



## **Gavriel Cohen's Conversations with Isaiah Berlin: No. 21**

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# Gavriel Cohen: Conversation No. 21

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## Selected topics

Critics and enemies *suite et fin*

Determinists (the Stoics – Cleanthes; Christopher Hill, Braudel, the *École des Annales*, Morton White) and anti-determinists (Epicurus, Kant, William James, Renouvier, John Stuart Mill, Campbell, H. A. L. Fisher, Trevor-Roper)

Explanation is causal explanation

Sidney Morgenbesser; Chuck Taylor; Bertell Ollman and the *Class Struggle* board game; Marshall Berman

The left at Wolfson College: Michael Chanan, Freeman, the General Meeting

Attack on the Sheldonian; IB's refusal to support sending Freeman down

The demand to see the files on students

The Hart report and the resulting commission

Academic controversies: Bhutto, Thatcher; Herbert Hart's lack of political sense

All Souls and the dispute over the use of its surplus funds

IB's opposition to the rejection of Kreisler

Gentleman scholars

IB's hostility to social studies: 'Sociology cannot be done by very clever people [...] nor can political science.'

Nozick, Mill, Weber, Marx, Tocqueville

J. M. Thompson, *The French Revolution*

The transformation of historiography by the French Revolution

The Blunt affair at the British Academy: Plumb, Robbins  
Where does one draw the line? (Grounds for expulsion from the  
Academy.)

Motion that the discussion should proceed no further

Motion to proceed to the next item succeeds

IB's participation in University elections: Jenkins versus Heath;  
Macmillan

The origins of Wolfson College: boredom with his chair, letter  
from Wheare

Meeting with the fellows of Iffley College: entitlement and the  
revolt of the pariahs

The Conference of Colleges

Creation of Iffley and St Cross: Kits van Heyningen, Charles  
Coulson

Coulson's conditions; invitation to IB

Reasons for accepting

Wolfson to be a base for scientists

Offer of Wardenship of Nuffield in 1953

IB consults widely, rejects offer of Nuffield despite advice to  
accept

IB's father advises against Nuffield on his deathbed

### *Side A*

GC It's all right. Today is 16 October. Let's start. If you remember,  
last time we spoke quite at length about what you called your critics  
and enemies.

IB Well, it's a very boring thing. I have remembered the name of  
the periodical.

GC I was sure that it will ...

IB ... come back. '*Salmagundi*'. I don't know what it means.<sup>1</sup>

GC By the way, did I leave in Albany the bibliography? I had a copy.

IB Yes, you have. No, in Headington.<sup>2</sup> I meant to bring it, yes, [?]. No, I meant to bring it. I put it on the sofa next to where you sit, but then I forgot you were coming here. It's there. I found it.

GC You mentioned names, partly just critics, partly what you called enemies.

IB People who make personal attacks, not just disagreement.

IB And you insisted on trying to remember everyone, because I thought that you – relatively speaking, met you in your life few; and you said that there are more than I thought. And you tried to pick up every name.

IB If one remembers. But I don't remember everyone. Aline reminded me of some more, but I have forgotten by now.

GC I remember you mentioned Popper for a short while, after your lecture on inevitability in history.

IB He complained that I didn't acknowledge his influence.

GC But it was not in writing?

IB No.

<sup>1</sup> OED: 'A dish composed of chopped meat, anchovies, eggs, onions with oil and condiments.'

<sup>2</sup> They are not in Albany or Headington; so perhaps this conversation took place in All is.

GC And then, of course, after *Marx* you had Raymond Postgate and others; I dare say ...

IB Communists attacked it.

GC ... that the majority of your critics were left-wingers.

IB Oh, always are. Always have been. Except for *Historical Inevitability*. That was an attack on both sides.

GC Catholics, like Dawson. Or even Bernard ...

IB Yes. Oh, and some man in *The Spectator* – what's his name? I remember. Though he wasn't an enemy. Just an ordinary attack. I don't, can't – a man called: he's now in Washington as a correspondent, I've forgotten his name, yes. Fairlie, Henry Fairlie.

GC (*surprised*) Ah, Henry Fairlie?

IB Yes. He attacked it.

GC Ah. I don't remember. I liked his writing.

IB In *The Spectator*.

GC He used to write for *Encounter* too.

IB Absolutely. But he's a right-wing writer.

GC But intelligent.

IB Yes he is. Quite sharp. Henry Fairlie, yes.

GC I was surprised that you said that nobody defended you in this argument about inevitability in history.

IB Nobody.

GC Not personally ...

IB No, an intellectual issue, not a question of personalities.

GC After all there are so many ...

IB No, there aren't so many.

GC Who was the one who asked you, 'Is there really anybody who seriously believes in determinism??'

IB Austin.

GC And he's right.

IB Of course he's right. Ninety-five per cent of philosophers are theoretically determinists.

GC Theoretically.

IB Theoretically. They would say they were. Because causality and science – how can one not be? Otherwise the world is a chaos – what do we explain? We can only explain that there are causes, like E. H. Carr – everything has a cause, self-evident. Anyone who doesn't believe that is a little mad, and that's the view, it's – a little mad. It's like saying black is white. We all know that all events have causes and they have causes. It's a platitude. There *are* indeterminists; there are such philosophers – very few. Among the famous ones – I think the only famous ones would be Epicurus,

from whom it begins. All determinism begins with the Stoics, and all indeterminism begins from Epicurus. Kant is an indeterminist. He is the greatest and most important. It isn't very well argued, but it's there. I can mention names to you, but they're all terribly – William James, Renouvier – who reads Renouvier in English-speaking countries? William James did. John Stuart Mill had a nervous breakdown, practically, on this issue, but he decided that self-determination was all right. If your character determines it, not just forces pushing from outside, then you are free. Kant called that 'a miserable subterfuge' – that very argument. It begins with Stoics – Cleanthes. Let me see, who else is an indeterminist? A man called Campbell, somewhere in Scotland, completely forgotten figure; yes.

GC And didn't historians come to your defence?

IB No.

GC But I am sure you met historians here.

IB Historians don't know anything about it. They don't know anything about it. Historians are not interested in philosophy.

GC But the argument is not only philosophical. I mean as a historical method, or attitude, I believe that ...

IB Most historians do not behave as if they were determinists, but they don't know it.

GC You really think so?

IB I have never known of a historian, who defended – who attacked the notion of rigid determinism. Fisher wrote a book – who was not a great historian. In the preface he said, 'Fortunate



are those who see pattern in history. I am not so fortunate. For me history is probably the interplay of the accidental in the unforeseen.<sup>3</sup> He was attacked viciously by Marxists, immediately, in the 1930s. He was Christopher Hill's chief target.

GC All right. Christopher Hill. But Christopher Hill is not the mainstream of ...

IB He had considerable influence in England. In England, very influential.

GC Influential, yes, but ...

IB Oh, all right, yes, of course he is. But tell me, who are the historians of England who took an interest? Trevor-Roper, probably, is not a determinist.

GC Surely not.

IB No, he doesn't come out with it, but he's not. Trevor-Roper is on my side.

GC I am sure.

IB He doesn't defend me by name.

<sup>3</sup> 'Men wiser and more learned than I have discerned in history a plot, a rhythm, a predetermined pattern. These harmonies are concealed from me. I can see only one emergency following upon another as wave follows upon wave, only one great fact with respect to which, since it is unique, there can be no generalisations; only one safe rule for the historian: that he should recognise in the development of human destinies the play of the contingent and the unforeseen.' H. A. L. Fisher, *A History of Europe*, [vol. 1,] *Ancient and Mediaeval* (Boston and New York, 1935), Preface, vii.

GC All right.

IB But the last lecture, it's quite true, his Romanes Lecture, delivered three years ago, two years ago,<sup>4</sup> is a defence of indeterminism of some sort. Correct.

GC And in his writing he's not determinist.

IB No, absolutely. Quite true. That really was a – it was all right. That was, in a way, a formal statement, about that, yes. Trevor-Roper, certainly. A. J. P. Taylor knows nothing about it. Doesn't think in abstract terms at all.

GC Though in his writing he's not determinist.

IB He doesn't want to have anything to do with theory, nothing to do with new ideas. He hates ideas, A. J. P. Taylor. That's why his books are old-fashioned political history, nothing about economics, nothing about social history, nothing about history of ideas. Rigidly confined to political history of the most pre-Marxist type. It's rather a paradox.

GC But you see, let's say, a man like myself, I'm not, I think [?] ideas; I'm not an expert of ideas.

IB All Jews are interested in ideas. Namier – I don't know whether Namier was or was not. He did not discuss it. I am sure he wasn't, but he wouldn't take up a position about that. He thought it was all metaphysics and – not interested in the presuppositions of history. There were a lot of aspects of no interest to him. I told you the story. I sent him this essay.

<sup>4</sup> In fact in 1988.

GC I'm not sure.

IB Yes, certainly, very funny. It's in my book,<sup>5</sup> it's in my Introduction. It is in the book. He wrote back saying, 'You must be a very intelligent man to be able to understand what you write.' That was about that essay. Contempt for ...

GC For ideas, oh yes, that I know.

IB And abstractions and philosophy and that kind of nonsense.

GC I know. I can see his criticism of your trying to deal with it ...

IB The whole issue is irrelevant.

GC But in his writings, as a historian ...

IB Yes, of course. But that is true of most historians. But they have no idea. They don't know. Because it's like people who talk prose without knowing it. Like Mme Molière.

GC One would have expected them to welcome this conceptual ...

IB No. They can't think. They can't think in abstract terms.

GC What do you mean, they? [?] you. Because I am also a historian.

IB That I know. Because Jews are exceptional in this regard. Jews are interested in method. Goyim are not, by and large.

<sup>5</sup> PI3 142 (in his essay on Namier, not in an introduction). See also B 530–1.

GC Particularly British historians.

IB They are not interested in ideas at all. But even in France, all these Braudels are determinists. The whole *École* [des] *Annales*, they are determinists.

GC I'm trying to fight them.

IB Yes, but *Annales* is very – impersonal factors.

GC It's too fashionable now, Braudel.

IB It's a little bit dying off, but – because they are all dead. But let me try and think. German historians – I don't know. Nobody says that Hitler was inevitable. That they don't like to say. Russian historians – American historians, for the most part I don't know who they are. They also don't bother, about ideas.

GC I'm sure that the younger generation is more interested in ideas, but I am not familiar with their writings, the Americans.

IB My friend Morton White, who is a philosopher of history, is a strict determinist.

GC I can see why many philosophers of history ...

IB Because it's such a clear and scientific – it's a form of rationalism. If you are to abandon that, then you're [?] some mystical ...

GC You lose your anchor.

IB Absolutely, exactly.

GC I can see why psychologically there are types that can't live without such ...

IB But look, the business of a historian is to explain. The state – all right – the narrative – all right. But the business of historians is to establish facts. That is done by scientific means of probability, like a detective, where you certainly use some kind of determinist premisses. Moreover, to explain: explanation is causal explanation – there is no other, for them. And that's what explanation means. If it means that in physics, it means that for us. That's what it comes from. Indeed, that's what I said in that essay, and that's what annoyed people.

GC Coming back to the list of your critics: did you mention Sidney Morgenbesser arguing with you?

IB No. Well, we argue about some things, but not this.

GC But not in writing?

IB He doesn't write anything.

GC All in all, this group – let's call them the Macphersonians – I don't know, Chuck Taylor ...

IB Oh yes, that's not the same.

GC I know. But generally speaking, it's a different school and a different generation.

IB Yes.

GC How was your meeting [...] intellectual one?

IB Oh, it was very friendly. We argued. Jerry Cohen was a pupil of mine – I taught him. Marx and Hegel, he read with me in New College, because his teacher was Ryle.

GC But he was a Marxist?

IB Oh yes. But he was a very ...

GC Did he [?] ...

IB In no degree. At no point. We personally got on so well. He knew perfectly that I wasn't, but he enjoys argument; he enjoys talking; he has got a very open mind. And now, of course, he's rather – diluted Marxism. He doesn't know where he is. But in my case, he just enjoyed discussing the points. I never for one single moment came across any kind of resentment or opposition.

GC He was not [?] shaken?

IB In no way. The same with Taylor, I never argued. Well, yes, Taylor. Taylor came to my lectures on the history of political thought and disagreed with me. When I got to Marx he thought I was totally wrong. But he went, he came. Then I had a class with him; there we disagreed, but in the most polite possible terms. I had a fanatical Marxist, [?] called Ollman, who is a professor in New York. No, you wouldn't. But he's a fanatical Trotskyite, more or less, whom I had to supervise and we had terrible arguments, but our personal relations remained so good that it never came.... Let me tell you a story now.

I was invited to talk in New York at some symposium – an annual thing arranged by a man called Melvin Richter, who is a political scientist in New York and was also here. He wrote a book on T. H. Green. This was the middle of the student uprising, 1968, might have been 1969, I don't know. That kind of period. And it

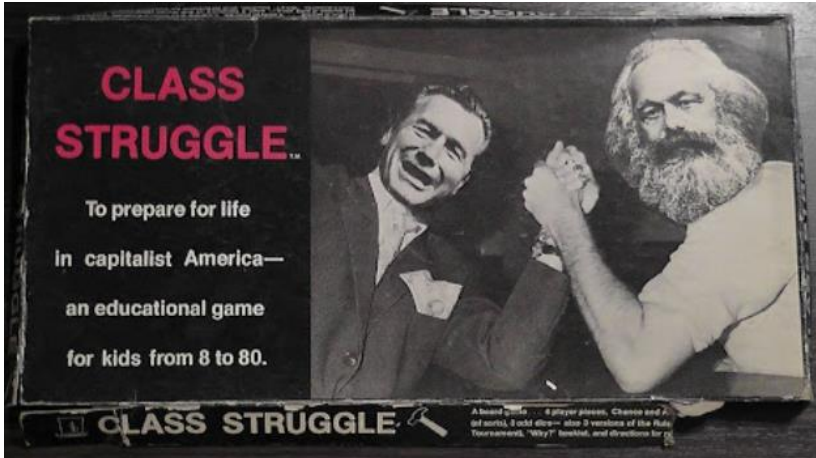
happened in a large hall in the City University, which has a large hall, and the speakers were going to be Chuck Taylor and myself – maybe there was nobody else. There was to be a huge argument between two people. (I can't remember the third person, but I rather doubt it.) That was obviously going to be liberalism versus Marxism in some way. We were great friends, so we weren't going to be disagreeable to each other, clearly. But – the man who presided – [?] he is now dead – he was a Jewish historian of ideas somewhere in Syracuse or in Columbus, I can't remember his name. He was already by then in New York, a large fat man [?], rather nice. He was very nervous that in my case there might be an outbreak on the part of the students because I was not fashionable at that moment. So he made elaborate arrangements for how I was to escape. If there was going to be an explosion of gas, I was to use a wet handkerchief to provide – against my nose, and there was a door through which we were all going to go. I mean, tremendous (*laughs*) precautionary measures were taken about the eventuality. They all turned up. There were two of my pupils in the audience. One was called Ollman – he's the man who wrote a book called – famous game in New York<sup>6</sup> – in which you lost money. First you made, then you lost. Called, I think, something like *Capitalist System*. Marxists versus capitalists, that was the game, like *L'Attaque*, with various pieces, [in] which you invest money, you lose it, you exploit (*laughs*) – large picture of Marx and Rockefeller on the cover. He's still there and [?]. He was an active Marxist propagandist.

GC Ollman?

IB O-double-l-m-a-n.

GC Who was previously your student?

<sup>6</sup> *Class Struggle*.



IB Certainly. I supervised him. After six years we managed to pull him through, after a change of examiners occurred. He was referred – it was agony, but in the end Charles Taylor helped, I helped, and so on. He was the son of a tram driver in Wisconsin – unusual for Jews – for some beer company. He got a second in PPE, in Magdalen, and they thought he was no good at all. But he came to me, asked to come to me and personally we got on very well. He met a girl in the tube, who's French. He rather liked her looks, he followed her, proposed to her, and married her, and he's still married to her (*laughs*). He's certainly unusual. Lukes knows him very well. We had to testify for him when he was off the job, in, I think, Maryland. He was prevented by the Governor from holding it because he was a Marxist propagandist. He never did, sued – all kinds of horrors occurred. Anyway, he was there. Then there was a man called Marshall Berman, who is also a rather brilliant writer, very neutoric and difficult [?], not entirely nice, but also supervised by me, extreme left wing, apart from all that, rather violent, and he wanted to be a kind of Dany le Rouge, a kind of Cohn-Bendit. I don't know if Peter told you that Cohn-Bendit



appeared in the book fair in Frankfurt, with somebody else, I can't remember, perfectly mild – did some job there, yes. No, Cohn-Bendit and Peter were both – had to do something – their names occurred together somehow – quite funny, I don't know how. You must ask him. Anyway, there were these two people. Very large audience. I made my liberal statement without [?] – I didn't [?] – I think Taylor spoke first; no, I spoke first and made my points – quite sharply, as I always do, perhaps slight exaggeration, and somebody got up and began to barrack me, tried to oppose me. At this point my two got up – they were very well known – and defended me to the – I can't tell you (*laughs*), somehow [?] displayed extreme loyalty, and they obviously – to pass the word that on no account was anything critical to be said about me. It was very unexpected. The chairman – you could have knocked him off with a feather – couldn't understand what was happening at all. Complete [?] silence, people got up, agreed, disagreed. There wasn't a single cross word. [?] I was a friend; I was a decent person; I was protected. I always felt, if there was a revolution, I would escape. My hasidim [?] (*laughter*).

GC Did you have your personal [?] in those days, in 1968, 1969, 1970.

IB No. The opposite. I was President of Wolfson for that period. I became President of Wolfson in 196... – when did I become? – 1965, I think, 1966.<sup>7</sup>

GC But the College didn't exist.

IB No. But it was – lived in houses in Banbury Road. It existed – didn't have a building.

<sup>7</sup> 1966.

GC The building didn't.

IB No, exactly.

IB 1966, I think.

GC When I was ...

IB 1966 till 1975. I was there nine years. You were here when?

GC No, when I came to Portofino in 1969 or 1970, you were building the College.

IB That's right. Very good. Quite so. When the riots broke out in Oxford – the first riots broke out in Oriel – Trevor-Roper was the chief – but, you can imagine, the Regius Professor. And then it spread, and we had in Wolfson three or four young, very left-wing young men. One was a man called Chanan [*repeats the name in Hebrew pronunciation*], Ch-a-n-a-n, who went to that Jewish public school – what's it called?

GC Carmel.

IB Carmel. And revolted against it in a major way. He was one of the ringleaders. But *the* ringleader was a man by the name of Freeman.<sup>8</sup> He was a computer mathematician. Very quiet, very gentle, rather sort of holy look. And he talked to two thousand students, or three thousand, at a time. He was the official head of the entire affair, very much listened to. He became a kind of guru, a kind of saint of the whole movement. He was a graduate student at Wolfson. Why was he a graduate student there? I would have

<sup>8</sup> Alan Freeman, Wolfson 1969–70. See 'Grant Cut Threat to Students', *The Times*, 18 March 1970, 2f.

taken him anyway. The Vice Chancellor of Edinburgh was a man called Swann; never, to my knowledge, told us that the man had the slightest left-wing deviation. He could have said he held strong political views, something. Not a word, nothing; it was completely concealed. He already led marches in Edinburgh, he was in terrible trouble. Nothing! Glad to get rid of him. I didn't think that was entirely honourable. I think it would have been terrible if we had not taken him, but at least we ought to have known. Obviously [?]. He wasn't very good, he wasn't very bad, quite decent. Now he, of course, led the revolution, but in Wolfson, he had no objection to anything. It was exactly what he wanted. That was the point. The point was Wolfson was ideal: no high table, complete equal relations between fellows and graduates, a thing called the College – I can't remember what it was called – there was a meeting of the governing body, but there was also a thing called the – not college assembly, I've forgotten what its name was, something like college meeting,<sup>9</sup> to which everybody came, and even the cook was made a member. That sort of thing. Freeman never came, but it was a piece of democracy. And everybody – all the dons came, the graduates came, everything was discussed, they made recommendations, and for some funny reason, until right at the end – I'll tell you in a moment – none of their demands were ever refused – they were all quite reasonable. Once there was no increase of temperature – they were never eccentric, they didn't demand anything impossible. It was a very loose texture. We didn't have a building, it was all very friendly, and the point is that Freeman thought it was perfect. In any other place with a university like that, he would have no objection. So in some mysterious – Bullock was then Vice Chancellor – he was one of them, there were two. He was succeeded by, I think, Habbakuk. They both got into trouble with the students.

<sup>9</sup> General Meeting.

GC About Bullock I know.

IB Bullock wanted – Freeman – what happened was there was an attack on the clerks in the Sheldonian. There was another one on the women, the secretaries, in the Indian Institute – I can't remember which one. But mainly the Sheldonian. Freeman wasn't in Oxford. He was in Southampton that day. But he came back to say that if he had been in Oxford he would have been with the attackers, to express solidarity. Bullock telephoned to me and said, 'I want to send him down.' No question, must be sent down, can't have that. Would your College agree to the sending down?' I said, 'No, as far as the College is concerned he's absolutely peaceful, we have no objection to him. He hasn't done a single thing which we can object to. If the University sends him down we can't help it. You can do it if you like. We will not help. We cannot send a document expressing disapproval, because we are not letting – University is University, College is College. From our point of view, he has [?]. I'm sorry to have to say it, [?].' He was not sent down. He disappeared, and has never been heard of since.

GC (*surprised*) Really?

IB No. He became some sort of computerist somewhere in Scotland, and is probably, I don't know – God knows what he's doing. Never. Disappeared totally. Just like the man in California, who started the whole thing in Berkeley. The rebellion started in Berkeley by a man with an Italian name. He then came to St Catherine's, I don't know whether it was under Bullock or not; must have been. And also, he was quite peaceful here. [?] So when you say, did I have trouble? – the opposite. Mr Chanan addressed the people who had a sit-in in the Sheldonian, you remember, that took over the Sheldonian, saying, 'Wolfson is with you!' – loud cheers. He wasn't authorised to say that, but one knew what he meant, and made no objection.

GC All right. Coming back again to the controversies ...

IB Oh, wait. No, I have to tell you one little fact, an addition to this. There was only one thing. The issue was about the opening of files. You see, the thing came from Warwick, and it spread to York, and the idea was that the students should be allowed to look at the files on them, because they alleged that when they applied for jobs at the BBC, secret files were supplied which prevented these people from getting the jobs. So they demanded the files, above all college files. College files didn't have this kind of information. These are University files. But they demanded that we should have no secret files in Wolfson. Now that led to a certain amount of disagreement among my colleagues, and, in principle, I was probably against showing the files, but in fact we succumbed. We said we had nothing to conceal – we didn't. Our files never contained anything against them. No, when they applied to the College, nobody ever said, 'They are dangerous revolutionaries.' What the University collected one doesn't know. So our files were opened. They never looked. [?] On that subject there was a certain amount of legitimate disagreement. I saw no reason why they shouldn't see them. I still don't. I was in favour to some extent of student democracy, because they didn't want to blow up the University. It wasn't like America: they didn't want to govern the University or to sit at college meetings. [?] All very tame compared to other places. We never had serious trouble.

GC Was there a division here between the fellows, the dons – in America there are some institutions ...

IB No. On the whole, not. We all went to a meeting of heads of colleges and we agreed that if this went too far we would have to withdraw our labour; we'd have to close colleges. No. There was complete solidarity. Some people went beyond others. The person

who was most hostile to them was Chester in Nuffield. There was a hundred per cent hatred of students from outside Nuffield. The others were milder. No, there was no – Habbkuk presided and it was all very mild. They created a student council, I think. Something like that. That was all it was in the end.

GC Then, I think it was still Bullock that nominated Herbert ... There was a Hart Commission.

IB Ah, that's right. No, no Hart Commission. No, Hart was the man who wrote the brief report, and then the commission was set up under – for student complaints – was set up under, I think, Nicholas, who was the Principal of Brasenose, a lawyer. And it had on it Stuart at Wadham and somebody else – the economist from Keble,<sup>10</sup> who is married to Douglas-Home's daughter, whose name I can't remember. I think three. And there there were violent scenes, and they were attacked with great ferocity, particularly by the present Mrs Lukes,<sup>11</sup> who used obscene language and God knows what. She was then a barrister, and they hired her. No lawyers could appear. Stuart was very shaken. And then there was a court of appeal – the head of the Court of Appeal was Neill, the Warden of All Souls. I can't remember whether he was Warden then or not.<sup>12</sup> But as Mrs Lukes was a barrister, and he was head of the Bar Association, or whatever the Bar is called, she suddenly became very mild. The last thing she wanted was – so it all evaporated. But there was a certain amount of – yes. But it didn't shake the colleges.

GC It didn't?

<sup>10</sup> Adrian Darby, married to Meriel Douglas-Home.

<sup>11</sup> Nina Stanger.

<sup>12</sup> No, it was John Sparrow.

IB No. People were not sent down. One was, I think, for hitting somebody. Perhaps one or two undergraduates. There was no mass – no mass measures were taken, nobody suffered.

GC During your service in Oxford as a don were you involved in hot debates and arguments of any academic controversies?

IB No. Ferocious argument, no. Not on the university level and not on the college level. No. There were things I felt strongly about but I have never been present at a violent exchange, or two parties who simply hated each other, couldn't speak to each other. I don't think that happens in Oxford. It happens in Cambridge, much more. [?] somehow feel more strongly. I'm trying to think what is the nearest to it. For example, Bhutto, the famous Bhutto – I took no part in that. Mrs Thatcher – I took no part in that. Those were real rows.

GC But you had your strong feelings?

IB No.

GC No. Neither in Bhutto's case, nor in Thatcher's?

IB No, I was rather indifferent. In the Bhutto case, I was totally indifferent. I didn't mind in the least. Although the chief anti-Bhutto camp was in Wolfson. About Mrs. Thatcher, no, because I took a rather mild view. I thought on the whole there was a case for giving her a degree because she was a prime minister; there was a case against it because of the terrible cuts. I thought if she lost and didn't get a degree we would be made to suffer by some sort of Conservative counter-onslaught. And we were. We must have lost about 10 million pounds. Herbert Hart was the heart and head of the whole thing – deeply involved. Deeply. He and his wife.

GC Did you argue?

IB Yes. He just thought I was being cynical. I didn't argue against him. I didn't say it was monstrous or wicked or wrong. I said I thought it was unwise.

GC But you had to vote?

IB Yes. I didn't. On that day there was a meeting of the – quite serious issues: I was on the Board of Covent Garden. So Claus Moser and I did not attend Congregation on the Tuesday afternoon, but we heard the news. He got the news conveyed in the middle of our meeting – about the defeat. He was very excited. I wasn't. I didn't mind particularly. No, I can't say that I felt very strongly – I thought there was no real issue. Herbert thought that if we defeated her, a lot of other universities would feel that Oxford was not elitist. But if we did it, others would do it too. And moreover that people would be so shaken that it would in fact increase the grants. The exact opposite happened. No other university took the slightest notice. It became a piece of front page news, just like King and Country, which was another matter, even in Israel, but everything that Herbert thought turned out to be totally false. He has no political wisdom whatever about affairs. No *savoir faire*. He's got no political sense. [?] She's of course fanatical, in a kind of sweet way. I'm very fond of her, always have been. But he's fundamentally an academic. He can't predict, he doesn't know about results of elections. He's got no idea. He is a Labour Party voter to this day, because Douglas Jay convinced him that the Common Market would be fatal to England – which it has not turned out to be.

GC Were you involved in committees in the University?  
Reforming the curriculum?



IB No. I think I wrote a letter to the Franks Commission about – advocating certain changes that didn't happen. [?] very [?] views.

GC You have views?

IB Yes. But never a member of a party which was advocating something. There were no parties.

GC We never discussed it, but my impression is that you were more modern in your attitudes towards university life than the majority of your ...

IB I'm not so sure. I was in favour of a tutorial system, which is regarded as reactionary. In All Souls – I'll tell you – there was a row about how to spend our money, when we had a vote to take graduate students, and then that was [?] against it. That was a real controversy of a fairly passionate kind. And there I did take sides, yes. I'll tell you a typical one in which I took sides, and we won very easily. I was on a thing called the Research Fellowships Committee, then. Suddenly Hicks, who was then professor of economics, discovered there was a huge unspent surplus which is called a building fund. No building was contemplated, so it was a perfectly theoretical affair which accumulated more and more money because the Warden and Bursar hated spending anything. So it was just a mechanical act of accumulation, again for no purpose. Hicks then made a fuss and said we ought to spend this money. Sparrow was Warden – above all didn't want to do anything. There was no change of any kind. They tried to give the money away. Maybe St Antony's needs it. Maybe others. Why can't we get rid of it? I made a speech saying, no college is worth existing if it hasn't got fourteen things pressing for realisation for which there isn't enough money. The idea of 'My God, what shall we do with this money?' shows deep [?], shows deep lack of understanding one's purpose. [?] We are a research college – at least

that. And then we had a vote in which the vast majority voted – I made a speech – vast majority voted with us. There were three opponents only: Sparrow, Ernest Jacob and Beloff. I think that was all. I think Beloff changed sides towards the end. Anyhow they were defeated. On that I felt quite strongly, because I wrote the original document protesting against this wish on the Warden's part to get rid of the money. Then there were negotiations with Bill Deakin, who thought he could make money out of us. Naturally. The idea was that we would have joint scholarships, joint fellowships. That didn't work at all. [?] wanted it, they just wanted a grant. Then there was a similar thing – yes, then we all voted to have graduate students. And then they all voted against me, but I wasn't here for that. No. The only time I felt very strongly was when we turned down a man called Kreisel, who is one of the world's leading mathematical logicians, and who is very contemptuous of people, rude, disagreeable, can be very haughty, and he was unfortunately made a member of the Common Room for a term and offended quite a lot of people. And although he came easily top in the recommendations of the Research Fellows Committee, he was turned down simply because people didn't like him. And I thought that was very bad, for a Research College. And it was part of my reason for going to Wolfson. I suddenly felt All Souls was no good. Their academic values were too weak. They simply went according to personal taste, although you can say, small community, one disagreeable man. Nevertheless, if we existed for research, here was a man who was, on intellectual grounds, impossible to turn down. Since then he has become a Fellow of the Royal Society, although he is a logician. He is a pupil of Wittgenstein, he's an Austrian Jew.

GC Yes, that's what I had in mind, when I was saying that you were more modern in your attitude ...

IB I was indignant. I thought All Souls had behaved abominably. I felt very alienated from it.

GC That personal attitude, which is typical of you – you suffer the weaknesses of people more than others. [?] I think that when you came back in 1945 or maybe even earlier, your idea of a university was not the gentleman scholar in the classics. You were modern [?] curriculum [?].

IB Yes, certainly.

GC We never discussed it, but that's my feeling, that's my impression.

IB I think most people in the philosophical faculty were.

GC Most people?

IB Most of Oxford, yes. They didn't want gentlemen scholars. There were such. Wolfenden, who was then [?] Commission, he was mainly a tutor in Magdalen, simply to teach gentlemen. He was a very bad philosopher but he was good with the rowing men. There were certain appointments of that type. Giles Alington, who was son of the headmaster of Eton, got a Third in schools, and was made a Fellow of University College because he was so good with the boys. That was Goodhart's idea, who had deep contempt for the intellect. Not contempt, but rather nervous of it, didn't like it, had no sense for it. No. I don't know whether ... The whole ideal of gentlemanly dons and young men who told them all about everything which was in their minds and hearts – paternalism. Yes. I don't think I ever fitted into that. No. Partly because All Souls was not an undergraduate college.

GC And yet, on the other hand, you were against some subjects that are considered to be modern ...

IB I still am.

GC [?] don't like [?] the social studies. Are you considered to be the enemy of social studies?

IB I'm sure. I don't think I'm very formidable, I don't think anyone's afraid of me, because I don't do anything about it. But certainly, I think there is some sense that I think they are no good.

GC But you wouldn't say it about economists?

IB No, economics not, no, because that is intellectually taxing in some way. I don't suppose it's of great use, perhaps, but no, economics has a discipline; it has some kind of – whereas the other [?] are soft. Economics, partly for mathematical reasons, partly otherwise, has a fairly rigorous intellectual standard behind it. It can be done by very clever people. Sociology cannot be done by very clever people. It can't. There's no room for – nor can political science. It can't be done by very – it's not possible.

*Side B*<sup>13</sup>

IB [?] in the twentieth century. I said there are none. Sidney said, 'What, you don't think Nozick is a genius?'

GC And did he say this...

IB Deliberate. Oh, ironically.

<sup>13</sup> GC annotates in Hebrew: 'Conversation about the meeting in Yarnton with the curriculum committee; Morgenstern [sc. Morgenbesser]'.

GC Ironically? (*laughs*)

IB Nozick is the exact opposite of what [?] is.

GC I know.

IB A reactionary, a deep conservative reactionary. 'Nozick? You don't think Nozick is the greatest – is as great a genius as Hobbes? Really? You haven't read ...? You haven't come ...? You haven't heard of Nozick?' A bit of that occurs. I believe it. I think there are no dominant political theorists in the twentieth century who are equal to the great classics.

GC [?].

IB Well, Mill. Yes. Or even, wait a moment, let's go a little bit later; even – who shall we say? – Weber is not quite a political thinker, but of that category. Marx, Weber ...

GC I don't think we had the opportunity to discuss de Tocqueville.

IB Tocqueville did come up in these discussions.

GC But not in ours.

IB I never really studied Tocqueville, I never taught it, and I've never had serious[?] thoughts about ... I've read it, it's a very brilliant kind of political, not sociology, but analysis of what happens, you can say that, partly historical, partly political, but ultimately it's a very high form of publicism, exactly – it's like Herzen. It's like – observation, yes. Description of America's ... it's a description. The idea of the equalities advancing on us [?]. It's more like – who shall we say? – Burckhardt, Carlyle. That's what it relates to.

GC Was there argument yesterday about it? Did my friends push at names?

IB No. I don't know whether Toqueville would be very useful to Israelis in that school. Certainly not the ones – the trouble was, what about the French Revolution? Who has written? What should one read?

GC Thinkers ...

IB Anything. How does one bring the French Revolution to their consciousness? And the Canadians write about Carlyle as if it was nothing but rhetorical poetry of a certain kind. In that case, I said, Michelet was better.

GC But still ...

IB Who is a straight historian, describes the events. From a point of view, but still, nobody is neutral about the French Revolution. There [?] Annales stuff but they are isolated monographs. But if one meant to read about the French Revolution, what would one read?

GC I like Thompson.<sup>14</sup>

IB I think that's probably the best. He's dull and decent. Perfectly all right; tells you what happened. I made Aline read it. Thompson's book: he was a don in Magdalen, old clergyman, yes, old unfrocked clergyman in Magdalen. It's a straightforward, impartial book. He tells you how it was. After that you can think what you like.

<sup>14</sup> J. M. Thompson, *The French Revolution* (Oxford, 1943).

GC I am not up to date ...

IB No, he wasn't either.

GC But in my day ...

IB Nor am I.

GC [?] preferred Thompson.

IB So did I, but I don't know what there is now. May be there is something else.

GC I don't know; there are over 20 ...

IB I know. But it's all either pro-Robespierre or pro-Danton, or pro-Tocqueville or pro-something-else. Straight narrative, history of the French Revolution, doesn't really exist.

GC But one ought, of course, to have a book on it because ...

IB But what about the Russian Revolution? They say it again, that nothing exists, because the documents aren't there.

GC But the French Revolution, it's not only its impact, even the terminology ...

IB No, but they said, thoughts about the French Revolution, their reaction to it. There's not much about that either. There are books, but they are not particularly first-rate. There are books about the German reaction, books about the English reaction. Such things exist. But they are not classical books to be put in the hundred – they should read it. But you can't force them.

GC Yes. In one way the French Revolution is more important than the Russian Revolution.

IB Of course.

GC Modern terminology ...

IB Comes from them. Absolutely. Of course.

GC Marx used the terminology of the French Revolution.

IB Of course. [?] No, the French Revolution turned everything over, upset everything, left nothing standing. Nobody was – the French Revolution made it impossible to read people who wrote before it. Take the most serious: Gibbon, all right, on the Ancient World. But otherwise, all historians became somehow – the whole thing changed. The questions changed; the answers changed.

GC In the British Academy, do you remember any issue that ...

IB No. Nothing explosive.

GC I remember one: on Blunt.

IB Oh yes, of course. I can tell you what part I played in that.

GC You were the President then?

IB No. Thank God. I would have gone mad. It was a year after I had stopped being. I was asked to go on for another year, but I was just wise enough to stop. I think it would have driven me off my head. What happened was that, of course, Plumb, who I'm sure was a Communist once upon a time, led the agitation against Blunt.



He wrote a letter to the President saying he must be expelled. Well, there was another account. The President, fortunately, was not even on the Council. He has no position; and that lapses to the ordinary ranks. And I had a – caused a certain amount of argument in the press, and I had a letter from the Secretary, Carswell, who said, ‘Can you help? The Council is divided. If we can go forward like that, the Academy will tear itself to pieces. We need something for a vote; we are bound to vote on this; and Council will make a recommendation for or against anyhow, [?] debated. There are people who are strongly for, there are people who are strongly against, expulsion. But there is a middle bloc who don’t know what to think. Can you produce a motion which will be something which a large majority could vote for, in whichever direction, so that we don’t have a total collision, and a permanent division of the Academy for all time.’ Suez, Munich, they didn’t want that. All right, I understood that. So I meditated and secretly I generated this motion. The motion said, ‘While the Academy deplores the behaviour of Sir Anthony Blunt, it does not wish to proceed further in the matter.’ Now this will be against people who want him expelled, but the fact that we deplore would suit the people who want something, not nothing. People who wanted to keep him wanted nothing at all. It’s not the business of Academies to condemn people for political crimes. If there was a political crime, it was for the police. Nothing to do with us. It’s a perfectly possible position. Herbert Hart took exactly that position.

GC I remember.

IB Exactly that. Southern at Balliol took up that position. Now, the man who was going to oppose – Council would propose a motion that he be expelled, because they had a majority of one, maybe of two. The question was, who was going to oppose the motion? The man who chose to oppose the motion was Lord Robbins. He was a great friend of Blunt. When he had discovered what Blunt had

done, he said it was the blackest day in his entire life. He couldn't come to terms with it. But he had been with him on the Courtauld, he was the head of the National Gallery – they knew each other very well. And he had great regard – he was a simple, naive, sweet man, Robbins. Very nice man, rather simple, but morally of very good character, and politically the super-liberal of all time. There has never been a liberal like him. The real absolute quintessence of the liberal tradition. So he was going to oppose it. On what grounds, I don't know; he didn't tell me. He asked me to second it. I declined. On two grounds – one bad, one good. The bad ground, which was not too bad, but – was that since I was an ex-President and he was an ex-President, it looked as if the House of Lords – somebody from the body of the Academy should be the seconder, there shouldn't be two Presidents. That was the bad reason. The good reason was this: somehow Herbert Hart took the line that no matter what the Fellow of the Academy did, unless – we elected them entirely on intellectual grounds – unless there is an intellectual crime – cheating, forgery – there was no case for the Academy to proceed. [?] I felt that I didn't quite agree with that. That if somebody asked me would there be no situation in which we would vote against – for expulsion. I would think, supposing we had a Fellow, or a would-be Fellow, or a Corresponding Fellow from abroad who was the greatest authority in Portuguese art that ever existed, who was a man of obvious genius, who would never be forgotten, a man of the highest possible talent in the matter, immortal, but one knew that on Thursday mornings he was the head of a concentration camp and gouged out the eyes of little children, every Thursday morning. Would I then vote for the expulsion of the man? I would. So the question is: where does one draw the line? One can't say where one draws the line. There's no principle. One draws the line where one draws the line. It's an ultimately subjective matter. Can't be avoided. Something which completely crosses everything one believes and wants in the world. But something one can't tolerate at all, at any price. If somebody

challenged me, I wouldn't be able to answer properly. Therefore I would rather that whoever seconded [?] was in the position of those who said nothing should stand in the way, who see no way for removing him for anything he did, unless you think he is intellectually inadequate. So I didn't. But I didn't feel strongly. I was for keeping him. Why? I wasn't sure myself. And funnily enough Trevor-Roper was for keeping him, for which I gave him great credit. It meant that intellectual merit, for him, outweighed. Blake was against. They were friends, but on this they disagreed very strongly. Dunn pursued him ferociously.

GC The wording of [?] Plumb's motion ...

IB It was a Council motion.

GC Council motion. What was the wording of Robbins's motion?

IB It was my thing. It was supplied to him, and he accepted it. I don't think he knew that I had drafted it, but the Secretary said, 'We've got the following draft of a motion, would you like ...?' That's what Council put forward. Council put forward that this is the motion which they oppose, which the others can support. The motion is that it proceeds no further. Council was against it. They didn't want to say expel because why? It would mean [?] treason and so on. They didn't want all that.

GC The majority was against expulsion?

IB Vast – the great majority. I'll tell you what happened. After the speeches were made, the Vice Chancellor – the poor old Secretary had to buy tiddlywinks – little green lead spheres – because there was no secret ballot in the entire history of the Academy. It was

founded in 1902, I think, or some such time.<sup>15</sup> There was no case – the only case would have been some intellectual – but they never thought there would be a political issue. [?] So they had to buy a box, and little pebbles, and God knows what. And this man got up and said, ‘Mr President, I have an entirely procedural motion – he was a lawyer [?] – which will not need a secret ballot, because procedural motions were for an open ballot. May I put it?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘My motion is that we proceed to the next item on the agenda.’ A procedural motion? We voted, openly, and something like 75 people voted to proceed and 35 people voted, 40 people voted against. That was that. Rather a brilliant move.

GC But you know what people said; otherwise you call it a secret ballot.

IB No, there was no secret ballot.

GC But you said that it was the first time that ...

IB But it wasn’t used. The man got up, produced the motion, no secret ballot. It came to the same – so people could vote openly.

GC So you know how everybody voted?

IB Unfortunately, as always with me, I came late so I had to sit in the front row, which is always empty at all British meetings, so I couldn’t look back, so I can’t tell you exactly. I long to know.

GC And during elections in Oxford – in the University, in colleges?

<sup>15</sup> 1902 is right.

IB No, I wasn't torn like this. I wasn't morally torn. It didn't upset me. I got rather excited, it was an interesting business, what had happened.

GC In the Blunt affair?

IB The Blunt affair. I knew which side I was on. I didn't make propaganda, I didn't ...

GC Were there any elections in which you were active in the University, in the College? There are many ways of being active ...

IB Yes, there are plenty of elections.

GC Signatures you gave to candidates?

IB Yes.

GC Nearly every time.

IB Candidates for what?

GC I mean, let's say when Jenkins and Heath ...

IB Yes.

GC Did you support Jenkins?

IB Yes.

GC And beforehand when Macmillan and ...

IB I voted – I only voted. I did not support anybody. Because Franks is a great friend, but I proposed to vote for Macmillan

because I thought that no one ought to be Chancellor. I still think that. It's a Dalai Lama position, it's entirely – what is the word I'm looking for?

GC Ceremonial?

IB Yes. I thought it ought not to be somebody you might meet at nine o'clock in the morning train on the Oxford platform. It ought to be some eminent person from outside – a symbolic person. Anyway – I like Macmillan anyway, so I thought he would do it beautifully, and he did, very good speeches, and – he did it beautifully. He did not want Blunt's honorary degree to be taken away from him in Oxford – nor was it.

GC Who did you say?

IB Blunt, an honorary doctor. Idiomatic to remove it. Very liberal, Macmillan. Civilised man, whereas Franks is rather stiff.

GC Now, coming back to Wolfson. I know that there is an article in *Lycidas* about the origins of Wolfson College, and I haven't read that, but the article is not personal. What really made you accept ...?

IB I don't know. I received a letter from the Vice Chancellor, Wheare, when I was at Princeton. And I showed it to Aline. I had been professor of political theory for enormous – not quite ten years. I think I was elected in 1957, and I wanted the job because I wanted a discipline to make me do some work. If I have no discipline, I don't do any work, like now. And so I wanted a straitjacket, I wanted something which would force me to lecture twice a week; and if I wanted to write, I would write. But I didn't want to be a research fellow, to torment myself, was I doing enough? That was when [?]. One day I applied for the job, I wasn't

invited. I applied for it like anybody else. Now, I had done it for about nine years and I felt that I didn't really enjoy it very much because I didn't have a sufficiently strong interest in what is right and wrong, what is good and bad politically, that's to say in actual issues. I was fascinated by the ideas of the past. I loved the ideas, I loved the history of the subject, I loved the entire world of political ideas, but I felt a professor ought to be somebody with some kind of opinions, too, which he would passionately defend, and ought to be deeply concerned with the burning issues of the day. I was not. And that was why in a way I was glad to – I thought, well, let me perhaps do something else. I had no idea – I realised that it was perhaps rather absurd, but I didn't say no. I came back to Oxford and talked to these people. I found they were very nice people.

GC Who?

IB The people were then Iffley College. You don't know how it came about? Ah well, a whole story. When I – in the old days, there were fellows of colleges and not-fellows. There still are: first-class citizens; second-class citizens. First-class citizens are usually people who taught the popular undergraduate subjects – classics, history; Chaplain was a fellow, usually, not always; modern languages, not always, not many people did it. Persian, certainly not. Science – you never saw them because they worked in the laboratories. Professors had to be because they automatically became – as a fellowship. Readership was not. So, in the old days there were two [kinds of] people, fellows and non-fellows. The non-fellows gradually became discontented and they found a leader in Michael [sc. W. E. (William Edward) 'Kits'] van Heyningen, who was a pathologist in Florey's laboratory, and he got elected to Council. It meant the revolt of the pariahs.

GC When was this?

IB 19... – it began in the early 1950s.

GC That late?

IB Late 1940s maybe. They threatened, whatever – like the Irish party: either they would go to America or they would block legislation in Congregation. [?] They suddenly felt [?]. There were fellows in the Royal Society who were never made fellows of a college, like Zuckerman – never became a fellow, of anywhere. He was an FRS. Others in the same position. He led these people, this scientist led mainly the scientists. Once they became elected and he became a member of Council, the University became frightened. They thought there would be serious consequences. Maybe there would be a kind of mass exodus. Even before this came up, there was already a movement headed by the Warden of Merton, who was a very nice ancient historian called [Robin] Harrison, to try and persuade colleges to expand their fellowship.

GC (*inaudible*)

IB That was before it became an issue. Some colleges took – we took one or two people [?], but not many – it still left about three hundred people unprovided for. Because the University can appoint without the colleges giving them fellowships, or even lectureships, or even membership of common room. Colleges are independent sovereign bodies. Then the University, in a state of perturbation, passed a statute: the statute said that anybody with more than  $x$  number of years – certain categories of people who had held the post for more than a certain number of years were entitled to a fellowship. Entitled, but no college was obliged to give them one. So it was an absurd law in a way. It created a moral [?] moral responsibility. In other words, it gave them a passport but no visa. Anybody could be made a fellow, but these people had entitlement, which meant that there was a case for making them



fellows. No college was obliged to. Colleges behaved exactly like countries under threat of immigration. They were [?] the High Table; scientists don't come into College much; they don't know anything about the undergraduates; Persian is not a subject which is taught here; there's not enough rooms; it costs too much. [?] There was a thing called the – something of Colleges, the thing which the Franks Commission set up. [?] of Colleges, or whatever it is. All heads of Colleges come together in a formal meeting, twice a term, to discuss matters of common interest. I've forgotten what its official name is – something of Colleges, not meeting, something – Conference of Colleges it's called. There this issue was thrashed out. We do have to take them, or we are obliged [?] apply to. It arose out of the Franks Commission, this movement. Then, in order to solve the problem, they said to us, 'What is a college?' A college is simply [?] – is simply a meeting of people who recognise each other as colleagues. It doesn't say that a college has to have a building, it doesn't say a college has to have money; it's a club, people meet, dining club. Still, they were given buildings. Two colleges were created. One was called Iffley, the other was called St Cross. Iffley was given a building in Iffley, an old eighteenth-century building, which I think was probably falling down in some ways, very handsome [?] three miles from Oxford. St Cross was given the St Cross Rectory in St Cross Road. I think the entitled people then simply chose, some one college, some the other. The only thing was that the head of the college was going to be given some money, the President was going to get a salary, nobody else was. They all had university posts, so they were paid for – that was the theory – but since the President might be an outsider, he would have to be remunerated. Well, the first man – St Cross chose the leader, the man who led the revolution, van Heyningen, a South African pathologist. Iffley was without a head, and they went first of all to a man whose name I forget. He was a famous

mathematical chemist in Wadham;<sup>16</sup> a very famous scientist of considerable – he said he would if he was given £2 million so as to create a building and have graduate students – call it a college. The university neither could nor would do that, so then he withdrew – after acrimonious ... They then sent me this letter, at least Wheare did. I didn't turn it down because I thought it might be fun. I don't know. I just didn't know what it entailed. I came back to Oxford, I interviewed representatives of Iffley College, and I said, 'The University has perpetrated a fraud on you; they have made you fellows, you are a college, but you are not a college. You have no money; you've ...' – didn't know – [?] I'm sorry, they were given twenty thousand pounds, and the rich colleges gave them I think ten thousand pounds for eight years. Not money, even by the standards of the early 1960s. So I said, 'It's really – unless you get ...'. They said, 'We quite agree, but how do we get money?' I said, 'I don't know.' 'Can you help us?' 'Yes, I'll do my best.' That's how it began. The rest of the story I tell in the thing, you'll see it.

GC But earlier you said that you applied and you were not approached.

IB For a chair. I applied for my chair, not Iffley – for a professorship.

GC Ah, I asked about ...

IB No. They selected me. They thought I'd bring them money, and so I did.

GC But why did you accept?

<sup>16</sup> Charles Alfred Coulson (1910–74), theoretical chemist; Rouse Ball Professor of Mathematics, Oxford, 1952–72, Professor of Theoretical Chemistry 1972–4; Fellow of Wadham 1952–74.

IB I'll tell you, I don't know why. I still don't. I thought it might be amusing, interesting to create a new college. What happened was that unless I collected the money I wasn't going to take it. I did not accept until the money was in the bag. I refused to be elected because I thought if there was no money then I wouldn't accept, there was no point. They didn't need a President, they weren't a college. St Cross was a rather meaningless institution.

GC So Wolfson grew out of Iffley?

IB Iffley was Wolfson.

GC That explains why there are so many scientists in Wolfson.

IB Entirely. And I made use of that. My whole application to Ford was on the ground that it would become a base for scientists.

GC When you earlier said that you applied, and you were not happy, you were not happy with the chair or you were not happy in Wolfson?

IB I was not unhappy with either, but I got a bit bored with the chair.

GC With the chair, but in the College?

IB I was entirely happy from the first moment to the last. The only motion I ever opposed at one of these general meetings was that children under twelve should be allowed to come to the common room and eat the meal without an adult – that I thought was [going] a little too far.

GC When you were approached you showed the letter to Aline. Did you consult with any other friends?

IB No. I only consulted when I was offered Nuffield. I was offered that too, in 1953, I think. I was elected by the fellows of Nuffield. I was offered it – by them. Then I consulted absolutely everybody, and I refused. Everybody told me to take it. Everybody.

GC And then you refused?

IB Well, I think Sparrow perhaps told me that if I wanted to be near the station, to be governor of the jail would be just as good.

GC I was going to ask: when do you consult and when you don't consult?

IB I consult always.

GC Always?

IB In the case of Iffley I didn't have to consult, it was very clear. I either [?] it or not do it. There was nothing to consult, nobody knew what it would become, nobody had any idea, it's a shot in the total dark. Nuffield was an existing institution. They already had – three Wardens they had, quite an eminent kind. Why they chose me to this day I don't know. But I thought, no. Economics and political science are not my thing. I couldn't bear to, it was too narrow.

GC And whenever you consult, when do you take advice?

IB I remember consulting when I was at Harvard, at the time when that came up – when Nuffield came up, and I was at Harvard, 1953 or so. And I was rather excited the only offer on the open market that was ever made to me. Every other job I applied for, in all my life.

GC Really?

IB Yes. I don't think I was ever offered a job in the open market. No. I don't think so. That was the first one, which I didn't – I had no idea it was going to happen. I was what's called a faculty fellow of Nuffield – it doesn't matter what that was. Anyhow, and then – I was rather excited. I thought, 'Maybe.' They are very rich, they are very well endowed. [?] I didn't mind it. I used to go to their College meetings. The building I thought was rather ugly, but I'm not very visually affected. But then I consulted. I remember at Harvard meeting Szilard[?], who I knew. He said. 'Oh, I would certainly take it. Now you go to Lord Nuffield and say I'll turn out that bunch of reds.' He'll give you as much money as you like. That was very typical. I still had not decided not to take it, and I came back. I still wondered: yes/no, no/yes.

GC And the majority of your friends told you to take it?

IB The vast majority. You can change it; you can alter it; you can do what you like. No. When I saw who the fellows were – no. I didn't see what I could do with it. It would have to be economics and political science – it was dedicated to social sciences. Maybe I could infiltrate a few historians, but the majority would do subjects for which I had no sympathy or of which I had no understanding. That seemed to me absurd.

GC Now, when you are faced with such decisions, whose judgement do you take more seriously than the others?

IB I would take my wife's advice, very seriously, I really would. She is very thoughtful, and when she gives a piece of advice, it's thought out, it's not impulsive, and when she says something it usually makes sense. It has a certain aesthetic or moral quality

which I understand very well. My father was dying in 1953 and I told him that I had been offered it; he said, 'No, [?]. No, not that kind of college.'

GC Really? He knew?

IB He was at Oxford during the war, and for some reason he knew. I wouldn't think he would know. But in some way he felt there are colleges and colleges; it was on purely snobbish grounds. He felt it wasn't quite real. I think they chose me because they wanted to be a college, because at that time they thought St Antony's was, because they drank port, and they sat around the table – somehow, with Bill Deakin, it had a real Oxford quality, [?] something in Sheffield, the refectory table, was something provincial, something like LSE, somehow it wasn't like [?] at Oxford, which is true. Still is.

GC I know.

IB In a way St Antony's is not. St Antony's is peculiar, but it's different. It has a certain Oxford quality, a certain – also not very intrinsic. [*ended by telephone interruption*]