



## **Gavriel Cohen's Conversations with Isaiah Berlin: No. 18**

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## Gavriel Cohen: Conversation No. 18

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Trevor-Roper and R. C. K. Ensor on Munich in *The Spectator*

IB and Trevor-Roper

Trevor-Roper and L. B. Namier

IB's childhood meeting with Russian Zionists

IB on Namier

The Oxford Professorship of International Relations

Agnes Headlam-Morley

Namier's attack on Harold Beeley

Namier's wife (Iulia de Beausobre)

Namier and the Zionist Executive

The Regius chair and Harold Macmillan: lunch with the  
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A. J. P. Taylor and Namier

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IB's pseudonymous articles in *Foreign Affairs*; 'O. Utis' and  
Polyphemus

*Desert Island Discs* and *Man of Action*: IB's record choices

What IB would choose in 1988; Alfred Brendel and Schubert

### *Side A*

GC And so, now it's all right. And before I'm going to my prepared questions, did you see *The Spectator* yesterday by any chance?

IB No.

GC There is an article by Trevor-Roper.<sup>1</sup>

IB By?

GC Trevor-Roper.

IB [*whisper*] Yes.

GC How we will have now many articles on Munich, because it's fifty years ...

IB Yes.

GC And the article is about how he came to realise what Germany was ...

IB Yes, because of Ensor.<sup>2</sup>

GC Ensor.

IB Ensor, I know.

GC You know – even you know the story?

IB He told me the whole thing, yes. I know him well enough.

<sup>1</sup> Hugh Trevor-Roper, 'The Munich Illusion', *The Spectator*, 24 September 1988, 19–20.

<sup>2</sup> R. C. K. Ensor, 'A Prediction of the Crisis', *The Spectator*, 7 October 1938, 7–8.

GC It's very interesting.

IB Ensor was a Fellow of Corpus. He was originally here in All Souls. He was an extremely learned man. Knew an awful lot. He was a journalist by profession. He was on the staff of the *Daily Chronicle*, which was Lloyd George's paper, before the war. And he had to pay all the Welsh MPs whose wives, whose wives had occasional meetings in the afternoon with Lloyd George. Because he always had to have somebody in bed with him. Usually the wives of Welsh MPs. Hence there was a man who had to pay them off, so he told me. But he knew an awful lot. Somebody the other day who didn't like Ensor, in some article which I read, I don't know how it came up, said that Powicke, who was the Professor of ...

GC Medieval History.

IB ... Medieval History always referred to him as Mr Know-All.

GC Know-All.

IB Know-All. He did know all – a very great deal. He was a socialist when he was young, then became a Liberal, and he came here as a Research Fellow, and he delivered this lecture in the Sheldonian about the German call-up, the conscription figures. And he worked out that the Germans were going to war in 1938.

GC Exactly.

IB It didn't happen in 1938, but still it was a correct guess.

GC So, do you remember the article?

IB It wasn't an article, it was a lecture.

GC And he published the article in a newspaper.

IB And I never ...

GC Sixty years ago.

IB Maybe.

GC Which is very interesting.

IB Maybe. But I heard the lecture.

GC Did you? Really?

IB I knew him very well. He was a friend of mine.

GC Apparently it had a real impact on Trevor-Roper.

IB So he says.

GC And he gives – in the article of yesterday there is a résumé of the article. Trevor-Roper refers here (*a*) to Kingsley Martin, without mentioning his name. He ...

IB Appeasement.

GC Appeasement. He says that all his friends on the left in Oxford, without mentioning names, were called by one of his colleagues as those who had to wait till Friday in order to know what to think. Now Friday was the day that the newspaper was published.

IB Yes, that's so. Quite.

GC But, of course, on this issue, the editor confused them, because he himself ...

IB Ah. Kingsley Martin was – the first pro-Appeasement article occurred in the *New Statesman*. Before *The Times*.

GC Exactly.

IB It's a famous and disgraceful thing.

GC But now ...

IB I never knew Trevor-Roper, before the war.

GC You didn't know Trevor-Roper before the war.

IB No.

GC I was going to ask about that.

IB I don't think so. I can't remember when I met him. I may have met him, yes, just before the war.

GC Because that was going to be my next question, after appeasement. How ...

IB I don't know where and when I met Trevor-Roper.

GC It's not just by chance that you didn't mention it to me in the 1930s. In the 1930s you were not friends.

IB No. I must have met him then, I certainly knew who he was. He came in for All Souls in 1937, and I probably read his examination papers, but I didn't think he was somebody I knew. I

may have met him in 1938 or 1939. I could well have met him before the war, but we weren't friends.

GC And when did you become more ...?

IB After the war.

GC When?

IB Can't tell you. I can't remember. He was at Christ Church. He was here before the war, he was an undergraduate at Christ Church. I don't think I knew him then. I knew him – then he became a Fellow of Merton, a Prize Fellow or whatever it was, for a short time, Harmsworth, something at Merton. And I might have met him then. Then he became a Student of Christ Church, and I certainly met him then. Made friends with him, yes. He was friend of Freddie Ayer, Herbert Hart.

GC He served with Herbert.

IB Yes, they became friends.

GC And they became friends.

IB Yes.

GC I see. I must say that ...

IB He admired him very much.

GC Who?

IB Trevor-Roper admired Hart.



GC And are they friends to this day?

IB No. Drifted apart. Not enemies, but they don't see each other.

GC I was sure that Trevor-Roper – I knew that Trevor-Roper was from a certain moment very anti-Appeasement and very anti-German.

IB Certainly.

GC And he remained so after the war. And it certainly had its impact on his attitude to the Jewish State.

IB Very likely.

GC And you know that he even came when the Eichmann trial was going on, he came for the *Sunday Times*, but I was sure that it was the influence of Namier, I don't know why.

IB Well, he was a great admirer.

GC Now, that – he *was* an admirer of Namier, but you see he never mentioned Namier here, in this article, which is rather interesting, because one of the reasons for Namier – you know, Namier is known in many circles for his inconsistent anti-German ...

IB Sure.

GC ... attitude, articles, fights.

IB Absolutely.

GC And he wrote some very good articles on it before 1939. It strikes me that Trevor-Roper doesn't mention it at all.

IB No, I don't think he knew Namier then. But I doubt if it's very conscious. I don't know when Trevor-Roper read Namier. You see, Trevor-Roper was a seventeenth-century historian: his first book was about Archbishop Laud.

GC Laud.

IB So the whole business about Modern History – he may have given thoughts to Germany, to war – everyone did – but whether he read Namier on the eighteenth century, most people did. He probably did read it. He probably admired it. It made a difference to him intellectually. Certainly Namier had a dominant influence on him, certainly. He was a real admirer of Namier.

GC That's what I thought.

IB Oh, absolutely. Oh, certainly, and quite proud of it. But before the war, when Namier was in Manchester, dealing mainly with Zionism, then I doubt he would have known him personally.

GC I'm coming to Namier. We spoke about it a little ...

IB What did Namier do about Germany before the war? He wrote about those government – but that was after the war, when – he made Taylor very anti-German because he, Taylor, was an intimate friend. But what did Namier publish?

GC Two or three articles ...

IB Whenabout?

GC I think in the 1930s, and not very late, in fact.

IB Quite, but where?

GC I read them in ...

IB In the collections, yes.

GC The collections.

IB I wonder if they were published – if Trevor-Roper read them. He published in the *New Statesman*, which Trevor-Roper didn't read. Trevor-Roper was always very snobbish; at Christ Church they were ...

GC I can see. It's not that I'm interested now in Trevor-Roper, it's more Namier. In what circles was he known?

IB I can't ...

GC For his attitude ...

IB I just don't know. I came across Namier simply because the – I can't remember how I met him. I didn't know Weizmann until 1938.

GC Pardon?

IB I did not know Weizmann until 1938.

GC 1938.

IB No. I remember the first time I shook hands with him; quite late, 1938. No, wait a moment. I didn't come across Namier – I didn't know Zionists, particularly – I was one, but I didn't meet the the leaders. The only one I ever met was Leonard Stein, and him

not much. He certainly, when we first met, took not the slightest notice of me. I was fearfully snubbed by him afterwards.

GC By Leonard Stein.

IB Yes. He thought I was some kind of Russian Jew lurking around Oxford. Didn't know that I was at All Souls. Didn't know anything.

GC But you mentioned ...

IB Beeley once said about Leonard Stein that he really was like an Englishman. Got up like an Englishman, sat down like an Englishman, wore clothes like an Englishman. This is correct. He came from Danzig, but he really was assimilated, in a sense in which Namier never was.

GC Yes, but you met Zionist leaders when you were a child.

IB No.

GC Those who would come from Israel.

IB No, never. Once, in my uncle's house, when I was very young, I was in a room when there was – they organised a meeting of Russian Zionists. On one single occasion. Apart from that nobody.

GC That was the only occasion.

IB I met Bialyk. Because I was – as you know he was lecturing [to] young Zionists or something. He came, there was a reception. We all went to a cafe afterwards. But I didn't really know any of these people.

GC But so this meeting at your uncle's house just stuck in your mind.

IB Because they were all there. Because Ben-Zvi was there, and Tiomkin was there, and – wait a moment, who else was there? Jakobsen[?] was there, all those people, all the Russian Zionists. Ben-Gurion was not there. And a man called – I can't remember their names. They were mostly Revisionists, or future Revisionists. Jabotinsky was not. Aleinikoff, who was a man you wouldn't know. Tiomkin, yes. He was there.

GC Let's come back to Namier. I told you, the day before yesterday, that of all your articles in *Personal Impressions*, that's the only one that transcends ...

IB Certain lack of sympathy, yes.

GC Did you realise that one could detect it?

IB Quite correct. He was – I didn't really like him very much. He was egocentric, very egocentric. He was ludicrous about the British aristocracy. He no doubt researched into it, but ...

GC I know.

IB ... he was very pleased to have met all these people. The fact that Baffy Dugdale was his best friend gave him deep pleasure. He was in many ways – one couldn't talk to him in any free or certainly not intimate, in any kind of, one couldn't be familiar with him, he was a 'böser Professor', he was like a nasty professor. Obviously brilliant, he knew a great deal. Everything he said was weighty. He had no small talk, and everything which he said was always dogmatic, clear, interesting, but totally self-centered. He didn't pay the slightest attention to whether you were interested or not. And

he suffered from a – to me – a high degree of anti-Semitism. He really disliked the Jews too much for my taste. Have I told you? – I think I may have said it in the article, I don't remember if I did or not – fundamentally, he did not enjoy being a Jew. He told me that he was the only member of his family not to have been baptised, because some aunt said she wouldn't leave any money if he was. I didn't think that was true. I can't refute it, but I think his father was a Catholic. The whole family probably were *mesbumadim*, baptised, but, I think, he was ashamed of it. He was after all a Social Democrat, once upon a time, and that didn't go with that. He felt that – he looked down on the Jews, and he felt that they they compromised him. I'll tell you the story in a moment. He was clever enough to know, and proud enough to know, that to pretend not to be, or to try to de-Judaise himself, was useless as well as undignified. So, since he didn't want to come down to them, they had to be pulled up to him, so that you could cease to be ashamed. The only way of doing that is to make them a state of an independent kind, like England. Without that, the Jews would always be an embarrassment. I think Koestler felt exactly the same. There are certain anti-Semitic Jews of this type who are intelligent enough to know that the only way to behave with them was to transform the Jews into their own image in some way. I'll tell you a story. Very typical of Namier. I tell stories in my article, which you've read, about the interviews with the candidates for the Jerusalem ...

GC You were together there?

IB Oh yes.

GC You were there?

IB I was there. Bentwich, who I did know, made me a member of that committee. The number of Jewish dons was not great. He and

I and Bentwich and Walter Adams from the LSE, Secretary of the LSE, who afterwards became head of the LSE, and after a while became badly treated by the students, in 1968. But anyway – and after – and somebody else, I think. Namier was there. He despised Bentwich. He regarded Bentwich as a sort of feeble, sentimental, worthless man. I remember they met in my rooms once in Oxford, in 1938. ‘Ah, Professor Bentwich, you are here,’ said Namier, like a basilisk, glaring at him. ‘What are you engaged on?’ Bentwich said, ‘Oh, I’m going to be – I think I’m joining the Government Department.’ ‘Well, I wish you luck of it.’ He bullied him, looked on him with real distaste. Ghastly feeble liberal of a sort of colourless sort. Namby-pamby, you say in England. Anyway, during the war, I came to see him, in 1942. He was working in Great Russell Street. Obviously no job for him in the British Government anyway, Civil Service was too expensive, they thought. His Zionism compromised him. That’s why he didn’t become Professor of International Relations in – when was it? 1946, 1947, thereabouts, when Zimmern either died or retired. He and E. H. Carr were both candidates. Well, it wasn’t the centre, but still – [of his] interest, but he would have been a very real professor. And he had a great friend called Agnes Headlam-Morley there of course, who was among the Electors. And Salter was ex officio as Professor of Politics, or whatever it was called then; against him because of his Zionism. And Ensor, who was on the committee, was against Carr because of his Communism. They were both against Communists and Zionists, so neither got it. And Agnes Headlam-Morley was invited to become it, which she did. She was a very nice woman, but by that time no longer any good, because she was shattered during the war, by the war, because her mother was German. She believed in Germany, she believed in Chamberlain, Appeasement, Munich, everything. She couldn’t face all those relations in Leipzig. Her mother was a very – a German poetess, composer. She was destroyed by the rift between Germany and England. She was a very nice, sincere, sweet woman,

and became a Catholic as a result of all these, I think – because of the collapse of her values. That restored her. Anyway, I went to see Namier in 1942 [?]. He was sitting in the room, looking gloomy. I was wearing, I remember, a plastic macintosh, which in England at that time was not known. He said: ‘Here I am, much older than you. It’s raining outside. I have to walk a long distance to my home in Shepherd’s Bush. There are not many buses at the moment. I have to wear a heavy coat which completely exhausts me, I realise.’ I said, ‘Do have mine.’ He immediately absolved[?] it: that’s what it had meant. He then said: ‘I will tell you something. By the way, I hear you are working for the British Government. What are you? A Yiddish censor?’ Typical. He was a Jew. And a recognised Jew. ‘What else? Must be Yiddish.’ I said, ‘I don’t know the Yiddish language well enough, you know. Do you?’ He said, ‘I used to, but now not so much.’ He said, ‘I’ll tell you something. There is a black market, you know. They say it compromises a lot of Jews who trade there. That is not true. The black market – the Jews – the black market does not compromise the Jews. The Jews compromise the black market.’ The most anti-Semitic remark I’ve ever heard – very funny.

GC [*laughs*]

IB Very funny. But you see what I mean.

GC So what prompted you to write that?

IB The mere fact that he was an extraordinary man. I was fascinated by this unusual phenomenon. That is all. And I felt that if I didn’t do it, nobody would. Because Namier as I knew him – nobody would write – Taylor would write something, but it wouldn’t be the same. Namier as a Jew, you see, Namier and his relation to Zionism etc., nationalism, the paradox between being a man who didn’t believe in ideas ...



GC And yet ...

IB ... and yet a passionate nationalist and complete contempt for any -isms. And this Anglomania together with Weizmann. The whole thing was remarkable. He was a genius, and therefore fascinating, got on very well with me. He approved of me. He used to come and see me here in the 1940s, late 1940s, early 1950s. Occasionally I got these visits from him. And I used to go to his lectures.

GC When I was once in Portofino ...

IB He was a tremendous bore. I mean prodigious. If you didn't want to be – if you were not interested in the subject on which he wished to talk, you were done for. No escape. He cost the Zionists quite a lot. He used to drive Shuckburgh to corners of the Athenaeum.

GC To buttonhole him.

IB It must have maddened him.

GC I know.

IB The story about Malcolm MacDonald I tell.

GC Yes, you said in your article. You know that I – do you remember the attack he wrote on Beeley in ...

IB Certainly. He said to me, 'I'm going to call it' – when was it written?

GC 1938 or 1939.

IB Before the war.

GC Before.

IB Certainly, yes. Of course. He said to me, 'I'm going to call it "Reelly, Mr Beeley".' I said, 'No no, that wouldn't do.' 'R double E and B double E. "Reelly, Mr Beeley".' I said, 'Well look here, but I don't think it's particularly ....' I persuaded him not to.

GC But it is a personal attack.

IB Oh, certainly. When Beeley wrote those pieces in Toynbee's ...

GC *Survey*.<sup>3</sup>

IB ... *Survey*, which he thought were monstrous ...

GC It's a terrible attack, and these are a [?]. 'Well done, Mr Beeley; well done, Mr Beeley.'

IB Oh, yes. He thought Beeley was terrible. He thought he was a stupid and contemptible man.

GC And Beeley was a student in Balliol, I think, wasn't he?

IB No. Beeley was never at Balliol, didn't know him. Beeley was at Queen's. And he didn't teach in Oxford in the 1930s. No connection.

<sup>3</sup> H(arold) Beeley contributed Part IV, 'The Mediterranean', to Arnold J. Toynbee (ed., assisted by V. M. Boulter), *Survey of International Affairs 1938*, vol. 1 (London etc., 1941). He had contributed similar pieces to previous volumes in the series.

GC No connection whatsoever?

IB None.

GC I thought that there was some ...

IB None. They may have met, but that was as far as I – that was that. There was an attack on Toynbee too, at that time. You remember what says: he says, ‘Professor Toynbee, when speaking of the capital of Scotland, spells it E-D-I-N-B-O-R-O-U-G-H, instead of B-U-R-G-H. It is not a grave mistake, but undermines confidence.’

GC [*laughs*]

IB They made their peace afterwards. So Toynbee says. Maybe, when he became a Catholic. Russian Orthodox, maybe.

GC He ...

IB They were contemporaries at Balliol.

GC The book that his widow wrote paints a tormented man. Did you read the book?

IB Yes.

GC I remember, I remember I read it in Italy ...

IB Yes.

GC At the same time I read this book, and Maurice Bowra's biography. And the difference really strikes one. I mean, it is as if he were a tormented man.

IB He dictated it.

GC That's what I was – is it his dictation, or ...

IB Well, I don't ...

GC ... or her interpretation?

IB Both. He married her. She turned him into a Russian Orthodox believer, or so she thought. Whether he was or not remains unclear. But he was certainly converted. From her point of view, she rescued him, a non-believer, for the Chu... – for Christ. He was deeply in love with her. I'm sure, to please her, he must have believed himself to believe all kinds of things which he may not have believed. I think it was sincere, but induced. Simply because he wanted to share his life with her. And yes, tormented he was. I think that is correct.

GC You mention – apparently you didn't like his wife too.

IB No, not very much. She was very polite to me. I met her more than once – after his death, too.

GC It's unlike you, to mention her name and that's that, without adding any – you see what I mean? You mention the name ...

IB She was very, she was very courteous, and perfectly nice ...

GC [*laughs*]

IB ... but stiff, and too much of a – too Christian for me. That's all she was. Too Christian. I used to see her in Oxford because Lucy Sutherland was a great friend. Used to be asked to tea by her, I was a friend of his, therefore she used to see me, we chatted about him. She was perfectly nice to me. But she was a serious, humourless, Russian Orthodox religious lady of a rather solemn kind. I had nothing against her, but she wasn't my type.

GC Surely. If you had something good to say, you would have said it.

IB Yes, certainly.

GC You usually do.

IB Of course. I met her first before – long before he married her, with Lady Rhondda. T. S. Eliot and Lady Rhondda were patrons of hers, because of religion. Particularly Eliot. She was a – escaped from Russia, and she was interesting to meet. And very aristocratic-looking.

GC I met her.

IB You met her. She was extremely ...

GC But she was very cold.

IB Cold. Yes.

GC She came to Israel once, to collect material for a book. I spent some time, yes, and invited her to ...

IB Rather chilly.

GC Very chilly, that's true. Very sad.

IB Yes. Sad and dignified; probably a rather noble character. All that I can believe.

GC But yet, you see, it's very interesting ...

IB Typical of Namier, who we were talking about. Talmon took him around Israel, of course. He used to denounce the rabbis [?]. He used to say to me – I met him in Israel, Namier. I had to go to a bank with him. He said he didn't – spoke no Hebrew; can I help him? I said, 'You don't have to speak.' [?] And he said, 'This place is going to be a clerical hell. It's going to become completely theocratic.' I rather laughed it off. I didn't believe it. It turned out much more right than I thought. But he himself, he said, 'I hate these *rabbunim*', as he called them [in his] Polish Jewish accent, Yiddish accent. *Rabbunim*. You know what I mean when I say *rabbunim*? I mean the Zionist Executive. Before the war. The *rabbunim*. He'd longed to become a member of it. Never was. He insulted them all.

GC But how was it so? Was it so naive to believe that without being active in a party you can be elected to the Zionist Executive? After all the Zionist Executive were partyless.

IB He was perfectly willing to be a member of a party.

GC Which party?

IB The Zionist party.

GC Oh, but – the general Zionist party?

IB Yes.

GC Ah.

IB Whatever Weizmann was. He called Brodetsky ‘ein fetter Null’.<sup>4</sup> This didn’t endear him. So that’s why they didn’t elect him. He wanted to be a kind of d’Annunzio, as I said in that article, riding in on a white horse.

GC And yet people who admired him – it was never personal, probably, it was always intellectual.

IB I think so. Well, Mrs Dugdale was fond of him, yes.

GC But you see, let’s say students. I remember in 1973, in the Yom Kippur War, the first days I was here, and there was a huge demonstration in Trafalgar Square. You told me that Lucy Sutherland and Agnes Headlam-Morley went.

IB I don’t remember this.

GC And you thought that it was their kind of ...

IB Homage to Namier.

GC To Namier.

IB That’s the only possible reason. If they went.

GC Yes, surely. You told me.

IB If they – well, I don’t know.

<sup>4</sup> ‘A fat zero’.

GC You knew.

IB I apparently knew. [?] I'm surprised to hear it.

GC You are surprised?

IB Yes.

GC And you forget the days of the ...

IB I can't say – I must have forgotten totally. I now – if you had asked me whether they did, I couldn't – I have no idea.

GC Now, I mean ...

IB You're sure it came from me, this information?

GC Yes, yes, you told me.

IB All right.

GC I went to ...

IB OK.

GC ... fight [?] I went to Israel.

IB OK, yes.

GC You told me. The only explanation is that.

IB [?] A keen devotion [to] Namier. They were devoted. And he was a friend of her father: the Foreign Office is where it all came from.



GC And Lucy was his student.

IB Certainly. And he nominated her for the Regius chair. I mean MacDonald offered it to her, but she then asked whether it was compatible with remaining head of Lady Margaret Hall, which she liked. It was compatible, legally, but it was made clear by various people that it wouldn't be well thought of, and she refused. Then it went to Trevor-Roper.

GC So that means that all the strong ...

IB They were a great friend.

GC ... influence on Macmillan's – in Macmillan's time – that Namier had influence [?] ...

IB I can tell you exactly what happened. From both. Macmillan adored Namier.

GC Did adore him.

IB Adored him. Admired him without limit. He was a contemporary at Balliol, as a student. [?] graduate, I suppose, and perhaps he was an undergraduate. And he gave him a second honorary degree in Oxford. He already had one. And he would – published all his books. The combination of genius and Conservatism was irresistible. And yet he had a certain eye – he had an eye, Macmillan. He had a certain insight into [*tape ends*]

*Side B*

IB [...] [?] Macmillan without doubt, if he had not been seventy-three. He was then – Namier was seventy-three.

GC He would have offered it to Namier.

IB Absolutely. Yes. No question. Far the most distinguished historian in England. He deserved it far more than anyone etc. he said all this to me, I remember, at lunch – I met at lunch when he was prime minister. Yes. Lunch with Lord and Lady Cholmondeley. We went to lunch with a – she’s a Sassoon, as you know. Oh yes, Philip Sassoon’s sister. Lady Cholmondeley, it’s spelt. Her husband was Lord High Chamberlain: not Lord Chamberlain, but High Chamberlain.<sup>5</sup> It’s a court office. She’s alive – ninety-four or -five. She’s half Rothschild, half Sassoon. Anyway, she asked Aline and me to lunch. Macmillan was there. I had met him before. And I always got on very well with him. And he said, ‘Who shall I make ...

GC Regius Professor.

IB ... Regius Professor?’ And I knew that I mustn’t nominate somebody’s[?]. He said, ‘Of course, Lewis Namier is the man, and I’ll certainly write to him.’ So I said, ‘Well, in present circumstances, I think perhaps if you could find a homosexual feminist negress, this would go down very well.’

GC You said that?

IB Yes. ‘Liberals would like that very much. That’s what you need at the moment.’ Something like that, which Taylor would never forgive me. I should have said Taylor without hesitation. He then wrote to Namier. Naimer claims – that’s why the whole row with Taylor. I’ll tell you what happened. He met Taylor at some meeting of the British Academy and he said to him, ‘You know, if you’re

<sup>5</sup> sc. Lord Great Chamberlain.

going to be Regius Professor, you'll have to give up television, and that kind of thing.' To which Taylor said, 'I shall quadruple it.' Then Taylor wrote a review of one of Namier's collections of essays. He said, 'Let me tell you, professor, we are your converts. We believe everything. You have taught us a very great deal. We are completely converted to your views. You have convinced us of everything you believe. We are your disciples. No need to say it for the fifth time.' He didn't like that either. Something on those lines. Now, Namier says he had written a postcard to Macmillan, in which he gave all the candidates in alphabetical order. They were: Brook – who was his assistant on the history of Parliament – Lucy Sutherland, Taylor, Trevor-Roper. Macmillan then offered it to Wheeler-Bennett, who was a great friend of his, who wisely didn't take it. He was also a friend of Namier – Wheeler-Bennett. Created a situation for him. Wheeler-Bennett really was not in any degree anti-Semitic – not at all – to an astonishing extent, given the circles in which he moved. And hated it. And did a lot for Namier in the 1920s. He lent him money.

GC Even then he admired him?

IB And lent him money, and financed him when he wrote his books. They were great friends. Namier was very devoted to him. He liked him very much, and respected him – an interesting relationship. Then Macmillan offered it to Lucy Sutherland – Brook was obviously not suitable – who then refused it, and then Trevor-Roper. And Taylor said, 'Only one name should appear on that postcard', and never spoke to Namier again. When Namier wrote to him, returned the letter unopened. Namier was very upset.

GC By Taylor's reaction?

IB By Taylor's rejection. Total rejection. I've always thought thought one of the reasons why Taylor made that famous

statement about ‘All that’s best in England was pro-Chamberlain and pro-appeasement’ – you remember the famous statement – was in order to spit on Namier’s grave. Anything by that time that would have annoyed Namier – a kind of revenge. He said, ‘I have only had two real friends in my life, and one of them betrayed me.’ The other real friend was Lord Beaverbrook. Namier and Beaverbrook. His true friends – one of them betrayed him.

GC So what caused the betrayal actually?

IB Not nominating – that was all. Because he said all these people were good enough. He wasn’t going to choose. He admired Trevor-Roper, who by this time admired him. They were friends, he had great respect for him, he knew that he came of a good family in the sixteenth century. Roper was the son-in-law of Thomas More. They fell on even – they were impoverished. And Namier told me in detail how grand his family was. Trevor-Roper doesn’t believe that himself, particularly.

GC Really?

IB No. But of course Namier went into the ‘mishpachology’<sup>6</sup> genealogy very precisely. (*imitating the accent*) ‘He was related to the Probys in the eighteenth century. I will tell you about Proby.’ Then bored me for a long time about the Proby family. No, it wasn’t that. He admired Trevor-Roper. He thought he was a very clever and interesting man – which he is. And he thought in some way, probably, that he was a better historian than Taylor. And he wasn’t wrong.

GC I was going to ask. You think it was not a mistake?

<sup>6</sup> Yiddishism derived from Hebrew *mishpacha* (‘family’) denoting mildly obsessive concern with family relationships.

IB No! I mean, Taylor would have made a very specific, interesting Regius Professor – he'd have made something of it. But Taylor thought it was monstrous.

GC I can tell you one thing. Students of Trevor-Roper, DPhil students, whom I know, all of them are solid historians. Students who were Taylor's DPhil students – many of them are not so.

IB I'm sure its true.

GC I am not sure that it is he who was not good as supervisor.

IB Not necessarily. No, I'll tell you. He adored history, Taylor. He adored teaching. So I am sure that as a supervisor he did take trouble over them. But I dare say the sardonic cynicism, all that sort of thing, in some way somehow affected them.

GC Yes.

IB Take my friend in Oxford now – what's his name? Real scamp.

GC Norman Stone?

IB Norman Stone. He wasn't supervised by Taylor, but he might have been. He has written – he's interesting – he is not a solid historian, but he is the kind of person who admired Taylor beyond anything because of the brilliance, the smartness. I am trying to think who is really ... He had a solid pupil in the form of a man called Ian Christie, who is not terribly good, and very right wing. He was a pupil, in Magdalen, who respected him. I am trying to think of other students of Taylor who really did this – probably they exist.

GC I know some of them. I don't think you know them because they are not here now. It just occurred to me, you see. All right.

IB Yes.

GC In your list of publications, of articles, I found only two, I believe, let's say in the last twenty, thirty years, that you signed in pseudonym, in pen name?

IB Correct.

GC It's in *Foreign Affairs*.

IB Correct.

GC Why?

IB Because at that time I did not want my relations to suffer.

GC In Russia?

IB In Russia, yes.

GC Relations – you mean family?

IB My father's brothers, who were then alive. I'm sure they're all dead now. My father's brothers, my father's sister, married – the widow, not widow, the divorced wife of Yitzhak Sadeh, living in Moscow then. It was a – they probably saw through it, probably [?], but I thought – that was the reason.

GC But in the same year you had one article, 'The Silence of Russian Culture', with your name.

IB Because that isn't too ...

GC Political.

IB No.

GC I see.

IB The other is signed Utis. You know what Utis means? In Homer, in the *Odyssey*, when the monster Polyphemus, who lives in a cave, has one eye, asks Odysseus, or Ulysses, 'What is your name?' He says 'Outis', which means 'nobody' in Greek. Nobody. 'O. Utis' is 'Outis' – 'Outis' is nobody. The man who doesn't want to give his name. That's the point.<sup>7</sup>

GC I see. I didn't understand. All right. If you want us to stop because it's five past four ...

IB No, another ten minutes. He'll come to fetch me.

GC I think that ten years ago or so, you had a programme, *Desert Island* or something of the kind.<sup>8</sup>

IB I did. *Desert Island Discs*. No, I never did that.

GC But something.

IB It was called *Man of Action* – about music, entirely.

<sup>7</sup> Only part of it. Later in the story, when Odysseus is escaping, Polyphemus calls for his family to help him. They ask him who is troubling him, and he replies, 'Outis', 'Nobody.' So Odysseus makes good his escape.

<sup>8</sup> IB appeared on *Desert Island Discs* in 1992, on *Man of Action* in 1974.

GC I was going to ask. Have you got a record of it, by any chance?

IB [?] Tape, maybe, but why?

GC No, I just ...

IB I didn't have to talk much. Not about myself. It wasn't like *Desert Island Discs*. One talks about why one likes the records, but not about oneself.

GC So you just picked up some records, and that's that. Do you remember what they were?

IB Some I do. I can't remember really. I think – let me try and think. There was a famous record of, I think, Christoff singing the famous scene in *Don Carlos* by Verdi about the – King Philip's aria, when he is visited by the grand inquisitor – before he is visited, when he sits in his study and says 'She never loved me', about his wife, and so on. It's a marvellous aria which Christoff sang marvellously well. Then there's a record of Monteverdi, which is called 'Dolcissimi capelli'<sup>9</sup>, 'Beautiful hair', a madrigal of great beauty sung by a French singer called Marc'hadour, no matter how he is spelt – a very old record. Then, there was Beecham's record of 'The Royal Hunt and Storm' out of Berlioz's *Dido and Aeneas*. No, wait a minute – no, its not called *Dido and Aeneas* – I'm sorry – its called *The Trojans – Les Troyens*. There are more things than that. There was ... certainly something – I think the 'S[pring]' – I wonder whether Beethoven, Mozart – there must have been. I wish I could remember – probably the 'Spring' sonata by Beethoven for violin and piano, played by Busch and Serkin. Nothing by Mozart, funnily enough. Don't know why. [?] just things that made a difference to me in my life. There was a record

<sup>9</sup> The phrase 'richissimi capelli' occurs in the aria 'Lettera amorosa'.



of the 'Blue Danube' sung by a woman called Maria Ivogün.<sup>10</sup> She was a most marvellous soprano. [?] It was a wonderful record. [?] I wonder if there ... There must have been a Beethoven quartet<sup>11</sup> or a Beethoven sonata<sup>12</sup> – there must have been – but I can't remember what. In those days I didn't know Brendel, so that can't have happened. But wait a moment. Mmm. Nothing Russian. Maybe there was. Chaliapin – wait a moment. I think there was a record of Chaliapin singing 'La Callunia' – aria from *The Barber of Seville*. There must be something more solid than that.

GC What was the criterion for ...?

IB In my case, simply works by which I was struck when I heard them, by which I was – that made a difference to me. Marvellous things of their kind, like the Monteverdi – whatever it is. Or the – I think, for example, there was an aria from Bellini's – no – yes – *Norma*, 'Casta Diva', sung by Rosa Ponselle, not by Callas. These were things, when I heard them – I was transported, sheer beauty of the particular experiences. All these records, not actual concerts – I simply chose records which made an imp... – meant something to me – not because of musical merit only in itself. That's how I chose. Not just favorite tunes. I would certainly have chosen something from *Figaro* if I was choosing something which I adored. But that wasn't it. There was no single record which had that effect on me. I can't remember what else.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Not included in the programme.

<sup>11</sup> Quartet No 14 in C sharp minor, op. 131, first movement, played by the Busch Quartet.

<sup>12</sup> The third movement of Beethoven's piano sonata in A flat, opus 110, played by Artur Schnabel.

<sup>13</sup> Minuets 1 and 2 from Bach's Partita No 1 in B flat, BWV 825, played by Dinu Lipatti; overture to Rossini's *The Italian Girl in Algiers*, the NBC Symphony Orchestra with Arturo Toscanini.

GC Since the programme, ten years ago or so, if you would have to ...

IB More than ten years, twenty at least.<sup>14</sup> Much more than ten years ago; much more, yes.

GC I remember the night it was recorded because we went together to an opera here in Oxford and I think that ...

IB May have been done a second time.

GC We didn't listen to it.

IB I told you.

GC You told me? Or Aline told me?

IB More than ten years ago.

GC More than ten years ago. Much more ...

IB 1974, no. Or 1978, no.

GC More.

IB Oh, much – much more likely to be 1968 or ...

GC Even that early?

IB Yes.

GC In 1969, 1970?

<sup>14</sup> Fourteen.

IB Yes, thereabouts, yes.

GC Since then, if you would have to think about it now.

IB [?] Yes.

GC You would have to select now.

IB What would I do? It would be different.

GC It would be different?

IB Yes.

GC Would you like to ...

IB To speculate? [?] Yes. I don't know, I can't think of it. Certainly Brendel would come in. The last Schubert sonata,<sup>15</sup> played by Brendel and one of the three last Beethoven sonatas, played by him. Certainly. And maybe one of the Impromptus or Moments Musicaux played by him, because it really has made a huge difference to my own conception of Schubert and of the piano. I think I must have – a I wonder if I chose Schnabel in the earlier programme, because he had a very dominant influence on me. I might have done, I might have done, quite easily.

GC Brendel's performance of Schubert is only I think a year or two ago, no? When did he play ...?

IB What, record Schubert?

<sup>15</sup> D 960 in B flat major.

GC Yes.

IB Oh, five or six years ago. Yes.

GC I thought it was two or three years ago.

IB No, longer ago than that. Certainly. Let me try and think, what else would have come in since then? Callas certainly.

GC Callas.

IB Yes. Callas, yes, even though her voice wasn't very beautiful. Callas, I think perhaps in *Traviata*, yes. Something. There were people who sang *Traviata* better. But it was a very powerful effect. Certainly. [?] experiences, particular records. Something out of a Mozart opera, certainly; something out of *Entführung*, conducted by Dr Böhm. There is a record of that that nobody ever – nobody printed. I thought that was wonderful. There is a chorus in *Idomeneo* by Mozart, I can't remember what it's called, it's I think a prayer to be rescued from the monster, which moved me very deeply.<sup>16</sup> Nothing by Mahler; nothing by any composer born in the twentieth century.

GC And Michael Tippett that we spoke about?

IB No. [?] Nothing in particular that I would have chosen, no.

GC Stravinsky?

IB No. I mean, I love his music, but it didn't ... I knew it before, but it didn't have a transforming effect. No.

<sup>16</sup> Possibly 'Godiam la pace', Act I.

GC Wagner?

IB No. Never took. I have heard the *Ring* four times now, it has never quite taken. No, certainly no Wagner. Did not make a ... no. No Wagner. I am thinking about something else in opera – I'm trying to think – yes, in *Rigoletto*, when he comes in after his daughter has been abducted, and he is trying to find out where she is, and he finds the courtiers. It's a broken aria. He si... – the words are something like 'La da, la da, la da, la da, la da'<sup>17</sup> – not words – he is trying to be funny, he behaves like a jester, but he is broken, totally broken. It's marvellously done by Verdi, this mixture of pretending to be a jester when he is broken-hearted and above all wants to find out [?]. He both grovels and hates these horrible courtiers. It's conveyed uniquely. Much better than similar sentiments of Wagner. It's very short, but pierces me to the heart. And oddly enough, I once talked to a man called Wiesengrund Adorno, who is a famous Frankfurt-school Marxist: Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno. I talked to him about it in the 1930s, and he agreed with me that it was simply marvellous. He began running down Verdi, and I said, 'What about this?' And I don't know why I didn't put it into my original ... But I have always thought about it. Today I would certainly put it in. It seems to me a unique moment in opera. Maybe I exaggerate, but to me personally.

GC I ...

IB Right. Thank you.

GC That's the end of the interview on Friday 24 September 1988.

<sup>17</sup> 'La rà ...', Act II.