

**Isaiah Berlin's Anti-Procrustean Liberalism:
Ideas, Circumstances, and the Protean Individual**

Jonathan Allen

Assistant Professor
Department of Political Science
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

jonallen@uiuc.edu

Presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association (August 28-31, 2003, Philadelphia, PA)

Introduction:

Isaiah Berlin's death in 1997, and the appearance of several new collections of essays by him over the past decade, have resulted in a flurry of writing about his political thought. As always, commentators have divided sharply over the status of his contribution to political thought. Some of his admirers point to the importance and originality of his formulation of the idea of value-pluralism – the notion that multiple moral and non-moral values exist, that they may conflict with one another, and that when they do, such conflict cannot be resolved by appeal to a single, overarching value or by means of a single scale of values. Many see Berlin's attempt to ally pluralism and liberalism as his most stimulating contribution to political theory, or note the role he played in Oxford and more generally in reviving interest in the history of ideas and in presenting to the English-speaking world a range of thinkers otherwise likely to have been lost to view – Vico, Herder, de Maistre, Sorel, etc. Berlin's detractors, on the other hand, note the absence from his writings of a book-length defense of his views, or find fault with the accuracy of his work in the history of ideas and with his scholarship in general.¹

It might be thought that this difference of opinion is in itself of interest only to those who were personally acquainted with Berlin. However, in spite of all that has been written recently on him, I believe that there are grounds for concern that some of the most distinctive and challenging aspects of Berlin's approach to political theory have been neglected or misidentified. As a result, his work is then criticized for "flaws" or "failures" that need not be viewed as negative qualities at all, or praised for views that do not express his deepest insights.

This essay is, therefore, intended primarily as an exercise in retrieval. My chief concern will be to offer a plausible account of Berlin's approach and central concerns, rather than to present criticisms of some of the specific claims he makes.² In what follows, I make two related claims about Berlin's thought. I argue, first, that at the heart of Berlin's work is an awareness of the protean character of individual experience, belief, and commitment. This

awareness is not simply an application or extension of his theory of “value-pluralism” to the inner life of individuals, but is a distinct insight, which although generally compatible with value-pluralism, also functions to constrain it and issues in a defensive and non-doctrinaire liberalism. I should stress that in making this argument, I am not claiming that value-pluralism is not central to Berlin’s thought – simply that it is not his sole concern.

The second claim I make is that Berlin’s sensitivity to the complexity of individuals sheds light on his distinctive approach to the history of ideas. This approach is liable to be seriously misunderstood if it is assumed that Berlin was simply trying to recapture the intentions of the authors he presents to our attention or to explicate the arguments contained in the texts penned by them. Rather, Berlin’s work in the history of ideas is best understood as an attempt to convey a vivid impression of the complex interactions between ideas, personalities, and circumstances. His work on figures such as Marx, Vico, and Hamann, is thus quite similar in genre to the impressions of friends, acquaintances, and public figures collected in *Personal Impressions*.³

The main intention of this essay, as I noted above, is to contribute to a more sensitive assessment of Berlin’s contribution to reflection on politics. However, in addition to making an argument about two neglected but – to my mind – central features of Berlin’s thought, I want to outline a broader claim about the significance of Berlin’s approach to political theory. I shall suggest that his work is a distinctive attempt to convey a kind of liberal political education – an education in judging the complex circumstances of the moral and political life – that is largely neglected by contemporary practitioners of political theory and the history of political thought. Through his work in the history of ideas, Berlin presents us with a distinctive kind of liberal sensibility, which I shall refer to as an “anti-procrustean liberalism”.⁴ This sensibility constitutes a profound response to the political disasters of the twentieth century and the terrible simplifications of the dominant ideologies of the century – fascism and communism. While these ideologies have declined in political salience, regrettably the habit of ideological simplification has not – and so Berlin’s anti-procrustean liberalism remains a crucial resource for the twenty-first century.

1. Inner Complexity and the Sense of Reality

John Gray has recently presented a challenging interpretation of Berlin's *oeuvre* in his controversial book, *Isaiah Berlin*.⁵ Although most of the controversy surrounding this book centres on Gray's willingness to embrace a conclusion always resisted by Berlin – that a consistent recognition of the truth of value-pluralism may lead one to subordinate liberal commitments to it, and to see that liberalism has no privileged moral status – I want to concentrate here on the distinctive features of his interpretation of Berlin.⁶ His central claim in this regard is that all of Berlin's apparently quite disparate concerns are animated by a “master -thesis”, a “single idea of tremendous subversive force” – the idea of value-pluralism. Gray defines this as the view that “ultimate human values are objective but irreducibly diverse, that they are conflicting and often uncombinable, and that sometimes when they come into conflict with one another they are incommensurable; that is, they are not comparable by any rational measure”.⁷

The claim that Berlin's central idea is that of value-pluralism is not original in itself. However, Gray then attempts to show that Berlin's rejection of determinism and his account of freedom are closely related to the idea of value-pluralism. Moreover, he claims that these concerns derive their coherence from “the centrality Berlin accords to the activity of *choice* in the constitution of human nature”.⁸ Gray argues that Berlin sees human beings as “inherently unfinished and incomplete”, not subject to any natural order, and defined only by their capacity for self-transformation and self-creation exercised through choice. Human freedom, in its most basic sense, is the capacity for reflective choice among alternatives. Moreover, the incompleteness of human nature and the importance of reflective (but not simply rational) choice in facilitating self-creation indicate that value-pluralism is an ineliminable feature of human existence. As Gray explains, “Diversity is the most evident expression of man's nature as a species whose life is characterised by choice ... (This is) radical choice, ungoverned by reason”.⁹

According to Gray, a distinctive kind of “agonistic liberalism” emerges from Berlin's value-pluralism, and from his emphasis on the way in which choice, underdetermined by rational principles, creates human identities. In his view, it is a form of liberalism far superior to any competitors in its recognition of a tragic quality always present in human affairs, resulting

from the fact that conflict among goods will always occur, and that some goods are intimately bound up with and presuppose the presence of evils. The Berlin who emerges from Gray's account thus rapidly assumes a Weberian or even existentialist form.

Gray later modifies the voluntaristic aspect of this picture by noting that Berlin does *not* think of the choosing self as “unencumbered” by allegiances, traditions and commitments, *does* believe that compromise and “balance” can sometimes be achieved when values conflict, and should be pursued where possible, and *does* think that the range of values available for choice is circumscribed by a horizon of minimal moral values common to all human beings.¹⁰ Nevertheless, it is the recognition of the ineliminable agonism of a choice not fully regulated by standards of reason that Gray praises as the truly distinctive and valuable feature of Berlin's liberal pluralism.

I noted above that Gray's most controversial contention is that to be true to his value-pluralism, Berlin ought to be willing to subordinate his liberal commitments to it. A thorough response to this challenge would have to evaluate the strength of Gray's criticisms of attempts to link value-pluralism and liberalism more closely.¹¹ My goal here, however, is somewhat different. I want to challenge Gray's core *interpretive* claim that value-pluralism constitutes Berlin's “master-thesis”, and that all his concerns in moral and political theory derive their coherence from his value-pluralism and his emphasis on the importance of choice. This interpretive claim clearly plays an important role in justifying his conclusion that the import of Berlin's views is the subordination of liberalism to pluralism.

Stimulating though it is, Gray's interpretation of Berlin is one-sided. Against Gray's portrayal of Berlin as “hedgehog”, albeit a hedgehog whose “master-thesis” is paradoxically that of the truth of value-pluralism, I suggest that Berlin should be seen as a “fox”, with commitments not reducible to his value-pluralism. I shall argue, in particular, that Berlin's thought is marked by an “anti-procrustean” sensibility, which is related to, but not identical with, his value-pluralism. I shall take this anti-procrusteanism to consist of two elements – first, a general resistance to reductionistic accounts of human action and values, and second, a distinctive sensitivity to the protean and complex character of agency.

What do I mean here by “reductionism” and “resistance to reductionism”? The charge of methodological reductionism may mean several things. It may mean that I have applied a methodology or standard of assessment that is inappropriate to the material, that I have simplified complex facts in a misleading way or in a way that obscures their complexity, or that my theoretical assumptions have led me to leave something of central importance out of my account. Such a charge is likely to invite contestation, for no theory simply reproduces the material being considered – part of the function of a theory is to simplify or provide us with an orienting framework. Thus, *your* accusation that I am guilty of reductionism is likely to be countered by *my* insistence that I am simply applying scientific method or moral principle correctly. If there is a conclusion to draw from this, it is that the validity of the charge of reductionism depends in large part on the question under consideration – that blanket applications of the charge to all attempts to use scientific methods to study human affairs are invalid. Despite the Romantic claim that “we murder to dissect”, complaints that all attempts to think of conduct in terms of rational principles or scientific method are invalid may themselves obstruct our understanding. A genuine appreciation for the complexity and heterogeneity of human experience will have to allow for this possibility.

It is interesting to note that Berlin in fact draws this conclusion from his appreciation for the complexity of human affairs. While his opposition to reductionism emerges most clearly in his articulation of reservations concerning logical positivism, his target is never simply scientism. Both before and after the articulation of his critique of positivism, he also expresses hostility towards all attempts to judge “mental activities” (such as art, morality, literary criticism) by a single standard. This means that Berlin is consistently opposed not only to attempts to judge all forms of thought on the model of the natural sciences, but also to anti-rationalist attempts to give us direct access to experience. In a very early (and uncharacteristically irritated) essay, he complains that Bergsonian anti-rationalism, “philosophy of culture”, and attempts to base an aesthetic on moral criteria all share the vice of imposing extraneous and distorting standards on different areas of activity and reflection. This undermines “the desire which gives to thought whatever value it possesses, the desire to discriminate, to eliminate the anarchical in experience, to introduce order into every form of contemplation”.¹² Although Berlin has an acute awareness of the non-rational element in human experience, he does not draw the conclusion that attempts to reflect on or articulate

experience in theoretical form are simply mistaken. Rather, he sees such attempts as both necessary and inevitably incomplete – valuable, but incapable of presenting a full or wholly satisfactory account of human experience and action.

This is the line that Berlin adopts in his critique of logical positivism, the philosophical movement that had the most important formative influence on his thinking.¹³ Logical positivism may be understood in various ways, but for present purposes, its central aim may be fairly described as that of producing an account of human belief and speech consistent with the methods of the natural sciences.¹⁴ The central project of this intellectual movement was to use a single criterion – that of empirical verifiability – to distinguish between meaningful and nonsensical utterances. The result was to relegate whole classes of statements – aesthetic, religious, and moral – to the status of expressions of emotions or attitudes.¹⁵

Berlin's final assessment of the project of logical positivism is stated in his 1950 essay, "Logical Translation".¹⁶ His overall judgment is that this was a version of a very ancient but always doomed search for immediate and undistorted access to the "basic constituents" of the world. As such, it was a form of what Dewey had diagnosed as "the quest for certainty", or the search for "the infallible knowledge of incorrigible propositions".¹⁷ Berlin warns that such knowledge is simply not to be had – in principle, empirical claims cannot guarantee certainty. Moreover, he points out, all truth-claims involve implicit comparisons with past or future states of affairs, ideas that have no immediate empirical referent. To try to do away with such imaginative constructions, Berlin warns, would leave us unable to make any kinds of claims at all. He notes: "We cannot speak without incurring some risk, at least in theory; the only way of being absolutely safe is to say absolutely nothing; this is the goal towards which the search for the 'fundamental proposition' asymptotically tends".¹⁸

However, Berlin does *not* conclude from this that all attempts to subject beliefs to clarificatory analysis are necessarily mistaken, that the letter must always kill the spirit. It *is* possible to translate between types of proposition, and it is often valuable to deflate extravagant beliefs (one of the fundamental motivations of logical positivism). But there is no *single* way of doing this. Rather,

Words mean, not by pinning down bits of reality, but by having a recognised use, i.e., when their users know how and in what situations to use them in order to communicate whatever they may wish to communicate; and for this there are no exhaustive formal rules. But because there is no single criterion of meaning and no single method or set of rules for testing it, it does not follow that there are in principle no criteria at all ... Neither, on the other hand, does the fact that many metaphors have proved fatal, or at least misleading, tend to show that all metaphors can or should be eliminated as such, and speech rendered absolutely literal".¹⁹

Berlin concludes that the “translation” or critical clarification of beliefs or clusters of beliefs involving non-literal (metaphorical) claims may sometimes help to simplify claims and liberate people by identifying nonsense and by destroying myths. However, human beliefs and claims cannot be assessed with reference to a single, uniform model without degrading or “torturing” them, and missing their real significance in people’s lives.

Similar considerations motivate Berlin’s more specific rejection of the idea that the methods of the natural sciences constitute the model for a disciplined investigation of human affairs. However, in addition to his general methodological concern that claims and beliefs should not be judged in terms of a unitary model, Berlin here invokes the need to bear in mind that meaningful action and intention constitute a crucial dimension of human affairs. There are different thoughts at work here. One is value-pluralism; Berlin thinks that attempts to construct “scientific” histories underestimate the variety of goals and identities that human beings have created for themselves over time. Another is a moral or political concern; Berlin expresses the fear that a deterministic account of historical events must, if generalized, undermine conceptions of individual responsibility.²⁰ This would not simply change and demean our image of humanity, but would encourage us to stop judging actions in moral terms, and provide fuel to those who call on us to adjust ourselves to supposedly inevitable patterns of development.²¹

At this point, Berlin’s methodological resistance to reductionism shifts into a more substantive and political opposition to all simplistic and abstract ideologies. Such ideologies do immense harm to human beings by persuading them to accept present suffering in order

to secure infinitely great benefits at some unspecified future time, or to use means normally thought of as evil because the importance of future goals or the necessity of the forces at work in history “dictate” this. In a later essay, Berlin makes it clear that the problem with all such utopian visions of an end of history is not merely that they try to reduce a variety of values to a single master-value but that they cause great suffering to individuals in the process.²² It is sometimes justifiable, in “desperate” circumstances, to use morally dubious means to secure short-term goals, but the remoter the goal is, the more likely it will prove illusory. In such cases, he warns, “the only thing that we may be sure of is the reality of the sacrifice, the dying and the dead”.²³

In opposition to the reckless utopianism of the twentieth century, Berlin proposes political skepticism, a recognition of the need to make trade-offs in order to secure specific benefits, and, above all, the need to “avoid extremes of suffering”.²⁴ This amounts to a kind of political moderation sustained by the negative goal of maintaining “a precarious equilibrium that will prevent the occurrence of desperate situations, of intolerable choices”.²⁵ Elsewhere, in similar vein, Berlin argues that after the holocausts of the twentieth century, there is a need to recognize a kind of minimal morality, a natural law “in empirical dress”, based on our common humanity.²⁶ What is relevant here is not so much our capacity for choice or self-creation, but a set of values that constrain that capacity and prevent it from resulting in serious cruelty.

Thus, while much of Berlin’s opposition to methodological reductionism or to reductionistic political visions may be accounted for in terms of his commitment to value-pluralism, and his concern that such views inhibit the operation of self-creation through choice, he is also motivated by a desire to avoid or minimize suffering. Such suffering may be imposed by people who are convinced that in the long term they are expanding our capacity for choice, but the harm that they do in the short term vitiates their claim and renders their vision an unacceptable option. Berlin’s defensive focus here provides us with moral reasons for moderating our appreciation of choice and diversity, and sometimes restricting them in the name of avoiding basic or serious harms to individuals. Questions may be asked about the relations between these two sets of commitments, but that they are distinct from each other seems clear.

I want to turn now from the defensive side of Berlin's anti-procrusteanism to a more positive commitment linked to it – his appreciation for the protean character of individuals. In criticizing attempts to model the study of history on the natural sciences, Berlin often invokes the distinction – central to hermeneutic philosophy from Wilhelm Dilthey to R.G. Collingwood – between the inner and outer aspects of action. In Collingwood's usage, this distinction marks the difference between events understood as physical occurrences and events considered as “processes of thought” or intention.²⁷ On this view, historians and students of human action more generally cannot ignore the inner dimension of an event, for this is what enables us to understand whether a physical motion is a move in a game, a gesture of commendation, or a form of assault. By interpreting the inner or intentional aspect of an event, we come to see its significance. Without such a sense of the significance of events, no histories could be written. Berlin too, sometimes differentiates between the “inner” and “outer” aspects of events in order to resist attempts to subsume historical studies under a natural scientific methodology.

However, in several essays, he uses the distinction in a different sense.²⁸ Drawing from, but adapting views advanced by Tolstoy in the Epilogue to *War and Peace*, Berlin argues that human experience occurs at two levels – an upper and a lower. At certain moments, he comes close to equating this with the distinction between the inner and outer dimensions of events – he suggests a contrast, for example, between Pascal's ability to explore the half-conscious attitudes of the “inner life” and the observation of the “furniture of the external world – trees, rocks, houses, tables, other human beings”.²⁹ However, the more central and distinctive contrast is between surface characteristics of our experience that are relatively stable and constant, and therefore more easily articulable, easily noticed, and “public”, on the one hand, and “more and more intimate and pervasive characteristics”.³⁰ This more “private” level of experience is fluid rather than stable, and consists of shifting beliefs and half-articulated attitudes and habits, emotions, reactions, etc. For Berlin, it is this more inaccessible level of experience that constitutes “the uniqueness of each individual and of each of his acts and thoughts, and the uniqueness too, the individual flavour, the peculiar pattern of life, of a character, of an institution, a mood, and also of an artistic style, an entire age, a nation, a civilisation”.³¹

It may help to provide a literary illustration of one aspect of Berlin's argument here. In *History: A Novel*, Elsa Morante tells the story of an Italian Jewish family from 1941 to 1951. Each chapter covers a year, and begins with a series of statements of the major events that occurred in each month of that year. For example, the chapter covering 1941 starts with entries about the Italian campaign in Greece, the German attack on the Soviet Union, the Japanese occupation of Indochina, the Nazi decision to force Jews over the age of six to wear a yellow Star of David, Gandhi's programme of passive resistance against the British, the attack on Pearl Harbour, etc. Morante then moves to the story of Giuseppe and Nora Ramundo and their daughter Ida. The book is centred around the contrast and interaction between the world of "public" facts and events, and the shifting human relationships and the fine texture of Ida's inner life of developing beliefs, dimly felt fears hopes, and quotidian concerns – all in motion until the day of her death. The novel provides a salutary reminder that the world of large-scale, public events (one sense of Berlin's "upper level") is always refracted through individual eyes and experience, and takes on an almost infinite variety of fluid forms at this "lower level".³² While we may of course pose many questions to the past and write about it with varying degrees of generality, any account of past events that completely neglects the ways in which individuals encounter and experience events will be impoverished – stilted or formulaic. Commenting on historical writing, Berlin notes that while it is a great contribution to detect previously unsuspected causal connections or to uncover neglected facts, what readers rightly want from a historian is "to be presented, if not with a total experience – which is a logical as well as practical impossibility – at least with something full enough and concrete enough to meet our conception of public life ... seen from as many points of view and at as many levels as possible ...".³³

The recent work of James Scott suggests another way in which awareness of something like Berlin's "lower level" of experience is important to an understanding of social and political life – particularly for social scientists and policy planners. In his recent work, Scott argues that among the causes of development project failures is an over-systematized and oversimplified understanding of human experiences, practices, and institutions – a view to which modern state-sponsored social engineers in the twentieth century have been readily attracted. Scott argues that this outlook, operating in conjunction with the agency of an

authoritarian state and in the context of a society too weak to resist state plans, has repeatedly produced development disasters, ranging from Soviet collectivization, Tanzanian “villagization”, “scientific agriculture”, to modernist town-planning. Scott points out that, in the interests of efficient administration, states need to systematize and standardize information about human practices. In some cases – where those practices are in fact “narrow, simple, and invariable over time” – systematized policy programmes and routines may be effective.³⁴ But in other cases, the neglect of the fluidity and complexity of human interactions in agriculture, the use of land, movement in cities, etc., can produce policy failures. These failures turn into disasters when the planners respond to failure by “blaming” their human material for “irrational behaviour” and attempting to manipulate or force people to conform to their theoretical expectations, rather than by adapting to complexity.³⁵

What lesson should we learn from this? In the hands of Tolstoy, awareness of the “lower level” of experience is intended to confound all attempts to make predictions or think systematically about human affairs; it serves an essentially mystical purpose. Berlin’s intention is quite different. For Berlin, it would be obscurantism to reject all attempts to systematize, analyze, and articulate experience. Rather, the lesson to be learned from awareness of complexity is, first, that a level of experience that is harder to identify and articulate *exists*, and second, that this means that attempts to present experience in general concepts, or in the form of scientific laws or systematic propositions will always be incomplete. To put the matter negatively, Berlin thinks that however important they are, the methods of the natural sciences do not provide us with the only important means of access to experience. Novelists, artists, musicians, and great statesmen have a kind of knowledge of human affairs that scientific method does not provide. Moreover, the knowledge they possess is not an inarticulable sense of “knowing how” to do something; it can be formulated, although not in a way that would satisfy the standards of formalization and generality demanded by the sciences.³⁶

Why is it important to grasp that there is a level of human experience that is too fluid, shifting, and multifarious to articulate in general propositions or capture in theories of social change? Berlin suggests two answers. The first is that an inability to see the significance of the “lower level” may encourage a doctrinaire response. Thus, when people fail to conform

to the expectations encouraged by the theory of human behaviour one has adopted, he may respond not by reexamining the theory but by attempting to manipulate the recalcitrant human material into submission. Such an attitude, Berlin notes, is not truly scientific at all, and may lead to great suffering. What is more – here we have Berlin’s second answer – the examples of Hitler and Stalin indicate that if they are sufficiently ruthless and determined, ideologues may succeed in forcing people to conform to their views, at least in part and for a time. But there will be an awful moral price to pay for their success – the violation of people’s complex and subtle interactions and the fear and actual injury produced by attempts to make people fully manipulable.

Berlin’s appreciation of complexity and his awareness of the protean character of human experience thus enables him to arrive at an account of politics that is similar in its defensive posture to Judith Shklar’s “liberalism of fear”. For Shklar, liberalism is best understood not as a moral ideal but as a political doctrine whose central goal is to reduce arbitrary public cruelty and the systematic use of fear.³⁷ It is built around an understanding of the *summum malum*, and an explicit focus on injustice rather than around any more positive moral ideal. However, unlike Shklar, who sometimes – misleadingly, in my view – conveys the impression that liberalism can be based solely on the commitment to reduce cruelty, Berlin’s defensive liberal pluralism is based on an explicit and positive appreciation for human complexity and variety.³⁸ Its defensive character derives from its commitment to promote individual complexity and therefore to shield it from procrustean programmes of various sorts.

On the account I have offered, then, Berlin’s thought is characterized not by a single “master-thesis”, as Gray would have it, but by two distinct, though closely related commitments: to value-pluralism, and to an appreciation of individual complexity. Though Gray is right to argue that Berlin values “choice-making”, “self-creation”, and the existence of a diversity of values, his appreciation for individual complexity indicates that it is sometimes justifiable to restrain choice-making and diversity when they threaten to become the source of procrustean programmes. Thus, there is a tension – a productive tension, I believe – at the heart of Berlin’s views. I now want to show how a recognition of the

importance of Berlin's anti-Procrusteanism offers us a new way of understanding the nature and purpose of his work in the history of ideas.

2. Personal Impressions, Politics, and the History of Political Thought

In his book on Berlin, Claude Galipeau describes him as “a giant, and pioneer, in the field of the history of ideas”, and ranks him with Arthur Lovejoy, Arnaldo Momigliano, Edmund Wilson, and John Plamenatz. While I agree that Berlin is largely responsible for giving academic standing to the history of political thought in the English-speaking world, it must be said that his understanding of his approach and its purposes is much more elusive than those of, say, Lovejoy or Plamenatz. Lovejoy, for example, is closely associated with the distinctive view that the task of the intellectual historian is to identify a number of basic “unit-ideas” (such as “the great chain of being”), which are then presented in new combinations by different thinkers in different periods. Plamenatz, too, as I shall show, presents a fairly clear view of his methods and purposes in *Man and Society*, and other contemporaries of Berlin such as Sheldon Wolin and Leo Strauss all advanced views about the nature of the history of ideas. It is harder to identify Berlin with a distinctive and explicit approach to the history of ideas, or to find a satisfactory statement of his conception of the nature and purpose of the history of political ideas.

To be sure, Berlin presented important reflections on aspects of historiography – on the interpretive character of historical writing, on its irreducibility to the model of the natural sciences, and on the historian's need for *Einfühlung* or *fantasia*. These writings clearly serve as indispensable guideposts to his own practice as a historian, but they seem incomplete in this respect – necessary guides to interpretive history in general, but not sufficient to pinpoint the distinctive features of Berlin's own work.³⁹ Moreover, even if we accept that Berlin's approach is a form of empathy, it is still necessary to specify both the proper subject matter and the goal of empathic understanding. As we shall see, a range of views on both issues exists.

Berlin sometimes characterizes his work in the history of ideas as the result of a decision to turn away from philosophical work, motivated by a sense of his limitations as a philosopher and by the conviction that philosophy was not a cumulative field of inquiry and that he

could contribute more effectively to the store of positive knowledge as a historian of ideas.⁴⁰ These remarks are quite puzzling – even downright misleading. For example, they surely exaggerate the extent to which he really did relinquish philosophy in turning to the history of ideas. As some commentators have noted, Berlin continued to write clearly philosophical pieces well into the 1950's, and his work in the history of ideas evidently reflects his own philosophical concerns quite closely.⁴¹ Moreover the sharp contrast between philosophy and history that Berlin sometimes makes is overdrawn, and inconsistent with his view that the philosophical study of categories of experience is in part a study of categories that have changed over time and across different cultures.⁴²

For all of these reasons, I think that Berlin's writings on historiography and his occasional remarks about his turn to the history of ideas should not be relied upon exclusively as guides to the nature and purposes of his post-1950's work. Quite why Berlin does not offer a more satisfactory statement of method I do not know. Perhaps the prevailing intellectual atmosphere at Oxford made it hard to see the significance of his approach or to find the terms to articulate it. In any case, I want to argue that his explicit statements about historiography need to be supplemented by paying closer attention to what I have been calling his anti-Procrusteanism. This not only illuminates his historiographic practice, but also permits us to see the connection between his historical work and his view of the importance of political judgment. I am going to confine my attention to the influence of Berlin's anti-procrusteanism on his historical writing in this section, and will turn to his contribution to a liberal education in political judgment by way of conclusion.

Excessive reliance on some of Berlin's explicit claims about the history of ideas has given rise to a kind of "standard view" of his aims. According to this view, his goal is to demonstrate, through the presentation of specific cases, the wide variety of world-views that have actually been held in Western intellectual history. Berlin's historical studies thus form a kind of illustration of the idea of value-pluralism – in the sense that they alert us to the limitations of particular views, as well as to the tremendous diversity of values to which human beings have in fact been committed.⁴³ This is indeed an important part of Berlin's project. However, while the "standard view" illuminates some of Berlin's aims and methods, it obscures others, and has made it tempting to assimilate his work to either one of the two

broad approaches to the history of ideas that have emerged as dominant in the English-speaking world over the past half-century: explication and contextualization. This is unfortunate, not only because it prevents us from gaining a fuller appreciation of Berlin's contribution, but also because his work often appears deficient when measured by the standards of explication and contextualization. In order to make the case that Berlin's work should not be assimilated to these approaches, and indeed offers us a genuine alternative to them, I begin by describing the methods of explication and contextualization, and why some aspects of Berlin's work seem assimilable to them.

The first of the two approaches to the history of ideas that I have identified – textual explication – sees the task of reflection on texts in the history of political thought as a matter of elucidating their meanings in accordance with the intentions of the author, or of analysing and clarifying the arguments made. Among Berlin's contemporaries, John Plamenatz and Leo Strauss provided two very different accounts of this approach. They are linked, however, by their shared insistence that the study of texts of political thought consists in close readings, supplemented, where appropriate, by comparisons between these and other canonical texts. In a forthright statement of a Straussian approach to the history of political thought, Allan Bloom insists that an education in politics should consist in “the careful study of texts, of the classic texts of the tradition – that and not much else” (Bloom in Richter, p.115).⁴⁴ In similar vein, in the opening pages of *Man and Society*, Plamenatz explicitly states that his approach is not strictly historical and pays no attention to “the circumstances in which this or that theory was produced”.⁴⁵

What then is the purpose of the history of political thought? Here Plamenatz and Strauss diverge. In *Man and Society*, Plamenatz argues that “philosophies of life” or of human nature shape conceptions of social relationships as well as the relationships themselves. It is impossible for human beings *not* to produce such philosophies – hence the enduring value of the clarification and criticism of the most compelling versions of these philosophies.⁴⁶ For Plamenatz, we should study the theories and arguments made by great or “idiosyncratic” thinkers, because they are both “rich in content and familiar”.⁴⁷ When we reflect on politics, we cannot avoid using terms such as law, rights, obligation, and consent. These ideas are expressed both richly and economically by canonical theorists such as Hobbes or Locke, and

so, by studying their work critically, we can learn to be more reflective about the assumptions we make and the terms we use. Sometimes this is because these theorists were clearer or more comprehensive in their thinking than we are. At other times, we may learn from their conceptual errors and lack of clarity. Plamenatz observes,

By seeing where their explanations are inadequate, we learn something about what they sought to explain. To treat *right* as absence of obligation (which is what Hobbes did) may do for some purposes, but not for others. By examining critically the arguments of *Leviathan* and *De Cive*, we learn why this is so ... If we do not get from Hobbes or Locke answers to the questions we now put, we do, by examining their theories, learn to put our own questions more clearly.⁴⁸

For Plamenatz then, the study of canonical texts provides an occasion for learning to combine comprehensive vision, conceptual rigour, and critical reflection on concepts that play a key role in political life. As Paul Kelly notes, Plamenatz's work is readily intelligible as an "application of the methods of 'Oxford' philosophy in both its realist and logical positivist/ordinary language guises to the arguments of past thinkers".⁴⁹ Moreover, Kelly is right to stress that on this view, there is a continuity between the history of political ideas and attempts to reflect normatively on contemporary political questions. For Plamenatz, studying the responses of past thinkers to the political issues of their day helps us to address present questions more clearly.

Plamenatz's version of explication accepts that some, perhaps many, issues that generated political reflection in the past are no longer alive for us. This puts his view of the purpose of the history of political thought somewhat at odds with the views of Strauss and his followers. Allan Bloom, for example, insists that the cultivation of openness to "the greats of the tradition" through close readings of the texts in the original language offers a form of escape from contemporary intellectual assumptions and provides access to a repository of perennial truths.⁵⁰ Close readings of these texts must be based on a cultivation of openness to their truth – that is, to ways of thinking that radically challenge our own. Moreover, Bloom thinks that "such an education ... gives the students an experience of the possibilities

of human greatness and of community based on shared thought that cannot fail to alter their expectations of politics”.⁵¹

Where Plamenatz’s form of explication emphasizes the methodological gains to be had from studying past texts, the Straussian version stresses substantive gains – intellectual release from faulty, contemporary obsessions, the cultivation of love of the pursuit of truth, and exposure to the virtues of (a particular conception of) the philosophical life. Both, however, share three views. First, the study of past texts provides an education in politics. Second, those texts need not (or more strongly, in Bloom’s case, *must* not) be studied by placing them in their historical context. If we are to be genuinely open to their claims, the arguments of canonical texts must be studied as *arguments*, or as claims on truth. Third, studying texts on politics written a long time ago is not a purely scholarly or antiquarian matter – it is not an alternative to doing normative political theory, but an aspect of it (or again more strongly in the Straussian case, the only form in which it can be carried out). These three claims present us with a distinctive set of views about the nature and purpose of the history of political ideas: it is focused on texts and arguments, and it gives us access to the truth or the methods that we require to think critically about the present.

These views are sharply challenged by proponents of contextualization – the second main approach to the history of political. In Berlin’s lifetime, this alternative also assumed two main forms: a variety of Marxist historical approaches, and the “Cambridge history” of Quentin Skinner, J.G.A. Pocock, and others. Though the Marxist version was influential when Berlin began his historical work, “Cambridge history” is now the dominant influence on scholarship in the history of ideas – at least to the point that alternative views have to be justified in relation to it. For the Marxists, texts on politics cannot be understood by concentrating solely on the arguments they present – rather, the function of those arguments in relation to class interests must be identified, as must their location in the process of historical development.⁵² Thus, for C.B. Macpherson, the work of Locke requires study, not as Plamenatz suggests, because it is a particularly clear and permanently valuable statement of a theory of obligation and the limits of state authority, but because it articulates and provides an ideological justification for the “possessive individualism” associated with the emerging bourgeoisie of the seventeenth century.

On this view, the history of political thought is neither a matter of retrieving perennial insights into the nature of the good life, nor a preparation for normative political theory. Rather, to understand works of political thought is to grasp their ideological (masking, justificatory) function in the struggle for control over the means of production. The study of these texts thus has contemporary value to the extent that they have contributed to the emergence of existing social formations, attitudes, and beliefs.⁵³ We study them to free ourselves of their grip on us as ideologies.

While the Cambridge historians share the Marxist view that the central purpose of historical study is to free us from contemporary assumptions and beliefs, they explicitly reject the Marxist assumption that a single overarching pattern of development is at work through history. This rejection is based on a concern to avoid anachronistic characterizations of ideas or judgments of their significance. At the level of method, this sensitizes the historian to the possibility that texts now regarded as obscure were once influential, and leads him to question the explicationist's assumptions that there is a "tradition" of canonical texts of political thought and that there is a list of perennial political problems which every canonical text must address.

In Quentin Skinner's formulation of this approach, the task of the history of political thought is indeed to identify the intentions of authors, but only in the sense that its aim is to discover what the author was doing *by* arguing in a particular way. In other words, our focus is not on assessing the propositional content or conceptual logic of the arguments (as it is for Plamenatz) but on the ways in which those arguments intervene in a historically situated dialogue about politics, a dialogue that took place not only in the studies of scholars but also in the political arena. We are to study past texts by placing them in the contexts of such dialogues and reconstructing their intended and actual public meanings.⁵⁴ As I noted above, one effect of this approach is to deal a blow to the idea of a canon of great texts, in dialogue with each other. But it also results in a rejection of the explicationist view that the history of political thought is in some sense continuous with normative political theory.

What then is the *point* of the history of ideas, according to the Cambridge contextualist? Several answers to this question are possible, but two are most frequently offered.⁵⁵ First, as Skinner claims, through studying the history of political thought, “we can hope to acquire a perspective from which to view our own form of life in a more self-critical way, enlarging our present horizons instead of fortifying local prejudices”.⁵⁶ This is generally similar to the Marxist view of the purpose of the history of ideas, though in this case we are liberated not by detecting the role of ideas in the class struggle. Rather, our political imagination is freed as we come to see both that many of our contemporary assumptions about morality and politics are the outcomes of largely contingent processes, and that some of those assumptions are mistaken, confused, or misapplied – Skinner gives the example of the belief that a theory of individual liberty must be accompanied by a theory of rights, which his work on civic republicanism questions.⁵⁷ We may also conclude that some of our beliefs are well founded, but we will be in a better position to draw this conclusion if we first understand past views on their own terms.

This first answer proposes the history of political thought as a kind of negative therapy – which serves us largely by dispelling the aura of necessity that hangs around our moral commitments.⁵⁸ By learning to see how different the concerns of past thinkers were, the grip of present assumptions is loosened. A second answer arises out of this, though it is incompatible with a strong version of the first. On this second view, an examination of the past may also provide us with conceptual and theoretical resources that have been unjustly neglected or misunderstood. The historian thus makes these resources available to contemporary reflection. This is certainly one of the motivations of Skinner’s work on civic republican conceptions of liberty. Though he usually stops short of arguing for the clear contemporary relevance of republican conceptions of liberty, he *does* mean us to consider them as serious candidates for our attention, and he *is* sympathetic towards Philip Pettit’s elucidation of the contemporary significance of a republican conception of liberty.⁵⁹

Thus, both answers that the Cambridge contextualist may give to the challenge of contemporary relevance deny the view that normative reflection on current political issues and the history of political thought are continuous enterprises. While the Cambridge historian may hold that historical study is *indirectly* relevant to contemporary normative

theory, by weaning us from our assumptions or by providing us with new (i.e., old, but unfairly neglected) conceptual stimuli, he will deny that we undertake study of the great thinkers of the past to gain the conceptual exercise we need to come to grips with present problems, or to retrieve the proper account of the good life. On this view, political theory and the history of political thought may be related, but remain quite distinct enterprises.

How does Berlin stand in relation to this disagreement between explicators and contextualizers about the proper methods and goals of the history of political thought? Into which of these camps does he fall? I think that the answer is: neither. However, his work is often assimilated to one or the other. James Tully, for example, credits him for being an inspiration to the Cambridge historians. It is easy to see why he might be viewed in this way. For one of the central claims of Berlin's value-pluralism and of his historical work is that some very central categories of human experience have changed over time. Under the influence of Vico and Herder, Berlin has suggested that people have interpreted themselves and their central purposes in radically different ways in different times and cultures. This means that to project our experiences, concerns and terms of judgment unreflectively on to past theories will invariably be to misidentify them. Thus, Berlin is sympathetic to the Cambridge contextualizers' concern to avoid anachronistic judgments and to be sensitive to the very different concerns of other eras.⁶⁰ Like them, he resists the Marxist idea that human history can be understood in terms of a single process of development. Like them, he resists the tendency to read contemporary beliefs and attitudes into the past. And like theirs, his studies of past political theories identify the political circumstances of their appearance.

But Berlin's contextualism is not simply to be equated with that of Cambridge history; it is both broader, and more restricted in scope. It is broader in the sense that Berlin is typically interested in sketching the general cultural and intellectual context, and does not focus to the same extent on the minutiae of the political struggles of the day. It is more restricted in the sense that Berlin does not treat past ideas as alien or simply distant from us but rather alerts us to the continuing and often unsettling challenges that they make to us. Thus, in his study of Joseph de Maistre, Berlin does not depict his views as the politically impotent work of a disaffected aristocrat, nostalgic for authority. Rather, in de Maistre's reflections on violence, Berlin discovers a disturbingly novel theme, and identifies this as a precursor of aspects of

modern fascism. This is a move likely to make a thoroughgoing contextualist wince, and it certainly associates de Maistre with views that he himself could not have anticipated. Nevertheless, Berlin claims to find a different kind of fascination with violence here from that found in earlier thinkers, one closer in spirit to twentieth century views. For Berlin, in this respect, de Maistre is our contemporary.

Berlin's treatment of Machiavelli provides a more familiar and even more striking example of the way in which he attempts to find contemporary significance in past thinkers. Here also, he finds a kind of significance in Machiavelli's work that Machiavelli himself could not have sensed. Though Machiavelli almost certainly preferred republican *virtu* to Christian morality, for whatever reason, he does not deny that the actions of a "virtuous" leader may be evil in the eyes of conventional morality, though he insists that it may be excusable to commit evil in the service of the common good. Machiavelli thus does not substitute a republican, for a Christian, scale of values; he holds the two together. Thus, without intending this, he makes available to his audience the disturbing thought that there is more than one scale of values with a claim to our allegiance. One again, whatever one thinks of this interpretation, it is clearly not straightforwardly contextualist – and indeed, in a late interview with Steven Lukes, Berlin explicitly distances himself from Quentin Skinner's understanding of the history of ideas, though without clearly explaining his reasons for doing so.

Does he then practice textual explication? Paul Kelly suggests that Berlin's work ought to be understood as similar in kind to, though less analytically "austere" than, that of Plamenatz.⁶¹ For Kelly, Berlin uses historical studies – here relying on the insights of past thinkers, there correcting them – to advance a comprehensive political theory in something like the way Plamenatz proposes. The obstacle that this view of Berlin faces is that he rarely engages with the argument of a text in a sustained or detailed way. Though he certainly conveys a vivid impression of past thinkers' views, he does not reconstruct them through scholarly textual exposition or logical reconstruction. Rather, as Stefan Collini has recently noted, Berlin offers us the history of ideas as "high-altitude aerial photography", emphasizing the central commitments of an author, providing comparisons, tracing the emergence of ideas, and identifying their current significance.⁶² While turning Berlin into a contextualizer *avant la lettre* is apt to provoke the complaint that he is often an inaccurate contextualizer, guilty of reading

current concerns into past thinkers, turning him into an exponent of a stern, analytical explication of texts, on the other hand, grasps his concern with assessing ideas at the cost of missing the rich texture of his empathetic reconstructions.

So what *is* Berlin up to? To answer this question, I think that we need to see that Berlin's "empathetic" approach involves four elements. Berlin offers us interpretive studies of political thought, which aim: (1) to provide us with impressions of the ideas people have held and of the significance these ideas hold for us; (2) to identify the political and cultural circumstances in which these ideas were formulated and in which they exercised an influence; (3) to give an account of the personal qualities and motives that attracted particular people to particular ideas, and which influenced both their theories and the reception of these theories; (4) to call our attention to the complex ways in which personality and circumstances affect the meanings of ideas in practice.

The first two elements of this approach will be familiar to anyone with a background in interpretive historiography or hermeneutics. From Dilthey to Collingwood the notion of *Einfühlung* has served to emphasize both the need to imaginatively reconstruct past ideas, and the need to assess the claims made by these theories in the light of our own experience, beliefs, and knowledge. Proponents of *Einfühlung* in general think that a proper engagement with a set of ideas has not taken place if the interpreter is insensitive to differences of attitude arising from cultural and historical distance, but they also insist that genuinely "entering into" past theories means taking them seriously, assessing the validity of their claims on us.⁶³ They thus tend to combine contextualizers' sensitivity to historical and cultural difference with a more dynamic and flexible idea of what constitutes a context, which enables them to share something of the explicators' concern to assess the validity of texts' truth-claims.

But the third and fourth elements of Berlin's approach – his interest in the relation between ideas and personality, and the ways in which ideas interact in complex ways with personality and circumstances in practice – add something distinctive to interpretive historiography. In the (only) version known to Oxford when Berlin was an undergraduate, R.G. Collingwood argued that history must be understood as the "imaginative reenactment" of the ideas and

intentions of an author. But Collingwood was insistent that what the historian seeks to “reenact” is meaningful action or “thought”, which stands outside the flow of experience “in some sense”, rather than “sensations” or “feelings”, which pass into oblivion once experienced and cannot be retrieved.⁶⁴ There are some serious difficulties with this view – for example, it equates intentional action and ideas too easily, and seems to assume that thought and emotions can be completely insulated from one another. However, what I want to stress here is that Berlin does not follow Collingwood on these matters. In a 1988 interview, Berlin comments that historians of ideas “... try and trace the development of ideas. The history of ideas is the history of what we believe that people thought and felt, and these people were real people, not just statues or collections of attributes. Some effort to enter imaginatively into the minds and outlooks of the thinkers of the thoughts is indispensable, an effort at *Einfühlung* is unavoidable ...”.⁶⁵ In order to write his early book on Marx, Berlin explains, he

tried to understand what it was like to be Karl Marx in Berlin, in Paris, in Brussels, in London, and to think in terms of his concepts, categories, his German words ... One cannot talk about ideas in complete abstraction, unhistorically; but neither can one talk solely in terms of concrete historical milieux, as if ideas made no sense outside their frameworks. As you can see, this is a complex, imprecise, psychologically demanding field of enquiry ...⁶⁶

For Berlin, ideas are not simply logical abstractions, but are always embodied by particular people, who give them a unique – and often a changing – form through the course of their lives.⁶⁷ In other words, part of Berlin’s goal as a historian is not simply to relay the content or argumentative structure of past ideas or to identify their historical political import, but to convey an impression of why and how they were held by real people, and what happened to those ideas under the pressure of circumstances. Thus, there are some striking similarities between the *éloges* for Berlin’s friends and colleagues of *Personal Impressions*, and his studies of political ideas – the explicitly historical studies, as well as many of the more discursive pieces.⁶⁸

Though some aspects of his approach are irreducibly personal, I think it is possible to identify three crucial ingredients. The first of these is Berlin's interest in the psychology of agents or thinkers. Like his favourite thinker, Alexander Herzen, Berlin is fascinated by personalities, and vivid verbal portraits of personalities are prominent in his writing. This is evident already in his early work on Marx, which Alan Ryan acutely describes as a "a series of reflections on the temperament that leads its possessors to embrace utopian, determinist schemes of social improvement".⁶⁹ Early in this book, Berlin offers a brilliant sketch of Marx's personality:

He was endowed with a powerful, active, concrete, unsentimental mind, an acute sense of injustice, and little sensibility, and was repelled as much by the rhetoric and emotionalism of the intellectuals as by the stupidity and complacency of the bourgeoisie ... The sense of living in a hostile and vulgar world (intensified perhaps by his latent dislike of the fact that he was born a Jew) increased his natural harshness and aggressiveness ... He had little charm, his behaviour was often boorish, and he was prey to blinding hatreds, but even his enemies were fascinated by the strength and vehemence of his personality, the boldness and sweep of his views, and the breadth and brilliance of his analysis of the contemporary situation.⁷⁰

There are three aspects of this quite representative passage worth noting. First, it is highly sensitive to the complexity of personality. Throughout this book, Berlin is fascinated by the complicated intellectual and psychological ironies involved in Marx's tough-minded dismissal of an agent-centred conception of history and of the view that ideas, and especially moral ideas, operate as a driving force in history. As Berlin repeatedly suggests, this is hard to square with Marx's evident passionate indignation against capitalism, as well as with the powerful (though often unexpected) impact his own ideas had on the course of history. However, Berlin is not content to identify these tensions as contradictions, as a reason for dismissing Marx's work. Rather, he shows how they animate and sustain Marx's thinking and inaugurate a new attitude to social and historical analysis.⁷¹ In much the same way, his studies of the Russian intelligentsia are designed, not to bury their ideas, but above all to convey their agonized sense of being torn between two worlds – the

enlightened West, and Russia – and the way in which this central psychological tension shaped their thinking.

Second, while Berlin avoids any form of “depth psychology” – any attempt to identify a single set of motivations or experiences at work in all individuals, he pays careful attention to the circumstances in which individuals find themselves. The passage quoted above clearly relates Marx’s personality to cultural and social circumstances – to the intellectual movements that were available and gave his emotions form, as well as to his predicament as a member of a discriminated-against minority. In a fascinating later essay comparing Disraeli and Marx, Berlin elaborates the view that as members of a socially excluded group, they were driven by a search for identity, or recognition, a search which could lead to assimilation, collective self-determination, or, as in the case of Marx and Disraeli, the construction of a highly personal form of identity.⁷²

Third, Berlin’s interest in personality is never reductionist. It is interesting to compare him in this respect with the historian, Lewis Namier, whom Berlin met while he was working on Marx, and who seems to have been decisive in interesting Berlin in the psychology of intellectuals.⁷³ In Namier’s view, ideas are epiphenomenal, produced by habit, or by emotions such as fear, ambition, etc, and they are often out of step with material circumstances. The consciously rational aspect of human agency is far less significant in motivating people and causing change, than irrational factors; Namier takes this as a guide to historiography as well as a reason to be suspicious of all political ideologies.⁷⁴ His political histories of eighteenth century English court politics are thus based on detailed biographical studies of individual members of parliament. Berlin seems to have taken from Namier an interest in non-rational individual motivations, as well as his view that individuals are often unable to foresee the consequences of the ideals they profess, but he rejects the view that ideas may be reduced to some deeper set of motivations. For Berlin, ideas are affected by emotions and habits, as well as by circumstances, but they are not explained by them; they retain an independent significance. In his

hands, the history of ideas demonstrates the unpredictable originality of human agents, and their irreducible complexity and idiosyncrasy.

This brings me to the second ingredient of Berlin's approach to the history of ideas – his interest in the complex interactions between ideas, personalities, and circumstances. Though he never reduces the significance of ideas to the psychology of their authors, or to the circumstances in which they appeared, his work does suggest that we do not fully understand the significance ideas have for human beings, unless we have some grasp of what it is that gives them appeal, and how they undergo unexpected transformations in practice. Thus Berlin argues that just as Disraeli, driven by a need for identity, invented and mystified his own origins, Marx “identified himself with an idealized proletariat”, rather than with its real members; his need for identity and theoretical comfort for his alienated social position helps us to understand the surprising anonymity of the “proletariat” in his theory, though it does not explain that theory or reduce its claim to validity.⁷⁵ In another late essay on nineteenth century Marxism, Berlin suggests that although Marx is the heir in many respects to Enlightenment universalism, one of Marxism's basic features, its division of humanity into bourgeoisie and proletariat, had the effect of undermining the notion of the unity of mankind. In the course of the twentieth century, this revealed the sinister implication that “there are entire sections of mankind which are literally expendable” – a conclusion that fuelled irrationalist political movements that would have been anathema to Marx, just as it decisively influenced Marxism as a political movement.⁷⁶ In similar vein, Berlin attempts to show how David Hume's skepticism became an important source of the irrationalist and fideist views of Hamann and Jacobi – though Hume would certainly have been hostile to this appropriation. In a fascinating conclusion to this essay, Berlin describes the German reception of Hume as “one of the unintended, and unwelcome, yet perhaps not altogether unpredictable consequences of their own ideas, which even the most reasonable, careful, self-protective and accommodating thinkers cannot always wholly escape”.⁷⁷

This interest in the interactions between ideas, personalities, and circumstances sets Berlin's more discursive writings on freedom and equality apart from a more strictly

analytical examination of concepts. Thus, although many have interpreted “Two Concepts of Liberty” as an attempt to reject notions of positive liberty, based on a conceptual analysis, it is important to see that Berlin does not reject the validity of positive conceptions of liberty on conceptual grounds. On the contrary, he accepts the validity of *both* negative and positive concepts of liberty.⁷⁸ His central claims seem to be, first, that both concepts of liberty entail practical costs and need to be balanced with care, and second, that the concept of positive liberty often displays distinctive imperialistic tendencies, in the sense that its advocates are tempted to identify a central or highest motivation in human beings, thereby threatening pluralism and underestimating individual complexity. Thus, what appears to the unwary as a purely conceptual argument, is in fact a blend of conceptual argument and historical judgment of the peculiar practical risks implicit in these two understandings of liberty.

The third ingredient of Berlin’s historical writing is, on the surface at least, stylistic. Virtually all of the personal tributes that appeared after Berlin’s death alluded to his gifts as a great “talker”. A much smaller number of commentators have pointed out that Berlin’s essays typically create the illusion of something like conversation, through a number of stylistic devices – comparison, allusion, informal quotation, anecdote, cumulative repetition, long sentences held together chiefly by the rhythm of speech, etc. Both David Pears and Noel Annan compare his literary style to that of an artist, whose brush strokes, though incomplete in themselves, gradually present a larger picture. Pears interestingly notes that though Berlin’s essays have a clear structure, it is not the logic of linear argument, but of “cumulative presentation”, and attributes this to Berlin’s belief that philosophy, broadly understood, involves both logical analysis and historical narrative.⁷⁹

But there is more to it than that. Berlin’s quasi-conversational idiom is uniquely well equipped to convey a sense of the complexity of the history of ideas and the incompleteness of reflection and expression in any given life. What I referred to earlier as Berlin’s sensitivity to the protean qualities of human experience makes him appreciative of others’ attempts to remain open to their varied, shifting, and

inarticulate commitments – as he is, for example, in his wonderful essay on the tormented and unresolved attempts of the Russian literary critic, Vissarion Belinsky, to do justice both to his sense of the importance and autonomy of great art, and his recognition that serious art cannot avoid political commitment. For Berlin, to feel the force of tensions within one, and not to deny them, may be a form of strength, rather than of weakness. In his own case, this resistance to attempts to stifle or oversystematize the protean qualities of experience is expressed in his quasi-conversational writing style. Whereas a more linear presentation might close off questions that ought not to be finally resolved, conversation allows us to respect the complexity of ideas, and their existence in the experience of real people. Beneath the surface of Berlin's style, then, is his substantive conviction that:

Man is incapable of self-completion, and therefore never wholly predictable: a fallible, a complex combination of opposites, some reconcilable, others incapable of being resolved or harmonized; unable to cease from his search for truth, happiness, novelty, freedom, but with no guarantee, theological or logical or scientific, of being able to attain them: a free, imperfect being capable of determining his own destiny in circumstances favourable to the development of his reason and his gifts.⁸⁰

It is this conviction that lies behind all of Berlin's work, and shapes his approach to the history of ideas. His historical writings present us with explorations of the complicated and idiosyncratic interactions between ideas, personalities, and circumstances, and they do so in a style entirely appropriate to Berlin's appreciation for the complexity of human experience. In my view, this renders Berlin's history of ideas distinctive, and leaves us with much to learn from him still – lessons that we cannot learn so well from the dominant approaches to the history of political thought.

3. A Liberal Education in Judgment

In the previous section, I have tried to show in what ways Berlin's approach to the history of political thought is distinctive, and cannot be equated with the dominant textualist and contextualist alternatives. I now want to return to the broader claim I

made at the beginning of the essay – that part of Berlin’s lasting legacy is a liberal education in political judgment. In my view, this is one of the central goals of all of his work.

I noted in the previous section that textualists and contextualists have characteristic views about the relations between the history of political thought and normative theorizing about current political problems. These views fall into two groups. For Straussian textualists and Marxist contextualists, the relation between the history of political thought and contemporary theoretical reflection is *direct*. For Straussian textualists, if we open ourselves properly to classic texts, they provide us with the truth about political arrangements and their relation to the good life. For Marxist contextualists, the history of political thought is a form of ideology-critique, the ultimate purpose of which is to raise revolutionary consciousness. On the other hand, textualists such as Plamenatz and contextualists such as Skinner see the relation as *indirect*. For Plamenatz, studying the history of political thought is a vital preparation for the task of reflecting normatively on contemporary politics, in the sense that it hones analytical skills and exposes us to comprehensive visions of politics. For Cambridge contextualists, the history of political thought has a therapeutic value, weakening the grip of contemporary beliefs and freeing up our political imagination.

On the interpretation I have been proposing, Berlin’s predominant (though not exclusive) tendency is to see the relation between normative theory and the history of political thought as indirect. There is more than one sense in which this is the case. In the first place, Berlin thinks that we need to be aware of hinge moments – such as the emergence of Romanticism – when key outlooks on life changed, with lasting implications for us. Historical narratives play a role in making us more aware of the nature of our current beliefs and assumptions. The history of ideas also makes us more aware of the existence of families of beliefs – and more aware that some members of the family are black sheep. He does this, for example, in his essays on Georges Sorel, or on the ways in which Kant proved an unwitting inspiration to nineteenth century nationalists. We also become aware of the great variety of beliefs

held by human beings, and we are thus enabled to open our minds to a much broader political agenda than we might otherwise imagine. In all of these ways, Berlin is quite close to Plamenatz and the Cambridge contextualists.

But my account of Berlin's historiographic practice suggests an additional, and more distinctive, view of the goal of the history of political thought and its indirect relation to normative theory. Berlin's interest in the relations between ideas, the circumstances in which they come to life, and the personalities who express them, suggests that his studies may be read as instructive cases, or cautionary tales. They instruct us both positively and negatively. On the positive side, the study of past thinkers or bodies of ideas reminds us of the irreducible idiosyncrasy of human beings. That is to say, it reminds us that we are both expressive beings, characterized by the capacity to make choices and to create our commitments, and imperfect or incomplete, beings. On the negative side, we are shown cases of theorists or political leaders who attempt to deny or suppress our incomplete and protean character. Taken together, these studies instruct us in the practical dangers of an excessive commitment to a dogmatic system or to a singular vision.

Here again, it is helpful to compare Berlin with Lewis Namier. Like Berlin, Namier was a Jew, acutely conscious of the vulnerability of European minorities to dogmatic prejudices. Like Berlin, Namier seems to have thought that the study of history teaches us contemporary lessons in political judgment and at its best, puts us in a position to master our environment through "heightened awareness" of the distinctiveness of our circumstances and the ongoing effects of the past immanent in our own persons and circumstances.⁸¹ But whereas Berlin was committed to a view of human agents as expressive beings, capable of free and relatively enlightened choices, and of making their identities through those choices, Namier was convinced that individuals were largely the product of forces outside of their awareness, and that the theories they held about themselves at any given time, were likely to be largely misleading, and deeply affected by interests, ambitions, and a variety of irrational factors. Namier drew from this the political conclusion that ideologies – by which he seems to have meant something like "general ideas or programmes in

politics” – were almost always bad guides to politics, and typically overestimated human abilities to foresee the consequences of attempting to impose ideas on reality. Namier is thus resolutely anti-ideological, committed to a politics of judgment. He writes:

Some political philosophers complain of a ‘tired lull’ and the absence at present of argument on general politics in this country (Britain): practical solutions are sought for concrete problems, while programmes and ideals are forgotten by both parties. But to me this attitude seems to betoken a greater national maturity, and I can only wish that it may long continue undisturbed by the workings of political philosophy.⁸²

Berlin’s position is obviously more complex than this. As those who focus on his value-pluralism point out, he takes the view that human beings cannot avoid interpreting themselves and their situation, formulating ideas about politics. This is an inescapable part of what it means to be human – indeed, we learn what it *means* to be human through these efforts – and the attempt to formulate general ideas or theories of human affairs may often produce important benefits. But we are often tempted to mistake take these theories for the whole of reality, and easily lapse into dogmatism. When we do, we are at great risk of being consumed by our own ideas. For Berlin, the only remedy for this is to recognize the need for political judgment, which involves an acute understanding of particular situations, and the responses that are appropriate to them. This is not achieved through irrational intuition, but involves some degree of generalization and comparison, although this falls well short of systematic articulation. As Berlin comments, judgment is:

... Above all, a capacity for integrating a vast amalgam of constantly changing, multicoloured, evanescent, perpetually overlapping data, too many, too swift, too intermingled, to be caught and pinned down and labeled like so many individual butterflies. To integrate in this sense, is to see the data ... as elements in a single pattern, with their implications, to see them as symptoms of past and future possibilities, to see them pragmatically – that is, in terms of what you or others can or will do to them, and what they can or will do to others or to you.⁸³

It is thus important not to overstate the contrast between general ideas and judgment. Berlin is clear that there is no substitute for sensitive perception of the particular features of a situation – but in order to perceive relevant features clearly, we need frames, comparisons, in short, some general ideas. The goal of political judgment is to see patterns in human events, to synthesize, while scientific explanation seeks to analyze and abstract. The contrast, however, is not absolute. To judge effectively, we may need the kinds of knowledge made available by the sciences and by general theories. But we should not suppose that these forms of knowledge are sufficient to guarantee good judgment, or to reveal everything that may be relevant to us. We need both the kind of sensitivity to particular situations that Namier advocated, and the perspective provided by general ideas.

This view of judgment is evident in Berlin's essays on Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt. Here he distinguishes between two kinds of leaders – those who are guided chiefly by a singular vision or principle (Churchill), and those who are extraordinarily sensitive to minute details and changes in mood and circumstance (Roosevelt). The former type of leader, who is motivated by a desire to impose a coherent vision or set of ideas on human affairs, is usually largely incapable of understanding people or events. The latter type, though likely to be less introspective, pursues ends, which are “the crystallization, the raising to great intensity and clarity, of what a large number of their fellow citizens are thinking and feeling in some dim, inarticulate, but nevertheless persistent fashion”.⁸⁴

I do think that in these essays, Berlin's preference for the responsive, rather than the visionary, leader emerges. But this is not a preference based on the criterion of effectiveness, and Berlin intriguingly blurs the distinction between these types of leaders. He tells us, for example, that the visionary leader is in fact guided by a political imagination that synthesizes beliefs, insights, and habits into a unified system – so such leaders are also responsive to some degree, though they may not know this. Moreover, such visionary leaders may be effective or ineffective, morally praiseworthy or monstrous. Berlin places in this category political leaders as different

as Churchill, Woodrow Wilson, Garibaldi, de Gaulle, Trotsky, Lenin, and Hitler. Luck plays a vital role in determining the success of any exercise of judgment, and it was fortunate for Britain, Berlin suggests, in the circumstances of World War Two, that Churchill blinded himself into believing that his compatriots shared his vision of them; this enabled him to give them a powerful sense of purpose. Moreover, though Berlin clearly thinks that Churchill's political vision was flawed in many respects (on colonial questions, for example), he also judges that it had morally redeeming qualities, unlike the equally visionary, but morally monstrous, views of Hitler.

Two views relevant to Berlin's understanding of judgment emerge from this. First, as I noted above, he thinks that judgment in politics is a complicated combination of acute perception and responsiveness to particulars, and general ideas or visions. But second, Berlin seems to prefer leaders who explicitly recognize that general ideas and visions are insufficient guides in politics. The reason is straightforward, and indicates the liberal character of Berlin's understanding of political judgment. As I noted in my discussion of Berlin's anti-procrusteanism, the political danger of excessive reliance on any set of general ideas, principles, or visions, is that people's failure to comply with expectations will not be taken as a reality check, but will be impatiently interpreted as a fault that must be fixed. This is all too often accomplished, as Berlin sadly notes, by a "kind of vivisection of societies until they become what the theory originally declared that the experiment should have caused them to be".⁸⁵

Alternatively, it results in ruin and undermines confidence in the value of applying reason to human affairs. We may learn this from studying political leaders, but we learn it also from the history of political ideas, as they interact in varied ways with personalities and circumstances.

Berlin's liberalism consists, in large part, in his respect for the irreducible idiosyncrasy and complexity of individuals, but also in his commitment to applying our reason to human life in order to emancipate people from the effects of oppression, prejudice, and ignorance. His insistence that we recognize the indispensability of judgment to political life, that we learn not to suppose that our ideas about politics are ever sufficient guides to reality, is motivated by his liberal

appreciation for complex individuality. Though he draws some of his views from John Stuart Mill, and though they are similar in other respects to Judith Shklar's skeptical "liberalism of fear", this is a distinctive anti-Procrustean liberalism, based on a central commitment to the well-being of real individuals. Moreover, it is a liberalism with an acute historical and psychological sense.

Conclusion

In the secondary literature on Berlin, whether it is critical or laudatory, he is presented chiefly as the author of a theory of liberty, or of the theory of "value-pluralism", and sometimes as a distinguished, though sadly unreliable and impressionistic historian of ideas. There seems often to be a half-expressed wish that Berlin had been a less scattered and more systematic thinker, less of a fox and more of a hedgehog. Berlin himself may have wished this; Stefan Collini reports that he resigned the Chichele chair at Oxford because he felt he had no "doctrine" to teach.⁸⁶

But there is an alternative view of Berlin, which deserves to be placed alongside of more familiar themes. In a recent essay on Berlin, Alan Ryan notes that Berlin's liberalism is at least as much "a matter of sensibility" as it is a set of views about liberty, rights, equality, obligation, etc.⁸⁷ It is this non-doctrinaire liberal sensibility that I have been trying to capture in this essay, and that I have termed Berlin's anti-Procrustean liberalism. It is a sensibility conveyed as much in his historical work as in his more philosophical essays, as much in the style of his essays as in their substance. Moreover, though it is closely related to his value-pluralism, it is distinct from it, and perhaps more closely allied to liberalism's central interest in individual well-being. There are then, at least two sets of commitments at the heart of Berlin's political thought, rather than the singular organizing principle that John Gray detects.

This anti-Procrustean liberal sensibility is a vital part of Berlin's legacy to political theory. While we should certainly not try to ape Berlin or his approach to the history of political thought, we should take seriously his concern to study ideas not only in terms of their conceptual logic, but also in their embodiment in individual lives and

in changing circumstances. Berlin demands that liberals pay close attention to human psychology and history, and learn that good theories also need the support of good judgment. Regrettably, these are lessons that always need to be learned.

Notes

¹ See Hitchens 1998, Johnson 1998, and McLynn 1999. Some of the critical reactions are usefully discussed in Kenny 2000: 1026-1027.

² These can certainly be made.

³ Some of his more discursive writings, including “Two Concepts of Liberty” contain some of the elements I am identifying here.

⁴ I have used this term before, in a review of *The Sense of Reality* (Allen 1998: 174). Part of my aim here is to cash out some of the remarks I make fleetingly in this piece.

⁵ Gray 1995.

⁶ I should note that in one sense – i.e., as a claim about the logic of the concepts of liberalism and pluralism, Gray’s conclusion that they are distinct values, and will come apart at times – is inescapable. What is more controversial is his dismissal of practical arguments for trying to hold liberalism and pluralism together for as long as possible, as well as his tendency to subordinate liberalism to pluralism, rather than keep them in productive tension.

⁷ Gray 1995: 1.

⁸ *Ibid.*: 13, and see also *ibid.*: 242.

⁹ *Ibid.*: 23.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*: 158-159, 167-168.

¹¹ I believe that an effective counter to Gray’s general subordination of liberalism to pluralism could be constructed, starting from the nature of a commitment to value-pluralism. To be more precise, I think it can be argued that Berlin did not think that anyone could simply be a value-pluralist, with no additional moral commitments. Rather, value-pluralism accompanied a commitment to a particular value or set of values, and restrained and inflected that commitment. Thus, Berlin generally seems to prefer Herzen, who combined passionate commitment with a remarkable appreciation for the beliefs of others, over Turgenev, who comes closer to the popular caricature of a liberal as “someone who cannot take his own side in an argument”.

¹² Berlin 1930: 13 (typed copy from Henry Hardy).

¹³ This is a slight exaggeration. Michael Ignatieff points to the early influence of Schmel Rachmilievitch, an exiled Russian Jew, who befriended Berlin and gave him his first exposure to philosophy, and in particular, to the Russian intellectual world. See Ignatieff 1998: 42-44.

¹⁴ See Ayer 1952 (1946): 5.

¹⁵ See *ibid.*: 102-119.

¹⁶ See Berlin 1978 (1950): 57-58.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*: 77.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*: 78.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*: 79-80.

²⁰ Berlin 1969a (1954): 63, 71.

²¹ *Ibid.*: 115-116.

²² Berlin 1990b (1988): 15-16.

²³ *Ibid.*: 16.

²⁴ *Ibid.*: 17.

²⁵ *Ibid.*: 18.

²⁶ Berlin 1990a (1959): 204.

²⁷ Collingwood 1946: 213.

²⁸ Berlin 1986 (1953): 18-20. See also Berlin 2000 (1954): 139 bottom (“trivial or unnoticeable ...”).

²⁹ Berlin 1996a (1953): 17.

³⁰ *Ibid.*: 20.

³¹ *Ibid.*: 19.

³² Morante 1984. I owe this reference to Philip Graham.

³³ Berlin 1978d (1960): 141.

³⁴ Scott 1998: 356.

³⁵ Scott in fact quotes Berlin to this effect. See Scott 1998: 347.

³⁶ The distinction between “knowing that” and “knowing how” is drawn from Gilbert Ryle. Berlin denies that he is thinking of “knowing how”. See Berlin 1996a: 33-34, footnote 1.

³⁷ Shklar 1998: 11.

³⁸ I have indicated what I take to be the strengths and weaknesses of Shklar’s approach elsewhere. See Allen 2001.

³⁹ Moreover, they are not highly original. Certainly, views of this sort were well established in nineteenth century German philosophy, and were represented in Oxford by R.G. Collingwood, whose work was an important influence on Berlin in this respect.

-
- ⁴⁰ See Ignatieff 1998: 131. Berlin recounted that the decision came to him in the course of a long transatlantic flight in 1944 after a conversation with a logician, H. M. Scheffer. See also Pears 1991:36.
- ⁴¹ See Ryan 1999: 349-350.
- ⁴² For example, see Berlin 1978b (1962): 8. See also Galipeau 1994: 34. If empathy also involves assessment of validity, as Collingwood seems to have thought, then this furnishes another reason for thinking that Berlin's distinction cannot be as sharp as he makes it out to be.
- ⁴³ In addition, Berlin sometimes sketches a narrative of the gradually dawning realization of the truth of value-pluralism.
- ⁴⁴ Bloom 1980: 115
- ⁴⁵ Plamenatz 1963: ix.
- ⁴⁶ See also Plamenatz 1960: 45. Plamenatz also had a more substantive reason for believing in the need to study major modern thinkers – viz., that their views of human nature were insufficiently social. See Wokler 2001: 153.
- ⁴⁷ Plamenatz 1963: x.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid.: xi.
- ⁴⁹ Kelly 1999: 50.
- ⁵⁰ Bloom 1980: 123, 131-132.
- ⁵¹ Ibid.: 138.
- ⁵² Berlin disagreed with, but generally respected, the work of Hobsbawm and Hill. He had little time for Laski, Carr, and Deutscher, once remarking that one of his arguments must be right if Carr disagreed with it.
- ⁵³ This also means that texts that express attitudes typical of a period or class may merit study as much as, or even more than, “canonical” texts.
- ⁵⁴ See Skinner 1988a: 266.
- ⁵⁵ First, he may insist that historical accuracy simply should not be described as “mere” antiquarianism; rather, it is a matter of upholding the precious virtue of scholarly integrity and the quest for accurate and impartial understanding. Second, he may claim that historical study should encourage tolerance, by making us aware of the extent to which our own past is at least as foreign to us as some cultures may seem. This is evidently not the only possible reaction to this discovery.
- ⁵⁶ Skinner 1988a: 287
- ⁵⁷ John Dunn and Raymond Geuss seem to take a similar view of the function of the history of political thought. .
- ⁵⁸ Skinner 1998b: 116.
- ⁵⁹ In discussions, Skinner sometimes seems to hedge between the first and second answers discussed here. He will often provide what appears to the unwary to be a rousing piece of advocacy of republican theories of liberty, and then, when pressed, will insist that as a “mere historian of ideas” he has little of value to say about republican liberty's contemporary applicability. While this may sometimes be a little frustrating to the audience, I think it does remain faithful to his sense of his role as historian.
- ⁶⁰ This would accord with Berlin's statement of the task of philosophy. See Berlin 1978b (1962): 9-11
- ⁶¹ See Kelly 1999: 51.
- ⁶² See Collini 1997: 4.
- ⁶³ Collingwood 1946: 234.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid.: 287.
- ⁶⁵ Jahanbegloo 1992: 27-28.
- ⁶⁶ Ibid: 28.
- ⁶⁷ Annan 1998: xx-xxi.
- ⁶⁸ In his stimulating introduction to *Personal Impressions*, Annan describes the *éloge* as Berlin's “paradigm”. Ibid.: p. xxiii.
- ⁶⁹ Ryan 1999, p. 348.
- ⁷⁰ Berlin 1996 (1939): 3.
- ⁷¹ Berlin 1995 (1939): 116.
- ⁷² See Berlin 1982 (1970): 259, esp. 284.
- ⁷³ See Berlin 1998a (1966): 92-93. This essay, one of the longest collected in *Personal Impressions*, is “composed purely from memory”, Berlin says. It is clear that Namier made a huge impression on Berlin. Interestingly, Berlin explicitly notes (Ibid.: 98) the psychological similarities between Namier and Marx.

⁷⁴ Namier 1956a (1952): 372-4, 1956b (1955): 382-383, 385.

⁷⁵ See Berlin 1995: 285.

⁷⁶ Berlin 1996c (1964): 139.

⁷⁷ Berlin 1982b (1977): 187.

⁷⁸ Jahanbegloo 1992, p. 41

⁷⁹ Pears 1991: 38, Annan 1998: xxiii.

⁸⁰ Berlin, 1969b (1959): 205.

⁸¹ Namier 1956a (1952): 372.

⁸² Namier 1956b (1955): 386.

⁸³ Berlin, 1996b (1957): 46.

⁸⁴ Berlin, 1998b (1955): 29.

⁸⁵ Berlin, 1996b (1957): 53.

⁸⁶ Collini 1997: 3.

⁸⁷ Ryan 1999: 357.

Bibliography

- Allen, J. 1998 "Review Essay: *The Sense of Reality*", *South African Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 17 (2)
- 2001 "The Place of Negative Morality in Political Theory", *Political Theory*, Vol. 29 (3)
- Ayer, A.J. 1952 (1946) *Language, Truth and Logic* (New York: Dover)
- Berlin, I. 1930 "Some Procrustations" *Oxford Outlook*, Vol. 10
- 1978a (1950) "Logical Translation", *Concepts and Categories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)
- 1978b (1962) "The Purpose of Philosophy", *Concepts and Categories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)
- 1978c (1954) "Historical Inevitability", *Concepts and Categories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)
- 1978d (1960) "The Concept of Scientific History", *Concepts and Categories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)
- 1969b (1959) "John Stuart Mill and the Ends of Life", *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)
- 1982a (1970) "Benjamin Disraeli, Karl Marx and the search for Identity", *Against the Current* (Harmondsworth: Penguin)
- 1982b (1977) "Hume and the Sources of German Anti-Rationalism", *Against the Current* (Harmondsworth: Penguin)
- 1986 (1953) *The Hedgehog and the Fox* (New York: Touchstone)
- 1990a (1959) "European Unity and Its Vicissitudes", *The Crooked Timber of Humanity* (London: Fontana)
- 1990b (1988) "The Pursuit of the Ideal" *The Crooked Timber of Humanity* (London: Fontana)
- 1995 (1939) *Karl Marx: His Life and Environment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)
- 1996a (1953) "The Sense of Reality" *The Sense of Reality* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux)
- 1996b (1957) "Political Judgement", *The Sense of Reality* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux)
- 1996c (1964) "Marxism and the International in the Nineteenth Century", *The Sense of Reality* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux)

-
- 1998a (1966) “L.B. Namier”, *Personal Impressions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press)
- 1998b (1955) “Franklin Delano Roosevelt”, *Personal Impressions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press)
- 2000 (1954) “Realism in Politics”, *The Power of Ideas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press)
- Bloom, A. 1980 “The Study of Texts”, in Richter, M. (ed.), *Political Theory and Political Education* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press)
- Collingwood 1946 *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)
- Collini, S. 1997, “Against Utopia”, *Times Literary Supplement*, Aug. 22
- Galipeau, C. 1994, *Isaiah Berlin’s Liberalism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press)
- Gray, J. 1995 *Isaiah Berlin* (London: Harper Collins)
- Hitchens, C. 1998 “Moderation or Death”, *London Review of Books*, November 26
- Ignatieff, M. 1998 *Isaiah Berlin: A Life* (New York: Metropolitan)
- Jahanbegloo, R. 1992 *Conversations with Isaiah Berlin* (London: Phoenix)
- Johnson, P 1998 “A Low-Risk Philosopher”, *New York Times*, November 29
- Kelly, P.J. 1999 “Contextual and Non-Contextual Histories of Political Thought”, in Hayward, J., Barry, B., and Brown, A. (eds.), *The British Study of Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)
- Kenny, M. 2000 “Isaiah Berlin’s Contribution to Modern Political Theory”, *Political Studies*, Vol. 48 (5)
- McLynn, F. 1999 “The Mouse Roars”, *New Statesman*, April 19
- Morante, E. 1984 *History: a Novel* (New York: Vintage Books).
- Namier, L. 1956a (1952) “History” in Stern, F. (ed.), *The Varieties of History* (New York: Meridian)
- 1956b (1955) “Human Nature in Politics”, in Stern, F. (ed.), *The Varieties of History* (New York: Meridian)
- Plamenatz, J. 1960 “The Use of Political Theory”, *Political Studies*, Vol. 8 (1)
- 1963 *Man and Society, Vol.1* (London: Longman)
- Ryan, A. 1999 “Isaiah Berlin: Political Theory and Liberal Culture”, *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 2
- Scott, J. 1998 *Seeing Like a State* (New Haven: Yale University Press)
- Shklar, J. 1998 *Political Thought and Political Thinkers* (Chicago: Chicago University Press)
- Skinner 1988a “A Reply to my Critics”, in Tully, J. (ed.), *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and his Critics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press)
- 1988b *Liberty Before Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)
- Wokler, R. 2001 “The Professoriate of Political Thought in England Since 1914: A Tale of Three Chairs”, in Castiglione, D., and Hampsher-Monk, I. (eds.), *The History Political Thought in National Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)