it, that there a lots of people I know who live in a certain kind of anxiety about your opinions.

IB Well my opinions are unduly critical in the sense that the standard which I set is not one which people on the whole attain, or have attained I mean, so it's an imaginary standard to some extent I know, but applied to myself enormously.

MI That's true, that's true, and it seems to me you do something else...

IB That's why I despise my own works. If anyone praises anything I've written, I'm very grateful to them but I don't believe them.

MI Isn't 'despise' a little too strong?

IB Despise is too strong, but disregard. I mean, if someone says that I've written something very good, I'm delighted, because all praise is delightful, but I don't believe them. I think maybe they've been slightly taken in. I didn't mean them to be taken in; I'm not,



so to speak, anxious to delude, but I think they're over estimating me again. My whole reputation – I said that in my [ ] speech at Corpus, that my entire career is founded securely on being systematically over estimated in a large number of places, large number of times, by a large number of people. 'Long may it go on,' I said. [MI *laughs*] 'I'm not against it,' I said, 'it buoys me up.' But it is what it is, may it not stop. No, that was a joke but it's [ ], you see?

MI What is the thing about you that is most over estimated, do you think? Or a piece of work that's most over estimated?

IB [pauses] Not any particular piece of work. I'm thought to be a brilliant writer which I'm not. I know what brilliance is and I haven't got it. I'm thought to write rather well and I don't, I'm rather a clumsy writer really, too many words. 'Too many notes,' said Mozart. Well that's [ ] true of me. Too many words, too verbose – that's what Evelyn Waugh said, too many words, too verbose.

MI What Evelyn Waugh said of you?

IB Yes. Criticism from various people. David Cecil [ ] suddenly as a writer without comparing me to others, yes; compliment to be noticed by him at all, however. [*laughs*] You see? Wait a moment, what is it that is over estimated? I suppose my impact on what might be called the culture of our time, that's what's over estimated. I don't feel myself to have been an impact at all, I feel myself a balloon, bobbing on the face of the water. The idea of, as it were, so to speak, attributing some kind of weightiness to me is absurd. I think I'm ashamed of minding it, too.

MI Ashamed of minding this? [IB Yes] Minding that you don't have the impact that people..?

IB No, no, no, not that; minding people's criticisms of me, I mean, minding that lots of things might be said. I mean I minded the fact that every single – I said that to Hardy, who denied it – that every single essay I published on politics [ ] was attacked immediately by both sides. Nobody ever came to its defence. It had an impact because [ ] being read, it had a sort of – it's an object of discussion, it stirred things up, that it did do, because I write much more vehemently than I think, perhaps, or certainly than I am. But nobody – I'm always attacked by right and left at once and I expect – I open a review and I know. Either it's going to be a mechanical thing in the *Boston Globe* which says something quite nice but casual, empty: or it's going to be serious, in which case it will be more than critical, it will be unfriendly. This broadly is true, because all the things I say displease the right and left, not equally, more left than right I think, displease the left rather more. The anti-Marxism is obviously – there's a number of...

MI That's why Scruton's line of attack seemed to me perversely wrong.

IB[ ] because normally I am attacked by E.H.Carr, by – wait a minute – by a man called Marshall Cohen, from that point of view; by some man, some Marxist or other in a place called [Salmagundi?]; by – oh, a lot of Marxists in England, [ ] black figure so to speak.

MI What strikes me so much about the book on Marx which is exactly the aspect of your character that...

IB The book on Marx wasn't attacked very much; it was attacked but not very much.

MI But the aspect of that book which I've always admired a lot as a mental exercise, is that you managed to put yourself inside the head and mind and heart of a man with whom you have no political or even personal sympathy [IB Perfectly true] and that seems to

me a rather large achievement; and also to be capable and to be an achievement possible only to a certain kind of liberal character. But Scruton has absolutely...

IB Scruton is nothing to do with me.

MI Indeed, indeed, indeed, you were a pretext for his...

IB Symbol of the kind of persons he wants out of the way. I mean I block his light. I'm known not to like him, to be against him, but obviously been reported and when Norman Stone asked me to lunch, he asked Jessica Douglas Home who was Scruton's mistress, and then she said, 'Well, I've got Roger here and I think he's not...' Well, that's obviously reported since he knows that I refuse to meet him. That's enough to set up something and I know a lot of people he knows, so it isn't as if they don't operate on the total periphery, as it were. That's enough to annoy him. Moreover, the sort of things I say and [ ] exact what he thinks are wrong are genuine. But given that he is a very perverse sort of writer and [ ] Peterhouse character, I know exactly what one [ ]; are rather popular, moderately admired, bland, if you see what I mean; bland, amiable, sort of liberal, sort of carry on regardlessly [MI *laughs*] totally superficial, I know nothing about sex, love, God, deeper, darker aspects of man, very remote from Dostoevsky. That's exactly what's wrong. Oh, I see the motive all right, the motive I see; but what was actually said was – didn't really hit the mark, I agree. It didn't really wound in the sense that – it was absurd what he said, wasn't it? It wasn't just his adoration – sudden vices to which I must admit.

MI I've got us off the track slightly. I wanted to ask you next if you'd describe what it is you feel is over estimated in your reputation. There must be lots of little things about you and your work that you feel are under estimated.

IB Yes. Yes, it's funny what you say. Now, what is under estimated? Well of course I haven't published anything on romanticism. I think I've got a thesis on the romantic movement which is important, which I've never set out in the lectures, which are now being re-broadcast.

MI At the moment, or...?

IB Well, it's being done. [MI Oh really, oh?] [On Saturday].

MI I wasn't here. Oh dear. When's the next one?

IB Let me look. There's a programme devoted to it, from 7.10 to 11.00.

MI Oh really? On Saturday?

IB Yes. Enormous great thing.

MI On Radio Three?

IB On Radio Three. We can probably get the BBC who will get the – there will be some sort of tapes of it. There's an interview with me, a man called [MI Drummond] Precisely, who is a cultivated man, knows a lot about music and other things, talks Russian; and there's a conversation and then a piece of music which is relevant to me. Brendel plays [ ]; something by Stravinsky, the *Les Noces* by Stravinsky, it's slightly [ ] in Russian, 'Little Wedding'. There's *Les Noces*, then there's – *Abraham and Isaac* I suggested to him, I mean I gave him the text from the Bible for it. And then there is the Mozart [ ] before the war, [ ] it didn't fit into the time intervals. And then otherwise, there's my lecture, it's the first lecture, otherwise it would be full [*phone rings*]...

MI Which goes on...

[Pause in tape]

IB [Speaking into the phone] But who talked to you? The Annans? Who told you about it? Who told you about the evening? Serena and also Noel. Well it wasn't – part of my speech which was [ ], everything else was very fine. They've got a very nice – it was pure Oxford, it was pure Oxford except for three persons who were not Oxford. Everybody was from Oxford and I'll tell you who was there and who were not. One was Noel. I'll tell you; everybody who wrote introductions to my essays was invited: Michael [H?] from Bradford; a lady called Aileen Kelly, from King's, Cambridge. OK, I'll stop, I'll stop. I'll stop. So do I. Good. [Replaces receiver] [speaks to MI who laughs]

MI Where were we? I've forgotten – oh, the under estimation and I asked you a question about...

IB Well, I think my thesis about – wait a moment and I'll tell you about these lectures, there are six of these things and they go on [MI Every Saturday?] Something like that, or Sunday or something. Look in the Radio Times, you see? But I suppose you can tape them and they have been taped in their original transmission, not only the – but they'll be taped again. You've got the tapes? [MI Yes] They lost them but they did find them. [MI Oh, good] I also read aloud my translation of *A Storm at Sea* by Turgenev [MI Oh, really?] It's a short piece, yes. But my introduction [ ] in some ways [ ] I should have put that in [ ].

MI Oh, I'm sorry. I was in the air on Saturday so I missed the whole...

IB Well, that's nothing, you can get all these things at leisure.

MI Anyway, tell me about – tell me what it is about the thesis in romanticism that you'd like to emphasise.

IB Well, I'll tell you. It's quite simple and I can go on for hours about that, in fact for six and a half hours. [MI *laughs*] It's that, very briefly, I've said this many times I'm afraid, in various forms in various broadcasts already. Broadly speaking, in European philosophy there are three – it's three legged stool upon which the philosophia perennis rests, from the Greek to [], never [] in this order, you already feel this must be rather – you can't, these sweeping generalisations are never true. But to continue. One proposition is that to every serious question there must be one true answer and one true answer only; because if there isn't a true answer, how can the question be a real question? The question is literally unanswerable, it's a chimera, a puzzle, some confusion []; secondly, that there must be some method of discovering this answer. Now, we may not be able to attain to it because we are too stupid, or too unfortunate, or original sin or it takes resources we haven't got, or we knew it once but in the flood, or something – disaster happened, not only the apple, but Adam in Paradise knew it. If he didn't know it, maybe the Angels did and if they didn't know it, God knows somebody must. [*Phone rings and there is a pause in the tape*]

MI Isaiah, we had two legs of this stool, this philosophical stool on the ground, and we need to have the third.

IB Oh no, we're only on the second one. Now wait a bit. But the point is there are – there is a method, now, like all of them. Different methods have been suggested. I mean for some people today the answer is in sacred writings. I say all that in these lectures, awed and inspired utterances of the Prophets; or in rational investigation, or in the laboratory, or in – I don't know – in the heart of an innocent peasant or child, like Rousseau, or *vox populi* or wherever you like. On the subject of where the truth is to be discovered, bloody wars have been fought because salvation depends on it and therefore it's perfectly reasonable for people who wish to exterminate each other, [] manner, because that's what matters. That's number two. Number three is that if you

could discover the answers to all the questions and put them side by side, they would cohere, because one true proposition can't be incompatible with another true proposition. That's a logical truth. If you knew them all, we'd know how to live. That would be perfection. That is what people believed; and that's true of Plato and it's true of Aristotle, it's true of Christianity, it's true of the Jews, it's true of the [P], true of the Renaissance, it's true of the eighteenth century, it's true of Logical Positivists, it's true of everybody. Every philosopher with any rational basis believes that. I mean the source may be mystical or whatever it is but it is the real thing, and it answers some question in some final way or in some approximation towards something. It must be there to approximate to, even if we can't get at it. And therefore, the idea of perfection or the perfect solution, comes from that. We may never know it, but in principle, it can't not exist because otherwise, what are we talking about. That, the romantic movement cracked and therefore it's a very powerful impact, quite important, for the first time in many hundreds of years: in the sense that they conceived the idea that the truth was not be discovered but created or invented, be above all – not in the world of science maybe but in the world of values, that when Herzen said, 'Where is the song before it is sung? Not anywhere.' For Joshua Reynolds, you see, there are Platonic universals. He said, if you paint David, you must not paint him with a harelip, although he may have had one; you mustn't make him mean because he is a King. Royalness is an objective thing which has to be reproduced as well as you can, not something... [*phone rings*] Hello? No, no she's not, no she's unwell. No, she's not well, she's in bed, at least I hope so. In Oxford, yes. Well look, ring her in Oxford if you like, she'll answer. Well, do ring her, why don't you ring her? OK. 0865 is the code, 61005. I am sure she will be about by Monday but still, she may not think so. OK. [*Replaces receiver*] Yes, well now, you see, 'Where is the song before it's sung?' Well, now the question is – in other words they conceived the idea – two things really are at the centre of romanticism although of course people – but the first lecture is entirely about the fact that everyone disagrees about what it is.

Every definition is contradicted by another definition. There's more literature about the meanings of the word 'romanticism' than about romanticism, almost [*laughs*] you see? That – that – oh sorry, where was I? My thoughts are wandering – that the idea there are two central things: one is that the universe is there is no *rerum natura*, there is no structure of things to which there are many possible approaches, scientific, religious, whatever; but there is an on-going movement, so to speak, in which you must participate in a mystical sort of way. In other words, that's what Hegel taught, more or less. Reality is not an object, it's a subject of which you are a part, and this generates its own purposes, it moves towards the purposes, it's not given, but so to speak – and produced from within itself. That's number one. The other is the incompatibility of values of course; the fact that there are certain – there is a certain contradiction in reality which nothing can reconcile and therefore there can be more than one answer to a given question, none of which are truer than the other.

MI Why do you think the last, that last proposition is new to the romantics?

IB It had never been said before by anyone. The trouble is I think I'm the first person to say it. I can't believe it because everyone must have thought that values are incompatible. You can't both eat ice cream and go to the cinema. I mean that you have to choose. This is not news, that there are some things which are not compatible with other things. Not all good things can be had together all the time. And yet, I can't discover who said that, because for rationalists, you see, this is soluble, it can't be a permanent state of affairs. There must, somewhere, be a solution in which everything coheres.

MI Because I'd always thought that that sense of the radical incompatibility of values arises in your thought out of the Reformation, the counter-Reformation, the wars of religion, the doctrine of toleration.



IB No. Toleration is simply exhaustion. They thought that the expense of fighting the war was too great. They never said there might be something in what the others say.

MI But I think in Locke's letter on toleration, you get a rather different doctrine, not a doctrine which simply...

IB I'm talking about the *real politique*. I'm talking about wars of religion, which come to an end simply [MI Out of exhaustion] out of exhaustion, yes. In Locke, no, in Locke's *Letters of Toleration*, you oughtn't to interfere with people's views.

MI Yes, and that you cannot – that beliefs are – I'm not always incorrigible to persuasion, but they may be; and in those cases you cannot use compulsion. And that implies a radical antimony of at least religious belief which then has to be tolerated.

IB Antimony, no. That simply means that you can't force people because that goes against their beliefs of what they are, but you might persuade them. The truth is one and you have it and you must persuade them of it, you mustn't [MI Use force] use force, because that disrupts society. The only reason is because it breaks the social contract, I mean it's expensive, it leads to blood, it leads to social disorder and wars of religion. So it's to be avoided at all costs. Hobbes more or less said that. He thought heresies were like worms, [ ] we must avoid distance, get rid of heretics because that rather – but no, Locke is more tolerant. Toleration really – you see, Mill after all is a man who believed in objective truth and [ ] to get it. Unless you allow opinions to clash, you'll never get to the truth, but there is a truth to be got at.

MI Yes, and it's that that the romantics call into question or believe that the truth is not found, it is made.

IB They don't talk about the truth very much. The point is, the truth – take the idea of duels. I believe one thing, you believe another. We have to fight. I may kill you, you may kill me, we may kill each other. All these things are, for a romantic, better than a compromise, because that's treason to the light within you, because the light within *you* is not the light within *you*. And this is not just individuals. You can now get, as it were, politicised versions of it; my country; my class; the class, the country; progress, history; that's what you have to identify yourself with from Marxism and so on. In other words, I do this not because it's good but because I am a German and it's a German thing to do; and for a German, this is the proper ideal because we're Germans. That doesn't lay claim to universality for everybody else. The Germans never thought that the Peruvians had to do it, you see? We conquered Peru because as German we were entitled. Why? Because we were German. Or it's exactly the same with class.

MI The Marxist view of ideology incarnates that [IB Absolutely] romantic view of – the truth for me is not the truth for you but it simultaneously says there is a truth.

IB There is a truth because they are objective, but at the same time the body which generates the truth is the class; and therefore a generation occurs, some kind of creativity occurs. It isn't – doesn't lie there in the stars, it isn't nailed to the heavens, simply to be discovered as it is for Kant. For Kant, these values are eternal – or Christianity. They're there. What you must do is get them right, but they're there whether you get them right or not, they have an objective existence which numbers have for some mathematicians. They're there, they're stars in heaven. As Kant says, 'The moral law within, the starry heaven without.' You see? All right, you see? With the result, you get Nationalism and you get Existentialism and you get Anarchism and you get Romanticism in various other shapes and forms; and you get it clashing with the ordinary common sense rationalism by which we live and neither side has won a victory, and we're in conflict between the two. It isn't as if, but it's made a

radical difference to everything we think after that. For example, the idea of sincerity doesn't exist before the eighteenth century, beginning of the eighteenth – it's curious. Truth, yes, I mean martyrdom is all right if it's for the truth. If you are a Moslem, it's pathetic. To die for nonsense? If you're a Catholic, you don't say, 'These Protestants lead souls to perdition and ought to be eliminated, but one has to hand it to them, they really believe what they say, they're not doing it for money, they're sincere.'

MI Yes, so in a post-romantic world, you accord them the compliment at least of sincerity.

IB Now you do. Even about Hitler, people said you know he's sincere.[*laughter*] It can go rather far, [MI Yes, such strong views] it can go rather far you see? But what I mean is that sincerity is a virtue which it wasn't before.

MI This is why the political romanticism of some conservatives put such extraordinary stress on conservatives having a particularly close relation to the deepest truths of the heart [IB That's right] which the liberal calculators and sophists...

IB Don't understand about at all. The light within, you see, is something to do with the inner light by which you live, and that's what matters, and you don't happen to have it.

MI But it then means, it then means surely that the stronger your feeling, the more likely that feeling is true.

IB Not true, no, but the inner light is *your* truth. It's not feeling, it's more like conscience, it's more like inner illumination for the – the Pietists really get it going. If you want to know when it starts, it starts in Germany.

MI It starts with the Pietists.

IB Of course. You see, you reject the church really, hierarchies, learning, just like the Chassidim among the Jews whose [ ] this analogous movement, started at the same time in a mysterious way. But the point is, yes...

MI So it's a child of the Reformation?

IB Mm, in the end. Luther didn't have it but I mean you just know the truth. The Bible says it. But it's Pietism that says, 'Look within.' And fundamentally, it's a reaction to the French. Historically, it's just francophobia. You have you see in 1500, supposing you travelled across Europe, from let's say Bordeaux to Vienna, which is my example. You discover a somewhat similar culture all along; northern Italy, high Renaissance; France, still quite good, I mean sort of [?] quatre, that sort of thing. You see? OK. Not [?] quatre, yes. [?] quatre. No, no, not [?] quatre, France was the first, it was a kind of glorious period all right, and poets and painters and things. Then you get to Germany even, you get Dürer, you get Grünewald, you get [MI You're doing well] [?] and these great scholars. Take the same journey in 1600: Spain is in full bloom; England is in full bloom. I mean Velasquez [ ] and Don Quixote, the whole thing is the same thing in England with Elizabeth. France? The Pleiade, Henri Quatre, a lot of poets and quite good painters.

MI In Germany it is...

IB Damn all.[MI Damn all, a disaster] Damn all, nothing; before the thirty years war. The usual attribution is the thirty years war. Nothing. Italy is not as good as it was, still you had good painters, you had Galileo and quite enough was going on, you see? Holland, marvellous; Belgium; even Sweden is beginning to stir with Gustavas Adolfus which was about then, you see? In Germany, nothing at all. I don't know why but it's so. Now, the humiliation of the Germans begins then. Then, by the middle of the seventeenth century, France is on top of everything; top of the army, top of the war, top of art, top of culture in general, top of

philosophy; there's nothing they're not number one in. The Germans are looked on as a lot of yokels.

MI I see what you're doing to me, you're preparing for me Fichte and Herder, you're preparing their arrival.

IB Of course, you see? The Germans are humiliated and what happens is always the same, which is one begins by imitating. Then there's a sudden pride and you say, 'No, why should we? And Thomasius in 1710 begins giving his lectures in German, not Latin which is sort of original, the first thing he's done. And then you get the Pietists who say, 'Let them have it [ ], art, culture, armies, this is all the external world, all that matters is here [*pats chest*] and your relation to God and to yourself. That's what really matters.' The French would have no idea of that, it's empty, it's superficial; gifted no doubt but totally material values, I mean nothing. Music, yes, inner worlds, Bach, and you could compare Bach with all the court stuff going on in the Regency court of Paris, you see? And that I think is when it begins. It begins with bitter, Francophile resentment which takes spiritual forms of inward gazing. You contract yourself into yourself as a form of sour grapes. It's a very sublime form of sour grapes, the whole thing. That I have said in print, you see? And then you get Herder. 'Spew forth your mouth [ ] ugly slime. Be German. Better a third rate German than a ninth rate Frenchman.' His rapturous doctrine, you see? Don't imitate the French. Fichte, yes. Kant, up to a point. Kant is Enlightenment but all the same, hatred of utilitarianism, hatred of the – I mean, well of the *philosophes* because they manipulate people, because – sticks and carrots – man must choose, not be shaped by legislation, by all these other words which are going to save man, they're going to shape him by bending the truth as they know it and now they're going to – that's my thesis. Now, it's really something which we don't know how to settle among ourselves, you see? For example, if I ask you which do you prefer historically as a character, Frederick the Great or Torquemada? Torquemada killed a lot of people, burnt them, horrible thing to have done. But there's no

doubt he believed, and he believed he was saving their souls, and the motives were pure, absolutely sincere. The results were dreadful, dreadful, like the Ayatollah. Frederick the Great was a nasty fellow, insincere, hypocritical and deceitful, selfish and really rather a shit; but there's no doubt he raised the level of German life, I mean the German standard of living rose in his day. He begins the Welfare State, practically, in Prussia. Now, which is preferable, you see?

MI Why is that a question? I don't understand why that's a meaningful question.

IB Because until the early nineteenth century, there was no question that Frederick the Great was superior, because sincerity is not a virtue; because the man who achieves things, achievement results. In thought, you admire the people who think the truth; in military [], the conquerors. Success is what matters, fundamentally, by the right means: moral success, aesthetic success, military success, economic success. Achievement is what you admire. Nobody admires, even Christians, don't admire motive which ends in failure. The Martyrs might because they're holy because they are successful, because they will inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. That's success, you see? But the motive, the idea that we ought to admire people who fail, even though they're stupid and it's not their fault, but they were at least sincere. It comes from Christianity, of course, naturally it does, and from religion, but nevertheless it's new. You see, the same thing with pluralism. Before a certain time, truth is one. Uniformity is good; one good, many bad. That's what Plato thought, that's what the Renaissance thought, too. The idea that society is good if there are lots of opinions all clashing – 'we're a wonderful, tolerant, liberal society because you see everybody can think what they like,' is brand new. Variety is a new ideal, it doesn't exist before; in mild ways and [], but broadly sincerity and variety are new ideals. And they dominate us.

MI Yes. When you were talking, I was just struck by how much the free market philosophers that I studied at Cambridge, all tacitly believed [IB They knew] that conflict of interest within market societies would eventually be ground out into tacit forms of social agreement [IB Oh, of course] from any one [IB Public consensus] from the many, one, was what they kept saying.

IB From many to one. Exactly. Well, that's all the rational – so do physicists believe that, so do chemists, so do mathematicians, as few pre-suppositions as possible, the unified field theory. Well, in the sciences, that is quite right, there's nothing wrong with that, because there you see, you really have got a certain degree of rational method of the correct methods; unless you get an answer which you think is true, it's no good saying there are two answers to this. Some people pretend that with quantum theories and with this and that, you will gradually get into romanticism, even into science. I don't believe that. I mean, some people like no doubt [K?] and these people think that the paradigm differs from generation to generation, and they're all all right for their time although none of them are objective or final. Well, there's something in that. But broadly speaking, as far as the external world is concerned, I wouldn't apply this. This applies only to men's wishes and thoughts, I mean to the man's, so to speak, inner world. And we are victims of both, we believe in both. Not in – you see, if a man comes and say to you, 'Twice two is seventeen,' you don't say this man wasn't paid to do it, it isn't a line of poetry. He really believes. He really believes and he's willing to lay down his life for twice two is seventeen. Then you say there is something wrong with him. You don't respect him. That's the position about morals in politics before the romantic movement.

MI Yes, and it's a position we also hold today.

IB About science, oh yes, common sense, yes. We don't admire people who have absurd views. But in ethics we don't have absurd views. We say, 'Well, it isn't absolute. There are at least a hundred

and sixty values but not two thousand.’ But then there are a hundred and sixty, anyone is entitled to believe anything.

MI And that’s a romantic consequence?

IB All I can tell you is there is no evidence of it before. The first man who said it, I think historically, is a perfectly obscure German Pietist whom I’ve dug up, called Arnold, somewhere in Germany...

*[Pause in tape]*

MI ... that way to a treatment of religious heresy with respect.

IB Ah, but he didn’t believe in heresy at all. He thought anything which was anti-orthodox was OK because he was fundamentally anti-religious.

MI Ah, I see, yes.

IB He thought it was terrible that people should persecute for a lot of nonsense beliefs.

MI The test is someone who’s a true believer and who actually finds in heresy some grains of truth and that is not the case with...

IB That’s what Arnold begins in the late seventeenth century, after Bayle you see?. No – now when is Bayle?

*Side B [sides A and B are combined in the digital recording]*

MI What – well, I’ll have to listen to the lectures, but where – what’s the role of the French Revolution in breaking this all up, the regicide..?

IB Well, people always say that’s what begins romanticism. It’s not true. Everyone thinks – [MI It’s German Pietism, I know] Well, I’ll



tell you. The French Revolution, theoretically, is purely classical [MI David and] well, not only David but the values in terms of which the French revolution is made are eternal truths, which the aristocracy tramples on.

MI No, but the other side of it [?] you know the thing on the American dollar bill, the sense of a new – the creation of a new world, the making of a new truth.

IB That's all right, well we've discovered the truth at last.

MI Ah, we've discovered it.

IB Well, we've gone back to Rome and Greece. Well, maybe not, maybe we've done it for ourselves. This *is* the truth; what Jefferson says is true and what Burke says isn't, you see? I mean this is all considering men, if they can give themselves thought and they know enough and they're brought up by a lot of enlightened persons who study the sciences and know languages and know what it is, cannot but agree that this is right and the other stuff is wrong. It's no good saying, well you have it your own way, we'll have it this way, you have it your way, we're just as good as one another. That kind of valuation is later, I don't know where it begins. That compromises the idea of objective truth in value judgements. That's the contribution, fatal as it can be – Fascism comes from that. I'll tell you what I mean. You see, the metaphor, fundamentally – people always in my opinion have – ethics and politics on the whole can only be understood in some central model in terms of which they think. I mean the Social Contract is in business model a contract. I don't know, the [teleology?] is sort of a biological metaphor, to have things tending in certain directions. Mechanistic metaphors of society has a collection of pendula and screws and so on, as in Diderot and so on. The metaphor here is – the fundamental model here is aesthetic, even in Hegel it is. All this business about conflict and dialectic and all

these things flowing across each other and being sublimated, is a very good description of symphonic music but not of the world.

MI Or the principles of aesthetic order in painting, light and shadow.

IB Anything you like. But in music then you have a theme, and a counter theme, they blend and they become something grander.  
[claps]

MI It's musical.

IB We may not have known that. It is musical, basically. Tonight I propose to go to an operetta, opera – I must go and order a car – called *Viva La Mama* by Donizetti. You don't want to come? [MI No, I can't] You probably could.

MI I wish I could, but I can't.

IB I was going with Aline but I'm to go alone.

MI I'd love to go but we have company tonight and I will, in fact, have to leave any minute now.

IB What is the time?

MI Twenty to six. Now...

IB Well in that case just let me...

MI You have to order a car.

IB No, let me look at my ticket, yes, just to see when it begins. [ ] the wife. No, it's not in this book at all, it's elsewhere.

MI God, you have a raft of tickets there!

IB Always.

MI Life is a continual festival of pleasures.

IB That's what Aline complains about, really too much. Wait a bit, this is not...

MI This is all in a bag of five pound notes, and what have you got there? You've got Covent Garden...

IB That's got to be left here.

## MI TAPE 31

Conversation date: 21 July 1989

Date transcribed: November 2002

Transcriber: Esther Johnson

Subjects covered:

80th birthday

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MI ... why are boring and awful? Just grand.

IB Well not grand, no, just very uninteresting, terribly uninteresting, quite unnatural, I mean we chatted about recordings, music, he had no interest in music – he had nothing to talk about, he had no personality except that he was quick, sharp, sort of smart; he might have been, I don't know what, executive of some sort dashing about meeting I don't know, contact some visitors, more like that. Artistically nothing at all or seemed nothing to me. However no doubt towards the end of his life particularly, he did produce some stunning performances mainly of post 1850 music, not Beethoven or Mozart ...

MI What did you think of the Wagner? [IB What?] Of Karajan's Wagner?

IB Don't think I heard it, don't think I ever heard it. I only heard The Ring for example, I never heard him conduct Wagner. He didn't go to Salzburg since I went, I wasn't at Bayreuth when he was there after the war, he didn't come to London. He's got an Honorary Degree at Oxford which was a scandal [MI Oh really] scandal.

MI Did you interpose your voice against him?

IB No I wasn't consulted. It was done by Council and I just saw it in the newspaper. However he didn't come to lunch at All Souls because he flew off in his Jet, he took his degree, appeared and then flew away. Well then he came to give a concert. I was fortunately in America when it happened. [MI chuckles] So nothing arose. His wife I knew, his first and second wife. I must tell you some of these before we begin. First of all the story about his first wife, it's unusual [MI Who was made the honorary Aryan by Goering] she was very pretty, blue eyed, fair haired, nothing Jewish about her appearance; but she took to [ ] in the war, I didn't [ ] entirely, he'd known a lot of White Russians who perhaps he knew, that sort of thing, then I know [?] or somebody, I think I knew [?] or [?] or somebody, anyhow she went about [ ] a little bit. So I realised that it wasn't quite kosher but I knew he was in the Germany [Austrian?] war, I knew that he was about to be 'washed'. Then that was that. Then I went to Berne in 1950 to stay with Dr Weizmann who was having his eyes looked at, he was then President of Israel; and I met Frau von Karajan in the street. She was enormously affable, I talked to her and she said, 'What are you doing?' I said, 'I'm staying at the – 'Oh there's no man in the world I'd like to meet more.' I realised later this was obviously with the 'washed' in some way, rather useful in her future career. But anyhow, [ ] 'What are you doing today, tomorrow -?' I said, 'Well the thing I most want to do is to go to Lucerne to hear Lipatti,' who was this marvellous pianist, died young and early, [MI Dinu Lipatti] Dinu Lipatti. She said, because there were no tickets, 'Well,' she said, 'Herbert is conducting. I think I can do something.' I was given a chair on the stage behind the platform somewhere, it really was sold out in terms of – Karajan conducted I don't know what, Tchaikovsky's 5th Symphony and then we had a Mozart Concerto which was divine.

MI He was an absolutely amazing pianist ...

IB Lipatti was a wonderful pianist, he was. And then I realised – and she said would I have a drink, no – I realised what was wanted

was an introduction to Weizmann. I didn't do it but I've felt guilty ever since. I wasn't going to take a Nazi to see Weizmann, I mean dammit, why should I compromise him? So ...

MI But you should put that down to war reparations, surely?  
[Laughing]

IB Well yes you have to. Yes well he divorced her in the end and married a very boring little French girl called Juliette who I used to see in Salzburg, who used to come up to me. I was introduced by Bob Silvers' lady and she said, 'Oh Herbert is so glad to see you, he's always talking about you, will you come to lunch, dinner etc?' I avoided it always. That's my relations with the late von Karajan.

MI Let me ask you about the concert on Monday night. I found it a very touching occasion, I'm just wondering what your impressions were of the whole experience?

IB I thought the whole thing was marvellous. First of all the musicians were of top order, such as never happened before, I don't think they've ever played together; they may have but I've never known of it. I mean Whatsername played with, same concert as Honegger, yes in [?] as it happened and I think that Fischer-Dieskau did the *Wintereise* [ ], [MI A ball, yes for them all] no, no , no [ ] was not part of it and so on. First of all I thought they were superb, beyond praise; secondly they were awfully nice people and got on very well with each other with me, and so the atmosphere was not as it would be with Shostakovitch or Rostropovitch or Stern, there wasn't any showmanship at all, no glossy – no heavy jokes, no loud laughter if you know what I mean and either the concert was beyond those [ ]. However Reni told me on the telephone that Alfred was rather displeased by the rather nasty reviews he got, [MI Oh really?] particularly the *Telegraph*, I didn't see it. The *Times* wasn't nice either; the *Times* did talk about me, he said well done [ ] wonderful, as I was in favour of pluralism in modern music apparently, something must surely be done to

illustrate my tastes – Boulez, [?] [MI Laughs. A little Messiaen would really make you feel better!] But they thought Mozart was safe and that's why they played Mozart. He then said, they all said [ ] because of Marx, not much about the others.

MI It was absolutely extraordinary.

IB Surely. [Lord Rutherford?] said to me it was like a snake charmer.

MI Ah no, no, no, no. [IB I didn't think that] No, no, Sue got it right and she said to me he's just like a little boy with a flute, is what he is. [IB Yes exactly] He's a kind of infinite kind of, tiny kind of ...

IB Oh the excitement was enormous, marvellous, totally devoted to it.

MI And I was very touched by Dieskau in a way standing up there, putting his great feet out there and kind of ...

IB Well yes, she didn't use her absolutely full voice, that was only done at that terrible moment ...

MI Oh I loved that, I thought that was [IB What? Happy Birthday to me] Yes I thought that was delightful.

IB I was not at the table fortunately, I was hiding, I went to get my food and managed to hide behind some tall man, nobody saw me.

MI Oh I thought it was one of the – I thought that was terribly nice. What I liked about the occasion was ...

IB A high C was what she wanted, it came out, the end was terrifico, unbelievable. [MI She was very good fun (IB hums the tune)] Oh she was fun, yes and pretty too I thought.

MI I felt – what I liked about the evening is that it didn't sink under its own grandeur. It was very amusing to see Lord Weinstock and Mr Sainsbury queuing up for their meal, it was rather good.

IB When I told her that I wasn't upset about Karajan's death [ ] she embraced me, that I enjoyed.

MI How is it, getting back to biographical questions, that such an event is arranged for you? It was absolutely astonishing.

IB Well I'll tell you what happened. The idea was that of Mrs [Gerson?] she thought of it and suggested it to him. He thought it was something that might make money as well for whatever cause I mean, electronic music or something, collecting money and that's why he wanted – because he thought it was perfect ticket; and then he telephoned Brendel because he knew that he was a friend of mine and Brendel then said yes, took it on. The rest was really him; the programme was arranged between Brendel and Nick Snowman who was the executive but I don't think Nick Snowman had much to do with it.

MI But they didn't consult you about the programme? [IB No, no] How did it end up being all Mozart?

IB They just decided that, [ ] you and me. I'm equally surprised if it had all been Schubert.

MI Did you miss any Russian music?

IB No, no, I didn't think it was necessary at all, doing it for my benefit. Well simply he and – well you see what happened was, well lots of things happened, then of course [M?] my cousin, well I mean Alfred said he wouldn't play with him anywhere [MI Oh really] well he plays the [ ], then what with Isaac Stern my great friend so of course as Ronnie telephoned to him and he said,



‘Delighted, very pleased to do it, and Rostropovitch would like to do it too.’ Couldn’t get their trio with Alfred.

MI And Alfred said ‘No.’

IB First of all he couldn’t prepare, it has taken him two years to play anything, anyhow the last thing in the world is to play a trio with those two. They’re not at all his style, so ...

MI And why? Because they’re too exuberant, too grand, too showy.

IB In some way vulgar for him, because their tastes are too different and above all Stern – the first time Alfred ever stayed in Oxford, Stern telephoned me in the morning, I had no idea of their relation, I came in quite naively and said, ‘That was Isaac Stern.’ Alfred said, ‘Oh, that was Stern! You know he can play very beautifully, sometimes even profoundly. It shows, the man and the artist are not always the same. Achh!’ [MI Laughs] You see? So I saw anyhow he became very offended of course, Stern, he realised that he was being held up and held back, couldn’t even play a sonata without it. Well he could have offered a solo but he didn’t. What he did was to talk to me and Aline about it, the dates, he longed to do it, couldn’t he persuade somebody and so on. Then he rang me up and said he was very sorry, his doctor told him he must take a complete month’s rest and [ ], couldn’t go anywhere, couldn’t play anywhere, all right I fully accepted it; that’s in theory grand political terms and he was very very [ ]. [MI How about Rostropovitch?] Rostropovitch couldn’t manage the dates, he apologised, I couldn’t care less; I mean he may have done it or not, his touch was very light, I don’t know him as well, certainly know him as a friend for many years in Israel and everywhere, Zionist movement.

MI But do you agree with – do you recognise Brendel’s characterisation of Stern?

IB No not really because Stern could play marvellously, no question, his Beethoven Concerto better than anyone and the Brahms and Tchaikovsky, no, no. I can see that Brendel wouldn't like this kind of [ ] schmaltz there somewhere, a touch of butter does exist somewhere, very little of it. He wouldn't have gone to the [ ] but I don't think they ever played in there, piano and violin and I don't think anyone ever has. Anyway [ ] as you know, as you can guess. [MI Oh God, as I know] Anyway so these two musicians [ ] and Mrs – anyway he wrote a letter [ ] saying so sorry , he had to go abroad, he couldn't take part in the concert, take part in it, attend, play, it's a vague term. She rang up Aline and said , 'Well, can't come to the concert, curious isn't it that all this – musicians should be Gentiles?' She's one herself. Well I didn't notice, I mean ...

MI That seems a vulgar remark to me if I may say so.

IB ... of course would have noticed it; it didn't occur to you, it didn't occur to me, it didn't occur to any human being, at least one Jew; what she meant was the great Yehudi.

MI He's not always played abominably.

IB Oh no! When he was a boy before the war, he was divine as a Wunderkind, he's better than anyone. He played Beethoven in 1936/7/8, he was absolutely marvellous, oh Lord yes. This was sometime after. [MI 1960's possibly?] 1960's he began to go off I think, some psychological difficult [ ], his hand trembles too, always and then these Guru things and all that began. And he wrote one of these awful letters to the Times, I don't know if you saw it, [MI No] saying how serious it was to see the society of 'my beloved adopted country' tearing itself to pieces, can't people agree – oh! One of these gooey sort of letters, it was awful. So high minded, spiritual letters.

MI That kind of liberalism you have no time for, [IB No] that's what gives liberalism a bad name. [IB It does] Why can't we all be friends? Why can't we all agree?

IB No but if you could see the style in which it's written, it's an inflated, spiritual style, sort of religious prose [ ] few of that, it's quite honest, quite genuine. I spent the morning with Naiman, who wants to meet you.

MI Yes I'm having dinner with him on Friday night.

IB So he told me. I was not to tell you that he would like – I mean I've produced this idea on my own, he doesn't want me to have to go, agent or persuade or anything. He wants to have a programme with you, I don't know what.

MI Well let's leave it 'till Friday night. [IB He's an extremely intelligent man] What's the status of his relationship with Akhmatova?

IB It was genuine. You see all Akhmatova's friends who live in her shadow are jealous of each other in their relation with her, none of them like each other. There's a lady called [Zoya Mariseva? Tomashevskaya?] who was a great [ ] Akhmatova [ ] who thinks Naiman is a – well, cheap little fellow really and the other man who came to see me in Nottingham was a bad man, a straight bad man, what's his name? A rather Hebrew sounding name, [Meylach?], just a bad man, just a very bad man. Brodsky and Naiman are friends, I say literally [ ], they're jealous [heirs?], there's no doubt he wants to toast Akhmatova, Naiman.

MI As a student, as a friend, as a confidante, as a ...?

IB No, no, no, no, as a journalist, he's a writer. [T?ovsky] I said that he kept on asking her to introduce him and she never would, it's rather like not introducing people to Weizmann or to Brendel.

In the end she had to go and see Akhmatova who was ill, Naiman offered to drive her to the little place outside Leningrad, Komarovo where she lived and [ ] and then there was pouring rain and she went in and saw her and said, 'I'm afraid I must go, I've got a young man who has driven me,' and Akhmatova said, 'Very well if you want to leave me, very well you can,' and she found him soaking wet for he had no clothes on and so on that she took pity on him and she said, 'Well you'd better come in and dry yourself at some [ ]' so she took him to see Akhmatova. After that he went on his own. There's no doubt they were friends.

MI What kind of age is he?

IB He would be in his forties [ ] forties. But I mean there's a – he is a gifted writer, he makes money entirely by translating from [?] [MI Oh really?] Yes, yes certainly, he translates from [?] into Russian, he gets paid as an occupation you see, the one steady trade there is in Russia. He's written a piece on Akhmatova which I've got and haven't read, in transcript, no doubt it will appear or with Peter my Stepson, he's the editor, publisher rather in English. [MI Right, because he's going to publish the ...?] Some day [ ] it in England.

MI Interesting. Well I will see him on Friday. I was very touched, to change the subject slightly, by your effort on my behalf – thank you very much.

IB Oh that's all right, it was brief and does what's wanted. [MI Absolutely and in fact ...] Hardy, you will have to deal with Hardy. Poor man, he obviously had some ambition to do it himself, I never ...

MI I had an extremely friendly lunch with Hardy [IB He's a nice man] and I thought [IB A nice man] he was very nice. I was appalled – no surprised, let's just say surprised – surprised to discover how much of your [?] there are, your unpublished ...

IB He says there's an enormous amount. I have no idea, I've never looked ...

MI He says there's five volumes Isaiah, what's going on here? [IB I can't tell you] Why won't you publish these things?

IB Because they're not good enough, because I'm not [ready?] [MI Really?] Well you can look – half the time daily I don't know what happens.

MI [chuckles] But you're going to let him publish them, there's another volume you will let him publish, the de Maistre ...

IB Yes, yes, yes that's right and even Hamann maybe; maybe Hamann, there is a piece which certainly is all right, I'll have to look at it in Italy this summer I think. I don't know where it is now, I think in Hardy's hands. But I'll tell you ...

MI Do you think most of what you write is unworthy ...?

IB I'll tell you what you ought to look at – yes I do, always have. I've never enjoyed writing, I've never enjoyed [editing it?], I don't feel what a genius I was in those days. No, I'll tell you; you ought to get out of Hardy or perhaps you have, that piece which has slightly embarrassing in character which I did in Jerusalem [MI The Jerusalem Lecture] You've read that have you? You have it I mean?

MI Yes – I have it in – but I don't know in what version.

IB Russian into English? [ ]. There's a certain amount of autobiographical truth in it.

MI Yes I asked him specifically what autobiographical materials he had and he mentioned that and one or two other things.

IB What are the other things?

MI Can't think of anything – nothing of any great importance. He mentioned another lecture, he mentioned a childhood essay, he mentioned tapes with Pat Utechin on your childhood.

IB [ ] That will be a start; and there is a man called Gaby Cohen as I told you.

MI What are you going to do about Gaby Cohen?

IB Don't know. He was going to come to the concert but he's still in Israel, he says he'll come in the Autumn, I'll tell him.

MI Could you tell him? [IB Of course] Because I'd like to maintain very good relations with him.

IB Oh of course, he wants to [ ].

MI And I'd like to make available any of my material for him.

IB Because he needs it, yes. Don't go too far. He's a nice man but he's what the Russians call [? intelligent], half educated. He's a Member of Parliament for the Labour Party in the Israel parliament, he's a decent, high minded man, he's professor of something or other in politics in Tel Aviv, he was a Dean, he has written about, I don't know, Anglo Zionist relations as everyone has in that country and so on. But he's not really quite – well the Jewish part I think he'll [MI Be good on] yes.

MI Well I will need his help on that side of the story, that's the side ...

IB Why, you haven't done – have we not done ...?

MI Oh we've talked a lot, we've talked endlessly about Jewishness ...

IB About Jewishness, not just about Israel?

MI No, we've talked endlessly about all sides of the question. I wanted to come back to one thing that occurred to me very forcibly in the concert which is – er – looking at – er – ...

IB The only thing I can tell you about Jewishness is my wife's brother who is a very nice sort of [ ] person, he even grew apples somewhere near Lyons and near Bordeaux and was and wasn't a Jew, I mean he had trouble with it, complained – he was a friend of mine – complained to Aline that I talked about nothing – every conversation always ends with something about the Jews, it's intolerable. [AB Laughs] And Aline feels that, too [MI Really?] oh yes. I talk much more about it now, the last twenty years than I ever did before. I really didn't talk about it forty years ...

MI Why is that? Why is that? For the same reasons that my father talks more about being Russian Orthodox ...?

IB Indeed, very possible. The point was that – yes – I suppose the existence of Israel made a certain difference to the position of the Jews but I've always taken the – the thing which, what I like about the Jews is simply [ ] as the Germans say, determined by colour – are they ashamed of being Jews? Are they all right? Are they fanatical? Are they, is there a complication with them? Are they Gentiles, are they partly ashamed, are they partly over proud – what's going on? I just rather like smoking them out, I'm naturally a person, sort of categorising them. German Jews are awful, Russian Jews are the only good Jews there are, British Jews less good. In that sense like me they're nothing at all, American Jews – a mixed bag.

MI But why is it that Jewishness has become more of a theme in your life in the last twenty years?

IB I think because more has been talked about it everywhere, because the Jews have become front page news which they weren't before. [MI And it's more problematic?] Well the talk and discuss – yes, I react more because I constantly see things about them and things happen to them and there's more anti Semitism, post Nazi anti Semitism, pre [ ] anti Semitism in Israel, they've become items of front page news in certain respects more than any other group of human beings I would say: and that naturally produces a reaction of an unconscious and continuous kind. I have not changed my view.

MI Does it make you feel more Jewish in some sense or more – does it change your view of yourself in any way?

IB Well probably – no it doesn't because I've always thought of myself – I was asked what I was. When I went to Oxford in the thirties I was so much part of the English Oxford scene there and I didn't know any Jews, I hardly knew Jews there. I thought that of course I was one and I used to talk to the Zionist Society once a year even then. But I lived my life entirely [ ] among the Jews. I didn't in the English but I felt Oxford, they were part of the – Oxford seemed quite intrinsically, quite green really, so perhaps they did part of it and it was. As a result of America, I was uprooted from Oxford and began to move about in social circles and generally speaking began to live in a wider and certainly more corrupt world and that probably made me feel mjews of any other kindore consciously what I was than I was before. At Oxford I was just a Don but as far as the Jews are concerned I think I always knew that if I was asked what I was, I would never say I was English, I would never say I was Jewish, I would never say anything except, 'I'm a Russian Jew.' That's how I thought of myself, that's how I was, that shouldn't be unaltered, that's steady. But no doubt as a result of, I don't know, Israel and going there and meeting all



those people and being asked to do things and being courted by them to some extent – Weizmann I didn't know before the war, not at all, nor did I meet him, met him once or something you see and so on, there's absolutely no doubt the Zionist movement to some extent sucked me in; and that naturally made one more fully conscious. That's all. But I will say this: when I meet Russian Jews I feel much more at home with them than Jews of any other kind. [MI But why?] Because they are more [fun?] people [ ] – well look, there's Naiman who is a typical one. I must interrupt myself and say this ...

MI What's typical – no you mustn't interrupt yourself – what's typical? Why ...?

IB Interest in ideas [MI Garrulous] garrulousness, spontaneity, [MI warmth] warmth [MI humour] and a certain intellectualism and even if not intellectualism a sort of openness to everything, I mean the opposite of German Jews, they're not pedantic, they're not scholarly, they're not pompous, they're not false important, maybe some were but not the ones – well take Jacobsen, the same with linguists, who's a man of genius if I'm told [ ], well he was a Russian Jew for my purposes, he made jokes, he was jolly, he would talk about anything. When I was ill at Harvard I used to get – with 'flu or something – he would suddenly appear in my little bedroom in Lower House with a huge bottle of vodka and of course some salt herring, La Russe. Well German Jews never did that to each other [MI Yes everybody would talk] same as that, it's the Samovar essentially, it's a tea party around the Samovar, the spontaneity and naturalness; and Jews have that and the Russians no doubt, they have it. Polish Jews are much more – I mean they're just as talkative, they're more cunning, they're more complicated, Russian Jews on the whole are nobler: I can't help feeling that, more like [?], they're more related to some kind of liberal section of the Russian Intelligentsia even if they were business men. Those are the people who in some sense thought to be the only Russians they could talk to; and therefore I may idealise them a bit but even when

I met the Russian musicians I felt they were absolutely very sympathetic. Naiman is sympathetic, so is Madame [Tomashevskaja] who is not Jewish at all, maybe it's the Russian part and not the Jewish part. The fact they're Jews – I mean I can talk about Jewish [ ] as well, even fear.

MI But then there's a slight complication introduced in this which is that you're actually ...

IB Pasternak I did not feel that about because he was so anti Semitic, Pasternak loathed being a Jew, he loathed it to a pathological degree. I mean I used, quite deliberately in '45, to use the word 'Palestine' Jew, the retreat [ ], the recession was visible. I didn't respect him for that. I could see he just wanted to be a Russian hero, and be a blonde [ ] merchant of Novgorod, that's what he wanted to be. It's like at Peredelkino where they all lived, these writers, had once been a State [ ] who's a famous star from sort of [ ] I mean landowner, filled him with joy. [MI Oh God, how terrible it seems to me] You see? Yes I knew and he was a good genius all right.

**MI But you're from Riga, dammit. In some ways you're claiming a kind of honorary affiliation.**

IB I can't help it, I know but I was in Petrograd from the age of – what – six?

MI It's not an accusation of fraud, it's just that you're ...

IB Look what happened to me in Riga. I was in Riga till the age of four but my parents were Russian straight forwardly and German too because they were bilingual but not to me [ ] the maid that's about all, partly that, partly life in Petrograd was a very Russian life inevitably. Then I read these books and I felt I understood everything around me and I understood everything about the nineteenth century, I dare say into the twentieth century and when

I read nineteenth century books, the values are plain to me. [MI Yes you know what's going on] Exactly. The twentieth century is not so clear, you see? But the Russians in the nineteenth are real people, that's the period of their glory, 1820 – 1920 is THE period of [MI Of Russian greatness] and enormous genius, yes. I mean some survived into the Soviet period but there's no comparison.

MI Yes well you're not going to get a loud disagreement from me on that score.

IB But about the Jews, yes – well I don't know why but the Russian Jewish Intelligentsia was a phenomenon; and then there was that man I told you about called [A?] with whom I felt absolutely at ease, he was pure soul, a Russian Jewish intellectual from Riga but he only talked, he talked with a Jewish whine but he talked entirely about Russian Books, Russian music, Russian politics, about socialism, about preaching socialism to bearded workmen sitting on logs outside Riga. That's a purely nineteenth century Russian left wing phenomenon.

MI Do you feel increasingly marooned in time? You don't [IB Yes I do] strike me as being a lonely man [IB I'm not] but it might be the case that you have fewer and fewer around who understand exactly where you come from.

IB I was made to be with the Russian Intelligentsia and the thing that struck me – and in a way I suppose it [ ] me too – these new people [ ] come out, Naiman, Brodsky, Tomachevska whom I met, [Imal Ivanov?] who was this man of genius who I met in Oxford who was a [MI I don't know Ivanov] he's a linguist, he's called [?] Ivanov [ ] called Bretislav. His father was a novelist called [?]. He's a linguist and Brodsky says he's the most marvellous man in Russia. He came to Nottingham, he's a friend of Akhmatova of course and I met him in Oxford. It's obvious that he's a wonderful man and I've read a piece by him on a thing called 'My Sister Life' – one of the early Pasternak which is better, more sensitive, profounder,

more nobly written than any English critic or American critic could write now about anything. He's not very [?] – he is [ ] but mainly he's a linguist. I mean he mentions discoveries, I mean [ ] made me make him a Member of the British Academy which I did [ ] world wide fame. But when I met him in Oxford the only thing he told me – he talked about his life a bit and about writers and so on – but what I mean I didn't know before that Stalin, and there are documents now found, wanted a separate peace with Hitler which Stalin drew up in '41 when the Germans were near Moscow you see? [MI Oh my God!] That does exist. [MI And Ivanov told you this?] He said [ ] Moscow, he said his father told him then. His father was a famous novelist, not terribly good, born in Central Asia, who I think was in some kind of rather, in some political circles to do with the Kremlin. I met him, the father, in India, where we both attended the Tagore Congress, I don't know [if I told you?] about that. Have I not?

MI But you may have, I don't know, you should tell me.

IB Oh I must. Is your instrument on?

MI Oh it's always on. Do you mind if I get myself something to drink or offer you something?

IB Well I would like to be offered something, you get yourself, anything you like. Do you want help?

MI No I don't want any help but there's some Roses Lime Juice and water, there's some Schweppes, there's some ...

IB I'll tell you, Lime juice would be wonderful. [MI OK] What would you like for yourself?

MI I will pour something. Keep talking, raconte. [IB Wait a bit, yes] Tagore.

IB Tagore. There are two tumblers are there? Or only one? What are you drinking? [MI I will have the same] There is ice but maybe not in the ice box, just have a look at that ice, is there ice in it? [MI No, it's fine] Well I can tell you where it is – look, I'm now using you like a servant, terrible thing to do. If you go into the kitchen which is opposite this room and open the fridge, you'll find the usual cubes in the upper part of it. I think ice is rather nice. That's right, thank you, shall I go on? When I was at Oxford I had an Indian friend called [?] Amir Kabir, a Moslem from Bengal. He was an undergraduate in my time and we knew each other, he was [ ] which I was not but he wrote poetry. So he made friends with me and he wrote some Bengali poems which he wanted translated, into which he translated into English and I was consulted by him about the prosody, I'm telling you this story rather long. And the lines went as follows, I can't bear not to repeat them to you: 'Pale and discoloured, wan and bloodless rolls the moon.' I said all that means the same thing [ ]. Three lines later I said, 'Oh, he 'sang out across the waters'; 'sang out is perhaps the serious but vivid, 'flung out'. I said next line, which was four lines later, really pleased him, it said, 'Throttled sorrow enbottled in my heart.' I didn't [ ] line, sentiments [ ], I didn't know what to do with that so I said, 'Look don't follow me I'm not English, who am I? "Enbottled" doesn't exist.' So a dictionary was produced and enbottled doesn't exist obviously and I said, 'Very well, in that case which do you prefer, 'throttled sorrow bottled in my heart' or 'bottled sorrow throttled in my heart?' [MI (Laughing) So sweet!] I can't remember what the final decision was. It was published by Blackwells. Then he disappeared from my life, went to Calcutta to further philosophy or something, then I met him [ ] Harvard, he was on a – travelling after the war on a Ford Foundation College [ ], I imagine so, a favourite ending. We embraced each other fondly. Then he became Minister of Education in the – Nehru's government, he was on the – there were not many Moslems you see in Hindu mainly government, he was a socialist of a sort and so on [ ]; and then he became Minister of something else. Finally he wrote me a letter saying he was editing Tagore's prose works, could I look at some

of these pieces and tell him which I thought were the best? They weren't allowed to pursue [ ] the Indians in 1957 so I said yes. Bales of jute began to arrive containing Tagore's works; he must have written five million words in life, he also wrote I think, painted two hundred pictures and wrote thirty-five operas. Very well; I heard a lecture, very beautiful old man, very boring too. Then – so I said, 'Article number 135, the lecture number 47, the letter number 200 seem quite good,' something like that. The only other two people consulted, the only other Oxford contemporaries he knew, that was Lord Hailsham and Canadian Ambassador in Bonn who was a man called [Hescott-Reid?] He was at Oxford with us, I didn't know him it could be added, he was exactly the same age. He's alive, he's eighty [ ] and I had no [ ] in the back of a book, just a copy. Then hundredth anniversary occurred, he must have been born in 18 – maybe 1870 – so then I received a letter from the British High Commissioner in Delhi whom I knew called – he was a friend of mine in Washington – called Gore-Booth, a letter from the Foreign Office saying that, would I come as I was one of the Tagore experts in the world. The three persons to represent the English speaking peoples were Aldous Huxley who was a Hindu practically, a man called [Untermeier?] who was an American poet [MI Louis? Untermeier?] Yes who was an Anthologist mainly and me because I said that I was very sorry, I was a professor, lecturing, and I was afraid that October was impossible, I couldn't just stay away. I then received a letter from the Indian High Commissioner in London making the same request. I had sent a copy of my letter to the British High Commissioner. I then received a letter from Kabir himself, [ ] saying please come, so I more or less sent copies of these letters. I then received a letter from the Head of the Commonwealth Affairs Office [ ] saying Mr Kabir is very very anxious for you to come, we wish to be on good terms with him, he's very important to us and so on, can you? And I said, 'Impossible.' Then they said if you can't come will you nominate somebody else so I said that I was sure Mr Stephen Spender or Mrs Veronica Wedgewood would be only too pleased to go. Veronica accepted, [didn't say no?]. Then I received a letter from

the Vice Chancellor saying would I represent Oxford University and the British Academy? Well if I was being pushed by the university I could discontinue the lectures, it was a straight order. Delighted. I went with Aline, stayed with the Gore-Booth's and attended the Kabir conference – the Tagore conference. Mildly anti British mostly, particularly those people from Sri Lanka and then Aldous Huxley appeared and I made friends with him, he was a very nice man. Then a wonderful event occurred: the Congress of Cultural Freedom which was then disrespectful, full of scandal, gave a reception to which they expected eighty or ninety people to come. Because of Aldous Huxley one thousand Indian students appeared. We stood in a row in front of them and [ ] – I can tell you what this reminds me of, executions. [MI Laughs] Rather like Maximillian being executed in Manet's picture. Then an Indian spoke up, nobody spoke. 'Mr Aldous Huxley; after the late Mr Gandhi, the Taj Mahal is a most prized possession of the Indian people: yet in your book *Jesting Pilate* you said it was an ugly building with towers like funnels. Will you kindly repeat that sentiment?' Poor old Huxley said, 'Well, I was an awfully young man, I was staying with the father of your Prime Minister, Mr [ ], I'm sure I will have changed my mind. I'm going to Accra, I'll see it again.' 'Very well,' said the Indian, 'we hope you will change your mind.' Well that was about all. And I travelled with Huxley, too with Aline to [ ] to the Taj Mahal which was marvellous.

MI And did he change his mind?

IB He said he did. [MI What was he like?] Gentle, sweet, serious, humourless [MI Humourless?] Yes rather, very nice old, sweet old man, talking very slowly.

MI Pleased with his enormous fame?

IB I don't think particularly, rather modest and interested in Hindu things, more [ ] believed in Hindu's. He was a bit bored I must say, he said, 'These Indians are very exhausting you know.' They had

to write in books what do you think of this and this, two hundred pages, and he said, 'I find them interesting. A. Huxley.' The operas he used to go to, I went to one. [MI What were they like?] Awful. Well I hate Indian music anyway. I don't like it.

MI And is that true of all non Western music?

IB Mm – don't know any other. I heard a Chinese orchestra perform in Canberra, certainly, when the Prime Minister was – Whatsisname, you know, the left wing Prime Minister that they had? [MI Gough Whitlam] Whitlam, you see was on very good terms with China then and they sent off the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra. They played on old instruments, they played traditional Chinese music, it was very remarkable [ ] but the rhythms interesting as the instruments were and they were absolutely mechanical. They all got up and smiled and frowned at the same moment. Absolutely [ ] musicians; and then they played the something, the Revolutionary Concerto which I think is a feeble Russian work by somebody or other, a sort of Glazunov with water. And then they played Waltzing Matilda ...

MI [Laughing] On traditional Chinese instruments, wonderful! You really have had a very wide musical experience if that would come at the farther end of the spectrum.

IB Exactly. It does. Why am I talking about Tagore?

MI I don't know, I can't remember. [Laughs] This is a case for the hundred thousand and one nights that sort of lost themselves. [IB Why Tagore?] It doesn't matter. We'll think of ...

IB Oh! Ivanov! The father of [?] who I met in India at the Tagore Conference and we got on very well and I [ ] for him in an Indian Temple which he addressed in Russian and I translated into English, rather beautiful. When he came back to Moscow he wrote



an official report and said meeting the representative of the British Empire called Berlin was exceedingly sinister.

MI Oh really? How do you know that?

IB Because I read it, it was printed, somebody sent me, whatsisname sent it to me, my friend in India you see? I told him, I didn't tell the son, I thought – I did, yes, he was a little bit shaken, so never mind [ ].

MI Now tell me about these – you were about to say something I thought interesting about this generation of Russians and your relation to them.

IB I must tell you, I – not that so much. I suddenly realised what I didn't know before; I thought the Intelligentsia was more or less destroyed; there were few old librarians sitting about or old ladies like Chukovsky's daughter, she is eighty. Not at all. They exist, quite young, these – all these Naiman's and company, there's obviously a whole collection of them. Some are of a very Soviet type, there's Solzhenitsyn who's a Soviet man [MI Absolutely] doesn't want to do anything at all [MI And that's his problem] yes it is. But these people are exactly as they were; they could easily be in Petrograd I'm sure in 1910. [MI Brodsky too?] Even Brodsky. There could have been a young poet of a slightly dotty kind ...

*Side B [sides A and B are combined in the digital recording]*

IB ... called [ ] everyone called him that, don't know why, because he looks like a sort of lump, that means. There was something, someone whose name I can't remember, there was a Jewish German called Meylach about whom Naiman, they oughtn't to say to you [ ] Tomachevska they said, 'Naiman is a trivial character but Meylach is evil, a wicked man.' They all hit against each other. I think Meylach is perhaps rather terrible.

MI That's an aspect of the Russian Intelligentsia or that kind of milieu that I always find terribly hard to take. I suppose it's in effect of oppression in the sense that they all kind of forced in upon each other, they lived a very kind of isolated – and you then get a kind of frightful sort of incestuous, backbiting, rumour filled kind of milieu it seems to me.

IB That is true and it's also false.

MI Not just the Intelligentsia, among Party hacks in Moscow, the same kind of slightly fetid, secretive musty air.

IB But among the Intelligentsia I think they just say malicious things about each other but Naiman is not a member of the Writers' Union, none of them are, none of those people. They form a small group – do you know what I mean? The mere fact that these seeds which were left by their parents grew into these same plants [MI Is rather touching] is remarkable too – no, no, more than touching; I think it means there's going to be a Russian culture of a proper kind, perhaps not in my time but certainly in yours, you see? There's going to be a perfectly good sort of real artistic and literary culture superior to that of the West. I am certainly talking like a Russian chauvinist, it doesn't exist ...

MI Yes, why superior to the West?

IB Because I suddenly realised the one thing you are right, he's more authentic, he's less clever, he's less smart, he's less conventional in a way. I mean we have no great writers in the West, all we have is rather skilful writers, that's about all you can say. The number of people about whom you can say have a moral weight as writers is not great. I don't know who you can say that, Graham Greene obviously thinks he is; but the [volume?] of the ordinary novels and poems which appear now that Auden is dead, nothing. Maybe Larkin is the last in a way you see of that sort: whereas in Russia there is something absolutely fresh, totally unexhausted.

You see there is – the horrible Steiner did say that better literature is written in Eastern Europe who are under oppressions with suffering ...

MI He will say that wouldn't he?

IB Well that isn't true, it's not the oppression but it does preserve people from commercialisation. There's no pornography in Russia, ordinary kind, you don't get sex shops; and that did mean they were driven in on themselves in their emigration, [ ] people did not cooperate with the State, were not approved of by the regime, who eked out difficult lives by some kind of non corrupt, non treacherous, non treasonable literature but who did not sell themselves to the Party or the State. These people were preserved; they knew each other, they knew who the others were, they knew who to trust and who not to trust, it's an absolutely genuine group: and they will spread because they're bound to under these conditions, under Glasnost, however bogus it may seem to be [MI They will] because they are allowed to do what they like now that you have Conceptualists who have written the maddest possible Surrealist prose if you know what I mean. It's pretty dreadful but it's free, it's free. It's rather like Italian films after the war, were marvellous, sudden outbreak of artistic talent, and these rather wonderful early [ ] films, even German films up to a point.

MI Well I hope you're right because what I've seen of the Soviet art and avante garde in the early Gorbachev years leads me to think that precisely the problem is that they're cut off from any usable past and so a lot of what you get in the artistic – is a kind of frantic imitation of the West of the worst kind. It would be very encouraging if what you're saying is right that they can reach back across the vale to ...

IB People were preserved somewhere, people who somehow were hidden by their parents, by their – somewhere realised that all this was no good, was deeply anti, so were deeply anti State and hid in

corners and saw each other with difficulty. I mean Pasternak was not touched, [ ] Doctor Zhivago expressing some kind of Communist dreams towards the end and he really belonged to the pre war generation and his Russian was actually [ ]. His two sisters in Oxford who've no relationship with Soviet life [ ], they might be pro Communist or pro anything but they're not of the type, you see? And the same is true, when I talk to these people I find that talking to them has a certain – to be absolutely natural. I can talk without difficulty, much more so than if I was sitting with English writers. English novelists [ ] for sure, talk in some special way or have something to do with the TLS or the [ ] poet if you know what I mean. You know perfectly well the world I mean. Who did you have with you in Paris? I saw that programme.

MI [Elliot Abrahams?]

IB Yes, son of Abrahams is it? [MI No] Who is Elliot Abrahams? Oh yes! The American Secretary of State, [MI Yes, frightful man] the Under Secretary of State for Nicaragua, yes.

MI Kind of sub Metternichean kind of counter revolutionary and very sinister character. Then some other people.

IB Who were the other people?

MI Oh a range of slightly – I wanted to get Eric Hobsbawm but he wouldn't appear with Elliot Abrahams also he told me.

IB And who were the others there?

MI Hilda Bernstein the South African ...

IB She talked – fanatic, I mean it was too boring. Once she made her statement ...

MI But she was representative of a certain tradition ...

IB Oh yes in South Africa, no doubt, Jewish revolutionaries anywhere. But what I mean is she went on and on and on, simply mechanical. I mean, we're not using violence as they are, they use violence against us what do you expect us to do?

MI No she was the thing itself, though, that's what I would say of her ...

IB Cheap terrorism by Africa so we have exactly what the PLO say, exactly the same line. Then who else do you have? I know the type ...

MI [Pohl?], a Polish journalist [IB She was awfully tedious, poor lady] Yes [IB A Pole?] Yes, a Pole, [IB The Pole was excellent, much the best] yes, rather quiet and ..

IB And moderate and sensible, far the best.

MI And then a Welsh windbag, an historian, who I thought was terrible.

IB Unspeakably awful. Why did you have him?

MI Well I thought it was a mistake – I would have much preferred Eric Hobsbawm.

IB No wonder there was someone who left, yes. But who recommended him, where did you fetch him?

MI This was a bad example of me coming in – I'd refused to do it twice and I did it at the last minute ...

IB But where did you find this man?

MI He's at Warwick, he teaches at Warwick ...

IB Well I know but I mean ...

(The tape is stopped and restarted)

IB ... the facts are given to one to look at without being over interpreted and, I don't know, the bits of [ ] brought in is very relevant, not too many quotations to distract one and a portrait is produced, I don't know you suddenly feel as he really could be in the room, that's the thing. I know what he would say, that's what I worried about because Karl Marx was like that. It isn't a particularly good book, it's mainly about ideas. Still I thought I knew what Marx would look like, be like if he was here.

MI Oh I think that's one of the best things about that book. I think it's terribly good ...

IB In some sense you see, I didn't like him at all, I thought he was awful; but I knew what he looked like, I could certainly hear the kinds of things he would say. [MI Mm, it's very vivid] That is one of the things – it strikes me like that anyway.

MI I absolutely take the point about amateur psychologising, that I do take because I ...

IB I'm sure you don't like it either, it's irritating when that happens.

MI Well I don't like it for one obvious reason which is, who the hell knows? That's what it comes down to.

IB Well Freudian speculations and relations with one's mother and one's father, I don't know, things not meaning what they appear to mean and not being what they appear to be and that is symbolic for something else – exactly.

MI I don't play that game. [IB Nor – but you must do whatever you wish to do but] I don't play that game and I also don't want to drown the reader in paper; it seems to me I have a major problem in thinking about you ...

IB In choosing all these bits of my life? There's a lot of stuff ...

MI There's a huge [IB terrible mosaic] yes, there's a very large mosaic, you know an enormous range of people; it's a logic in which one could disappear without a trace and I think part of the strategy that I have to find is to ...

IB I gave you a list of my enemies, didn't I?

MI No! [IB I can] Oh, give me a list of your enemies! I'd love a list of your enemies and then I really must go.

IB OK. [MI List of Enemies] Is this recording? [MI It's recording] Very well, [ ] from the very beginning, mine is from people who attacked me in public roughly, not people I privately disliked, I don't mean that. But still, enemies: now, did I have any enemies at school? No, none that I knew. Did I have enemies as an undergraduate? One or two but I mean rather trivial and all that. Then, a Don. People didn't care for me but that's not to say – they were not people who would take the trouble to do me damage you see as would enemies do. I think hostile abuse I regard as signs of enmity because they're really personal. The first nasty review I got was for Karl Marx from a man called Raymond Postgate who was [?]'s brother-in-law who was an ex communist and socialist and that really was an attempt to destroy the book utterly. I never thought it was a very good book but this I did mind. I minded when a bad review said – personally I'd rather not be reviewed at all, just as I did not want my name mentioned in public at all, I don't like seeing it in newspapers anyway, even for praise, gives me no pleasure, a neurotic symptom of some sort; desire for concealment, security, all these Jewish vices. Now, then I had a

singularly nasty review of a mad kind by a man called Magee – not Magee no, Robert Kee who [ ] Ireland, who produced an article in something called Picture Post along – 1947 that was the year, I'm afraid it was a personal attack. He came to interview me at Oxford on – in more or less [ ] fat, awful man and [ ] sitting in the room, complacent and sort of greasy and he really was a very – truest – the person who introduced him to me and did write to him saying you shouldn't have said all that. But he then wrote me a letter of apology at some point which I didn't receive and then he tried to commit suicide I think but didn't really; married four, five or six wives, very handsome. And I've met him since and he says to me, 'You still feel [ ] – you still feel we're enemies?' I never accused him of anything, I never – I said, 'Well, I'm afraid there is yes, a wound, still there, ' I said, 'I always hope it won't be but I'm afraid on introspecting, I find it there.' That's what I replied so [ ] sometimes smarts. I wish it wasn't, I mean I'm always hoping it's gone, 'It hasn't gone,' I said: because it's quite funny, he was very very polite to me and that was Robert Kee. Then there was a man called Marshall Cohen who was Head of the Philosophy department at UCLA who wrote an attack on me in some philosophical periodical saying, 'Who is this man,' you see and so on, 'Sir Isaiah Berlin, why is he a Knight and what do people find in this awful [ ] about Two Concepts of Liberty?' But that was a personal attack, that's all I mind really, it was abusive, well it abused me. Then a man who's name I've forgotten, called Green I think, who wrote a book called [Children of the Sun?] a book on literary pornography. Not in that book but some article, 'Who is preferred the meddled figure? It's right to take him down a peg or three,' that kind of thing – er – just a Cold War figure and nothing else [ ] written down, what's all this nonsense? Then there's [ ] somebody in a [ ] German called [ ], I think his name was Meyer, perhaps he is a sort of Marxist: 'How boring, how predictable, how dreary, how empty, how superficial, how -' no good at all and so on, that sort of thing. People came to my defence [ ] and words, all words of that sort. Deutsche, he wrote me in the Observer in a very hostile fashion [ ] inevitability which you can't [ ], Deutsche said. Various Marxists



[MI But [Mark Carr?]?] Yes well Carr is a [contrary?] you see, Carr attacked me for my views but not personally. What happened was that I delivered – he attacked me, he used to attack me and [ ] a bit; then he – how did it come up? He definitely heard it over the radio somehow, the article then appeared in *The Listener*, letters of some sort, I don't know, I must have written an article in which he attacked me and I replied and I accused him of saying things which weren't true and he replied saying that they weren't true but it was too late to change them now, the thing was in the press. He was ideologically very loud and rude but not personally at all. We continued on quite good terms. But names [ ] I suppose, people say nasty things about me now [MI Personal enemies?] Yes, I have them, I think perhaps [ ] at All Souls who don't like me very much [ ] is quite, I've known them positively take steps to do anything against me as far as I know, didn't try – I've forgotten them I think.

MI I sensed a real bitterness in your [note?] the way All Souls has gone down however [IB That's true] which might lead you to feel that, not enemies but people who really ...

IB They've become mediocrity's, they're not personal enemies though. Well I suppose Scruton I must regard as not exactly friendly, that could be said. [ ] saying enough and he exposed [ ] lately, in society who detests me? There are such people. [MI Who?] Can't think of anyone, isn't that awful because it's against me that I don't have enough enemies. [MI Yes, yes (chuckles)]

MI I would have thought having enemies is much less of a problem than having friends who disapprove of you.

IB Well that's very frequent, almost all of them do one way or another: some kind of complacency, cowardice, sitting on the fence, a lot of people think all that, certainly. Oh I think almost every friend I have disapproves of me. I'm rather like a person about whom somebody said, 'He has no enemies but his friends don't like him very much.' [Laughter] That's quite just.

MI That's simply untrue.

IB I know it's untrue. Stuart Hampshire disapproves of me; very fond of me, great friend but disapproves. Herbert Hart used to disapprove of me, of being reactionary ...

MI Judith Hart as well probably ...

IB Less. Used to. Jenifer. [MI Jenifer, yes] Used to but now come round, [ ] nonsense but she's sufficiently fond of me not – no she doesn't really disapprove of me, doesn't care that I [live?] Let me see who else? Bob Silvers does not disapprove of me. The [Haskell's?] don't disapprove of me, either of them. [MI No] No. Well, I'm giving you names. Alfred only thinks I'm very idle, lazy, I don't write down what I ought to, I don't do the work I could, that sort of thing, no more than that. Freddie Ayer disapproved of me.

MI But he is no more.

IB He is no more. He was a friend in a way but you see – Humphrey House, the famous critic, great friend, disapproved very strongly. [MI Why?] Oh, I suppose not being left wing enough really, being in with the wrong people, [ ] distaste, being seen in the wrong company. Donald Maclean detested me, the late. Guy Burgess grew quite fond of me [ ] I had a row with him. [MI I remember you telling me about Henry Wallace] He really did like me very much. Wait a moment – don't love me? [?] very ambivalent. [MI Why?] Because I'm ambivalent about him, no doubt, I could explain that, I could so but I mean – love me to be on excellent terms with him, he thinks maybe I am, now, but for a long time rightly suspicious in my attitude towards him. Maurice Bowra is an acquired taste of; he was envious of me and that is one of the things which they all feel about me, I am a victim of envy. I've had too easy a life, I've done too well on too little if you see

what I mean. The other people that – I don't know, people like, I think people like the late Doctor [Sch?] thought that about me, why am I known at all, what have I really done, where is the value at all? My [ ] is too small, it's made to go a very long way, that's what [Sch?] thought. I've been too well off, too popular, too quite well liked and therefore when it comes to brass tacks, what have I produced? What am I, what is my contribution, what about it? You see, that sort of thing. I'm trying to think who. [?] felt very little about me and [ ] was very fond of me and I was a great friend. But the general idea is why? Why all this? What do you think is any good that he has done? I mean he hasn't really done very much, he's been pretty idle in his life, he's enjoyed himself a great deal, what's all the fuss about? His despatches in Washington, no doubt if you can read some of them are boring beyond words [MI Laughs] What is the great legend about? Anyway there's a very good legend about my despatches, all absolute nonsense, Emperor's new clothes. [MI Yes, yes] I am the victim of envy, that I am [ ] in that way, anti Semites can't like me but I don't know that I've ever known many.

MI Let's stop there Isaiah, I have to go.

*End of tape*

## MI TAPE 32

Conversation date: 1 November 1990

Date transcribed: February 2003

Transcriber: Esther Johnson

Subjects covered:

*The Crooked Timber of Humanity*

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### *Side A*

IB Did I ever tell you about Diana Cooper? [MI No] There was a man called Robert [M?], Meyer as I call him who was a German metal merchant who supported music, childrens' concerts I think, who died at the age of a hundred and five. When he was a hundred, a concert was given in his honour in the Festival Hall, the Queen appeared. Afterwards there was a party and Diana Cooper, whom I knew, approached me – and the Queen was about by that chair – and said, 'An awful thing has happened to me, somebody, a lady came up to me and said How are you Lady Diana? I said Well I'm old and [] and all that, still I go on, I try to go on, I don't give up.' I knew her face but I couldn't think who she was. Then I saw the jewels on her and I realised it was the Queen and then I said, 'Oh Ma'am, I do hope you'll forgive me, I'm out of my mind, I had no idea it was you, but you see the thing was that you weren't wearing your crown.' So the Queen said, 'Well I thought this morning and I thought I'm going out this evening, I thought it was rather Sir Robert's evening, I thought I wouldn't.' [MI (Laughs) Very nice] Quite all right perfectly right from all sides, everyone emerges with perfect credit.

MI I wanted to ask you what you thought of Sir Michael Tippett [ ].

IB I like him. Personally.

MI Yes I know you like him and I know you like him personally. Why do you like him personally?

IB I can't tell you why. I think there's something very genuine about him, extremely sincere, very genuine, very – slightly dotty but ...

MI Dotty because he's a pacifist.

IB Well then [Henry Ormond?] totally confused him, rather dotty and he wanders about some dark Indian forest, no harm in a composer, many others are doing that. More that, very [ ], could be quirky, all that. But there's something genuine, very human, very decent, generous, kind and gifted; and I always think his music is not quite as good as I would like it to be. I never liked Britten you see? I remember the famous statement [Quotes in French] [MI Laughs] But he's quite [ ], why not?

MI Bit crazy to me but he asked for a reason. [IB Not for you?] Oh no, asked me mostly because [ ] musical illiterate but he thought better have a musical illiterate than [IB He probably watches it on television or something. You don't know him?] I met him once [ ] Brendel [ ] ...

[IB He must have some moral respect for him, that's what I mean really, some sense of affinity.

MI It's not something I could refuse. [refute?]

IB No, no, that's so. The only time I felt that – you know one of my friends in Oxford though I never saw him much was a man I greatly admired, some people hated and that was an excellent man called Dodds, Professor E.R. Dodds, Professor of Greek – oh the machine in on [MI Yes] all right. Well he was a father figure to

Auden and MacNeice and he had been Professor of Greek in [?] when they were there, I think MacNeice must have been on his staff and Auden's [father?] may have had something to do with it, [university doctor?]; very odd noble figure [ ] direction but [ ] first world war, he wrote poetry, not very good but he was very genuine, original and interesting man who was very good in interesting ideas. I didn't know anything much about him except that he was interested in [?] which I didn't know anything about at that time [ ] Christian era and all the rest. Well [ ] there was something exceptional about him. My friend Maurice Bowra wanted to be Professor of Greek more than anything else in the world and stopped being a social host and began to work very hard in order to get it – he wrote book after book; the first book was rather good, the other books were not much good and he wanted people to give him money who couldn't have liked him, either personally or intellectually, who couldn't, [MI Why?] Because Maurice Bowra was frivolous, sensual, [ ] homosexual, amusing, witty and sort of Byronic and rather John Bull-ish too in a way you see in a kind of hearty, extrovert patriotic way, the sort that Murray liked, high mindedness [ ] inner life by [League of Nations?], peace, nobility and snobbery, too. It was no good, [Murray was?] typical high minded liberal of a rather vegetarian kind. Maurice Bowra was – if ever there was a man – who was a – what is the word I am looking for? What is the Greek word for meat eating as opposed to herbivorous? Of the animals? [MI Carnivorous] Carnivorous! He was rather the man who was carnivorous it would seem, flesh was [ ] to him, Murray, [MI A ?vore] Superior view of that. Never mind. Lady Mary Murray was a Puritan, he loathed money, Bowra, from our point of view, quite rightly. She was a woman, she was the daughter of the woman who emptied the entire wine cellar of the great house of the Carlyle's into the moat you see? [MI That's Puritanism with a vengeance] Well, he really was, and she was a water drinker of a rigid kind, extremely severe and high minded sort of feminist and anything else in the world, Lady Mary. So it was a hopeless business. Anyway Murray chose Dodds; he had no business to choose a successor anyway, it was clear that Baldwin

who was Prime Minister [appoints Regius?] was going to consult him, the most admired figure in the Classical world, rightly, because he was kind of [ ], Murray. Apart from being a superb Greek scholar in the ordinary straightforward sense, he had the genius of knowing what cultures were, very good at that. Dodds was appointed because they were all [ ] and [Maurice?] was rather crushed by this and as part of the revenge he and the others began to read Dodds' poetry after dinner to his friends. [ ] tough. But I got on with Dodds, he was rather left wing, high minded, abominably treated in Christ Church for which he [ ] before I became a student [ ] Christ Church Fellow, a friend of mine hated him. He'd been a pacifist in the first world war, he went to Ireland in order to avoid it, he took an interest in spiritual matters, he met Freud, took an interest in – fond of Plato in a Freudian manner, [ ] wrote a marvellous book called, 'The Greeks and the Irrational' which was no good to any of these people. I mean his colleagues – Page who was the Classics [Prof?] at Christ Church who was a conservative by that time – also despised him, he seemed to them exactly what I was trying to make out [ ] Lord [?] he seemed to them a real sandal wearing, wet, open necked shirt – but I loved him and Goronwy and it made my relations with Maurice Bowra a little difficult. I didn't see him often, about once a year, but when we met there was a certain natural sympathy, partly because he had read my books, quite liked them and was into Russian literature. My proudest moment was when he wrote an autobiography called 'Absent Persons'. It was rather good and it got, rather incongruously, the Duff Cooper prize, nobody could be further from him ideologically than Duff Cooper as you can imagine; and somebody had to present it and he asked for me to do it. I didn't because I had two that day so it was done by Conor Cruise O'Brien who was the next person on his list, naturally. Still the fact that he asked for me to do it was wonderful, I've never felt better pleased because I had great admiration for him as a scholar, as a man, as a pure character and I could understand very well why Auden and MacNeice thought he was marvellous, was a sort of father figure to them. Maurice Bowra would say, 'But politically, he's an idiot,

silly, that's what I don't like; high minded, silly, prig, prude, awful.' [MI Isaiah, I wanted to talk a little bit about ...] Go on. What about the war? The coming war? I read your article, you were rather troubled, you appear to be rather troubled.

MI Yes I was. I suddenly thought that a lot of people were going to die, they're going to die [ ] war ends [IB No] one of those war ends is the invasion of Iraq [ ] Mistaken [ ] [IB Stake?] Mistaken war ends [ ] we should not invade Iraq [IB Why?] We've taken Kuwait.

IB Why not take it out? It's a Fascist country at the moment. If you're going to organise some kind of order in the Middle East which is not undesirable, including Palestine, so long as he's there, infinite trouble will occur. I don't want him killed particularly, but it would be a much cheaper way out if he could be assassinated, much better than the war. Still, I don't particularly want – because I don't think individual murder perhaps has that effect. But I certainly want him discredited, yes, [ ] yes because otherwise I think that he's a genuine, rather so to speak sort of what's called a flash talent, flash dictator, you know what I mean, wants to conquer, be in control of the Middle East, wants to be a kind of local Napoleon you see? And that I think would cause far more harm than people being killed in the war. [MI What price?] Ah well, you may well ask, one can't tell, one can't tell but you see, can't count what price. Well you can't suddenly stop in the middle of the war as though to say, 'Enough, enough, enough blood, now we retreat.' That's rather difficult. What price? I don't know, I was in favour of the Falklands war I have to tell you because I think if people invade other people's territory, everything must be done to stop them otherwise the whole world can become a kind of [MI ?] Yes, and more lives will be lost, horrors will happen. You may say well, what of Iraq? Power, Russia, America, what can they do? They can do quite a lot, quite a lot of harm. Israel I think is reasonably safe [ ] I think [ ], I think they have nasty weapons which is probably well [ ]: but the other countries – no, I think if people attack, I agree he



ought to have got out of Kuwait but if that means a war then it has to be a war. I'm a hawk. I don't know why I'm a hawk, I think I'm a hawk on principle and that principle. I believe in the United Nations funnily enough, absurd as it is; if it eventually decides to do something or somebody decides to stop somebody, you may say what about Panama you may say. Well that was wrong. That was wrong because the Panamanian dictator wasn't taking anybody's territory, they're just being badly – like an American businessman, but that's different you see, that was wrong. And it was wrong to oust the leaders of Chile and of somewhere else too that was Marxist, before that. Was it Venezuela? No, one of those Latin American countries, had some kind of German sounding name but a member of the CIA got rid of him. And it was very wrong to get rid of Mossadeq. All that I'm against, it's true with me but this is somewhat different. [MI Just because he was Fascist] Well because they're Fascist with Fascist ambitions, not only Fascists vis-a-vis their own people and a killer of a very irresponsible kind; I mean remember that story about asking the General what do they think about the possibility of war, would it be successful? One or two of the Press had certain doubts. They were killed immediately, no [ ] at all, immediately. Well, I'll tell you why he's a fascist; because he wishes to impose a kind of precious yoke on his neighbours, that's all and I mean the Arab States are Fascist enough anyway, nobody could say they were Democracies. But still poor old Kuwait is comparatively decent, freedom of speech occurred, the essays were printed, the Kuwaities didn't feel miserable, that's all right. You see when should one go to war? One should go to war I agree only when there's no other means; everyone kept repeating that and it's correct. I refused to sign a letter against De Gaulle during the Algerian war, or the end of it, as a Fascist dictator, roughly, quite a lot of people did including I remember [? monte] who was the Editor of the equivalent of The Encounter in Italy [ ] and my name was included on the [ ] and I had to correct it because I said that he wasn't bad enough to be assassinated, not bad enough; there weren't concentration camps in France you see? All right, one may be against but it wasn't a real

oppression. One should only start a revolution or a war if any other consequence is worse. That I believe, that's all.

MI The range of our disagreement is small.

IB I agree, I mean only if it's worse. I think it would be, you may think not but this is open to argument.

MI Oh I'm envisaging a war and I think a war may be the only way [ ]. Like you I support the principle of [ ] Security, all that I haven't any problem with, I've just got a problem with taking the war to Baghdad [ ].

IB No I agree, I think that to bomb Baghdad would not be a good thing but I'll tell you ...

MI [ ] poison gas, more people, I just want to minimise deaths.

IB I'll tell you what I mean, I'll tell you what I really mean and that is that what really [ ] me, a lot of people will say 'Why isn't there more negotiation? Why can't they get after [ ], why can't they talk to him?' It's probably absurd to talk to him, we know that and all this endless stuff about the government isn't doing enough, what about my uncle, what about my son? I understand it but it takes the form of saying these are warmongers, they just don't want peace, obviously one can do something. One can't, that's what Heath said. He said it was because Mrs Thatcher was on the other side, it was apparent Heath [ ] Willy Brandt may be more or less [ ] he's living there now; the thing can be done by negotiation, it's like negotiating with people in Lebanon, what has that got? There's a slight difference; when the Secretary of the [official cabinet?] said 'Why can't you recognise Syria?' All right, they misbehaved four years ago, they got a bomb on to the Israeli plane but if they [ ] Terry Waite, that I can understand, that I can understand. To recognise a bad country has been done in the past [ ] to pretend that a country is wicked, it's not recognised. They can't hope to get

results, [Hassan?] [MI says something inaudible about an alliance] Oh have we? Oh well, he's on our side, yes but England is still not recognised [ ]. I know, he's worse than the other in a way, they are worthy of each other, both theoretically Socialists, straight Nazi stuff from both [ ]. At the most optimistic it seems to me [ ] was said to me by of all people, Carrington, I meant to tell you the other day, we talked about all this: he said, 'Well [ ] I think the King of Jordan can't survive,' which I think everyone says, there's something in it. 'If he goes, Jordan will become Palestinian in which case half the West Bank can be [buttoned?] on to them and that would be a possible solution.' It's certainly the most optimistic thing I've heard yet from the point of view of Israel. [ ], not impossible, it could happen.

MI Isaiah I must, although I can see you don't want to, talk about the Crooked Timber.

IB You'd rather do that than talk about my cousins from Moscow? They came here a fortnight ago.

MI I would like to talk about that, too, but I want to talk about [IB Crooked timber – go on] little bit [IB Go on] No I was just reading it last week and I [IB Go on, go on] I have a lot of difficulty with the distinction between [ ]

IB Oh it's quite difficult, there's no – there is a difference, yes. Yes, quite difficult to expound, people find it difficult to understand no doubt, let me try [ ]. Relativism means I like coffee and you like tea and nothing can be done about that. You like coffee sweet, I like it without; you like concentration camps, I don't.

MI Relativism is the claim that war ...

IB There are different values and that's that. Different people have different values, nothing can be done. You can try and persuade them to change their values but you may fail, and anyway different

cultures are different and they have certain different values that neither of them, neither of them is right or wrong, they have no criteria.

MI But is it a further claim that those values are basically derived from intuitive preferences [IB Not necessarily] intuitive judgements ...

IB It doesn't matter how that's derived, the point is they are different and there's nothing to be done but the idea is that you can't argue, I mean you believe this, I believe that but ends are ends and certain people have different purposes in life or different tastes; we don't mind about tastes, we get rather worried when it gets to more serious matters [ ] Israel. Now what [ ]. I'll tell you; I think the following but – the number of ends which human beings can, being human, strive after is not [ ] great [ ] or whatever. These ends are such as one can understand, one can imagine by a piece of imagination you can imagine if you were living in such and such a place in such and such a time, people would be – you would yourself – be tempted to, you could imagine yourself pursuing this kind of goal; so you might perhaps, on reflection, think it wrong and certainly don't want it now. If you can understand that all these ends are human ends and that by pursuing them people don't dehumanise themselves, however unsympathetic to you they may be, then I think you can regard them as objective and not as relative, let's say they are what human beings can pursue and remain – they test whether you can communicate, whether you have any common ground which you can argue. [ ] and I will give you an example. What I mean, before I give you an example, that's what Herder really said, I mean different cultures have a different sense of [gravity?] but nevertheless communication and even sympathy is possible. With the Nazis you can't because – when it came to the Nazis I know what I think. I don't think that they were mad or the idea of exterminating Jews was such that it's just – what Stuart Hampshire says it's just evil, then one can't talk. You may have to kill them, yes, that's another matter because you have to

protect the culture in which you believe; but I believe about the Nazis that they were human beings like us: they happened to have empirically false beliefs to the effect that Jews were sub men and poisoning culture. So long as there were Jews there, the German values is what they believed, would be totally compromised and would rot away. So long as that happened they had to be treated like vermin and had to be exterminated, well all right. But that's a mistake, you can say that's an empirical error, it may be incurable but it isn't a question of values. Values are intelligible. If you believe you see in the theory of what the Jews are, then you can see how it might be, what they were thought to destroy, just as if you know what a Catholic in the seventeenth century is, you understand why they want to kill Protestants because you know there's only one pathway and these people subvert. You can say, all right, that's a factor, that's not a question of values, you know there's only one way, [Latin quote] you see, tell these wicked people who subvert faith and these victims who give up faith, Inquisition. That's all right, it's intelligible. You may say we must go to war with them because they're incurable, nothing will cure them of their belief; in the meanwhile the damage they do is such, they'll do less damage if we kill them. All right, that's the same thing about Iraq, that's another matter, they ought to [ ] value. [Murder?] is wrong, you're saying that [humanity?] is right? But all these values are your values and they're objective in the sense that they really are what you are prepared to give up your life to promote. And that's enough, there's no more objectivity that is possible, but you can understand that the other people might have the same attitude and you understand their point of view; and if you understand their point of view at all, even if you are not sympathetic, then these values are equally objective you see if they're there, that they're not arbitrary if you see what I mean, they're not just a matter of taste. [MI Let's go back to the Nazi's] That's what Pluralism is; hence you see, you get toleration and hence you get trade-offs and things, you see? There are plenty of cultures which we – I mean don't sympathise – we wouldn't I don't think get pleasure [ ] but you can see that [ ] believes that something which human beings with the ability to

communicate, can believe. You can argue; you can try and say in your sense of a belief, what do you make of this, what do you make of that? Why do you believe this? Surely it contradicts something which you also believe. You can demand this, about whether their beliefs are coherent or if they really do believe what they say they believe. So the consequences of their beliefs are such that they're prepared to accept. That's always the argument, people would disagree but the assumption is that there is common ground so that the common ground is something objective.

MI So what then is the connection between that view of Pluralism and your political [ ]?

IB Ah, that I've never understood myself. I think only this: that Liberalism is founded on – to put it in a very simple platitude – on mutual tolerance. If you allow people to pursue their goals and don't force them into some framework for which you assert the value and they do not, which is the position of every kind of [ ] patriarchal thing, any kind of [ ] children and don't want to leave them to their departure, they were quite sincere: and everything depends on the denial of the sanity of your particular values which are binding on others as much as yourself; and being binding, if people resist, something has to be done to quell them, educate them if you can, pass laws if you must, but quell them in the end. Liberalism roughly means that people are allowed to do what they like provided they don't do things which are worse than [ ], worse; and the worseness you claim is something which a lot of people in a lot of times in a lot of places, would recognise. That's as far as you'll go, you can't say everybody; but if a large number of people in a large number of times – in other words human differences are exaggerated because a lot of people a lot of the time in a lot of countries think that lying is wrong, that murder is bad and that [ ] is a good thing which [ ] it is, that love is all right [MI Those are compromises] which individuals may deny but are sufficiently widespread to be able to say, this is the life I wish to live, that's the form of life without which I don't think I can survive.

MI You see the conservative critique of Liberalism always is that Liberalism actually requires relativism [ ], it requires relativism that is – liberal tolerance requires [IB Your value is as good as mine] Yes, it requires that. [IB Not that] And you're saying no.

IB Not that, not that. That's the only originality of my position I think, you see?

MI You're saying there has to be a common – there is empirically a common world ...

IB Yes, everything empirical for me. When you say 'empirically', it's a fact that; and a fact that is something which is a result of it. I don't ask for some sense of transcendent guarantees if you know what I mean because I don't believe in God and I don't believe in [ ], I was cured of that I mean by, I don't know, by [ ] that is so. But what I think is this, let me make the finest point. I think human beings act experience in terms of categories, that's to say – why categories? Well it's something very simple, for example things in space, we think we know lumps of stuff are about the place, we also think there are [ ], things with water, these are, what I mean is, part of the furniture of the world which we think about. There are certain other categories too, like good and bad, right and wrong though words for right and wrong don't exist outside the English language, it's rather [ ], they don't you know. What is the French for right and wrong? [an exchange with MI which can't be heard] No, right and wrong. Good and bad, bon et mauvais; no 'right', and it's something different from good, there's a very Anglo Saxon, there's a Hebrew thing but there's right and wrong, the French say [ ], not quite the same [ ] make it sound very English so for all the book justice as fairness, you can't translate it.

MI As [Alan Montefiore's?] wife discovered.

IB She is, is she? She translated it? Oh well you have to say [] which is the best you can do. Anyway to go back, we left talking about categories, right and wrong, good and bad, red and blue, they're different []. Now these are set and we assume them to be set for the Romans as well but they may be slightly different colour words but not very different, the Romans also knew what [] is []. Now some of these things are pretty fixed like straight and crooked, true and false, value words, I mean whether good or right and beautiful whether we approve of them or whether we don't. Others are more flexible, for example: you can imagine that there might be four dimensions, much easier if you can. In that case something appears at right angles to a cube. We would not be able to see it, somebody appearing in four dimensions would say, 'Now he's gone in the direction of the [], towards the [],' he can't explain just as we can't explain two dimensional beings, what do we mean by saying 'behind'? That could be worked out, [] it could be; that category could be shaken, I mean it's permanent as far as we're concerned but you could imagine it could change, material of it could change, everything could become a gas. One, two, three, four might be a little different. So there are these fixities of a different order of flexibility; and politics and morals, those are also categories nothing like as firm as the other ones but they exist.

MI Well let's take a few. The thing that's disturbing about de Maistre is that he says it's as much a fact about human beings that they want to slaughter each other as the fact that they love each other or are capable of trusting each other [IB Could be true] and the doubt addressed by Maistre to liberalism is simply that liberalism conveniently ignores facts about human behaviour ...

IB Well he sows doubts, that's why I like de Maistre, some truth in that. It's exaggerated, the number of people who want to torture other people isn't that great; I mean if there is such a thing as aggressive discourse, there is such a thing – I've always believed that wars are mainly created by boredom, like the students when peace has been on too long people get bored, they want action,



they want something to happen, they want upheaval. I think that's true. Well what [ ] said to a liberal is perfectly true, if you have the instinct, they do want [ ], something needs to be done to stop it, direct [ ] in other directions, create fences, stop them doing it if necessary by violence, that's all right. But you see his point about liberalism is too naive. I believe that the eighteenth century philosophers were too naive, the idea that all good things can be had is false and therefore the idea that, the great thing is that Condorcet said, 'In future the only one method of establishing things [ ] let us calculate.'

MI Do you believe that?

IB No! No, and I was taught that by Machiavelli, by quite right, by de Maistre [ ] knew it before when I saw the Russian revolution but I mean therefore human beings are not simple entities presupposed by H.G.Wells or people in the eighteenth century or even [ ] you see? The psychology is wrong but it is a factual thing.

MI Yes but let's look a little more closely at what you say of de Maistre because you say at one point, 'Men's desire to exterminate themselves is as fundamental as their desire for self preservation or happiness' – that's a paraphrase of de Maistre. What might follow from that is that de Maistre's executioner [IB Is the thing which stops it?] Yes [IB It would depend on ( ) that's the point] yes, and the difficulty therefore is to know exactly how a liberal argues against those premises.

IB Well you have to say, well you would say if this is true , it's not absolutely clear but it's exaggerated, the idea that men want to exterminate each other is just as strong as the fact that people want to love each other, well they may not to want to love each other but on the whole most people want peace, justice, happiness; some don't and some get bored with it. There's no doubt this is not irreversible; there are enough exceptions to worry us but the point is if you believe in these other values, you and most members of

your culture, then you are entitled to abort these other instincts and you have to say why? You see because the values in which you believe, in which most people believe, you have to say that, that humanity has lived by are [ ]. Nobody's ever quite denied that; very few people have said war is the thing, extermination is the – I mean Nietzsche may have talked like that, but you see what I mean, people who've talked like that are somehow exceptional [ ], if something changes from – nature is suddenly altered in some drastic way, I wouldn't know what to say, I really wouldn't, I would say my world has collapsed, I don't know where to go, I don't know what to do, you see?

MI But you see many people who lived through your exact period of life from the Russian revolution to the holocaust believed precisely that their world had collapsed, they believed precisely that the entire set of assumptions that they had made [IB No well they were wrong], political behaviour [IB They were wrong] and human action were overthrown by what they saw in the thirties and forties [IB They were wrong, they were wrong] They were wrong, why?

IB Because the ideals, in the name of which all these horrors were done, were perfectly acceptable in principle. None of these humans denied that the quality wasn't so good, that exploitation might be an evil, they may secretly not believed that but still, they would concede that the purposes of communism were not monstrous. They would even concede that the purpose of fascism which is domination of the German way of life – all right, it doesn't suit us, we would say we don't want to live a German way of life but that in itself was intelligible. However the world didn't collapse, it only collapsed because they thought people couldn't behave like that but that was wrong, they didn't know enough about human beings, their psychology was short sighted but their morality was not. [MI Who is 'their?'] Well the people who were upset by this and said, my world has collapsed, I don't know where I am, if you will behave like Stalin, you will go to slaughter like that, they allow themselves to be killed without resistance? I don't know what's

going on, these are not human beings as I understand them, they're wrong about that [ ]. Genghis Khan – I mean when the Germans with some exoneration tried to say Why pick on us, other massacres have happened? There's a certain truth in that; it doesn't excuse them, that's a self exoneration, it won't work with us.

MI But it's human, only too human.

IB Yes and it's impossible to say, yes Genghis Khan, yes Pol Pot, yes Stalin; if you allow all that why [ ] particularly why do you think somebody should [ ] so specially [ ]. Terrible yes but why so specially? Well because genocide is no solution, that's – but it is intellectual. My position is that of course the human psychology is inadequate but irrational forces and dark drives and all these things exist and by now we know that. I don't think anyone today would be astonished by anything of that sort.

MI But the implication of that is that Bormann, Eichmann can be understood. We are not faced with something ...

IB You don't get a Nation that suddenly [goes along?] with that, it's an easy way of talking. One understands what things you are after, it's very evil, it's very terrible, it's the worst thing that anyone may have wished but one understands why they do it and by God, they've got to be stopped. But one says, well can't you understand, isn't it wonderful [ ] Germans, wonderful [ ], marvellous, glory, it's always been a human end and killing your enemies is a very old story because that's what they did many times: and then you say, well you've learned something since, that's not progress I don't think. You see the idea that we're morally better after all we have learned in all these centuries, that's not quite true. We have learned some things unlearned others.

MI Well then we get into another kind of difficulty with your position, we don't believe in progress but very frequently, in fact just now [IB Oh within bounds, yes] you referred to the fact that

there are certain [IB I ought to have qualified it] you said history doesn't progress in moral terms but you also said we can learn from history.

IB Yes, yes, within bounds it does, it's wrong what I said. What I mean is within the culture there is progress [MI Within our culture] within any culture there can be progress; between cultures, not necessarily you see? I mean we hang people for stealing a sheep, we no longer do that [ ] I can't deny that, it's more compatible with values which they and we both accept but some are unable to see. But within – the same thing with art ...

MI Let's stick with that example [IB Sheep] In certain Arabic countries they don't hang you for stealing sheep but they cut off hands for adultery. Is it then possible for a Western liberal to say that is an inferior form of moral action? [IB Certainly] If so on what basis?

IB On the basis that human beings are rendering a disproportionate punishment if you believe it to be a crime, disproportionate to me in the kind of culture in which we live we don't want to do so much harm to people who have done comparatively so little. We believe in punishment. [MI But that's in our culture, Isaiah] All right, well you can say they're mistaken, they've made a mistake about what human beings should be like, what human beings are and what they can be and we know and they don't. We may be wrong, they may have a deeper view [ ] we can say within our [ ] according to him, kind of civilisation, within our form of life, let's say our form of life, this won't do. And you say, but you say we're superior; superiority lies in the fact you claim that your understanding of what people are and what makes them nearer to what you think we both accept may be happier, more just, more truthful, more [ ] and this is a bad way forward. That's all you can say. But the assumption is there are certain common values; if there are no common values then relativism is true but I don't believe it. Let me give you an example of no common values and

then you will see what I mean [ ]. Supposing that a man comes along and he likes driving pins into people [ ] likes causing pain [ ] and you say that well they could do the same to you. No they can't because I'm stronger [ ] And you say but why do you [ ] Because I rather like driving pins into resilient things ...

*Side B [sides A and B are combined in the digital recording]*

IB I can't help talking, the value I mean – he's in a different world, no good. We call him mad, we lock him up. Madness only means total impossibility of communication, it doesn't see too many of the things without seeing which normal life becomes impossible, well then which even minimum normal life becomes impossible, that's what that means, that's why we call them mad although usually we would call them mad when they get facts wrong; 'I'm a teapot,' that isn't true but a case of moral madness can occur in the example which I gave you, you still call him mad, you don't punish him you see? That's when we are saying the assumption [ ] is that communication even across ages is possible, otherwise we wouldn't understand what sincerity really means. The whole possibility of communicating with area cultures, of understanding what they say even though you say the merry Greeks were brutal, cruel, everything [ ] says about them you see, they were like us, they were mean, savage; the fact that you are able to enter into the world of the Trojan war means there are common values. [ ] Have I made it clear, not quite? Or clearer? [MI's reply is inaudible] You see relativism is arbitrary, you can't know, you can't tell at all in that sense – I collect blue. Why? Because it's blue. Do you like blue? [ ]. Then why do you do it? Because it's blue. That's all right, there you really part company, you say, well tastes are relative but in the case of relations of human beings, in cases of morality, of politics, there are very certain common bases.

MI What do you say to those who'd say that the common basis that you specify is at too high a level of generality to allow real discussion between different view points to occur; it creates only a

specious common ground, it's not sufficiently detailed a fine grain to adjudicate genuine conflict of values [ ].

IB I think that's wrong. I would agree that the Roman values are tiresome, I would hate to be Roman you see? Or I would say I don't think I'd mind Catholics or Protestants exterminating each other, I'd say No, no, [ ] that's no good to me, that's practically wrong; I hate their views, I hate their actions. I understand them, I understand how one might be human and fully human and possess all kinds of valuable human qualities but still do this, then I reject it. I reject it. Can you argue with it? Maybe not. That's all I mean by saying that these values are objective. I'm not saying that you can always come to an understanding. Stuart Hampshire thinks you can, you can always, what he calls 'counsel' each other, discuss; not always [ ]. But when I say that [ ] what I mean, they pursue objective values which I reject, that's [ ] but their objectives are not just conventions, they're not something which simply belongs to [ ] climate, you might become totally unintelligible to me. It's a pure question of communication. I can communicate with Torquemada but I can make no difference to his conduct.

MI Then the question is if understanding Torquemada makes no difference, the influence ...

IB Well it might make no difference to me but I think in principle, somebody could. If St Thomas of Aquinas appeared before him, he might persuade [ ].

MI But somebody might say why is a person under any obligation to try and understand someone else at all?

IB [ ] obligation only if you want to live in a common world, not otherwise. No obligation in the sense of doing duty, it's expand your experience for you; broadly speaking self development is an end. If you want to realise yourself, develop yourself, the more you understand the more developed you are. That's why [ ] is of a

certain value. I'm sure that Levi Strauss when he believed that these [ ] Indians followed certain structures and patterns, it expanded him, he felt pleased, he felt [human?], he felt he was – made him more valuable than [ ] American [ ] more splendid member of society.

MI Following this line of thought, what role can you give to the possibility of understanding producing a change of heart which [ ] what importance can be ascribed to persuasion in a [moral?] society?

IB If you believe in something true or valuable and you argue in favour of it, somebody – you can persuade somebody to agree with you, you tend to towards a sympathetic relationship with them and in some cases, you make your society better, it has stopped them doing nasty things. But even if it's not that, even if it's just rather harmless kind of liberties and you argue and by persuading them – partly of course it is vanity, you like other people to think what you think and you think that if other people agree with you [ ] they're right, partly [ ] but also it means you live in a happier, more friendly world.

MI One characteristic of your liberalism which strikes me very forcibly is that because you insist on the possibility of [ ] disagreement within one mind about what emphasis is placed on liberty can also [ ] possibility [ ] disagree [to? two?] persons over the same kinds, your political theory does require, if not de Maistreian executioner, it does simply assume that there's going to be a lot of force and coercion.

IB A lot of conflict certainly, conflict certainly, force I don't know. A lot of conflict which you would hope to be able to settle by means of trade offs or by persuading people not to behave like this. But certainly all choices are painful and all values conflict, some have to conflict; therefore it's [better?] history but not yet. Oh certainly I believe in the permanent possibility of human conflict

because the values conflict and because one has a right to pursue [ ] one pursues what one pursues at the expense of something else [ ]; and if there are a million people who believe one thing and ten million believe another, there may be a war. I don't think perpetual peace is very likely and I don't think one world is even desirable because I think there will be civil war, which [ ] is worse, it's national. I believe in units, I believe in Nations, in groups, I believe in human associations where really peace reigns within, with a great community of values. If you say well this creates a conflict with other people, with other communities, all you can say is [ ]. As for optimism or Mao's many ploughs, it just doesn't happen. Still [ ]. There's no reason intrinsically why people should kill each other or go to war or fight each other. I prefer justice, you prefer happiness, I pursue one, you pursue the other: is there a conflict? Maybe [ ]. So it's rather dreary [ ].

MI I suppose my difficulty, the central difficulty I have is when you said earlier that lives depend on facts, certain observable historical facts about the range of behaviour and values that we can expect of [IB Of human beings] of human beings; and I'm still troubled by the contingency that seems to attend your selection of these facts that is a conservative – simply based [ ] takes a different set of facts [ ] Jesus different set of facts [ ] he says, You and me are [IB No, let's argue] of shame ...

IB Then you must argue. Your argument about facts can be settled by experiment, by history by – you see the arguments about facts are capable of being resolved, arguments about values are not, you see?

MI But your selection of those facts is contingent on one set of values [IB Mm, no] I mean people would say simply, Isaiah the thing about you is that you have essentially a trusting [ ] a certain optimism in your selection of facts.



IB Sure and you can go to them and you can say if that is true, then I can be cured. I must, I have to say that. Bernard Williams tried to make out that that is what the reviewer of the Times Lit. Supplement [MI John D?] was trying to say, that [ ] from de Maistre, that I was too optimistic in effect, he didn't quite put it like that [ ] didn't make sense [ ]. Anyway [ ] nihilism didn't [ ] at all, but no; but in that case I would be cured. He's someone you should talk to I would think, people of another kind [ ] happiness, [ ] full of love, it ain't so. There's a great deal of brutality, cruelty, then I would say show me the evidence, would you give me the evidence?.

MI But your next essay after de Maistre, an essay which I think is a terribly good one, I think [ ] European or whatever it's called in which you talk centrally about the holocaust, the century of violence and death and come out with the conclusion there is nothing that is vindicating the centrality of the certain core of human values than the systematic demonstration of their absence for the last thirty years. [IB Yes, yes] Well you know someone would say that's the most optimistic possible [gloss?] that you could make.

IB I can't remember what I say. Do I say that? I haven't read the reviews.

MI No; and I'm not saying your [gloss?] on it is foolish or – I'm just saying it is ...

IB What do I say? Tell me again because I've no idea what I said. I haven't looked at these things, I've not read the book [ ] and I mean it, only de Maistre. That's vivid because I worked on that, there is a certain touch, or look at that's correct [ ] read.

MI There are paragraphs that say [ ] experimented in all forms of mass murder [ ] all the same that it's an illustration of the importance of return to a core set of assumptions, of values [ ] ...

IB But I mean there's something in being [ ]

MI No, no, that people are – there is a range of human behaviour, there is a range [IB Quite] Auschwitz, Brown Shirts, [ ] because a man [ ] de-human, that's what I take to be [ ].

IB Well if so, I am wrong, I'm wrong to say that because what I want to say is not that humanity is established by its contrast in being human but that this so-called inhumanity, provided you accept the assumptions – I mean Lenin believed that by killing a lot of people he did nothing but good. Stalin may not have believed it because he was I think a human savage of a hypocritical kind but the people who obeyed him, or believed he was a Master [ ] he's leading us to a better life and the better is something which we can understand [ ], better even now. Just wrong. But these huge sacrifices are sacrifices to something which in theory we don't disapprove of. All we can say is this is not attainable or this is not the right means towards it or history doesn't move like that. But the madmen themselves, I don't want to say that the Nazis are the killers, they're inhuman, they're nasty, terrible people, dreadful, you call them inhuman but you believe they aren't moved by values which would prevent us from doing it. Presumably because they know some other values which we can understand but reject [ ]. Empirical views [ ]. I don't know whether a [ ] had empirical views in any case [ ]. There are people who just kill for killing. Hitler was animated by oppression. [MI not audible] Ah, no. Then you can say people [ ] killing, you say that they are monsters and that something has to be done, they have to be locked up. They are the [ ] humanity, their values are sufficiently near to being non values. At that point, you do proceed to remove them.

MI When you remove both of them you remove [inaudible]

IB Yes you do, you do, because they do harm. Well you can justify [ ] but that you regard as [ ] without proper values, not worth

considering, too opposed to everything else and therefore must be cast out. But the case of people who kill in principle, of course you stop that too; maybe you hang them, maybe you kill them but at least you can see [ ]. If you catch a man like that maybe after three years of [ ], there isn't time, you kill a lot of people in the meantime. In the other case, I couldn't, you're just a [ ]. There are people who are savages. I don't know what I would have done with Zulu, Shaka – you know the Zulu king who slaughtered a lot of people. Genghis Khan [ ] perfectly intelligible ideas but he was vain [ ] incompatible with too much that we [ ]. That's all I'm objecting to, it can be a case of values. However it's the same with Kant [ ], or Christianity, God has told me what is right and wrong. Blessed are those who believe in it, you can commit more killings than anybody else. In that sense [ ] something which cannot be denied only in the sense that something is not [ ], outside the nature of possible human choices. There are always those who know what that range is; there you might say that's rather difficult to [ ]. What you have to say is let us say that there are ninety seven pursuable goals; that anybody pursues forty three of these, I can talk to, fifty two is even better [ ].

MI I think the core of [John D?'s] critique of your book [ ] violently disagree with [IB Of course] is difficulty with your position which you are prepared to see merely empirical cases [IB Quite] where your judgements are what constitutes grounds upon which a moral position rests. He keeps saying, if you don't have that you're just a nihilist, you've just chosen a lot of contingent – the highest hopes of human nature and you've cobbled them together ...

IB And you're the alternative to God, as it were, some ultimate thing hanging on that result, that's what Alistair MacIntyre now believes; in other words unless there's some ultimate, firm – you nail it to some unbreakable sort of aim which has objective values [MI What do you think about that kind of ( )?] Well I began with that, I began with that myself I think; there was a time when I believed with G. Moore, that good was then given to my direct,

unanalysable quality which you [ ] the values are [ ] who knows what's good, who knows what's right, you know the only values are – [ ] and objects of beauty; but it does rather – it leaves out justice, happiness, common life and so I know but [ ] I was liberated time and again by the thought that [ ] we do know by just looking, we have a kind of magic, dullness, we know it's blue, we know it's no good; direct inspection is not [ ] there they are, staring at us. Objective, that's what [D?] realises.

MI The terrible problem though it seems to me is that [ ] ...

IB Only by becoming an empiricist. I keep asking myself, do I really, why do I really? What is the state of mind in which I accept these things? Then I think, well [ ] why do I? I'll tell you what made an impression on me was a statement by a historian of very good ideas, in general I [ ], that's a man called [?] very good ideas: he said that in cases, physics, chemistry and other things dealing with the objective world, we believe in objective values, mathematics too, tied to its form, no good saying to some people [ ] impressions: but we liberals admire society in which lots of things can occur [ ] and we admire so to speak, variety as such; we admire the possibility of [ ]. That means that we don't really believe that there are [ ] in that sense, you see? In other words they are not empirical [ ]. We believe in plurality; when [G?] said, if we do not accept – what was it? – [ ] in mathematics, why should we do so in morals? We know twice two is four, well apply that to everything. In the end, the truth will out [ ] that's what [?] in the eighteenth century said, one more step and we shall know what is right and wrong, most people [ ]. We know what [ ], we know what kindness has occurred, we know that justice [ ] all right to do what [ ] situation [ ]: but I think it is the fact it is believing in these a priori values [ ] what can I do, take up [ ] I want to save something. That's why I believe that the word 'objective' is not to be used, to refer to me and not to anybody else, it really means 'generally accepted.' If you take it to its long enough [ ] why some empiricists carry [ ]. I am sure [D?] really means – or you may be right, he wants the truth

you see? Some kind of ultimate, universal ultimate values. [Latin quote] That's [ ], that's natural. [Latin quote repeated] [MI Inaudible] It's approximately true, approximately true, that's what [ ] I believe that's what it is, human sacrifice must be [ ] I'd be very happy if the other was true just as I would rather like to have a life after death, very pleased. But the craving [ ]. [MI Really?] Well not strongly but I would quite like it. If I was asked to choose whether [ ] but you would say why, could you get a world in which there were only these iron clad values which [ ] anything else [ ] I have said why people killed for it. I object to these [ ] I find that they're [ ].

MI [Inaudible] power of persuasion. Is there any way in which [ ]?

IB No [ ] of that kind. I think my life is the opposite of my views [ ] you know the weak always admire beauty and strength like Goebbels [ ]; my values are prejudiced, I know what I am doing and why. I don't doubt the values [ ] although I know that I do, but I believe in the opposite. I don't [ ] I believe all choice is painful, not painful to me. [ ]. [MI Inaudible] Well of course I believe [ ] maybe, yes [ ] but the agony is [ ] the [ ] of human relations.

MI It's all a matter of frustration [ ] I'm doing something very wrong but I can't stop myself.

IB Yes certainly, I don't think I've ever had that, I expect [ ] but I don't think I've ever had it. I [ ] emotion, I've lived much more in the sense that [ ], for example I've made myself a coward towards which I'm prone; if someone says something terrible to me at table, I want to contradict it or have a row but I don't, quite often, that sort of thing, you see? I [ ] meet people who in theory I strongly disapprove of [ ] quite polite. I despise myself for that, something [ ] but [MI Not overly] no, that's the point, if I did I'd stop it. I mean I have been brave on occasions, but not very often. I remember in 1940 [ ] when I was asked to go to Russia with Burgess; I couldn't deny that leaving England was a – be attacked

because the Nazis might be coming and I might be tortured and killed. But I was ashamed and that's why, when I got to America, and discovered I couldn't go to Russia, I came back because I was more ashamed of appearing to lurk there, you see? I could have [ ], there weren't a lot of jobs but they insisted that I take them and I thought oh dear, what will people think and they'll be right. So in the end one chooses to be in chains. I think 'Dread Shame' is my motto, I saw that at a big bent piece of stone from one of the pediments, one of the things called [ ]; well in this case on the [ ]. Well it was a stone motto somebody [ ]: 'Dread Shame' – I never understood it at first, I do now. 'Dread' and 'Shame', I realised the [ ].

MI One of the things that I'm not clear about [inaudible].

IB Ah, simple, that's quite – you may be wrong but it is quite – one of the forms of romanticism is denial of a [ ]. [ ] message and believed that values are not to be discovered. I think they are discovered but not discovered in an objective sense, discovered in the sense that whatever you believe [ ] maybe they do; I mean it's enlightened; but they believed that values were created and not found, as a work of art is created [ ] but when it's done [ ]. No, I make it; it's not a copy [ ]. Now if you believe that then the question arises, what itself does the creating? If you think it's just yourself, in the ordinary empirical sense, then you're like Byron or like any other romantic outlaw, very [ ] in my own work but by God, I'll fight for it. Comfort? I spit on that, [ ] kill; I see the values, they're mine and I follow them because they're mine, that's good enough, [ ] good at that, they're mine [ ]. But there is a doctrine which the Germans kept going [ ] which in itself is not just [ ] such as my party, my faith, my church of which I'm indissolubly – I can now see myself in connection, in association with other people to pursue, so that we together pursue the same goals and can only as it were, can only really understand myself as an actor in a [ ] some kind of collective [ ]. I pursue these values because it's German and not because it's right or wrong, because it's German. Why? Because

I am a German. Why should I be German because you have German values? Because I am German, that means 'we' [ ] couldn't [ ] myself, there are plenty of non Germans who have collective values, that's where we're moving; and I can neither help it nor want to help it. That's me, my life. Now if you believe that then [ ] Nationalism directly [ ]. If there's a man who can in some way point the path to where my group want to go in order fully to realise itself as a group, then I worship and follow. Napoleon was admired by the Germans but then he was an artist, artist in human politics just as Beethoven was an artist in sound. Napoleon created new forms of life, that's an artistic, aesthetic thing to do and even though I may perish in the course of being tortured by him in order to kill me, it's a high up form of life collectively than just sitting on the ground contemplating or having [ ]. That comes with that kind of romanticism; I mean aesthetic approach to politics in which politics is an art and a creative [ ]; shape people to make something of them, you make them into a certain kind of entity, you mould them. Once you start moulding them for your purpose, it's your purpose and you'll say, [ ] understood me, some do, some don't, so [ ]. When at the end in the bunker the Germans betrayed the German people [ ] because I am their future, I am [ ]. Anyone will [ ] that. But the admiration for Bonaparte is a value, I mean why did Victor Hugo admire Napoleon? [ ] that's a correction [ ] romanticism in general. [ ] Also I think he won [ ] there are no conflicting values because ...

*End of tape*

## MI TAPE 33

Conversation date: 29 April 1991

Date transcribed: November 2002

Transcriber: Esther Johnson

Subjects covered:

Tutorial on *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*

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*Begins on Side B and continues on Side A*

IB ... but then you would say that I ask where amid the essays on liberal philosophy etc. is the masterpiece? Roughly well, certainly Miss [Himmelfarbe?] said in her review that I have never asked that.

MI Yes; you're not troubled by this ...?

IB No, to no degree, I should be no doubt but I've never said that you see? I've never said, Well, now what about the great work on romanticism, shouldn't there be and I'm ashamed of not after all leaving to the world some great masterpiece. No; I regard myself as a small scale writer; if I write a long book for myself, that's fine but I don't feel embarrassed by not doing it. I don't feel my life is wasted because I should have produced – you know, where is the big book? The sort of thing people ask about Trevor Roper. Historians have to produce one, a big book, but in my case it's always been so. I mean I should feel deeply ashamed but I don't.

MI Yes. I should also make it clear that that formulation might imply that I think I'm waiting for a masterpiece. [IB Oh well all right] I myself am not, I wish to make it clear but I regard many ...



IB So would you say when his work – he asks where amid the essays on liberal philosophy is the unanswerable masterpiece?

MI And you say, ‘I do not ask’.

IB I don’t ask at all. [MI Laughs] And then you go on you see, you say, ‘In search of it etc. etc.’ there’s a shadow on me because I’ve not measured up to – it’s perfectly true that I’ve not measured up to other expectations but I don’t know that I’ve not measured up to my own because my self deprecation takes the form of saying I don’t think I could have done better. That’s genuine if you see what I mean. It may be true, it may be false but I think I’ve done everything – everyone does what they can. I don’t really believe in people editing them but never brought it out. There’s a general view. I think people are what they do to a large degree and if you say, ‘Ah well, I mean he could have written a wonderful book but then his marriage got in the way or he’s a drunk,’ people often say that about Cyril Connolly; he was too selfish and too pleasure loving to have done what he could have done. He couldn’t because he was selfish and pleasure loving [MI Laughs] because he was himself, you see what I mean? If he hadn’t been like that he wouldn’t have been him, but I mean that’s why I think it’s always wrong to think people have somehow failed to do what they could have done. People say that; what they mean is able enough or interesting enough or something, that’s very different. [MI OK] Now ‘these doubts are not tormenting but they’re real’, is what you say or that’s not so.

MI Oh that was my attempt – yes, I see what you’re saying.

IB Just that these lacked the grand, grand virtues [ ] vast standard of historical [function?]. These doubts are certainly not tormenting but they’re real.

MI They’re neither tormenting nor real – [Laughs] – all right!

IB No, that's three points already, call them one. Now the graver connection occurs. You say 'Berlin appears to be a fox who wishes he were a hedgehog.' Never have I wished it. [MI Never.] Never. [MI Never.] Why do you think that? [MI Well, I ...] I'm a fox who's quite content to be a fox; what I say about Tolstoy is that he's a fox who thought he was a hedgehog; that's rather different; and that's what I'm accused of by Perry Anderson, of being a fox who is really a hedgehog, because I *have* got a large central idea, and of course it's a terrible idea, but there is something unifying, and he thinks it's quite wrong, but there's something which I'm being accused of, whatever it is.

MI Yes, I think what's happening is that I'm misinterpreting conversations with you that I do remember and I'll have to return to them ...

IB No, no, it's all right, I mean it's probably quite easy to misremember – not misremember, but misinterpret. Yes, but you think, but why do you think ...?

MI I mean misinterpret in the sense that I ...

IB No, no, but I ask you, what kind of a hedgehog am I, in your view, I mean? What is my unity of vision, which I strive after? Not pluralism or liberalism, or all these conflicting values and all the rest of it. That's not an obsessive vision. [MI No, no, no.] But I mean I don't reduce everything to that.

MI No, my point about you not being a hedgehog is the obvious one, that I don't think someone who is a liberal pluralist can be a hedgehog by definition.

IB Well, all right, but in that case why do you say that I am?

MI I meant something different by 'hedgehog': I think I meant some desire on your part [IB To?] for [IB Single vision?] – well, I think a deep emotional interest in those who have a central vision, and a perplexity, a psychological interest in that kind of achievement.

IB Well, only because I've studied that, because Karl Marx was one, and Tolstoy was one, and so on, but I don't think, no, I don't think that's right. I've got no either envy of or [ ] obsession by or terrible interest in people of single vision; on the contrary, I think them very grand, important geniuses, but dangerous. [MI Yes; well, but that's clearer, that's clearer.] I know, but I do think they can be geniuses of the first order, you see? People who have a single vision about the universe like Dante or Tolstoy or somebody – Tolstoy didn't, in my opinion, but he wanted to. But there are people with a single sort of view of the world and they can be marvellous but don't tempt me – or object to terribly. I admire them, and concede their importance or their genius. [MI I think the words here are ...] No, but you must be thinking that I have somewhere a desire to put it all together.

MI Yes, I think I do [IB You see?], or slightly – I think I've overstated everything, and what I actually think is: a slight feeling on your part – How would it all add up, what would it be like to be a hedgehog? As I make it clear, you're aware ...

IB But I'm going to tell you what I think. You might be right because one doesn't know oneself, but I'm telling you I never felt like, I never have felt a hedgehog in my life, or any temptation to be one. I've *admired* hedgehogs – Toscanini or somebody.

MI And as I say in the piece, you have a deep intuitive understanding ...

IB Well, Toscanini, you see, is a hero of exactly that kind. Akhmatova was a hedgehog. Oh, I'm impressed by them, I'm deeply moved by them, but I've no desire – not *with* them, I mean, I don't walk the same earth with them. Now: 'a letmotiv in my work [...] human desire for certainty, [...] for unshakeable belief is noble, incorrigible, and highly dangerous'; that's all right. I don't know about 'noble', I'm not sure it is; unshakeable, incorrigible and dangerous, yes; maybe it's a case of noble noble, a case of ignoble ignoble. I don't think Karl Marx was noble: brave rather than dignified, and sort of worthy of respect. Noble?

MI In the case of Tolstoy I think so.

IB He certainly, and Dante or somebody, I mean of course but I don't think ...

MI Yes noble is probably wrong, I like [].

IB On the other hand when you say, 'there were some liberals nonetheless under some very current human longing for a political system that would promise escape from dreary eternity of liberal compromise', – that's true. Now who thinks that I am a belletrist? People do I'm sure. [MI Yes, I don't] No but who does?

MI Well I think people do, I ...

IB Well they've now been accused of it in writing. I'm sure they must. I don't regard that as unreasonable.

MI And I go on to say that I don't regard it [IB As culpable] as culpable ...

IB Litterateur and so on but quite serious. But who in fact does think that? I'm sure people do, they must, people think that I'm – and they realise that I'm ...

MI I can't cite you chapter and verse, there's not an army of enemies behind me whispering in my ear ...

IB No not enemies, no you needn't have enemies but what I mean – I feel I'm exposed to this, it's a perfectly reasonable position to take about me, I can understand it but I just wonder who in fact – out of pure curiosity.

MI I think I have in mind a straw man probably. What I have in mind is some tremendous monument of rather narrow erudition [IB Yes, (?)] the field in which you've written [ ] essays within thinking ...

IB Yes quite light stuff, interesting but rather light. All right, I agree but I just wonder who in particular? There could be such people.

MI Well, I think of straw men in the sense that perhaps I'm inventing ...

IB No but I mean I can conceive of it very easily, I am sure they exist, they've never come out of the wood as though, I mean, they've never said it. What a pity. I'll tell you , I think the only person who did say it is [Miss Himmelfarbe?] She said, 'Well we're waiting for his masterpiece, it's all very well all this stuff but where's the meat?' That's what they used to say about [Sedgewich?] Now, a thing which I do think is in a way right and in a way wrong and that is – now the next page that is – about English being a second language, like Nabokov and Conrad.

MI Maybe the analogy's not right because you were nine years old and ...

IB Well never thought I'd feel more comfortable in it because you see Conrad, Nabokov went on writing in their own native languages, they could; Nabokov wrote novels in Russian before he

started writing them in English. I couldn't, I can't write Russian now, I never could; if I have to write a letter in Russian it takes me two days to write one page; I mean the letters are wrong, the sentences are wrong. I can talk it and I can read it but I can't lecture in it for example. [MI And you can't write it] No. If I dream, what I mean if I talk in my sleep, it's in English – oh there is a Russian base, you're quite right of course but it's true it's not my first language. In the historical sense that's actually true but I don't quite belong to a kind of bilingual kind of continuity by which I in a sense belong to two languages though I think in terms of one I also think in terms of the other. There's some truth in it, bound to be but it isn't true enough, that's all I want to say. [MI OK] Now why do you say 'Petersburg'? I have now skipped to a row of columns where [ ] all [ ] writers – that's quite right; she also asks about Aldous Huxley, was he alive, same woman and there's insight, parallel ignorance when he arrived from Petersburg, you say it throughout.

MI I don't know why I said that, I think it's a statement of reactionary [ ] ...

IB Mm – pure curiosity. Now we've got through nine points, gradually coming. Petersburg again, same page, same column. 'Nineteen fifties there was a naturally creative' – I think that's right, 'doesn't seem an accident, coincided with a period of emotional happiness' – it's a sweet thought but not true because you see I don't know what you call creative because the piece on Tolstoy was written before marriage, the piece on historical inevitability was written before, what else?

MI Henry Hardy has made this point to me, I think it's true. [IB It's not true] No, no he agrees with you.

IB Exactly. It's true that Two Concepts of Liberty is after marriage, made no difference, I didn't. But I say it's awfully nice of you to say it, it's very nice to Aline but not – no. Now, Jewishness. The

point about Jewishness, I thought I'd said to you myself about the fact [of] my anxiousness to please. That comes from me, not – 'it is possible that Berlin Jewishness has a certain amount of homogeneity that goes with it', homogeneity isn't right for me. I don't feel, I may be, I don't feel marginal and for better or for worse I am too accepted, [ ] marginal. It's true about the Jews in general, that their anxiety to please comes from the need to adapt, I think that's fair, and my case too, taken from one culture and thrust into another; but I don't think it's to do with being a Jew, much more to do with crossing over from Petrograd to Surbiton. I mean that's much more of a shock which makes one, given my temperament in general, makes me liable to try and make my compromise with. You see I don't think it's the Jewishness which is central. There is a general proposition it's true [ ] I was such a non embarrassed Jew in that sense, unlike others; that never got in the way. Being Russian, being foreign, that yes you see? Some sort of foreigner, yes, as quick as that, more foreign origin than Jewishness. The two may coalesce if you see what I mean but – Now 'in short they have to know their enemies minds – that's the Jews'. 'Enemies' is a bit too strong. [MI (Laughs) Yes] People of course they must know what they must know about strangers, the minds of the foreigners they live among, I mean the aliens' minds. I never felt [ ] were enemies in any degree, on the contrary if something was ever said against me it [was said] 'he was too comfortable' in the world in which I live. That's what I was accused of by several – Namier accused me of it; there was a Polish economist in Washington I remember who was a friend of those New Dealers who said, 'You know the thing about Berlin, he's too comfortable in Zion.' [MI Laughs] It's a logical quotation isn't it? Can't remember who is – can't be the word comfortable, 'at ease' I think in Zion, I don't know what the first [ ] are. [MI Very good] But he wasn't, you see, himself. But I'm afraid that is true, I'm afraid you see that I've never felt – I've been so well treated that I've never felt – oh dear maybe they're anti Semitic, maybe I don't like them, maybe – I mean I should have done but I am superficial by nature about human beings and therefore it didn't occur to me.

My point is that it may be true but it's not a thing which is natural to me to think because I skip about one thing and another, I don't have a profound questing nature, that's probably fair.

MI [Hard?] to believe that exactly.

IB I float about quite happily, I mean I just adapt myself ...

MI One account of your superficiality might say you don't really listen or attend to other people but that's not true. [IB No I do] And insofar as superficiality takes the form of simply not noticing ...

IB On no, no I do, I do, very much I do and I take an interest in people's faces, heads, movements, I take all that in. What is true about me is that I think I am quite good at people's characters, not very good about their feelings. In a room I don't know other people are depressed or nervous or [MI I think that's true] that I ignore. On the other hand if you asked me about the skeleton, the bony structure, I'm quite good at analysing them, yes. I think I have some sense of a certain realism about what people are like and their essences. It's rather boastful but it is so; but at the expense of not being sensitive, I think that's mostly just and that's why I don't feel particularly the pains of adaptation if you see what I mean because this happens absolutely naturally and instinctively. Now you give the wrong examples about the conflict of values; equality versus liberty is all right and justice versus order, no, no reason why they shouldn't [MI Sorry, justice versus efficiency] Did you bring it?

MI Yes I bought another copy, [IB Oh good God, what did you ...] I was going to give it to you, I thought it was ...

IB Oh I see, no, no, just sent it from New York [MI By who?] by the publisher. It came with a collection of other reviews quite mechanically. Neither you nor Weidenfeld sent it to me.



MI Justice versus efficiency I said, not justice versus order.

IB Equality versus liberty and justice versus order you say.

MI No, I say versus efficiency

IB No. No, third column, page 34, line 6.

MI Ah yes, yes, you're right there.

IB Justice versus order, that's not a conflict.

MI I mean it's a potential conflict not an actual conflict.

IB No it could happen but not – needn't, even in an extreme form. Extreme justice doesn't – what you really mean is if you want too much order, you might shove aside justice in order to obtain it. So you might but I don't think, it doesn't usually, it isn't that which leads to anti order, anti justice.

MI Well what examples would be better then, sorry.

IB Oh, the one I give from one of my works; spontaneity versus planning; – er – a very odd one, knowledge versus happiness, that can conflict. You know if you have cancer there's nothing [ ], should do according to rationalists. I once asked Stuart Hampshire, he said 'But if you know, then you can do something about it.' But you may not be able to; ignorance can be bliss is what I mean. Creativity versus happiness maybe: when Racine became Christian [ ] she was psychoanalysed [ ]. If Kafka had been psychoanalysed probably he wouldn't have written a line after that. Now it's quite right on page 35, column 1, you do say, 'Liberty versus equality, justice versus efficiency.' Well that's not a terrific conflict as spontaneity. Mercy versus justice is [ ] obviously. OK, nothing further on this page I'm happy to tell you. [MI chuckles] Back to toil. I've told you ...

MI I'm finding this excruciating ...

IB Your essay, you have handed your essay to me [MI I know] I have to regret to say that on page 36 [MI There are problems] Mm. Now 15, my fifteenth point, column 1, 36 before you get to the end of the first paragraph, 'Liberalism [ ] dark sceptical to the views ...' I'm not sure that it's dark but leave that, 'and cautious', yes, 'for semi progressivism nineteen sixties' certainly, 'the shallow Edenism proletarianism' – well, sometimes yes, sometimes not. 'The reason surely is as a Jew forced to meditate ...' now, roughly these people, let me tell you this should be true but it isn't and I'm ashamed of that. I mean this is a great historical fact. I wasn't upset by the holocaust, nothing like; by the Nazi's, yes. I couldn't go to Germany after the war at all for quite a long time. I wouldn't go to lunch at the German Embassy when a perfectly virtuous German Ambassador who was known for his anti Nazism invited me, who sort of knew who I was and so on. But I learned about the gas chambers in 1945 [MI Yes] not heard of but lots of people knew before that.

MI But I'm not taxing you with knowing that. The argument I'm making [IB I know] isn't dependent in the slightest ...

IB But you're saying that the destruction of people and therefore history is a nightmare ...

MI This whole section is a commentary only on the European ideal and its vicissitudes, an essay of 1957.

IB I can't remember I'm afraid, I tell you I haven't read them. That is true.

MI It's a good essay, it was written in 1957 ...

IB It was written for a conference of a lot of philistines in Vienna. Nobody else wrote a single word. [MI I was very struck by it] The thing called European – some kind of, not movement I mean, some kind of World Organisation which then gave me the Erasmus Prize many years later. I resigned from it because I thought it was entirely bogus. So it is, with the Prince of the Netherlands at the head of it but they had a meeting in Vienna because the first prize went to Austria. I was a member of it, I was asked to make a speech which I did: but tell me, what do I say there?

MI Well it seems to me it says at some considerable length it discusses the horrors of [IB Twentieth century] of the twentieth century.

IB What the essay called ‘Politics in the Twentieth Century’ because of ideas, twentieth century – that’s quite right [MI And in that sense it ...] Don’t think it’s much to do with my being a Jew though. ‘Destruction of its Peoples.’ That isn’t it, it should have been. In the case of a great many Jews, it is and it’s strange it shouldn’t be. You’re quite right, suppose [ ]. It’s not wrong but it’s not true. It just isn’t – I’ll tell you why, but the meditation on the awful fate of the Jews is not something I have dwelt on and my Zionism comes from the fact that they live irregular lives, that they’re abnormal and they should be cured but that isn’t to do with destruction, just with the fact that they live embarrassed lives, but not that they’re liable to be slaughtered you see?

MI I think focusing on the fact that you’re a Jew is wrong but it can’t be wrong that those two essays, ‘Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century’ and that essay have nothing to do with the experience of Fascist ...

IB It’s much more to do with Communism, much more to do with Stalin, Lenin or Stalin. If you were Lenin you see, [ ] the horrors or the particular thing was very close to me which I knew about. After

that plenty of Fascism even, not before Hitler but there's Spain, there's Mussolini, all that you can say, that is not something which had a sort of decisive influence of any kind. If [ ] people thought they were communists at that period but the fact is I didn't, quite apart from Stalin, didn't push me in that direction. For me there was not [ ] enough. I was anti it because all liberals were because it's quite natural to be anti it; but it wasn't something which made a sort of dent, made an impact. Russia did. So you can say 'Two Concepts of Liberty' is an anti Stalinist treatise. That it is. Undeniably. The idea of liberty as interpreted by Marxists has been bogus and genuine and bogus and dangerous, that [ ]. Now you say 'not the first series of Fascism [ ] politics' you're sure I'm not? But who did say it? You're sure it's right? Well Nietzsche more or less for the reason [ ] of course but who was the person who complained that he said that politics is Fascism. People have said it but I'm not sure whether before me or after me or when. Nothing to do with me I mean, not because I said it but I just wondered what you were thinking of.

MI Oh there! This is a slightly blush making confession. [IB Go on] That interpolation in that first sentence was put in by Leon Wieseltier simply to [IB Bring in whom?] but who he had in mind I don't know [IB What does that mean?] But I didn't object because it seemed to me that it's ...

IB Oh quite probable, well it may be true, I just was interested. Why not send him a post card?

MI Well I feel very embarrassed not to be able to give you a ...

IB No but I mean he's very pro me and all that you see so it isn't meant to be a snub, saying I'm not original and all that but I just wondered who in fact did. It's quite possible that someone like – I don't know who – Walter Benjamin or ...

MI No it's not Benjamin.

IB Well anybody like that, I mean who talks about his [aesthetisation?], politics as a kind of art and its horrors? That Fascism is a form of perverted artistic ...

MI I'm trying to think, I'm trying to recall my state of mind when Leon put that to me and what I ... [IB You saw him did you?] No, no it was all done by phone because I sent it to him and he – that was the change that he'd made in the text and I let it stand because ...

IB Oh they may well be right. I just wondered, there's a genuine inquiry.

MI I keep thinking that in my youth I read books by George Mosse and people like that but [ ] Fascist, [IB You may well be right] historical books which talk about the relationship between Wagner and Hitler.

IB Yes but it's still not the same, that wouldn't be it. Wagner was a tremendous Nationalist and glorified the Germans but that's not aestheticising. Aestheticising means regarding politics as an artistic activity on the part of the creator.

MI Well I know who does a lot of that but that's after you, not before you and that's [Carl Shorsky's?] *fin de siècle* Vienna [IB Yes] which has a long and fascinating discussion about [Karl Weger?] Mayor of Vienna [IB As an aesthete?] He argues that – yes it's not exactly the same argument, it's an argument about the way your sense of politics as spectacle, politics as [IB Theatre] theatre, politics as ...

IB It's not the same. Politics as theatre is a pretty good idea, people do think that but that's dramatising himself and other things, that's not aesthetic quite, [MI Moulding man] the moulding man is. The moulding man is in theatre isn't if you see what I mean, there's a

difference. The moulding man certainly. If you really think that politics is a kind of – yes, Napoleon you see is the great original artist. But I wonder who said it? I think it's right but I'm just curious.

MI Well I don't want to take away one jot of originality from you if it's deserved ...

IB Look, it's not the point, it's not the point, I just want to know, I'd be interested to know. I don't regard that as a great original contribution, that sometimes reminds me, I can't lie and Magee's story, when he went to Popper and said in his crude way, 'The idea that values clash is therefore a very platitudinous idea, there's nothing much in it, people must have thought that for many years, but who actually before Berlin said it?' Popper said, 'Oh yes, there was somebody who said it before him.' 'Who?' 'I did,' he said. [MI Laughs] In fact [ ] isn't there but still, that I enjoyed. Then, same paragraph, 'What is missing in Berlin's account of Fascism is why such anti humanist belief remained impervious to the facts and why does the error seem so plausible that individuals can murder in it's name.' And I wrote something down about that which I can't read. Capital N, looks like Nagel, can't be. Oh yes, of Nazism was what I put down. Well I can answer that. I don't think it is impervious to the facts, if you like I interpret the facts, I've always believed as I think I've told you that the Nazi's were not mad, they were not pathological. If you believe that there are such people as sub men then the rest follows. If you think that there are creatures who are termites who are poured into poisoned wells ...

MI That just seems to me ...

IB Well the Middle Ages believed that about Jews, Christians believed it right through the Middle Ages they poisoned wells, the burned the Host ...

MI But my question remains why is such a belief impervious to the facts? [IB Well wait, the point is ...] You would be, to put it mildly, surprised if I were to say of course people like you are termites.

IB Yes of course I would and what I mean is that it's an empirical error, not madness.

MI Fine; but if it's an empirical error how is it possible ...

IB You can interpret things as you do. If people say to you, 'You know these are very sinister people,' there's enough in Christian tradition not to make it totally implausible. That's true about anti-Semitism, it's a very acute form of it you see but it's not new; and it's so violent that it would say it's a difference of kind – not quite. If you think of all the antipathetic things said before it of all the Nazi's, they were pretty violent.

MI Then all you're saying to me is that these beliefs are very old and very traditional and therefore ...

IB That's all and therefore imperviousness comes from that. It's not they're impervious, they're sort of systematic misinterpretation of reality, you can say that about any religion almost if you don't believe in it, or Hegel or any false view. [MI I still find it, I have to say ...] You're astonished, astonished that so many people should have believed such things. That's too optimistic.

MI The problem is not what I believe but what you believe because I think that there's then a difficulty in your account ...

IB I'm not astonished you see? That's my point. I think it's terrible but given the history of pure intolerance or human hostilities or what people believed about other people, tribes about other tribes and all the rest of it: it's untrue what they believe, it's demonstrably untrue all that, but nevertheless it's vastly more frequent than not you see? And therefore the whole of history then comes under that

hammer. I mean why should Cicero have said that the Jews are enemies of the human race? He did: gloomy, [ ] opposite somehow, wouldn't marry anybody else, put on the hats, I don't know huddled into small Semitic looking – frightfully unfriendly looks – all true I can see that, that might be thought. But it did become a doctrine.

MI I just think then you have to ...

IB The ferocity of the Fathers of the Church was very great if you see what I mean but it is a Christian phenomenon, it's not true of Islam, it really isn't. I mean Islam regards the Jews as second class because they're not Moslems, they're Christians, apart from now I mean which is a particular situation but I mean they look on the Jews as inferior persons who can't be treated as equals and can't have full rights; but it hasn't got the Christian element of actual so to speak centring on them as weak, evil, dangerous, somewhat Satanic somewhat. Shylock is rather a Satanic figure you see which I don't think that is true of anybody outside Christianity. All due to God killing which is where it started from.

MI I just still – I think there remains an enormous puzzle about it, about the incompatibility of observed empirical fact and belief. There are countless examples of such incompatibilities in other fields, I'm not saying in the case of the Jews as you say there is twenty-five hundred years of Christian and other beliefs ...

IB [ ] there's this belief, this hostility. It may not be justifiable but it's certainly explicable; you see if you have a Christian sect in Rome which wants to, which is violently opposed and opposed by the Jews or heretics, and the Jews invented the idea of heresy and eliminating heretics, that was a Jewish invention, mad enough you see? Then you begin to see that the Romans are all right and that Pontius Pilate really thought Christ was quite innocent, it was all these horrible people who did him in. Once you get that going and Christianity spreading, it can't avoid singling out these people, it



got very obstinate but opposed to everything which is dearest to us.

MI But then you can trace it all back to romanticism [IB No] then you've got to put in another [IB Of course] great chunk of argument [ ] Christianity ...

IB Of course but I ought to have said that romanticism is a secular form of a certain kind of Christianity. [MI In what respect?] Well, that it's a – there is a Pietism you see – it's a – the inwardness, the fact that everything – the only thing that really matters is the motive, the inner soul, the inner life as against motive not consequence, you see? And that can be regarded as an element, strong element in romanticism: dedication is clearly a religious concept, a romantic concept. [MI Right.] Now [ ]. 'Moral idiocy'. You're quite right, 'all traces are beyond the possibility of genuine understanding', that's all right. Not true of the Nazi's however. [MI Why?] Because I can understand them because I mean, as terrible as it is, I can't say that if I ever meet Hitler there's a difference between being outside the moral Pale as people say and insist on eliminating him. It may be necessary to destroy them because they're a danger to everything which you believe as a minimum of human decency but that's different from saying that they can't be communicated with. They can be but it's no good, they believe what they believe too strongly and therefore they have to go, you have to shoot them. There's a difference between the two, [MI Yes, I can see that] in being impossible to speak to because, I mean my case is of somebody who – I think I've used this example on you – supposing a man comes and – it's rather like, using your examples is all right, if you said 'I don't see why you shouldn't be tortured for pleasure', that makes them go too far and I don't know what to say to people like that. I know perfectly well what I could say to Goebbels, I don't mean the non-communication, I'd just say, 'What you say is horrible, you're a very bad man, what you believe is both false and dreadful and people like you ought to be hanged otherwise you'll do far too much damage to mankind.' That's all

right, I shoot him down like a sort of mad dog or something but I don't think I don't understand what he's doing, he's part of the human race.

MI But can you understand what he's doing?

IB Oh I think so, if you believe what he believes. First of all anti Semitism, you have to admit that you understand that because it's too universal and too ancient to be regarded as unintelligible. You can condemn it but it's no good pretending one doesn't understand what a man in the club, why he says – well there's this wonderful story which I can tell you. There was a man called Terence [?] who was a Manchester Guardian correspondent in Bonn and for some reason he was very horrified by Nazism, anti Semitism and suddenly threw himself into pro Zionism and became a kind of agent of the Jews and began editing little periodical to explain Israel to Members of Parliament. He went to stay with his father who was an Irish Peer, a dim Irish Peer. The dim Irish Peer said, 'What are you doing these days? Still on The Guardian are you?' And [?] said, 'No, I've left that.' 'What are you doing?' He said 'I'm doing something for a Zionist organisation.' 'Zionists, who are they?' He said, 'It's a kind of Jewish Foundation.' The father said, 'YOU KNOW JEWS?' [Laughter] [ ] story, wonderful, dim Irish Peer! But you can't say he's unintelligible, you see? [MI Yes] Given that you can even say that, the rest is simply a very violently perverted form of it. I mean Proudhon said that Jews ought to be liquidated, nobody knows quite what that means. There's a German philosopher – Wagner came near it yet you can't pretend you never understood Wagner. He's not beyond the Pale, he's perfectly intelligible, unsympathetic, rather [ ]. I mean even these Christian Priests, Luther of the Jews, St Thomas of the Jews, all these Fathers, you can't put them beyond the Pale of humanity. Another matter is when you say these peoples' ideas are so dreadful, so wicked or so incompatible that I regard as the minimum, they're dangerous and I'm afraid that without actually shooting them, we can't live. That's OK, that's like going to war; we go to war because

otherwise we perish, the danger to our country is too great. Above all I want my culture preserved, I go to war to defend it. It's exactly the same.

MI So the problem of understanding that I raise is not in your view a problem at all?

IB No, it is a problem but it doesn't quite apply to the incompatible values. I mean if a man says to you ...

MI But the values of a Fascist are incompatible with views but they're perfectly comprehensible ...

IB If you do that about a man, if you say that 'I don't know what he means, he's mad but I don't accept that it's being beyond the Pale,' not the Pale in the normal sense but beyond the Pale of our morality, well that's a different sense of beyond the Pale. It's intelligible but appalling, I never thought that human beings could be as perverted as that. 'Perverted' is different from 'mad'. Let's make you an example: a man – my favourite example is this – a man comes along to see you and you find that he pushes pins into people and it hurts them and you say why does he do it? 'Why do you do that?' And he says, 'Because I like it.' And you say, 'You like causing pain?' 'Mm, not particularly.' 'But you realise it does cause pain?' 'Yes.' 'You realise if you do it to them, they might do it to you?' 'Yes they might but I'm stronger than they are, I could stop them.' So far so good. You then say, ' ...

*Second side (Side A) [sides A and B are combined in the digital recording]*

IB ...pushing pins into resilient surfaces. 'You say, 'But if I give you a tennis ball, would that be as good as human flesh?' 'Just as good.' Then I cease to understand you see?

MI Yes but that's what you're dealing with here.

IB No. That I don't understand. If a man thinks that causing pain to human beings is trivial, unimportant, plays no part ...

MI That's precisely what some of those people in the SS believed.

IB No. They knew they were causing pain; they were delighted because they're wicked people, they're poisonous, they're termites, causing pain? They're only too pleased. To get pleasure from causing pain is a well known human characteristic, Sadism we know about. But to say it doesn't matter whether it's tennis balls or human beings, I just happen to like it, the fact that they suffer is indifferent to me, that's unusual because pain is regarded as a very central factor in human experience..

MI But surely there are lots of people who sent Jews to their deaths who for quite convinced ideological reasons believed them to be sub human [IB All right] and therefore regarded their flesh to be more or less the equivalent of the tennis ball?

IB Yes they did, but that's different. If this man says, 'For me human beings are tennis balls,' that's rather different. In this case he says, 'No, no, human beings are human; tennis balls are tennis balls. I just don't see the difference from the point of view of pushing pins which is what I enjoy doing.' Well of course they did. They regarded the Jews as expendable, yes, what some Americans are accused of feeling in Vietnam, the Gooks and so on, you see, highly possible. Japs – they were called – what were they called during the war? They weren't called Japs ...

MI The German attitudes to the Jews were therefore not that different from American attitudes ...

IB I'm trying to think – what did the Germans feel about the Japanese, unlike the Germans in the second world war? There was some name they gave it. It wasn't just Jap but they felt they weren't human. I mean killing Germans just had to be done but they were

cousins; Japs were not human beings at all, they were just Yellows. Let's leave it like that. Well that's all right, that's a reasonable interpretation of what people are like, that's misunderstanding of a very grave kind of basic facts about human life. All right. But that's different from moral madness you see. The man with the tennis balls has to go to an Asylum. A man who doesn't mind about children being slaughtered and being – torturing small children for pleasure is near madness; when people are sent to jail for those sort of – as opposed to prison, it's because of some abnormality, psychological abnormality. The Nazi's were not abnormal, that's my point.

MI But the same problem, or not the same problem but a problem, a massive problem remains surely that there are millions of people called Nazi's or Fascists or whatever who have the particular belief that Jews are sub human and that is ...

IB Well the very idea of somebody being sub human is itself what is wrong.

MI Yes, well exactly, I'm not thinking of the Jews ...

IB No but the concept of sub humanity is something which is profoundly wrong, false [MI Yes, it's empirically false] it's empirically false ...

MI And it has enormous moral consequences [IB Terrific, enormous, but the point is it's ...] and it does seem to me to be equally mysterious how that arises [IB Ah well that's another matter] and how it's established and how it remains in place ...

IB No, no that's people – empirical errors can always be explained in rational terms [MI How would you?] Oh you'd say that tribes hate other tribes, that you accept, people don't like strangers, you say Why do they not like strangers? You say, Well people like being among their own, I feel strangers are dangerous to our form of life.

That's intelligible. If you work up from there, work out from there you will get to the Nazis in the end by degrees. I agree – what I mean is it's – these are negative facts about human beings but it's not unintelligible. People did say that, they're wrong. And then Russell said, 'There is no Nazi philosophy, only Nazi pathology.' Well that was his epigram, what is politically highly desirable but not true. You see it's that sort of – Dalton coming to talk in Oxford said, 'These pathological chaps in Berlin ...' they weren't pathological, they were dreadful, they were appalling but pathological must be used carefully. If you're going to say pathological you've got to say there is a psychological abnormality which is in a sense some kind of thing which is doctors or something are put on to. No doctor could cure the Nazis.

MI That's clear to me, but I do think there's a terrible – there just is a difficulty for liberalism which believes that there are natural facts about human beings which – and properties being human which most other human beings really has [IB Oh certainly] and then they'd be faced with constant recurring examples in the twentieth century of people who did not hold that belief. I think that's the problem.

IB You have to say it takes all sorts. [MI Laughs] That's what you have to say, say some people are strange. There are people who have absolutely what we call lunatic ideas but they're not lunatic, that's just a way of putting it, people have very odd ideas. Some people think that Negroes smell, more the same, not as bad as Nazi's; some people think that – like a Colonel who sat next to me in All Souls before the war and he said, 'Have you been to Belgium?' I said, 'Yes.' 'Don't like the Belgians much you know, there's a man awfully near the Beast.' It's on the way there. Of course this man wasn't mad; screwy, yes. What you have to say is people do – people have prejudices, they form irrational beliefs but you can't say irrationality is the same as madness or the same as [ ] and you say at a certain level it becomes such that you can no longer include them among human beings; you can. But I don't

think it's true of the Nazis, it would be much too easy to say that. Well Mussolini certainly was not mad, Franco was not in the least mad, you see? Most people would be quite comfortable with Franco. Who attacked me the other day? Oh yes, [ ] of course. Have you read that piece?

MI I've read some of it, yes, I've just got it.

IB It's a very long piece. [MI Yes, I don't know what to make of it exactly] I mean it's extremely friendly no doubt about that. I think he's partly right. I've written him a long letter which perhaps I ought to send a copy of to you [MI Yes I'd like to see that] because what he wanted and what Bob – some of us wanted was a controversy in his pages of a friendly kind – that I didn't want, too exhausting but I wrote him a long letter telling him he was marvellous. I must say it's the highest praise that I've ever received from anybody in print in a sense, the things he learned from me and all that ...

MI He cautions you about the French Revolution though.

IB I know because he says I didn't mention it. I give reasons for that. [MI What reasons?] Because it had nothing to do with Nationalism, people say that, that it begins with the French Revolution, it isn't true. The principles of the French Revolution were ordinary, rational, eighteenth century encyclopaedist stuff. When people said '[ ] Patriot,' they didn't mean Frenchmen, they meant a man who belonged to the country who had believed in liberty, equality, fraternity.

MI But what about Volney, what about 1792, what about [ ] la revolution?

IB Well exactly, well me, je [mappe?]. Well all right, once they were attacked by the ,migr,s and had to have a war with them, they naturally defended the frontiers of France but so they did in every

other war, that in itself isn't – was did produce Nationalism in the end of course was Napoleon. First of all he worked it up in the French and secondly he generated it in the conquered nations. That certainly happened. But when people say the French Revolution causes Nationalism – La Nation – it's true, they don't talk about Nation, people or non du people not [ ] la Nation. La Nation comes in but that's only because it's not the King; the contrast is not with other nations, you see? [ ] is wrong but he does – most people say what he says, that isn't right, that thing comes from the wound again only to me. [MI The wound] Well the attack on the Germans and on the Dutch and on the – all the rest of it, the French as conquerors. He also doesn't want me to make the most of [true?] Fascists because after all Burke, that's when he read Burke; I don't pretend he was but [ ] defends that too. The letter is perhaps a little too praising of him for praising me, that's a thing might perhaps strike you as being a little too complimentary but I was really moved by it. I thought he was, it really was a kind of encomium and that's unusual for me at least. I'm not subject on the whole of – from someone like him, highly critical, tough – the trouble is he's writing a book about Burke, enormous book and he thinks he's Burke and he's a bit wrong about Burke too. I said, 'Look you know I know nothing about Burke, you know everything.' Still, he did believe in a hierarchy, social hierarchy, he believed whether by wealth or by descent. He hated democracy, hated liberalism, hated all that. It's no good saying he's a pluralist liberal.

MI Yes that will never do especially not if you've read what he wrote about the food rioters, seventy-nine [ ]

IB Who, Burke? No. But food rioters where, in Paris? [MI No in – ] Ireland? In England.

MI Straight market argument, you know, we should have full market pricing of food [IB And to hell with the weak] and to hell with the weak. Very interesting. Well thank you for this.



IB I'm only sending it to you as my biographer.

MI [Sab ? le tire] as they say in French. [IB What's le tire? What does le tire mean?] The shoot ...

IB Oh, the thing, le tirez, tire means the aiming of the gun. Tirage, why tirage?

[There is a short break in the tape]

IB ... to know what the differences are because it's very amusing.

MI Between what you think of yourself and what others ...

IB No, no, no, between, not at all that, between what various people think of me themselves, a variety of impressions, whether there's any unity or whether what Stuart Hampshire thinks is quite different to what you think; what you think is quite different from what Reni thinks; what Reni thinks is quite different from what ...

MI Oh I think there's a wide convergence of view. [IB I just wondered] I have vast experience as a biographer but I'm not going to tell you what they think ...

IB Oh but you think there is a convergence?

MI Yes, because you're a very consistent character, you convey ...

IB You see my friend Hampshire thinks very badly of all my writings for example, thinks I'm wrong on practically everything. He used to say to me, 'Why do you go on with philosophy? You ought to write about the Russians, I mean you can interpret them and that's really your subject. Why do you go on with this?' [Laughter] After my lecture which was on 'Two Concepts he came up and said, 'I've got very profound qualifications,' which was not

the first thing I wanted to hear at the end of an inaugural lecture.  
[Laughter]

MI But that's what friends are for.

IB Of course and he's my greatest friend and remains one.

MI Is he back now?

IB He's in Berlin at the moment but he's coming with his wife in the Autumn. She's a very tough lady, have you met her? No. You've met him? [MI Oh yes] but not her. She's a feminist and uncompromising, always on the left and quite good on the history and philosophy of Science, quite an authority.

MI I'm going to have to go Isaiah but I did have some questions I wanted to put to you for further sessions, could we ...? [IB By all means] Could we make an – could I make an appointment?

# MI TAPE B1

Conversation with Aline Berlin, 20 November 1989

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*Recording is on Side B*

*Side B*

AB ... in my frivolous days rather irritated then because the Rothschilds always wanted to have experts, you know they almost rather paid, you know what I mean? They'd always have the champion of this and the champion of that so it already got on my nerves a little bit [laughter] so brought in, you know were having him come over to tell. Anyway after lunch, we'd all had lunch and then suddenly Isaiah appeared. He was dressed in a white linen suit I remember, he was pretty fat and I didn't have any recollection of having seen him on that boat you know, two months before really, it didn't mean a thing to me, and I saw a man in a white linen suit, absolutely all I remember was that I couldn't determine his age. He could have been fifty, or forty or thirty or twenty, impossible. I think he was only about thirty, thirty-two. [MI Yes, thirty-two] All I remember is an impression that he was impossible to detect if he was old or young or medium, no age at all, in fact he hadn't changed very much. And we were introduced, everybody in the room and he bowed and said, 'How do you do?' but he didn't say anything to me at all which was silly because he didn't say, 'I think we met on the boat.' As he must have told you he was very amused because he wondered what nationality I was or whatever it was he was interested in. So that was that. And then he was very angry because very soon afterwards I had a golf appointment with my friend Cecile de Rothschild who was the daughter of the family so we had to sneak out and he always to this day says, 'Isn't it awful, you left the room about five minutes after I was there.' [laughs]

And then the usual thing I couldn't understand what he was saying, you know the usual thing ...

MI The usual thing meaning he began to hold forth?

AB No, no, that nobody ever understands Isaiah the first time you see him, you know every body has that trouble and it takes two or three goes before you – well everybody had that trouble, perhaps you didn't but I mean most people did.

MI Was it more pronounced then than it is now? [AB Then I think more perhaps] He talked more, with a kind of more rapidity and kind of nervous jumbling of his syllables?

AB No, maybe. Depends, I notice he does it sometimes, he does it more than others, yes. He probably did then, I don't remember now. Anyway that was the first time and then that second time when I was – well he told you that. [MI Tell me. It was at the Pierre wasn't it?] [laughs] Yes, November 1942, I got this message from my friend Victor Rothschild who was a great friend of mine before the war and also I knew that he would have news of my brother who was in the Resistance, and I knew he knew something and I was longing to see him. I hadn't seen him, I had news of all that sort of thing and I got this message, very secret message to say could I have dinner with him, he was there just for one night and it was very secret, no telling anybody. I was rather flattered that he'd asked me rather than the others, but however. So I arrived at the Hotel Pierre and to my – you know when you're terribly looking forward to seeing someone, there were two people in the room, one was a Banker who was dismissed very rapidly and the other was what I thought was Isaiah but I didn't remember, I didn't connect him with the man in the white suit that I saw nearly two years before but I didn't think much. Also I was terribly excited to see Victor; and Isaiah then, as he must have told you, felt a little bit out of it so he left after a few minutes. [laughs] Then in the mean time, a year after that I got married and all my life changed

completely and I was rather crushed after a while and [MI Your life changed completely?] well my whole way of life and everything [MI Where did you spend the rest of the war?] and then that's when we went to Canada with him, you see, my then husband [MI To Montreal?] yes and it was terribly awkward but so you don't want to know about my bit.

MI Well I wanted to back you up at this point because I wanted to ask you to tell me about your family and where you come from [AB Yes] because I think that's important to the story, [AB Yes that is rather] something about your family background. [AB Yes, how much do you know?] This is where I probably know less than I should and I would like to have quite a full sense of your family circumstances, your origins, your life in Paris in the thirties.

AB Well there are two different things, my origins are not the same as my circumstances. [laughs] [MI Well let's start with your origins] On my father's side? [MI On both sides] Well my father's side as you know was Russian and he was called de Gunzburg and I'd like you to get the spelling right, Isaiah always pretends he doesn't know it, the way we spell it [MI Spell it for the tape recorder] All right. Well he was called Pierre de – and he was a baron but he was called Pierre de Gunzburg, G-u-n-z-b-u-r-g [MI Gunzburg] yes and Isaiah always gets irritated, he says one ought to say Ginzbourg and I don't know what, anyhow that's how we spelled it. Well anyway, he came from this Russian family, completely Russian; my brother wrote a very amusing piece about the origins, maybe I'll show it to you one day [laughs] but it's terribly romantic, my brother was very funny and made a sort of tremendous affair of it. What happened is that my great grandfather made quite a lot of money as a tax farmer, vodka farmer? You know these people who got tax out of vodka, it was called something I think [MI And where did he live in Russia?] and they came from somewhere, Isaiah knows where it was, somewhere in the South but not Poland, I mean really in Russia, anyway he made a lot of money and then he became a banker and became very prosperous and

they came to Petersburg and my grandfather was the son of this man, he took over you see and became important in the sense of being THE sort of King of the Jews if you like, you know for instance, Isaiah's mother when I was engaged to Isaiah, she was terribly excited that I was in that family because they looked up to them rather like here one looks up to Rothschild, they didn't mind about Rothschild not because he was so rich, it wasn't rich like that I mean but it was very important because he was the only man who had the connection with the court and with the – I've lots of letters, it's quite interesting; so he was quite important and did a great deal for the Russian population in Russia, so he was quite well known. Even to this day when people, even now people say, 'Ah!'. Anyway so that's – and then there were ten brothers and sisters and my father, there were ten children and my grandmother who was a first cousin of this man and who was connected with the Warburg family, there's a kind of connection there, but she was Russian too and first cousin and they had ten children, at the eleventh child she died at the age of thirty having married at the age of sixteen so he didn't – anyway my father then came to Paris, he married my mother when he was thirty, he came to Paris having been you know a young man [MI When does he come to Paris?] brought up completely in a rather sort of grand house in Petersburg, never going to school, having entirely tutors and things; his mother only died when he was two but the father looked after all the people. He didn't ever tell me quite enough about all that period but he was very – I don't really want to boast – but they were very very sort of rather aristocratic family for Jewish people which is rather – they were, anyway they treated themselves rather as that, not being rich but being very dear sort of and my father was very good looking, very fair and didn't look very [ ]. And then that family, it was the usual thing of great Jewish families, half of them married their own first cousins and the other half married good families in different – for instance the best Jewish family in Austria, one had married a [Guttman?], his sister married a Sassoon here, he married French, another one married – you know that sort of thing and I noticed with half, about five and five [laughs] that's

how it all worked out, that's on my mother, father. And so my father came to Paris and he was then thirty, my mother was twenty and he married. It was probably an arranged marriage because again a connection. His first cousin was my mother's aunt you know, everybody in these families always interconnect over Europe somehow. And my brother always says that my father really never adapted to France at all, he didn't like France.

MI In what circumstances did he come to France?

AB Oh I don't know, I don't think it was the war, he just happened to come or perhaps they [MI It wasn't the revolution, it was before the revolution?] Oh it was in 1900, 1902, they married in 1902 my father and my parents and he was born in '72, my mother was born in '82 and it was probably an arranged marriage but my mother was madly in love with him, it was a very very happy marriage, I mean right through and terribly secure and nothing happened ...

MI And you mother's family side was from where?

AB My mother was quite a different thing, completely French. I mean on her mother's side was called Halphen was a very, one of these very very well established French, probably from Alsace, Jews you know rather like the [T?] or [F?] you know who were quite well off but very French, tremendously and her father funnily enough was a rather self made, completely self made man called [Deutsch?] but he called himself Deutsch like Deutsch , Deutsch de la Meurthe because he was very French, he came from Lorraine and he wouldn't think you were German so the name was Deutsch de la Meurthe and he came from a very very poor family and they made a great deal of money in the oil business, first with oil lamps and then cars and all that so he became very rich and completely self made and very jolly and very very nice and married rather above himself socially by marrying this very sort of stiff lady, I never knew her, she died before I was born. So the combination was very odd because my father didn't get on with all that French

family at all really, you know he was very gentle and very shy and never really liked – oh he loved my mother though I would say he was rather sort of out of it all the time; and I myself felt terribly, very cosmopolitan, I felt when I was at school and all that I felt not really belonging quite; not so much being Jewish which was all very conscious, we were not religious at all but the – you know we were told we were Jews and that we were very good and one must be very pleased and all this and that and the boys did what they had to do and we learned a bit, you know the sort of basic. But it's more that I felt in Paris, I always felt with my school friends, different, sort of being not French, sort of very cosmopolitan really [MI How Russian did you feel?] and we were brought up – I always felt very Russian for no reason really at all, I know I don't speak the language but I felt I was much more on my father's side.

MI Yes, I'm sympathetic to that. I don't speak Russian and I feel tremendously Russian.

AB Tremendously, especially when I was young, I mean it was [laughs], now less because Isaiah says I'm so French when he's cross with me [laughter] and we were brought up with sort of – my mother, the great thing was to be very simple and we weren't at all snobbish, I mean my parents were the opposite of snobs, they were very shy and knew nobody, they knew nobody really, I mean they knew people but they only saw relations or very very very, rather dull people and [MI Where was your house in Paris?] oh the house in Paris was a house built by my grandfather, very big house which we still have, I mean I've just got rid of it now so [ ] in the Avenue [D?] which is on the things you know, very 16<sup>th</sup> arrondissement, very boring big house with big flats and all the families lived in it. It was [MI All the families of your family?] of my mother. There were three, you know one sister and then when I married I had to stay on there and my brother stayed and it was only divided into four and there was only one family that wasn't related, so it was a rather family house which I still can go to now in fact. And so it was terribly secure the whole thing and I was brought up by an



English Nanny that never left and everybody was – and you know I was brought up like these sort of people [laughs] and very very very unintellectual but when I started growing up I think I had a sort of desire because I enjoyed studying, I was quite good at school and I really rather enjoyed it and I had a feeling that there was a lot of lack of interest in my family, you know there was nothing encouraged; I never was taken much to the theatre or didn't know much about art, I was ever taken to a concert, nothing much [MI Why was that? Why?] of anything, they just didn't bother because my mother only thought of fresh air and wanted me to be very healthy, I was the youngest of the family, awful things happened to my brother but that's nothing to do with that and my father was too weak to think anything. That was all very nice but sort of – but as I grew up I got very influenced by a school friend and other people so I didn't – teach me anything. But I always had a sort of secret kind of feeling for sort of university life and all that without having it really but I had a sort of vague desire [MI What kind of education did you have?] Well a very very proper French education and I passed my baccalaureate and all that which was very rare, all my world, my own little circle which was a very tight little circle, none of the girls did that. It wasn't done. I was the only girl, so really I was considered by the others a little bit funny, you know going out a little bit because I did this when I started to go to [ ] and then I married very young. I never knew for instance – and then I got married very young when I was nineteen because there was no way out, to get out of this very boring – sweet, I was very spoilt and all that and I played golf and I started playing a bit of golf and won a championship and everything and was rather shy and wanted to get out and the only way in those days was marriage for a girl in my world, nothing else; and he was very nice my first husband, he was sweet, very charming, very easy going but he told me to my enormous astonishment, he said, 'Do you realise that you are quite a sort of [laughs] that your family is very well known?' which I didn't know, 'and that you're terribly well off?' and things like that which I didn't know, I knew nothing! [laughs] I was terribly innocent in those days.

MI Tell me a little bit more about your father because I want to be clear about why he came to Paris, what kinds of things he did in Paris and what kind of character he was.

AB I don't know what he did in Paris, all I know is that when he was a young man he started being sent like all these Russian – or at least in my families – for instance he went to Hamburg and worked in the Warburg Bank as a young man and then he was sent off, there was some way farther away because apparently he'd had a mistress and they wanted him to get away and that kind of thing and before he came to Paris – he wasn't working in Paris, I don't think so – he must have come and then I suppose he felt it was time for him to get married or something, I don't know. But he was a terribly, he was quite Russian, he had a little Russian accent, a little bit and he loved to talk to all his friends where, in those days when I was a child, were sort of White Russian ,migrants and refugees, not particularly Jewish people and he did a lot for them, these people, he helped these people a great deal and he liked seeing them and there were these various people, I don't know what's happened to them. So there was all that and I tell you I sort of [laughs] Isaiah met him once and thought he was charming, they spoke Russian and got on very well, only once and he died in 1948; my mother died much later. But I always had that sort of feeling and so my first husband died very young of cancer which was just before the war, '39 and I had a child, Michel who is now at Sotheby's and so then I was only then about twenty-four or something and then the war came and I was rather pleased about the war, it might get me out of something [laughs] and then I started meeting people who started telling me about – I remember there was a man who started telling me about a sort of intellectual life and I had an enormous sort of feeling for it. [MI When?] Then in 1940, there was a man, a doctor who I got to know and I worked for a bit and all that, and he started telling me I knew, I don't know, some scientist things and he known Anatole France and then having to explain how these people all spoke and I thought this

was wonderful and I had the sort of feeling – and then I hung, I went to America in 1941 and hung about, playing about doing nothing for about two years and then I had a sort of feeling that I really must settle down and I found this great scientist who was very intelligent. It's the first time I'd really met somebody who was doing something, I mean in all my world nobody was really doing anything and [MI This is Halban?] Yes and he was in those days very important because he was right bang into the Atomic bomb business, he'd been sent over, he'd been working with [your UN?] in Paris and he was Austrian origin but brought up entirely in Germany although his father was Austrian and all that and I fell in love – well I don't know if I fell in love but anyway I had this tremendous attraction for somebody I found attractive and was really very, I was terribly impressed and he couldn't tell me what he was doing exactly, it was secret, but at least somebody who knew something and who was doing something and I found it very romantic the way he spoke about these things. [MI Was he Jewish?] Half but completely converted. His father was Jewish but was already baptised and he hated being catholic and all his friends and his first wife were Jewish and everybody and he had no feeling about that at all and he was a complete socialist so I became very socialist in a rather [laughs] quite militant, I followed his views, I mean I liked his views, he was very very, he really was and he used to have awful rows with people all the time who didn't have the same views but I thought this is it, this is real, this is something. But still it was a difficult life, I won't go into that but I was expecting a child and suddenly Victor Rothschild came again in 1946 in New York, we had a flat because after Canada we spent a year in New York, it was another reason for his reason anyway, before coming here and Victor said, 'I'd like you to meet,' – to him not to me because I was supposed to be just a rag and I was expecting my son Peter, I was very pregnant, about two weeks and always sort of crushed and very unhappy [laughs] and Victor who was my friend then was rather impressed by my husband and said, 'You ought to meet Isaiah because he's in New York just now and as you're going to Oxford, it's nice for you to meet him,' said to

him rather than me, 'because then you could meet him in Oxford and he could make you know people on the –' so he was brought to tea and Isaiah always remembers how he saw me again, he realised I was the same person but this time, well first of all he rather liked me but it wasn't that, but he said I was completely different, very humble and very crushed, a sort of slave wife, very frightened and he was rather impressed but he thought that was a bit strange. And then what happened, then we went to Oxford and I said, 'Shall I ring him up?' you know it's always difficult and I said, 'All right I'll ring him up,' and then he was so sweet and we became friends at once really and it was marvellous for me because he would take me to concerts, you know those lovely concerts and then we'd go and have tea. I thought this was [ ] life, totally wonderful. But there was no question of romance in that at all; and then little by little of course it – well I don't know if you want to know. [MI Yes I do but that's ...]

[Short break in the tape] ... he liked me so much because I had nothing really much to offer you know but we got on marvellously well always, it was wonderful for me.

MI What was it about him at that point? Let's just describe the early period when you'd go to concerts together, what was it about him that you enjoyed?

AB First of all I felt utterly at ease with him which didn't always happen with other people and I've never in my life enjoyed myself so much as I did with him and we used to [lark?] and I don't know quite what we talked about. And then there was that great long journey on the ship – has he told you about that? Has he told you that, in '49? [MI Yes when you go] when the boat was grounded and then we [MI No, no tell me that story] the ship was grounded [MI I don't think he's told me all those details, tell me all about this trip] Well [laughs] that was very funny. I had to go to America, my mother was in America and I had to go on my own to see her and you went in those days by boat and he said, he probably rather liked me very much already, I mean not loved but he liked me very

much, and he said, 'Why don't we just go on the same ship because I know other people going on that one,' so I chose to go on that one and there were masses of people we knew on that boat. He must have told you that story?

MI Well men often tell these things very clipped and in an abridged way.

AB Well all these extraordinary people, well he remembers who was on it, I mean there was a crowd, it just happened, it was a terribly interesting lot of people.

MI Can you remember any of them in particular, who they were, were on the ship? [AB Yes] Can you remember who?

AB Well the main people were this Ronnie Tree and his wife Marietta, yes, and this Judy Montague who was a great friend of Isaiah's who was great fun; and then I knew also some French people. There was a very intelligent and rather flirtatious man called Antoine [?] there with a man called [M?] well there were all kinds of that sort of people. Anyway we had this ten days or two weeks or whatever it was that was absolutely lovely because – and again without any feeling or guilt or romance, I didn't think of anything like that at all but we just enjoyed ourselves. We got terribly – we were always together and people invited us, you know, 'Come and have dinner with us,' and this and that and we were always together and we talked and talked and talked; he was the only person I really could talk to, not about anything intimate or anything like that, I never complained about my life or anything like that, not till the last minute. But and then in 1952 ...

MI What about the sand bar – sorry, the ship runs aground?

AB Oh the ship runs – yes, I arrived at Cherbourg, I came from Paris, I got on in Paris and he came, the ship came, you know you got on in those days in Cherbourg and then we started having

dinner and then the ship stopped in the harbour and got grounded, we [ ] to shake and that was the end of that. So we were stuck there and then limped back to Southampton and they said well we'll be here for two or three days so I took him back to Oxford and he went back to his College and I – I think with some other friends too and there was that man Katkov on the ship, too and so we had three extra days because the rest of my family were in France [ ] and then we got back onto that ship and so we became – sort of intimacy grew a lot from there. And then the other, the great important [ ] was 1952 when he really, I think that's when he says, that his sort of feeling for me became quite strong. I didn't want to admit it really, I wasn't thinking of leaving my husband or anything like that but my whole life, the greatest pleasure in my life was with him even then I could see him more and more. Because he said, 'I'm going to Aix for the Festival,' but with a cousin of mine [?] Rothschild who was a great friend of his and a great friend of mine. He said, 'Look, she wouldn't be very pleased if we stayed in the same hotel, you know because she has invited me so you'd better go somewhere else.' But I drove him down and it was wonderful. We drove all the way down, spending the night at Valence, not at all in the same room, no, no, oh nothing, no romance there at all, just sort of great friends and my husband didn't mind all that because he thought that you know Isaiah was – no question of having a lady love, you know one didn't think of him at all in those days in that way, no, and nor did he for a long time I don't think. Before I came along, yes but one never thought of him in that – and he was a complete bachelor and he wasn't particularly good looking or anything, so my husband didn't mind at all, you know he wasn't a bit jealous that I drove him down. But then we got more and more – and I was very involved and didn't do – and was behaving rather badly and he fell in love with me then he said, you know, more or less, so it started more or less from that point. And when his father died he was very emotional, at the end of '53, that was quite – and he sort of came out more with that, he was very emotional and much more open about himself and ...

MI And he turned to you in fact then?

AB Then it was more – yes, there was much more then, then it really was quite [ ]. And then I needed him more and more but again I put aside any question of anything you see, I don't know what I thought [laughs] but so much so that in the end my husband put his foot down, quite rightly at this point of view [laughs] because you know that terrible mental influence that somebody can have. You realise I was seeing him practically every day you see and I think and it got him [ ] our marriage wasn't going at all well and then the end of '54 after terrible dramas that he might have told you when we didn't – yes, he must have told you that – but at the end of that time suddenly my husband was asked by Mendes France who was then Prime Minister to come back to France because he'd been kept away from France because he was so difficult that his colleagues wouldn't work with him. But Mendes France said it's mad not to have a good scientist in France and he asked him to come back and start a new laboratory in France, in Paris or outside Paris and he said 'I've been asked to do that.' So normally it would have been marvellous for me to go back home and all that and that's where I realised that I couldn't do it; and when he said, 'Look we must decide if we're going or not, what do you want to do?' and it came out like that, I never thought I would dare, I said, 'I can't do it.' And that meant we were separating because he knew who it was because it was very much on the edge and I remember rushing to Isaiah next morning [laughs] to tell him. He had no idea, nor did I have any idea that I would do that and then it was terrific. The great thing was that I in my life had never – first of all I'd never been in love as I had been with Isaiah, it only came then gradually you see, that's why I wouldn't admit to myself then completely and utterly and it was quite different from my life – it completely changed then. Nor had I ever been loved the way I was loved by him, ever; I mean the affection, the real love, you know it was a thing I'd never really had and he completely changed

me, I mean everybody thought I was quite – then I became different again [laughs].

MI How did he change you?

AB He thawed me. I was very very frozen because I'd had a lot of [ ] and I always said, I mean completely, it was just like an unfreezing.

MI Did you unfreeze him though?

AB No. He wasn't, he was the most romantic, the most affectionate and romantic and loving person I'd ever met in my life. Well he must have told you, he had been in love with this girl but that was with no – you know nothing to it at all – and then he had, I think he was, he had somebody else but not really, so he'd never had much life with a woman really much and it all came sort of pouring out as if it were bubbling out as if he'd never had it. He was already forty-five or something, or forty-six. He'd had something I mean but you know he was like a very much younger boy in that sense and very extrovert you know and sort of all his feelings came pouring out. I'd never met anybody like that. And it was interesting that I still to this day can't understand how this happened, I mean or maybe he thought I was attractive, I don't know, but that wouldn't be quite enough [laughs].

MI [laughs] It would take you some part of the way, surely?

AB Yes but not for him, I don't think there's enough really, it's not the first thing he looks [for] in a woman you know, he wasn't like that. For him it was the feeling to get a close relationship and that's what counted, and we have but how it still is there I can't understand why really because I was brought up – I mean completely different upbringing, completely different education, completely different way of living life and yet [MI What's the – can you make the difference more precise?] Yes the difference more



precise was that he was Eastern Europe and I was Western Europe, I mean down to food, I mean everything you know. [MI Down to food? What do you mean?] He doesn't like [laughs] I mean he really doesn't like – not a question of French food – but he really likes Central European or Eastern or Russian or Polish – not Polish but I mean he doesn't like anything to do with Western culture really, I mean except books and things, a way of life, or attitudes and everything. He really is – there was a great difference there of belonging – I don't know if you call it Russian or what – but anyway part of that part of Europe. It's so different, I mean perhaps French has such a tremendous impact on one, you know the French way of life or education, it really absolutely moulds you really. And I have – my mother was very French, I know I was brought up – I don't know. And sometimes we really feel it, this terrible contrast and then you see and the way I live in Oxford or something, he found it a bit difficult to – because it's different from what he was used to. Mind you he's got used to it now and I've also adapted more to what he likes. [laughs] It was difficult for him because we had, I had these children, I had three sons and he was very nice to them but he'd never seen children in his life nor does he look at them to this day, little ones, they mean nothing to him. He was extremely nice to them but he tried to keep very distant because their father was still alive and he didn't want to have too much influence, you know and in the end of course he arranged all their education and did everything for them. But for him it was hard because I didn't want to leave our house which is this same house in which I now am because I had these children, was divorced and I didn't want to take them out of their home, you know move everything, have new father, new home and you know I couldn't do it, at least that's what I thought. But I was thinking of them and that they had to stay put, so poor Isaiah, I don't think he was very happy in the beginning coming to our house, he said he felt absolutely like an outside guest which was a pity really. I think that was – we were very happy together but I don't think he was very happy in that sense, his first two years in the house. He felt he should be a guest in the house which was – also he'd never

lived in a family [MI Because the children were at home?] Yes of course, yes. But he was very very sweet with them, he never interfered, he never, on the contrary perhaps he didn't quite enough, you know he didn't [ ], he was very nice to them.

MI How old were the children when you were married to Isaiah?

AB Well first my older one from the first marriage, he was at Oxford, he was eighteen or nineteen and then the others were ten and six, that sort of thing. Ten and six.

MI Because I only know Peter.

AB Well Peter was ten and the little one was six. [MI The little one's name is?] Philippe. He's the one who is a scientist like his father, I mean he has his father's brain, a very good scientist and [MI And the third one's name is?] The eldest one? [MI So it's Michael?] Michel, we still call him Michel. Very funny I talk French to Michel and English to the others because he was born in France. Today I had lunch with him again, we always talk French together although he's lived in England, brought up here, so he was much older but Isaiah was very nice to him. The little ones were – they were quite happy at home with Isaiah, it was all right, they must have suffered a bit.

MI Was the divorce tough on them?

AB I didn't know that at the time because I thought it had been so tough before because they were so tense in the house that I thought the children used to be all the time crying and all that and they looked much more relaxed and everything became so much easier afterwards you know, for their own ordinary life, everything was easy, nobody bullied them [laughs] there was no more, it was all much more relaxed and I think they were very happy in that sense; but they must have felt it, yes, especially the little one I think more at the time. But they took it all right, I don't think they had

much harm, I mean it was OK. And then the most terrible thing happened in 1958, that's where Isaiah was so sweet because my sister-in-law had had an operation at Oxford at the Nuffield on her back, my brother's wife, and they had a little girl of five and right at the end, just before she left the little girl came and stayed, she was five; and the day before they were going home because she was well again, she had this appalling accident. She fell from a slide in the playground and she never recovered, she became a vegetable. It was an absolute horror. She nearly died then because she had haemorrhage in the brain and then she was in hospital for weeks and so it was terrible for Isaiah but he really – like because it was '58, we'd only been married two years – for about three months we had the poor mother who was anyway convalescing and was in an absolute mess I mean, and the child of my brother, the child in hospital completely unconscious and then she never recovered, my sister-in-law's mother came to stay too and everybody was in the house except the little child and it was hard for Isaiah, for me too but I mean it had to be done, you know, one just couldn't help it; and it was very funny because the mother, my sister-in-law who's my brother's second wife, is a frightfully grand family. She's called de Gramont, she was of the de Gramont family and her mother was even grander, she's a [M?], so that was the mother who considers that the House of the de Gramont family was nothing compared to them, they were jumped up and Louis XIV or something, whereas they come from [ ] and so she was very much like that, the mother. So poor Isaiah, every evening at table we were all having dinner, he was marvellous. He used to talk, they used to exchange little historical facts of a petite histoire kind of thing with this lady who was very well behaved and all that but obviously very snobbish – not snobbish, you know that kind of [ ] of St Germain people who for them, if you're either anybody but not their milieu, it's the same being servants or anything at all identical, very nice, very polite but they consider themselves – but however they got on very nicely, I had to go through this too, it was very hard.

MI How long did that period last?

AB A few months, three months, well you know we couldn't help it; but the thing was with Isaiah, he was so terribly, well so sweet you know, he was so easy.

MI But did you feel in some sense that you had to break this old bachelor into family life, that some kind of bits of his make up really had to be changed? Or did he fit into family life very easily?

AB No, he just fitted in. I wasn't conscious of having to do anything but occasionally he must have been a bit tense because once or twice he suddenly blew up, you know when things, suddenly blew up. For instance I had to talk to him about something to do with money or something, but otherwise luckily he didn't have any [ ] feeling. I mean this is just – I don't really want you to put it in but you know it's always difficult the fact that – well he had money, he was never poor but there was nothing – he realised that everything came from me you see and it could have been awkward and he always – that didn't bother him at all, it never has. But once or twice he did blow up when there was – because he didn't want to have anything to do with that sort of thing. [MI Didn't want to have anything to do with the money side?] no with my side and so I realised that he was trapped a bit then but that was at the beginning, otherwise not at all, no he doesn't – he's very relaxed about that [laughs]

MI And so is it the case, again without prying, essentially that the money in your family is handled by you? [AB Yes] He just ...

AB Absolutely everything, absolutely, he just – but you know he deals with his own, you know about his Royalties or whatever it is but that's about it [MI He deals with that?] His own bits, yes, I mean financially it's all the same but I mean he knows what he has to do in that sort of sense. But otherwise no, I do absolutely everything. But that's all right, I've nothing else to do [laughs]. But

that all works out very very nicely, there's no trouble, at least he doesn't want there to be.

MI Did any of his friends, his Oxford friends, give any sign to you that they resented his change in situation?

AB That's what was so extraordinary because I was expecting that all the time and it was amazing how they didn't, I don't think anybody did, nobody. First of all he was really so very much liked and enormously loved by all, by everybody and they were very pleased that he seemed very happy. I don't think there was any resentment and more in America; his best friends in America were very nice to me because I thought it would be awful for them you see, suddenly this wonderful bachelor – and he became very involved in our family life and you know he lost his family – well not lost his family, he didn't lead the same life at all any more. I've never felt that but I was watching for it because I thought it might have been [laughs]. No I don't think so.

MI Because there is this story of Akhmatova, I mean [AB Oh except her!] I mean Akhmatova saying something [AB Terrible!] rather unpleasant in your own house about him being in a gilded cage

AB I know. Now who repeated that the other day? That man, what's he called, Naiman? [MI Yes, Anatoly Naiman] Yes, he said it, he's the one I think you found [ ]

MI And do you remember him saying that or do you ...?

AB No she never said it to us, it's been repeated from somebody else, from these others or it got into the book about – what was it? – what was her friend called? [MI Chukovskaya] Chukovskaya and this other man, Naiman, knew about the gilded cage. But it was rather frightening when she did come and I had to meet her. I didn't realise then how much she resented it but she was so grand,

she was so regal and I remember I was so terribly – one really felt, she made one feel very shy and all that. But it was a bit silly in fact, Isaiah should have realised that at the time. He didn't, Isaiah never had any sort of, he wasn't at all self conscious about that whereas I kept on – to this day I'm terribly worried about the fact we have this house and the servants and all that sort of thing, you know, I still feel very guilty. I do it [laughs] but I don't ...

MI But why should you? I mean why do you?

AB Because I always have, I always have. Always have and yet it didn't change my way of life [laughs] which is a bit silly.

Second side [A]

AB ... before we married how much he suffered from his loneliness. And all this business of talking late in the night, he just couldn't be left and that's why he had to have this tremendous, you know all this talking to people and he didn't like being alone. You know he always thought he had a wonderfully happy life, I don't think he was that happy when he was younger at that point of view so that's why he plunged in, I think, I mean well that's how I see it rather, into his work.

MI But what was it that – I mean there is a puzzle here. Here's a man who you discover to be tremendously affectionate, even passionate man, wonderful company for a woman who didn't get married till he was forty-five? I mean can you explain, I mean you were the lucky beneficiary of all this but I mean it is a sort of odd pattern in a way.

AB But I can explain something which I think is better to not say, is that until – I mean long after he was in love with this first woman he must have told you about, until long after that he'd never been near a woman at all because he said that he'd decided when he was a boy that he was no good for that, he was fat and he was ugly, I

mean that's what he said and that it was of no use and he had no sex life at all. So ...

MI Did his arm have something to do with it?

AB No, no, and that's what made him so outgoing with people and intellectuals and all his interests because that's all, he was completely – so although I wasn't the first personage, there was a kind of revelation all the same with love life, that's what made the difference, that's what made him different from the other people because – I don't think one ought to say that, well you ought to say that he had no relationship till later, not as late as me. And yet he never felt inhibited about it, he said he didn't mind.

MI You see I find this puzzling because I find him – I don't find him a sort of neurotic personality at all and obviously the reason that people love Isaiah so deeply is that he's rather expressive, you know ...

AB He wasn't neurotic and in fact this thing here, instead of making him neurotic or have a complex, he didn't, he didn't mind. He didn't mind.

MI But to put it bluntly in another way ...

AB I mean any man would have been very worried about that sort of thing.

MI But when you first saw him, when you first laid eyes on him, one of the things that you said to me was I couldn't figure out his age. [AB Yes that's right] Isn't that another way of saying that in a curious way he was sort of sexless? [AB That's right, yes, that's what people thought] He didn't give off an erotic charge of any kind.

AB No, no but I must admit that when we got on better and better and so beautifully but I never thought of anything of that sort with him because I considered that he was completely out, he didn't want, have anything to do with that sort of thing, you know one just put that aside with him, one didn't see him in that way at all: and that one day, I don't know, he took my hand or something [laughs] and to my enormous surprise that's when I realised that I was also, it had an effect on me physically you see? It meant that I was probably already in love with him. [MI That's good but it came as a kind of surprise to you?] I remember we were in the car and I said, 'Damn!' I said. [laughter] I don't think he understood that at all but I knew what was happening but I didn't expect that. But look you must be careful, I don't want to say things too much [laughs].

MI You're in a difficult position, you have to trust me but I have no reason to betray your confidence and it seems very charming and ...

AB But that's why he was in that sense really very different from other people and also I think perhaps that's why all these things sort of came bubbling over you know after that; and quite frankly until this day, you know are just the same, there's the same sort of affection and all that.

MI He is a tremendously affectionate man. [AB Yes] It must have been also from your point of view very enjoyable, very nice to be in a position where it was you as the woman who was in a sense much more a person of the world, much more used to life with men than he was to life with women and in a sense you were much more experienced than he was in the world; and that must have made it, I mean that must have been pleasant in a way. [AB For whom?] For you. [AB For me (laughter)]

AB Yes, yes I [ ] always remember that I met a horrible Frenchman I knew, I'd known before, he's still around somewhere, and I saw



him years later when I was married to Isaiah and he said, 'Vous, marriage intellectual?' he said! [laughter] [ ] it wasn't very nice. [laughs] I still have, I still am rather ridden with inferiority [MI Really?] Yes about, you know a feeling that I'm of no interest intellectually although you know I have read quite a bit, I'm interested in ...

MI But do you feel that in relation to Isaiah?

AB No. No, no, not at all although I don't understand what he sees in me but that's another [laughs] but we do still have great – no, no. Well he thinks – the funny thing is he listens to my advice on everything, I mean absolutely. I have to be careful, if I say one thing you know just like that, he immediately does it or follows the advice and ...

MI Do you read what he writes?

AB Yes certainly [MI I mean as he writes?] Certainly, well everything – our great romance really started for me when I decided to translate his Hedgehog and the Fox into French, so that was marvellous because I used to go to All Souls, that was that last year before the whole thing broke, that's what made it break up in fact because of course he was delighted and I'd spend the afternoon trying to translate this thing and he was so funny because all this thing of not knowing French, he knows French very well, so in theory on paper you know he knows the words, so we'd do this together, it was marvellous. But I really used that as an excuse, you see, it was a wonderful way of going to see him every day. But I do, I do read yes, of course I read his things and then I'd like to do more really but I can't always [ ].

MI Do you give him advice about what he writes?

AB Sometimes, I used to, I have and he doesn't ask me so much but I have occasionally. I look through things and then say – I

remember when his father was, I mean I would show him repetitions and things ...

MI To shift the focus slightly I wanted to ask you what impression his father made on you? Did you ever meet?

AB I met him, yes, I just met him before all this but I met him – oh absolutely very, very – I remember that – oh I never met him here but we met, you know once we went to meet them when he was in Vevey on a holiday and once at [B?] in the South of France so I'd see him just sitting in a caf, or something and I didn't see him at home. He was not unlike – he had a – he was a small little chubby man with little – you know sort of not rimmed glasses, without them and not very interesting I didn't think really but absolutely sweet and rather light, lightweight you know [MI Jolly, cheerful?] Yes, I didn't know him more than that but very gentle, very gentle and sweet but of course his mother I knew very well.

MI Yes, well tell me what impression his mother made upon you.

AB Well she was a very powerful personality. By the time I came along of course he'd died, his father had died and so there was that awful thing of every time we used to go and see her she'd look so pathetic when we left and Isaiah couldn't – he was a bit impatient with her you know in the last years because he didn't want to, he always felt guilt and that she looked so pathetic and self pitying and that sort of thing. But she spoke, and he takes a lot after her, from her I must say, she was the brain I think and she'd talk a great deal, not fast but a tremendous accent, a Russian accent, she never spoke English very well; she spoke all right but [ ] and well she adored Isaiah, her whole life was wrapped up and he tried to keep her at a distance.

MI Did you find it difficult to come into that?

AB I found it a bit of a bore, quite frankly some time, I mean you know in the sense that it was so overwhelming and I feel now that I wasn't quite nice enough I think to her, all right. Well we got on better towards the end. [MI Did you resent her?] Oh no, oh no, no because Isaiah was not at all – on the contrary I thought Isaiah wasn't quite close enough to her towards the end, you know he was – he didn't like all this – that's why he tells me all the time, 'Don't see your children, don't ring them up, they don't want to see you,' he's always telling me that. 'It's an awful bore,' he says, 'they don't want to see you either.' [laughs]

MI But I hope you ignore his advice? [AB I do yes (laughter)] He felt burdened by her, he felt ...?

AB Yes, that's right, yes but he admired her a lot and he ...

MI When you say he took after her, you mean his brain or did you mean other things as well?

AB No not his character, I think he had much more his father's gentle, sweet and easy going character; she was much more, she was much more domineering but I think she was very powerful – I don't know quite if I can explain but no he wasn't like her in character at all I shouldn't think, he was a bit in looks. I knew her when she was already quite old and sad and all that but she was really very bottled up you see, every time one went she'd never never stop. I remember my mother used to go and see her, you know being a mother, and she was absolutely exhausted, she'd never never stop talking, it's almost on a [ ] you know, she was like that.

MI An intelligent woman but not an intellectual in any sense?

AB No, no I don't think so, she liked music, no not at all, no not at all. She knew quite a lot about opera and music, she was very musical. I think she was worried about Isaiah I think really. [MI

Why?] Even when he married me. Oh I could see that suddenly, I mean him marrying – she was very pleased that he was marrying and that I was Jewish – but you know a divorced woman of forty or whatever I was, forty? Thirty-nine, forty? And three children and all that, well it is, I can see if you're a mother it's not sort of perfect [laughs] but actually I think at the same time she was very keen and I think we got on better and better towards the end because I became a bit nicer to her. But you know how one is, one is rather selfish and not thinking much.

MI What was it about – was there a characteristic of hers that you really liked and admired, was there something about her that you felt was admirable?

AB I should have but then [ ] that I'd have like to have been because for instance she had a sister, Isaiah's Aunt who only died the other day, or two years ago, with whom I got on much much better, only I couldn't have a real, she had no sort of, I didn't feel that she had tremendous understanding for sort of inner thoughts and things like that, whereas her sister did, very much so more and ...

MI Isaiah was tremendously broken up over his father's death?

AB Yes, tremendously. Yes, very.

MI This is a heartless question; he's always described by everybody who knew him as a sort of light creature and I therefore wonder [AB Who, Isaiah?] Isaiah's father [AB Oh his father, that's right, yes I think he was] and I sometimes wonder therefore why Isaiah's love was so intense?

AB He loved him because he found life with him very very easy whereas with his mother it wasn't so easy I think. He was very easy going, Isaiah enjoyed his company you know, he talked about things, about current affairs or whatever was going on, there was

no trouble, no burden, I think that's why. He got on very well with him, enjoyed his company I think. But in those days you see it wasn't – I mean I knew Isaiah was very popular and very intelligent and very this and that but I didn't have the sort of feeling I'd married a great man or anything like that, well that wasn't the idea. [MI (laughing) That came later?] Now I'm beginning to think so [laughs] [MI Because I think you have!] Isaiah's very funny, he said, 'Isn't it extraordinary, it's only now that people are making all this fuss? Suddenly at the age of eighty, I'm suddenly thought of as something –.' He's amazed, himself, amazed. He really is very very modest, there's no question about it and has always been very unambitious and always wanting to get on with everybody, tremendously [MI Sometimes to a fault] Sometimes to a fault and also sometimes I think to a fault of not wanting to reveal his own opinions too much if it's the opposite as I was telling you a little bit [laughs] because he likes to get in with anybody and he likes – and he got on very very well with my mother at the beginning, very well. She liked him enormously but when I told her that I was going to marry, she said – because she liked him so much I thought she'd be delighted – she said, 'Il est inépousable.' [laughter] She liked him enormously but I could see she'd never thought of him as being *épousable*! [laughter] [MI It's a very good remark] Wonderful, 'Il est inépousable' is what she said but my mother was not at all – she was quite clever, my mother, and very shrewd about people but very very direct and very warm hearted and all that but very badly educated, you know about these ladies of that period, but he got on very well with her and she did with him, very well. I sent them off on a boat together when we were engaged and before I was divorced, I couldn't marry him. He was going to America and so they went off together on the ship so they got on very well, very well. Towards the end he got a bit fed up, she was getting very old and more difficult and I think she was less happy at the end because he didn't talk to her very much. But the beginning was fantastic, they got on beautifully. But he liked you see, he liked simple people who were spontaneous, my mother was very spontaneous, very warm hearted and at the same time quite amusing about people,

you know she was quite shrewd and he liked that. People always think that he had to be with people who could be about his level intellectually. Not at all. For instance around me, the only person, well my sort of childhood friend rather fancies herself as being very knowledgeable and cultured and intellectual – well not intellectual but sort of very very knowing about things and that's the only – but she's a little bit cold I think, you know and not that sort of warmth of giving out. He doesn't like her and she's my closest friend, it's [ ], I mean they get on but each one's sort of forcing it and she doesn't feel at ease with him because she always tries to show off you see and that's no good, that doesn't interest him at all. Whereas I have another ex sister-in-law who knows nothing at all, very charming and very nice, you know sweet and marvellous and always in a good mood and he likes her very much. He doesn't need to be with people – of course now there are people he enjoys being with like, I don't know really, you and all that, that he enjoys but he also likes, he's very fond of people who are just nice people and that's why he doesn't get on very well with most French people you see because they're too ...

MI What is this thing about the French? Because he says when he's irritated with you, 'Oh she's so French,' according to you?

AB Well he doesn't say that quite but he does think I'm rather French and the French are conforming. He hates rules and conforming and I do – you know the way I was brought up you know, I sort of you know want things this way or that way, sort of rather formal – not formal but [laughs] and that he doesn't like very much, you know having meals at a decent time, I don't know whatever it is, or having these sort of rather rigid rules, I don't mean rigid, not being severe but sort of set and to conform because I like him to dress in a proper way or – not proper but you know that sort of thing, that kind of – he thinks that comes from the French, not loose enough and I care a little bit too much about what one's supposed to do or what people think or this and that,

so that's what he thinks is French. I used to think I had a Russian soul or something though I don't think that any more! [laughter].

MI Have you ever seen him depressed?

AB Oh yes, yes I have and he really does sometimes and that's over his work usually or feeling he's not up to something. It's difficult to say but he has been through – well he does even now sometimes.

MI Can you remember particular periods or episodes?

AB No I don't remember, I could never quite make out why but only to do with his work or non work or not doing something or a feeling that he hasn't succeeded or it's wrong or – it might have been brought on by somebody who's attacked him or something or disagreed or – I can't remember, it is difficult to say and I didn't always notice it at the time and then he'd say, 'I really am rather depressed.' But it wasn't very bad and I didn't always even notice it, he'd say, only it was difficult to know why in the end or perhaps it was just in his character occasionally.

MI I mean can you remember a patch in your life together which you now look back on as being a hard time?

AB No, no, really not at all ever. You mean difficult or because he was worried or something? [MI Worried or something else, because he has been ill] If he's not feeling well he gets very depressed, if he's not feeling well.

MI And he had one bad episode of illness?

AB One very bad, yes about ten years ago [ ] no he wasn't depressed then but when he's not feeling very well or when he doesn't need to – you see he's terribly quiet really, you know with all this agitation he's a very quiet person in himself. I always thought – that's what I thought was so remarkable because he

wasn't, at the same time you know with all this nervous talk, he's not an agitated person in himself at all, not nervous.

MI Do you think of him as a self reliant person, psychologically?

AB Yes, and you see I don't think he thinks about himself terribly much, I mean I think of himself concerning his work but he doesn't have these sort of worries about his [laughs] he doesn't, I don't think so. And he has, I mean apart from perhaps being lonely, he has had a remarkably easy life, that's true, happy life. He hasn't known really a life – he's never known terrible tragedies in his life you know around him. I mean his father died, all right, he was sad but he hasn't been through any, he hasn't had any terrible things happen to him.

MI Whereas some hard things have happened to you?

AB Yes, very hard. I lost a sister when I was ten [] she was nineteen but I had, it was awful, and I lost a brother when I was seventeen, he was, my brother was twenty-one and then I lose my husband a few years later. So I really was knocked about in that sense and I think it probably has, it probably has an effect on one's character. It rather hardened me except when Isaiah came to thaw me! [laughs] Thawed me out! I always used to think I didn't feel things very much but since I was married to Isaiah he made me – well he didn't make me, it just happened and I feel much more. Extraordinary that, isn't it?

MI Well I think that's one of the nicest things you can say of anybody. Why don't we leave it there?



## MI TAPE B2

Conversation with Mary Bennett, 1 February 1994

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*Two cassette sides are combined in the recording*

*Side B*

MI: You were just saying that IB looks more more like his father now than when he was young and I wondered what you meant by this...you meant more than just looks...

Yes, not so much looks, ...a more staid impression, I suppose, and in a sense more establishmental...(?)

...that was what his father was like?

Yes, he was the sweetest man, but he hadn't got the zip of Mrs Berlin.

I'd like to talk to you systematically about the parents but...I'd like a chronology of when you came to know IB first and concentrate on the period of the 30s...can you remember not when you first met him but when you first heard of him?...

No I can't, I think probably the first definite impression I...When did he become a lecturer at New College? (MI: 32?) Well I think I probably had just met him then and had probably heard of him through the Lynd sisters, Sheila and Maire, Sheila and BJ, and their friends, but the first definite impression I think I had was when my father came in after interviewing him for the lectureship and said that here at last was a young man like the young men of his generation who were interested in everything

MI: ...Bec of course IB when he first came to NC Common rooms thought it was death... MB:...perhaps my father did too (both laugh)

When did you first actually set eyes on him (MB: Can't remember) When you think back to him as a v young man, 32/33, what kind of physical impression...comes into your mind?

Frightfully ugly! (MI: Yes...) I mean notably ugly.

MI The nose, the ears, the complexion, what is it that makes him so ugly...?

...I can't say, I can't pin it down to one thing, just the general visual experience ...

MI But despite that you become fond of him (MB: Oh yes!) But that's rather odd isn't it?

MB: Oh surely not...everybody was fond of him, nobody could not have been. I first got to know him well, I can date you that quite accurately, when he and Christopher Cox and BJ and I all went to Ireland together...(both agree date: that's 33, I think)

MI What do you recall of that trip to Ireland?

MB Almost everything...you've seen the piece he wrote about the visit to Bowens Court and Elizabeth Bowen? I was the youngest of that quartet and very much the least grownup, and I didn't really know any of them at all well, and I was therefore v much in a sense a passenger...and I can't remember who it was who said we ought to go and call on Elizabeth Bowen at Bowen's Court, I hadn't ever met her, but anyhow it seemed to me a faintly embarrassing call, bec I don't think we let her know beforehand that we'd be descending on her, and we arrived to find her and her companion (whom we all thought was called Miss Prong (?) but who turned

out to be called Miss Brown I believe) sitting in what seemed to us, seemed to me anyhow bec we were quite windblown from sitting in an open car, exquisite silk summer dresses topping and tailing gooseberries on the [?] of Bowens Court...And I think I probably hardly opened my lips in that curious 24 hours bec I felt v much the youngest, the least in-the-world and, well, the party has been described by Isaiah...extraordinary Irish mixture...delicious salmon and v nasty other food, I can't remember what it was, and coffee after dinner strengthened with tea!

(MI: Really?) Yes, and I committed the most frightful social gaffe bec we were all having cups of coffee after dinner, and I couldn't think why it tasted so nasty, it really tasted of quite exceptional awfulness, and lo and behold there were tea leaves in the coffee cup. (MI: Not by error?) Not by error...it had been put in in the kitchen to make the coffee stronger, as it emerged...(goes to fill up the kettle!)...I don't think I was fully aware of the currents of agitation that were apparently going through Isaiah over BJ capturing Humphry House, it seemed to me to be perfectly familiar, BJ captured every young man ...she was irresistible, so beautiful,...

MI When did you find out that it was agitating Isaiah?

I don't know that I ever did really, (laughing) I expect the agitation is slightly written up in that piece...I would have thought it probably agitated Christopher Cox, who... was much older than the rest of us and regarded himself as a sort of chaperone, rather more...well then having shed Humphry House, we ran into a donkey cart, I'm not sure that this is recorded in Isaiah's piece?...I was driving (BJ and Christopher and I took it in turns to drive) and I drove the car mercifully not very fast slap into the back of a donkey cart which I hadn't seen in a patch of dapple

(MI: patch of what?) Dapple, dappled light...and the first thing I was conscious of...BJ saying we must catch the donkey, and

Christopher's hand dripping with blood...a little bit of his finger come off with flying glass...and an old lady in the hedge moaning saying she was killed. Then two...I can't think how all this happened but some charming Civic Guards turned up and I've no doubt BJ's appealingness got round them, bec they said they were sure it was quite an accident and we heard no more and...back to Galway where C went into hospital and the other three of us spent a night in a hotel and the next morning a splendid Irish countess called the Countess Metaxa whose son in law...or perhaps daughter in law was a friend of C's came – son -in-law, came with her son to C's bedside in hospital and offered us the loan of her island to recuperate in and so we all went off to it and were all quite divinely happy there, a sort of Elysian period...

(Where was that island? I've heard the story of the accident but I'm not clear...)

MB: The island was in a lake at a place, near a place, called Maam Cross. (MI: What made it so happy?) I don't know, we all got on and we were all v carefree, it was v v beautiful, and it was a v serene place

Can you remember what you talked about?

No, one can never remember what one talked about, it's the most elusive...I think we talked a good deal about, I imagine we talked a good deal about the management of life, whether we were going to...fried potatoes, who was going to bathe, that sort of conversation...we laughed a great deal, Isaiah made pancakes (MI: Did he?) He did!

Did you have a sense with him of a kind of non-stop volubility? or did he relax?

He relaxed, he spent quite a lot of time reading a book...he was much less active than the rest of us, the rest of us were the sort of people who walked up mountains and swam, and while we did this

he peacefully read his book...no it was all extremely unscrewing  
(?)

Can I back you up a bit and ask how you, the junior partner, would have ended up on this summer holiday? how did you end up in the foursome at all...?

um I suppose that for the first time I felt that I knew well as a result of having lived in the same house, having gone through the experiences...two interesting and congenial men, probably, who were from then on, both of them, close friends

...trying to get a picture of what Isaiah was like...almost my biggest difficulty as a biographer is to get a sense of change over time, there is a sort of line you hear about IB that he has always essentially been the same, in a way...but...a sense that there's another earlier persona on display in the 30s and I'm trying to put my finger on it

Some people say he was much more of an aesthete then, much more dandified...

(MB: I shouldn't have said that...) I think I'm on the edge of saying was he slightly affected, to cover his insecurities...

Well, I expect that may be so but of course if one has all been living at a rather primitive level making pancakes that's not the side that emerges...I mean we were all v ungrownup...our collective life was camping out so to speak...no, I would have said my experience, my recollection of the young Isaiah was a complete absence of any put-on-ness... (MI: You felt at home with him?) ...absolutely, like we'd known each other all our lives sort of relationship

Doesn't that strike you as slightly odd...strikes me as rather odd, here you are as a sort of ...family...and here's this Russian Jew....you hit it off...from very different worlds is what I'm

getting at. Does it puzzle you in retrospect that you did get on so well? or that he seemed to swim so easily...?

I didn't find it in the least puzzling at the time, it seemed the most natural sort of thing...and I felt he was in a sense a foreigner, but...that didn't make any difference to the sort of cosiness (?) you might say...(pause, pouring tea!)

Unless you have any further memories of that summer of 33, I'm just wondering... whether you can describe what going to see him, what your contact was like with him after that...33/34, go to see him in his rooms...

I used to go to tea with him from time to time...he used to have lunch parties, like every young don did then...and it was a sort of general part of my growing up, at that sort of age met a lot of other...people too, went about, out to lunch and dinner and so on, which I hadn't v much before, whereas BJ and her (??Paulina) friends...Sheila Grant-Duff and Diana (?)Hopkinson had all lived a very social life, before they came up to Oxford and carried on with it, v much in the swim with all the Cross and Goronwy Rees and Adam von Trott and to some extent I suppose Maurice Bowra, I very much wasn't, and didn't really start swimming as you might say until after that summer of 33...(pause)

I'm trying to recreate a sense of the circle of his friends at that time, 33, 34, particularly the circle of women friends, I'm just wondering how you would (?)name the (?)pattern...

...(sound indistinct, often echoey – not sure if I missed anything)  
I don't think I can say anything about it really, I haven't got a clear picture of it

...one of the things that IB has talked about quite a lot with me is his relationship with Rachel Walker...

He has talked to you about all that has he? ...then you probably know more in a sense than I do...really she went absolutely completely off her head...I don't know when it began, I think they met, I think through me...and he will have given you a picture of her and her extreme brilliance and fascination...everybody, of both sexes, found her ...quite unlike anyone else, fascinating in the highest degree...What point their relationship had reached before she went to France, which she did in 34/35, I don't feel sure...bec although I knew her well in the sense that she was my closest friend at that time...of course people don't tell you the truth about their private lives...(MI short question, didn't catch it) Well up to a point but not beyond it so to speak...

When she was in France she was fallen in love with by a man called (?)Cavaillier, at the Ecole Normale, who was a v heroic and simple character who was ultimately shot by the Germans...and he wanted to marry her v much, and she was wavering in that year and thinking seriously think about marrying C

(MI: and your evidence for that is...?) Well we met, we spent the ?Easter of that year together...I was revising before schools, and we went down to the S of France on a joint hol and it was perfectly clear that she was thinking about him and at the same time comparing him w Isaiah...it never occurred to me, I think I was prob rather thick about this, that Isaiah was epousable... (MI: I'm not sure it occurred to him!) I don't think it probably did! ...and then of course something happened that summer, I don't know what, and ...Tips went steadily madder and madder...

(MI interjects, can't catch, maybe Did it start then?) I think she started starving herself about then...I should have thought she wasn't particularly mad...my father had a breakdown in 35/36 and I would have thought she was still more or less on the rails then, I think Cav was visiting her in England from time to time, and was ultimately expelled...(MI: by whom?)... by Tips...who turned him out of, no I think he jumped out of the car...he wasn't undramatic...think he jumped out of the car in the middle of the

Cotswolds and ran away...then let me think...36/37 I was abroad, first in France and then in Rome, and that was when Tips was starving herself...none of us knew about anorexia then...she may have started before...but certainly by the time I was in Paris in the autumn of 36 she was...the Spanish Civil war started in 1936, yes, the autumn of 36, she was certainly beginning to starve herself and she got more and more bizarre and more and more hostile to all her friends...including me and including everybody

When you say bizarre what kind of things do you mean?

...I don't feel sure...well I think mainly relapsing into silence...and oh suddenly feeling that whatever happened...she lived with her mother at Burford, and ...in a house her mother hadn't the slightest intention of leaving, and suddenly...practically forcing her mother to move somewhere else, that sort of thing...and suddenly having wild plans for this or that...and having sort of waves of extreme hostility to all of her friends I think

Did you talk to Isaiah about it (rest of question indistinct)

No...(missed a small bit) but I don't think I would have anyhow, bec I was friends of both of them and I knew there was nothing I could do about their relationship...and I kept out of it...so if he's talked freely to you about it you prob know more than I do

Well he's talked freely and then in the corresp there are some v touching and v passionate letters fm her to him...as a biographer its hard for me to assess how much of the story I need to know

No – not v much I should have thought...because I don't know how much effect it had on him but I should have thought he protected himself fairly firmly...Mrs Berlin didn't take to her...and I'll tell you a thing about Tips, which is that I think...probably in the summer of 44 (sc. 34)...before any of us had spotted how v odd she was capable of becoming...The Eli



Halevys always spent whitsuntide with us in the lodgings, and Tips had been one of the dinner party, and Madame Halevy had said to Eli afterwards, she told me this... 'What an extremely intelligent and charming young woman!', and Eli had said briskly afterwards 'dommage qu'elle soit folle', but none of us had spotted that at the time

(MI) It's difficult when you read these letters which are v touching and which you want to treat w a great deal of respect...hard to assess how much is simply what a passionate young girl would say, and how much is slightly, as we would now say, over the top – something almost about the syntax is a little odd. When did she publicly...go off her head and when was she...(MB: Locked up)...locked up?

It had 2 stages, the main thing...was that she retreated into absolute silence, and I cant really date this but I should have thought by 38, well then she started eating again, I think she had some kind of physical breakdown and became v fat, and I think it was pretty clear that by that time she was oddish...I went out to see her...fm time to time...and then there was some terrible drama I didn't know about, I suppose 38...that she became violent in some way...and was then sectioned, as now it would be called. (MI: By her mother?) ...I think her mother had no choice...she was locked up...and fm then on she was always in hospital, and there was a period when she seemed to be getting much better and more like herself and Phoebe (?) who was a contemporary of ours at Somerville, and I, both went to see her, but she wasn't real any more, she was less overtly unbalanced, but you didn't feel a real person was there..it was awful, it was absolutely awful, bec here was this brilliant attractive girl who really...educated all her contemporaries more than any of our elders did in Somerville, she opened our eyes to pictures and books and things that we would never have seen otherwise, and she just first of all retreated behind this hostile wall and then stopped existing at all really...and I suspect this would have happened Isaiah or no Isaiah.

(MI) He feels v burdened by it...one of the reasons I'm fond of him is that he...things v openly, but I can tell that this still bothers him, I think he thinks...it would have happened whatever, (MB: However much one thinks that, one cant feel it...)

(MI: How long did she live?) I don't know when she died, but quite a while. There was a moment when her mother thought she would die of tuberculosis which she was discovered to have in hospital, but she didn't, and I dont know the answer. (MI: Perhaps in 40, or later than that?) Oh, later than that, it was after the war...yes, it much have been...she was in St Andrews Hospital...Northampton and I had relations living not v far away and I used to go and see her (I don't think I did it more than 2 or 3 times)..I should think in the early later 40s, after the war but not long after.

Any other living people who you know who remember her?

Yes, Sheila Shannon, Sheila Dickinson, whose husband has just died, in the papers today...Jenifer Hart, but not so well...It would be worth having a word with Sheila ...when she's recovered fm the immediacy of Patrick's death... ?Phoebe of course is dead

(?can't quite catch it)...one of the characteristics of Isaiah in the 30s...very intense....developed friendships with women...your correspondence with him was one of the fullest and most important...I suppose your letters outnumber almost anyone else's, but he has a wide ...female acquaintance, and kind of confessional relations with lots of them (MB: yes, I'm sure!) ...telling him little stories about their lives, and he's behaving slightly like a sort of maiden aunt...(MB: Yes, there was that element)...but inepousable at the same time

I would have said so, but not everybody thought so...(MI: Who else do you think was attracted to him, v fond of him?) Well I think

Sheila Lynd thought that he was in love w her, and I think that Sheila at one stage, really before I knew him I think...took him seriously...I suspect it was probably because...more like an abbe than a maiden aunt, that we all did confide in him so freely (laughs).

(MI) I mean he was also v susceptible to women. S Spender once said to him rather maliciously why is it that everybody around you is so good looking?...Looks and appearance mattered to him (MB:Yes)...when he speaks about a woman her looks are very (MB:Important) ...He always thought of you for example as exceptionally good looking...and yet there's this v curious kind of screen btw himself and women.

(MB) Do you think it's partly an effect of being an only child? (MI: why do you say that? I think you may be right, but I'm not sure why youre saying it) Because as an only child myself I think one grows up much more with grownups and much less pervious in a way to one's contemporaries, and also w a v strong sense of self-protection, bec one knows one is the basket in which all the eggs are...(?)I've always thought that v noticeable in Isaiah

Did the fact that you were both only children...did you discuss that? (No, not that I remember, but we discussed a great many things and it's poss that we may have)

I suppose that brings us fairly naturally to his parents...I'll tell you what I know...I know what Ssaiah says...also what some of the correspondence tells us ...memoirs ...diaries...on the one hand by Isaiah's father, v touching sort of...history of the Jewish roots of the family, written in 46, and then a number of notebooks...many of them about Isaiah, so from that I get a v strong sense of the...intensity...the way in which they lived their lives through him...But I dont have a sense of them as individuals

(MB) **Oh, they were very much individuals. There was a sort of no-nonsense quality about Mr Berlin, I mean one could see him in his gumboots walking about buying forests, so it was all quite in character and he was sort of brisk. The thing about them both, of course, was that they had this marvellous gaiety...**and...they were a sort of lifeline to me in the war bec my mother was sitting in New College running this superior kind of boarding house for all the people college had put into Lodgings...she was obviously missing my father v much, I came down at the weekends, and Oxford in the war was fairly bleak bec not many of ones friends were about, and there were the dear Berlins, using Isaiah's room in new College, always pleased to see one to all appearance, and always bubbling with gaiety...and it was tremendously life-enhancing to drop in on them, and Mrs Berlin of course understood absolutely everything ... I learnt more about what one might call life, with a cap L, fm Mrs B than I have fm most people (laughs).

(Really? Expand on that...) I can't, I have sort of passing observations, things that I would never have spotted myself, (?)about people. She was awfully proud of knowing Lettish, and having been brought up in the country, and being able to wring out a sheet by herself, she had v strong wrists she used to say...and **she was a flawless housekeeper, the house at Hollycroft Avenue was hideously ugly, but marvellously well kept and clean ...**

Isaiah I think had fantastic respect for his mother...she obviously drove him mad...but I always had the impression that he was slightly sorry for his father. But you're creating rather a different impression...rather a more impressive figure...

I think, yes, Isaiah prob felt his father didn't keep up with his mother...to some extent, anyhow, and I think he felt that his father was more devoted to his mother than she was to him, which may

have been true, but I didn't think of him as pathetic at all, **I thought of him as a very robust and admirable character.**

(MI) I'm interested in the ...gaiety...bec the stuff that Mrs B leaves behind is...often the stuff people leave in diaries is (MB: You work out your anxieties in your diary)... but you don't feel gaiety, you don't feel laughter

Oh, we laughed incessantly, that's one of my main recollections of being w Mrs Berlin...peals of laughter (Did she have an extremely thick accent?) Yes. (MI: She wrote v clear english...but you heard a thick...did she have a deep voice?)

I don't think it was particularly deep or high, just an ordinary sort of voice, but v accented, and her turns of phrase were v Russian...and she always tried to make one eat too much...marvellous food...and cakes made w walnuts and cream, that sort of thing, and one was always pressed to eat and eat and eat.

Was she the sort of person to talk about ideas? Did she have an intellectual side to her?

She had a v religious side, I think she was...v v Jewish, and she didn't I think talk about ideas, but she went to lectures...when she was in Oxford, and said how interesting to hear subjects from the Christian angle as well as fm the Jewish

If you have to stand back fm her, what do you think Isaiah took from her? apart from everything? (both laugh) ...was there anything that stands out fm her charcter that you see in Isaiah...feel he got from her?

Well, the bubblingness - not but what I thought Mr Berlin bubbled a lot too

Did you have a sense of their marriage....of their being close?...or a sense of iciness?

I didn't see any iciness at all, I don't think I was looking for it, I wasn't really analysing things, just enjoying their company.

Isaiah's always rather scornful about the way his mum dressed, the way she presented herself – what impression did she make on you as a woman?

I don't think she had any visual taste at all (*laughs*), on the other hand **the paintwork in Hollycroft Avenue was washed once a week: I think she was a very very scrupulous housekeeper.**

Did she confide in you her worries about Isaiah? (MB: no) Why do you think you became such good friends?

*Side A*

...(Tape misses a bit?) MI:...phrase MB: but perhaps it doesn't mean much!... (both laugh) MI: a lovely phrase, it made me wonder, to ask you unexpectedly when both she and Isaiah saw the point of you, what do you think they saw?

Never occurred to me to ask the question...one doesn't ask oneself that question in one's early 20s, one expects to be liked!

During the war, remind me what you were doing

...the BBC, first in a rather phony organisation called the Joint Broadcasting Committee, which was really a front organisation for getting recorded material into Germany, I think, and then when its founder died, which she did in I think 41 or 40, we were amalgamated w the transcription service of the BBC and our job was not to have anything to do with broadcasting in London, but to provide stuff that stations outside Eng could use in their own

services...I think we wasted a lot of public money, weren't really v useful but felt we were at the time, and I dealt with the French Colonies and Portugal...I looked after a certain amount of stuff about the Free French for Latin America...then at the end of the war I went into the Colonial Office.

One letter I found from Isaiah to you saying how lonesome he was in N York...late 40 early 41 (MB: Yes I remember when I re-read the letter)...wishing you could come out and get a job...he obviously had a v tough time (MB: why did he?) Well I think it was at a period when he was waiting for the Guy Burgess trip to Moscow to happen and it didn't and he was v much at a loose end (MB: and really expecting to go to Russia?) I think so yes, and much more anti-American than I expected (MB: really?) yes...his letters to you are v interesting...other letters confirm it, his initial impression was terribly negative...it's later that he gets terribly Rooseveltian and pro New Deal...but that's when he's got into the Washington world...his initial reaction was get me out of here, I don't like the Americans...

MI: I get a sense you saw a lot less of him after the war (MB: Yes) Why do you think that was?

Well I think we both had other circles by then (MI: to put it sort of brutally, did you ever get the feeling that Isaiah had dropped you?...no reason to suppose he did, just asking). MB: No...I think we saw each other a great deal before the war bec we lived on each other's doorsteps, one met all the time, and after the war we didn't

(You were in London in the Colonial Office?)...But I never for a moment felt he wouldn't help if I wanted help, or something of that sort (There was no cooling?) No, it was just that we were swept in different directions

(When did you get married?) Almost, oddly enough, the same time Isaiah did, in 55.

...(Then you came back to Oxford?) No, not for ten years.

MI: ...a wonderful letter fm Isaiah to you in the 70s, 74...one of the best letters of self-description he ever wrote to anybody, a sign of his closeness to you, he said 'I think w embarrassment of my life as a series of train passenger carriages connected by couplings across which v few people managed to cross...' one compartment for the 30s, one for the war, one for the 40s and 50s, v few people cross...and I had a feeling he was saying that to you to explain why...

...[why] we didn't see each other much... Very possibly...I think it's probably true of him a good deal more than its true of me...I also have led a life in series of quite different slices, but I did probably keep connections going over the couplings more than he did. (Do you reproach him for that?) No, not in the least...

(MI) ...go back to the 30s a bit, I need some help w the Lynd sisters...I need to know about their background, their origins...

Well, Robert Lynd was a v engaging Irish journalist, good looking, gentle, slightly drunken...married to an extremely dynamic good looking ambitious wife...Miss ?Dryhurst...v much Hampstead L-wing revolutionary trad...had these 2 dazzlingly beautiful daughters, one exactly like her mother to look at, one exactly like her father. And Sheila was talkative, amusing, laughing, and fair, and BJ at that stage was drooping and silent...(she shows MI a photo of BJ)

(Why was she called BJ?) I'm embarrassed to tell you...stands for Baby Junior, she and her sister were v close together and everyone who knew them as a family (MI: called her BJ)...that's exactly like BJ at that age, v romantic Irish (*ie the photo*) ...Sheila...was jilted by a cousin of mine called Gerry Young to whom she became engaged when she was an undergrad and he was too...one of my maternal aunts was a friend of the Lynds, my aunt Olive Heseltine...Sylvia Lynd was often ill, their mother, and Olive used to take the Lynd



girls off on holidays... they were very much absorbed into the (?cousineage, on my mother's side, and Gerry and Sheila were engaged and G then extricated himself and I think Sheila took it rather hard and at that stage I think threw herself into the Communist Party – though with an interval...(?) Isaiah (?) perhaps in between, I can't do the dating of that...and BJ also had a muddled life, from the point of view of men, because she became engaged to Tommy Hodgkin who ultimately married Dorothy...and she jilted him idiotically because she lost her heart to a rugged blue who I don't think ever looked at her twice...there were moments when my contemporaries I felt like an (didn't get next phrase at all!) ??ellen...rows (rose?) of Mariannes??! (both laugh)

...and in a very much more romantic way I think BJ...peeled potatoes for her hunger marchers then also went into the communist Party and became much more dedicated than Sheila, and married a man called Jack Gasta(?) who was the 13<sup>th</sup> child of a Rumanian rabbi...who was a Communist eminence, and she never got out of the Party at all though she lost her faith, was very martyred about it, because Jack remained a devout communist and BJ felt she must stay in the party because of him. So that's the Lynd sisters, but it was very largely I think a reaction from Sylvia L who was frightfully ambitious for them...wanted them to marry people like David Cecil...

...Sheila was I suppose 3 years older than me and BJ one year older, they knew everybody...all the clever young men...all the world of Oxford at that time

MI: ...out of sequence really, but figures so much in the public mythology...Virginia Woolf coming to dine...give me your sense of the story...

both laugh...MI: what memory do you have? Mainly the visual one of how extraordinarily beautiful I thought Virginia was, sitting with her cheroot in a red velvet dress in the corner of the music room of the drawing room of the lodgings. I don't remember, I think

Isaiah over-, well as one would expect, writes up the embarrassment and difficulties of the conversation...(MI: didn't seem so agonisingly self-conscious to you?) Not to me, but then my antennae are much less long than Isaiah's!...

MI: I'd like to go on and on but I'd like to think about some of the things you have told me and then perhaps come again...some of the things you said about the parents are especially precious...(MB: I suppose Jenifer Hart knew Mrs Berlin...). MI: Stuart Hampshire did too...Let me stop there.

## **MI TAPE B3**

Conversation with Shiela Sokolov Grant (SSG)

Also present: Fiona, eldest child of SSG and Micheal Sokolov Grant

Conversation date: 20 November 1989

Date transcribed: mid July 2022

Transcriber: Henry Hardy

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**SSG** In those days, you didn't know women in the colleges – chaps didn't. The only time they ever had women around was for the Commems and things. And then they were always from London and Scotland and all the smart places.

**MI** And what changes in the 1930s about that?

**SSG** Oh, well, there was a tremendous change. Have you ever read Douglas Jay's autobiography? Because he actually says in that that he feels that it was he and us who brought about the change. Because I knew several members both of New College and of All Souls before I even came up in 1931, because we'd been the summer before. He'd brought us over here and introduced us to all his friends .

**MI** So it was a freer – it was much easier for women by 1932 or 1933?

**SSG** Yes. By that time even my contemporaries in LMH who hadn't got all the wonderful advantages I had of Fellows of All Souls – they too – labor clubs and things like that. The Labor Club was enormous: the biggest club, I think, and it had dances and things like that.

**MI** But what rules still applied at LMH? What kind of discipline were you under as young girls?

**SSG** quite a lot. Yes, you had to be in by 9:00, unless you put down that you promised to be in at 11:00, that sort of thing. Then the doors were shut and men weren't, in fact – I was quite glad of that too – men weren't allowed in the College at all. One couldn't be reading quietly in one's room and a knock on the door and in would walk somebody one knew. That didn't happen. And I didn't mind that. I didn't mind it not happening. I thought it was quite a – now I suppose it's quite a different world. Boys and girls are there together, aren't they?

**MI** What rules seem to apply about your access to a place like All Souls? Could you simply wander in and knock on Isaiah's door?

**SSG** Oh, yes. Well, I don't think they quite realised what was going on. As a matter of fact I think Miss Grier, who was my headmistress [sc. Principal], must have known a little bit about what I was doing because I suddenly had a terrible – not fainting, but giddy attack at the end of my first term, I think. And I remember her saying, you've always been pretty giddy. Yes.

**MI** And what do you think she was implying by that?

**SSG** Well, that I was going to places like All Souls and New College and Balliol, where one wasn't supposed to walk in without a female with one. Otherwise one was in great danger from all the undergraduates.

**MI** But one walked in none the less. That was a rule more honoured in the breach than the observance.

SSG Yes, I think it was. I walked into New College to see Christopher Cox, who was my greatest New College friend, really. And so as I was walking in to see these very respectable people, I suppose one was permitted to do so. If I'd been walking in to see undergraduates it might have been a bit different, though not in New College, because – have you ever met any of the Lynd girls, BJ and Sigle Lynd?

MI No, I unfortunately didn't.

SSG Yes, they were a wonderful pair, and BJ actually lived in New College, pretty well, because she lived with the Principal [sc. Warden, H. A. L. Fisher].

MI I've spoken to Mary Fisher.

SSG Oh, have you? Is she still around in Oxford? Does she still live here? I'd love to see her again. I haven't seen her for forty years.

MI She's in a very bright and cheerful state, I thought.

SSG Yes. Did she marry? I forget whether she had children or not?

MI That I don't know.<sup>18</sup> She married in the fifties.

SSG In her fifties or the fifties of the ...?

MI In *the* fifties. I'm too discreet to ask whether they were *her* fifties.<sup>19</sup> And were you reading PPE from the beginning?

<sup>18</sup> She didn't.

<sup>19</sup> Her early forties: she was born in 1913 and married in 1955.

**SSG** Yes, I think I was. I think I chose it. And then somebody said that I'd made a great mistake, that one really should be properly educated. One should have read history or something and got down to it. But from my point of view it was a tremendous help, because one was writing all these essays on all sorts of subjects. So it helped with journalism, which was what I went into afterwards. But listen, you're talking about me rather than Isaiah.

**MI** We'll get to Isaiah, but I wanted you to talk about you a little. I'm just wondering about what you recall of your tutorials and lectures in PPE. What were the moments of that education that stick out in your mind, or the people who taught you who you recall?

**SSG** Well, now this is the awful thing. Let me warn you. In one's eighties, one forgets names. I remember the people perfectly well. Who was it who was at Balliol who was my professor teacher? I keep forgetting his name. And he then founded the college in Brighton.<sup>20</sup> Doesn't mean anything to you?

**MI** The founder of Sussex?

**SSG** Sussex. He founded Sussex College, but Isaiah didn't think much of him as a philosopher. He thought Collingwood was the chap and I did change to Collingwood.

**MI** That's what I wanted to get to. What impression did Collingwood make on you?

**SSG** Rather frightening. He was very impressive. One was impressed with him but I found him more frightening.

<sup>20</sup> John Fulton, appointed in 1959 as principal of the University College of Sussex (University of Sussex 1961).

Fortunately, I worked with a tragic and dearest friend of mine called Jane Rendel, and she thought he was a great mind. And in actual fact, she totally broke down two or three years after the university and lived for the next forty or fifty years in an asylum. I never saw her again. She was very, very admirable. Clever girl.

**MI** Yes, something like that happened to someone else called Rachel Walker. Did you ever know Rachel Walker?

**SSG** No, I didn't know her, but it's vaguely a name. Do you think it was through Collingwood?

**MI** Maybe he caused the destruction of two bright and promising young women, not just one.

**SSG** It wasn't immediate, because she was in America at one of the American universities for a short time, I think, too. It didn't happen till then, at the beginning of the war.

**MI** Who besides Collingwood made an impression on you?

**SSG** I'd have to look all these names up, wouldn't I? [Agnes] Headlam-Morley, who taught international relations: she was the strongest female person I remember, I think. And that's was because I was interested in the subject. She was tremendously pro-German and anti the Versailles Treaty. And she was the daughter of an important foreign office chap, I think, or a Professor or something [James Wycliffe Headlam-Morley], who was just called Headlam. I don't know where the Morley ever arrived from.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> 'James Headlam assumed by royal licence in 1918 the additional surname (and arms) of Morley, on inheriting the property of the last member of the West Riding family from which he was descended through the wife of his paternal grandfather.' *ODNB*.

MI So let's talk a little bit about Isaiah.

SSG Yes, indeed.

MI When did you first hear of him?

SSG I wonder whether it was when he joined All Souls. I don't think I knew him as an undergraduate, although we must have had a year together. He was Corpus, wasn't he? This Jane Rendel, who was my great friend, I wonder if I heard of him [from her], but I don't think I did. Sandy Rendel, who then became a professional journalist with *The Times* – Stanley Rendell was there with him. But funnily enough I've never talked to Isaiah about Sandy since those days. No, I think I only knew him when he joined the other fellows of All Souls whom I knew.

MI You already knew Goronwy then?

SSG The first one was Douglas Jay. My closest friend at St Paul's was Peggy Garnett, and she produced Douglas Jay. The summer before we ever came up, he brought us here to Oxford – more or less every week we used to come up. In fine weather we went for long drives to places. In bad weather we all had lovely parties in Christopher Cox's room in New College.

MI Before you even actually came up to Oxford?

SSG That was before, you see. That's why I was very, very lucky. I really knew Oxford quite well – especially all the glamorous chaps I knew, you see. And I met Goronwy, you see, before I came up. We didn't really make great friends. He was around in this circle but then his mother died, and Douglas Jay said, Look, I think it would be nice if you wrote to him about his mother. That was his last term. And I did



write to him, and he answered, and he was so pleased to have been written to that we made immediate friends then, in my first term, when I came up as an undergraduate.

MI Which is autumn 1931.

SSG Autumn 1931. And Isaiah – I don't really remember him – he must have been around –no, because he was in 1932, wasn't he – All Souls? I think perhaps I didn't know him till 1932, because I didn't really know people in Corpus. If he'd been in New College I might have met him – I was more with the New College lot, as you might say, and All Souls [?]. And the wonderful thing about All Souls was that it wasn't the sort of college where on the whole undergraduettes went and therefore one walked in and, as I said, I think even in *The Parting of Ways*, they called me Miss Shiela, rather like my grandmother's servants – it was rather nice – but there again we're back on me, let's stick to Isaiah.

MI When you go on to you it's fine. Don't worry about that. That's fine. I'm just wondering whether you can recollect what first impressions you got of Isaiah when you met him – physically, what impression he made on you.

SSG I don't remember having a more physical impression of him than of anybody else that one met. He didn't seem to me any different in any way, that he looked different, which he must have in actual fact.

MI It's just that when I asked Mary Fisher that question, she said, absolutely like that, she said 'Astoundingly ugly', she said. I thought that was a wonderful remark.

SSG Oh, no, I never thought that. Really? No, no. That never crossed ...

**MI** Because she was devoted to him all her life.

**SSG** Yes, of course. Yes. No, no, I didn't feel that. I didn't feel he really – he was just –everybody looks different from everybody else.

**MI** But what drew you to him? What attracted you to him?

**SSG** Well, it's talk, really, I suppose. It always tumbled out. He always had something to say. And he was amusing.

**MI** Did he seem very different from all of the others? Was there something distinctive about him as a young don?

**SSG** No, I don't think so, because I knew so many young dons. There are some differences: an All Souls person like – who wasn't in that set – was the economist – what was his name?<sup>22</sup> – he would seem distinctive from the others, but Isaiah seemed to ...

**MI** That is to say, you're saying that they all loved music. They all had a wide cultural reference.

**SSG** Oh, no, no. That not at all. No, what attracted me immediately was the music because he had this wonderful gramophone and all these wonderful gramophone records, and he took me to concerts. We went to concerts together. That was lovely. The music was the one thing that he had more than anybody else that I knew in Oxford, at any rate, or anywhere indeed.

**MI** And you had music yourself from your family or from your ...

<sup>22</sup> Ian Bowen?

SSG Not really, except I'd always – like everybody I was taught to play the piano, I played it very badly and soon gave it up. I'll tell you who I also knew who was a friend of Isaiah's, somebody –who was that musician who became a musical scholar? We mentioned him last night. Martin Cooper. I was very fond of Martin Cooper. Martin Cooper was more immediately attractive as a person. I loved Martin Cooper. I've got a picture in my mind of him stepping back off a kerb with his hat tilted back. No, I liked Martin, but only for a very short time. I didn't really know him – it was just his last term. I don't know what he was quite doing at Oxford when I met him: he was a great friend of Goronwy's too: and he [Goronwy] had been at New College all the way ... I don't know: he [Cooper] seemed to be a free person.

MI When you went to see Isaiah at All Souls, can you remember his rooms at all? I see the gramophone and I see the gramophone collection, but did you have an impression of happy chaos or was it very neat and tidy or was it ...?

SSG No, it certainly wasn't a happy chaos. There were a lot of books [*tape garbled*]. People like Isaiah knew who one could ask about.

MI So that he was someone you could consult on those kind of questions?

SSG Yes, I would say he was. I was always consulting him. [*tape garbled*] I didn't like it, of course, when he criticised Goronwy. I hoped some of his criticisms weren't really true.

MI What did he say about Goronwy that you thought was just wrong at the time?

SSG I'm ashamed to say I don't think I can remember any actual thing he said. There was a general slight

disapproval, if you know what I mean. I don't remember him ever actually saying that Goronwy was wrong.

MI Do you think there's a tinge of jealousy? He just thought why is this charming woman going out with this guy when she really ought to be more interested in me?

SSG Oh no, I don't think he thought that. I think I think he felt that I was interested in him, too. I was interested in them all. I loved them all. I wouldn't have associated jealousy with Isaiah at all, I don't think.

MI Do you meet Adam in 1932?

SSG Right at the very beginning, almost – no, 1931. I met him in Balliol because we were both asked to tea by a Balliol don whose name I've forgotten, because my brother had been in Balliol right up to, I think, even the year before I came up. But he wasn't there when I was there. But the Grant Duff name was known and this Balliol don had invited us both. And we both found each other, Adam and me, we found each other so very much more fun than the male don that we really just talked to each other. And I never saw the Balliol don again. Whether Adam did or not, I don't know. Which was very rude of me.

MI What was it about Adam that you found so enchanting immediately?

SSG Well, he was very handsome, he was handsomer than most of the others. And he was the first German I'd ever met. My father had been killed in the German war, and people like my grandmother said, 'Never speak to a German again.' My mother wasn't like that at all. I'd never been to Germany and none of our family – we'd had nothing to do with Germany. And it was just the time, with all these wonderful German

films – *All Quiet on the Western Front* and things like that – so that it was moving and exciting to meet somebody different from the others.

MI And when does Adam meet Isaiah? It's 1932, 1933?

SSG Yes, of course. Yes, but that was Rowse. He'd met Rowse before he came up. So he would have met him, presumably – he probably would have met Isaiah in 1932 rather than 1931. But I don't know: you could ask Isaiah that.

MI One of the most important letters in your collection is the letter in which Isaiah discusses Adam's letter to *The Guardian* in March 1934.

SSG 1933? Was it 1934?

MI I think it's 1934.

SSG Yes.

MI I'm ashamed to say, as a biographer I am sometimes wrong. I cannot afford to be wrong in print. But I may be wrong now.

SSG Yes, because he was still in Oxford in 1933. It must be in 1934.

MI It's an important letter. And I'm just wondering whether you can recollect what impression that letter made on you. That is, Isaiah is saying to you: Adam may have very good reason to say that there is not much anti-Semitism in the court in Kassel, but essentially, come off it, this is a Nazi regime, and he seems to be excusing the regime.

**SSG** He certainly was, and up to a point he did that all the way through because – I don't know whether you've ever come upon that solid, solid book of the letters between me and Isaiah [sc. Adam]: there's not a word there really against Hitler in the whole book. And he didn't realise, I don't think, how ghastly the Nazis were.

**MI** Did you ever have that out with him, not in a letter but in private?

**SSG** I don't know that I did. When we met, we didn't really quarrel. We quarrelled a lot more in letters than we quarrelled when we were together, I think.

**MI** So you rather took Isaiah's side on that issue?

**SSG** Oh, certainly, strongly, yes. Though he's writing apologising for having been perhaps too strong about this letter, because I think Christopher Cox comes in there too, doesn't he?

**MI** There's another element that comes into your correspondence with Adam, which is a slightly sardonic view of Isaiah, sometimes, which I thought was very revealing. That is, a view which says: He's so detached from European politics and so detached from the gathering crisis in Europe and so insulated inside the Oxford world that I can't quite connect to it any more.

**SSG** Is it me or Adam saying this?

**MI** Well, both of you. I'm just wondering whether I'm getting that right or whether I'm putting that too strongly.

**SSG** I think we all felt, Isaiah included, that he was misjudging the situation in Germany, except, of course, for

the anti-Semitism. That he'd got. He never went to Germany again. When the three of us went to Czechoslovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia, Goronwy and I went back through Germany, and he went the route round. I suppose he really didn't want to know much about Germany. It must have been painful for him to hear what was going on there. I don't think he studied it as much as even somebody like Douglas Jay, who was on *The Times* when Hitler came to power. And he was very angry with *The Times* because they were already stopping the things coming through from Ebbut and other people about how bad the situation was in Germany. Dawson was already then trying to dampen it down and say that it wasn't as bad as all that.

MI But I catch a hint in your own – you become steadily more involved in both the German question and the Czech question, and Isaiah is in some sense steadily, not less involved, but his detachment, I think, bothers you occasionally?

SSG Oh. No, I don't think I – by that time we weren't so close. There aren't so many letters – I don't remember letters much between us when I was in Czechoslovakia. Were there letters? I don't think there were: very few then, I think. It was 1936 onwards when I went to Prague. I think the letters had diminished by then a bit.

MI Because it's one of the things, as a biographer, that I'm having most trouble with, which is establishing Isaiah's relation to the political events of the 1930s, astonishing as it may seem. He has opinions. He has thoughts. Dawson comes to All Souls, for God's sake. He finds *The Times's* appeasement very hard to take.

SSG Yes.

MI But there's some level of emotional detachment.

SSG Yes, I think you're right.

MI Which is quite striking. The Jewish question apart.

SSG Yes.

MI He feels very, very strongly about that.

SSG There is a letter from him to me at some point about the Germans. I think I ask him why they're like they are or something like that. And that was more about the German reaction, it wasn't about Hitler and what was actually happening at that moment. But how they got to this position. Do you remember that or not? I don't know.

MI I'll have to look for it. But you remember him discoursing on this.

SSG I think there's only one letter on that subject and maybe quite a late letter. It may be even post-war. No, I think perhaps it wasn't ...

MI What do you think? The letters are full of affectionate and friendly judgements of you in relation to your personal life and your political life. How do you react to those judgements? Do you think he got you right or do you think in a kind of way he never got you right? Didn't understand.

SSG No, I think he did. There's one letter – do you remember the one? – in which he said, I always cared about the flowers and the animals and the countryside, that sort of thing, rather than ... And I think he was right. Looking back, I realise it was rather a mistake. I'm completely immersed in all that now.



**MI** That is, you value his judgement of you. That is, you think he's someone who's understood you rather well?

**SSG** I don't know. It's never occurred to me to think whether people understand me. Possibly my girlfriends [?] they didn't understand me, but I don't remember feeling misunderstood by the chaps.

**MI** Because it's an important part of Isaiah's reputation that he's regarded as having very good personal judgement. And I've always wondered in fact whether his closest friends, people like you, actually agree with that, whether you think that he does have very acute judgement about you as a character, as a person, good judgement of the choices you've made in your life.

**SSG** Well, I think yes, he judged those fairly well, especially the wrong choices, I suppose, the political ones. He never actually protested about anything. He never actually said, oh, look, why on earth are you doing this or that? He accepted that I was in Czechoslovakia, and I was trying to do something to help the Czechs, I think. Though I don't know whether he realised the extent to which I was immersed in the Czech cause, and he wouldn't have liked, I'm sure, anybody like Edgar Mowrer, my boss in Paris. I don't think that's the sort of American he would have approved of.

**MI** But why not?

**SSG** Well, he was too political. I don't think Isaiah was all that involved in the political situation. I always felt that he was up in philosophy and all the more spiritual things in life than what was actually going on in this horrid world. I never thought of him as – except of course in – I suppose one did in the wartime when he was over in America writing these

splendid letters, but I didn't get them: we weren't corresponding. But I knew that story, by the way, which is always mistold because in fact, you know, the story about Irving Berlin and Isaiah.

MI Why is it mistold?

SSG Because I got it straight from Clementine, you see. What did she say? You tell me what you think the story is and then I'll ...

MI The story as I understand it is that Clementine said to Winston: There's a man called Berlin who's done very good work for war bonds or something, and he happens to be in London staying at the Savoy. Would it be possible for you just to meet him and shake his hand? And he said, Oh, very good. I've wanted to talk to Berlin for some time. Invite him to lunch. This Berlin comes to lunch and is asked a lot of questions about the state of American opinion, and when will the European war end. This Berlin answers with increasing perplexity and embarrassment until Winston realises that some mistake is going on, and then finds the joke amusing and tells the Cabinet. And somehow the story gets out on the grapevine very quickly. But how exactly that happens I don't know. Possibly through Korda, who's staying with Irving Berlin at the Savoy at the time. But anyway, it's in *Time* magazine in early April 1944. Through which source I don't know. Now is that roughly right or is it ...?

SSG Yes, it is roughly right. It is. But I think she felt about one version of the story that somehow Irving Berlin had been mocked at – not mocked at, that he'd been invited by mistake and that he wasn't really worth inviting to lunch. Whereas she specially wanted him.

MI Yes.

**SSG** I think it was that.

**MI** She's very important to the whole story. She knows what's going on. It's her husband who doesn't.

**SSG** He altered the table setting. She hadn't even sat him next to Irving Berlin, because she knew he wouldn't get on with him, but he rearranged it.

**MI** Oh, I didn't know that detail.

**SSG** Oh, yes, I think he rearranged the table.

**MI** Specifically to sit closer to the person he thought was Isaiah.

**SSG** Yes.

**MI** I didn't know that detail.

**SSG** It was Isaiah who changed it about him, not him about Isaiah. It was Isaiah who wanted this splendid chap beside him.<sup>23</sup>

**MI** I'm just wondering, I asked you earlier whether you thought that Isaiah was a good judge of you. I'm wondering whether, looking back at the 1930s when he was a young man, you think he had good judgement about himself, or did you occasionally sit and listen to him rattle on and think, for God's sake, Isaiah, you don't know yourself at all?

**SSG** No, I don't think that ever occurred to me. I don't know how much I was thinking about what his self was. I accepted

<sup>23</sup> This doesn't make sense? What can she have meant?

him without any questions. I liked him very much. We were great friends, and amusement is what I mostly remember. He was nearly always cheerful. I felt what I ought to be asking him about was philosophy, but we didn't really talk very much about philosophy. We talked about human beings and about those around us and what was going on in Oxford and ...

**MI** And what you liked about him particularly was this capacity for amusement, the vitality.

**SSG** I think so. It was a vitality and lightness and ...

**MI** And the friendship takes the form of visits to his room in All Souls. Walks.

**SSG** Walks. Yes.

**MI** In Addison's Walk and other places?

**SSG** Yes. A lot of walks.

**MI** Visits to restaurants?

**SSG** Not much. No, I don't think, now I come to think of it, that he went to restaurants. I was endlessly in restaurants with Goronwy at the – what was it called, the famous restaurant at that time in Oxford? But I don't think I ever dined out anywhere. I think it was either in his own room in All Souls or New College. I don't know whether he got to New College in my day, did he?<sup>24</sup> No, I think he was still in All Souls. I'm not being very helpful.

<sup>24</sup> He taught at New College from 1932, but had a room there only from 1938.

MI Oh no, no: don't say that. You're being very helpful. Did you see him at all during the war? Because there's a break in the correspondence for a long time.

SSG Yes. There is totally, isn't it? I don't think I did, because the first term I was in Oxford – I saw him of course, with the beginning of the war, I saw him just a brief time, perhaps only one – my first term with Toynbee in Balliol. I saw him then, but I think after that, I don't know if I saw him at all until after the war finished.

MI You don't remember him looking you up during the war? Because he was back occasionally.

SSG No, I don't think so. I don't know whether he even knew where I was or bothered about me at all – because we must have both been in London. Because then I was in London, at the BBC, but I had this lovely escape place, this [name?] Cottage which my grandmother lent me.

MI And that's where you spent a lot of time during the war.

SSG Well, whenever I had holidays, when I wasn't working in London. Yes, I was there.

MI There's an interesting letter from Isaiah in 1949 when he's in America, he's lecturing in America, I think he's at Harvard. And he's just turned 40 and it's rather gloomy. It's a very, very good letter. There's one passage in it when he says he's very keen to meet you in I think it's Cherbourg in 1949.

SSG Oh yes, he's coming back. I notice that now, lately. I'd been forgotten. But how it all happened – I was already married by that time, wasn't I? Wasn't I married to Newsome? So what I was doing meeting him in all Cherbourg ...

**MI** But do you have a memory of meeting him in Cherbourg?

**SSG** No, I didn't. No, it didn't come off. That was the thing. But why it didn't come off I don't know, because I think it was I who suggested it rather than him, when he was enthusiastic for the meeting. And for some reason the meeting didn't come off. I didn't go to Cherbourg and I didn't meet him.

**MI** You didn't meet him at all? It was 1949. You've no recollection of meeting him?

**SSG** Well, certainly not in Cherbourg. But we met in Oxford. At what stage was it? It was just before he was meeting his present wife.

**MI** Aline. When did you become aware that he was becoming attached to her?

**SSG** I think I only knew – I was rather busy with my marital relations at the same time too. And I think I didn't think about his. Or did he it talk about it? I remember him talking about it, but it may have been after he married – about the husbands. I'm sure it's in the letters much more accurately. I think it is mentioned, isn't it, or not? No, perhaps it isn't. No no, it wasn't. In fact he ...

**MI** why I'm asking you.

**MI** On another subject slightly, I wanted to know the story of how Jenifer Hart came to be called thingamajig.

**SSG** Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I do remember that story. That was nice. We all loved Herbert Hart, of course – admired him tremendously. And he was ill and in hospital.

**MI** What period is this?

**SSG** Oh, it must have been in the 1930s still, I think it was before the war. I think it was quite early on. I simply went on a kind visit: that was the the purpose of that. And just in talking about various people, just as I forget names now of people, I forgot hers, and I called her thingamajig to him. I said: And how is, oh yes, thingamajig? And of course he repeated it to her immediately. I never got on very well ... I've got on better in the last year or two. I always remember my first meeting with her was when she said in a loud voice: There's that awful girl with the red coat and the green skirt. And I looked around and of course I was the only person who was wearing these things. And she was at Somerville: she was quite a friend of Peggy Jay's, but not of mine, ever.

**MI** You didn't get on with her?

**SSG** Not really.

**MI** not?

**SSG** was pretty bossy. She probably still is, really, isn't she? I always thought of her as making her own way in life, not bothering very much about other people.

**MI** What about the spies business, and the Communism business? There's a very interesting letter from Isaiah to you in 1956 talking about his shock at discovering that Guy had been a spy.

**SSG** Oh, is there? I'd forgotten that. Yes.

**MI** I'm just wondering about your own sense of surprise about Burgess and Maclean ...

**SSG** No, I knew it. Actually, I remember Goronwy telling me the story that Burgess had told him that he was a spy, and had asked Goronwy to join him, and Goronwy said he had refused. I said: For heaven's sake do, and I've always assumed he did. I don't think Goronwy was a spy. But I'm rather trembling about this book coming out now by his daughter [Jenny Rees] because she behaved I think very heartlessly to her father. I don't think she was fond of her father – much less fond than I was.

**MI** And Goronwy would have told you this before the war?

**SSG** Yes, it must have been, because yes, it must have been before the war, but probably only just before, because I wasn't seeing very much of Goronwy at that time. I saw him more a little bit after war started because I was sorry for him in his extraordinary place where he was housed down by the docks – it was all very uncomfortable.

**MI** 1940.

**SSG** it was right at the beginning of the war. But where he was unhappiest was later on when he was turning into an officer. Then he looked back on the docks and his friends in the docks with great affection: the people he met in Camberley or wherever it was.

**MI** This is interesting. So Goronwy is telling you, possibly in late 1939, early 1940, that he's had these conversations with Burgess about being an agent, being a member of the Party. He's telling you that Burgess has tried to recruit him, and that he, Goronwy, will not play. That's what you remember Goronwy as saying.



SSG Yes, I do. And I still argue to this day with Isaiah: I don't think Goronwy ever joined the Communist Party. I got several letters from him in which he said he would never do such a thing, that they were mistaken.

MI Because the competing narrative is to the effect that Goronwy does join, 1937, and gets out when the Stalin–Ribbentrop Pact or the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact is announced in 1939; that Goronwy for very honorable reasons takes one look at that and thinks to hell with it. But that's not the version that you would subscribe to. That is, he *was* a member of the party 1937–9, then left.

SSG No, I wouldn't have thought he was a member of the Party, I don't think, but I wasn't very close to him at that time.

MI What about the others? What about people like Jenifer Hart and the others?

SSG Well, I think I only learnt about Jenifer after the war when it all came out, I think. And could Herbert have known that Jenifer was in those sort of circumstances?

MI he must have known.

SSG must have known.

MI So that you were not at all surprised when Burgess flew the coop.

SSG One of the things I do remember, which Isaiah absolutely denies, is that he invited us to a party that he was giving for his parents when his parents were there. And it wasn't in [*gap caused by cassette reversing?*] sat next to him and talked to him a bit about Russia.

**MI** This is in the RAC club after the war.

**SSG** After the war, yes. It was literally – two or three days later Burgess went off. Even the next day or something. But Isaiah I think denies that Burgess was at this party.

**MI** But you're absolutely sure?

**SSG** Well, yes, and Micheal is absolutely sure. But I wouldn't like you too much to emphasise that to Isaiah, because Isaiah has always said he wasn't there. He didn't have anything to do with it. But Micheal – certainly your father,<sup>25</sup> wasn't he, he couldn't have invented it because I think it was his only meeting with Burgess. I don't think he'd ever met him before.

**MI** Can either you or your husband remember the substance of what Burgess said or talked about on that occasion at the RAC?

**SSG** Have you ever heard Dad talking about this?<sup>26</sup> I'll ask Micheal, if you like, when I get back.

**MI** If you would it would be helpful.

**SSG** Yes.

**MI** It's a very tangled scheme. What you discover when you look at Isaiah's correspondence is that Guy wrote him quite a lot. I mean, twelve, fifteen letters.

**SSG** I always hated Guy. He was one of the few people I really disliked.

<sup>25</sup> Speaking to Fiona.

<sup>26</sup> Fiona's reply is inaudible.

**MI** Why?

**SSG** Why was it? I don't know. He was awfully unattractive. He was unattractive to look at and to listen to, to smell and everything else. No, he wasn't my cup of tea at all. I didn't meet him all that often. Very seldom. By that time Goronwy and I had split up when he got so close to ... In fact it was one of the reasons. I once said to Goronwy, I can't stand your friends, or something. What was that ...? Now what was it he said? I can't remember, but it was ...

**MI** But in fact, Goronwy's proximity to Guy was one of the ...

**SSG** Was one of the things that took me away from Goronwy, yes, I'm sure. And of course, then his love affairs, his affair with Rosamond Lehmann.

**MI** Isaiah was at Bowen's Court when all that takes off in September 1936.

**SSG** Yes. And then they all go and stay in ... By that time, I was abroad when they are staying with ... Isaiah loved her, didn't he? The writer. What's her name?

**MI** Elizabeth Bowen. Yes. But you were abroad then.

**SSG** Then I was abroad. I wasn't really in touch with that lot at all then. I knew her in Oxford, actually, in the early 1930s. But I didn't know her later on. I wasn't anything to do with – I'd moved out of those circles by then.

**MI** I'm not doing this very systematically, but I did want to take you back to one thing that you were mentioning before, which is your visit to Subcarpathian Ruthenia. That developed after Salzburg? That is, you went to Salzburg?

SSG Yes, we all met in Salzburg to begin with. And then it was Isaiah who suggested it. Because he said that there was this miracle-working Jew, I think – was he a Jewish doctor or something? – in Subcarpathian Ruthenia. And he wanted to go and see his miracles.

MI And so you all tagged along.

SSG And so we all tagged along. Yes. And we couldn't – when we got to Bratislava, I think it was, Isaiah insisted on buying the tickets because he alone could speak Russian. And this extraordinary thing happened: when we started to come back with our return tickets, we found he'd bought six single tickets there.

MI So that his linguistic competence was not all he made it out to be.

SSG No. Well, I think that Slovak or Czech is very very different from Russian. I don't see why he should – I can quite see he could have made a perfectly honorable mistake.

MI So that this place was actually in present-day Slovakia?

SSG No, it's in present-day Russia now. Where we finally went to – Mukachevo, it was called – I think it's in Russia.<sup>27</sup> It's in Russia now, and has been ever since the end of the war.

MI And what do you remember of Mukachevo?

SSG Oh, I remember it distinctly, actually, because we travelled, all three of us together, with this wonderful melon that we were carrying around in Isaiah's hat. And the closer

<sup>27</sup> It is in Ukraine.

we got to Mukachevo, the more thankful I was for the Czech – we always had to go and sign in at the Czech consulates, all the way through – not all – they wouldn't be consulates; I don't know what they were, but they were, I suppose – the Czechs were very much keeping – they were the masters in Czechoslovakia. And I was so relieved by the cleanliness of these things that I would really have preferred to spend the night there than in the hotels we did stay in. I would really like – and primarily in Mukachevo and places like that I was really so, so frightened. I was awfully frightened of all the Jews with [?] down their backs. There were so many people who had only one leg or a withered arm or injured people all round one. And I remember Isaiah saying, well, the only way to keep healthy was to eat yoghurt, which I'd never met before in my life. This was a health thing. And then we went off, Goronwy and I. I said I couldn't stand it: Couldn't we go to this wonderful resort that we'd read about in the book. So Goronwy and I went off to find this place, which was no place at all: it was simply a sort of frontier post.

MI And then you came back.

SSG And then we came straight back again and picked Isaiah up, and I think he hadn't found his [?] rabbi either. I think he wasn't actually there, but he was rather disappointed. He was pleased to have talked to several people while we weren't there, in Russian.

MI Can you remember who he talked to?

SSG No, I can't remember any of them by name or who they would be. Does he remember? I don't know.

MI You put your finger on something that I hadn't realised about this visit, which is the extent to which it's Isaiah's visit to the Central European shtetl, to the Jewish world. And what

was slightly horrifying about it was just how Jewish it was: people with long locks and kaftans.

SSG Well, it was a mixture of how Jewish the Jews were, and how the other natives – I think it was the natives more that had all these injured, limbless – looked ill and looked generally ...

MI Were they coming there to be cured by the miracle doctor?

SSG No, I don't think so. I don't think there was anything about that. But curiously enough I do remember that we got as far as Uzhorod or somewhere like that. And then we thought that we couldn't really go on. There was no train to go on. So we took a taxi and we three got into the taxi and asked him to drive off, but not a bit of it. The taxi was then filled with any number of other people who climbed into the taxi and sat on the roof. It was thoroughly – and then off we went to Mukachevo in this taxi. And I always remember the driver seeing the expression on my my face, perhaps all our faces, of horror, and saying: You want to come back?

MI You said three. Remind me. There's you, there's Isaiah and ...

SSG And I would have really liked to have shared a room in these hotels with Goronwy. But Isaiah wasn't having that at all. I felt that I was much more vulnerable to somebody breaking in to these horrible things, and that I needed a guard of some sort. No, no. They slept together, and I slept ...

MI Isaiah was a slightly priggish duenna figure [?] guarding over your virtue .

SSG Yes, I think so, a bit, yes. Yes.

MI What did Goronwy think of that?

SSG He didn't seem to protest, and I don't think I made a fuss, but I did say it would be rather nice. And I remember Isaiah said it was perfectly all right because they were next door, and I remember talking to them through the keyhole in a rather pathetic way. Whether that was just Mukachevo – that was the most unsavoury of all these places. But they got steadily worse as one went through Czechoslovakia. And then the other thing that happened on this thing was that he and Goronwy were always talking about philosophy together, and they were discussing great philosophic thoughts, which left me far behind. I really didn't understand what they were talking about.

MI How long did this visit go on, do you think, this whole trip?

SSG Well then because of these tickets we got stuck. We did get back out of Mukachevo, luckily, we stopped in Uzhorod and all of us wrote back to our families saying please send us some money in order to pay for the tickets to get off, so that it took a bit longer than we meant it to take. But it can't have been more than about ten days at most.

MI I have only two more questions: what time ...? Because you have to go and see ...

SSG Oh, yes, well, it's 12:00.

MI I'm just wondering what Salzburg was like in the 1930s. It was such an important part of Isaiah's life through the 1930s. I wanted to get a sense of the atmosphere.



**SSG** Oh, it was beautiful. The atmosphere was that there were – an enormous number of Oxford people were there in those days and one knew quite a lot of the people around, and I remember the lovely horses all round – [?] out of their noses, pouring, filling all the water all round. It was a most beautiful place. Oh, I loved it. Yes.

**MI** You'd spend all the evening at the various concerts.

**SSG** Yes.

**MI** During the day what did you do?

**SSG** What did we do? I think we just walked around Salzburg; it seemed so beautiful to be there. I suppose we had meals. We stayed in the hotel. I don't know quite where: did we stay in the same hotel? I can't quite remember, honestly.

**MI** Did Isaiah supervise the room arrangements in the hotel?



SSG Slightly, yes. I remember: Goronwy and I *were* in a hotel to Isaiah and he came to visit us. And there was very shocked to find that Goronwy and I had a room together too.

MI didn't approve?

SSG at all.

MI But happily there was nothing he could do about it.

SSG I don't think he minded. He just said 'Tut tut' rather than anything else. He didn't try and say this shouldn't happen, but I suppose this must have been the time we went on to Subcarpathian Ruthenia, so that he was jolly well going to see that that was respectable.

MI Did you have a sense of a gathering Nazi presence in Salzburg?

SSG Not yet. No, we didn't at all.

MI But Isaiah does not go back through Germany.

SSG He didn't come back through Germany. But this must have been after when we also went and met this woman that Stephen Spender was very close to. We talked about her even last night. Margaret Kennedy? Was she called Kennedy? And what were we saying about this? But I don't think Isaiah was around. That was all in Vienna. I don't think it was – Isaiah wasn't there. That musician we talked about whom I like, we both liked so much. He was there.

MI Cooper.

SSG I'm just wondering, as we're coming to the end, whether you feel slightly abandoned by Isaiah in the years after the

war. You've had much less contact with him than you would have liked, and had a sense that he's changed and got grand and distant, and doesn't talk to you.

SSG No, I don't think I really felt like that, because I was perfectly satisfied with my own life, which I knew was totally different from Isaiah's life. I don't think I ever felt any resentment. I may have made the first move to write to him rather than him to write to me, but not with any feeling that he jolly well ought to have done something different. No, I don't think I felt resentment. I knew that he wouldn't approve of the life that I was living then.

MI Why not?

SSG Well, it was in the country and farming, something very different from anything that Isaiah would ever have dreamt of having that sort of life.

MI Do you think he's changed a tremendous amount since you knew him as a young, young man?

SSG No, I don't think he has changed all that, funnily enough. I don't think we get on as well as we did when young. But this was partly arguing again about Goronwy. We were always arguing about whether Goronwy was or wasn't a Communist. I've always been trying to defend him for this because I've got several letters – I've got about two hundred letters from Goronwy as well as all the – I've kept all my letters from everybody. Isaiah's aren't the only ones.

MI Good for you. On behalf of the trade union of biographers, who wish to salute you, madam.

SSG There's always a difficulty about it because of the family. They don't like – I have offered them to the Bodleian. But on

the other hand one would like to know – they say that one can say, oh, well, nobody must publish anything for thirty years or something. But I don't know quite what to do about it all.

MI What's the problem? The problem is you don't want their contents disclosed?

SSG Well, there are some bits that might be harmful.

MI To whom? To you? To them?

SSG No, it's my husband. For instance, I was asked just recently to do more of *The Parting of Ways*, bring *The Parting of Ways* up to the end of the war. And this was an Irish publisher, and now he's rather changed to it being not that; but what he would really like to do, together with a man whom – I wonder if you know him – what's he called, Tomkin? – who's a publisher at – you know, darling, this big – Random House publishers.

Fiona [*inaudible*].

SSG He's one of the Random House publishers. Anyhow, I'm meeting him. I haven't met him yet, but he's a great friend of this Lilliput, the Irish publisher that I'm in touch with. And now they want me to do an autobiography. But my husband says if I really write the truth about my autobiography all my children will turn against me. And he will: I'll divorce you, he said. But I don't think I'm ashamed of my life really, in any way.

MI quite a life.

SSG you think? Well, it isn't. Compared with Isaiah's life: I mean, look at it. All he knows and reads and has written and seen, and all the wonderful concerts and theatres and operas

and things he's gone to, and all the Americans – I've never even crossed the Atlantic. My life is very, very narrow, I think.

MI You've lived it vividly. You remember it well, too. Good for you.

SSG Well, I've enjoyed it. It's been a pleasure rather than a pain most of the time. I'm very fond of people. I like people really, much more than my husband – your father doesn't like people a bit, does he? Unfortunately. Even Isaiah, and I don't think Isaiah approves of him either.

MI Really? I see no documentary evidence.

SSG No, there's no documentary evidence. But I think he thinks: Why on earth did you did you marry and give up all the life you might have had?

MI Do you ask yourself that question?

SSG It's rather a difficult one to answer, in front of my daughter especially. I do see I could have had a more exciting life. It started more excitingly than it is ending, except that suddenly this extraordinary sort of thing that one thought one's life was finished and suddenly Robert Kee, whom I don't even know and never knew, and haven't read any of his books, rings up and says, will you come ...? So that vaguely makes one feel perhaps one's had a life.

MI And then there are the circling vultures like me.

SSG And then there's you, yes.

MI Thank you very much.

**SSG Nice to have met you. And I'm sorry about all the contre-temps. They were quite unnecessary.**

# MI TAPE B4

Stuart Hampshire

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Side A

SH ... when doing this before, that I get the dates wrong, I mean sometimes even to the degree of recalling something which occurred after the war and attributing it to before the war. So that was a fact well known to Isaiah that I have that ...

MI Well let me introduce the tape. It is Tuesday February 1st 1994, I'm at 7 Beaumont Road, Headington Quarry, I'm in the study of Sir Stuart Hampshire. [SH That's right, yes] Fine OK, and this, I should make it clear, is a confidential interview, these tapes are entirely for my private use. [SH Yes] So, and I should also make it clear that you're quickly going to regard my questions as inconceivably dull [SH No, no] because my first interest is simply to get a narrative of your friendship and I have, in terms of my own work just so you know, I've done seventy to eighty hours of interviewing with Isaiah himself. I have only really begun to talk to his other friends, I have only begun to read his correspondence, I have read heavily in his correspondence in the thirties, [ ] incoming and outgoing; but what I know a little bit about now is sort of '32 to '38 but not nearly as much as I'd like to, so that some of my questions will lack the precision that I myself would like. [SH Yes, OK] But if you'd allow me to talk to you and perhaps talk to you again [SH Yes of course]. Anyway I just thought if you could tell me when you heard of him first, that is it's not the question when you met him first but when you heard of him first.

SH I think that the first occasion I can recall was when I was an undergraduate at Balliol College and probably in my first or second years, well certainly in either first or second, I can't remember

which. A friend of mine with whom I subsequently lived in lodgings was Benedict Nicolson. Does the name mean anything to you? He was the son of Vita Sackville West and Harold Nicolson and he became a friend of mine quite early, well he came up the same year to Balliol and I had a room there which overlooked the Ashmolean and Ben was there and he said, 'Oh there goes Maurice Bowra and Isaiah Berlin,' he said to me, they were walking across and we saw them from above and that was the first – I didn't associate anything particularly with Isaiah then.

MI And Ben would have known who it was simply because of their public celebrity [SH Yes] or because he knew them privately?

SH He didn't know them, he knew who they were, he might have – through their parents really because Maurice of course by then had been around and was a famous Oxford figure for many years and hence Harold Nicolson would certainly know who he was and probably had spoken to him or they'd met, I don't know. But actually at first I think another early occasion before I knew him at all was a set of lectures on philosophical issues known as Circas where each person gives a lecture. There was a series of lectures on philosophical topics by well known philosophers and one of them was given by Isaiah, most surprisingly, on the subject of matter. You wouldn't suppose he would ever speak about matter and I think he now has forgotten that he did speak on matter but he certainly did and he gave a lecture which was [MI Where?] at Balliol Hall ...

MI These are called Circas, spelled c-i-r-c-a-s?

SH Yes because they're a succession rather, you see different people, that's why people would go to them because it's amusing, it's not monotonous; and I remember the lecture was really about a recent popular book by Eddington called *The something of Science* which everybody read, it was a book of popular science. I suppose this must have been '33, well or early '34, my first year,

and it was about Eddington's suggestion that science, modern physics represented reality entirely in terms of equations and so on, so on. I can't remember how he developed it. Then ...

MI Can you remember what position Isaiah took in relation to this book or what ...?

SH It was critical of this metaphysical claim of a Platonic kind, that the universe consisted of – it was sceptical as usual. I don't think he took a – I mean he'd be careful he did not take any scientific position but it's interesting how odd it was that Newton should have – that physics should have developed in this direction. That's how I remember it. Whether he still keeps a copy I should be very doubtful, this was years ago and discontinuous with anything ...

MI Did his lecture impress you or did you think just a clever chap or ...?

SH Yes it did rather, yes, yes, not terrifically but yes. I thought he was interesting, yes.

MI Was there anything characteristic about the way he lectured that you ...?

SH Yes, his nervous gabbling really you could call it, yes. I mean it was obviously – a nervous lecturer, that's all, a high strung lecturer.

MI High strung but propositional, I mean not all over the place.

SH Oh no, no, no. No, it was certainly not an ideal – he gabbled, I mean it's the only word one can use. And I think that a lot of people everywhere in the world but certainly in the Anglophile world are impressed by names; I mean Isaiah Berlin like Wittgenstein and so on, these somewhat glamorous names in the Intelligentsia. I'm convinced having lived in California a certain amount that the guru's have to have some sort of foreign – you



know like Foucault, you know when Foucault arrived in Berkeley a football crowd turned up which certainly wouldn't if he was called John Osborne. Any rate, I remember being impressed by the name, certainly, it struck me as somehow – is glamorous the right word? – somehow exotic? interesting? But incidentally in that time – you must have been told this by him, perhaps by others – that he was invariably called Shaya [MI Yes] which I never called him, never. [MI Really?] No, I disliked it strongly and somewhat effectively [MI Why did you?] I found there was something sort of sentimental about it, I don't know, that's how it struck me and I was in a small minority when I did know him in never using that name. Well then that's about all but I didn't hear much about him when I was an undergraduate in Balliol, he didn't – then what happened not very long after that was that Ben Nicolson and maybe Jeremy Hutchinson if the name means anything – of course it means something to you because you've talked to Isaiah a lot, maybe, I can't remember whether Jeremy came but Ben invited Isaiah who by then he had met, how I cannot recall, Isaiah may. He'd got a car, Ben, and in the Summer we were to drive out to the country and there was a famous grocer then called Grimbley Hughes, goes right back to the nineteenth century at Carfax and we went there [MI Called Grimbley Hughes?] Grimbley, yes, G-r-i-m-b-l-y Hughes, a famous nineteenth century figure, stories are told about his relations with Jowett and so forth, and we went there and bought [MI And this was at Carfax?] yes, we went there and bought food for a picnic and in particular black olives which Isaiah laid great stress on which you can't get in grocer's now I doubt in the centre of Oxford. But any rate we bought these and went to the country and had a kind of picnic, well we had a picnic but I cannot recall where it was or how, what I do remember [MI Do you roughly recall the date? Are we talking Summer '34?] Now that's where I go wrong. Well it must be, I have a terminus ad quem, '35 I guess, I guess. [MI And out of term or in term?] Well it could only be '34 or '35, '33 I wasn't here, '36 I knew Isaiah very well so it must be '34/5 and I guess it was 5. [MI Summer?] Summer [MI Good weather] Yes and I remember we were all much amused by

the fact that Isaiah talked continuously and couldn't bear to look at the country and said he didn't like landscape or he hated looking and that was a kind of joke among us all. Whether Jeremy was there I can't remember. I tell you who was there I'm almost certain, and that is Francis Graham Harrison. Does the name mean anything to you? It might. [MI Yes] Well I think, I'm almost certain he was there.

MI Do you remember what Isaiah talked about?

SH [laughing] Not very well, not very well no.

MI Did you feel any irritation, did you think to yourself God Almighty I want to get a word in edgewise?

SH No, no I didn't, I thoroughly enjoyed it, I thoroughly enjoyed it. What I recall is that it arose from that that we must have talked about Kafka. Now there's a particular story about Kafka and Isaiah and me. Some years, well it can't have been many years earlier but maybe '32, maybe, in North Wales where I then lived as a schoolboy, I got books out of Boot's library. There used to be – I'm sure you don't know this because it's long before your time – Boots used to have libraries at the back and there would be [MI That's a fact to make a young man nostalgic I have to say!] [laughter] well if you went in, in Llandudno which was the local resort place which had a big Boots and therefore they had a library; and in there I came across a blue volume which I feel still sentimental about, which was *The Great Wall of China*, short stories translated by that great man Edwin Muir and his wife Willa Muir who had been – was it British Council? Any rate cultural representatives in Prague and they translated Kafka and they translated *The Trial* and I picked out this book because he had been mentioned, very typical at the time, by Aldous Huxley somewhere in an essay of the great sort of list that Huxley would produce which was so beneficent, I mean a lot of people like Herbert Hart and he were influenced by, in which he gave a list of

seminal minds or something like that: I remember Kafka, Proust and Pareto, well I vaguely knew who Pareto was.

MI Gracious what a fancy list! [SH laughs] I can see why that would be very seductive, I can see why you think boy oh boy, this is ...

SH Yes, yes exactly so and must I hope have happened all over England. Then of course I got hold of the rest, I know I was tremendously impressed, it had a big effect on me and so that came up and Isaiah had written – he's probably told you about Oxford Outlook? [MI Yes] The joint editorship with Crossman; well he had written in the Oxford Outlook an essay on Kafka so – well I can't remember whether I'd read that essay or he showed it to me afterwards, I rather think the latter but I'm not sure, when I came to know him. But we talked about Kafka and then we corresponded about Kafka and then we became friends, I don't know, he invited me round to All Souls and I went round and so on, and then ...

MI Did you agree about Kafka, did you disagree or did you ...?

SH Both agreed that, well of its importance and yes we did I think. What happened then about Kafka to complete the Kafka story was that when in '37 Isaiah and I went to Salzburg, Elizabeth Bowen – we took a house, he probably has described that to you [MI Yes] three of us – four, Sally Graves came – Elizabeth was sent by Joe Ackerley The Trial – was it The Trial or The Castle? No I think it was The Castle and she said I can't review this, it's not my sort of – and gave it to me and I wrote a thing about it [MI Isn't that interesting that she couldn't, said she couldn't review this?] No, well she felt it was a sort of Intelligentsia thing of the wrong kind, she had no background in it at all, Elizabeth, it didn't mean much to her; she could see it was important, impressive, but she – so she gave it to me and that occasioned, it brought it about that I came to know Joe Ackerley very well and we became friends. Any rate that's the end of Kafka. [MI And did you review it?] Yes, I can't

remember what I said and I'm sure it was pretty foolish but that's how that ended. Then ...

MI Did you feel, just on the Kafka issue, that Isaiah had good judgement about literature as difficult as that, did you feel he had a natural pitch for it? [SH No, –] you obviously did and this obviously has meant a great difference in your whole life but did you feel Isaiah has the same?

SH No I didn't feel that, I felt that he had a flair or – well no, he was in contact with European thought and feeling which by nature I was not. I think that that was a strong – it's not something he liked stressed in fact but I think that his foreignness – I am and was almost comically British, I mean to a ludicrous degree and this always was in a sense inferiority in a sense, yes, that I've always been aware of a tendency to reveal a remoteness from the subject matter of European literature by mispronunciation for example. [laughs] Isaiah represented ...

MI Wait a minute, wait a minute. You're the one who goes into Llandudno Boots and finds Kafka for God's sake, I mean aren't you slightly under selling yourself?

SH [laughing] No, no because you might be attracted to something which is nonetheless you realise is an acquired rather than an innate taste and in Isaiah obviously [MI There's just more natural ...] well he was cosmopolitan, yes and I think there are many people, he may have shown you Maurice's funny poem in the style of T.S.Eliot, the parody. He represented European culture to every graduate student for example at the university from the beginning and of course it goes both ways, in some contexts he could be negative but in many contexts he was positive. [MI What do you mean 'negative' there?] Oh well, Humphrey House whom he must have talked about, was very chauvinistic although he was an intellectual he was a natural chauvinist really and he always thought that Isaiah had no feeling for – which is true – for Wordsworth or

Tennyson, not really, I mean a certain curiosity about them or amusement about them but they're not part of his life.

MI Yes. Not true of something like Dickens however [SH Less true] for which I think Isaiah had a genuine love.

SH Yes, yes and certainly less true about various things he read as a schoolboy, I think that's true, yes. Well what happened then – I think I'll do better if I – well you want to ask questions.

MI I'm going to get you back to the narrative. We are at a picnic in the Summer of '35, we've sorted out Kafka and now we can ...

SH Well after that I saw Isaiah very often, we became [The phone rings and there is a short gap in the tape] Sorry, any rate she's a bit sick but she's in the sick room and we can go on, I can go and pick her up at twelve o'clock, she's in no harm.

MI I have children, it seems to me this is a higher calling. [SH Let's continue for a bit, I don't really think it ...] Well will you stop me when you? [SH When I think I ought to go, yes] please. You saw Isaiah a lot after that picnic?

SH Yes, more or less continuously for, until the following Summer, then I took ...

MI What if I may ask drew you to him? Obviously something at the picnic, some sense of suddenly getting the point of this man or ...?

SH Oh yes, we just got on very well, it turned out we liked talking about the same things, quite a lot about really books and history, nineteenth century subjects, rather more than philosophy though he was of course a philosophy tutor and I was doing philosophy. So that came up but we didn't really – we talked about philosophical personalities rather than the actual problems, yes

that's my memory at any rate and that goes on until the Summer and then I had to take schools [MI This is the Summer of '36?] Yes and we went to concerts quite a lot in London.

MI And when you met him you'd see him in his rooms at All Souls or [SH Yes] he'd come to your digs?

SH No, I'd go to him on the whole. He did come to our – he knew all the people independently of me, Jeremy Hutchinson and somebody called David Wallace who was killed in the war who was my closest friend and Ben. He knew us all, if we gave a party he came to the party and we were rather joke figures to him as being, knowing all the Dons and so forth and so on and we formed a Club called the Florentine Club which he thought was a fairly snobbish institution, intellectually snobbish. [MI Why were you called the Florentine Club?] Because it was given to painting, I agree because of Ben and Jeremy who knew – or Kenneth Clark, people came and read papers and it was a bit priggish to put it mildly at any rate in Isaiah's eyes, less so in mine. [laughs] And it had a final party at which Maurice Bowra came and I can't remember who else, I mean people such as – one rather thinks that Osbert Lancaster did but – any rate a group of such persons, and that amused Isaiah, all that. And then [MI Did you take schools in the Summer of '36?] Yes and then we made this plan to go to – which he must have described in detail [MI To Ireland] to Ireland, yes with Con O'Neill.

MI He was talking about it to me yesterday and said you went to the Blaskets.

SH That's right, to the Greater Blasket Islands, rather frightening because we went in a coracle I think, they're not actually called that in Ireland are they? Anyway it was a coracle, there is a name, a technical name and they're propelled by a man standing rather like a Gondolier at the back – are there two men? I can't remember, with long poles but the sea was very very rough and of course one

was aware that Isaiah is not a swimmer and Con and I were both aware but he didn't blanch in any way but the men played it up you know to frighten us deliberately and shouted a great deal.

MI Because you didn't have a common language, I mean these were Irish ...

SH Well I think they understood but he must have told you the story about Desmond Flower and all that? [MI No] Well there was a man – but you must check up with him because he's accurate and I'm not – I think called Desmond Flower to my belief who was in Dublin and a well known Dublin intellectual who specialised in the, in [Urse?] to put it roughly and they were very anxious, he was particularly anxious that we shouldn't make the Blasket Islands a tourist centre and he knew very well that Isaiah wrote for *The Spectator* or something or – any rate was sort of liable to appear in public in some way or another with an account of the Blasket Islands and at that time a film had been made of [MI By Flaherty] No – oh yes, Flaherty, yes that's right, *Man of Arran* and that had ruined their place [laughs] I mean everybody flocked there; therefore – hence the story he told you about the people putting on a performance? He must have done [MI Yes] Yes and singing the *All Souls* song and all that? With Con and he did, he taught it to me? Well that arose ...

MI He didn't tell me about the *All Souls* song, what he said to me was that they, as I recall, he said there was some difficulty of communication which was broken the following morning on a walk when he sang a capella the first movement of some Beethoven Quartet [SH laughs] that's his recollection, and the woman then burst into some form of spontaneous song in reply and it's possible the *All Souls* song ...

SH Well then they said they would put on – my memory is, but you should always back his against mine, my memory is [MI Why?] well because he's more a historian than a philosopher, that's why;

my memory is that they said they were going to put on a show, would we do something too? Which sort of persecuted us in a way and we walked miserably round Ireland, I recall the three of us saying what can we do? All consumed at least, I and Isaiah certainly consumed, Con a little less, with self consciousness. I mean we might have been able to sing something if no-one else was there but in front of our peers, it was – any rate we then sang I think the All Souls song. They did a sort of curious shuffling, I don't know, but that's my memory of it and Con loved the birds which of course Isaiah didn't. [laughs] There were wonderful birds there.

MI And Con did imitations of the birds?

SH Yes. He was a bird man and he was a terrible romantic, it was a little unfortunate that, I didn't realise it. Isaiah did but he was in a kind of romantic frame of mind about Western Ireland [MI Yes, Isaiah was not] Well no, no he was not, not really, he was amused, we had a lot of amusing episodes I mean as we – he was reading Bouvard et P,uchet in Russian and in an Irish bus, a Russian translation of Bouvard et P,uchet, how that came to be I do not know, you must ask him. But he has a great fear as you know probably, or he's probably told you both of drunks and of moths, anything that blunders and it really was once or twice quite awkward in the bus because the buses would stop outside some key place and in would get these frightful Irishmen as I think [laughs] you know, shouting away, perfectly friendly but nonetheless there was this very surprising figure in appearance but also reading a Russian book but they didn't know it was – how could Bouvard – I've never thought of that you see – be translated? It seems very unlikely. Will you ask him? [MI (laughing) I do find this terribly funny!] Well it's very surprising that Flaubert should be translated, at least that particular Flaubert.

MI So then Isaiah would then recall in horror ...?



SH Well we were all standing up and he obviously – well he did his best, yes but one could see very well that shouting at Irishmen was not his form, where you got this sort of heartiness that Americans can so easily do with the Irish like Houston and those people, not exactly Isaiah's form, not then at any rate, not even now perhaps. So that was awkward, then we arrived at [MI Bowen's Court] Bowen's Court and then the drama, I don't think you want to go over that again. The drama unfolded.

MI I don't want to take you through it at enormous length except to say that I've read Victoria Glendenning's account, I've read Elizabeth Bowen's letters to Isaiah [SH Oh you have?] Goronwy Rees's letters of a highly disingenuous character to Isaiah, I've read Isaiah's letters to Mary Fisher on this, I've got a kind of four or five cornered – I'm just wondering what you made of it, very briefly. What did you – let's ask a different question – what did you know at the time that it was happening? This was now in September '36 as it were.

SH Well I did not know the degree to which Elizabeth had been half in love let us say with Goronwy. I didn't really grasp how that was a serious thing. On the other hand, on the first night, I do recall Rosamond – we were playing this Consequences game with Rosamond and I hate paper games so it's in my mind and John Summerson and – oh, a delightful man, homosexual [MI Yes I know exactly who you mean] at any rate we were all sitting round and I remember very clearly Goronwy sitting on Rosamond's chair like – and I could see that Elizabeth disliked it and I was aware that something was going on and, but yes I was aware that something was going on and when Con left we all had a feeling, well I mean Isaiah and I both had a feeling he was leaving a ship which was certainly in difficulties, we were well aware of that. And then came all the dramas and the letters and so forth later. That's all I was aware of.

MI I'm just wondering what you – because you came to know her terribly well ...

SH Elizabeth? Yes I had enormous admiration for her, much more than Isaiah really. There's a short period for Isaiah, this is what he said to me so he must have said it to you quite recently, when he was at New College later, both before and later in '37 and so on, when Elizabeth was a lifeline to him because that was an unhappy, uncharacteristically unhappy tract of his life in New College; he didn't – these rather awful fellows and atmosphere and so on didn't suit him and going to see Elizabeth was an escape and he was then very fond of her [MI This is when she was in Headington or when she was in London?] when she lived in a house called Waldencote yes, not the later houses. There was a house called Waldengcote where my brother used to go and see her when he was an undergraduate. Any rate then it was an intimate relation but it declined over the years. It did not with me. I mean he remained a friend of her but – well after all we went to – it was the '37 Salzburg and it was still existing then. After there was really quite – I don't think he knows this but she was really quite offended when she came back to Oxford that – it wasn't as bad as David Cecil but – Isaiah has this very episodic character, I don't know if you've noticed that, that once a thing is over, it's over for him rather and although he saw Elizabeth it had become ...

MI That's a very shrewd remark of yours. He acknowledged to Mary Fisher that he regarded his life rather like a kind of series of passenger coaches connected by couplings and each coach represented a period of his life and you could cross over these couplings with great difficulty but he acknowledged the sense in which people were compartmentalised almost by [ethics?] and then people would, not be dropped exactly [SH But they'd pass out you see?] they'd pass out and you feel that very much happened with Elizabeth?

SH Yes, it happened with Elizabeth and of course she was offended, yes. She was a very haughty lady. He couldn't be bothered, I mean he didn't mind seeing her but he didn't go out of his way at all and she was a widow and alone and – it was true she had a constant lover but yes, and I used to see her at all times because she came to America a lot and then I used to go – she was a heavy drinker which is something congenial to me so I used to go then when Ritchie came down and we'd have these boozy evenings I enjoyed very much with her, she was a wonderful person to talk to in that sort of way, tough, [laughs] yes military tough, yes I remember it was rather awkward once when we were all at Princeton, she was earning money teaching and we used to see her every day because my wife liked her very much and they got on; but she couldn't stand the anti Vietnam war, she was a woman of the right really in all ways and also a Protestant, went to Church, that was quite an awkward thing for some of us. [Laughs] But yes, Isaiah is like that, for example over Wolfson which absolutely absorbed him for two years, he could hardly think of anything else when he was setting it up you know, which was perhaps a major episode in some ways in his life. Now it bores him [laughs] I mean he looks glazed if you talk about it though I regard it as a staggering achievement. That's not his view at all and so yes, it's true that he does, I mean some of the Americans felt that, Nicky Nabokov for example felt it terribly, he was the most – not that Nicholas had any right to complain because he was often rather malicious about Isaiah and usually to people who promptly [?] themselves ...

MI Agreed by the sense of having been taken up, of having been a close friend for a period and then ...

SH Well he really thought he was a very close friend and then Isaiah was bored by him, he just was and of course he had – you knew him probably? [MI No I didn't] Oh I see, well he had a ...

MI I go back only about fifteen years of this, not very long. It's an odd connection. My father was [SH A pupil of his] at St Paul's and then at New College, St Paul's as a Russian refugee in the 1920's and then was a Rhodes scholar at New College in the late thirties, he essentially had a connection over seventy years, it was not intimate and not close but it was the basis upon which I [SH Came to know him, yes] kind of from the early eighties.

SH I just thought your father might have – no I suppose he wouldn't have known him. Any rate Nicholas felt that terribly. Isaiah even would go so far, which was very bad, to turn on the television when he was there and so on and it really outraged him. It is a feature which he himself of course as usual is quite well aware of, I mean a lot of his American friends were intimate and then sort of rather – except in the case of Nicholas where I think there was some positive resentment, I think that either the Hofmannsthal or somebody maybe, maybe around somebody repeated something Nicholas said and he [ ] not to like that. I mean [ ] not to forget that and yet he moves in a world where of course that's happening all the time. [Laughter] But there it is.

MI There it is. I wanted to return us to the narrative because in effect we've got to September '36 and I wanted to talk a little bit about your election to All Souls which came at this point [SH Yes] and the role if any Isaiah – I mean it was a result he very much desired. I'm just wondering in what sense he ...

SH He wasn't an examiner, he wasn't, no. All I know about that I suppose is that at the Queen's Hall which is a very thirty-ish memory, the Queen's Hall. I went to a concert with I think John Pope Hennessy, I think so, a figure of those times, not a very nice man but still. He's still alive [laughs]. We went to hear Strauss I think, my memory is that it was Strauss was the conductor and Isaiah was there in the old Queen's Hall and in the interval he said, 'I think if you stay home on Saturday, you will hear something to your advantage,' which you're not supposed to say to a candidate.

That's all I remember and then – did he ring up? Probably, yes probably, that's all I remember about it. Oh! And I wrote a letter [MI You think he did ring up?] I do. [MI It was Isaiah who informed you?] I think so, I think so, I believe so. And I wrote a letter during the exam describing my experience talking to the fellows at dinner, that I remember happened which – you know there is a dinner that you go to, sort of social thing and I think he kept that letter because he said he came across it. That's all I remember about that. [MI How could you write a letter during the exam?] Oh after the exam not during the exam, no, after the ...

MI You did say during and I thought this man is a prodigy of sang-froid [laughs] and self possession!

SH [laughs] No, no, no, no, I think the thing occurs long after the exam, I think so, and then I just described what Richard Pares had said and Geoffrey Hudson and so on and he turned up this letter the other day. That's all I remember. Then ...

MI Did you experience the election and the process of entering All Souls as a tremendous sort of difficult rite de passage or did it seem a kind of natural succession?

SH Oh no. I was very pleased, I was very pleased because it solved the problem, it solved the problem of what one was going to do or be. [laughs] I mean that ended it so that it was very – and I by no means thought I would infallibly be elected. I thought I had a chance of being elected but I mean there were people there – any rate there always is about All Souls, I can't remember whether Hugh Trevor Roper or who – but there were sort of obvious persons of – I can't remember whether he was that or the year after, the year before. Any rate, so I was just very pleased and it solved a problem and also it was sort of that I knew I could be OK at, I mean that I felt it fitted in some way. The next thing which is significant in Isaiah I think is the Thursday meetings in his rooms. He was a friend both of J.L.Austin and of Freddie Ayer and these

were the two so to speak most prominent figures of the time in philosophy among the young and he was the only person who could have brought them together plus one or two others of whom I was one. And he's described all that, that's been written and that was – and another thing that ought to be stressed which I think is very important, that he did write articles, two or three? two I remember, I remember their content which are extremely good. [laughs] I mean I say that in terms of surprise because I think he really, analytical philosophy, his gifts were in another direction but the fact is these articles were extremely good. I mean I don't think, partly because of the war everything any of us wrote then tended to be, it dropped a bit. But people [MI He had real talent] He had real talent, yes, and they were on untrivial subjects and they were enough, argumentative enough or detailed enough which they might not have been. You would suppose that – Gilbert Ryle always said about, had a phrase which I present to you because I think it's rather good. He said that as a philosopher, Isaiah was a touchline philosopher, very typical of Ryle and that's true but ...

MI For the benefit of someone who is not a rugby player [SH Soccer] or a soccer player, what do you think that means exactly?

SH That he didn't come forward with a thesis or a – which written thing attempting to establish some position which would be associated with his name, that was not how he operated. He would talk about, with extreme shrewdness and perceptiveness about various other philosophers and what he wrote, which of course was not much I mean in quantity at that time, would take off from other people's theses and correct them slightly, not slightly, correct them.

## MI TAPE B5

*Conversation with Jenifer and Herbert Hart, 7 November 1989*

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### *Side A*

MI Professor Hart, Jenifer Hart on November 6th 198- number 7. Got to get the basic data right. 1989. You first met Isaiah in 1928.

HH In 1928, yes. He's two years younger than I am and he came up to Oxford two years before me. He was at Corpus, I was at New College and I think I first met him at the undergraduate's Philosophical Society which was called the Jowett Society and certainly I first had any conversation of any length with him there; I may have met him in the street before, been introduced, but that's where I first – and we became friends quite rapidly.

MI Can you tell me just a little bit about yourself, what I need to know about your own biographical background before you – what kind of person you were when you came up to Oxford? I mean in sociological terms.

HH Yes, right. Both parents were Jewish and we were brought up, I and my two brothers and sister, fairly orthodox but in the North of England, in Harrogate in Yorkshire where my father had until – he migrated from London in 1900 when he married and first started a business, a Furrier's business in Bradford and then my mother couldn't stand that so they moved to Harrogate and there he started a business which became a very successful Ladies' Tailor, Ladies' dresses and furs and he – it was very successful for a time, he went to Paris every year and bought models and took me with him and that was that. The house – they became fairly prosperous after a time and he had a passion for building houses which he built

[ ], there were practically no other Jews there at all and so I was brought up very largely in a non Jewish society. My father ...

MI But you said it was an orthodox ...? What did that mean?

HH That meant largely no bacon! [laughter] I mean largely no, the dietary thing – there was no Synagogue, it was such luck, I hated it all, there was no Synagogue but on the High days, Day of Atonement and New Year, we went to Bradford and took rooms in the hotel [MI And went to Synagogue there] and went to Synagogue and fasted. I didn't fast until I was thirteen, Bar Mitzvah, [laughs] I won't tell you anecdotes about me but anyhow that was probably all you would want ...

MI And were you inclined to philosophy when you came up? Tell me a little bit about your education just so I know ...

HH Well I was, after three years, unhappy at times at a Jewish house at an English Public School in Cheltenham which was absolutely – I loathed every moment. I was just about to run away; my father said his business was going down and he had to take me away and sent me to the splendid Grammar School in Bradford which I adored. I was a Classical scholar and I got a scholarship at New College. My – one of my bothers was previously at St John's, he'd also been at Bradford Grammar School and I was a Classical scholar and interested in Ancient History and vaguely interested – I knew no philosophy but I got interested in ideas of that sort.

JH Perhaps you'd already read Spengler?

HH No, not till I was at school, I then met – yes, you're quite right – we had a very strange intellectual Master, he wasn't literal, he wasn't actually a first class scholar and he was mad on Spengler and he introduced me and I became wildly excited by it and ...

MI What was it that excited you?



HH Oh the whole huge cosmic sense of history [MI The sweep?] Yes, the sweep and I just swallowed it more or less whole, actually wrote, whilst still at school, an article in the nineteenth century [ ] on Spengler and I ceased to believe as soon as I became to do philosophy in Oxford but I was carried along by this. I knew he was an excellent teacher, very unlike ordinary school teaching ...

MI This is roughly the kind of person you are and I can already see that there's certain analogies between your background and Isaiah's in some sense.

HH Yes. My parents were very, my father was a very English sort of person though both my parents were born in England but then I have one ...

JH Your grandparents came over didn't they?

HH Not all, but three of my grandparents came over, one of my grandparents had been here, the family had been here since the late eighteenth century.

MI Right, so that's different.

HH Yes, oh yes but I had a passion for the country, not Isaiah's thing at all, I couldn't bear to live anywhere else but England. I love travelling and so in that way it was rather different from Isaiah's.

MI Yes; but what kinship when you met him at the Jowett society and you became friends, what ...?

HH Oh it was ideas, yes and also the enormous entertainment of his conversation because he seemed to me to have been born middle aged, you know he was like a person already established in a sort of way, and great gaiety, intellectual gaiety.

MI Did you feel sort of, when you say he was middle aged, did you feel sort of callow and young in his company or did you feel ...?

HH No, no, he never put one down in any way, never. I felt that there were depths there that I was incapable of plumbing but he ...

MI Did he strike you as a European figure? I mean someone from a very different non English milieu?

HH Yes, there was a sense of Europe as compared with my rather English background. I adore as I say the countryside and I was very happy with a lot of friends at the Grammar School and so on ...

MI What books was he talking about? Can you remember what kind of ideas and books you did talk about?

HH He would, if I raised it I think, he would talk about Spengler if I wanted him to but he really talked about Marx and of course I got interested. I knew nothing about him at that ...

MI He was talking about Marx in '28, '29?

HH Well he would talk about the sweep of history and historians and ...

JH I rather doubt that, that he was talking about Marx in '28, '29 but I don't know, I wasn't there.

HH No, perhaps that's wrong. I had the sense somehow, perhaps I'm just reading it back, that I should try and understand Marx through him, I certainly got that from him at some stage.

MI You meet as undergraduates; what kind of physical impression does he make on you, I mean what does he look like?

HH He looked very much as he does now I think [laughs] [MI And what does that mean?] Well he was plump, he was much plumper than he is now [JH Really?] Oh yes, he was fat at one time, yes. [MI Bespectacled?] Yes he wore spectacles as I do. [MI Was he already sort of baldish?] No, I think he had a fairly – I can't really remember – but I think he had a fair crop of hair, yes. [MI How would he dress?] He always seemed to me to be unlike me and – I dress very badly – but he seemed to always be wearing a suit which is fairly rare amongst undergraduates at Oxford; the notion of him in Oxford bags is not really a real one [JH Or a tweed coat] or a tweed coat.

MI Did his and your Jewishness emerge very early as a point of commonality?

HH No we didn't talk about it much except I expressed astonishment you see? I reacted against the whole religion at about the age of twelve, I ceased to believe and went unwillingly to Synagogue with my parents and no doubt crudely said and thought that it was all nonsense and I hated the – my father brought over the, I forget what the English is, from Bradford to teach us Hebrew on Sunday afternoons in our own house where we'd spend beautiful Sunday afternoons learning Hebrew which I never absorbed at all. No, we didn't discuss – he let me feel that he valued the historic, the history and the connection with the past and of course he knew an enormous amount about it, I mean I remember the amount he knew if you tapped any question about it, it seemed to me fantastic.

MI He seemed in other words very close to his Jewish past at that time?

HH Well he never let me think he believed at all but he went to Synagogue.

MI Do you think he was in some sense closer to the religious doctrines than you or did you detect any difference between your attitude to Jewishness and his attitude?

HH Oh well I mean I wouldn't go and fast and so on and all that and he did; and when one teased him about this, he'd say, 'No I don't believe but I like the sense of continuity of the past,' this tremendous thing which he kept – and I say, 'You're carrying it a bit far, aren't you?' [laughs] and he would say – I remember once a bit later when we were in Switzerland together he said, 'What does being a Jew mean to you?' And I said, 'Well I like my Jewish friends and I think it's pretty marvellous what they've achieved and done but I have absolutely no feeling that I want to be further in.' He said, 'Oh no but the extent to which you're Jewish is to some extent a function of what other people think about you, and you can't get rid of that so it doesn't rest with you how Jewish you are.' I remember him saying that at [Caen?]

MI Yes, that's a perceptive thing to say as well. Do you have any more general remarks to make about what it was like to be a young Jewish man in Oxford in 1928/29, what did it feel like?

HH Yes. In my case there was absolutely no difficulty or unpleasantness at all. I only had one ...

JH Of course most people recognise you as Jewish [HH Well I freely said that I was] if your name – I know but I mean it is a bit different from some people.

HH Yes but there was no unpleasantness at all. You would think that if they didn't think I was a Jew they wouldn't very much have dropped anti Semitic remarks in my presence but I had only one out of the four years 1926 to 30 that I was here, I only had one incident and that was an extraordinary one really. I'd got great friends with a curious South African boy who was a son of a rather well known Headmaster in Cape Town, who came to New College

at the same time and we became quite friends and in those days as an undergraduate you could lunch in your own room and ask friends and I gave a luncheon party and asked him and in the course of conversation he talked about being friends with I think all the [Kaffirs?], South Africa and [blacks?] and I said, 'Oh why do you have any feelings about this?' I was very naive and he said, 'Oh well I don't like it but I'd rather sit down to lunch with a [Kaffir?] than with a Jew.' So I said, 'Well you are sitting down to lunch with a Jew.' And he was so embarrassed that we more or less left the party and that was the end. That was the only anti Semitic remark made in my presence that I heard in the whole four years.

MI But anti Semitic remark or not, would it also be possible to feel at Oxford in '28/'29 that you were still in some sense apart?

HH Yes, I still all the time didn't have – well of course I never went to Chapel and all that ...

MI And these places were very, in a sense, that Chapel was still very much the centre of College.

JH Men's Colleges, not women's. [HH Yes! (laughs)] When I come to Somerville.

HH Yes, the Chaplain – he was quite friendly to me – I once [], also in some sense the Bursar, but he never, never, there was never anything unpleasant. I can't conjure up feeling about any more than I did at my Grammar School where [] known about the Jews.

JH Well of course a lot of the undergraduates were presumably certainly agnostic if not atheist, weren't they? [HH Oh certainly] So I mean in that sense you weren't any different. [HH Yes, that's true] They weren't all keen Anglicans.

HH No, no, no. In fact there was a Society – [] Oxford something, what was it called? – which sort of non conformist and he called

on me once, he didn't know that I was a Jew and said I felt how awful it was that is but I didn't have any reaction. I think we ought to go across ...

[*Short gap in tape*]

MI I'm resuming after lunch with Professor and Mrs Hart. We're really still talking about early undergraduate days, '28, '29 [HH Yes] I'm wondering whether you can recall political conversations with Isaiah from the very early period as undergraduates?

HH No, didn't have any I think really. I mean I was some sort of liberal, I remember debating societies at school and I was sort of liberal candidate.

JH You weren't terribly interested in politics were you?

HH No I wasn't, no. [MI And he wasn't interested in politics?] Not at that phase, no. So we talked about philosophy quite a lot.

MI When you say that, I mean specific technical questions in philosophy?

HH Well philosophy was done then, it wasn't all that technical, rather large scale questions about Aristotle and Plato came up and so on. I can't recall the detail of any philosophical conversations.

MI I want to widen the circle. Who else are you aware of as being his friends in this very early period, '28/'29/'30 before you go down from Oxford?

HH '28 to '30. Well he knew Spender I think who was more or less contemporary, in fact came up between me and Isaiah. Other ...? [JH Maurice not around then?] Yes, yes but I wasn't in Maurice Bowra's circle at all but I don't think he'd got on to Isaiah's as early as that. Goes blank. [JH David Cecil?] Not then, later. You see he

was at Corpus – oh there was a man called Dickie there who was a lawyer [MI Last name Dickie?] Yes, D-i-c-k-i-e and one of my contemporaries at school was there whom he knew but he wasn't great friends with him. So I don't really have – rather strange people whom he knew from his family were brought into my [ken?] through Isaiah at that period, there was a man called Rachmilievitch, I think I met him then through Isaiah, liked him enormously.

MI What kind of impression did he make on you, Rachmilievitch?

HH Oh sort of [ ], chattery and very charming.

MI That must mean you had connections with Isaiah in London or you would see him in London as well as at Oxford?

HH I think he brought him down to Oxford, I think so. No, when I moved to London I did see Isaiah a bit in London. [JH But that wasn't till ...] '30, I went down in '30.

MI I want to return to the political question. '29, '30 is ... [HH Hunger marches] Hunger marches, the Crash, all that stuff? You know you're saying this passes by the window of the [ ] far away, is that what you're saying?

HH Yes. I remember I went to, in my third year, I went to earn some money by tutoring, son of a wealthy Wykehamist, the College said he needs tutoring in the vacation, would you like to do it? And I stayed at this rather grand country house, [ ] near [Radlett?] and there the whole talk was about going off the Gold Standard and how the Socialists are a terrible menace and so on. But I felt sympathy and then of course before I left, just as I left school there was the General Strike and I didn't feel any inclination to join the strike breaking.

JH The Hunger Marches weren't until '32 [HH No, '29] No, there weren't hunger marches in '29.

MI No I think my question implied only that there'd been a stock market crash in the beginnings of the depression, I don't think I implied hunger marches – I think the Jarrow march actually is quite late, it's '36 but be that as it may. I wanted to flesh out a little more what you did with Isaiah? I mean apart from talking, did you go to concerts [HH No] did you share music at all?

HH He had a gramophone with an enormous horn, simply fantastic, do you remember it? [JH Yes indeed, he gave it to us at one point] He gave it to us at one point and I used to listen to records in his room. But I don't think I ever went to his room in Corpus, I don't think I went to it when he was an undergraduate, no I didn't, I'm sure I didn't. [MI So you would meet in ...?] when he was a lecturer at All Souls in '31 I should think and I saw him there quite a lot because I had a lot – my Wykehamist contemporaries at New College included Douglas Jay who was one of my closest friends and he was going up to All Souls and Sparrow had been my contemporary too, so I knew a lot of people who were at All Souls, I was unsuccessful myself getting there and I had another friend called Ian Bowen who's dead now and I used to see Isaiah there quite a bit.

MI Let me back you up just to round out something else. I wanted to get a sense of what your philosophical training consisted in as an undergraduate.

HH Well we had, there was a very remarkable teacher of philosophy at New College called H.W.B. Joseph, hot water bottle Joseph. He was half Jewish but his father converted early and become a Canon of Rochester Cathedral of all places, and he was a tremendous, not bullying but severe teacher with a tremendous sense of the strict meaning of words, all that later linguist people deny and one word, one meaning. But I enjoyed him, I found him



stimulating and I worked away and he was a very good teacher of that sort and frightfully conscientious. He taught Jenifer's father at one period way back and he was a fellow of New College and Isaiah, when he became a lecturer at the College, he hated Joseph, he thought he was death. [MI Why?] This narrow restricted view of philosophy, dead revisionism and so on. I found it curiously more stimulating but that was my training. [MI Stimulating because it was precise?] Yes, it was precise and he wrote a book on [ ] and Logic which I still think is a very good book and I got wildly excited by that. He opened up things I'd never conceived of in a very clear fashion, he was incredibly clear though it was rather rigid, the whole thing. That was my training largely; and then there was another, the man who subsequently became Warden of New College called Smith. He was just the opposite, he was relaxed and easy going and rather vague and the two together were a very good mix.

MI Would it be possible to suggest that you have a fundamentally different intellectual temperament to Isaiah's? That your interest in precision and that kind of clarity and that kind of precise meaning of words is rather different than Isaiah's [HH Yes] much more expansive ...?

HH Yes certainly there's a much wider and deeper vision, oh certainly.

MI Well that's not necessarily what I was implying. I was implying the comparison was favourable to you.

HH I see. Well, no Isaiah was never loose in language exactly but he would say things, huge generalisations would come out which appeared not always to be warranted – I think you feel that more than I do. (to JH) [MI Did you twit him about that?] Yes, yes, yes, a bit. [JH Even then?] Yes, I queried it, yes I think so.

MI Did you ever feel in awe of Isaiah as a young man?

HH No. He was too – I mean one felt the radiation of generosity and goodness. I mean the thing about Isaiah that I've always thought, that he's as good as he is clever which is rare.

JH Do you remember Elliot [Filkin?] saying this? There's a great friend of ours called Elliot Filkin and we said, 'You must meet this fantastic man, Isaiah Berlin, he's so clever.' And when he met him he said, 'But you didn't tell me how benevolent he was.' It's a very rare combination, to have someone who's so clever and yet benevolent ...

HH No I can't recall the detail of what we talked about really I'm afraid. There were a lot of jokes [MI Ah!] tremendous.

MI Do any of those come down to you now? [HH I don't think so] So the least characteristic remark games now are recording for all posterity. [HH I see!] [laughter]

HH Well that wasn't – that was our invention. [MI That's your invention] No. I met Isaiah in some very peculiar settings sometimes, we often met at a caf, in Soho with other people, friends of Isaiah's, I can't recall their name, and there had dinner together when he was at – before the war at All Souls, went back to Oxford. I was a barrister. Perhaps the most uncharacteristic setting for Isaiah, I don't know if this is worth saying, I don't know if you've ever heard there's a chalet in Mont Blanc on which for a hundred years now has been used for reading parties for Oxford undergraduates, above St Gervais du Bain, do you know? [MI No] It's underneath the Mont Blanc massif and this was built and set up by [M?] Urquhart who was a Victorian figure, upper class Catholic, who one had an idea of uniting the Papacy and the [Califate?] and he used to have come to him high up on the Alps for Summer sessions, Priests from the Catholic Church and Mullahs from the Mohammedan. Anyhow his son inherited this, became a fellow of Balliol, and then used it for reading parties. [MI

In the vac. or in the?] in the Summer yes, and it continued and the wonderful records of the young Macmillan playing some kind of ball game against the wall of the chalet; and imagine '33. I went there with a younger fellow who'd taken the management of it on and there were about fifteen of us, and we knew that Isaiah had been travelling in Ruthenia and I had an address and so we sent a telegram inviting him to come. And he did come and I was sent down, I knew him better than anybody else there, to meet him at St Gervais Les Bains which was down below and then there was a walk up, quite a stiff walk up, and so we went and had dinner at the hotel and I explained the walk up and 'Oh you're expecting me to do that!' he said, 'I'll do it if we can stop at every corner.' So about ten o'clock at night, there were about three thousand feet to go, we started on this journey and he insisted on stopping at every turn of the road and he went on talking the whole time. The consequence was that though I was in splendid training, I'd been in the Alps for some time, I was absolutely dead when I arrived, he was as fresh as a bee. [laughter] And for all his dislike of the country he was able to stand it for about three days.

JH And he manages not to notice the country, doesn't he? [HH Yes he doesn't, it's true]

MI That's also a story about his quite extraordinary vitality. [HH Yes, it is extraordinary, yes] Now you go down, I never know whether you go up or down to London, you go up to London, you go down? [HH You go down] You go down to London, you train as a barrister [HH As a barrister, I was called to the Bar in the beginning of 1932] Right, and you see him occasionally? You said you saw him in Soho caf,s?

HH Well he would suggest meeting or most often I would come up to Oxford at the weekend to stay with one or two friends and sometimes with him.

MI And he's elected a fellow, you are not. Was that very galling at the time to you?

HH I didn't mind Isaiah being elected instead of me, no, no I felt that was absolutely right. No I wasn't galled, I was rather sad, I rather wanted it but I soon came not to want it. I very early got a rather large practice at the Bar which I wouldn't have done if I'd stayed at All Souls for a bit, I would have delayed all that. So I was in a way quite pleased. No it didn't rankle at all, I was just rather – because I'd been told by my tutors that I would get it and so on, led to believe. No I wasn't.

MI I'm asking this question out of order really but perhaps I'm asking a question now about your undergraduate period together: in the constellation of your friendships, would he be among your very closest friends, or ...?

HH Well in a way I felt tremendously, that one could be tremendously intimate with Isaiah I felt but I saw much more, more often because of the way in which your College concentrated partly or Wykehamists like Douglas Jay much more and other ...

MI So you saw them more but you felt none the less that if the occasion arose you could be very ...

HH Well the whole Jewish side was open to me, it wouldn't have been comprehensible to them and so on; and he was very interesting, I mean I could ask him questions, he would interpret one's background – one of my grandfathers was – I forget the English word for it – Head of the London Orthodox Community, my paternal Grandfather, great Grandfather was Head of the London Orthodox Community and excommunicated the Liberals. [MI Oh really] Yes, he could interpret all that for me and so on.

MI Interesting. Did you – you still saw him when you were in your practice in the thirties but would it be true to say that you [HH

Only intermittently, not regularly] you were less intimate in the period through the thirties ...?

HH Well intermittently as I was saying. It was very easy to feel intimate with Isaiah and pick it up again immediately after that. This was the thing about it, great warmth was the ...

MI [To JH] When did you two meet, is this in this period? [JH He never remembers]

HH 1936, right? [JH Yes] [laughter] [MI Where and when?] In Cornwall at – I don't know if you know the Oxford Institution of the Reading Party? [MI No I don't] [JH It wasn't a reading party!] No wait a moment, I'll tell you. The chalet which I've mentioned was the site of reading parties where you got together a lot of young men and – only young men – and then you walked in the, worked in the morning and walked in the afternoon and such reading parties were held in Cornwall and then Douglas Jay I think gathered the idea of assembling some of his friends like [JH Including women] including women and I went then in Cornwall.

MI [To JH] And what were you doing? Were you an undergraduate at that point?

JH No, in 1936 I was between being an undergraduate and going into the Civil Service and I had a year – I was too young to do the Civil Service exam, so I had a year when I was still living in Oxford [ ] and studying various things and preparing to do the exam.

MI And you're already politically active at that point? [JH Oh yes] From when?

JH Well I was always interested in politics because my father was very interested in politics [HH He stood as candidate for Oxford once] well he stood as a candidate for Oxford in 1910 before my time but even in the 1920's I think I was very interested in politics.

We lived in Paris [ ] the Reparations Commission and he was interested not only in International politics but also still in home politics, he was still a keen Liberal and I was very devoted to my father and took over all his ideas, not totally uncritically but partly I suppose, and ...

MI I should ask you the same question, I ask you [HH] to define yourself sociologically and I'm wondering whether you could do the same in terms of your background and where you come from?

JH Well my mother was a sort of minor Scottish aristocrat, rather keen on her connections with the Duke of Athol and that sort of thing, she was called Murray and in the end they were minor County, quite poor and there were five daughters and none of them went to school as girls didn't in the '80's, '90's, so she was formally uneducated but in fact very artistic and managed to train herself as an artist and she was extremely clever at embroidery and all sorts of artistic activities. My father came from a very different background; well his father was in [ ] masses in the Chinese [ ] and they were reasonably quite well off whereas my mother's family wasn't, they'd lost – they'd never had any money, gone. He wasn't very rich, my father, but compared with this, quite well off. Stop me if I'm going into irrelevancies. My father was a clever boy and went to Harrow and got scholarships and got to New College and gained a prize for open College, he didn't teach or anything but then went to the Bar, about 1870 he must have gone to the Bar, early nineties I suppose, Chancery Bar, you see I'm committed to the Chancery Bar [HH New College too] admiring my father I suppose and he wasn't terribly successful at the Bar I think, he made a very unfortunate first marriage which was a complete disaster and they didn't speak for ten years and he finally married my mother in 1910 and [ ] war he went into the Home Office, he tried to join up [ ] he went into the Home Office as Legal Adviser and was obviously very well thought of and they asked him to stay at the end of the war but in fact he became a legal adviser to the British Delegation for Reparations Commission in Paris. So we all

moved to Paris in 1920, there were by then four children, well five really because [ ] and he was an intellectual, very clever, very – well sharp wasn't he? [HH Mm, good Classical scholar] and very well read on a wide field, marvellous library. [MI How long were you in Paris?] Well the family – about ten years but the last two years I was sent to a boarding school in England because he knew the Reparations Commission would end ultimately and they thought we'd better be rooted in some sort of school in England.

MI And then when he came back he settled in Oxford?

JH In Oxford, yes, but while I was at school in England we still went of course to Paris or abroad for holidays except we always had this Cornish house and stayed there. So we were quite well off and my father was very happy in this job, very privileged and he went to Geneva a lot and The Hague and I was terribly interested in his work and [HH He was an International lawyer] Yes he became an International lawyer, a combination of the Bar, perhaps the Home Office because he was on [ ] to the Home Office and he wrote a number of books and articles and was very keen on the League and was really one of the originals of the creators of the League. So I was very much involved with all this and ...

MI And so your maiden name was?

JH Fischer Williams, well Williams really, he was called John Fischer Williams and I was brought up to think that war was just the most awful thing there was and I was taken to the [ ] and shown the [ ] of the eighteenth century. But he wasn't a Pacifist but he believed that International disputes should be settled by law, that was his great thing. He was only sixty in 1930 when the Reparations Commission packed in and they had to move back to England and he was offered various jobs but he was rather haughty and turned them down unfortunately. He was a great friend of [?] who was Permanent Secretary to the Lord Chancellor who had Patronage and he was offered a County Courtship and various other things

but he somehow refused all these and built a house in Oxford and thought he'd have lots of friends there and would have an interesting life. But it didn't turn out quite like that because he'd lost his salary and had a private income; then there was the world crash and he had five daughters who were all educated privately, I was at university, and then International chaos began going very wrong so he became incredibly gloomy understandably throughout the thirties which slightly coloured my [ ] at university and – is any of this relevant?

MI No this is all relevant. I mean there are very few people who are as important to my biographical subject as the two of you so the more I know about you, the better really.

JH Well I don't know, some of this is not perhaps relevant, I don't think Isaiah's life is it?

MI But when did you join the Communist Party?

JH The Summer of 1935. I'd just come down from Oxford and throughout my political career I was a keen liberal, at school I stood as a Liberal candidate for the election of 1929 [ ] could conquer unemployment [ ] didn't precisely get returned when I was at school but the Fascists did less well than me. [laughter] And then I moved to the Left in the early thirties and abandoned my father's liberalism but didn't really dare tell him because he would have been rather upset I think, he didn't much like Socialism I must confess. And so when I was at Oxford I was, yes I was a member of the Liberal Party at Oxford to be fair, first year or so, and then I became Labour but I was very much wrapped up in the decommissions union and worked for that a lot and used to go round giving lectures about [ ]. Well then I went to – a friend of mine at Somerville said, 'We're running a camp for unemployed people, unemployed miners in Wales and people from the East End of London and we're running a camp near Oxford. Would you like to come?' Well in fact in was run more or less by the



NUWM which the Commies dominated which I didn't really know at the time, I was fairly naive about the Commies I think, not that I really regret it, so I thought well it will be interesting, I was very much more concerned with domestic things as I ever was because Herbert and people like Isaiah I think only really got interested in politics with the International crisis and they got very political this time in the thirties but it was all International affairs whereas I was always much – also upset about poverty and felt terrible guilt about being reasonably well off and that sort of thing. So I went to this camp and I was in a very emotional state, I'd just done schools and [ ] to do well and I immediately fell in love with an unemployed milkman and broke all the rules and went to sleep in his tent and [laughter] it was all very romantic and we all met unemployed miners and we used to sing songs and there were people there like Philip Toynbee and [?] Charles and quite a lot of Communist undergraduates who obviously hoped to get me in and it wasn't very difficult. I suddenly saw that this was great because you were wanted and it was a closely knit organisation and guilt then could go because you were part of – not exactly part of the working classes but on their side so you didn't feel this worry that you were privileged, silver spoon in your mouth. So I joined up fairly easily really.

MI I want to know, I want to connect your stories together. When do you meet him? You meet him in Cornwall at the schools in ...

JH I met him in Easter of '36. [MI And this is Summer of '35 that you were talking about?] Yes. So I was a Communist then and about to go into the Civil Service if I got in which I hadn't done the exam yet, and I was going to be a secret Communist in the Civil Service not a Russian spy I hasten to say, that never came up. But I was terribly naive as you can well imagine and really ingenuous about it all but I somehow thought that I would somehow help the Communist Party in some way and – well originally when I joined the Communist Party I said, 'Oh well I won't go into the Civil Service,' it seemed to me you couldn't be a Communist in the Civil

Service; I wanted to do social work or something but they said, 'No, fine, wonderful, you can go in and you'll be useful to us.' But I still didn't really understand what they were at because I, when I was interviewed by the Civil Service Commissioners I said I wanted to go into the Ministry of Labour because I thought you could help employment or something and they said, the Communist Party said – no, the Civil Service Commissioner said, 'No, it's a rather inferior ... [short break in tape] ... the Minister of Agriculture, well the Civil Service Commission again said ...

*Side B*

JH ... why not a great Department of State? And so I said, 'OK, Home Office.' So they, ironically, their views and advice – my father had been in the Home Office and I knew a lot of people there and so it was going to be also a cosy round and anyway that was fine.

MI So you were in the Home Office from when to when?

JH From '36 till I finally left at the end of '47. I meant to stay for life of course because I was very keen that women should go into the Civil Service, very few had gone in in the upper grades and I saw myself as a sort of pioneer and I would certainly have stayed for life if: a) I hadn't met Herbert and Herbert hadn't moved back to Oxford, but when he came back to Oxford as a Don – well I stayed on in London for two years thinking I was going to stay there for good but then it was rather unsatisfactory living in two places and I had the children in London and I was then rather bored by the Civil Service, I wasn't appreciated enough and so I abandoned it, having arranged a job in Oxford and sort of thinking it would work. But to go back to my view of – I thought Herbert was rather frivolous about politics [laughs] and he and his friends were always making jokes against God which of course I was an Atheist but even so I thought that wasn't really very necessary; and I remember going for a walk – there was a man called Norman Brown, you

probably know him, you know Norman Brown? [MI Yes I know him] who was a very close friend of mine and he pooh poohed Herbert and that lot and said they were very juvenile going on about jokes against religion, there were more important things that I ought to be doing. Still I didn't feel he was altogether soul mate, not especially committed to my politics. But he was moving. [laughter]

MI When were you two married? [HH In the war]

JH Well I wasn't allowed to get married in the Civil Service, we came at it, were man and wife in '37, I moved into his digs, it was very uncomfortable. As a woman in the Civil Service you weren't allowed to marry but I finally got permission by chance in 1941 by which time I wasn't certain I wanted to marry anyway, I wanted to see life and remain independent and so on, but I decided I wanted to have a child so I thought I'd better get married and so I managed to get permission somehow and so we married in '41. [HH Inaudible, then Got in by Jenifer] ]

MI Got in by Jenifer? [HH Yes]

JH They were being revealed to Chapman Pincher and all that lot.

HH You know that there was a libel, did you ever hear about? [MI Yes] I gave a broadcast about being a Communist and [JH This is totally misunderstood] totally misunderstood picked up by the Sunday Times which produced a leading article saying, 'Wife of MI5 man is KGB agent [JH Says she is: 'I was a Russian spy says wife of MI5 man'] So we started a libel action but didn't pursue it. They produced a feeble apology and I then became aware of the enormous risks of a libel action.

JH When I was in the Civil Service and a Communist, they didn't know, they never asked you about politics, you must know [ ] and all that, I never told any lies and I became fairly disillusioned with

it, became disillusioned with it fairly soon after about a year or so, the strain was rather great feeling I was double crossing – but no, I never actually did anything because they never, never asked me to do anything.

MI The Communist Party never asked you to give them information?

JH No. They told me I'd got to wait for ten years, I heard this on the broadcast which I was very relieved about. I'd got to get really accepted, join all Social Clubs and that sort of thing and get completely accepted and look fairly like being so I wore a black hat, rolled umbrella, cape, tie. But I used to have to go and see a contact every three months or something like that who would ask me or keep an eye on me [HH Change taxis wouldn't you?] and unfortunately one of them was probably a KGB agent unknown to me. [MI Who was that?] Well I don't know his name because you didn't have names. [HH He was a Czech wasn't he?] Well I got this vague impression, I don't know, MI5 had tried to make, they showed me about a hundred photographs, I really don't know but I think I met him about twice and he was very fishy, he made one take taxis and get out of them and take another taxi so you were covered.

MI When is this? Is this in the thirties?

JH Yes, late thirties, it was in '37 I should think; and I didn't like this really because I saw myself as this rather idealistic person working, going to work for the British Communist Party somehow. Well I was always very doubtful about a lot of it. [MI What were you doubtful about?] Well I was doubtful about even the morality of having a revolution and secondly the possibility. [HH And what about the trials?] Well the trials too because we didn't know all about the trials because if you were worried about the trials – I remember having discussions with friends of mine who were Left wing but not Communist and we were very worried and thought,

well perhaps we don't really know, perhaps it's better than it looks but no, I was worried about them, there was a great deal to know but we didn't know, maybe we could have discovered more. I didn't have the wool pulled over my eyes, I mean I read the [ ] communism [ ]

MI I wondered, to switch briefly to you at the risk of breaking this thread, to ask whether it is true as your wife suggests that you are essentially politicised by the deteriorating International situation in Europe in the thirties or that that's a kind of not how it happened.

HH Mixture, I mean I felt that certainly the whole spectacle of the Nazis, Fascism made me think a bit more about politics but it was also about this time people like Jay who would have been at Oxford with me [ ] Labour and I talked his language, so a gradual process.

JH No I agree there, quite a lot of your friends and acquaintances at the Bar were inevitably fairly right wing weren't they? Well I mean people like Sparrow, Wilberforce [HH Oh they'd be very upset perhaps] and so that – but I mean you weren't, not that you were right – you didn't see politics from a right wing angle but on the whole they were fairly unpolitical but if anything, on the right.

HH I knew nobody who was very active in politics at that time except I think Douglas really, Douglas Jay.

MI Two questions again of a certain grinding obviousness but at what point as a Jew did you suddenly feel, Boy, this is terrible what's going on in Germany, this is really – this affects me, this is a menace, this is more than just a bad regime, this is ...

HH Curiously enough, Jay had done a lot of journalism, he was on the Herald before he went to be a Communist, he had been on the Times, and he did a lot about the [ ] trying to get the English to see what horrors were going on, or would go on under the Nazis, and that appalled me. I didn't feel a depressful menace, I was really

unrealistic about that, I somehow never felt, didn't particularly to come home, I just felt terribly angry about people who were being persecuted in that way.

MI Second question is whether you can recall at any period in the thirties at any time discussions with Isaiah about what was happening in Soviet Russia?

HH No, I don't think I did. No, no. We'd talk a lot about the Nazis [MI But not about the Soviets?] Not to me, not to me. I got the feeling that he was full of misgivings and apprehension about Russia, Soviet Communism.

MI And at some point before lunch you said it's to Isaiah that you owe the feeling that you ought to acquaint yourself with Marx [HH Yes] and your wife said no, it didn't happen that early, it must have happened later.

HH Well it depends, I think I got on to it because Isaiah was writing this [ ] book on Marx ...

MI Yes, he doesn't begin doing that until '33, '34 until after he's a fellow at All Souls. I wanted to ask you about the trials and whether you can cast your mind back to '36, '37, '38 and did you read about them in the newspaper, did you discuss them in the cell, did you ...?

JH Well being a secret member I never went to a cell [MI You never went to a cell] I wouldn't like to. The moment it was decided I was going to go into the Civil Service, I was not meant to have any contact with Communists and that from my point of view was disappointing because one of the attractions was to meet working class people on the basis of equality and so a couple – no, but one discussed them with one's friends, I mean I discussed them with my friends. We have a group in the Civil Service which was of left wing people, they were mostly older than me and they had a Club

and we used to read papers to each other, we called it the [?] as a joke, most of them weren't communists at all; and amongst those sort of people, Andrew Cohen, they all [ ] Civil Service, amongst those sort of people, yes we were worried yes, I think we didn't shut our eyes, I think we read about anything there was but we were not very clear how much there was in the British papers.

MI But you don't have a recollection of any moment when you thought, God something really terrible is happening here and here, you know, old Bolsheviks, heroes of the revolution were being sacrificed?

JH Well how soon was that known in England? Was it known before '38? Yes I suppose it was, '37? Well one went on I suppose thinking there must be some good reason for this which we don't know, we didn't want to believe that the whole thing had gone wrong I'm afraid.

HH Perhaps like Mrs Webb, you can't make omelettes without breaking eggs.

MI Yes. Some omelettes, some eggs is all I can say. [laughter]

JH Yes but I mean there was no actual moment when I said I'm not a communist any longer, I just faded out, I don't mean the trials and what was happening in Russia generally contributed to this.

MI When would you date your fading out? [HH Inaudible]

JH Yes, Herbert had some influence on me, it's true because when we were living together from '37 onwards, he thought I was pretty ridiculous and really mad and I used to struggle all the time to read the Handbook of Marxism which I didn't altogether understand and didn't much like a lot of it and he punctured a good deal of

this. Well I always think I started weakening probably the end of '37, certainly in '38.

MI When you say 'punctured', what was it that you punctured and how did you do it?

HH Theories of historical inevitability and so on, the whole lingo of the way in which the course of history was described.

MI But that's exactly Isaiah's line on those subjects [HH Yes] but it doesn't sound as if you get your line from Isaiah.

HH No, I don't think I did, I think it came through anyhow, I don't think so. As I say, maybe but I can't remember discussing much about Communism with Isaiah before the war.

MI Now let's move into the war. One of you said either earlier that it was – it was Jenifer got the job in MI5. Now what happened?

HH When the war came I was on the Officer's reserve and I was called up, they found I'd got a [ ] murmur, it was quite harmless and they wouldn't take me.

MI Sorry, a murmur – a heart? [JH A heart murmur]

HH So I had to go – I wound up my practice and had to go back and there I was earning a lot of money with all my friends away fighting or in the Army or in jobs, I determined to get out of it. I tried to get into this that or the other and then Jenifer was Private Secretary to the Permanent Head of the Home Office and every day the Head of MI5 used to come to sit in our ante chamber waiting to see the Permanent Head talk to Jenifer and one day said, 'Do you know about a young man who could help us, who can't get into the Army?' Jenifer said, 'Yes.' [MI 'I do actually!' laughing] And so I got in and within a week I was handling what I maybe didn't [JH Within a week after I'd mentioned his name I may say,



there was no checking up at all] and within a week of that I was handling what I did for most of the time I was there, the decodes, the German decodes which were top secret; [JH It shows you how slack they were about] and then a terrific row broke out because already when I was immersed in all this stuff and knew all the secrets, they discovered that I was living in Douglas Jay's house and they had, madly they'd got a warrant to open all letters going to that house [JH Where I was living too] Yes but it was on Douglas Jay ...

MI Because Douglas Jay has a reputation for being a kind of fire eating left wing ...

HH Yes, tremendously not only anti Communist but anti everything foreign and absolutely fantastic and was the most incredible patriot, I mean terrific. And so they held their [ ] when they discovered I lived there. I managed to convince them that it was all rubbish.

JH Well they first of all came to me and said, 'We like this man you recommended, he seems rather clever,' and I said, 'Yes, he is rather clever,' and they said, 'But is he all right?' [HH Good person to ask!] [laughter] And I said, 'Yes, he is.' So it was unbelievable.

HH Absolute comedy, I never stopped laughing. Anyhow ...

MI But they didn't – you're saying they didn't even know that you lived together? [JH No]

HH Did they not know? [JH No of course not] No, no of course not.

JH I said, 'Why are you asking this?' and I think they said, 'Well isn't he living in Douglas Jay's house?' because I was living there and I thought oh God, they've got on to me – since I had nothing

to hide because I'd never done anything, but still they were aware of me.

MI Who else are you working with in MI5 during the war?

HH Liddle was the sort of person I saw, Guy Liddle, do you know the name? [JH Recently denounced] Dick White, he was a great friend, I was his number two in all those sections, [?] Jones a bit who became Head of the Office later, [JH Anthony Blunt] Anthony Blunt who shared my room for three years, I'd known him a bit before the war.

MI What impression did he make on you?

HH I was going to say that was one of the things this libellous article got hold of. Well I mean I knew he had been a communist, was a communist still I thought, I was interested in his conversation about art, he was frightfully illuminating, very good art historian I thought. He was a cold fish, I always felt that, cold fish and he was very friendly and we were both members of the Reform Club, I used to lunch with him quite a lot. He wasn't the kind of person I very much liked but I admired his elegance and so on and I didn't think that he would do anything bad during the war. He attacked in conversation the government, MI5 and the government for not handing more secret information across to the Russians, especially these decodes which we got to our concern all the communications about the Eastern Front and it was quite plain to us that there was going to be an attack on Russia, a German attack on Russia.

MI Now when did you get those – this is of intense interest to me for various reasons because one of my uncles was in Military Intelligence [HH In England?] Yes and felt passionately that the Soviets weren't getting information so I'm sympathetic to this – but sort of May, April '41?

HH Oh long before that, yes. I mean we had the constant flow of this stuff, though I was only responsible for those aspects of it which concentrated on secret German activities whether counter espionage or espionage were involved, sabotage, but mixed in with it all there came a lot of stuff about the Eastern Front and there it was plain to us.

MI And where is that traffic coming from? This is radio traffic?

HH Radio traffic certainly, yes from various outposts to Berlin. They had a network from Berlin all over occupied Europe and all over the occupied East and the messages would come back from the outposts to ...

MI The outposts being Poland [HH Poland or – yes, certainly] and the messages are simply describing troop concentrations?

HH No, merely concerned, because this was only meant to be things about secret activities, they would describe the arrival or departure of agents and so on but they would also say what was going on in the area or something.

MI How much of that did get to the Soviets before '41? Nothing presumably because ...

HH Not as such, no, but what Anthony did was to try and hand it all out and the great danger was that it would blow the source. The worst thing he did in the war was to endanger the source. After the war the reason why you would find some difficulty shaking his hand was that after the war when he knew Philby was at the top of the Secret Service, he kept mum and Philby was sending people to their deaths which [ ] and so on and knew all that and said nothing because he couldn't disclose that without disclosing himself. However that's Anthony's job.

MI Would it be true to say that when June 22nd 1941 comes, the British Intelligence community is – someone like you would have been taken none the less by surprise?

HH No. We used to discuss with Dick White is anything going to happen. No when it broke we were sitting in the garden in Jay's house in Hampstead on the Sunday.

MI When do you hear it first? [HH Then] On the wireless? [HH Yes] Do you remember what time of the day? I'm sorry to go on with this, this is nothing to do with Isaiah ...

HH No [laughing] I remember sitting in the day, it must have been about midday I should have thought on the Sunday.

JH One other person he met in MI5 who's been quite important is Victor Rothschild.

HH Oh yes saw a lot of him, we became friends, I knew him a bit before and his wife who was working in MI5 [JH Well she wasn't his wife then] No.

MI Now Isaiah's in New York and then in Washington, occasionally back across the water, what contact do you have with him during the war?

HH I'll tell you a comic story about it. Isaiah was in New York for a bit, yes and then he went to Washington and he rang us up and said, 'Look I'm coming home.' I think this was in the winter of 1942, no 1940 when the bombing was on and he said, 'Could you put me up?' We lived in Douglas Jay's house [MI Where was Douglas Jay's house, just the address?] Well Walk, Hampstead, and Isaiah arrived and marvellous seeing him and so on and he disclosed that his main reason for trying to stay with us is that he was feeling terrible guilt in not being exposed to the bombing in Washington and he was hoping to get a good night's bombing

which it did, there was an air raid that night and he gasped with relief, 'Ah!' [laughter] That's a true story.

MI How much is that serious and how much is that Isaiah being ...?

HH Self caricaturing ; well he certainly felt uneasy about not sharing what he thought were our tribulations [JH Well I think a lot of people in America did, a lot of English people] Yes, he did certainly, that was serious. Whether the gasp of relief at the bombing was serious I don't know! [laughter]

MI Did he talk about his war work with you during that visit in '42? Can you remember what he said about being in the Embassy?

HH No, I think he let us know that he was writing these weekly things which I then got hold of and had a constant supply and in fact ...

MI How did you get hold of them? I thought they were much more restricted – well you were a senior chap, I don't mean to slight your eminence in the least but ...

HH How did I get hold of them? [JH Perhaps he sent them to you?] No, I think I was able to ask and got them in MI5.

MI What did you like about them? Or what was good about them because I've seen a published edition of them.

HH Oh they've been published have they? [MI Yes] Well it was the personalities described and the complexity of the political scene was all made intelligible, I thought that they were wonderful. [JH They were so unlike usual [ ]]

MI Was that the only visit you had with him during the war, the one in '42?

HH I doubt it, I don't know. [JH I was trying to remember, I can't remember, honestly] I can't remember, I can't remember any other occasion that stuck in my mind. I think he telephoned to one the last time one was, just [ ] concerned.

JH But you presumably know how often he came over?

MI I think I do if I look back at the tapes, now I can't remember, I seem to recollect two or three visits.

JH I mean we probably saw him every time he came, I think he would have looked us up.

MI But it's the '42 visit that you remember particularly?

HH Well just because of that yes, you see he was seeing his parents who were around the corner but I think they'd gone in the country to ...

MI They'd gone to Oxford. I meant to ask you that, we got ahead of ourselves. Your parents come down from the North to London in '39 and so you meet his – they live close to Isaiah's parents? [HH they didn't know each other] Ah, they didn't; but you meet Isaiah's parents [HH You see I had met them before] But in what circumstances do you remember meeting them first? [HH Meeting who?] Isaiah's parents.

HH He asked me home, Isaiah asked me home or I think I probably met them in Isaiah's room in New College, before the war when they came up to see him; and then when he was staying with his parents – and I can't remember whether this was during the war or immediately after it – I used to go and see him. He got ill once, there was a girl friend called de Bendern and she was there at that time. Mrs Berlin was obviously very apprehensive and I [MI Apprehensive of what?] In case he married her [ ].

MI What impression did both of them make on you? [HH Who, the old Berlins?] The old Berlins.

HH Well as I say she was a formalist Yiddisher Momma but she was intelligent too, and small and compact, one felt a lot of energy there, she was in many ways like Isaiah and I thought her a pretty tough intellect I should have thought. [JH Probably it makes her sound more aggressive than she was] No, no, she was a bit of a snob, I must attach that my forbears came from [?] from Poland and before that she'd said of course the Russian Jews are aristocrats, the Poles were far lesser and I said, 'Well my ...' [laughter]

JH You must tell him the story about the school report.

HH Oh I see, well. Yes, when Isaiah – I got into trouble with Isaiah because somebody else had published this and had it from me and Isaiah said, 'Well I don't think it's true,' but it was true. No, Mrs Berlin said to me, 'You know Isaiah, when we first came to England from Riga, we lived in Sydenham and Isaiah was sent to, at the age of six, sent to a full Dame school and the first day he came home and said, 'Mama, I understand nothing, I shall never make any progress,' and she said according to her, 'Oh you wait my child, it will be all right.' At the end of the term his reports came and there was Isaiah top of English and everything else and then she said to me and I repeated this and then it was published by somebody who heard it from me, she said to me, 'Meester Hart,' she had a very strong Russian accent, 'Meester Hart, my husband kept those reports in his office in his safe and then there was an air raid and the safe and the office was destroyed. Can you tell me where I can get a State Archive copy?' [laughs] [MI That's a wonderful remark] Well Isaiah ticked me off for this and you told somebody that I [MI But you heard it, you stand by it?] Well I couldn't have invented it.

MI Well that's a story about immense filial piety and pride. [JH Oh well she was] [HH Absolutely, yes and more about [ ] Gentile]

MI Now when you come to their house, did you have the impression that you were going into a Jewish family?

HH Yes somehow, there were the [?] on the wall. [JH Oh they were very Jewish] Even in my parents' house there were [?]. [MI But no prayers, no -?] Oh I was there several times on a Friday night and there was grace which Isaiah didn't usually say. You see he's always had a [?] light up here and I've tended many of those.

MI What impression did Isaiah's father make on you?

HH Well he was bubbly, excitable, something of Isaiah's volubility, fairly superficial, happy rather it seemed to me, gay, obviously very affectionate to Isaiah but more sort of airborne than I would have expected, less grave and so on.

MI What kind of couple were they? They were obviously radically different temperaments.

HH Yes, I think she had a kind of motherly attitude to him. [JH He wasn't an intellectual at all] No, not at all. He was clever, bright not not an intellectual.

MI One of the surprises I found as Isaiah talks about them, is that he is in some ways fonder of his father, actually more affectionate about his father who he thinks of as a rather light weight figure but who he I think loves in a much more uncomplicated way than this mother who's obviously much more intense and dramatic influence on his life but from whom he feels a good deal of much more ambivalence.

JH Well she was rather demanding wasn't she, which his father wasn't really.



HH My mother died and I was very fond of her, shortly before his parents died and I richly sympathised with Isaiah so that I felt when my mother died that I didn't sense the roof had blown off and he said that's exactly how I'm now feeling and he went on about this, exposed to every wind and nothing would be the same, much more than I felt. He was obviously ...

MI But she died very late didn't she? [JH Yes] So he was already in his fifties when he's saying the roof has blown off. Some people have said he was sort of mother fixated. Did you ever feel that?

HH No, I wouldn't have thought so. I never discussed her or his relations with her, no. I think he may have been bullied by her a bit.

JH But he never reacted against them in a sort of classical way, he was always incredibly nice to them, he spent a lot of holidays with them although he was bored by them at times, I remember him saying that.

HH Well not everybody reacts as you did to your parents, I didn't at all. [laughs]

JH It's very usual to go through a phase of reacting against your parents which I'm sure he never did at all. [MI There was no rebellion] No absolutely not; and he was very kind to them though fed up at times because they demanded to see him a great deal and it obviously wasn't terribly fulfilling in a way.

MI Well let's move forward, unless there's some other thing we should cover, to the sort of post war period of '45, '46. You come back and become a fellow of New College teaching philosophy and jurisprudence [JH & HH No] Just philosophy. [HH Just philosophy] You become a tutor and you do revisions, do you do supervisions together?

HH No, all the thing we did together was in the Summer Term before the degree exams, it's common to get your pupils who are in for the exam together for a weekly session in which you can discuss anything, they can raise anything, they don't have to write an essay and they might also have a regular supervision; and this was a thing we did together, two hour sessions a week and they were hilariously funny and we used to take one concept each week, space one week, time the next, causation the next, responsibility the next. Isaiah was very good at that, I mean when he got away from detail [laughs] he was at his happiest and he did give lots of people a kind of stimulus in their last term.

MI But how did you operate in the same room, I mean I think of you as complementary in certain ways but very different. He takes up a lot of oxygen, Isaiah, when you're with him. What's it like to teach with him?

HH Well this was not the regular teaching, it was rather different but it was open to anybody to raise any question. Who would like to ask the first question? one said and start off, then one would chip in. But Isaiah was very good, he didn't dominate.

JH Yes I always thought that one of the differences between him and Maurice Bowra of which there were many probably, was that if you started saying something if you were talking with Isaiah but if he was talking and you began saying something, he stopped and listened to hear what you were going to say; whereas Maurice would – did you ever know Maurice Bowra? [MI No] would stimulate him to shout you down, don't you think that's true? [HH Yes] Whereas although Isaiah is a fantastic talker, as you got to know if you begin saying something, he does stop and listen. [MI He's not a bad listener] That's what I mean. [MI That's the surprise I think]

HH There's a certain tendency in his conversation to become a monologue.

JH Well yes but then that's partly one's own fault of one doesn't break in. But it was impossible to break in with Maurice.

MI But you felt in your teaching, just to be clear, that it was fun teaching with him, that he didn't dominate, that you worked well as a ...?

HH Oh yes, certainly, certainly. He was losing interest with philosophy, technical philosophy.

MI Can you, from your side, account for that or explain how that happened?

HH No, except I now see that the kind of philosophy he might well have thought was a terrible thing. I mean he wrote a great essay on what was called counter [?], 'if', when you might think that 'if' had – was an exhaustible subject and wasn't much connected with the greater 'then'. And I felt that he felt that and that nobody was doing the history of ideas in England at least as it ought to be done and that he really had a niche which rightly he thought he could fill and it was too sterile and too narrow. He got excited over the early days of logical positivism as much to show its shortcomings as to welcome its positive contribution.

MI Did you feel at that time that, as you began to your serious juris prudential work that he was someone you could talk to?

HH No I never worried him, I thought he would be bored to distraction, I don't suppose he'd read my books, I shouldn't have thought so, I'm sure not.

MI So it's not an intellectual companionship outside those classes that you did together?

HH Not a scholarly companionship, no, I mean in a sense I suppose we talked about ideas, yes [MI Not your ideas in your field?] No, I was much more interested in his work than he was in mine, I shouldn't think he was interested in mine at all. Bentham, about whom I wrote a book of essays, would be a hollow figure to Isaiah [laughter] and of course there's a lot to be [] by that. But no, no, no, no, it's [] that I don't want [] though I did do things a bit about, they're in a collection of mine called, 'Essays in Philosophy and Jurisprudence', about liberty, freedom. I used to criticise bits of his things on freedom, essays on liberty.

MI You didn't like 'Two Concepts of Liberty'?

HH Oh I liked it but I thought it was – there were things missing from it, yes, and ...

JH 'Historical Inevitability' didn't you, you thought []?

HH Yes I thought, I don't know what I thought about that.

MI This is again one of these questions of ignorance that I shouldn't come to you so unprepared but do you have on record in print disagreements with him about liberty? [HH No, I've never commented in print at all] Can you recollect now what those disagreements were, as say 'Two Concepts of Liberty' came out? What is it that seemed wrong to you about them?

HH Somehow the [] was – he didn't sufficiently, in his account of negative liberty, deliberately [] the actions of coercion, he didn't take into account that this might be quite worthless to people who were starving and who needed to have an economic background filled in. That side was too – when I raised this kind of question he said, 'Well that's not about liberty, that's about the value of liberty,' and I said, 'You can't cut in this way, it's going to blind people to important things,' that was the most ...

MI Yes, well that's a fundamental disagreement with that, I mean that's as fundamental a disagreement as you can have.

HH I don't remember pressing it much I'm afraid.

MI And that's also [ ] that shows up a fork line that shows up between your politics and his, surely?

HH Yes, I'm much more, I'm not very left wing but I'm more to the left than Isaiah is, yes, yes.

JH Well it's a bit like Mrs Thatcher going on about how we're giving people choice, freedom which isn't choice.

HH Free to dine at the Ritz. [MI Yes, free to sleep under a roof [ ] Yes, that side of the criticism I think was one he never really met. Wollheim wrote something about this on Isaiah, criticising him and so on.

JH Are you going to see Richard Wollheim?

MI I'd like to, yes. This is '46, '47, '48, '49, you move back to [JH Oxford] you move to Oxford [JH End of '47] How old are your children at this point?

JH They were born in '42, '44 and then '48 [HH And '50 and '59] and [?] was born in '59 [ ].

MI Are you teaching? Are you ...?

JH Then? [MI Yes] No I first of all had a – I couldn't possibly offer myself as a teacher, I'd never done any, well no-one in those days wrote theses. No I had a job in the extra mural [?], a vaguely administrative job called Supervisor of Studies, but I did start teaching quite soon because I realised early on very soon that if

you were in Oxford, thing to do was to be an academic because you didn't really count otherwise. In any case I was obviously interested in a lot of things and so I managed to get some teaching for the Diploma in Public and Social Administration on the grounds that I could teach about public administration at a place called Barnett House. So I slithered in like that.

HH You didn't acquire a fellowship but ...

JH Then I got a fellowship at Nuffield – and do you want me to go on? [MI Yes, yes] Well I did the extra mural thing for two years; after I was there for a short time it was quite enjoyable and then I got Thomas Hodgkin who was Head of it and was an old friend of mine who was a communist incidentally and he was covering the world with infiltrating communist tutors in an interesting way, [ ] in Africa; and we got on very well but he didn't think my heart was in the movement which indeed it wasn't because – for various reasons. So I conceived the idea first of all of writing a book about the Police for a series, a series called Town and Country, because I'd been in the police section of the Home Office for five years and I thought well there isn't a book on the police and how they're organised, so I used to leave the [ ] at five o'clock sharp every day and my great Bodleian and began writing a book which gave my [husband?] something to bite on, and then saw Studentships at Nuffield advertised and I thought well I ought to put in for one. So I was sent for by Norman Chester who said, 'Well you're too old to be a student, would you like to be a fellow?' So I said, 'Yes, that's OK,' [laughs] so I was a fellow at Nuffield for a year or so, a researcher. [MI What dates, do you remember?] Yes, that was '51. So and then I built up teaching, well I was a lecturer at New College for a year because – I mean the whole thing was very scandalous. James [J?] who you're probably going to see was a politics fellow there [HH He'd been my pupil] well he was going to go away for a term or so, I think he'd asked me already to do a class with him, I did a revision class with him and on the strength of this he was going to go away for a term – a year I suppose, he said would I

take over the politics teaching at New College and I was really not qualified to do it but it was fantastic experience. So for a year I taught politics there and then I became [MI This is '51?] '51 I suppose that was, yes and then the politics job at Exeter fell free because Norman Hunt who had been appointed had a nervous breakdown [HH Really?] Yes it's not generally known, one shouldn't say it, and so on the strength of saying I was a lecturer at New College, I got the lecture – well being a lecturer meant you taught all their people and so on, so I got a lot of teaching experience [MI At Exeter?] at Exeter also so I was extremely lucky because you jolly well learn how to teach. But this was all Modern History and Politics and 19th Century History, 20th Century History a bit and I picked up a little teaching from LMH and Somerville and I wanted to get [HH She'd been at Somerville as an undergraduate] wanted to get, wanted to become a tutor obviously but I didn't see how it would be possible because partly my qualifications weren't very good and partly because you could only become a tutor at a woman's College and there were very few jobs going, it depended on someone dying or resigning and I was in slight despair because I was earning very much less [ ] but I was earning about a quarter of what one was earning in the Civil Service of course which with a growing family is useful to have a bit of money. But then the History job fell vacant at St Anne's, Modern History job in 1952 and the family ...

## **TAPE MI B6**

*Conversation with Jenifer and Herbert Hart, 7 November 1989*

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*Side A*

MI Herbert and Jenifer Hart on November – what did we say, the 8th? [JH 7th] November 7th 1989, University College, Oxford. We're talking about the period between 1946 and the early fifties, I think the period between your return to Oxford and his marriage in effect. Can you describe, either of you, perhaps you to begin with? You teach with him. How do you see him socially after the war? [HH Oh, so when he was married?] No before he was married.

HH Well OK, he would have one to lunch at All Souls.

JH Well we lived in New College Lane, he came in to our house when he was at New College, he came in to our house a great deal.

HH We lived at New College Lane, there's a beautiful house, eighteenth century house on the left as you come round the curve, we lived there.

MI And so he was in and out quite a lot?

JH In and out a lot, yes. [HH Yes quite a bit, yes he was]

MI Is he interested at all in your children? [JH No, he doesn't dislike them] [HH No. He wasn't hostile]

MI Let me try an impression out on you. Stephen Spender said to me that after the war a lot of people began to worry about Isaiah in the sense that the monologues were becoming longer, the sense



of talking all night was becoming slightly pathological, as a person ...

HH No, I had the sense that he was unsettled and hated being a bachelor fellow at All Souls and he then asked you to find him a wife, didn't he? He suggested you might – one of your sisters might do? [JH I've forgotten that] Oh yes certainly he did, yes. No he was looking for a wife, I mean he wouldn't have made any steps but he certainly did [ ] certainly and he obviously didn't want to be a bachelor living in College for the rest of his life, hated it I'm sure, he began really to hate it.

MI And did he talk to you about that?

HH He would let off occasionally but not in any plaintive way but just in the – yes he did say what about one of Jenifer's sisters please? He said that to me.

JH Was he friendly with your sisters, Judith and – ? [JH No] Was there any period in which he came between the two of you, in which his friendship for you came between the two of you, one which Isaiah was a source of strain in your –? [HH No, I don't think so, do you?] [JH No, happy cheer I would think]

HH He warned me off against you originally if you remember, yes at the earlier stage [JH Before we were married?] before we were married and just before we were settling down to live together, he said, 'Oh you ought to be aware, what she likes is making people feel uncomfortable.' [laughs] [MI Did he really?] There's something in it, too! [laughter] And prickly she was and [JH Acid] so you ought to be aware, he said this. When I reminded him he said this two years later he was rather embarrassed because it [ ] him But he did definitely warn me, I told you at the time.

JH Yes, yes I think that's [ ] too. Oh I think he thinks I'm hyper critical and I'm always saying don't despise me for this and don't think I'm morally weak.

HH Also the communist past I think must have reflected on it. He was very anti.

JH Well I think he thought it was rather ludicrous. Incidentally when I was in the Party and hanging around in Oxford, they said – and people knew I knew him fairly well but not terribly well – they said couldn't I recruit him as a member? I thought that was very unlikely! [laughter]

MI Why did you think it was so unlikely? Here was a man who was writing a book about Marx, he had a Russian Jewish past, I mean it's not the wildest possibility that he could be interested in ...?

JH Well partly he would have thought it was all ludicrous, I mean there's a tremendous strand in him, isn't there, thinking things are ludicrous? [MI yes] And well I don't know actually why I did but I certainly did think it was highly unlikely. Well to begin with I don't think he went in for political action. If you're a member of the Communist Party, even if you're Stephen Spender, I think you're expected to do something. [MI Laughs] [HH Stephen was only a member for four days!] See what I mean? And that was one of the things I liked about it, the sense – and belonging to the Labour Party no-one allotted you a job and said look, what you do, this is how you can advance the cause but if you joined the Communist Party they were all so purist of course, you were given a niche and told this is what you'd got to do and what you'd not got to do, also. I couldn't see Isaiah fitting into that sort of structure.

MI But that means in a sense he didn't have the temperament of a true believer? I mean just temperamentally it's beyond politics [JH True believer in what?] in a cause of that sort.

JH Well he didn't believe in the cause of communism, clearly [MI But any cause] Well he believed in the cause of anti Fascism and liberty. Yes, I mean he believes, he's got passionate convictions.

MI I want to move to other more personal train. At what point did you become aware that, you know, Professor Halban and his wife had come to Cambridge and [JH Come to Cambridge?] I mean to Oxford, sorry. [HH We got invited up there quite a lot]

JH We knew them very well because curiously enough I was at school with Aline in Paris but that was just a coincidence really. I don't know, we got to know the Halbans as they were, we used to go there a lot.

HH I think we were introduced to Hans by Isaiah [JH And we used to ride Hans' horses] [MI Hans had horses here?] [JH Yes] Yes and he rode them, well he was a fantastic rider, well he behaved like a Cossack, he had these lovely horses, I used to go out and ride and he would ride them through a cornfield, across the cornfield because it stimulated the [JH It stimulated them, it tickled and so they went faster] [MI It must have stimulated the farmers who ran the fields too!] He owned them I think and this really put me off, I mean trampling down perfectly good corn.

JH And we never really liked hunts I'm afraid [ ] but anyway the horses were great.

MI Why didn't you like hunts?

HH Oh it's coarse I think, I didn't like them at all, I thought it rather coarse, didn't you?

JH Coarse not in the sense of coarse jokes [HH No the sentiments were coarse] It's rather pathetic in a way, he felt an outsider and he always wanted me to explain to him about how Oxford worked. Well in a way that was fair enough but it became a bit of a bore

and he had a chip on his shoulder about not being traditionally part of Oxford ...

HH There was a sense of Aline, then, a bit sort of disconsolate from the background, I don't know, I had a very feeble grasp of what he was like but I didn't like him. [JH You never met him?] [MI No] I didn't like his jokes, I didn't like his way with horses [JH And we went to dinner there] [MI And they were at Headington?] They had another house.

JH They had several houses. They had one right up at Barton where he owned this land, I think that was a small house, they started then in a rather more modest way and then moved, not to the present Headington House, but to the house at the top opposite [?] Lane; and then he bought Headington House. [HH Did he buy the house?] Yes, I remember him showing me round it and saying how grand it was. [HH Lovely I thought] And soon after that he was dismissed. [MI He was dismissed?] By Aline.

MI Oh yes, yes I'm sorry. When were you aware of Isaiah's feelings for Aline?

HH Not until Isaiah told me I think. [MI And when was that? I mean how...?] I don't know, I remember it was a rather painful moment because he said, 'I'm going to marry Aline,' and he said, 'You thought her a great bore, didn't you?' So I said [JH What did you say?] I think I'd said so you see before I knew [ ] ...

MI But in other words you did not find out about this affair until he told you he was going to get married?

HH Yes, I'd heard I think from Stuart that they were having an affair together [ ] and that Aline was teaching him things that he hadn't learned before, I think he was joking, something, but I had no detail of what it was really.

JH I thought we were told when we went to a senior lunch in June – they married what? In '55 would it be and Lionel Butler or somebody said to us jointly, 'Isaiah's going to get married.' I think that's right.

HH Isaiah then did sort of say something to me about what [ ] like, did say something.

JH But he was a bit apprehensive in a way at leaving All Souls and the intellectual climate, he was in some ways depressed about living in College but ...

HH Sort of starting sexual experience rather late in the day. [MI Yes. Did he talk to you about that at all?] He said one or two things, yes which I didn't [ ] as much as [ ] but yes.

MI Did he talk to you about those matters? [JH No]

HH Stuart talked to me more about that side of their thing by saying that – some such remark about because Isaiah had very puritanical standards about that to begin with and Aline succeeded in relaxing those. Yes, Stuart [ ].

MI So he gets married. Were you at the wedding? [HH No, where was the wedding?] I'm suddenly realising I'm not sure, I think it's in London. [HH In a Synagogue? I doubt it] I'm not sure. Anyway, you're not there. What do you then begin to notice about him as a consequence of his marriage? How does marriage change him and when do you begin to notice it?

HH Well I think he was calmer, I think as a result of settling down, not faced with being a bachelor [ ] which is a terrible [ ].

JH Well I think initially we saw very much less of him because he moved up Headington Hill and I think inevitably Aline didn't want

him spending an awful lot of time in All Souls [ ] and we did see less of him at first I think after his way of life had been rebuilt.

MI Do you think that Aline possibly felt some jealousy towards either of you or both of you?

HH Not to us personally but it wasn't jealousy but on one or two occasions when not only we but some other friends were together up there she said to Isaiah, 'Now here's all your old friends. Enjoy it.' There was a touch of it.

JH Well inevitably she gets very bored about talking about the thirties which is so important in his life and he loves reminiscing about all these endless people one knew [ ] their various goings on and so on. No but I think she felt a bit dilettante and she felt all these people were very clever and although she's obviously very able, she hadn't had a stringent academic [ ] as other people had and Isaiah used to say to me, 'Do be nice to her and make her feel part of it,' and so on. I think he saw there was a bit of a problem, naturally.

MI But he changed in other ways. He became a wealthy man to put it – to be vulgar about it although that clearly wasn't what was important to him about getting married.

HH I don't – yes, somehow I don't know if he is romantic a bit so I feel that made almost no difference.

MI What do you think?

JH No I think at times, at times I have felt it made a difference partly because of the kind of clique of wealthy people. Most of their friends now are pretty wealthy people and some people they only know because they're wealthy and I think this does make a certain barrier. I mean they can't actually stay in houses I suspect where there isn't a private bathroom and they're reduced to – well

they have stayed with us but they don't get a private bathroom and I think it has cut him off a bit but not as much as some people would think of course, I think that's true.

HH Yes I think she has a problem which she felt she must not upset the boat by walking into our house which is quite unused to entertaining or having people with that amount of money and so on.

JH And she's slightly reluctant to come to one's house because she – it's almost like slumming, she feels a bit embarrassed by it [ ] what she's used to in her house and home. I also think they developed a London life as a result of the marriage, much bigger London [HH They took out a [ ] flat of course] and they met then a lot of new people really, I don't think really through her connections but still having money in various circles, some of them were intellectual and interesting but some of them I think were much more London society and then they consort with the Monarchy a bit more you see. At times, if we are being critical at all, this has had some effect on Isaiah. I think his political views moved a bit to the right, he became a bit more establishment but at the same time there's always a tremendous basis of the old Isaiah, it's very much there, the other thing has been I think a bit marked.

MI What do you think? Do you think that's true, that account?

HH Yes I think so, yes. How much we're [ ], I'd occasionally come away, I don't know whether from [?] or from some party thinking how can you bear to know all these awful people? [laughs] But not very marked, not very marked.

MI One of the other things that happens to him in his fifties, in the 1950's, is that he begins to become famous in some sense [HH Yes] I mean he begins to become ...

HH So much so that in America, if people ask me if I know him I usually say I don't because they'll [think] I'm boasting. [JH At least that's in the past]

MI When do you begin to notice that he's becoming famous, I mean that he's becoming prominent, that he's becoming a sort of public figure in some sense and no longer just a very clever and interesting friend and a Don?

HH Yes. I don't know actually, I can't put a date on that. You can't pick up a newspaper without seeing something about [ ]. I don't really, I couldn't put a date on it I don't think. [MI But is this more the fifties or the sixties?] I'm afraid my memory is too [ ]. It never obtruded much from the [ ] more important [ ]. [MI It didn't intrude in your friendship?] Not at all, no, not at all.

MI What do you feel about his – we're now moving slightly away from biographical to more general – what do you feel about this, his public reputation as a sage?

HH He is a very – amongst the [ ] of College he's got [ ] to being wise I think, if that's what a sage is and if that's what being a sage means, I think it's OK. I don't know. I think all the public pronouncements he's had to make which have had weight because of his position, have been good and I'm certainly not [ ]

JH Well when he writes, his [ ] letters to the Times which he's normally reluctant to do but occasionally he probably got [ ].

HH I think it's marvellous that a person with that degree of intelligence and academic attainment should have some kind of position which the world at large who are ignorant of all these things would attribute importance to.



MI Has there ever been say a political occasion or an issue has come up where you feel he's rather flunked it, I mean he just hasn't kind of ...?

HH He's tremendously – you see we were all working to get Mrs Thatcher denied a degree, Isaiah thought it was absolutely wrong that she should be denied a degree here. And that was successful, largely not through left wing people but the scientists who for the first time in their lives trooped down to their labs to – prevented her and did. Isaiah thought this was folly and that we should regret it and has constantly said since, 'You don't know how much money you've lost the University by doing this,' and so on, he always kept on this line and has never seen the idea of [ ] making a stand to give other people and encourage other people, it was a real protest against the worse things she's done since in education [ ]. So it's a real difference [ ]

MI Did you have a kind of face to face argument on that subject?  
[HH I could, of this kind, yes]

JH Oh yes, perfectly friendly so to speak but also I mean he goes to meals at Downing Street and [ ] which we rather criticise him about, tease him about. [HH Would you accept an invitation to dinner at Downing Street?] No of course not. [laughter] Except as a communist spy! [laughter]

MI Yes, I expect that's when you'd be tempted to rejoin the Party! File a full and complete report! [laughter] People have approached him for example for rather flunking the issue of Israel, that is for being back according to liberal moderate character in the climate of Israeli opinion, critical of the government and yet perhaps more silent than he should be on [HH I see] on, you know on what the Israeli's should do for the Palestinians for example. Have you ever felt that?

HH He once reproached me and I was rather furious for signing a letter with [Strawson?] and Freddie Ayer saying about what was going on on the West Bank and so on and he – Oppenheimer here, do you know him? [JH Peter Oppenheimer] [MI No] – he attacked me and Isaiah joined in [MI Publicly?] [JH No] in his drawing room and Oppenheimer began by saying, ‘I see you’ve joined up with the anti Semites?’ [ ] attacking me, attacking [ ] and Isaiah rather joined in, it’s the only thing, it’s the nearest to [ ] corner like that.

MI My attention may have slipped for a second because what was the issue over which that conflict was momentarily? [HH I signed a letter which Peter Strawson and] yes I followed that bit and what was the subject of the letter?

HH Oh I think the behaviour of the – some kind of repression on the West Bank, I can’t now remember.

MI This would have been a couple of years ago? [HH Yes, two years ago] Quite recent. [HH Yes and I did get rather angry] [JH It was longer ago than that]

MI Well one would get angry if someone says you’d joined the part of the anti Semite even in jest.

HH Isaiah didn’t say that, Oppenheimer did. [MI But what did Isaiah say?] When I complained about it, I said I took no notice, I don’t care for Oppenheimer or what he thinks. He said, ‘You’re wrong, he’s got quite good judgement.’ [ ]

JH He’s always willing to say you’re wrong, your saying that reminds me that he constantly does say that to one. [MI Isaiah?] Yes [MI Will say you’re wrong, yes] and that was one of the great things ...

HH Somehow my mention of this quarrel but I can’t now remember, I know there is one [JH Because he doesn’t much

believe in the way ...] Oh I tell you what, it's a letter, it's coming back and this is why I felt Isaiah was making an extraordinary mistake. The letter was saying there should be negotiations and I put in the letter there should be negotiations and a settlement, International settlement in which both Russia and the United States should be parties; and I mentioned this to Isaiah that I was going to sign this and put in the point about there must be on the footing of the great powers [ ] and Isaiah said OK. And then later when the letter was published he'd forgotten that he'd had this conversation with me, I think I had, and then Oppenheimer was present and raised it and said, 'You've joined the anti Semites.' [MI I see, I see] And I forgot to remind Isaiah that he'd already – I'd told him that the whole thing ...

MI Yes it's a puzzling disagreement because lots of Isaiah's public positions would sound rather like the one's you have just said you supported. [HH Yes]

JH What I was trying to say was they – you know one of the questions you asked, in a way he believes much less in public actions or public announcements than going behind the scenes and learning all about people and getting it fixed in some way, I don't mean in a nasty way fixed but ...

HH To go back to this, Stuart Hampshire also joined in and said – of course very hostile to [ ] for obvious reasons and said, 'What does he know, what has [ ]' he said this to Isaiah about the situation the Israeli's had got to face [ ]. [MI Stuart said that? That's surprising] Well [ ] because Freddie Ayer said precisely [laughter]. So we had a bit of a quarrel but I didn't sense it as I ought to have done but look I mentioned this three weeks ago and he said it's OK as long as you put you know that any settlement must be one [MI Great powers] Yes. That was the nearest I think I've come to a quarrel or feeling angry.

MI There's been no other period in your life or your friendship with him where you felt kind of strain or difficulty or ? [HH No I don't think so, no. And you?]

JH No. I mean we disagree on some political things, for instance I'm CND and he just says, 'Oh you're stupid,' but he's very loyal, Isaiah, he likes the concept of old friends, the fact that we've both known him for a long time [ ] in a sense helps with him.

MI Oh it's very clear to me that you rank very near the top ...

JH No I wasn't really speaking personally but I mean he is loyal to old friends.

MI And actually the number – when I asked him who should I talk to among, because he knows thousands [HH (chuckling) Thousands of people!] the number of people he actually listed were very small, there were only about five people he said you really ought to talk to and you were, you and Stuart Hampshire and Stephen Spender and very few others.

JH It's a pity because David Cecil is dead, he was very important to him because quite often the Berlins say they've got no friends, it's one of their turns [ ] lists of friends. [HH (laughs) Lists!]

MI Speaking of lists we get to one of the things that I think you regard as a kind of minor defect, the lists and the monologues. [HH Yes] What is it about that that bothers you?

HH Well it gets a bit – sometimes the lists are the same [laughs] and anyhow I don't know what, it doesn't seem to advance conversation to have Isaiah speculating about who ...

MI How many homosexual fellows there are in All Souls ...

JH Or conductors or something less important, yes, and this thing which he goes in for quite a lot about who is the greatest living historian and produces those people or eliminated, constantly going on about people who are no good, if you mention someone [ ], 'Oh he's no good at all.' I get rather angry, I tell him he's totally dismissive, much too often and there's no-one left really.

MI He can be, I fear the back of his hand sometimes, I mean I fear – he's sometimes accused of being a gossip. [HH I don't mind that I think, I don't know] [laughter]

JH Well he's interested in personal relations in that sense, it's not malicious gossip is it? He's always very clear who he can say what to, not just go round indiscriminately.

HH He sometimes appears over confident, doesn't he? In some point or case he'll slap his thigh, you know as much as to say [ ]

JH Yes, he says, 'I know, I've met all the important people,' a little bit of this comes in at times [HH Yes, left wing geese] yes, geese. I think Stuart's a goose at times, he thinks I'm a goose.

MI And you think sometimes he just – what's the charge, that he lacks the courage of his convictions or that his convictions are just very much to the right of yours and therefore ...?

JH Well I wouldn't say very much to the right [HH I don't think he lacks the courage of his convictions at all] No, he doesn't, no and he's very interested in moral problems and [ ] find out that aspect of him both in personal relations and in everything, go on thinking about morality of the thing which is rather unusual [ ]. No I wouldn't think we were terribly far apart [ ] I suppose but some of his attitudes are moved to the right a bit.

MI Well that's [HH I hope there's not been too much loose talk] No, I'm just wondering, I mean I could ask you all kinds of more

general questions about him but I think for the moment that's probably where I should leave it. I'm just wondering whether there's any other story, moment, anecdote, vignette about him that you'd want to put on record or some aspect of his life that we haven't touched on?

HH [Inaudible] But the whole is [ ], you can go there in his company, he's in a sense King of the Jews and everybody coming – people pouring in to the King David Hotel where we were staying, all day when he was free to see him and he loves it, I mean it would drive me mad. he loves it, it would also kill me [JH Not because he's self important] No, no he just loves visitors.

JH He's a very modest man I think in so many ways don't you think? Especially in relationships, in relation to the status he's got which he thinks it's ludicrous so often.

MI Yes that's very charming and affecting side of him but he does love being ...

HH Ceaseless activity to midnight every night. It would kill me. I said that proudly and he said, 'Well if I stayed up it would kill me, don't you stay up,' and try and stop him. [JH But it's not because he's egocentric or something] No, no not at all, he just loves activity of that sort.

JH And he hates pomp and ceremony and he's got a great sense that he is rather ludicrous because he often talks about himself, chattering [for approval?] and that sort of thing ...

HH Well the other thing I've got down here is how excellent a chairman he was at that committee I sat on for ten years.

MI Yes, that committee just again for the record you said over lunch was ...?

HH The Rothschild Fellowships which are given to Israeli scholars to go abroad, very generous well funded thing by Rothschild money which he meant for religious purposes [ ] and he chaired this brilliantly. He's just given it up, I gave it up two years ago and he was awfully good at making clear points to the persons being examined, being a co-examiner and so on.

JH On the weaknesses side, something to do with this, sometimes he dismisses people as being boring or insignificant when they're not really [ ].

MI Can you think of an example or a particularly major example of that?

JH Well I can't think of any major but I know that some of one's friends or acquaintances, when one's said, 'Look, this is a very interesting young person,' and he'll meet them and say there's nothing to them. But I mean usually he's very right about people because one of his great things is getting inside people and having [ ]. But there are times when they're dismissed because they haven't scintillated or produced an exciting idea immediately you know? [laughs] There's an element of that I think.

HH There's just one feature, except when he had a bad illness and I think nearly kicked the bucket, I'd never seen him depressed. Have you? [JH Oh well yes] Not depressed [JH I think he was a bit depressed in New College about 1950] but he wouldn't sit and – but he had a very bad illness and he lost interest in everything, fantastic for Isaiah. Aline described it to me and he couldn't read and couldn't talk [MI When was this?] I should think he – it was some lung thing wasn't it? [JH Was that the time when he went to hospital and he was most desperately ill?] [MI In the 1970's?] [JH Yes, it wasn't the stroke trouble, well he has had some heart trouble] Yes, but I'd never seen him in the ordinary way [MI Depressed?] depressed, never. I was with him in his room once when he got a frightful attack of 'flu and he just lay inert in bed

and slept most of the time. Aline then came out to New College. But he wasn't, even then, he wasn't depressed. This other thing, he was, and Aline described it to me as she couldn't get him interested in anything for about two days. But apart from that he doesn't seem to have the ups and downs [JH Perhaps he's amused by himself?] [laughter]

MI He does seem to me to have great equanimity of character, steadiness.

HH Yes certainly and it's as if he fears nothing, not death, he can't understand anybody fearing death.

JH Partly because he's endlessly entertained, isn't he? Sometimes sees this funny side of everything, sees institutions as being ludicrous, it always gets him along quite ...

HH But also he's got a kind of basic equanimity, I mean I think this absence of any fear of death is quite extraordinary.

MI Does he ever talk to you about that?

HH Just mentioned it, yes, not [ ]. 'I don't mind a bit,' he says, 'I love life [ ]'

MI I did have two other questions, I realise, that have to do with his later Oxford career. I get a strong sense from him that he's pulled away from All Souls and feels in many senses disillusioned with the quality of the fellowship [HH Yes, yes he is]. Can you date that or give a sense of how that emerged or tell me what he's told you about it?

HH He very much thinks nobody's any good in philosophy, there's nobody any good since – he rather tends to miss the great ones of his day, so he does run them down [JH Too dismissive] there's nothing [ ] a bit mistaken; and one wonders how much that is due



to perhaps less than totally impressive personality, he doesn't pay too much attention to that and doesn't rate their intellectual gifts as he should. [MI Would he say the same of [Parfitt?]] Who? [JH & MI Parfitt?] He's got antipathy to [Parfitt?]. He does condemn, I mean a negative thing, lots of people as being second rate and so on and I'm pretty sure he hasn't really much [ ], he gets osmosis, he smells a second rate character. I definitely think that ...

JH Yes I do but it's very difficult to reconcile this with his general tolerance which a lot of people talk about him as being very tolerant and knowing lots of people and wanting to know lots of people but there are both sides to him. But this thing about not reading, yes I mean I remember sometimes being in his room and just pulled out a book and reads one sentence and he knows about this man, you know [laughs]

MI Yes, sometimes it works but sometimes doesn't, sometimes it leads him wrong ...

JH I mean some of the stuff he has written on Rousseau and George [?] he was very quick to [ ] and I think he really hadn't read the text properly. He would admit it but he would say well it didn't matter, I know ...

HH [laughs] Yes there is – that is a great failing.

MI One that he admits to, that's what makes it fairly more complicated, he admits he's no scholar nor claims to be one, although he's a better scholar than he possibly makes out. Some of the Russian work seems to me to have genuine scholarship in them. This is again jumping around slightly, do you have any impressions of him in his time running Wolfson, being a [JH Tremendous success, wonderful. [HH Yes] Why was he good at it? [JH Why? I think the main thing in a way] [HH Yes]

JH Do you mean how was he or ...?

MI How was he a success, then why was he a success?

HH Well he chaired the Governing Body.

JH Well he got all that money and fantastic buildings. Of course Aline did a great deal in terms of choosing things for the College and she would deny that but she did actually.

HH ... vitality, you impart a lot in the position of the Head of a College. We've got a chap here, a new Master who has tremendous vitality and radiates down, I mean there's probably some fallacy in this physical metaphor but it does and Isaiah does spread a kind of making people feel it's worthwhile.

JH Well all these scientists who've done nothing remotely like it before [ ] all the things he talked about and were terribly excited and interested and the whole thing went actually like a bomb. He also saw again some of the ludicrous side of it, you know ultra democratic Wolfson, he did put his foot down as you probably know when somebody suggested children should [ ] in the Common Room. [laughter] [MI Oh, I hadn't heard that story!] Yes, something about that. But he didn't mind, I mean it was, in some ways the organisation was ludicrous, I mean it was fantastically democratic with two hundred members who'd come to the meetings and Isaiah would just say, 'Well it's very funny,' and they'd pass this resolution and that resolution, it didn't really matter, things didn't go wrong, it was a dynamic meeting, it was a fantastic success I think.

HH It was marvellous to have somebody there who, if there were guests or something, you know that they won't be either bored or neglected and – marvellous, yes.

JH Yes going back to your thing about drawing away from All Souls, he is much less in academic life of course in the last few

years and used to be, I mean the mere fact that he goes to London for five days a week, the whole thing that he's not so closely connected [HH Yes certainly] because he works in the British Library a lot but his sort of social milieu is rather different than it used to be, I think this is true. But he is more critical of the fellows of All Souls, I suppose you know this ghastly young reactionary who used to be ...

MI Well what do we mean about – I'll just ask you one final question, I mean this is your chance to, I guess to say something about him that you would want to have him remembered for. I mean what do you think he'll be remembered for?

HH What will he be remembered for? Things like *The Hedgehog* and *the Fox* I should have thought which to me would fill a lot of light, many English people are interested, seeing points about Tolstoy and so on.

JH Do you mean remembered for in terms of writings or as a person? [MI It was open ended] It was open ended. Well the writings, surely would we not agree that the things about particular equal [ ] he's written about, Churchill, [HH Yes those essays] the essays, these I would have thought would last tremendously well.

HH But Isaiah will be remembered as being an academic who had a fantastically wide approach to life and art and enormously able to broaden peoples' horizons. I remember once, an Indian I think it was or was it an Israeli who read some criticism of Isaiah and made some kind of mistake you see, but you see the thing about Isaiah is he sets your brain on fire.

[Short break in the tape]

MI ... his power of analogy you're saying?

JH Yes, I think he's very great because it's so sad that so much is in the conversation, I mean there are the works of course but most of them don't do full justice to his conversational abilities.

MI How harshly would you judge the fact that there is no great single work? You complain that you've written a kind of large, big book.

HH It's not big.

*Side B*

MI ... the same is not the case with Isaiah.

HH I attribute [ ] this with myself and I can't see – I think it's a great shame that somehow his quality won't be preserved in this [ ], would it have been preserved if he'd written a great book, I don't know, that might have been incompatible with his genius really.

JH Because he didn't, he never really, I don't think he ever really wanted to, didn't see himself as doing this, he sees himself as dipping into something else, I think he probably ...

HH Right at the beginning [JH because there are quite a lot of them now of course] Right at the beginning he did have a project of writing about the intellectual background of the Russian revolution [ ]

JH Yes I remember Woodward in *All Souls*, a long time ago, it must have been in the 1930's or that time, saying to me that it was ridiculous that this chatterer just talked away whereas I really like books and of course Rowse thinks the same.

HH Oh yes, Rowse said, Rowse was probably very envious, Rowse said, 'Of course I, my success of which I am not reluctant to speak, is due to very great industry as well as my other qualities, I go to

libraries. Isaiah doesn't go to the library and take down into one note book and then transfer that to another note book, he doesn't do that kind of thing yet everybody thinks he's absolutely wonderful.'

JH Which of course now he is doing isn't he? [HH Well he's trying to] [MI Do something with romanticism]

HH Yes, these are the lectures in Washington, yes, extraordinary story.

JH But when Maurice did that some time ago, that's the sort of attitude – there are people who are pitiful in this.

HH I don't know, as long as this quality could be in some way preserved or the memory of it, OK.

JH Well the letters will do that of course to a very considerable extent because the letters are like his conversations [MI Yes, that's why they're so important] I do hope you're going to get hold of them. [MI He's thrown them all away for God's sake!] Well Herbert did not there are a lot of other people ...

HH I didn't have very many of them, I spoke to him regularly, I didn't – he wrote to me on – yes I did throw them away, yes.

MI Well let's stop there. [Short break in tape] Let me ask you about going to school with Aline in the late twenties, do you have any recollection of her?

JH Not very much. We went, it was a funny school, we only went twice a week and you went and did your prep at home so I didn't really know her very much but I have a picture of us there which I produced – no I really hardly knew her. It was a French school and you don't really make friends, you just work very hard when you're there and go away but she was obviously a quite intelligent girl. She

was a year younger than me and we were in the same form so she must have been quite bright. [laughs]

MI Will you for me again – again this may seem because I'm not attending carefully enough, you may have already said this – when exactly you first met him.

JH No I haven't said it. He thinks it was – I was talking to him the other day because I couldn't ask him if he'd seen you which you already knew, he thinks it was 1933, I think it was 1934 but it doesn't really matter very much. I was an undergraduate and he says that I was invited to a meal at All Souls with an old boy there called Turner who was a friend of my father's and sort of slightly admired me I think and invited me to lunch at All Souls and produced Isaiah. But I thought I'd met him first at dinner at the Fisher's, I used to go, he was the Warden of New College [HH H.A.L.] Yes, Fisher. Again my father knew him and his daughter Mary was at Somerville and I used occasionally go to their grand dinner parties and I was put beside Isaiah and I just thought he was the most wonderful thing I'd ever met! [laughs] He kept me in hysterical laughter most of the evening and then he used to invite me to meals in All Souls at intervals and I met Maurice Bowra through him and well people like Stuart and Norman Brown, a lot of these Beaumont Street group, you know? [MI No] Jasper Ridley. Well there was a fantastic group, very intelligent undergraduates and some graduates who were very friendly with Isaiah. This was in '34 I think. [MI Why was it called the Beaumont?] They lived in Beaumont Street, 7 Beaumont Street and it was a very lively and nice group. Two of them were killed in the war and so I saw a certain amount of him then but I wasn't terribly intimate. I was frightened of him of course because I felt dreadfully inferior and my [type of life?] was very different from his, nothing like as comprehensive and I was always frightened to be shown to be no good, you know? [laughs] But I enjoyed his company, he was wonderful.

MI What physical impression did he make on you when you first met him? What did he look like, how did he strike you?

JH Well I think very much the same as now. He always thought he was very unattractive, regarding himself as fat and he'd got this bad arm and everything, sort of cripple and he thinks he's very ugly but I don't know, I didn't really notice very much I don't think, I was rather interested in what he said and thought and ...

MI But you didn't think of him as a kind of incredibly clever and charming character who was sort of repulsive in some way?

JH Oh no, no, no because people aren't easily repulsive when their characters are interesting and come through I think. There are repulsive people but it's usually part of their character because he's so – well he's so warm and charming [ ]. No I didn't, but I think he thought of himself as repulsive, I think he thought that he could never have any relations with women.

MI Did you think of him in the early thirties, I'm talking about the early thirties now, as a sort of sexless character?

JH I don't know if I did think of him like that but I think looking back I suppose I would have, I mean I never imagined that any woman would have sexual relations with him, I think I thought that though I he's always – I mean I think you must ask him what he wants to tell you about his love life. He's capable of great passion, I mean there were girls around then some of whom I knew, well certainly two, who he was very much – very very fond of and he was capable of great emotional feeling and can fall in love. I don't know if I thought much about it, about whether he had sexual relations with people, I didn't [ ]. [MI You saw Mary Fisher in the thirties?] Yes a certain amount, I was never a close friend of hers but as I say my parents were with her parents and she was at Somerville, she was a year senior to me. Isaiah was of

course – are you going to talk to her incidentally? [MI I'd like to, yes] Yes because he knew her very well and I think if he ever got round to thinking of whom he might marry, I should think she was on the list so to speak though she was rather a cold calculating character. She never fell in love herself, she alleged to be – had lists herself about who she might marry but it's not quite the way to go about it. [laughs] But I mean he liked her and she's very clever, interesting amusing character and there was a great deal in common to talk about. We went to Ireland with her and the [?] he knew her very well. I don't think he was ever in love with her.

MI Was there ever a period when he was in love with you?

JH Well I don't know if I ought to answer that. [MI Well –] I don't really honestly know what he wants to ...

MI Well I'll tell you what he's told me. He said that you were incredibly important to him in the immediate sort of post war period, '47,8,9. He was devoted to you, speaks of a physical relationship with you, speaks of it discreetly but with great affection and tenderness and obviously owes you a very great deal and feels that without you he would not have known what, you know, physical affection with a woman would have been – is what he says. I mean that's what he's saying. I, being his biographer, I am not in a position to assess anything, I'm simply telling you what he says. So that's what I believe to be the case.

JH Well I didn't know he would have said that because I assumed that he wouldn't wish to say this but I mean it's all true actually and we had a fantastic affair which started – which actually didn't start until 1950 until he suddenly married. But it was great fun, it was tremendous but you see he was always incredibly worried about Herbert and didn't want to hurt anyone, he was very tentative and doesn't want to hurt people and it was a very difficult, tricky situation. But Herbert never knew though because I was interested to know whether he was going to reveal this. Isaiah always had this



feeling that he must be truthful because [ ] and it's one of these great things about him and about Russians I think in a way, too [ ]. And at one time he thought he must tell Herbert, he couldn't go on living with a lie because we were all living near each other and he was constantly in the house, they had room opposite each other and I was in Isaiah's room and [ ] which was rather exciting of course and most extraordinary and so one time he went to Herbert and he said, 'Look, I'm in love with your wife.' Do you know what Herbert said? 'It's not possible.' [laughs] [MI Really? And what did he mean by that?] Well he's always regarded – well I don't know, I suppose he meant it was impossible, I mean it's rather funny.

MI I mean it could mean various things couldn't it? I mean it could mean simply ...

JH Well it could mean no-one could be in love with my wife because she's so awful, how could one ...?

MI It also could mean, 'I'm in love with my wife and that simple precludes her being in love with someone else.'

JH Oh he didn't say I as in love with him, it was obviously 'I'm in love with her,' he didn't say anything [ ] about him. No I think Herbert meant how could anyone, because I'm obviously the sort of person with whom one could fall in love with but not actually in that situation. But Herbert is – you know, he's not really into personal relations. Anyway that cleared the air a bit because Isaiah felt he'd done his stuff and Herbert didn't seem worried. Then I think he did it again another summer because this went on fairly, it lasted really five years, quite a long time and I think he came again next summer and so Herbert said to me, 'Isaiah goes mad every summer. He says he's in love with you,' [laughs]. I said, 'Oh dear.'

MI This would have been down in Cornwall? [JH No, no, in [ ]] So where is this – I thought – so where is this? Is this in Oxford? [JH Yes] Every summer you said.

JH Yes, every summer, I mean July or something, and Herbert said something comes over him obviously in the summer, he thinks he's in love with you but again he didn't rush to decide and so that was all right I suppose. Herbert as you saw never, well nothing did destroy my relationship with Herbert, Isaiah never suggested I should leave Herbert and marry him which I think it would have been unsuitable anyway because I think I would have felt inadequate to marry him. [MI Why?] Well because I'm not up to him intellectually, well I'm not saying I'm up to Herbert intellectually but his intellect is very different from mine [ ] in the matter of marriage but I wouldn't be able to cope somehow with his sphere of interests and anyway I didn't want to leave Herbert, partly I was fond of him and with children, I mean I've never wanted to and I think I'd have been very worried if Isaiah – but he wouldn't have because he, you know, he thought it was totally wrong [ ].

MI It's difficult for me to know what's actually germane to this biography or not so I may ask questions that may intrude on your privacy but I'm just wondering how the affair started, whether it was his initiation or yours or how it happened?

JH Well I'd always been very fond of him and I think he's always been quite fond of me but there were times when we'd never see each other and it wasn't, it obviously wasn't fair at all. Well I began seeing more of him when I came back to Oxford and there he was in New College and we lived in New College Lane and we both saw a great deal of him and we just became much more interested in each other. Well I mean what actually happened was, he was lying in bed [ ] and I think Herbert said, 'Oh you'd better go round, Isaiah says he's got ill and wants someone to look after him,' it was all very open and I think I went round and he was lying in bed and he just suddenly pulled me down and then we were away and for him it was incredibly exciting because nothing like this had ever happened to him before [ ] and so for him, I mean it was terribly

important to me, too, but in a sense it was more important to him because it was his first, as far as I know, physical relationship.

MI Well he is quite clear about that, he's quite clear about how important ...

JH And I think, well he in fact said to me that if it hadn't been for his affair with me he wouldn't ever have seen himself as marriageable and taken [ ] and I often think one affair leads on to another [ ], I in fact was having a tremendous affair with Michael Oakeshott before Isaiah and was deeply in love with him. My relations with Herbert were not very good, I was feeling miserable and I was having this great affair with Michael and I behaved very badly really, dropped Oakeshott but I mean one affair sometimes gets you into sort of mood of having another one, you're all keyed up. And so I think possibly he moved on to Aline whom he'd known [ ] and it enabled him to take the plunge; and although I was terribly upset at the time, our affair was petering out, like [ ] expected to and it was awful at the time.

MI Did you, well let's follow it in order, it went on for five years, I mean did you have any, did you have much time together or was it always slightly kind of furtive and slightly hurried or were you able to go away together?

JH No we were never able to go away together, it was rather furtive, you're quite right. Well we used to – I don't know if he's told you this – we'd meet in churches [laughs] [MI No he didn't tell me that] because, I don't know how we fell into this but they seemed to be safe places which no-one else ever chose so it was rather uncomfortable, sometimes in church yards, well and in his room in College, well All Souls [ ] New College [ ] but even there it was very difficult because normally he had an open room and people used to, I remember David Cecil once came in the middle and he said, 'Oh am I interrupting a love scene?' [laughs] No it was rather furtive though occasionally we met, perhaps only once, it

was a terrible occasion – mind you none of this ought to be repeated, I think ...

MI I feel this is your story, not my story, I'm not at liberty to do what I want with it.

JH His parents were away from his house in London and he was about to [ ] he suggested we should spend the night there so that was going to be a long night [ ]. The disaster was we went to bed together and the neighbours had been told to keep an eye on the house in case of burglars and seeing a light they [laughs]. So that was rather wrecked. [MI And they actually came in?] Yes they actually came in but they didn't, I don't think they discovered me, I didn't get out of the bed or what but anyway they knocked on the door. No he used occasionally to suggest that we should go to a hotel in London but I [ ] public thing so it was these rather mad meetings and as I say, he liked the excitement, in a way he liked being in a dangerous situation, liaison dangereuse I think and I was rather alarmed about it actually and he'd come to our house and think that it was all right and I'd say, 'Look the children may walk in.' That in a way excited him because it was all so very exciting for him.

MI I hope you won't find this vulgar but I mean one of the things he says about you is he finds you tremendously attractive, just finds you tremendously – he still thinks of you as a tremendously attractive woman and I'm just wondering whether you felt the same? [JH About him?] Yes.

JH Do I find him physically attractive now? [MI Yes] Well I don't long to go to bed with him [laughs]

MI But thinking back to the early fifties, did you find him physically attractive?

JH Well yes but partly because I'm normally attracted by peoples' minds and then the rest follows, I mean I don't really go in for the beautiful shape. If the person interests me, that's all right and I liked having physical relations with him certainly but if I come into a room where he is now, I don't immediately feel I want to go up and [ ] but partly at my age I don't really have any sexual feelings I think, they're not there, all dried up.

MI When did you first become aware of Aline as a – of his interest in Aline?

JH Well I knew he knew her, I don't think until this terrible moment in the corridor at All Souls after the senior lunch when I think it was Stuart Hampshire or someone came up to me and said, 'Have you heard the latest news? Isaiah is getting married.' He'd tried to get hold of me to tell me, I hadn't seen him for a little time and that was that, so no I didn't know he was really interested in her [ ] and then of course he rang me up and said come and see me [ ] I couldn't really complain, I just felt I'd been very lucky to know him so long and I remember him saying, 'Cry my child, cry.' I mean he could see for this horrid situation [ ] and I think he'd been too nervous to tell me before understandably I don't know how rapidly he [ ] I think I had been told. Then I mean after I'd got over the shock – and I knew it was right in a sense [ ], we went on seeing each other [ ] relationship.

MI Did your relations with him continue after the marriage? [JH You mean physical relations?] Yes. [JH Did he say anything about this?] He suggested that there had been relations with someone after his marriage but he didn't say with whom.

JH Well I expect, yes, you know in a rather haphazard way. [MI It must have been a painful business?] For me? [MI Mm] Well, no I think I'm sorry to say that I was pleased that he didn't just totally drop me I must say, I mean I think our line always was as long as Aline doesn't know anything and we were always very very careful

about that, as long as Herbert didn't know anything, as long as the outside world didn't know anything, that's how we felt [ ] all right. But it was fairly intermittent and there were many things that became rather chancy, you know if you happened to meet one in the street, he'd say come and talk to me and it wasn't usually arranged beforehand, you know but ...

MI Can you remember how long that went on?

JH I should think until – it wasn't very long [ ] – I should think until about '59. But I mean it's part of his clinging to the past I think, he likes living – he likes thinking about the past, he likes recreating his feelings about the past.

MI What you're saying is he didn't want to give up the past? [JH Yes] And neither did you. [JH No] This is a difficult question but what do you really feel your husband actually knows about this [ ]?

JH I don't think he knows anything. Lots of people won't believe this but it happens that very few people know [ ] because very few people know that Isaiah's and my relations [ ] but I think I have told two people and they refuse to believe it because husbands usually are on the look out but Herbert is very unusual in this respect and I really think this is true.

MI Is it possible that he knows and simply understands what you need?

JH No, because I've had a great many affairs since marriage and he hasn't known about most of them, he was a bit jealous once I think with William Glock because when he came to New College and I lived in London for two years and he used to come back at the weekend and I lived in the same house as the Glock's [ ] affair really and things got a bit difficult, in fact it's partly because I thought the marriage would break up that I didn't [ ] and left on my own. No I don't think Herbert ever has, well I think he knew vaguely or

since that something went on in that direction for me. I think he regarded it always as rather unimportant in some ways. [MI Do you resent that?] No, I think I'm rather pleased.

MI I mean you might resent it in the sense that here's a man you live with who doesn't understand you? [JH [Inaudible] done things she shouldn't have done] This is another difficult question but in your relations with men, do you think of your relationship with Isaiah as especially important?

JH Oh yes, absolutely, the most important in my life really and the most intense I think. I mean not that my relations with Herbert haven't been very important too and I was very much in love with Herbert and on the whole it's been a good marriage I think as marriages go. Herbert [ ] absolutely central partly because it was so unbelievable, I'd never seen him, I'd never fancied him even doing that sort of thing, he wouldn't be interested. I was overcome. I suppose it was my base motive, I think I was rather flattered being taken up by this great man. Sometimes I felt a bit humiliated because occasionally he would take me to a concert and I felt he was very keen that no-one in the outside world should [ ] which was absolutely correct and right according to the rules we were playing by but sometimes I felt a bit humiliated, why should I have to be hidden like this? But I mean he was quite right.

MI And you really did not think it would ever lead to anything else? You describe it as if you both always knew that it had a certain or given set of limits but is that really ...?

JH Well limits only in the sense that I didn't think he was ever going to suggest that I should leave Herbert and marry him, limits in that sense. [MI But would you, had he had?] No I don't think so, I don't know, I don't – partly because – well I've already really answered that, I would have felt inadequate which I suppose I don't feel as inadequate with Herbert though I am inadequate in various ways compared with his brain and the whole cultural

ambience and also because of the children and all that, no I don't think I would. But I don't think he ever – I don't know, have you asked him whether he ever thought of marrying me? Did you ask him that question? I think his answer would no. [MI No, I've not asked him that question] But I should think almost certainly the answer would be no partly because he was very very fond of Herbert and I've got a lot of letters where he says how much he loves Herbert and [ ] and that he's such a good man and the last thing he ever wanted to do was to hurt him. He wouldn't hurt him [ ] so I shouldn't think it ever crossed his mind.

MI What did your children ever know about this?

JH Well they didn't know at the time but they knew he rang up and came to the house a lot because he was constantly ringing up and coming round and I think I have mentioned it to them since but they're not really very interested and one doesn't want to worry them further [ ] of course but I think I've only really told it to them recently, sort of rather en passant because like all children, they always think – they're very worried. Have you got children of your own? They're always worried that the marriage is likely to break down but one of my sons at the age of about eight said to me, 'When you divorce, will you put the interests of the children first?' [laughs] I mean he had no evidence that we were going to divorce at all, it's never been a topic actually because I've always believed in a rather old fashioned way, marriages which were going to last but you have got to [repair?] them because they won't last [ ] in a way and the marriage is sufficiently solid to carry the [ ] my philosophy and it's the general structure which is quite agreeable and you're good friends and [ ] relations with the children and all the rest of it but you have affairs at the same time, very often I've been much nicer to Herbert when I've been having an affair. [MI I know] So when I said something to the children about this they weren't interested or worried.



MI Well I'm not sure [JH I don't think you'd better answer []] Well that suggests there's more to tell. [JH No, not really] No I think, you know, it's not for me to be the messenger of his opinions to you and you know them anyway but I'm – I was very struck when – I didn't ask him about this, he volunteered his side of the story not – but in a very discreet way and with great, with a great sense that it was the making of him in a very deep emotional way and that's why it's important to the biography and I have no idea how to deal with it, talk about it.

JH No, it's a problem isn't it? Aline of course knows that he and I had an affair – incidentally I suppose you're going to be talking to her? [MI Yes I will] Yes. She doesn't know I think the extent of it either in terms of time, I imagine she doesn't know either in terms of time or how important it was to either of us, I don't think she knows that, probably she doesn't want to really, she [], you know she's a very sensitive, rather timorous character, I don't think she'd want to probe whereas some people want to know, when they marry someone, all about peoples' affairs, others don't and I always thought that she would not want to know what was going on but she knows we did have an affair. I don't think she knows, in fact I'm certain she doesn't know, anything that went on after their marriage, I think that would be absolutely not [MI Yes Isaiah makes that clear] And that's very important [] because [] and he hasn't got all that much in common in some sense [] close friend. We see a lot of them and recently [] but very often he [] or they just say, 'Come up and we'd often go up after a meal, we don't often go []. But Isaiah was always encouraging me to – and he said, a [] I think – to give Aline confidence and to be nice to her and ask her to go for a walk and [] but which hasn't been quite too successful because she's a really bad walker [laughs]. [MI And you're a rangy, long strided – ] well I used to be [] and she sort of [] along. But sometimes he's complained that – well he used to complain that I didn't ask her to our house. Well I used to ask her quite a lot but she always seemed to find a reason – well she'd say she thought she could come and didn't know if she could, she

might be doing something else and then you got the feeling that she might want a more important invitation and then she would come perhaps for ten minutes as though she'd got to rush off and [ ] didn't really want to come or not and he said, 'Oh well it's because she's frightened of you.' It may have been the truth.

MI Did he ever talk about any other relations with other women?

JH Well, did he tell you anything about people he fell in love with in the thirties? [MI Yes] I mean there was this girl called Rachel Walker, commonly known as walker, yes who I knew very well, she was [fun?] and he was passionately in love with her and – yes he talked about this quite a lot [ ] and the whole saga of [ ] and one night [ ] sleeping in his bed and she went into a madhouse, not entirely due to him [ ] and then there was this Patricia de Bendor woman whom I didn't really know who I was instinctively jealous of – when was that? In the late thirties or forties? And I was sufficiently fond of Isaiah to be jealous of Patricia because I knew he was in love with Patricia. But I don't know what he said about it to me, he didn't introduce it very much actually.

MI I have to ask you what's the status of your letters, the letters between you and him? What others you have?

JH Well I have some what you might call innocuous ones but also some love letters which he used to tell me to destroy but I didn't destroy. Did he mention this, had I destroyed them? [MI No] I feel pretty sure that he destroyed any from me, I would think. But I didn't destroy them, I have got them.

MI Well that's – why don't we leave it there?

## MI TAPE B7

*Conversation with William Hayter, 28 April 1994*

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*Side A*

MI 28th today and this is Stanton St John?

WH Stanton St John and I'm William Hayter and this is April 28th 1994.

MI Right. I'm here to talk to you about Isaiah, this is for a biography that's supposed to be posthumous, not to be published in his lifetime. He says, 'Après moi, le déluge.' That means that you can be as candid as you wish, it also – I should assure you – these conversations are confidential, I don't have any desire that they go beyond this tape recorder<sup>28</sup> and I think I wanted to just get from you in a very undirected way a sense of the narrative of your friendship and acquaintance with him over your lifetime. When does it begin?

WH Well although we were contemporaries at Oxford I don't think we ever met then at that time. It begins really in America during the war. He was at first in New York and I was at the Embassy in Washington and he used to telephone to me from New York from time to time with what was obviously fascinating news but I couldn't – I hadn't got the wavelength, I couldn't hear what he was saying at all, it took me a long time to get it ...

MI You simply couldn't understand it?

<sup>28</sup> I have interpreted MI's opening remarks, with his agreement, to apply only in the lifetimes of IB and WH. WH's daughter and literary heir Teresa Hayter has given her approval to online publication. H.H.

WH I couldn't understand it [MI It was so quick] It went so fast and rather convoluted and I wasn't used to the way he spoke which I am now of course but for a long time I was baffled by it. However I got his wavelength in the end, then he moved down to Washington to the Embassy and then I saw a lot of him.

MI At that point, what position did you occupy at the Embassy?

WH I was one of several First Secretaries in the Embassy but [MI This is in Halifax's Embassy?] In Halifax's time that's it, and however quite a space I was once called Head of Chancery, Acting Head of Chancery and so Isaiah's famous reports used to come to me on their way to the Ambassador and of course they were fascinating but I'd say to myself Oh this is very wonderful but is it true? Isaiah replied, 'It's true at a deeper level.' [laughs]

MI It's a wonderful story. Is it – why were you sceptical about it's truth?

WH Well it was so extraordinary and so clearly derived from some very inner level of this United States Administration to which most people didn't have access that I could hardly believe it but I didn't dare to change it and sent it on unaltered up to the Ambassador who sent it off and it was very fascinating. I don't know what his sources were; there was one man called Prichard, a very fat man who was eventually called up though he said, 'They scraped the bottom of the barrel and now they've taken the barrel itself.' [laughter] He was one source, I don't know who the others were. [MI He saw Frankfurter?] He saw Frankfurter, he must have seen people like Joe Alsop and [MI Bohlen?] Walter Lippmann, Bohlen was around then, yes he was so he would have though then we did see a lot of each other at that time.

MI Did you feel even then that he was unusually well paced and well connected?

WH I did, yes, well he couldn't have produced these reports if he hadn't had extraordinary series of friends and acquaintances all over the Administration.

MI Were other officials in the Embassy producing similar kinds of reports?

WH Nothing like that, no, no, he was far the best source of political information that we had and he was always bringing marvellous people to see us, I remember he produced Weizmann to talk to me, he came to see me. Why Weizmann called on me I can't imagine but he did; he was the most impressive man I've ever met I think. Isaiah's relations with the Jews were a bit awkward because he would report to us what they were saying and of course at that time they were – we were being very tiresome about Jewish immigration into Palestine and so they were pretty hostile to the British Administration for obvious reasons and Isaiah knew all this and reported it to us quite properly but it was slightly embarrassing for him, the reporting to the enemy as it were, but I think he managed to play it both sides successfully without betraying either.

MI But did you feel his loyalties were occasionally under strain on the Palestine question?

WH They must have been, no he's not I think a very keen Zionist as far as I know, I mean he goes there often, has very good relations, I don't think it ever occurred to him to go and live there or anything like that, but I think for moments he did feel awkward but he was certainly reporting very fully on what his Zionist friends told us.

MI But you never heard him at the time in Washington in '42 or '3 express shall I say Zionist opinions to you?

WH I don't remember his doing that, I can't remember his ever doing that to the best of my recollection.

MI I don't want to lose the thread of these reports. Can you describe their chain of influence? That is did Halifax read them or did he simply pass them on?

WH Halifax certainly read them. I don't remember – Isaiah could tell you this – I don't remember Halifax ever querying them or discussing them with Isaiah. As far as I know he just signed them and sent them on but he must have found them very useful, the background and his dealings with the Administration.

MI And then they go back to Whitehall and what is their circulation as far as you recall it?

WH I think fairly wide, they were not in a sense top secret, they were not, didn't involve any National Security or Intelligence stuff or anything like that, I should think they were probably rated Confidential which meant that they had a pretty wide circulation in Whitehall, they were not outside. I think, I guess but I don't know but one could look that up but I should think they would be Confidential rather than Secret or Top Secret.

MI Would you say that they honestly had any influence?

WH Well, hard to say. I think they must have influenced Halifax's attitude to the Administration when talking to them and I think they must have illuminated Whitehall as to what the reactions of the American Administration would be to given situations which of course was extremely important, then and at all times, particularly then. But I would have thought they must have influenced peoples' attitudes if not their actions.

MI But chiefly you think with Halifax not necessarily in Whitehall?

WH Well we know the Prime Minister read them and I think, I'm sure the Foreign Secretary did and I think they were, no I'm sure

they were, very widely read. I mean people were then very anxious to know what the Americans were doing, what their reactions would be and this must be one of the major ways of gauging that I think.

MI Were you instrumental in getting him to Washington?

WH No, no not at all, no it was just decided. Is Aubrey Morgan still alive? [MI I don't think so] No I don't think he is, he would have been a very good source about Isaiah but I'm afraid I think he probably is dead. He was Isaiah's boss in New York. There was a wonderful moment when Aubrey wrote a letter to someone in Washington, to me or someone, saying, 'I feel it my duty to bring to your attention this very unfavourable report on a member of our Staff here and that was a headline, 'Berlin plastered.' [laughter] And I think it was Aubrey Morgan who did that, I think so. [MI It was a vast Embassy] It was a huge Embassy, I mean there were three Ministers I think, or more, six Ministers I think and countless Councillors and unending First Secretaries and others on the way down, a huge pyramid; and this quite apart from the colossal Whitehall representation in Washington, every department then thought it ought to have its representative, the Board of Trade, the Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Defence of course, everyone thought they had to have a mission so there were either, there were oh I think something like five or six thousand British officials in Washington then, perhaps more.

MI I mean it is an extraordinary moment; I suppose I'm inviting you to reflect upon is what an extraordinary moment it was for you to be in an Embassy in the middle of the war in the sense that the height of somehow British power in this century at the heart of the Empire that was soon to replace it.

WH Yes, oh it was very interesting. I remember Ronnie Campbell who was a senior of the Ministers there saying to me, 'The Americans have got into this bad habit of treating us as a junior

partner.' And I said, 'But aren't we a junior partner?' And Ronnie said, 'Well no, the Commonwealth, Empire and all that, they're equal.' And I said, 'I rather think those days are over.' Ronnie was an older generation, rather unwilling to accept I think.'

MI But you could feel that even in the war?

WH Oh yes, it was very, very noticeable, yes, all we could run was the begging bowl, you see? Lend lease began to supply it by then, all the necessities of life. It was a terrible moment when one of the lists of the lend lease was supply the sanitary towels and this caused a furious reaction from someone in the [ ] said, 'If they can't cover their own cunts, God help them.' [laughter MI Yes, that general feeling is] the general feeling is that we were relying on them for the ordinary necessities of life and as far as the actual fighting goes, we had as many people fighting as they had in the early stages, they were all supplied by – a lot was supplied by them.

MI Besides his despatches, I mean can you describe what the routine of the Embassy was that would involve him, that the routine of meetings and sessions together and things, or did Isaiah pretty well go his own way?

WH I think he rather went his own way, I don't remember him – Halifax wasn't the one to have meetings of the Staff, he liked to see people individually, one by one, and I don't remember any meetings of that kind. I would go and see him and other people would go and see him but one by one. I know that Isaiah must have been in to see him from time to time, Isaiah could tell you that, but my recollection was that there weren't meetings at which he was present, or there weren't meetings, period.

MI Was he regarded as a very kind of odd fish in the Embassy?

WH Well we felt we were very lucky to have him I think, we all thought he was very exceptional, he obviously wasn't the sort of



typical run of the mill Diplomat, he was different from that. Lillian Hellman was writing a play in which a Diplomat was involved; she was a friend of Isaiah's and she said to Isaiah, 'I've never met a Diplomat, I want to have one described to put in a play, can you produce one for me?' Isaiah said, 'Well I'm not a Diplomat but she produced me.' And I was entertained lavishly by Lillian Hellman, given tickets for Oklahoma which were almost impossible to get in those days, [ ] go to parties and I can't think of anything more to tell you about Washington, I think that ...

MI Did you become – did you feel that in Washington you actually became friends with Isaiah?

WH Oh very much yes, I did. I remember a wonderful lunch with him at that French restaurant, I can't remember what it was called, L'Escargot or some French name, and Isaiah said to me, 'Do you believe in absolute moral principles?' a question I hadn't given any thought to before but thinking about it I decided yes, I did and Isaiah said, 'Obviously you're a Wykehamist and not an Etonian.' [laughter] Isaiah loves characterising doesn't he? [MI laughing, Yes, did you think that was fair?] I thought it was fair enough I thought. [laughs] We did become friends, yes we did.

MI What do you think he liked in you?

WH I don't know, I don't know, we liked the same sorts of things, we liked music and we had a sort of Oxford background, I mean we knew a lot of the same people and so on and we did become friends and have been – I see him much less now than I used to but at one time I did see a lot of him.

MI Speaking simply to Isaiah as a Diplomat, I mean do you think he had sort of basic good political judgement?

WH I think he did yes but I think he wasn't – well as I say he was a keen Zionist but he wasn't limited by that, he was interested

enormously and I remember Freya Stark was around then and although she was obviously very pro Arab, he got on well with her and that was perfectly all right, he wasn't narrow minded in any kind of way. I think his interests were pretty general, pretty wide. I think he had, has very good political sense I think, very, quite English though I would say for someone ...

MI Because in fact that's often very rare in intellectuals and academics.

WH Very, very, no I think that he – well he is very rare in all sorts of ways and he has I think a very good clear political sense, one only has to read what he writes about people like Churchill or Weizmann or anyone like that, he has a very acute and well based political sense I think, very strikingly so I should say.

MI You said somewhat earlier that you had been introduced to Weizmann by Isaiah in the Embassy in Washington during the war [WH Yes] What impression did Weizmann make upon you?

WH I think he's a really, really authentically great man I've ever met, well not quite true, I think [?] Kelly's an authentically great man but I have qualifications in my views of [?] but none about Weizmann. I remember one superficial interview which struck me as tremendously powerful and tremendously intelligent and very sort of upright, honourable, great man I think, really great man I thought.

MI Did you get any sense of the rapport between Weizmann and Isaiah?

WH No, Isaiah brought him in and left so I didn't but it's clear I think that they were friends and they must have got along well, I'm sure they did.

MI So you're together – it's appalling that a biographer should not have his dates absolutely [ ], '42 to '5?

WH I came back to London in '44. I'm not quite sure when Isaiah – I think he came back fairly soon after that I think. I saw him quite a bit then. [laughs] I was going to the Potsdam Conference as Secretary to the Delegation and Isaiah was supposed to be coming too and one day Isaiah appeared on the doorstep of – we were then living in a little house in St Leonard's Terrace and Isaiah appeared sort of shaking his fist in the air; he'd been banned from the Potsdam Delegation by Eden who said, 'I can't have that Isaiah chattering around the place.' [MI Oh really?] Typical superficial Eden approach to things, I have a very low opinion of Eden.

MI In other words, Isaiah – this was in London?

WH This was in London, he was back by then, this was in Summer of '45 the Potsdam Conference.

MI And the house is in St Leonard's Terrace right down by the hospital there? [WH By the hospital, yes] And now you see Isaiah ...?

WH He was shaking his fist in the air [MI Because he'd just heard?] He'd just heard that he wasn't to come. He had been on the strength and then taken off it you see?

MI But he was upset about not going to Potsdam. [WH He was, he was yes, very] He mentions it as a ...

WH That was Eden. I heard afterwards, I asked Bob Dixon his Private Secretary why was Isaiah taken off and he said, 'The Secretary of State doesn't want Isaiah chattering around the place.' I don't know whether Isaiah ever knew that but that was apparently what it was.

MI At any time – just to go back to Washington – during the war were his Russian connections, his Russian language made use of, was he a kind of conduit or a contact point with the Russians? [WH I don't remember that he was, no] But presumably at Potsdam he would have been useful because of his Russian?

WH He would have been very useful I think, yes, yes he would I think, I think he would though the Conference, the contacts of the Russian delegations were pretty formal. Gromyko was there, Gromyko was in Washington during the war, I knew him at that time and he was, he and I and Chip Bohlen were a sort of drafting committee I think and that was on that kind of formal level, there wasn't very much sort of mateyness; I mean there were dinner parties of a formal kind with toasts and all that but there wasn't much informal contact.

MI Was it at Potsdam – no it must have been earlier – that you made the acquaintance of Bohlen?

WH I knew Bohlen in Moscow during the war – before the war, before the war and I knew him in Washington during the war and then at Potsdam and then of course we were in Paris together, we were both Ministers at our respective Embassy and then we were both Ambassadors in Moscow at the same time. When he was sent to Manila I was rather nervous [ ], I mean American Ambassador in Manila makes some sense, British Ambassador in Manila makes no sense at all! [laughter]

MI So he doesn't go to Potsdam but you do and then instead he goes to Moscow, '45 and has his meetings with Akhmatova and Pasternak [WH Yes] is there till early '46 [WH Was that in '45? I'd forgotten that] Late '45, January '46.

WH He stayed with us later in Moscow of course. [MI yes in '56] In '56 yes.

MI I want to get to that but first, in that immediate post war period do you ever recalling him saying to you, 'I'd really like to stay in the Foreign Office.'? [WH No, I never heard him say that, no] You thought he was always destined to return?

WH I thought he was destined to [ ], I always thought so. I don't think he would have been happy in the Foreign Office, I think he would have known that really.

MI Why do you think he wouldn't have been happy?

WH Well no scope for his particular activity, he wanted to write honestly and he wanted to talk freely, he wanted to see who he wanted to see. I don't think he'd have fitted in the kind of formal framework, it wouldn't have suited him I don't think. [MI Something about his temperament as well?] A bit. I think he liked us to say what he thought and talk all the time and Isaiah's great ability is talk of course, I mean he's a better talker than a writer, he's a good writer but he's a far better talker, gets pretty heated and [ ] around all the time. [laughter] He's a marvellous talker.

MI Do you think there are people in the Foreign Office and the Embassy who thought rather like Eden, that he was a chatterbox, clever but just not ...?

WH I think so, I think I'm not sure the Foreign Office would have welcomed him for that reason. Eden's judgement was very superficial, thought of him as a chatterbox and some others might have thought that too I think really and [MI But you didn't] I didn't, no, no, I could see he was much better than that, of course anyone who talked to or saw him regularly could see much more than that. But I thought of him as a Don really, it never occurred to me that he wanted to stay in the Foreign Office. Do you think he did? Have you an idea that he did?

MI It crossed his mind and there is a certain amount of correspondence in '45, '46 as he kind of [WH Really] evaluates things in his mind. I think like you he was not seriously tempted, I think he felt temperamentally he wasn't suited.

WH Yes I wouldn't have thought it was serious, a serious option for him. I'm surprised that he really thought that, yes.

MI So when do you pick up acquaintance after that, after '45?

WH Well I stayed with him in New College on one or two occasions certainly, when he was told that before he went to All Souls and I used to see him from time to time but never very – he was in Oxford and I was in London, we didn't see each other; but somehow we've always remained friends and corresponded occasionally. I wish I'd kept his letters, I never keep letters, I've always regretted that I don't but I haven't, I don't think I have. We sort of saw each other from time to time in London or in Oxford.

MI Can you remember any of those occasions in the sort of post '45 to the mid fifties?

WH No. I can remember staying with him in Oxford and we were asked by John Wheeler Bennett to lunch at Garsington and then there came another invitation to lunch with the Trees at Ditchley and Isaiah decided that this would be the more interesting [ ] instead. Next morning we met John on the station at Oxford with furious results, not unnaturally! [laughs] But I don't remember anything very much that he said. I remember a great flow of talk but I can't remember anything particular that was said really.

MI Were there recurring things that you talked about or themes that you felt you had in common with him?

WH Funnily no, I can't think of one, I don't know. We talked about Oxford of course, we talked about the Foreign Office, we

talked about people a great deal and his great theme of characterising, it was his great thing of equating Oxford Colleges with various countries: Christ Church was Germany, Balliol, France – no Magdalen was France – no I've got it wrong. No Balliol is Germany, Magdalen is France, Christ Church is America [laughs] Corpus is Denmark [laughter]

MI Can you remember on what basis a place like Magdalen would be regarded as France?

WH Well France – it's like soldiers, rather corrupt, strong communist element! [laughter] [MI Rather good! And Balliol?] Balliol was sort of earnest and a lot of very high thinking and rather liable to be a bit hysterical [laughter] Christ Church was very rich and rather stupid [laughter]

MI And Corpus is just very small?

WH Corpus is small and very virtuous and upright. I added one to that, I made up one of my own that All Souls was like the Vatican, you see there's no subjects and it claims a special relationship with another world!

MI [laughs] Oh that's very good!

WH Well Berlin loved to do that sort of thing and he'd say Alan Bullock is the bulk or bull of Oxford, comparing this with that, loved that sort of thing.

MI And then because you'd been posted to Moscow before the war, did you have sort of Russian conversations?

WH We did a bit, yes, I don't remember him talking very much about Russia. [WH's wife enters with coffee] Come on, darling.

WH I don't remember talking about Russia to Isaiah, I'm bound to say. I never thought I was going to go back to Russia and I didn't, Russia was a special subject for me. I was very surprised when I was sent back there. I didn't expect to go there at all.

MI Tell me the history of that. When are you sent? You're sent fifty -?

WH '53, just after Stalin died. I was in Paris, I knew I was going to move somewhere, didn't know where and I never thought it would be Moscow because they generally sent more elderly figures to Moscow and I was forty-six and I didn't think it was my level at all. But I don't know why they did, some reason I was sent there and it was very splendid promotion and I was very thrilled to go though my Russian was always very bad and never got much better unfortunately.

MI And Isaiah comes to see you in '56?

WH Isaiah came to stay in '56 I think. I came back to England in '55 with Bulganin and Khrushchev and we came to Oxford and I said to Isaiah, 'You must come now because we and the Bohlens won't be there indefinitely and when we're both there, friends of yours, you'd better come now, soon.' So we arranged for him to come at that time and he came and it was a great pleasure I must say. He spent half the time with us and half the time with the Bohlens.

MI He felt tremendously grand to have two Ambassadorial residences.

WH Yes that was lovely, it was very enjoyable, we all of us enjoyed it very much.

MI What was the atmosphere in Moscow in '56 as you recall? How much thaw is there?



WH The thaw was on, it was very different. I mean when I was there in the thirties we never, we had no Russian contacts at all except servants and the people in [ ], among them people were constantly disappearing and you'd never know whether they would be there or not. In the fifties this never happened, there were no disappearances and there were a lot of contacts and the ...

Lady H [ ] for big strategies and Isaiah was just married.

WH Isaiah was just married, yes he was, yes.

MI And was this the first time you met Aline?

WH I think – well of course I met her during that visit to – I'm wondering whether about Bulganin and Khrushchev she was around then? I think it was the first time I met her, I think it was.

MI Just to get the Bulganin and Khrushchev visit, they come to Oxford in '55, is Isaiah involved in that because I've missed ...

WH No I don't think he was but I [MI He's not presented to them or he didn't –?] I think he must have been because I remember I was talking to Isaiah and Aline on the lawn at New College and Bulganin and Khrushchev had gone ahead up steps, there was a loud explosion and I thought oh dear the moment I leave them, they're bombed! [laughs] It was only a sort of what you call flash bang thing and we were there, I was talking to them then about arranging their – when they were coming to us, only then he must have been there at that reception for [ ] and the then Magdalen College Vice Chancellor, so the reception was in New College for them and Isaiah must have been at the reception but I don't remember his playing any very active part.

MI So he comes in '56, do you arrange a programme for him or does he kind of basically go on his own?

WH Arranged it himself I should think, he was very active and he telephoned all these people, he used to go out and telephone from telephone booths not from the Embassy, that was wiser, most likely to be bugged and he was full of enthusiasm and interest really.

MI What did you feel about his attitude to the regime, did you talk politics, did you discuss ...?

WH [ ] because we all were but we thought it was a moment when things might improve and they had improved, Isaiah said they'd improved very much, constant contact, the Polit Bureau would turn up at Embassy parties in quite large numbers very often.

MI And he remembers the Polit Bureau turning up.

WH Turning up, yes, surely a contrast to Washington. In Washington you could meet anyone you liked except that bosses, in Moscow you meet the bosses but nobody else really.

MI Yes, because nobody lower down the totem pole can speak, they're tongue tied.

WH No Diplomat [ ] express [ ] or mid Secretary of State, at least everybody else who ought to.

MI What was it like living in the Embassy in '56?

WH Well it was not bad, I mean you can ask [?] more than me. Housekeeping wasn't very easy but people were luxuriously looked after, it was a nice house [MI The one right opposite?] opposite the Kremlin, that's where we lived and we had plenty of servants, we could manage life very easily really. [MI Did you feel spied upon?] Oh yes, very much. [Lady H Never mind] It doesn't matter, I mean all our servants were spies but a very good thing having spies for

servants because they're cleverer than the average domestic servant and they can't leave! [laughter] Well you know they were spies, everybody treats them as spies, there's no problem. You must be careful what you say but there are not very many diplomatic secrets, that's an exaggerated idea.

MI It's an important trip in Aline and Isaiah's life because I think unless I'm much mistaken, it's their first trip abroad as a married couple. [WH I think it was, yes] What impression did they make upon you together on that trip? [WH Marvellous]

Lady H Marvellous except that occasionally Isaiah forgot that he had a wife and she had to say, 'What about me?' [ ] she wanted Isaiah to commit his time to get used to ... [laughter] [Rest of comment inaudible]

MI And she seemed terribly interested in being there? [WH Yes, does she know Russian? [ ] Well she was studying it. [WH Was she, was she?] It's on that visit that he sees Pasternak.

WH Yes, yes he came back one day and said Pasternak had written a novel. I said to him, 'He doesn't write novels, he writes poetry,' and he said, 'He's written a novel and his whole life's gone into it, this was the wonderful thing.' And Isaiah had read it all through, sat up all night reading it, he was in tears by the end of it, it was wonderful and Isaiah [MI This was in the Embassy?] In the Embassy, yes, I think it was anyway and it obviously made a deep impression on him. This of course was Zhivago and I think that was the first I'd ever heard of Zhivago. He was obviously deeply moved by it I think. It is a very great work, too.

MI Roughly how long did he stay with you?

WH Well I can't [Lady H inaudible] Oh, you've got the – I think the visitor's book is there, we can find it, look that up, yes. He

stayed with us I should think about ten days or so and then they went on to the Bohlens. It may have been longer, not less.

MI I wanted to ask you actually what impression Chip Bohlen made on you because he was a very important figure in Isaiah's life, so what sort of man was he?

WH Splendid man, I think he was one of the best Ambassadors I've ever encountered, very strong personality. Splendid man to work with I think really, he knew Russia very well, he spoke fluent – well he'd been an interpreter as a matter of fact and his judgement – and he ran the most efficient well organised Embassy, it was very, very high powered indeed, splendid man. I was ...

MI A sort of quiet thoughtful person or very forceful?

WH Very forceful. He loved – his real whole interest was Russia I should think, passionately interested, thinking and talking about Russia and what the Russians – how it was going to go, what was going to happen next and he really was very deeply sort of involved in it. [MI Much more than you for whom it was a fascinating posting but it was not sort of your life?] Oh much more than me but it was very much his life I should think. But he was an extremely able operator.

MI Did he come across as a very grand East Coast patrician? Because he was a kind of grand figure.

WH Well I suppose he was. He was a lovely sort of hearty figure you know and you felt he was sort of cheerful and lively and for my part – and he was [subliminally?] kind of reliable and there was a terrible occasion, Suez occurred at the end of my time in Moscow and there was a Kremlin meeting where Khrushchev said the British and French Governments were – a Kremlin reception – where the British and French Governments were behaving like bandits and I thought they were but I thought he shouldn't have

said so to a party to which he invited the French Ambassador so I persuaded the French Ambassador to walk out; and I looked round and there Chip had rounded up all the other major Ambassadors, all of whom were frightfully anti Suez as he was and made them come out after us which was very [MI So that was very good] very good, very good. And the French Ambassador was silly man who was very pro Suez and it was rather difficult to get him, he said, [French quote] [laughter] [MI He said to hell with that!] But it was a lesser kind of – I mean privately he was extremely critical to Suez to me and I didn't feel inclined to defend it either, but publicly he was [ ] and the British Embassy was then being besieged the next day and he wanted to come round with the flag [MI Besieged?] besieged, yes, there were demonstrators and he wanted to come round in his car with his flags flying and I told him not to. [laughs] He was a very splendid man, marvellous. [MI And his wife was a quite –] She was a very attractive woman, very [MI an important figure for Isaiah because a friend of his] Yes, she was, she was in a sense almost more of the kind of East Coast patrician and her affairs [ ] were very much grateful to her family, I think it was [ ] and she was delightful, an absolutely delightful person. They were a marvellous couple. I always felt a slightly inferiority complex with Chip, they were so able and so good, I felt he was higher above than I was but I admired and liked him very much, he was a very good colleague.

MI What was the period of your posting in Moscow, '53 through [WH '53 to '57] What an incredible time to be there!

WH It was a very interesting time, yes, just after Stalin died, it must have been wonderful to have been there in Gorbachev's time and Khrushchev's time though not quite so, stirrings, but fairly interesting too and with a great change after the deep freeze. [MI My father went to –] WH Your father came with Mike Pearson [MI that's right, in '55] '55, well the Russian Secretary tried to make him come over to – extraordinary story.

MI But my father was very, very much affected by Khrushchev taking him aside in [Yalta?] not him but Mike Pearson and saying you know, 'We cannot run this society on terror,' and saying it with obvious conviction, just that you know, we cannot go on like this.

WH Well that was the great change, the terror did end and no doubt other things happened but the terror ended when Stalin died, there wasn't a state of terror in Khrushchev's – everybody was frightened still, oh it might come back but there wasn't in fact – nobody was being arrested and put in concentration camps then. But I remember there was a painter, [ ] we wanted to buy a picture of his and they turned out too expensive but we asked him to the Embassy and he said, 'Many many years will pass before I'd feel it safe to go to the British Embassy.' That was the kind of feeling of the unofficial people that it really wasn't safe to go to Foreign Embassies. It might come back. It never did, I mean even in Brezhnev's time it was sort of [ ] two steps forward, one step back – it was only one step back, it wasn't two steps, they weren't back to Stalin. No, terror wasn't really Brezhnev, it was a kind of stagnation, it wasn't terror either, that possibility was eliminated, thank goodness. It could come back now in a different form but it didn't then, there was a big difference really.

MI It's terribly important to Isaiah's story in a way that he had seen the Russian revolution from first hand and was therefore inoculated against any tendency to be sympathetic to the Soviet experiment from the beginning. Do you think it marked him out in distinction to many members of the Oxford left in the '30's and [WH Yes, yes] the British left in the post war period?

WH No he never was a fellow [ ] fellow traveller of any kind, Isaiah, never.

MI Speaking of all that stuff, Maclean was in the Embassy in Washington.

WH He succeeded me. [MI Oh! (laughs)] I knew him quite well, he came to stay with us before we were married, he stayed with Iris's family, we all knew him and [Lady H Came to ?] Came to [?] [Lady H [ ] asked me back to Wales] He was in a way a rather attractive figure. [MI Was he?] Well he was very good looking and very soft voice and an ordinary run of the mill Foreign Office character of a rather high powered kind.

MI Yes, right. This is the Guest Book of the British Embassy – [WH No, it's our own, private one] Oh, your own? 'The Hayters, All Their Lives'. [WH From Shanghai to ?] Fantastic! And this is the '56 period, now what I am seeing here is that between August 5th and August 22nd in 1956, Isaiah and Aline Berlin have signed their names, listing their house as Headington House, Headington, Oxford and just by chance above it I see 16th to 18th June, a rather round young hand of someone called Douglas Hurd.

WH Oh really? I'd forgotten that he came for the weekend. He was on his way back from Peking, yes.

MI Isn't that marvellous and you've kept that your whole ...?

WH We only had people who came to stay, not people who came to meals. People who actually stayed the night.

MI And there I see Douglas Jay. [Lady H He came [inaudible]

WH And Douglas came, he's a very old friend of mine, Douglas. [Lady H He had only one shirt. Shocking!] Only one shirt! Gracious!] Dirty pair flannel trousers, scruffy figure, Douglas.

MI Thank you very much for finding that, it's very – I wish my parents had done that because that seems to me a brilliant thing to have done.

Lady H But it used to be much more interesting when people had addresses, I mustn't delay you if I show you my father's [MI Oh no, no] rather ...

MI Oh I see, there is Washington. [WH I think not many people stay in China] [Lady H inaudible] No on the contrary, I would like you to enter more if possible.

Lady H But you see that's when you see them often, that's how they used to be but ...

WH I don't think Isaiah ever stayed in Washington.

MI Oh gracious, so this is really a family tradition ...

Lady H [ ] I think every [ ] house had but they weren't much good because they didn't stay where they lived [inaudible] [MI They did the water colour] someone who stayed there. [MI It's beautiful!] Yes and that's the house he paints and so on. But those are much more [ ]. But very useful if you're writing a life [ ]. [MI Gracious!]

WH No, I don't think Isaiah ever stayed with us in Washington, did he? No, he can't have, no.

Lady H No because he had the house and do you remember [ ] Washington, that great stout man?

WH We talked about – Prichard, yes we've talked about him.

MI Yes, Prichard's very important to the story.

*Side B blank*



## MI TAPE B8

Stephen Spender

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*Side A*

MI Stephen I'm wondering whether you could recall in what circumstances you first met Isaiah?

SS Well I first met him at Oxford when he was at Corpus Christi and I was at [Univ?]. I can't remember the exact circumstances but we saw each other quite a lot at Oxford, we'd go for walks I think and – well, that's all ...

MI You can't remember the year can you?

SS Well yes, it would be either 1928 or 1929 when I think I went up – if I went up in – it was my second year, I can't remember whether I went up in 1927 or 1928.

MI What clubs or classes or tutorials would have put you together with him?

SS There weren't any clubs or tutorials, we just met, I think there was a certain – oh, I knew one or two people; there was a poet called Bernard Spencer who I think also was at Corpus and maybe Bernard introduced me to Isaiah. But Isaiah was quite a famous undergraduate to people – famous among a small set of people, I mean people would talk about Isaiah and ...

MI Famous for what?

SS [Laughing] For talking a great deal and for being amusing and intelligent and a rather sort of, I think, sought out I think as a ...

MI He was right from the beginning ...?

SS I think right from the beginning, yes; I don't think we thought of Isaiah as going to have at all a public future, in fact I think one thought of him as a scholar and a very intelligent and civilised conversationalist with an interesting background of course from Riga and so on; but one certainly didn't think him – so one thought of him as remaining a Don, I think.

MI What impression did he make on you when you first met or when an impression began to crystallise?

SS Well I think we immediately liked one another very much and we got on very well and he seemed to have a peculiar – I can never understand, I mean I'm very grateful to his attitude to me, he's always been very protective to me and ...

MI Why protective?

SS I think he's always regarded me as a person who might get himself into trouble and I think ever since he's always regarded me as a person who always has to be paid for; I always have great difficulty when I'm with Isaiah and I ever – it's rather a joke, ever paying for anything and so he has been rather protective.

MI Do you think his impression of you is warranted or does it irk you slightly that he regards you in this light?

SS No, I'm rather grateful. I mean I think he probably regards – I don't know but I mentioned he regards me as a person who does sort of foolish things, you know Spanish Civil War, joining the communists at one time and he has a sort of – I think partly because I think probably he feels that he knows me very well and he knew that I was never a communist, could possibly be a

communist and so he has a view of me, probably he thinks he has to protect me from myself I should think a bit.

MI Do you think he's right in that? Do you think his judgement of you is accurate? Do you look to him as someone who is an accurate mirror of your own character?

SS Well he's quite different from my – really quite different from my other friends and I have a friendship with him which is quite apart from my friendship with say, Auden, Isherwood, Cyril Connolly, all sorts of other people who are my friends some of whom he wouldn't care about, not very much I don't think, care about Cyril Connolly for instance.

MI What would make your friendship with him different than your friendship with the others?

SS I should think we, I feel we understand each other very well. I don't know whether that's being partly Jewish on my part or something like that but I feel we have a sort of friendship which is apart from our friendship of either of us with anyone else really.

MI Let me ask you what physical impression he made upon you when you saw him when he was a very young man. What did he look like to you?

SS I think his – I was thinking as I came along some one described him as looking like a baby elephant and I think that's rather a good description of how he looked, especially the sort of – I mean it was like in relation to the grown-up Isaiah, he was like a sort of smaller version of his present self and one can imagine a kind of receding series in which Isaiah somehow would be born say at the age of forty or something like that but that he would be a diminutive version which would grow and grow and acquire more knowledge and so on. I think that his friends always regarded him, I mean sort of cherished Isaiah partly as a kind of – one side of him is a sort of

joke figure precisely because of that, because there was some sense that he'd always been exactly the same, just a sort of – that he'd always had a rather adult mind. So in fact, I mean Isaiah, for Isaiah to be playing around would seem something to be remarked on. I mean I remember once going to some party in which Isaiah became very sort of frolicsome and stood on a seat, a window seat, throwing cherries at people from a sort of little bowl of cherries.

MI But this seemed highly uncharacteristic?

SS Well most people would notice Isaiah, if anyone else had done it, it wouldn't have been a matter of remark but I mean everyone enjoyed Isaiah being so sort of frolicsome; in that respect rather like one would Dr Johnson, it's ...

MI Yes. To pursue that point a little further: you convey the impression of a young man who is preter naturally grown-up when all you undergraduates are much more kind of callow and that that made him in a sense, a sense of fun. Does that mean that he – he seemed to be a person who'd had no childhood, that he seemed ...?

SS Well I think one would feel a bit about him like that and also of course very cosmopolitan; I mean coming out of a much of a wider world than we did but also I think at St Paul's – I made friends of his like John Davenport or people who knew him at St Paul's, Arthur Calder Marshall I think – would say Isaiah was exactly the same, would sort of joke about, I mean as though they were talking about the grown, the adult Isaiah being a kind of schoolboy but exactly the same as he was when he was adult and was that sort of chap.

MI I'm wondering whether – because in your autobiography you say immediately Isaiah was from Riga. Could I assume from that that you knew very quickly where he came from or should I assume

on the contrary that he was rather guarded about his background and origins? What did he tell you about himself?

SS Well he talked about his parents who lived in Hollycroft Avenue and I visited him – I mean we saw each other in the holidays quite a lot because I lived in Hampstead and he lived in Hampstead and so we'd see each other in the vacation and I'd go to his house, I knew his mother who was enormously proud of him. Later on I caused tremendous offence and I never quite see why – that showed the sort of touchiness of Isaiah and the whole family I suppose but I think Isaiah was a bit annoyed about it because when he got a knighthood, I thought he wouldn't want to be congratulated on getting a knighthood so I wrote to his mother and congratulated her. They were all rather annoyed by this I think, I think Isaiah thought it was a kind of malicious joke or something.

MI Oh really? [SS Yes] I think it's rather nice to write someone's mother.

SS Well exactly, that's what I thought, to write to – but I knew he wouldn't want to be written to.

MI Well I think he was touchy on the whole subject wasn't he?

SS He was touchy on the whole subject, yes but I mean I think there's a certain lack of assurance somehow about – I mean underneath all his cleverness and everything and his wisdom and so on, that there's a certain lack of security or a lack of – a certain, almost like a feeling that he's a stranger in England, that outsider quality about Isaiah which I think is partly why – I mean the thing that he was reproached by, by Roger Scruton or someone for the other day which is partly why he's very hesitant about taking up public attitudes on anything and I always trace that back to his roots really.

MI I'm interested in his Jewishness and your part Jewishness. I mean how did you – did you establish that as a bond very quickly? [SS No] Or did it only gradually come out that ...?

SS No I don't – I think he would talk about – I don't think I'm even very, I wouldn't be conscious in the same way as he would I don't think anyhow; but the Jews are certainly the subject that he's enormously interested in and that he talks about a lot and it's ...

MI But did he talk a lot about it at that time when he was a much much younger man?

SS I think we always talked about everything. Of course he talked a great deal – well then we went for a walking tour, Isaiah and I, but when was that? That wasn't till much later, till the 1950's some time, not before the war, I think it was just right after the war, he'd remember. We went to the Lake District and we went for about a week's walk and then he talked a great deal about music, I think about Mozart and so on. Isaiah was always prepared to treat anything as a subject and I mean actually he treated, last week when we met at lunch, he treated how to get from my house to the Brendel's house at St John's Wood which is an extraordinarily difficult journey and [MI As a subject] as a subject ...

MI And you discussed relatively efficient ways to do same?

SS Yes, I mean whether you should go to, I don't know, take the tube to go – he first of all said, 'Take the tube to Golders Green, then take a bus,' and that wouldn't do, then, 'On the contrary you could go to Oxford Circus, change at Oxford Circus, change at Tottenham Court Road,' [laughing] and so on and I mean Isaiah can [MI Spin anything out] yes, he can get very much on the subject. David Hockney made a very nice remark about Isaiah; he said you know what he liked about Isaiah was he talked to anyone about anything. He'd be chatting away and talking away to David when David was doing drawings of him and then the cleaning lady

would come in and Isaiah would start talking to the cleaning lady about detergents [laughter] ...

MI Yes, that's very characteristic. Can you remember what you used to talk about in your very early days?

SS Well it's so difficult to say because you see we couldn't really – I mean I suppose he – I think that I would always, if asked, explain everything, I mean I know more what he talked about than what I talked about; I mean I can't imagine that we talked about philosophy although I think Isaiah did explain to me once after he came back from Harvard how someone had told him he couldn't possibly be a philosopher because he could only be a historian of philosophy and so on. But I mean I seem very incapable of abstract thinking, I mean that's why I've always wondered why Isaiah seemed so attached to me, I've always thought well what was it really – that I don't really know anything about his particular subjects you see? Well he might see me as a kind of Russian figure perhaps in the Herzen or something manner [laughter] just possibly.

MI But do you think he was attached to your poetry? Was that [the bond?]

SS I don't think he likes poetry very much.

MI But music?

SS Music absolutely, yes. But it always seems to me that the talk has come more from his side – as a matter of fact he's not a terribly good listener I don't think, he's a person who can start off and then – but I always find if I'm going to tell Isaiah an anecdote, I spend about ten minutes mentally trying to package it into as minute a space as possible so that I can squeeze it in ...

MI And have some expectation that he'll actually listen to it? [SS Yes] I'm trying to chart your relationship to him in a very dim and distant past: you say you have walks with him, can you remember any other things that you did with him in this early period when you were at [Univ], Oxford in 1929, 1930, 31 ...?

SS He wrote a lot of letters. I have an awful feeling that I've lost his letters to me, I keep on worrying about that. I know I did have them up to the war – very very interesting, I mean, hundreds of them and we certainly conducted a correspondence I mean you know ...

MI Between where and where were those ...?

SS Well, I'd be in Germany for instance. I think he must have thought [of] me as a kind of person who sort of lived rather – you know sort of went out into life and kind of did rash things he probably thought and ...

MI And conversely you would think of him as someone who stayed in his shell, stayed in the cloister? [SS Yes] Never took risks?

SS Well that wouldn't worry me, that, but I suppose that's so. I could – I would have thought of him really as a scholar and a writer. I mean I would have thought, I mean I think the side of Isaiah which thinks of himself as a kind of scholar working in a garret and this scholar ought to be like a sort of scholar in a Russian novel or something working in a garret in a Russian novel and have written the history of thought, part political – perhaps politics is something, we had that interest in common, yes certainly, his history of the thought of people like Lamartine or someone like that, sort of literary figures who went into politics you see, intellectuals who went into political action.

MI Did he see himself that way at any point do you think?



SS I think he did seriously think of doing that at one – I think he was thinking of writing such a book in several volumes and I think he feels – I think Isaiah might feel he's betrayed some kind of vocation but I mean who doesn't think that they have betrayed?

MI What kind of vocation do you think he's betrayed?

SS As the starving scholar. [laughter] And he was like – that was the – until he married, well that was rather the image of him then and I think that before he married, I mean some years before he married, his friends were rather worried about him, I mean they thought that he was getting very – you know, that he would talk until three or four in the morning and that he was compulsive and also that he was a great gossip; he also had the reputation. There's a nasty remark about him in *A Journey To Iceland*, or whatever that book was called by Auden and Louis and [MI Saying that he was a gossip] saying 'A saucer – for Isaiah Berlin, a saucer of milk,' that's the line and that's by MacNeice I think, and in fact Isaiah never forgave MacNeice [MI For that remark] for that, no and I think Isaiah is extremely sensitive and really very frightened, well quite frightened of any kind of public role in which he might be stared at and I think in that way he's extremely sensitive and I think he probably minded that attack by Scruton but he would have minded much more when he was young.

MI Yes. Let me ask you a little bit about politics, your own visits to Germany, you're obviously – the Spanish Civil war, the whole – you're plunged in that question from the very early period; but is Isaiah similarly gripped by what's happening to Europe in the thirties and in the same way, do you think? Do you feel a kindred spirit with him, at least of level of interest and ...?

SS Well on the level of interest, yes but I suppose – I mean I am sure that Isaiah is everything one means by a liberal in his thought and thinking. He must have been – I remember one thing that we discussed quite a lot, we went to Salzburg once or twice together

and you see a kind of topic would be 1930's, 1933, 1934, what would Austria be like if the Nazi's came? Well you see to Isaiah this was, it's cynical to think what his attitude was, it was simply how would, what would happen to all the Jews? And how could Austria manage, how could there be Salzburg without, I don't know, Elisabeth Schumann, Lotte [Lenya?], Bruno Walter, all these Jews? But he did seem to have a very detached attitude about this. I mean well I wonder about Isaiah, I can't think how would he react say to the concentration camps or something? I mean horror, shuddering horror but I don't think whether it stirred any sort of any feeling that he ought to do something about it or – what could one anyhow do about it?

MI In effect you suspect him of a kind of a – he's a liberal in the mandarin sense of slightly more detached than he ought to be?

SS Well I wouldn't say that he ought to be. I mean in a way that's his strength isn't it? I mean that he's, I suppose for me that he's a sort of outsider but who has the same feeling, has feelings about the same things that I have feelings about; that I mean during the anti Fascist period I would think that one had to be rather active about it but I don't think Isaiah ever did think that. So how much did he care? I don't know.

MI Can you remember ever a stand up row with him on this question?

SS No. What he did care about, certainly hatred of communism in the Russian form would be very, very strong and greatly intensified when he was in Russia during the war and he's told me how, when he was in Russia at the British Embassy, he'd lie awake at night thinking what if it suddenly turned out that he'd lost his British citizenship and went back to being a Russian, what'd he do? He'd kill himself, quite seriously, and he decided he'd kill himself and he did think that the Russian regime was the most horrible regime, I don't know, in history but the most horrible modern regime that

was. He thought that very seriously but maybe all my kind of anti Fascism and so on seemed to him rather superficial compared with his knowing exactly where he stood about these things, I mean intellectually and emotionally and everything, I think a much stronger intellectual grasp than I would have had, you see? And also a very firm conviction, a very clear idea of where he was placed and what was required of him, that he wasn't cut out to act about this.

MI What do you mean, 'not cut out'?

SS Well rather like you might decide that you're not – you may sympathise with a cause but you may decide that you're not cut out to be a sort of soldier for freedom or something like that, you ...

MI I'm interested in this because you've described a friendship that contains within it quite substantial disagreements over matters of principle, that is you are much more sympathetic to what the Bolshevik revolution is trying to do in the early thirties especially when set against the background of the Fascist threat, Isaiah is adamantly anti communist in a way that you're not, he's somehow more detached from the Fascist menace than you are, but somehow this never surfaces – comes to the surface of your friendship, is that what you're saying?

SS Well I think, you see, that we're always being attacked – I was just reading a book by C. [Aitchison?] the other day – we're always being attacked, I mean Auden and myself and various other people, for having been 'communison', having had these very strong views but actually never having in any way because we had these views, attacked intellectual Fascism or an essay of T.S.Eliot's – actually probably Isaiah feels more strongly about T.S.Eliot's anti Semitism than I do and I think simply it's because I may have made – had a vision in my mind between the political and the literary and always placed the literary above the political. I mean after all when we were young, members of my generation, the writers we admired

were T.S.Eliot and James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, writers like that; and they all came really out of the first world war and were strongly anti political, so that to them literature meant anti politics and politics meant death to literature. I mean even D.H.Lawrence I think, well sort of messy politics in his writing, and so I don't think I could quarrel with anyone whom I admired in so many other respects about politics. I wouldn't feel at all critical of Isaiah and I'm sure I didn't at any time feel at all critical of Isaiah for not being openly anti Fascist or – I thought, in fact I always thought that being an anti Fascist was rather vulgar really, but I just thought that one ought to be and one had to be.

MI And presumably a corollary of that set of beliefs about politics and literature would be a set of corollaries about temperaments, that certain temperaments are just different, yours different from his? [SS Yes] Can you remember conversations with him during the period when you went to Spain or before you went to Spain, can you remember what you – whether he – you said at the outset that he had a kind of protective attitude towards you and I'm wondering whether this came out over the Spanish thing?

SS Well I mean I am sure that during the Spanish Civil war I was very obsessed by it and I'm sure I talked a great deal about it and he was always sympathetic but I think he always, you know regarded me like – as like someone who sort of goes out and has an impulse, you know like a sort of mechanical mouse or something [laughing] to go out and do silly things really. I think he would be very clear that I would be – he did say to me once or twice, 'Well, you know you're quite unsuited to all this, you're not that kind of person at all,' so I think he probably had some clear idea of what kind of person I was which made all these kind of activities like a sort of automatism of a kind of mechanical toy that sort of behaves [laughing] that wasn't the real person, I think.

MI Yes. Did you suspect there was any truth in his assessment of you?

SS Yes, because I've always thought that all power – perhaps I should make clear I belong to a very public family because my father was a journalist [MI Absolutely, yes] two or three uncles were journalists and I've always despised that, I mean I despised it in them and I despised – but nevertheless I have that sort of side of me which I think is vulgar and sort of public, so that – and I think that my friends have really always you know felt that well that was a side of me they could ignore or something like that. I mean if I knew say Arnold Toynbee I wouldn't take Arnold Toynbee's politics very seriously, I mean the basis of my respect would be that he was an historian and also I think that's again is why I've never really felt with any kind of political criticism of T.S.Eliot was to the point at all because this was something superimposed on the Eliot who cared about poetry.

MI Except presumably you get into limit cases like Ezra Pound where you're anticipant of something else where an unquestionably wonderful poet says unquestionably awful things and somehow the awful things do kind of scratch the template of the poetry a bit don't you think?

SS Well I've never felt he was unquestionably a wonderful poet.

MI No, but occasionally ... [laughter] I am wondering whether you could, moving in and out in this period of the thirties, describe your visits to Salzburg with Isaiah; what you did, how you travelled, where you went, what you saw, you know what he was like as a travelling companion?

SS Oh well he was always great fun, very good and I mean we were not at all extravagant you know, we didn't have – I mean we had a kind of student standard of life I think. I mean Isaiah was really well like an Oxford student, not exactly perhaps a poor student but we really didn't care very much what we ate or what sort of hotels

we went to, what class we travelled and all those things that you get very stuck with when you get older but ...

MI Was this kind of three weeks in August?

SS Perhaps three weeks in August, yes. Well then – I don't think I – Isaiah had a very strange friend, now what was he called? A very diminutive boy, I can't remember his name ... [MI A Russian?] No, English who was almost like a sort of Page, always going around with Isaiah, very very sweet, very nice but somehow the kind of person who – and I think he may have done this – who goes and marries a waitress and sort of disappears from your life altogether.

MI Can you remember his name?

SS No but I'll – I think probably Isaiah wouldn't – I think Isaiah feels vaguely troubled about – Corley, Michael Corley. [MI Michael Corley] Yes. I think Isaiah feels vaguely uneasy about the whole thing. [MI Why?] I don't know why, but anyhow, but the point is that I think that actually Isaiah was always with Michael Corley and that Michael Corley, he was rather like a kind of Pageboy or something like that, but really very understanding, a person who understood Isaiah very very well and adored Isaiah and then somehow disappeared from Isaiah's life and from all our lives for that matter.

MI So you travelled in a threesome in fact?

SS I think that when we were – no, what I was really saying is that Michael – Isaiah was much more with Michael [MI Than with you] really than with me all that time.

MI Can you remember what you listened to in Salzburg?

SS Yes. Well we listened to Don Giovanni and we also listened at one time, one year, to Toscanini doing Meistersinger, we went to a

great many – if course all the concerts and things as well as the Operas; Fidelio, Toscanini's Fidelio – or was it Bruno Walter, no just Toscanini ...

MI Now I can imagine you in a pair of shorts or even God knows lederhosen, I can imagine you in climbing boots kind of athletically disappearing off but I can't imagine Isaiah doing any of that. I imagine him only in kind of almost suits in any kind of summer setting. Do you remember what he wore, what he looked like when he was on holiday?

SS Well yes, he was always in suits, he certainly wasn't in lederhosen [laughter] and he certainly wasn't in shorts. I don't think I was as a matter of fact, yes, and I don't think – I think probably a tweed suit – I don't think that he went in for Oxford bags and that kind of thing, he may have but I don't think he did. He was always demurely dressed.

MI Demurely, yes, it's a good word. At what point in your pilgrimages to Salzburg did you feel Nazism very close, from the beginning, from '34?

SS Well of course I was in Germany so, [MI Yes, you'd been in Hamburg] in 1932, – 1929, 1930, 1931, 1932 I think, so of course I did feel it very strongly. I didn't feel it so much in, certainly not then, in Salzburg in 1929, 1930, I mean that seemed rather an escape from it really, but it was always imminent, I mean really externally and also internally because of the sort of Austrian lederhosen and all that side.

MI What other English folk did you meet in Salzburg in the summers?

SS Well there'd be other people I think – I was trying to think who Isaiah was – apart from us – there were two or three friends of ours all from Oxford, I don't know whether Bernard Spencer

would be – but otherwise I didn't, I really didn't meet anyone. I mean I think there were one or two Americans, there was someone called James Laughlin who later, who became [MI A publisher] a publisher but I really didn't know him. I didn't know any of those American composers at that time, but this was before – this was very early you see, this would be 1930, 1931.

MI I may be talking about the later period or are all your Salzburg trips in that very early period with Isaiah?

SS I think so, yes. [MI Because he goes to Salzburg through the thirties ...] The best one was in 1932 which would be – because there was one when we would talk about what would happen to Austria but it seemed very unreal, it wasn't until 1934 when I was actually living in Vienna when it seemed imminent. [MI Yes, that's under the Dollfuss ...] that's it, the Dollfuss time.

MI It's a terrible shame if your letters to Isaiah in that period are lost, that would be terrible. Are you sure that this is the case?

SS No I'm not, I'm not sure [MI Where might they be?] We have a room in the house called the Bottomless Pit [MI All right and they might be in the Bottomless Pit] in the Bottomless Pit, yes but I really will have to hunt through everything. I'm pretty sure they must be somewhere but I know they're not filed. [MI Are other of your correspondences ...?] Yes, other correspondence is filed.

MI Is correspondence from Isaiah and to Isaiah after the war filed?

SS Yes so it wouldn't amount to – yes, some of it but I think it's private property, I don't think I've thrown anything of Isaiah's away but it wouldn't be significant. Some during the war was, he wrote when he was in the British Embassy in America and he was rather unhappy I think.

MI Oh really? Did you get a feeling he was unhappy?



SS Yes, but he hated America, yes [MI Really?] Yes a lot of the time, yes. [MI Hated, that's a strong word] Yes. I remember him writing saying that all Americans looked like knees. [MI Looked like?] Knees, yes.

MI Because it was a very good time for him in lots of ways.

SS Well there were various times – I think when he was at Harvard perhaps he hated America – was he at Harvard or? – I think he was at Harvard, perhaps he liked it when he got to the Embassy.

MI We're jumping ahead slightly, I'm just wondering whether you can – after you go down from Oxford and are in London and you've come back from Spain, I'm wondering what your contacts with Isaiah in that period sort of '37 to the war, seeing him and ...?

SS Yes, of course you see the difference from my early contacts with Isaiah and later ones is that Isaiah, one saw Isaiah alone and occasionally I see him alone now. I had lunch with him last week and I'm having lunch with him tomorrow; but one does have the feeling though that Isaiah is kind of surrounded and very open to lots of visitors, doesn't one? [MI Yes] And so that you can go, you know – you can make a – I remember Nicolas Nabokov used to complain bitterly about this, that he'd make a pilgrimage to go and see Isaiah and couldn't get him alone for a single moment really. But he – even physically if one can get him alone, one does feel that he's not this sort of lonely – that he's somehow been parcelled himself out with little sort of morsels and that you don't have the same kind of relationship which I really don't mind at all, but alas, yes.

MI Did you begin to feel that in the late thirties?

SS Yes I think so, yes.

MI Did you go up to All Souls to see him at all?

SS Oh yes, quite often. [MI Did you stay?] I don't think I stayed with him but I stayed probably at Oxford, yes.

MI The picture you create of him is interesting me in lots of ways, the image that what he is now he very much was in the thirties already is I suppose the most substantial [ ] what you're saying, that he's extremely talkative, extremely expansive, confident in public if less confident in private, with most of his political views in place, very much formed. Is that a sort of summary, an accurate summary of what you're telling me?

SS Yes but I think there was a period – when? When he became rather sort of – when he had relationships with people, for instance Elizabeth Bowen I think which was sort of disturbing in a way I think and I think when he was – and then when he'd go on talking sort of compulsively and you know you felt he was afraid to be alone and yet he didn't have any particular relationship with anyone and sometimes he got sort of half entangled or entangled [MI What do you know of his ...?] and of course also I didn't have much to do, I mean I feel outside Oxford and he was very much taken into Oxford.

MI Yes. On the subject you were just broaching ...

*Side B*

SS I think he was very – I think he was very attached to her, I don't really know very much of this.

MI Well how did you know it disturbed him or upset him or ...

SS I don't know [laughing] I don't know how – well I think you see if his relationships with all those Oxford people, Maurice Bowra, there was some kind of thing, competition between – or

conflict between him and Maurice Bowra which I really don't know about; David Cecil, he was very fond of David Cecil but I mean somehow sort of touchy and uneasy I think about all those relationships; Humphrey House.

MI What do you mean 'uneasy'?

SS Very gossipy so therefore bound to produce crises ...

MI I'm wondering what impression Isaiah made on you – how can I put it – erotically? I mean what impression you formed of Isaiah's love life in the thirties?

SS Well I think that Isaiah put across the idea that he had no love life and I think I certainly felt that he didn't. Then he actually had relationships with two ladies didn't he at the same time you see but that didn't really fit in to one's picture of him although it didn't altogether surprise – I mean no one's love life surprises me [laughter] so it didn't really surprise me very much.

MI Did he talk to you at all about his love life?

SS Well then, yes, then of course he was very very much in love with Miss de Bendern, wasn't he? [MI With –?] the sister of Ann [M?] [MI Yes] What's she called, Ben something de Bendern and he really was extremely in love with her. There were quite a lot of people I should think he was rather in love with; I think Sheila Lynd, he was obviously very susceptible in some way but he played the role of a kind of a susceptible person who is not actually involved but rather like Swift or someone like that [laughter] and I mean that's a known role isn't it?

MI Yes. Did you ever talk to the ladies concerned? [SS No] Did you ever get any sense of homosexual interest in his life or homo erotic interest in his life? Attachments to men that seemed to be tinged with a kind of an erotic edge?

SS Well I think the only possible one would be Michael Corley. Michael Corley was extremely pretty, very small, very [ ] but then on the other hand you see Isaiah tends to go – could go in for kind of what you would call kind of toy relationships, kind of toy, kind of playing around with people whom he was charmed by and whom he charms and I think he – that related to his attitude to Michael Corley. Michael Corley was a kind of what our daughter calls, you know when a 'Toy Boy' means something like [ ]. No there's a sort of acting a role and in fact such a sweet, really very sweet natured touching person that Isaiah was of course perfectly happy with this, to be always with someone was always attending him. I mean if – I think Isaiah had a cold once in Salzburg and he was sort of tended the whole time by Michael Corley and I remember asking Michael Corley how Isaiah was and he said, 'Oh well, he can only get worse, Isaiah's incapable of getting better. [laughter] Any illness strikes him down.' [laughter] And I wonder would he talk about that, he might? He might just feel guilty about Michael Manchester guardian, I mean not about sex but about, that somehow he allowed him to drop out of his life and the daughter tried to [ ] him up a bit.

MI Following another thread was Isaiah hypochondriac? [SS Yes, decidedly] And how did that manifest itself?

SS Well nearly always thinking he was ill in some way or other, I think he still does. In fact I always annoy him, I always deliberately annoy him by saying how well you're looking and [laughter] see what will happen.

MI He seems extraordinarily vital and in rather good health basically like many hypochondriacs often are.

SS Well perhaps – anyhow he's going through I think a rather good phase at the moment, he seems very happy and he's given up a lot

of things in a very sensible way I think. That [ ] she's a wonderful wife, isn't she?

MI Yes. Go back to the late thirties; one of your letters to Isherwood makes reference to the fact that you'd just been reading Isaiah's *Marx* in '39. I'm just wondering whether you can remember what impression that book made on you if any.

SS Well, yes. I mean tremendously energetic, I mean I can't really remember very much and what it said but I mean I think Isaiah's always had the value for me of a person who thinks whom I can read, I mean I can really totally read everything that Isaiah writes. I think he's greatly underestimated as a writer, I don't know why he's so underestimated, I mean he somehow doesn't – I mean he's sort of looked on as a sage who sort of happens to write but I think he has really no position as a writer at all and if you were asked at a quiz show a list of twenty of the greatest living English writers, no-one would mention Isaiah would they I don't think? [MI Yes] Yet I think he's a wonderful writer.

MI I don't think there's any doubt he's probably one of the very finest living essayists [SS Yes] and I completely agree with you about that, with a prose of tremendous – a sort of, it's falsely regarded as lapidary but it has a tremendous sort of drive to it, it carries you along, it's very ...

SS No it's not lapidary, in fact Eliot's remark about it which annoyed Isaiah is much more to the – he says 'the torrential rhetoric of Isaiah Berlin' [laughter].

MI Which annoyed Isaiah most, the 'torrential' or the 'rhetoric'? I suppose a little of both. Can you remember any other things that he's written that made a particular impact on you when you read them, you thought – stick in your mind?

SS Well all those essays, even the one on Churchill, all those essays, what else would there be?

MI Well it's the 'Personal Impressions' essays.

SS Well just mention some others.

MI Well, there's 'Vico and Herder', there's 'The Age of the Enlightenment' ...

SS Yes absolutely, yes.

MI Have you ever criticised his work and said, 'Isaiah, I don't follow you here, I don't like this or', and if so, what was his reaction?

SS No never.

MI Has he ever ventured to criticise your work? Say 'I don't follow this' or 'this essay is ...'?

SS No, I don't think we – you know in England we don't seem to do that very much do we? I mean in England you scarcely ever mention someone's work to them or very rapidly and immediately it passes away. One thing I was thinking, actually Auden and Isherwood, they most resented my friendship with Isaiah when we were young. They I think – particularly Isherwood when we were in Berlin; I think I used to show Christopher Isaiah's letters to me and he regarded Isaiah as a kind of intellectual life-hater, that kind of thing. [MI Really?] And also both of them – this has all sort of been covered up in time – but both Auden and Isherwood were distinctly anti Semitic, they have somehow buried that. But certainly when we were at Oxford ...

MI Did you feel it? You felt it?

SS Yes and they regarded my friendship – I think Isaiah – and Auden only became friendly with Isaiah very late in life, I think well again of course that regrandeurmark can be in the ‘Letters From Iceland’.

MI Was any of that anti-Semitism directed at you to the degree that there’s a Jewish part of you which you’ve always been very explicit about? Happy with.

SS Well not openly I don’t think, I mean not openly, it’s [ ] there.

MI ‘Life-hater’ is a very odd thing for – a very odd choice of words when you say that Isherwood thought that Isaiah was going to be an intellectual life-hater. What did he mean then?

SS Well I think that he thought that he was a Puritan and that he had the kind of Jewish – I know one thing that made Christopher very anti-Semitic was the idea of untouchability you see, that he, which is true about – it is a Jewish characteristic, isn’t it I think? Not wanting to be touched, not wanting to – sort of producing endless ideas.

MI Untouchability in an emotional sense.

SS In an emotional and even in a physical sense. I think he felt that about Wilfred Israel, too. Do you know who Wilfred Israel is? [MI Yes, he’s in your ...] And Wilfred Israel – actually he was the friend really of Christopher Isherwood but when I wrote my autobiography Christopher was amazed because everything I wrote about Wilfred Israel Christopher didn’t know about because Wilfred, although they seemed to have this very close friendship, would never reveal this Jewish side of himself and Wilfred made this rather marvellous speech to the [?] saying what the Jews should do with it if they came to power, they should all go out in the streets. But he would never say anything like that to Christopher, you see?

MI It's interesting. The business of untouchability I wanted to follow you on because I remember the sharpest remark you make about Isaiah in your autobiography is to the effect – I'm negligent because I can't remember the exact words – was that he was a person who spun out theories about human emotions while making the pretence that he experienced none of these emotions himself. [SS Yes] I wonder what you meant and how that instanced itself?

SS Well he would talk endlessly – that was the gossipy side – talk endlessly about people's relationships with one another as though he was completely outside all this sort of world of people having relationships. He did once explain to me I remember when we were in Salzburg was that something I did as a matter of fact that shocked him very much you see? And he explained to me that this was the Jewish side of him, he was very shocked because what puritan side of him which was very shocked by my promiscuity.

MI I have to ask you what you did, I don't mean to pry but in some – just enough so I can make sense of this story.

SS Well it was awful. I think we were walking along in the evening in Salzburg and I saw a young man who saw me and I just left Isaiah and walked off with him, that was all. But that was a very bad thing to do.

MI And Isaiah was shocked by this?

SS Yes, but he did talk about it, I mean he was very sweet about it really, and he explained it in terms of his Jewish Puritanism more than in criticism of me. I'm sure he hasn't forgotten it – he's probably told a million people anyway. [laughter]

MI [laughing] He's not told me! Despite all this Jewish Puritanism you obviously were close friends, I mean I can see the basis of the



intellectual friendship in the sense of sharing music and sharing a certain discussion about politics, certain interests in ideas of pleasure and conversation and so on but did you have a sense of him as being a warm and affectionate person? [SS To me, yes] Because the remark in your autobiography implies a certain kind of coldness to him or a certain emotional timidity.

SS Well partly because I'd be afraid of writing about him because I'd know he wouldn't want to be written about; and also I'd know he would not be want to be written about in any way with a kind of claim to warm friendship or something like that I don't think. But I mean if I really wrote about Isaiah, I'd write very warmly and I don't think I'd produce that impression at all.

MI Why do you think he would not want you to write about his warmth?

SS Oh, his warmth to me, I think he wouldn't like me ... [Long pause]

MI Because he'd think you were gushing or demoting or something? [Long pause]

SS Well [Long pause] I was trying to think of the people who – you see I always sort of imagined that Isaiah was my best friend but not [ ] illusions imagining people, but later on I realised that there were people he really felt as warmly about; a very good case would be Stuart Hampshire. [MI Yes, he's great fun, Stuart] I mean he feels enormous affection for Stuart Hampshire and who else? Well he did actually in a sort of way for Nicolas Nabokov I think although he was cautious about – I mean one good thing about him is that he doesn't have illusions about people, does he? I really don't know what Isaiah thinks about me, I mean he'd probably spend some time in analysis of my character which he hasn't ever communicated to me but he probably has to other people, like he

would to me about Stuart Hampshire. So I think he could probably give quite a good lecture on my character.

MI But I think this touches on something that's very interesting about him as a person and it's one of the most complicated sides of him. I live in a great deal of anxiety myself as someone who doesn't know him one twentieth as well as you do [SS He's obviously very fond of ...] of what he thinks about me but I've decided this is what everybody thinks in Isaiah's presence, what does this man say about me when I'm not here? What, for the record, he says about you when you're not there, to me, is Stephen Spender is one of my oldest and dearest and closest friends. Absolutely.

SS Yes, well that's what he wrote when he gave me my – the third time actually [? collected?] [MI (laughing) Did he? Did he give you the same present three times ...?] Yes he gave it on my seventieth birthday, he gave it to my son on his twenty-first birthday and me again on my eightieth birthday; but he did write exactly that.

MI I think it's one of the moral problems that actually troubles him quite a lot, is that he has I think quite sharp and severe judgements about almost everybody he knows in one way or the other. [SS Yes] He also likes them and doesn't quite know what to do about the side of him that judges and the side of him that likes. But he's more discreet I should say to the extent that I'm taping his impressions of people, he's much more discreet about people for the record. [SS Yes] And even when the tape recorder is off, he's much more loyal I would have to say than I expected him to be because he is an enormous gossip and I sometimes fear that ...

SS I mean there are very few people – well of course – there are certain people he can't bear to be in the room with. [MI Such as?] John Richardson. [MI I don't know John Richardson] John Richardson is the, is writing a biography of Picasso at the moment – [MI Why can't he bear to be in the room with John Richardson?]

He – ask Aline, Aline will probably provide you with a list of people Isaiah can't stand to be in the room with. John Richardson would certainly be one. [MI Can you think of others?] Yes, well I can't at the moment but I know there are others, [MI I wanted just to resume ...] some of them are people I actually quite like as a matter of fact.

MI I wanted to talk a little bit about how often and in what circumstances you saw him during the war; he was in Washington but he did come back. Did you meet at all during the war, do you have any memory or was it mostly a friendship maintained through correspondence?

SS I think through correspondence. You see I was being a fireman during the war and he was being in Washington most of the time.

MI Did you meet? He did come back a couple of times.

SS Yes, we must have, yes. [MI But you don't have a –] No, I mean I would have gone to Oxford, met him there.

MI Did your friendship pick up again after the war?

SS Yes, I mean I think it never, our friendship never has been very constant I think it's never lapsed, not at all.

MI It's never had fallow periods where you ...? [SS No] You can't think of breaks or tiffs or arguments or [SS No, we've never quarrelled] It's rather a remarkable achievement isn't it?

SS I think most of my friendships have been – I've once – I did have a bit of a quarrel with Isherwood at one time but with Auden I was, remained – I mean actually Auden was – at the end of his life he was very difficult and tiresome in some ways but still I remained a very constant friend of his.

MI You make an interesting comparison between Auden and Berlin in fact as young men when you say that Auden was very overpowering and you felt very much under his spell in certain ways as a young man but didn't feel that of Berlin, or Isaiah. I'm wondering why that was? Isaiah can be very overpowering when he wants to be but he wasn't to you?

SS No he never has been I think. How do you mean, 'overpowering'?

MI Well just intellectually overpowering, I mean you just feel, you feel stupid in his presence or you'd feel inadequate or you'd feel those things you didn't understand; you feel slightly dominated by him.

SS Well he lays down the law, doesn't he? And he is enormously clever and can be very informative but I've never felt that Isaiah was sort of beyond my reach, really, say as I'd feel perhaps with Bertrand Russell or someone like that. [MI Or with Auden or the young Auden] with the young Auden, yes.

MI Let me ask you about Isaiah's – the post war period. I suppose I wanted to know whether he talked to you about marrying his wife? [SS Yes he did] And what did he say and how did it – when did you become aware that he was thinking of marriage?

SS I think that he told me probably about – he told me not to tell anyone which I didn't and then I was working then with Irving [Crystal?] at Encounter when Irving Crystal came in and said, 'Say, did you realise Isaiah's getting married?' I realised that he must have told about a million other people [laughter] not to say anything. Well then he told me that – I think he told me you see on the assumption that he was an asex – a myth rather, that he was an asexual person. I think his idea of his asexuality was very much connected with his having a withered arm and so that I think this slight – what would you call it? – disablement, Isaiah sort of

projected as it were onto the, onto his whole body and onto his whole personality so that he played this role in all our lives of the person who was a spectator; so that imagine if the situation I was telling you about in Salzburg would epitomise his attitude in – of his life in relation to my sexual life. Probably one of the things that might have interested him about me was my sexual life, I don't know, it quite probably was because I think that as he was withdrawn, and I think he still has something about that, he still retains something of that, the idea that people he knows are role players – I think I'm being rather sensible now, I'm getting into something – are role players, are sort of projections of a kind of theatre which is going on in his own mind, is very important to him; so that when he talks about, say, Stuart Hampshire or someone like that or Nicolas Nabokov or whoever it was, it is rather like a sort of theatre master talking about his sort of animals who are doing their tricks, but the assumption being that he does not live a life which includes these kinds of trick, they're sort of playing out, as though they're living his life vicariously; there's something vicarious, or was, about Isaiah. There perhaps still is really. But then, well yes, he told me that in fact he'd had sex but I think that he discovered, rather to his own surprise, that he was sexually normal and functional and made love to a woman and so on [...]. I don't know whether he did with – and all his other relationships did have the air of – rather operatic – of a person who can't do something and who's hopelessly in love with someone who's unapproachable and perhaps cruel to him like Patricia de Bendern who I think was. But then he'd emphasise, when he did talk about it, how very extreme his feelings were really, I mean he certainly gave the impression of being extremely in love with Patricia de Bendern whom I don't think I ever met; and I think this was something to do with the side of Isaiah's character which I was saying before which disturbed people who say would go to Oxford and find they couldn't go to bed because Isaiah wanted to talk all night so they'd be lucky to get away at 4am – this was before his marriage. So probably we were all living a bit vicarious lives of Isaiah; and then I think that he – but whether he morally

disapproved – I think that he would morally disapprove of some people although being very tolerant of [them]. Some people, I mean he – in fact I do feel a gulf with him there, I mean I feel a whole lot of things but I really couldn't tell Isaiah because they would probably shock him profoundly; I mean such as my granddaughter [laughing] whom I adore as a matter of fact, but who has a – at the age of eighteen has a passion for a black bouncer in a night club who goes and stays with her as far as I can see at the weekend in Cambridge. I mean that's the kind of thing I couldn't tell Isaiah. [MI Why, because he wouldn't ...?] Well I mean if I told him I would think it would be very – he just wouldn't want to see Saskia you see? I mean I think he'd – it's very funny as a matter of fact his attitude to my children because only lately did he meet Matthew and discovered that Matthew was an enchanting person and he was very surprised, so it seemed to me rather funny that Matthew being at Oxford all that time when he was twenty and Isaiah had never bothered to find out what Matthew Spender was like, and then he did just by chance about a month ago.

MI Was he always indifferent or uninterested in children, your children specifically?

SS Can be of some interest I should say, although Lizzie – I remember Lizzie going there but at the end of tea Lizzie saying, 'Good-bye Isaiah, thank you for my advice, thank you for your advice,' so that is an idea of Isaiah, someone who people go to for advice.

MI Do you go to him for advice or have you gone to him for advice?

SS No, I wouldn't go to him for advice.

MI Do you go to people for advice?

SS I don't think so, no, I don't know why, I don't think I do. Do you? I'm always afraid of bothering people. I was just thinking today well I'm writing something and I don't have a single person I can show it to. [Laughing] [MI Not even your wife?] No.

MI But isn't that the condition of writing itself?

SS I suppose it is – no, but I think it's – in a way it's a comment on our age because I don't think anyone probably nowadays does but I think, I'm sure that in the nineteenth century people did have, I'm sure that the writers of the nineteenth century all showed their poems or their novels or whatever it was to friends. They even gave readings of it didn't they?

MI Has Isaiah, turning the tables, has Isaiah ever come to you and obviously been in some state of agitation and wanted to talk something through with you? [SS Yes I think he has] Felt unsettled about something? Can you give me a – ?

SS No I can't give you an example but I think he perhaps has, yes.

MI Did he talk to you about the knighthood and all the business of becoming knighted and everything? [SS No] Because that upset him a lot and I just thought you might have felt the fallout.

SS I knew he was upset about it but I've forgotten why – why did he accept? [laughing]

MI [laughing] I know, it's quite – I think he accepted in part because of his Mum and Dad and I did want to ask you what impression ...?

SS Well that's why he found, he really was so offended about my writing to his mother.

MI Yes because I think you got the psychological basis of this right.

SS Yes, perhaps he didn't want me to.

MI I'm wondering what impression his Mum and Dad made upon you when you saw them in the thirties and then later; what kind of woman was his mother?

SS Oh well very motherly, very proud of Isaiah, I liked her extremely. Very talkative but sort of looking at [Isaiah] – you know, if Isaiah was in the room, not able to keep her eyes off him. And his father, a kind of male version [laughing] of the same thing. [MI Talk voluble] Yes. But I mean they were very intelligent, very intelligent sort of East European Jews I think, you know people who feel they have particular, rather limited interests [ ] he did, but I mean people of influence and intelligence all the same.

MI When you went to see them did you feel you were going into an alien milieu?

SS Well alien in a very delightful sense. No, not alien, I mean I did know people like that. I had a friendship with a girl called – I don't think Isaiah ever met – called Gita [S?] and in fact she became great friends also of Christopher and they used to invite Christopher and me every Sunday in Berlin to lunch because they thought we needed feeding up a bit. [MI Yes and it was the same milieu?] And they were rather like that, yes, you know these very intelligent and tremendous – you know very, I wouldn't say perhaps a very wide culture but a very tolerant cultures which people here don't seem to have. I mean they weren't surprised to hear you wrote poetry or ...

MI Yes. I'm drawing to the end of my tape and to the end of our time but I wanted to ask you what characteristics of Isaiah seem most attractive to you and most salient?



SS Well I think what seems to me attractive in everyone, I mean all the people I like, which is the most mysterious thing I think of a lot of it is vitality I was thinking about the relation of vitality to inhibition and somehow in order to have vitality, you have to be uninhibited, but uninhibitedness is not such a simple thing as we've so imagined [we were here?] It may be sort of directed. But I think he does have immense vitality, immense – and he's a very good man, he really is a very good – he's a virtuous person, isn't he? I know nothing bad about him and I've known him for a very long time. When people occasionally criticise him I'm always rather shocked at him being criticised because I think he's such a sort of example of a really good person.

MI If you – this is a preposterous question really – but what historical importance if any would you ascribe to what he's done?

SS Well, I – as a writer, I should say – as a writer I'm sure he will remain a very interesting writer. Well his position rather amazes me. I mean why he is regarded as this kind of superman who everyone, from the Royal family downwards, would sort of go to for their advice [laughing] does rather amaze me. But on the other hand I think it's a great tribute to people that they think that. I mean I think it's a bit exaggerated but I think that they do think that means that they're responding to something which is very good in him.

MI Well he says himself that his whole career is based on a systematic over estimation of his talents. Do you agree?

SS Well I think one would have to agree to that partly, wouldn't one? Because I mean if you were really able to sort of statistically establish that there must be people more intelligent and more everything that whatever Isaiah is that Isaiah [ ]. But anyhow I don't think it's quite – I mean given the fact that he's an extremely intelligent man I think it's that people think he has wisdom or some property very difficult to name and of course that they've attached

this especially to him. Incidentally I think that's a very English thing to do, I mean the English have to have a great someone or other who sort of tops someone or other in every kind of sphere, don't they? Just like George Moore said the English always have to have a greatest writer and I think Isaiah tells that and says who is it today and he said Virginia Woolf you see? There must be a great man of letters and I think Isaiah is somehow playing a kind of role almost like parallel to the Royal family, mysteriously related to the Royal family too, of being this great sage. Well if you take him as that it's a bit disappointing if you go and he's just obsessed with telling you how to get from [laughing] St John's Wood to Belsize Park [laughter] which is what one likes about him. Actually imagine the sort of – in fact you see that would fit into a kind of folk story wouldn't it? A man of infinite wisdom – I mean you can imagine it in almost any literature, a folk story like that, people start talking about how to get [laughter] ...

MI I'm sure a wonderful shalom [aleikum?] fable of Eastern Europe exists on exactly that theme. I mean it's obviously some wonderful story of Riga Jewry where he comes from. Well I think that's where we'll stop.

SS Yes, I've got to go to an exhibition.

## MI TAPE B9

Conversation with Bernard Williams, 21 November 1990, part 1

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### *Side A*

MI Wednesday November 21st 1990 re Isaiah Berlin and political philosophy. Bernard, for biographical purposes I simply wanted to get an account, a narrative from you of when you first met Isaiah, how your lives have entwined over the last number of years. You can start wherever you want but if we could be as systematic as we can ...?

BW Yes, I can start right at the beginning actually, he is of course as you know, he's in fact exactly twenty years older than I am and there's always been a time gap thing about that, he was the same age as Freddie Ayer was and these people who I both count as my friends were twenty years older than myself and another close friend, Stuart Hampshire, he is fifteen years older than myself so I'm in the slightly odd position of having some close friends who are that much older than myself: and because of that, I actually first met him as – when I was a student; in fact I think I'm right in saying that the very first words that we ever exchanged was after a lecture, an undergraduate lecture he gave in Oxford. I suppose it was the usual sort of pushy undergraduate stuff because it was one of those simply enormous lectures in the Schools in Oxford where the lecture is given in a place rather like the Gare D'Orsay really and masses of people there, just a regular undergraduate lecture and he said something that I thought [laughs], it was rather typical actually, he was propounding the then very popular thesis that what was called something like the polarity argument or something like that which is a sort of positivist argument, that it made no sense to apply a given predicate to everything: so that if you said everything was F, the only answer was well what's that supposed

to contrast with? So he was producing this usual sort of argument of the time and [MI What time is this?] Well this must have been in 1949 or 50 and I went up to him afterwards, he'd referred to Thales by possibly having said that everything was made of water, so I went up to him and said again the sort of thing you said at that time, that I thought that was meant to be an empirical proposition, that is if you took absolutely anything and did something to it, it would turn into what you would recognise as water; and to my surprise he said, 'Certainly, certainly, it might well be so.' [laughs] So I produced what I thought was an objection only to find it was accepted by the speaker as it were. Well after that we met from time to time and I particularly of course tended to meet him at musical or operatic occasions of both kinds, interests we've always shared; I didn't know him I suppose enormously – well then I did get to know him a bit more when I was at All Souls which was from 1951 to 1954 and then from '54 to '59 I was a Fellow of New College and I saw a little bit of him then.

MI This is a question of ignorance, what role if any did he play in your election at All Souls or was ...?

BW Well you'll have to, you'd have to check that with others. I can't actually at this instant remember – he must have been at All Souls at that time and then he certainly applied some [?] but I don't know what it was, I mean the person who'd be able to tell you about that if you would, but I mean I don't know of you want to talk to him, would be [Dommitt?] who was newly elected at All Souls at that time and certainly was keen on my election. I can't remember if I ever knew what role Isaiah played in that.

MI But you had no sense of being his – a prot,g, or underneath his wing ...?

BW No, absolutely not at all, not at all. No I've never had that relationship to him at all. The relationship we've always had has been that of older friend and – yes, older friend and in a way, I was

as it were put in the role of, or not put in the role of but was happy to have the role of as you might quite say, more professional philosophical colleague or friend; because since he's always had this thing as you well know of saying he isn't really a philosopher, or stopped being a philosopher, and that of course goes into the question about the introduction to the book and all that, and he tells the story which you must have heard in at least three different versions about whatever it was that [Scheffler?] said to him that made him stop being a – Scheffler or whoever it was – stopped him being a philosopher, I had the role as it were of his being the historian of ideas and me being the philosopher and our relation's always been predicated on his belief that at philosophy I'm better than he is and my belief that a very large number of things he knows and quite a number of things he understands better than I do. [laughs]

MI I want to keep you to the narrative, you then talked about going to New College [BW Yes] Is that right, '54 to '59?

BW Yes, and I think what had happened was that there had been various exchanges because he must have already been at All Souls because Stuart was at New College and I first met Stuart I suppose when I'd just stopped being an undergraduate or when I was just at All Souls or something in about 1950, '51; and Stuart, I remember seeing him in New College. Now Stuart took Isaiah's place, they swopped over. Then of course Stuart went to New College at a later point – and Tony [Quinton?] came from – went to All Souls from New College and Tony Quinton came from All Souls and so there was this exchange going on, so Isaiah must have already gone, yes that's right, that's it.

MI Just rolling back before that, the musical connection: how did that occur, that is how – did you actually go to concerts together, did you meet there?

BW More the latter, infrequently, some once or twice I think we went together. I remember an occasion which was actually later, it was in the sixties, you will remember the – I've even referred to this somewhere – you remember that he wrote this article called *The Naive and Sentimental Verdi* or whatever it's called, I mean it's about – what's its exact title, do you know the piece I mean? [MI Yes I do] About in which he contrasts naive and sentimental artists in the terms that Schiller used and he particularly addresses itself – it's called *The Naivety of Verdi*, that's right, and he has characteristically long lists of artists who figure as respectively naive and sentimental in Schiller's terms and Verdi is a striking example of the naive artist. The interesting fact is that that contrast is formed about Verdi almost entirely of course around the fact that there is a corresponding sentimental artist in Schiller's terms, namely Wagner; but he's hardly mentioned at all. He's the silent contrast – I mean he is mentioned, just, – but he's almost entirely mentioned by implication. I mean he describes Verdi as having absolutely straight forward human passions, not issuing manifestos, not being reflective about his art, not going on about things other than opera and all that kind of thing and of course the negative pole of that thing is all the time Wagner; and actually we might come back to that because I think that notion of the elemental basic universal human passions, love of country, love of one's relatives and so on, is very important also for understanding his so-called relativism or whatever about history and politics. But I remember that in the sixties, I think it was '65 or '66 I think, I went to a concert performance of *The Force of Destiny* that was given no doubt by *The Chelsea Opera Group* in *Oxford Town Hall* and I wrote this down somewhere. Isaiah, in the interval Isaiah came advancing towards me up the aisle through a crowd of persons that he sort of wove through, people tried to talk to him, sort of heading straight for me. He could see me and he was coming towards me, sort of straight through the thing, and without [laughs] any further introduction he said, 'You know of course Schiller's essay, *'Uber Naive und Sentimentalische Poesie?*' so I had to say I was afraid I didn't [laughs]. 'Oh disgraceful, disgraceful that

you didn't!' [laughs] 'Shameful, shameful, ignorance.' So he then proceeded to lay out the entire thesis of the naivety of Verdi in the middle of Oxford Town Hall [MI In the entr'acte] in the entr'acte yes that's right which needless to say was absolutely stunning, brilliant performance. That was very characteristic, too. Now the reason I saw rather less of him in those days I think, that is I did see him in the fifties and sixties as I've described, sort of on and off if you know what I mean, but I wouldn't have said at that time that there was any sense in which I was particularly intimate with him, I mean he was a perfectly good friend of – we were perfectly good friends, was that it's quite – what has subsequently become a very important element in my life since very early 1970's – is going virtually every year to Portofino, their house in Italy for a week or less than a week or possibly even ten days on certain occasions in the summer; and that particularly happened when my present family was born and we took the babies and the young boys there, and actually both my children call Aline Berlin, Granny, she's their only honorary Granny as it were, and to be absolutely frank [laughs] that the reason, I think one of the reasons that I didn't go to Portofino until the very early 1970's was that neither Isaiah or Aline liked my first wife. I don't think they ever got on with Shirley, I think they regarded her as a sort of far too busy, sort of clattering person really, not their taste really, whereas they've always adored Patricia and we've always got on very well. And since then of course I think it's particularly since – well it certainly is – particularly since my marriage to Patricia that we've, as it were our relations in that sense have prospered partly through this summer acquaintance. However there was an incidence, one of two incidence's in which I have spoken, one or two or three incidence's I suppose in which I have spoken to Isaiah most closely on a personal matter was actually before that and it was in 19 – it illustrates a point about which as it were I valued his judgement. This was in 1966, possibly 7, either '66 or 7. The situation was that I, to my absolutely genuine and considerable surprise, I received a letter from the Vice Chancellor of Cambridge offering me the [Knightsbridge Residency?] in Cambridge and for which I hope

I can say, needless to say hadn't applied [laughs], I'd actually been, at this point I'd been – oh that's right, I'd only been eighteen months at Bedford so it must have been in 1966, something like that, and I was surprised to receive this and very excited by it and the trouble was there were various reasons which hung over my accepting it: one was Shirley was working in London, how would a divided life work and so on, had some reasons for thinking that possibly marriage wasn't in the sense in the best of health anyway and so on: secondly I knew something I shouldn't have known which was that they'd already made a decision that if I refused it, it would be offered to Stuart and I had reason to think that Stuart would like that, I think he was disappointed in America and I think that he would have liked to come back to that chair and I was put in what's called an embarrassing position. In fact I think it was Isaiah, I can't swear to this, I think it was Isaiah that told me it had been offered to Stuart, this having been leaked to him by Herbert Hart who was one of the electors, I think that was the situation, and I actually thought – I didn't hold this against Isaiah – I thought it was rather a wicked situation to be put in really and actually I held it against the electors. I don't think electors ought to do this trick, I think it's unfair really because it always gets out and so on. Now, so I was rather in a state about this, probably more of a state about it than I would be now having been a younger person and so on. I went and saw Isaiah and I actually went to Headington, I specially went in the afternoon to talk to him about it and he was a great help. I didn't actually follow his advice and I think he didn't give me advice that he expected me quite to follow, I think he gave me advice which he might have expected to produce the sort of result it did in a way [laughs]. That is, he said that both Stuart and I were behaving absurdly really, I mean that what everybody was doing was engaging in sort of Don Carlos like heroics [laughs] and he said, 'You're behaving like [?]' he said [laughs], 'that sort of nobility of friendship is being expressed on all sides and the whole thing can only generate total misunderstanding, you must do what you want to do and don't try and sort of square it all somehow.' Perfectly good advice actually. I needless to say didn't quite too



that, I was too squeamish so I did a very weak thing, that is I wrote to Stuart. I wrote to Stuart in a coded manner, that is I wrote to Stuart and said, 'Look I really do have terrible problems about this decision quite apart from anything about you, it's not about you, I have terrible decisions because of Shirley and she likes London and because it's so undecided it would really make a difference to me to know whether you'd accept it if I turned it down,' which is the best I could do at coding and I said,' because I had reason to think the third party would be what both of us would regard as a disaster and it would be absurd if there were misunderstandings,' you can see what I said. And needless to say I got a sort of immediate heroic letter from Stuart saying on no account would he accept, he'd obviously been briefed [laughs] saying well there's no way he would accept it anyway. I didn't think that was true. So everybody did behave in a somewhat Don Carlos like manner and Isaiah regarded the whole thing as mildly absurd I think. That was one of the occasions on which I had as it were a close discussion with him and he was a little, I mean not in any substantive way as it were, but he sort of knew what was going on at the time when my first marriage broke up and I got together – because he'd actually met Patricia a lot actually by, accidentally, he'd met her at a dinner at Wolfson College or somewhere and I think they got on rather well and then when he discovered what was sort of in the wind, he got rather – I think he was rather pleased about that actually [laughs] on general grounds as it were. So that was one of the matters about which we were quite close and involved, yes. And then after, especially after, I mean from about 1972 or 3 onwards there have only been three or four years between then and now when I've not been there in the summer and so on.

MI You said earlier that you described one incident in which you went to him for advice and that's the [Knightsbridge?] Chair; are there other specific incidents which you can remember besides that?

BW Where I went to him for advice? Yes about intimate matters [MI Yes] Yes there was another one, actually it always seems to be about professorships, it's not quite – it's very recent. He actually told me off, he reproached me which is not something he very often does but he did reproach me. He reproached me because I had told somebody else, Mrs Brendel in fact, I told her rather a lot about my feelings about coming back from America to England which as you know has been a very muddled and painful business; and the relevant part is that I accepted the job here when we were, for a whole lot of reasons, in rather low water in California. It had to be done on a kind of bet about whether things were going to get better there or not and we took what we then thought was the kind of safer option of returning and then of course in the long interval between that and actually coming, things in California got a lot better [laughs] and so the last year was spent with a very great deal of regret. I mean I think actually on the whole we've now put that mostly behind us, I mean one just goes on as it were. But it had been a very painful event, series of events or period really, the whole thing had been rather horrible, and I actually didn't have many people to talk to about it except Patricia and one or two friends in Berkeley but of course the friends in Berkeley whom I had talked to it about, it had a rather sort of odd aspect because they said all right and Donald Davidson actually said to me, 'Well you must be mad, if that's what you feel you've actually got to say to them well you're not going. Institutions can get over these things.' And somehow I found that extremely difficult in the end, impossible thing to do, I couldn't do it somehow, partly because I thought that it did make such a fuss about my going abroad, it was a kind of double insult and it somehow meant I'd not only left England, I'd somehow denounced it in some disgraceful way and I could – anyway this is a discussion about Isaiah, not about me but I mean I had problems about that. And I didn't have many friends, I don't know actually, I'm not a person who has very intimate friends actually on the whole, I mean almost the greatest part, by far the largest part of the interests in my life is actually my marriage no less than with friends, we're a sort of rather private

couple as it were rather than I have a lot of – but I have, I mean I do have, obviously Stuart and Isaiah among them and this goes back to this thing about them being older than me actually in some way which is obviously of some importance. And Isaiah reproached me for having said this to Reni, he said, ‘It’s too ungracious,’ he said, ‘it sounds very bad, it puts you in a bad position, makes you sound ungrateful, graceless and arrogant and it’s not a good idea,’ he said. He said this to me as he left our house in Oxford, just as he came out of the door, he was just getting into the car, sort of left me with this, very untypical actually, extremely because he’s always very careful not, on the whole, to say things that upset one and certainly not to leave one with something that upsets one. At the time I felt a little that it was – I mean you know this thing about he’s not as young as he was, it was rather late in the evening, you know he was tired and it sort of ran away with him and he hadn’t meant to say it. I’m not so sure now. Like often with him I think there was probably more aim in it than I thought at the moment. Anyway I was very upset by this, I went to see him again, I went up there and we spent an afternoon – and I simply wanted to explain to him how this had come about and I said, ‘I don’t have many friends and I’m rather fond of Reni and we were there in the house and so on and she’s a very good one as you know, well you know she a very good one at eliciting you know,’ and of course you know, of course if you’ve got any sense you know like all people who encourage you to gossip to them about oneself that it’s a very good way of a lot of other people getting to know about it. I mean Patrick Gardiner, who used to be a kind of professional confidante, he was the man everybody told their secrets to. He must have received more peoples’ secrets in his time than anybody else and as Richard Wollheim once said to me partly because everybody knew they’d be passed on! [laughs] which is slightly true mainly but actually I didn’t intend it to be passed on, I just talked to her because she sort of seduced me into talking about it if you know what I mean which is obviously rather good. Anyway I was told off by Isaiah so I went and explained it to him and he – the interesting thing was, it’s a very interesting fact, I’d thought a

lot about what he said because he didn't actually as it were retract what he'd said. When I told him that I'd just had a very nasty time [] he said, 'Yes I'm sure it was horrible, it must have been a horrible time,' and he said, 'I'm sorry if I – I didn't mean to be unpleasant, it's awful, I shouldn't go around telling you what to think and so on, terrible thing to do, tell you what to feel, so I was just concerned about the fact that you are -' and now this is relevant to him as it were, he said, 'The thing you've got to remember is that you have been enormously successful as have I, though not in exactly the same ways [laughs] and anybody, or almost anybody,' he said, 'certainly as persons in our position like you and me, we have something in common; that is to say that there are persons who say we haven't deserved it, who will say that we are, both of us, quite unnecessarily lucky; and if you appear to people to be unnecessarily lucky, [laughs] you necessarily attract resentment and persons say, "Certainly not worth it, why should he be doing so well, it's not as good as all that.' [laughs] He said, 'Everybody admires your work,' but he said, 'I hear persons saying, you know it's very very good but it's not as good as all that.' [laughs] and he said, 'Of course, ' he said, 'your work's much better than mine,' he said, ' I mean what people say about me is, I'm told this, is "he's never done anything! [laughs] Not done anything at all,' he said, 'just all those essays, short notes, what has he possibly done, never done anything.' So then of course as we all know this terrible strain of self doubt, the feeling that his reputation is an artefact, that it's invented, that it's blown up, it doesn't really exist, this all came out. I mean he's spoken in those terms before, never so directly and it's interesting that he should have spoken directly in relation to what he saw as a problem for me, and in the way of a warning.

MI But did you see that parallel, just for the sake of argument?

BW No, no, I didn't. I mean let us say I saw its component parts, that is there's a fact about him I've known, because we all know, I mean it's a very manifest fact about him, that he's always, he has this terrible self doubt, I mean you must have already heard about

in endless forms, the tremendous revisions and unwillingness to publish and the absurd – well we might come back to that – the absurd in my view, role in his life of certain powerful, whether they be sort of intellectual academic social figures like Bowra or still more philosophical figures like Austin. I think the reason he stopped being a philosopher isn't anything he said about that famous conversation with [Scheffler?] or whoever it was but it was Austin really. He was like a lot of people unduly terrorised by Austin and I think like a lot of people who knew Austin I think that he had, he'd internalised an Austinian super ego about precision which has killed more philosophical talents in this university than you've had hot dinners. I mean by the moment you'd got into your head that terrible voice saying, 'But it just isn't true! It doesn't follow! Now what's that supposed to mean?' Once that voice was ringing in your head, the pen fell flaccidly from your hand and nothing was created; and I think there's an element of that – I mean there are many other elements that you'll know about, understand better than I, but there's an element of that in Isaiah. So I knew that he had all that. Now I can explain why I didn't ...

MI But parenthetically it would then follow that the Austinian super ego was not a new...

BW Yes, that's right, that's right, because I resisted it, I always resisted it. I knew in some instinct – I mean we ought to be talking about Isaiah not about me, but I mean there is a parallel in a way, it's an interesting issue because it's come up at this point which I hadn't quite thought about in these terms, that by some instinct I think, I resisted Austin. I didn't know him personally, hardly at all, I didn't like his public philosophical persona and I think, I even thought at the time actually, it's one thing I thought self consciously at the time because you've got to remember that Austin died in 1960 when I was thirty-one so it was only a decade of my professional life at all in which I coexisted with Austin as it were and [MI Whereas for Isaiah, it was thirty years] Absolutely

and his youth and everything and I didn't go to the Saturday mornings and I had a reason for that. I probably would have gone if I'd lived in Oxford but I lived in London with Shirley and I – actually the one term I could have gone because I was living in Oxford, I didn't. Now the reason was that I thought that much as I admired Austin, I thought that the sort of thing where he went on wasn't the sort of thing I needed. I mean I'd been persuaded, oddly enough, by a figure for whom I now don't have very great philosophical respect, namely Miss [Anscombe?] because of her Wittgensteinian influence, that philosophy was a serious business which just being clever at it wasn't good enough and that's the one thing I owe Miss Anscombe actually, she persuaded me in some way of that, that it was – it had something to do with things which wasn't just about being smart. Now the fact I knew I can be clever [laughs] wasn't a particular problem I had and I knew I can be clever in philosophy; and it seemed to me – and I could also be quite harsh and all that stuff – and that's what Austin seemed to me to be: and the sneering dismissal of anything that sounded at all kind of pretentious or imaginative or high flown just seemed to me exactly the opposite of what both I and actually the subject needed. I always used to say with Austin he was like somebody in the British Treasury who – he always used to say you see that why we needed all this close analysis and so on was to get down the inflated metaphysical and philosophical pretensions, you see? And I said anyone who thought that the British philosophical economy needed deflating was like someone at the Treasury, you know, who deflates the economy when they're all lining up in the dole queue! [laughs] The idea that the real trouble with English philosophy was the sort of raving Heideggerian passions were roaring across it, I mean it's so obviously untrue that of course that's like most of other of Austin's explanations of why he went on as he did which was actually a piece of an ideology that it wasn't why he behaved like that. He went on like that because that was what he was good at doing and then he had to invent a way in which it was relevant to philosophy and all the ways in which he tried to explain its relevance to philosophy are ridiculous. I mean they're not even

plausible, they're all excuses. Anyway that's by the way, let's go back to the other thing. The thing was that I had of course understood about Isaiah's forms of self doubt, needless to say not being an insanely conceited – you know Isaiah's distinction between being conceited and being vain have you? [MI No] We'll come back to that, yes – not being insanely conceited [laughs] subject to the thought that a) that I haven't done as much as I might have done: b) that what I've done isn't as good as I or other people sort of thing, I mean if one isn't very conceited of course one is open to those thoughts and manifestly to some degree they are in my case justified. But they're in such a different territory from Isaiah's because if it's the case as I think that I've done less as yet than I might have done, it's not for Isaiah's like reasons as it seems to me. [MI And what are Isaiah like reasons?] I mean when I say for reasons I don't mean for Isaiah like causes, I mean the description of what it was to have done less than one might have done in the two cases is different. That is that there's some large work of intellectual history, that is Isaiah has a large number of materials which he simply as it were failed to bring together and so it's got – and obviously the remark that Oscar Wilde made about himself, that he put his genius into his life and only his talent into his work, is one that could be naturally applied to him. But that couldn't be applied to me; I mean if that accusation applies to me is that I've, you know, the work's too clever and hasn't penetrated things as fast as it might have done or something of the case, the basis is different: so because the basis is different I hadn't as it were thought of putting them together.

MI So in a sense what he said to you by way of explanation of his rebuke, did not convince, it did not carry with you because you felt the two cases, him and you were quite different.

BW No, no, it stood as a rebuke, it's just you were asking why I hadn't made the association he had and I tried to explain that. But there is a further element, it meant it stood as a rebuke because of course not being mad I'm perfectly aware of the fact that

somebody in my position is open to resentment or envy, however you wish to characterise the reasons for that: and obviously my problem is like, which is I think different from, actually is slightly different from his in terms of peoples' sentiments, is that I'm likely to look very arrogant and that the rebuke stood in relation to that because I looked as though I was toying you know with the University of Oxford and so on. Well, I am rather, that's certainly true [laughs] in evidence of that I can say that I'm not absolutely sure that the University of Oxford in it's present condition should necessarily have to be too sensitive about my or other peoples' arrogance. [laughs heartily] The difference between being vain and conceited, which Isaiah uses quite a lot, is a rather keen one, particularly at the moment actually; in his usual way he categorises people in this way. It's perfectly sound: being conceited means having a false impression of your own merits; being vain is being very sensitive to what people think about your merits. They're clearly two different things but as Isaiah points out, they're certainly compatible. He said, 'Freddie was both vain and conceited!' [laughter]

MI I just want to round up these moments when you've gone to him to talk about something intimate, something painful, something difficult, whether you can think of any other occasions where you've had these moments when you've had a kind of heart to heart?

BW Yes, well there was at least one conversation about Patricia leaving her husband and Quentin and all that. I would be quite willing to be up front, you know between our ourselves if it had anything of you know immensely particular light but I mean he was extremely what you'd expect him to be, I mean he was very, I mean after he'd had a certain experience not unrelated to, not totally unlike that himself; and he was quite funny about that in a way. I don't know whether he must have talked to you at various points about Dr Halban and he's quite funny about Dr Halban [laughs] I must say. He didn't – one of the ways in which it seemed to me



that it helped me a lot was of course, and this is often true about which we all know, the platitude about the best sorts of friends and the best sort of advice, was not of course of anything he told one to do or even anything he told one to think about what one had done, but by the way in which he described his own experience and certain sensibility he brought to that, he was frightfully good at cheering one up. I mean while acknowledging perfectly frankly what could scarcely be denied, namely that I had behaved extremely badly towards Quentin Skinner which is hardly the matter of a dispute, and not denying that fact, it was a little like the [ ] about Stuart, about not going on too much. But he didn't as it were, the force wasn't that he told me not to which of course could have simply sounded cynical or inconsiderate or like somebody you know out of either *Les Liaisons Dangereuse* or [laughs] *Marivaux* or something [laughs], it wasn't that; it was partly because he talked about the person at that time he was disposed to call, 'My predecessor,' [laughs] in what could be called an encouraging manner! [MI Yes] I think, so he sort of generated a sensibility about it of a positive and supportive kind. And one of his great capacities it seems to me, I mean you'll have thought about all the different ways in which people as it were speak well of him I'm sure, but he seems to me to have a – I haven't really quite put it in these terms, I can't quite put it rightly, Michael, but it's something like this: he has the capacity for generating a way of feeling all right. If he thinks it's all right – I mean if he thinks you're behaving badly, he'll tell you so or indicate to you – he doesn't tell you so, he'll indicate that perhaps by even a silence; but if he thinks it's all right really, you haven't done something, you're on the right lines really, it's had to come out, he has a way of generating confidence or feeling well about it which isn't at the expense of the other feelings that are appropriate to the occasions, not by denying them. So that as it were he can make positive and as it were life giving emotion as it were out of nothing; he can actually increase the emotional economy. There's a lot of people who say, 'Well now you've done the right thing,' or 'You've done the thing that must be right for you and her,' or whatever it is and, 'Sort of forget about those other

people,' or even tries to say, 'Those other people haven't got a case,' you know it's garbage of that kind which unless you are either very cynical or very tough or rather disagreeable, you're not going to believe anyway: he doesn't do that. But he can somehow acknowledge those claims but generate a surplus out of nothing [laughs] for one's own claims; and I think that's actually part of the way in which he lives what is of course is of philosophical importance, I mean his recognition of the coexistent and uncancellable conflicting claims. But it's part of the psychology of that recognition.

MI Exactly. I mean I'm digging away, we're both digging away at the sense in which he might be considered a wise man and a wise friend, that's why ...

BW I do regard him as a wise man and a wise friend I must say although I think also there are some things about which he is sometimes quite silly. [MI Such as?] He's perfectly capable of being silly. I think that there are two things about which he's sometimes silly: one of them's a deep matter and the silliness, though I think it's genuine, is a superficial part of a deeper phenomenon which is not deeply silly. Do you see what I mean? It's better if I put it less abstractly. What I have in mind is what he says in the remarks you – the recording you sent to me about the Nazis. That is I think that it's simply inadequate in a silly way to say that the Nazis were persons whose fundamental values were of a universally accepted kind and which would otherwise be admired, namely Patriotism, concerned for the decency of their country, the integrity of their National life, only unfortunately they had some erroneous empirical beliefs [MI About the Jews] about the Jews. Now that in fact is silly and it's so silly that obviously we have to ask if perhaps we were right on some other question [MI Why does a clever man hold a silly view on that subject?] Why does a clever man who's a Jew hold a silly -? Why does a clever man who is a Jew, who is particularly interested in the dark reactionary histories of the European consciousness say that? And the answer is there must

have some more to be said about it; and that's why I say the deeper part of it, though probably in a certain very important way erroneous, is not silly but what at issue in that moment – and I've heard similar things occasionally, especially perhaps in his later years, is something which frankly is rather silly and if an enemy, as it might be Scruton or somebody, saw that, I mean they would say very unfavourable things about him on the basis of it. I mean they would say, 'This is a foolish superficial liberal who hasn't understood what's happened to Europe,' or 'Doesn't understand about human evil,' or whatever they would say. But I mean you can imagine a sermon on – by George Steiner based on that text which would be of a very unhelpful character and could do Isaiah as it were genuine harm because it would make him look like a silly person that he isn't. There is a dimension of his life in which I simply think is in a certain way more deeply silly, what I mean by that is it's more silly all through but also of course much less in a way important: and it's the dimension of his life which in a way I suppose the focal figure of which is Bowra; that is that he's always been as it seems to me much over impressed by Bowra and the world of Bowra and he will tell one stories about Bowra endlessly and in fact tell them [laughs] the same stories about Maurice and as we all know, Maurice who I knew a bit, a bit, not at all well, not as Isaiah did and again I knew him well enough to know what the effect was and I think I know what he was like actually. As you well know – did you ever know Bowra? No, you know what it's like, you've had the endless stories – no the fact is that Bowra did suffer to a considerable extent of being one of these wits whose jokes don't live on the page, I mean unlike actually Wilde, I mean many wits don't but unlike Wilde where these jokes can still be sparkling at you, I mean you can read them and they can actually make you laugh, Bowra wasn't like that. I mean the thing about his jokes were that they were funny because of the way – the remarks were funny because they'd simply popped out so unexpectedly; I mean it was their relation to their context which made them funny [MI And therefore you had to be there] You had to be there because it was simply a form of social impudence of a certain kind and without

the context and the surprise, it just looks like banal and boorish and superficial and snobbish and ...

MI So the difficulty with Bowra presumably then is that there's a kind of systematic over estimation of this character? [BW Yes] What I always fear when Isaiah talks about Bowra is a very complicated sense that this was the man who valued himself much more highly for example as a Greek scholar that he [BW That's correct] deserves all that stuff. Isaiah doesn't seem to me to be deluded about how to evaluate Bowra as a person and therefore I need to know why you think his [BW Yes well I think he is you see?] engagement with Bowra is silly.

BW Yes. I mean I don't think his engagement with Bowra per se is silly, I think it leads to some – I mean it's what I call is the focal point of a set of things that I see a certain skewing of the values he would otherwise apply elsewhere in what I would call a Oxford chatter direction. You see for instance, because Isaiah knows perfectly well, and he and I have had this conversation more times than I [laughs] wish to remember in a way because especially these days it tends to go on rather predictable lines, like our conversation incidentally about what's wrong with Traviata which is a conversation we must have had almost more times than any other [laughs]. [MI I'll have to ask you about that] Yes, I'll tell you about that conversation about what's wrong with Triviata – Traviata, Triviata is a very good slip of the tongue there! [hearty laughter] [MI Perhaps we don't need to have it after all!] No I can tell you more precisely what the disagreement is about, it's a perfectly possible disagreement but it also illustrates something more interesting actually so don't let me forget that. [MI Let's finish off Bowra] Let's finish off Bowra. The thing is that Isaiah knows and says perfectly sincerely and correctly that Bowra over estimated himself as a scholar. He doesn't locate absolutely precisely the way in which Bowra over estimated himself as a scholar but that doesn't matter much; I mean the trouble was that Bowra himself was impressed by technical scholarship, particularly in the person of

Dennis Page and would then try to write dull scholarly books [laughs] which – as well as superficial popular literary books. Now the superficial popular literary books were superficial and popular and the dull scholarly books were very bad [laughs] as several articles, he wasn't very good at it, that's the trouble. He hasn't quite got that but that was the situation, yes. So it wasn't that Bowra resented – it would be false to think that Bowra's resentment at what happened to him was simply that literary works and works with a literary content had been despised by the scholars; he thought his scholarship was despised by the scholars and – but he was right, [MI How right he was] how right he was you see? [laughs] And Page, the horrible Page was a much more horrible man than Bowra in many ways, he was a disgusting man and actually he had a lot of things wrong with him but he was a much better technical scholar than Bowra and he used to knock him in his lectures, you know, he'd say, 'Well we've got another verse by the Warden of Wadham here which isn't Greek.' But the point about Isaiah is this: that this envy, at least this is my view, Isaiah might contradict it but this is my view, these misestimates [The phone rings and there is a short break in the tape] Got enough tape? You're looking at it rather anxiously. [MI It's just that we're going to run out but that's fine] OK. I think that this led to a misestimate of two remarkable figures who were two of the most remarkable Classical scholars round here and happened to be here together and they were both Professors when I was an undergraduate and I had a very great admiration for both of them in very different ways, namely Frankel and Dodds. Now Frankel and Dodds were both very remarkable men, Dodds was also a very nice man; Frankel – nobody's ever claimed was a nice man [laughs] – he was very nice to me actually but I had no personal reason – but everybody knew he was a monster. But they were both, in quite different ways, really rather great men and they were much greater men than Bowra; and the fact is that though Isaiah knows that Bowra over estimated [ ], he hasn't as it ever seemed to me, ever been able quite to rewrite that set of evaluations so that people who in a certain sense ought to be respected, namely Dodds for

his human qualities as well as his scholarship, Frankel certainly not for his human qualities but for being a certain kind of quite extraordinary figure in a subject for which Isaiah has a great respect, he hasn't really enough respect for because – and that's the sort of thing that he gets from Bowra and then it turns into exactly the sort of thing that as it were Continental scholars and others outside Oxford hold against Oxford. I mean the sort of chattering assessment of manners or whether somebody had a comical foreign accent or whether Dodds had Communist beliefs or was interested in Spiritualism or was too wrapped up with Irish poets or something; I mean just things which you'd have thought in a way were the fabric of an interesting intellectual life, it's really a case that in that respect Isaiah's aspects as an intellectual – let's not speak of academic – I mean as an intellectual was the point I want to stress, seemed to me a little [collified?] by the world of the Common Room or ...

*Side B*

BW ...temperamentally two different ...

MI Do you think there are other cases in which the kind of width or breadth or catholicity of Isaiah's judgement as an intellectual has been limited or impeded or slightly distorted by Oxford Common Room provincialism?

BW Yes I think so, I do think so. I can't give you another example off the top of my head, I'd have to rummage around, but I think so. I think that there are persons again I mean who I think, you know, have to be taken very seriously, who somehow seem to disappear too quickly because they aren't somehow the right shape. Now Isaiah in principle of course knows that perfectly well because he's always talking about, you know, unhandleable geniuses, persons it's quite impossible to get on with and so on and so forth; and of course I don't believe, I would want to distinguish what I'm presently saying from the very serious sort of Scruton like charge

that this is a person who's compromised the intellectual life very radically by a pursuit of social success, which you yourself answered in a very friendly and appropriate manner in referring to his gifts for friendship and so on which seemed to me absolutely right; but I'm not saying that – well obviously I'm not, we wouldn't be having this conversation if I thought that – but I think that what – the sort of thing that a Scruton might mistake for what he's talking about is something about that you've just well expressed, a certain kind of Oxford provincialism as it seems to me ...

MI And then the substance of the charge is not merely provincialism but that he values a person's human Clubability over much, he values it often at the expense of a genuine estimate of their intellectual qualities and contributions and there is therefore a risk that a kind of a savage character [BW Yes that's right] a difficult character of undoubted talent will be neglected by someone, or misestimated by someone like Berlin because he ...

BW Well, it's not misestimate – yes, I mean the cases I was referring to very certainly were simply misestimated, I mean he seems to me to have wrong beliefs, I mean in the sense that for instance his remarks about Frankel would be of an entirely external character no doubt, 'Very distinguished scholar,' you know but I mean it obviously means nothing to him at all. Sometimes it seems to me that the misestimate isn't – in a way a purely intellectual estimate isn't wrong but it doesn't have the effect on his life that it should or his own sensibility isn't affected by the farouche or the untidy or the awkward or above all – of course I plead guilty too to some degree – by the boring, particularly the self importantly or generally gracelessly boring: and he's softer on Clubable bores actually, interestingly, than unclubable bores. His example is [Quine?] you see? I mean Quine is a Club man and a bore, also a horrible man. Now Isaiah sort of knows he's a horrible [laughs] man really but actually he sort of quite likes him as a kind of another College figure, well actually a lot of people do, it's not a very exceptional case but it's an illustration of this same point up

to a point I think. I think it's connected with something about him actually which I think is very important to him. I mean we're talking at a shallow level here but I think this leads – there's a thread running from this to something that goes much deeper which is of – I think is a rather obvious fact about him, namely his fascination with the persons with whom he contrasts himself. I mean his fascination with dark, irrational, religious, reactionary, dangerous, unhandleable creative figures [MI De Maistre] De Maistre and Dostoevsky above all and ...

MI Well I'm surprised you include Dostoevsky because I find there a simple revulsion, you know I don't want to – a sense that that really is unhandleable for him.

BW Well I think you're right but I think the fact that he keeps – it seems to me – yes, I mean you're right, something more precise. In the case of De Maistre, because De Maistre after all had the apparatuses of as it were French argument about him which makes him – that enables Isaiah in a way to get his hands on it more. But my feeling is that his casting of himself as having what some people thought, in particular what Dostoevsky thought, were the negative aspects of Turgenev and his sympathy for Turgenev as somebody who people thought was too civilised, too liberal, too disposed to run away [laughs] and all those things. It seems to me constantly – it's like you see when I said the thing about Verdi and Wagner was typical, that this constant talking of the shaping of Verdi was a shaping against the unmentioned counter image of Wagner; the shaping of Turgenev is a shaping against the unexplored counter image of Dostoevsky; that the importance of talking about all that is given by the idea that there is something enormously powerful, important, significant, which somehow – indeed doesn't want to get into, that's quite right but he's conscious of that very fact as it seems to me. And this must have again something to do with what we were talking about the silliness about the Nazis.



MI Where should we go here? There's so many lines I could follow you, we could follow but perhaps we should just follow the issue of the Jews because I think it does lead us somewhere interesting. I want to get a more precise sense from you of why he's silly about the Nazis [BW Yes] in what I sent you and what is the proper account of the Nazis that he's failing to confront in his political philosophy.

BW Well I think, this is in danger of sounding tidier than I think it is but it's a little neat but, you know, you can abstract from that I'm sure [laughs]. I actually think there are kind of sort of three strains in it actually and they're different from one another and let's just put them down: one is about being Jewish from the holocaust; one is about evil; and one is about social explanation and I think they combine in this matter not surprisingly [laughs] since they're a highly charged matter. The Jewishness seems to me connected with this: he thinks it's extremely important, Jewishness I mean it goes without saying is obviously frightfully important to him and whether somebody is a Jew is very important to him and he's always referring to whether one's a Jew or not or whether people are Jews and needless to say not being a Jew but sort of – whereas I think occasionally think people are Jews who aren't and this always produces absolute incredulity from him, I mean the idea that anybody could think this goy person was [laughs] you must have had the same experience [laughs] 'Jew, Jew? You must be joking!' a lot of this goes on. So it's very important to him and his connections with Israel and everything. However he's obviously manifestly by his entire way of life and everything, he's an assimilationist Jew and like many assimilationist Jews he regards particularly politically active orthodox Jews with alarm and fear and distaste. I think that goes along with the idea that while being a Jew is interesting and important, the idea that it is for all time special, set apart, is repugnant to him. Now many discussions of the holocaust and interpretations of Nazi [] are clearly based on some such conception and the historian struggle, I mean the recent controversy obviously to some degree turns on the issue of

whether this event is somehow absolutely special or not. One: Isaiah wants to say, and has explicitly said, that it isn't absolutely special. He wants to say that without betraying the Jews but in his own mind he can't be – to say that can't be a betrayal of the Jews if you see what I mean, from the Jewish end of the question because one reason that people have for saying that it's absolutely special, namely roughly Freddie Raphael's reason for saying that it's absolutely special, is because of the absolute specialness of the Jews; and so there's a denial there I think which is tied up. That's the first reason. The second reason, this leads to the second reason, the second reason for thinking that it's absolutely special is because you think it's absolutely specially evil. Now this can be thought in a religious dimension. Now he doesn't think that because his view of history is secular and for a Jewish person it's very secular because part of the rejection of the specialness of the Jews is a rejection also of the specialness of the Jewish self understanding of history, namely that it could be religiously redemptive or meaningful or teleological in the religious sense which obviously reject. But I think with that and perhaps even in association with it, or perhaps on more general grounds, he seems to me to [phone rings, short break] so very resistant to the idea of evil in history even in a secular – if you can accept the idea of a secular sense of evil where evil's just a shorthand for certain ethical categories about irrationality, sheer destructiveness; and I think that goes back to the issues about relativism which we might get on to later, about the notion of the as it were the [gesuntermenschentum?], I mean the idea that there is a kind of human normality which is part of the fabric of history, and he is resistant to the idea that there is a kind of human normality which is so awful that – but while he's resistant to it, it falls into the category of what we were talking about earlier, that it's part of exactly the presence of which he's always conscious of and hence of course the fascination of it in the case of De Maistre where it can be handled because it's presented in a theoretical form, the idea that people – I mean what he finds much harder to handle obviously is where such notions are presented, not in a French theoretical form by a mildly dandified

French reactionary [MI But in the SS] in the SS or in the works of Dostoevsky, I mean where it is made concrete if you like or real in imaginative terms: similarly when it's made concrete in the rather different terms precisely as you say in the SS. And that's very resisted I think. Now a third reason which comes to the – the third point which I was talking about is this: that if – suppose that you resist even a secularised category of evil and you say, then you have to say, well the Nazi phenomenon needs an explanation and if you're against the, you know, negative divine incursion into history or inexplicable wellings up of human destructiveness except that you don't like that, then you've got to look for something explicable which of course the Marxists used to do, I mean in terms of the last expressions of Capitalism or the you know, well known – well none of that's frightfully convincing but what we've actually got of that sort. But what is clear about it is that to provide such an explanation would be to use to some degree the categories of sociology or some related social science because you see you can't do it entirely by history. If you do it entirely by history, then you're going to end up into another sort of religious or ethical category again because you're going to start talking about The Germans and German history and why is German history so peculiar. Well you're not as it were going to [be] given a guarantee that that is going to be a secular and non racist explanation unless it's got some theoretical apparatus to mark that point. If I just say well there are certain facts about German history, the unification of German history, that it happened so late that the industrialised – but then you see I've got to start saying something about industrialisation or the nature of industrialisation to make that stick without us just being stuck with the wicked old Germans and there they go again kind of thing, you know, because it's as it were the explanation of the Nazi phenomenon is heavy industry plus being German. Well that's [laughs] you know, forget about it. So you're going to be getting into something which even if it isn't a Marxist explanation certainly, not a Marxist but some explanation which is going to use the categories of industrialisation and so on, certain aspects of the German middle class resentment, the relation of the traditional

German upper class to an emergent bourgeois class and things [arrontier?] class and so on: if you're going to start saying these things – no Isaiah hates all that because his impatience with the social sciences, in particular sociology, as we all know is very considerable. And indeed I would say that was another little bit of Oxford parochial silliness to some extent. I mean I don't think his argument, I mean we can all produce a posteriori argument against sociology and some of us are in a better position to do it than others [laughs]. But Isaiah's arguments really are against the possibility of the social sciences are actually not as a matter of fact very interesting and they don't contain any very powerful intellectual consideration.

MI And they then produce a weakness in for example the De Maistre argument which, by making De Maistre a kind of avatar of totalitarianism produces intellectual history of a very dubious kind. I mean it's overly intellectual [BW Yes that's right] or explanation of origins and it turns a kind of early nineteenth century you know Sardinian Ambassador into some kind of, you know, Angel of Death as it were [BW Yes that's quite true] it doesn't quite work. [BW It's a nice romantic consideration though] But that in your view springs from a certain view of social explanation?

BW Yes, I think that's right. I think he thinks that all social explanation really is either historical, in a very generous sense of historical, or the history of ideas or psychological.

MI But then to return to this business of what's silly about his view about the Nazis, it can't surely be the case then simply that social explanation is a missing piece here, because even when you've got social explanations abundantly in place in the Nazi case, you're still left with why individuals did what they did [BW Oh of course, yes] faced with other human beings and then you're into, you're back into the problem of evil and ...

BW Yes, I'm not quite – that's not quite what I'm trying to say. I mean the point is that you don't have to be silly about the Nazis in saying that you don't understand what happened, in fact quite a non silly thing to say about the Nazis is that you don't understand what happened. [MI What's silly is to say I understand] Yes, what's silly is to say, well what is particularly, what I picked on as being particularly silly was to say that the Nazis were a combination of a universal – well not universal but very widely spread recognisable human belief which as far as it goes is perfectly admirable, [MI Patriotism] plus false beliefs about the Jews. Now that's ridiculous, I mean it's obviously ridiculous because it first of all leaves out – well I mean it's obviously how ridiculous, I mean the idea that racism is a matter of empirical error is just daft because where does that empirical error come from, you know I mean it's just absurd, and also because it's quite wrong to see patriotism or love of country as a category which can be operated at a level of generality in which both Verdi and Himmler are examples of it. I mean by the time you get to – I mean no doubt Himmler was in many ways a patriotic man but the relation of – and it's not a simple pun to call both Verdi and Himmler patriotic: but the role that any such patriotism plays in the explanation of them and the role that their psychology plays in the explanation of their patriotism is so different in the two cases that you said simply nothing if you say that that's what I'm getting at as being silly.

MI Well that then takes you directly, if I'm following you, to this recurrence in Isaiah's view that there is a kind of set of propositions about human nature [BW Yes certainly] that provide us with a kind of stable basis for a liberalism that would avoid the relativist [BW Yes I think that's right] for us to say that we can recognise in Himmler, in Verdi, certain common properties of quite normal order, human [BW Universal human passions as he's so fond of saying, yes] and your point about that is that they are being specified at such a level of generality that they entirely miss what is quite distinct and separate about Verdi and Himmler?

BW Yes two points: that is one, that's absolutely right, I mean the trouble is that specification of the universal human passions is it always runs into the problem that at the level of which it's true, it underdetermines the phenomena to the point that quite a large number of pieces of relativism are still left in place; in fact also, if I could put in a slightly kind of post modern consideration that is not his favourite meat and drink as it were [laughs] namely, that some of us would say the very constitution of manifestations of those universal human passions is itself a product of what you're trying to explain. I mean you can construct it as another example of, you know, love of parents but the fact is, I mean rather as any anthropologist will tell you in anthropology 102, incest, although it has a common meaning, it isn't the same social phenomenon in Ancient Egypt, Tahiti or wherever, you know; so in the same way you want to say love of country, love of even one's relations and so on, isn't though much in common, isn't the same phenomenon because part of its construction, part – well I mean you know what I'm talking about. Actually the interesting thing is that Isaiah wouldn't because he would – I think that's partly – no, it isn't – I was going to say it's partly a generational matter but it isn't entirely a generational matter, it's a temperamental matter, whether you like that sort of thought or not. But even if you allow – there's one point we've just made, namely that these passions are not actually univocal, but even when you allow them to be univocal they're so highly general that much remains to determine. There's also a third point, is that one of the universal human passions is missing, I mean not of one but a set of them is missing in the universal passions of mankind as far as I can see and the case it gets referred to but is not part of the substance of it, that is the desire for destruction, the desire for power, the desire for power that takes the form of destruction [MI Which precisely De Maistre specifies so brilliantly] of course, absolutely and of course a writer, needless to say for whom, who he really cannot bear at all, namely Nietzsche – I mean one of the great differences between us intellectually is the fact that I'm constantly interested in and become increasingly interested in Nietzsche and it's not a subject that he and I would

as it were have anything much to say about, I mean he just regards the whole thing as merely quite unacceptable. I mean he knows enough to know that what [ ] said about Nietzsche, I mean Nazism, anti Semitism and so on is false, doesn't interest him and insofar as he thinks it's either just merely clever or repulsive or both. Now that doesn't even fall into the class of what I said earlier about Dostoevsky, namely that he's aware, he knows about it but he's afraid of it, he just – but and I mean I don't regard it as a necessity of anybody to have to take Nietzsche seriously, I mean I don't think it's – it's not one of the writers I'd put in the class of saying that it's simply a mistake to think that it's of no interest, I mean it's a question of ...

MI But this is not a matter of writers one way or the other [BW No, no that's a matter of temperament] it's a matter of whether a philosophical view based on universal human passions is missing some key items.

BW That's right, absolutely it. And so I mean to summarise it as if I was sort of giving a little kind of note book of it, I mean I would say the trouble about the view is that it as it were ignores the construction of the passions and how far the univocal – and it ignores the highly general and undetermining feature and it ignores one of them or a group of them. And that's a bit damaging but of course the point ...

MI But then how damaging? Because I'm very struck as I listen to Isaiah's view of the liberal premise or liberal set of arguments, is that he puts – given his emphasis on the practical difficulties of reconciling conflicting views, the fact that people will be attached to different values, the fact that in his view there are monsters about; it's a liberalism with a fair room for inevitable forms of coercion, I mean I've teased him to the effect that the hangman plays a pretty large role [BW Oh yes, yes] in his view as it does in De Maistre [BW Yes that's right] they may have an apparently sunny and slightly overly optimistic view of the universal human passions but the liberalism that then gets ground out is not

especially sunny and is rather, in its defence could be said to be quite realistic about the possibilities of mutual human malignity.

BW No I agree. I agree about that. I'm not saying that what he is, is a fatuous optimist. I mean fortuity is not as it were the problem, that's not the problem I quite agree with you. And of course like many conservative liberals to that extent he's rather pessimistic, you're quite right about that and he's resigned and rueful and a lot of things of that sort which is of course absolutely right, I mean a correct description of it. No, the [ ] seem to be me to be twofold: one is intellectual, that is that his actual representations of human history can seem thin or illuminated only by sunlight, not because the dark forces aren't there, as I've already said they are there, but that he operates a lot of his time with his back to them; that is that the way they're working is by pushing him along a contour when he's not looking at them really. So that they're present in his work but they're present either in the form simply of acknowledgement or by exclusion as in the Dostoevsky/Turgenev kind of case.

MI But is that fair given as you say that his whole post war intellectual life was devoted to taking the romantic challenge to all that enlightened optimism seriously, you have the De Maistre essay at the centre of it; is it quite fair to say that he's kind of got his back turned to the – there is some sense in which he's trying to take this seriously?

BW He's trying to take it on, you see, but I think the trouble is that comes to the second point is that either it – I mean he sees it as a challenge but he sees it as a challenge to a view rather than the substance of the problem. [laughs] I mean he addresses himself to romanticism because as I said, I mean my view is that he is fascinated by the forces which in a way his view doesn't allow enough for; and – I mean as I am to some extent in the sense that because I know that my natural temperament is of a rather argumentative rationalistic bent, I've always been interested in the irrationalist writers and phenomena [laughs] I mean that's in a



sense one of the similarities between Isaiah and me but I suppose I'm a bit blacker about them than he is actually in some ways; and it may be also easier for me to be blacker about them than it is for him. [MI Why?] Well because he's Jewish and because he's an ,migr, and because his country which his first language came and has been living under a hideous tyranny for almost his whole lifetime, and that seems to me to make it a bit harder, I mean you know, you have a larger thing involved in your life [laughs] than I have, I mean as just a suburban English boy who Germans dropped the bombs on as it were and otherwise just had Mr Attlee [laughs], it's rather different! But you see the trouble is, there is another thing to which you yourself have referred that the effect of it is that the acknowledgement, because its kind of acknowledgement, it simply makes these forces if they haven't either been sillily assimilated by saying as he does – that's a rather unusual excess actually – but I mean if he doesn't just say well their ideals are all right but they're the false beliefs or something of the kind we've talked about earlier, they're simply demonised – not demonised, that's religious – but they're simply labelled as monsters. So either the hangman or some clinical surrogate for the hangman, has to deal with them. Now he's never ever been the kind of fatuous liberal who thought that you could do a lot of things without employing a hangman. I mean he doesn't think that somehow, he doesn't subscribe to some Shavian or other rubbish that effectively all went round being frightfully nice to everybody and had a nice system of education, everybody psychoanalysed or something, it would all be hunky dory; he never thought that. But the trouble is that you've got the course of human history, intelligible in its variety though with much local – rightly pointed out by Herder [laughs] – variety, Vico, Herder and variety in various places – but based on the universal human etc passions expressed in different ways [ ] – but as it were is punctuated by monsters [laughs] who break out or turn up. But that you see is one of the unacceptable, by others, unacceptable – incidentally in that case unacceptable to him – schemata for the holocaust. But it's simply ...

MI Yes, because he doesn't want to call them monsters, he wants to call them rational human beings with whom we could have a conversation who have unfortunately empirically incorrect views about Jews, Gypsies and half of the human race.

BW Well he does, well he gets into that state which is a bit extreme even for him I think, but the reason for that – and we've already been there – the reason is that he can't use the simple monster model in that case because of the all the requirements he has about how to think about the Jews. So that that excludes the simple monster case there I think because it's too close you see to a demonising explanation which would make the Jews too special or something like in that area. But there is a demonising – I think the sheer monster view is that it's exclusionary, it's acknowledgement but it excludes. What it's saying is, life is like this, there are monsters, you have to face that there are monsters, you can't eliminate monsters. Monsters have to be eliminated by human action, human institutions be prepared to eliminate monsters he says. Now the thing about that is that the negativity has been externalised. [MI Under non human or -] non human, exactly, so we have the gesuntermenschenverstant which expresses itself in all these culturally various ways, we have the non human, the beast, the external. Now of course there is an enormous literature on this subject of the kind that he precisely [laughs] isn't interested in reading. I mean [MI Which would be the most illuminating on this matter] Precisely. I mean it's certain views of the Frankfurt Schools, certain pro structuralist critics and others who write – well we don't even have to go as far as that – but for instance I was thinking of my – some people I know, you know for instance a lot of very recent work on Colonialism, the view of the Other in Colonialism, the figure of Caliban and a lot of writing about Shakespeare and the treatment of the Native or the Other in studies of racism, literary and historical and so on, the conceptionalisation of racism in terms of Otherness. But this

seems to me exactly the sort of thing which is relevant here which is ...

MI The conclusion of which would be human, only too human.

BW Yes that's right. Exactly, exactly. And of course the very business of that it's itself a human reaction you see, that he himself is doing which is to externalise, stigmatise, make into a thing, make into a beast like Caliban. But the odd way he's doing it to those people themselves in a very gentle way.

MI Yes. But isn't – I mean, again I may be going round the houses in a slightly tedious way with this but it does seem important to, at least to me, to understand it. I was very struck when I did the interviews how much he was straining to produce an account of the Nazis which would say precisely human, too human; which would say, no not monsters or beasts and then produce what you regard as silliness which is these were just normal, calculative, rational human beings: and if there's silliness in fact to lurch – it's a kind of uncertain lurch between wanting to simply weed them out of the common human species in order to preserve the slightly sunny estimate of human nature; and on the other hand a much more troubled sense that when someone like Stuart Hampshire invites his hobby horse here would say we're dealing with evil, he doesn't want to take that road precisely because he thinks that then leads to a demonisation which allows the mind to shut down in some way. Do you see what I'm saying?

BW No that's quite right. Yes I do see what you're saying but I think that the thing is that this is something about how long you go on. It seems to me that there are two things: one is that he will go on as long as he can, even at the cost of silliness, to recruit residual or recalcitrant phenomena into humanity and into a humanity which is not necessarily sunny but let's call it positively comprehensible, that is what I mean by positively comprehensible can be comprehensively related to what he and you and I would

call positive values. I mean there's a list of positive values because what he's always interested in is the conflict between positive values and that's the thing [MI Among positive values] yes exactly, that's what's most interesting in many ways. OK. So he goes on as long as he can to comprehensively assimilate some recalcitrant human phenomenon [laughs] to positive human values even at the cost of a certain silliness by explaining that it is actually positive human values with some false empirical – OK. The question is what happens when he gives up doing that? Now the category of evil plays no part, partly because it isn't secular and therefore has, it sounds like Judaism calling, and secondly for a very good reason which I absolutely agree with him about, namely that those who invoke evil always invoke it too soon, that is it's a denial of its very process of trying to understand and it's taking refuge in what the great Jewish philosopher called The Asylum of Ignorance, Spinoza's phrase. It didn't apply quite to that but it's a great Spinozean phrase that it's taking refuge in the asylum of ignorance and calling it evil; and of course most disgusting of all is sort of facile journalistic invocations of evil by as it were Steiner or I mention again Scruton because he obviously [ ] and this was just disgusting and that sort of stuff. So all power to Isaiah in as it were going on for as long as possible and not slinking off into the asylum of ignorance labelled evil. But when he gets to the end, when really even he is defeated [laughs] of comprehensively assimilating the recalcitrant to the positively [palliable?], he then reaches for the category of the monstrous, the unassimilable, and the monstrous just means the unassimilable; and then they're mad or they're – you know, something. The point is he also loses [laughs] interest. I mean he was always interested as long as it could be associated to positive human values, fascinated. When he gets to the end of that process even he runs out of gas. We pull down the shutter and the shutter's just got monster written on it really. [laughs] I mean end of subject, just as somebody might, you could imagine some palaeontologist who's only interested in hominids and as long as they're hominids and he tries as far as possible to make them homo something and as soon as he's agreed that *Australo Pithicus* was a

monkey, he just – aw forget about it, animals. [laughs] I think that's how it works. But the trouble of course, you and I or others of a blacker, even if in my case perhaps slightly more facilely black temperament, would say that all the time you were looking at the human and assimilation to the human, you'd have to be assimilating to negative human values as well.

MI Indeed. Well what then follows from all that we've said about the Nazi case for this relativism, pluralism distinction? I mean, in what sense is it, does it hold up? What are the criticisms to which it must now be subject given what we've said?

BW Well I think relativism and pluralism really are two different subjects. I mean I do regard relativism as a historical, largely, either – since the Colonialist applications of it or the ethnographic, synchronic ethnographic applications of it are over except for what is actually totally mirror image, I mean obviously it calls namely whether we should intervene on behalf of preserving alien cultures, it's not a relativist view; it's a non relativist view that it's a good idea to preserve variety which is a different matter. It has to be because it's a matter of power, I mean it's now a question of how we use our power or [ ]. Since the ethnographic case is over, you see it's a matter of historical interpretation really, relativism; and I think Isaiah has always been curiously ambivalent about that, curiously ambivalent about it. I mean I think that a lot of his interests, his interests in the variety of human life and Herderism and all that, plays into a certain relativist tendency because he's just interested in them as phenomena. But I think what's supposed to save it from real relativism is the common human passions bit I think, I think that's the idea. Now pluralism is something else however it seems to me and we've all got a problem about that because since it's a feature of modern societies to be pluralistic and there are many, to use Rawls' phrase, as many conceptions of the good around and whether we're just concerned with the frame work in which they flourish and so on, I think Isaiah hasn't, I don't think in a way he's really quite discussed that problem in that form,

do you think? [MI Well I'm just -] You see I think for instance, well let me put it this way, I think pluralism, let's refer to the Rawlsian problem because he's formulated them in a particularly striking and influential manner, it's a social problem; it's a problem about the existence of communities within a community, they need not be geographically continuous sub divisions; I mean they may be Born Again Christians and they're geographically dispersed but they are a community within a community, OK? [MI Yes] Now I think Isaiah has thought less about the question of running a community in which different values are represented by, in this sense, different communities than the conflict of values within one person. [MI Yes] It seems to me that his major concentrations have been the two of a) where the emphasis on the values are historically dispersed and as it were you have a society which is tremendously concerned with the recognisable human values of heroism rather than equality, or aristocratic freedom rather than equality or bourgeois industry rather than – and so on and so forth, I mean historical explanation about the terms of history of ideas comes in there; that's the as it were classical relativist problem but one to which he of course doesn't want to and doesn't have to give a relative answer really, relativist answer. He can say there are fundamental human values, some of them are stressed more in some communities than in others but we can assimilate them to our own view because they come back to positive values we've got. And as I said in that introduction of course, there is the interesting idea which is always playing in the background, is modern liberalism actually in a way a higher stand point because it recognises the plurality of all these, a kind of sort of left over Hegelian thought in a way ...

MI Yes which I think he, I think it's what's very interesting about that introduction because I think that is what's going on; I do think that is ...

BW I think he does think that. It's actually the paradox you see it's also in Rawls [MI Yes] because Rawls thinks that the theory of

justice is concerned with that virtue which enables you to run a pluralist society. [MI Yes] He also thinks it's the highest moral capacity. [MI Yes] So presumably that society which most calls on the highest moral capacity [laughs] must pro tanto be the best society and therefore the pluralist society is the best society. [MI You must tell that to Ayatollah Khomeini] Exactly, and you see Jack doesn't really quite want to say that, it's just a consequence and it's an interesting Kantian consequence actually that – or quasi Kantian consequence – but Isaiah I think does think that but now he has two fields as it were; there's the relativist one where the values are dispersed through history but they're non relativist reasons which we've discussed and there's a case where they're in the breast of the liberal and above all in the liberal. He loves cases also because he likes spontaneity, particularly of an artistically represented – he loves spontaneity, that's one of his most engaging features of course is that unlike many, quite a lot of liberals of the modern kind anyway and still less like many of the Oxford parochialists with whom he's spent perhaps rather more time [laughs] a good idea, he likes absolutely genuine human spontaneity and that's why he likes a certain kind of opera, above all Verdi. I mean that's why Verdi is THE great embodiment of the human gesture, human expression, absolutely straight, and the naivety of which he spoke – I mean you might think that quality was rather present also in the works of Wagner but not for him. He thinks it's all what he doesn't like, contrived. He thinks in some ways it's been thought out, that there's a very odd – well of course it's true but it's not exactly the thought that Wagner's works overwhelmingly convey to those who love them, but still.

MI Where does the spontaneity argument play into what you said ...?

BW The spontaneity part? – sorry, I was rambling in an Isaiah like [ ] like manner; in the following way. He's interested in the conflict of values in the breast. Now there are two ways that can show up: one is the spontaneous case, that is where the conflict is in an

unreflective, pluralist person or even he doesn't have to be all that pluralist, he just has to be in a well known human situation of different calls, so that a Verdian hero finds himself divided between his loyalty to country and his loyalty to his daughter or something. Now the great thing about that is it's unreflective, he simply feels the one thing and he feels the other thing and he has to live it through; and because there's such a thing as noble decent connection with one's values and the great quality there is that the – not that the result has been thought out or rationalised or represented by some scale of canon of arguments but that it's truthful: and of course that's one of the things where I absolutely sympathise with him. I mean partly because of his interest in romanticism, his scepticism about the powers of rational reorganisation or representation of these things seems to me absolutely correct.

MI I can see the mark of that in your own philosophy.

BW Well I mean he and I would agree on – and of course that's why those are the things he likes in my philosophy really because he thinks it represents, in a slightly more technically worked over way [laughs], something which he finds very sympathetic and which obviously in some degree I may even have derived from him, I mean emphasis on these things. Now of course the thing is now that of course his attachment to what you were referring to just now, to modern – the secret thought that modern liberalism does actually represent the highest stand point because it makes conscious what has always been true. You see the chap I just talked about probably hasn't got, well he certainly hasn't got a full reflective consciousness of it and in a certain way isn't even conscious about the underlying truths of pluralism. In a way, the very way he experiences his spontaneous conflict, is not of the same order as that and he's certainly not like some Rawlsian agent who's whizzing back to the original position [laughs] and deciding whether all patriotic persons should put patriotism [laughter] sort of going through some ghastly Kantian calculation you see, of a



reflective character because he hasn't even got the requirement for that, namely the thought I've got the values of patriotism [laughs]. He doesn't have that thought! What he thinks is [MI What am I going to do?] Italia! Mia filia! [Italian quote] [laughter] That's what he has and that's how they're represented in him and ...

## MI TAPE B10

Conversation with Bernard Williams, 21 November 1990, part 2

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### *Side A*

MI Two of Bernard Williams, November 21st, 1990. We were talking about spontaneity but we were also talking about [BW Pluralism in the breast] pluralism in the breast and I don't want to lose sight of the other pluralism [BW No, that's right] that is competition between communities or inner communities.

BW That's right. No that's what I was going to say indeed with this whole thing about – what we were talking about was the fact that his representations of the plurality of values as it were, tend to be either diachronic and what you might call Herderian in the very broad sense or concerned with them in the breast and that has both the cases of the spontaneous case as it were and the reflective case which of course tends to be the characteristic feature of our old friend 'modern man' as it were. But I think that he's addressed himself less to what many thinkers such as for instance Rawls think of as THE central problem of modern liberalism which is the relation between the values that hold the community together when it's a pluralistic community and the visions of the good which as it were operate in the sub communities. Where Rawls of course would – well you know the view, I mean the view has to be that the values that hold it together have to be the right, I mean that is the priority of the right over the good so that the society is founded on a conception of the right which will allow the coexistence and fair negotiation between those exponents of various conceptions of the good. Now I don't think that Isaiah – this may be a defect of my understanding of his views – I don't think he thinks very much using that set up as his way of going about it. What I hear rather is that partly because of his first interest, the Herderian

interest as I very coarsely labelled it, he really is interested in the notion of a community being built round one rather than another conception of the good; so the notion of a community, that is to say a modern Rawlsian community which is [MI Competing goods] yes, competing goods but where it derives its character from the emphasis perhaps on one – well or one sub set of them rather than others. Now ...

MI And does he then address the obvious difficulty that in these small sub communities of the general community there may be goods which are [BW Unacceptable or ?] Let me back up. He's very interested in the possibilities of understanding other peoples' goods [BW Absolutely, of course, absolutely] and the difficulty in these communities is that the goods may be only too understandable as it were [BW That's right] and therefore it becomes very difficult for a liberal to devise an account of how even the right must prevail faced with, I don't know, South Boston working class people saying, 'You're not bussing my kids.'

BW That's right, you're dead right, of course that's the problem. I mean that is that the both that some of the goods may find other of the goods absolutely repulsive, I mean some of the sub communities may find other sub communities absolutely repulsive and antagonistic and as you rightly say if we imagine, in the centre as it were, the highly self conscious liberal who's got the priority of the right, and the goods that go with the right – I mean that is to say the goods of a sense of justice, a sense of fairness, all that stuff – and then there's all these people out there with their communities with their assorted goods and presumably their own conceptions of the right and in Jack Rawls' view they've got to have some of that, each of them, we have this terrible problem which you've precisely referred to. Now it seems to me that Isaiah's resources about that tend to be twofold; one is – no threefold really – one is I think his – I don't criticise him for this, I mean I think it's – we all have a share of this problem, I mean it's a real problem, but I don't think it's one he's made high on his agenda. So I think what

he tends to do is, first of all he tends to look at the sub communities in the Herderian spirit, they way he'd look at any other total communities, 'Oh well I understand them' and so on; the other is to, another is interestingly to see the Rawlsian approach itself as being a particular kind of historical phenomenon [laughs], I mean to distance himself explanatorily from his own society as represented by the philosophy; and thirdly to use the standard liberal values themselves congenial to him of moderation, the rejection of fanaticism: I mean the term 'fanatical' is quite a strong term of dispraise, isn't it [MI Indeed] in his discourse? Fanaticism is something which gets a poor press, well that's ...

MI It gets a poor press but again a characteristic ambivalence because, surely because [BW Of course, he recognises one the universal human [laughs]] a lot of his fascination with the nineteenth century romantics consists in precisely the valuation of sincerity as a value and then it's not exactly clear at which point a sincere believer becomes a fanatical true believer and at what point you shade into a ...

BW Well that's why Verdian figures are that good you see because they are absolutely spontaneous and not at all fanatical. [laughs] Well except for Otello; and he's deluded, he has false empirical beliefs! [Hearty laughter] which he also acquires in a plausibly rapid manner. [MI Indeed yes, it gets us right into race but then another ...] Now I don't think race is an important matter in Otello for him [MI For Otello?] No for Isaiah. I mean for modern critics it is, I mean both Otello and Othello are plays about race or performances about race but I don't think they are for Isaiah, I don't think he's [MI And that has to do with Jewishness] Yes, he's just – [laughs] I mean I think that if Othello had been a Jew [laughs] he might have – but he doesn't regard Nebuchadnezzar as any more racist I think than anything else. Let me just tell you, let me just put it in for one minute, the little disagreement about Traviata. It's not very interesting but it just illustrates something. He and I have had now – Patricia says we've had it about fifty-seven times

– the same conversation, which is that I don't regard *Traviata* as by any means the best of Verdi's more notable operas, it's obviously a very remarkable work but I don't think it's quite as good as a lot of people think it is, particularly I don't think it's quite as good as Isaiah thinks it is and my reason for this is twofold; one is a technical objection which actually applies to some degree to *Otello*, namely his famous passion for speed got in the way of it quite working, I mean things have to happen too quickly; and the other is that the attitudes of the father are so repellent to us, the way in which the father deals with Violetta with all that ghastly stuff about the sister, that her reactions cannot be reactions which we as modern people can respect as much as we have to in order to make her position as noble as it has to be for the plot; because a modern woman confronted with that stuff would say, 'Well I'm afraid I'm not responsible for your daughter's life.' Well I say this or something of this kind to Isaiah he – what he does is he simply historically situates it. He says it's simply a matter of historical understanding; and here we have a universal human passion [laughs] namely concern for one's family and one's family reputation which is represented perfectly correctly in terms of French bourgeois life of that period and in those days it was the case that your daughter might not be able to make a desirable match if your son was living openly with a prostitute and so on, and he's concerned and so on, '[Italian quote]' represents it perfectly and so on you see?. And for me this won't do.

MI It won't do in the sense that you are quite as able as he to historicise this and understand it in its context, but whereas for him it does not diminish his artistic enjoyment as it does for you.

BW That's right, it does for me, and this is connected with his extremely historicising and in fact very conservative approach to opera production. He barely likes anything, which as they all do now, take liberties with the production and tries to move it around in time and things of that kind; and sometimes he thinks they come off and he enjoys them and he very sharply picks on anachronisms

of behaviour, he's always against Jonathan because Jonathan has made the Countess of Figaro fall over on the bed: 'No woman of her position would do something in front of her maidservant, perfectly ridiculous conception, does he know nothing about the eighteenth century!' and so on. No all right but the trouble is that it does, the idea of the opera house as Museum then becomes rather an oppressive conception, I mean no, as it were, young director wanting to do something [MI Wants to be the custodian of a Museum] Well of course, I mean we could then just have, if we could have holographic films of the productions with various artists in, that would be enough you see on that view. That's not good enough. So in a way there's something about, of a kind I haven't quite captured, about the relation of the way in which the universal human passions in their historical locations relates to his own emotions which has a certain reflective indirection about it you see? Because he thinks that – do you see what I'm getting at? [MI The indirection I don't follow] What I mean by that is the following: he thinks that he is absolutely responding, he has an immediately felt empathy with Verdi's characters, and in that he and Verdi's characters, I mean that needs a little deconstruction but that's not in question, are as it were a firm and universal value. I mean when whoever it is refers to Italia or father refers to his daughter and so on, you know empathy goes on. But you see it's got a trick to it because I'm as willing to do that as he is but I can't do it with the father in Traviata because it has to go through this historical distancing route in order in that case, not in others, but in that case to work and I regard that as an imperfection, a parochialism of the work because it's – is a rather local bourgeois passion to be as concerned with that about the reputation and so on and so forth you see, and the son with a prostitute and all that kind of thing. That is part of – I won't go into that – but I mean that's part of our disagreement on the subject of Wagner because actually, because the present age is so now in Schillerian terms sentimentalische, the naive artist is actually Wagner because the thing is you don't need to know about the bourgeois conventions of 1860 to make it work because Wagner attempted to arrive by

enormously sentimentalische means at a psychological level that wasn't relativised to 1870. And of course he succeeded in the sense that you don't need historical instruction to be blown out of your seat by some of these works. It's a shame about the fact that people turn up in the theatre without any historical instruction [laughs]. So there is a little artificiality about Isaiah's relation to the spontaneous in the theatre which is not totally unconnected with the problems about the reflexivity of the [ ] liberal.

MI Indeed. I think that's a fascinating point in fact and one to which he cannot fail to be responsive I think, given that his – he of all people will be interested in precisely the relationship between problems of artistic empathy across time and political understanding you're implying in simultaneous time? [BW Yes, exactly] Very interesting. Well I may as I said to you earlier I quite promised to not, for these things to come back to him. I will have to find some very indirect strategy to take up this point with him while concealing the origins of the discussion in which this idea was seeded in my mind if you see what I mean.

BW Well, Michael, as far as – well it must be a question of your own methods and the course, we're all only too aware of it, the danger of as it were altering the thing you're trying to study. I mean you've got a Heisenbergian problem [laughs] of a rather – of a sort of Nils Bohrian problem rather of a rather high order there. But just speaking for myself, I mean I would have no resistance at all to, if you thought it was compatible with your methods, for you mentioning this whole area about self consciousness and all that, because actually I've even – you know the thing about the festschrift do you? I mean the the Margalit festschrift? [MI Yes, yes] Does he still not know about that? [MI I'm not sure] Because we're all, I mean Avishai and I when I last saw him – are you in it as it were?

MI I'm supposed to be in it, yes. I'm in a terrible state of hesitation about it because I feel this is one position which I'm rarely in of

actually knowing more about this subject than is good for me; I am always in the situation of having to write things where I don't know damn all, a kind of leap, and sometimes the fact that I don't know enough actually helps me to cope whereas in this case I know too much and also feel I don't, so ...

BW But maybe you would want to keep out of it, but Avishai and I, when I last spoke to him, it was still meant to be a secret from him, I've written a piece in that which is about the – it's called *The Naive and Sentimental Opera Lover* [MI Oh right] and it's about Verdi and Wagner, the difference in my taste and his taste and how it relates to this point about Wagner having turned out to be – and it contains some anecdotes about opera which [MI Oh good] so that that's got some of that; indeed it tells the story about the Town Hall in Oxford obviously and the wonderful remark he made when he invited us to the Box in Covent Garden to go to *Parsifal* and [laughs] he said, I said, 'This is really, I mean it's very nice of you, of course we'd adore to come, the position is I adore *Parsifal* but it's going to be horrible for you.' He said, 'No worse than the others.' [hearty laughter] Which is quite a remarkable thing to say! [laughter] So you can mention these things. The things obviously that I would be less – well it goes without saying [MI Sure] I mean the thing about his, you know, shying away from the horrible or whatever but of course these [ ] abstract points about liberalism, self consciousness, spontaneity and so on, I mean I – actually you don't have to ascribe them to me, I mean they can come quite naturally out of – yes, yes. I have talked to him a little bit about that, a little bit about it. I find now it's harder, well we all do I suppose, I was going to say it's always been quite difficult to keep him to the point, I don't quite mean that, I mean that the concept of the point of keeping him to the point as a rather special interpretation sometimes. I do find now as I suppose we all do that the business of keeping him to the point in any sense can get a bit harder, I mean but I suppose that's just true as one gets older and when one's eighty, one – he's never proceeded in the – you see it's so interesting that he came out of you know Freddie and Austin



and Stuart and so on all sitting around arguing about analytic philosophy in the late thirties because the way becomes absolutely natural to somebody who's brought up in that School, about how it goes clonkity clonkity clonk, I mean what consequence is in just the broadest – what the rhetoric of that sort of discourse is. It's absolutely not his way of going about anything. I mean if you try to recall him to – and I think there's another half of that disjunction which is still somewhere over there, you know, 'No doubt, no doubt,' or 'Well as Mrs Weizmann is only too fond of saying ...' or 'As Maurice always put it ...' or something; I mean it's conversation, not argument, it's always conversation and not argument.

MI Yes but I'm glad we've come back to that because that's the sense where I want to end up is going over a little bit over the ground of his philosophical career and you seem to be saying that his philosophical career was a struggle against his natural inclinations and his natural abilities; and is there some sense in which it proceeded according to the same logic as his fascination with [BW laughs, MI's words inaudible] intellectual attraction to it's opposite?

BW No I don't think so, I don't think it was quite. I think that what he's the, not victim of because he hasn't done it badly, but I mean I think that what was a shame was that he in many places in the world he would be obviously and naturally a philosopher, that's what he would be. He happened to come to a country and be educated in a country and have the formation of a country that led to him doing philosophy in an extraordinarily untypical and, from the point of view of his talents, a not very fruitful form: and at a time where even with regard to that country, it was particularly exacerbated, namely that it was enormously – well no, let me retract one phrase. The point was that because he's a genuine esprit and prefers the living to the dead, of course absolutely correctly at the time he got into the subject in the late thirties, he was naturally involved in the new things, the things that young people are interested in, the sort of esprit [ ], he wasn't interested in fusty old

persons in Common Rooms banging on about Joseph's logic or some old stuff of Pritchard's, I mean you know obviously he'd be interested in the new thing and the lively thing and the thing that came from elsewhere and look forward and so on, of course he would, which had real – you know. [laughs] Unfortunately it had every conjunction of characteristics which were not really his; I mean it was resolutely anti historical, resolutely trivialising of the ethical and separating of the political, deeply involved in respect for science – well that wasn't true of Austin but it was true of Freddie's positivism ...

MI And you point out gently in the introduction that he buys into a little more reverence about science than was good for him.

BW Yes while knowing absolutely nothing about it. I mean his Renaissance man characteristics of which he's rightly praised, I mean he does know more about more things than most people, one thing he doesn't know anything about at all [laughs] is the natural sciences, not only does he not know anything about them, he doesn't even know what it would be like to know anything about them, it's all connected with the fact that he can't blow up a bicycle tyre and so on, it's sort of connected with his technological incapacity [laughs] which is a well known feature in his life. But he really is, I mean it doesn't [quote] so there he is faced with philosophy of which the heart land is anti historical, anti ethical, non political and scientific and proceeds by a form of linear linguistic analysis. Well the only element in that which is congenial to him is the word linguistic and of course that's why he liked Austin because what he liked about Austin really, apart from the fact that he was frightfully clever and a very powerful personality and quite funny, not quite in my taste but still in Isaiah's taste certainly, was that he had this quite wonderful ear and he regarded language as the most extraordinary phenomenon. And that was – I mentioned to you earlier that Austin never gave a coherent account of how or what he was interested in connected with philosophy, and he really didn't. I mean the accounts were quite

batty actually and the reason was because he had this astonishing talent and fascination with language which he could use and look at and distinguish in the quite – I'll give you just one very brief example which just shows what the powers were. There was a standard thing – you may have heard it – there was a standard thing which Austin used to give this class excuses, you know, in which he would talk about the use of inadvertently, accidentally or, and talk about very detailed cases of whether you meant to do it, intended to do it and all that; and inevitable at about the end of the second sessions some visitor, usually either an American or an Australian would say, 'Professor Austin, could you tell us what central problems of philosophy are illuminated by this inquiry?' And [laughs] Austin used to reply, there'd be a certain pause and he'd reply, 'Roughly all of them.' And the choice of 'roughly' is very classy indeed I must say, I mean you have to know what, you have to be on top of the language to do that. And Isaiah adored that, that form of – because you see it's non linear actually; that what he liked about it was the imagination, I mean the sense of verbal unexpectedness which Austin deployed. Now Austin used that in a typically English way, utterly played down, self denying, ironical, misleading, superior, cruel [MI Cruel, you got to the adjective before I did] cruel way. And he used it to mortify other people and Isaiah never denies that and he says he doesn't like that, he didn't like that because it offended his kindness. But he said that Austin wasn't like that if you knew him personally, that's why he liked him. I think he genuinely didn't like that; he wasn't one of the people who you know like certain subservient followers of Miss Anscombe or of Wittgenstein who actually liked the fact that they were horrible to him, objectors, and some followers of Austin did, at least he giggled about it, you know in a sort of Don-ish way, you know when he'd mortified some stupid person. Horrible. And Isaiah, because of his sensibility, loathed that. So he really was a very vain man but of course because he was a friend and because he liked – he wasn't like that in private – he liked the dryness you see and I think he liked the dryness because he came from somewhere else, because he isn't really English. I mean he's terribly

Anglicised but he isn't English and I think that English dryness terribly appealed to him because he could see the fancy and the imagination and the intelligence under this very dry surface. It was like a shared secret as it always is with irony, just the way that Stanley Cavell went over the top; you see Stanley Cavell practically fell in love with Austin being himself as it were an overblown, decadent Freudian expressivist, Wittgensteinist of the most, the kind that Austin said, 'Well I don't know what all that stuff's supposed to be about,' you know? But he adored him because he thought he could see it, just as people think Webern is very short, dry and thin but those who understand know that it's actually Mahler but it's been compressed [laughs] into something so small [laughs] and that's what I think in a way, that's what Stanley felt about Austin and I think some relative of that is what Isaiah, in a less extravagant way, admired about him.

MI Well what judgement do you then make because you ...?

BW So I mean he started in the wrong – it's not that he wasn't a philosopher but he wasn't that philosopher but that's what was to hand and that's what he did.

MI But then, your earlier phrase that he internalised a kind of Austinian super ego is a very strong statement. I mean [BW About that philosophy] yes, but it might have, that might either have had productive effects on Isaiah's life or largely negative ones.

BW Well I think it had productive effects to some extent. I think it had one productive effect and another negative. I think the productive effect was that it drove him out of analytic philosophy because he couldn't do it because he wasn't good enough at it and I mean the important point is that he thought he wasn't good enough at it. In fact I don't think that he was terribly good at philosophy in precisely that style; I mean I think he was very good at it, I mean he's much better at it than a lot of other people who do it, fair to say most people who do it, but he wasn't as good at it

as he ought to have been granted what he is, if you see what I mean. Above all he wasn't as good at it as Austin was good at it and he was actually, curiously enough he didn't think he was as good at that as Freddie was; but I don't think that's true actually. I mean Freddie was simply more professional, that's all, but because there was less there to move around it was easy to move it around if you see what I mean, [laughs] that's all very well. So it had the positive effect of in a way displacing him from what is in many ways as certainly as done then, a rather narrow subject into something rather richer. I think it's left him with two problems, one a general writing block and the other is a sense of inferiority of what he does as against philosophy and that's not confined to him, it's a very common English phenomenon of that generation.

MI I lived this in Cambridge, its negative effects I think are everywhere in a way [BW Because people think it's ...?] Well I mean the tremendous prestige that accrues the precision that philosophy has, casts all forms of historical [BW Yes] in the sense that it's just swotting up what the chaps use to say [BW laughs, Yes that's right!] as opposed to, you know?

BW Do you see this as a particularly English problem?

MI I don't know, I mean I think what's happened, and I think Isaiah's a good example of what's happened, is that there's a very particular marriage of philosophy, history and politics in this country which is very mutually suspicious, that's been fantastically productive. I find the historical depth that combined with a certain philosophical precision about what the terms as meant, it's meant that there's been a lot of good work in this country but if you're working on a historical divide, you feel constantly exposed to the condescension of those who think you're not being [ ] and much of that seems to me fairly [laughs] justified in my particular case certainly and more generally and therefore – but I think it's a shame when it produces a kind of stutter in a talented man like Isaiah. [BW Yes it has] Isaiah has little to be modest about, I mean there's

a genuine talent there and there is something about – which I think you bring out in your introduction – there's something you know propositionally germane about historical [BW That's right!] understanding really. [BW Absolutely! Absolutely correct] that philosophy simply has to take on board and I think he's stuttered over much about ...

BW Of course and I've always told him that, I've always told him that, that he did, I mean that he was led by Austin to underestimate in a sense what he's good at. Interestingly another case which is much less interesting because we're dealing with a less interesting and less talented man, is actually Tony Quinton, and it's a slightly more misleading case in one way because Tony Quinton looks more like somebody who does the standard philosophy but as a matter of fact he's not actually very good at it and his philosophy is rather undistinguished; and he just spent more time doing that insofar as he was doing anything except telling jokes and getting in with the Conservative Government [laughs]. Actually Isaiah's over estimate produced – it's not now a decision I would want to make a negative, I didn't agree with him at the time, I'm not sure he wasn't right but it had a big role in relation to the appointment of Jerry Cohen here you know as against John Dunn; because I supported John Dunn, I mean I tried to encourage him to think that John Dunn would be a – I thought John would be a useful addition to Oxford precisely because he's a historian rather than a philosopher and it needs some more stuff that doesn't sound like the other stuff, whereas Jerry, talented and attractive man and serious person though he is, in the end he's a philosophical knitting man really: and even the book about Marx, though it deals with this very large and important historical subject, certainly does it by a great deal of knitting of a fiddly ...

MI And Isaiah precisely, according to what you're saying, would be extremely susceptible to that kind of Talmudic knitting and the tradition that it's Talmudic.

BW Absolutely, that's absolutely right and he thought it was obviously the right thing; and he said, 'Dunn just spends all his time trying to do philosophy and being no good at it.' Well of course that conjunctive criticism is quite a damaging one but you might think that that's not actually charitable or even accurate account of John's situation actually.

MI And which then – I don't want to take us – I might have to – I wanted to pursue a little bit about John, particularly his review of Isaiah's 'Crooked Timber'. I think I'll let that go and working towards summing up, you said very much earlier that – the Oscar Wilde remark about the perfection of the life and the perfection of the work ...

BW If you remember he said, 'I put my genius into my life and only my talent into my work.'

MI In what sense is that true of Isaiah? Because it's a common judgement and yet there's a lot there on the shelf.

BW Yes sure, sure, I think that. I think he thinks it more – well he wouldn't put it in those terms because he wouldn't like to – one thing for instance that's very interesting and – well it's not very interesting but it's very notable – is that he's a man who uses the word 'genius' very frequently. I don't mean by that he distributes it widely but he does use it quite often and you will have heard him, as we all, have on countless – 'Certainly a genius,' you know, 'Man of genius' [laughs] extraordinary and all that stuff: and if he's certain of anything about himself it's that he isn't one and that to him, I don't think he's got the kind of vanity which makes that a depressing consequence for him, I don't think that he ever expected to be one or thought he might have been one or anything but it's seems such a formative category and I think it's quite an important formative category and I think he thinks if you're not a genius, because of the discontinuity implied by the word genius, I

think he has a slight feeling to think that all of us who aren't geniuses are kind of sort of in the same line of business really and some do more and some do less, some do better, some do worse; then he likes the company ...

MI But paradoxically it works as a kind of relief.

BW Yes, that's right, that's it because granted we aren't geniuses, well you have a decent life, I mean, you know, we earn our money and we make a respectable – you know it's nothing to be ashamed of, that sort of you know, not disgraceful publicly and ridiculous idleness [laughs] not Norman Stone [laughs] that's an ultimate disgrace! But it's a let off, it's a let off of course, a bit, that's quite right. And notice how much time he spends either with persons who might be thought to be geniuses or interpreters of genius. [MI Yes] And Brendel, who's – I mean in a way he is a genius and kind of batty with it [laughs] in a sense, in his case a rather gay genius, non ferocious manner at least if not his wife or, the poor thing [laughs] he adores and not only because Alfred is but because of Alfred's I mean quite wonderful identification with, sense of the presence of, Mozart or Schubert or Beethoven. I mean that's wonderful wonderful thing, indeed I mean I totally share Isaiah's view about that, I mean that is – but it's very very important to him, that sense of association with genius, as he felt about his relations with Stravinsky I think similarly. [MI And with Akhmatova] yes, that's not a dimension that's accessible to me but he's spoken to me often about Stravinsky and ...

MI There's so much more I'd like to talk to you about but ...

BW We could talk again possibly [*phone rings*]