

# The Isaiah Berlin Virtual Library

## Supplementary Letters 1946–1960

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## Supplementary Letters 1946–1960

The following letters do not appear in the second volume of Berlin's correspondence, *Enlightening: Letters 1946–1960*. They are mostly late discoveries which might have been included had they come to light in time. More annotation may be provided later, but for the time being the texts are made available here for the convenience of readers. Abbreviations and other editorial apparatus follow the conventions adopted in the published volume, including those listed [here](#). Archival sources are listed at the end of the PDF.

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TO DIANA COOPER

15 November 1946 [*manuscript*]

New College

Dearest Diana,

Like everyone else I seethe with frustrated indignation – frustrated because there is no one in particular I can vent it on. Personal feelings apart, it seems to me idiotic that precisely at a moment when the General is returning & no one here has any real links with him, this change shd be made. No doubt there is some splendour in leaving at a moment of apogee, with nothing but golden opinions falling in a golden shower on one's head – with not a cross word from any party or interest or person, and you can continue to live an enchanted life at Chantilly, still it *is* a lunatic act on the part of the Foreign Office – I know nothing of the facts, no doubt one mustn't jump to unsupported conclusions – but prima facie it does seem queerly irresponsible. I have become a remote & ineffectual don & should have views. Like Sir J. Simon, I am inclined to say that my blood literally boils. It will cool a little if & when due recognition occurs. I have no animus against Sir O. Harvey – he is a nice, gentle, inoffensive high minded liberal with a Chinese expression – & all I remember of him in Washington is that he addressed an American official called Dr Berle, an enemy to England & the head of the State Department's Secret Service – under the impression that he was talking to me. A really absurd cross purpose talk occurred – you will

agree nothing is ever funnier – on the lines of “I have often read your telegrams, you know”. Dr Berle who suspected as much went green & said “really?” – ‘oh I am not in the American Department, of course, but they come round, you know, they come round’ etc. & finally turned to his other neighbour & said “What an intelligent man Mr Berlin seems to be”. Consternation. Explanations. Frightful embarrassment. My name always lands me in things of that kind. I have at last obtained my lunch with Mr Churchill who was very genial & sang musical hall songs after lunch: he spoke with some warmth about Lord Halifax & indicated certain weak spots – I long to repeat the magnificent turn on all this when I see you – when oh when will that be? – when in a mild fit of loyalty I said ‘but hasn’t Lord H. always led a rather sheltered life?’ he said ‘don’t you be too sure about that’ & enlarged on this too in sweeping strokes. I have just returned from Ditchley where there were: The Straights, Joe Alsop, Judy M. & some Americans. I don’t believe that our plot is going too well: so at least the new Mrs T. whispered in a tense manner: yet they seemed to me getting on like houses on fire. Joe’s newspaper articles of 1946, much blown upon at the time, have become the official policy of the United States: & he is justifiably pleased. I really like him very much: he was piqued at being told by Judy that he talked more than I do: apart from that all went off without a hitch. Ronnie is deliciously happy: & Marietta is sweet & good. But I cannot see her getting off with Ronnie’s friends in Society: & I am not clear what the effect of that will be. Judy was charming: gay, very amusing, full of irony & very very quick. I wish Joe wd act for his own & the general good. Victor too I saw, & he is conspicuously happier than ever before: Tess is very sweet & gentle & nice to one, but embarrasses me as some high minded Wykehamists do: the air loses oxygen, breathing becomes difficult, the forces of life ebb, & loquacious as I am, the words cleave to my mouth. In short I have an idea that she is perhaps, dare I say it, a prig: tremulous, sensitive, lovelorn, devoted, anxious, public spirited, and governessy, uneasy, tortured & a prig. Terribly in love, in a sense very happy, terrified of Barbara, passionately anxious for Victor’s friends no longer communicate with her, filled with rumours of what Barbara says of her (I don’t doubt it is unrepeatable) & in some queer way devitalizing, not in relation to Victor, who is obviously unpersecuted & at peace, at least relatively, but vis a vis me for example. Perhaps I am no good with the insecure

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or the oversensitive. I like her well enough to have a sort of abstract respect for her donnish qualities: but I am uncasy with her. I wish it weren't so. Oxford is bleak & cold & not itself yet – there is an atmosphere not of slow recovery but of a breathing spell between two crises. It is very extraordinary about Dr Dalton: 'they have shot our fox' said a Conservative M.P., I feel genuinely terrified of Sir S. Cripps's ruthless honesty & tenacity of purpose, & think with wild longing about Italy & France, Paris and Rome and Chantilly from which I feel fatally divided by the cold dank grey mist which is much older than the College rooms it sits on & has long killed any possible enchantments of the Middle Ages or anything else. And I hear Evelyn W. has written a book on corpses. But when does J. Julius come? & when shall I see you?

My love  
Isaiah.

TO DIANA COOPER

21 January 1947 [*manuscript*]

New College

Dear Diana,

And now I am in bed with 'flu, and it could not be more melancholy. Yesterday I had to decline Lady C.'s summons because I had to lecture at 12 – far too many people come, not a word do they understand, but lecture rooms tend to be warmer than their sordid unheated lodgings – they are reduced to the condition of the emaciated haggard students in Dostoyevsky or V. Hugo – the kind that have burning eyes & buy rusty pistols for political assassination – only ours aren't very spirited. I am sure John Julius is better off in Strasbourg at the moment. *Any* joke *any* lecturer makes is wildly well received, so that I kept mine in fits of easily purchased laughter & felt deeply ashamed afterwards for currying favour at the expense of the dignity of the subject. After that God, quite rightly I must add, punished me by shooting sciatica into my shoulder & some unknown virus into the rest of my system. But if by some strange luck I were to visit – on Friday for example, wd you be there, in London I mean, could I visit you in the Dorchester at tea time? it may alas not be possible but I shall swallow a much larger quantity of much stronger drugs if it is. The thought of Paris is infinitely

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remote in this very H. G. Wellsy atmosphere – the procession of dull shiny reputable remorselessly boring remorselessly information-avid faces thoroughly well adapted to modern life, with spare parts & contractable frames, not hard nor soft but like something out of plastic not exactly bogus, not exactly genuine good dependable bakelite with not a spark nor a glimmer anywhere. Oh dear I cd go on like this too long. If Friday is no good don't, I pray you, trouble to answer. I shall probably continue ill – All my love & to L. de V.

Yours

Isaiah.

Your Xmas card was very like my colleagues: Particularly the Ouisiti, proprement dit.<sup>1</sup>

*On 12 February 1950 Kenneth Clark<sup>2</sup> wrote to IB:*

Dear Isiah [*sic*],

I have been immensely impressed by the leading article on Schiller<sup>3</sup> – the most brilliant thing of its kind I have read, & far the best criticism of Schiller.

For some reason I have a fancy that you will know the name of the author. If so could you be very kind & put it on a post card.

Sorry to bother you

Yours,

KC

*IB's reply follows.*

<sup>1</sup> 'Marmoset, properly so called'.

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Mackenzie Clark ('K') (1903–83), later (1969) Baron Clark (life peer); art historian; Keeper, Dept of Fine Art, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, 1931–3, Director, National Gallery, 1934–45, MOI 1939–41, Slade Professor of Fine Art, Oxford, 1946–50 (and 1961–2).

<sup>3</sup> [Erich Heller], 'Friedrich Schiller: The Moralizer as Poet', TLS, 10 February 1950, 81–3.

TO KENNETH CLARK

n.d. [>12 February 1950; *card*]

New College

Dear K.

I haven't the least idea. I thought it very very good myself – the best sort of Ideengeschichte,<sup>4</sup> it begins to be clever & interesting & not flashy for the opening lines & then becomes better & better – who could it be – Eddie?<sup>5</sup> *not* Miss Butler;<sup>6</sup> not any Professor of German; Mr Willey?<sup>7</sup> not any professor of philosophy – if you do discover I'd love to know: I wish it cd have been me (I?) – I wish I thought I cd ever say things like this – almost the profoundest thing said was something about the transformation – drastic act – of spiritual & intuitive experience into *moral* currency & the iron curtain between sense data and Jenseits<sup>8</sup> – which prohibits symbolist clairvoyance as the effect of the great Kantian reforms: is it an obvious platitude that the establishing of an official barrier between the sayable & the unsayable, the 2 worlds: the Procrustean effects of this frontier: & the battle of the 2 wor[[]]ds is almost the most important phenomenon of our age? may be.

yrs

Isaiah B.

<sup>4</sup> 'History of ideas'.

<sup>5</sup> Probably Edward Charles ('Eddie') Sackville-West (1901–65), music critic and author; later (1962) 5th Baron Sackville.

<sup>6</sup> Eliza Marian ('Elsie') Butler (1885–1959), Schröder Professor of German, Cambridge, 1945–51, author of *The Tyranny of Greece Over Germany: A Study of the Influence Exercised by Greek Art and Poetry Over the Great German Writers of the Eighteenth, Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Cambridge, 1935).

<sup>7</sup> Basil Willey (1897–1978), King Edward VII Professor of English Literature, University of Cambridge, 1946–64; author of *The Seventeenth Century Background: Studies in the Thought of the Age in Relation to Poetry and Religion* (London, 1934) and *The Eighteenth Century Background: Studies on the Idea of Nature in the Thought of the Period* (London, 1940).

<sup>8</sup> 'The beyond'.

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HUMPHREY SUMNER

14 March 1950

New College

Dear Mr Warden,

When I returned in the spring of 1946 from my wartime post in Washington, you were good enough to ask me whether I had any thought of working in the field of Russian history, and I remember saying that my interest had indeed been turning in that direction from philosophical studies, and that I had intimated as much to my colleagues at New College, as early as 1944. As, however, the pressure of teaching was exceptionally heavy during the post-war influx of undergraduates, I felt obliged to put off consideration of any such change until the crisis was over. During the succeeding three years we spoke once or twice about a plan, to which I was increasingly attracted, whereby I should devote a greater part of my time to the study of certain selected aspects of nineteenth-century Russian history. In 1948 I accepted an invitation to go to Harvard University in 1949 to lecture on the social and intellectual antecedents of the Russian Revolution, and in the course of 1948–9 articles by me dealing with various aspects of this subject were published in the *Slavonic Review*, the *American Historical Review* and other periodicals, principally in the United States. The six months during which I lectured and held classes on this topic at Harvard (I had conducted a class on it in the previous year for the Modern Languages Faculty at Oxford) served to make it clear to me that a definite shift in my interest had occurred, and that although I continued to be much interested in modern philosophy (on which I went on writing and lecturing), I should prefer to undertake as my main task a specific study in the field of Russian history in the nineteenth century.

As I began to accumulate material for my lectures and classes on the history of radical movements in Russia prior to 1917, I realised how little systematic work, even in the form of isolated monographs, had been done in this field, either in Russia or beyond it. The Russian Revolution is probably the most important event of the twentieth century, yet the amount of serious work accomplished in any country to analyse its causes and examine its antecedents and roots in the past, even in the most general fashion, is remarkably

small. I had for many years taken a good deal of interest in the history of ideas in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and in particular acquired a certain degree of acquaintance with Marxist thought and practice in the course of the research made necessary by writing a volume on Karl Marx in the Home University Library, before the war. While looking for information on the influence of Marxism, by attraction and repulsion, on Russian thought and practice, I found that surprisingly little had been done even in the Soviet Union and in Soviet terms to describe, let alone account for, this phenomenon. It seems to me, therefore, that what needs writing is the history of the major developments, social, political and intellectual, which led to the outbreak of the Revolution of 1917. It appeared to me that in order not to go back too far into the past, the proper beginning of such a study should lie in the social and intellectual ferment of the 1830s and 1840s; and after studying the material of which there is far more in the great libraries of the United States than, e.g., in the British Museum or the Bodleian, I came to the conclusion that I should like in particular to attempt a history of Russian radical thought against a background, and indeed foreground, of the social, economic and political facts with which it is, perhaps, more closely bound up than in other countries.

My present plan is this: to devote the first volume of such a study to the life, doctrines and circumstances of the great critic Vissarion Belinsky, who is one of the central, and in some respects the most commanding, figure in the early period of the various movements which culminated in the Revolution. There is no work on his thought and influence in any non-Russian language, and indeed nothing authoritative in Russian since the standard life written in conditions of political control in the 1870s. The book I contemplate would be a full-length study embodying, so far as possible, everything of importance that later scholarship has made and is making known about the man, his environment, the circle of his friends, and the crucial effect which his views had upon Russian – and indirectly European – writing and thought. Further volumes of this study would deal with the conservatives, liberals and radicals of the 1840s, 1850s, 1850s and 1860s, the revolutionaries and their enemies of the 1870s, and the Marxists and Populists of the 1880s and 1890s, culminating in the Revolution of 1905. The last volume would, perhaps, deal with the lull before the final storm of 1917. I should like to make clear the fact that I do not propose to confine



myself to the history and analysis of ideas and movements, but to treat in considerable factual detail the concrete social, political and economic changes with which they are interwoven. Nevertheless my main emphasis would rest upon the development of social and political movements and doctrines – and the activities of the most important individuals concerned with them – rather than upon social and economic history as such.

At present I do not look beyond 1917 – indeed, even this programme seems to me ambitious enough. I should have no difficulty in finding a suitable publisher for the four or five full-scale volumes of such a study, since I have had offers from more than one firm prepared to undertake a long-term project of this kind.

It is clear to me that I cannot undertake such work if I continue to teach as full-time tutor at New College, with the requirement of devoting, apart from University lectures and classes, a minimum of fifteen hours a week to giving instruction in a subject unrelated to the topic of my research. It is for this reason that I venture to apply to my old College for a Research Fellowship which would make it possible for me to realise the scheme outlined above. For, without the degree of leisure and financial assistance with which a Fellowship of this type would provide me, I could scarcely hope to achieve more than small fragments of the complete design. On these grounds I beg to make a formal application for an appointment which would enable me to pursue the programme of research and publication in the field of Russian history (and the history of European ideas)\* outlined above.

Yours sincerely,  
Isaiah Berlin

\* See Appendix 2 (a).

#### APPENDIX

There are certain further considerations which I feel obliged to place before yourself and the College.

1. Should my proposal commend itself to the College, I should have to make some provision for obtaining access to Russian material not available in this country or elsewhere in Western Europe. Since the archives of even the Prague – let alone the Moscow and Leningrad – libraries are not likely to be accessible to Western scholars within the easily foreseeable future, they cannot

but turn to the very rich collections of the United States – contained principally in the Library of Congress in Washington, and also at Harvard, Yale and California. When I was at Harvard in 1949 I received an invitation, subsequently confirmed, to visit that university at regular intervals in order to lecture and give instruction on the history of Russian social movements in their relation to the West. This proposal attracted me because, apart from the stimulation afforded to any researcher by the opportunity of discussing the subject with adequately qualified students and colleagues (of whom there are many more in the United States than in England), this arrangement could also provide me with the dollar funds which would at once enable me to work in United States libraries, and adequately supplement the emolument provided by a Research Fellowship – should the College be disposed to grant one – which, I assume, would be substantially smaller than the stipend I at present receive from New College. I should not wish to go to Harvard every year, but perhaps once in two, and occasionally once in three, years. This appears to me to be an almost essential condition for the success of the plan I have outlined, since the Russian collections in the British Museum and the Bibliothèque Nationale, and that in Helsinki, suffer, particularly since the war, from gaps in essential material, and I see no other reliable possibility of obtaining adequate dollar funds. An arrangement with Harvard would also enable me to collaborate in a large project for the translation of Russian texts and documents of the nineteenth century in which, when I was there in 1949, it seemed possible for me to participate with eminent scholars in the field of Russian studies. If this part of my plan is approved I should normally expect to spend a minimum of four and a maximum of five terms out of every six in Oxford; at times I might miss a Harvard year altogether and remain in Oxford for seven or eight terms out of nine.

2. I must also make clear that I have certain commitments to publishers which I should wish to fit in with the general scheme outlined above. I have undertaken to write:

(a) a volume in the Oxford History of Europe (to be published by the Oxford University Press) to be entitled *The History of Ideas in Europe 1789–1870*. The editors of this series have invited me to carry the account to the present day, but if my main project is approved by the College, I should not wish to do this, as it would delay the Russian volumes too greatly.

(*b*) a volume in a new (Penguin) series dealing with the doctrines of major European philosophers, to be devoted to Bishop Berkeley. This should not take long, perhaps the long vacation of 1952.

Of these (*a*) would blend quite happily with my main subject of study and indeed would complement it in, I hope, a fruitful manner; while (*b*) is in process of being written and would not seriously interfere with it.

If my general scheme is approved I should hope to complete the first volume of the Russian series, i.e. that dealing with Belinsky and his times (approx. 1830–48), by the summer of 1953; although it may take a little longer, depending upon the accessibility of Russian material, and the general physical conditions of work at Oxford. The basic outline of this book is contained in the notes which provided the substance of my Harvard lectures, but these will of course need amplification and a great deal of additional detailed research.

3. I should not like, if these proposals meet with approval, wholly to cease from teaching, and still less from lecturing, in the University. I should wish, if my application is accepted, to be permitted to continue to teach philosophy to four or five pupils in New College, as this is a subject in which I continue to feel interest – and thus to remain a Lecturer of New College; and also to lecture in the University on such subjects within my ken as may be considered useful by the Sub-Faculties to which I belong, as well as on my chosen field in Russian history. For I should wish to continue to participate as fully as is compatible with my main task of research in the general life of the University.

Isaiah Berlin

TO DIANA COOPER

1 June 1950

New College

Dearest Diana,

Better to be understood than more intimate and not read; consequently, I dictate. Poor Jimmy Smith, with whom I spent a weekend together with John Julius at Beccles, who complained that he did not enjoy himself at all because he did not understand a word that had been said although God knew all the other guests said enough and in very loud voices. The other guests were the Hoffes,

John Foster, Joe Alsop and Juliet Duff and me, so that you can imagine that in fact there was a good deal of talk and appalling and enjoyable singing till 3 a.m. (John Julius can report to you).

To resume: The Elba plans look very gloomy. The villa offered us by Dottore Ferretti is at once primitive and expensive, so all hope now is concentrated on the village of Lerici. I did have a wild glimpse of hope scotched by a charming postcard from your friend Miss Jenny Nicholson, who said she would be occupying her own villa in September and offering to find other accommodation, then when I explained the poverty, more of my friends than of myself (as dons go I am not rich, but not poor), another postcard extinguished our hopes by saying how expensive Portofino was. So what we hope for is that dear Miss Willis, an ex-headmistress with a 1910 attitude to Italians, will find us something as she promises to do near the Hotel Shelley e les Palmes, in the village off which the poet was drowned. None of us four dons is at all like Shelley; Mr. Dick even less than I, if you see what I mean. If Lerici fails I don't know what happens, Corsica I expect or Brighton. Connect, connect, says Mr E. M. Forster in all his novels; I shall do my best to connect with you in September if you are anywhere in Italy. The prospect looks grey at the moment.

Israel was splendid. The President is not enormously affable about his government, nor they about him; Mrs President snubs them fairly openly, and is a little like an Anglo-Indian lady who prefers to have as little to do with the natives as possible (for goodness's sake do not repeat this or I shall get into grave trouble all round), but the political pattern is very like what would have happened in Russia if Lenin had not arrived upon the scene, and upset things; the same naive and touching political theorising; enormous inefficiency; everybody very nice to everybody; no corruption at all, but nothing done unless you know the Minister personally and there are 75,000 persons who know not only the Minister but his aunts in Odessa, and sister-in-law in Cleveland, Ohio etc.; laws somewhat lax, nobody punished much as it is assumed that nobody means any harm, and all their records in the war have been very good, and you cannot punish people for killing other people with their cars as after all they are decent good people, hurrying to their wives so as to be in time for the Sabbath evening meal, and it was a genuine accident which might have happened to anybody. I found it charming, and particularly the domestic

atmosphere in which anybody may be offered any job, and things can only be done not by graft but by persuasion, as for example in Oxford; a system I understand.

There is one business item: there is a man there called George Weidenfeld who edits *Contact* with Nigel Nicolson etc., who is for the moment a very amiable and competent Viennese factotum of the President (Raimund and Liz are friends of his), who is engaged in promoting a Festival in 1951, I imagine for a lesser and at [a] different season from our big British one. The official reason for it is some grave scientific conference about 'The Battle with the Desert', to which various rural scientists, agronomes, agrosophers, agrologists etc., hydrologists, hydrologers and hydronomes etc, will be invited. But to deck this out a little there is to be a series of concerts by the Palestine Orchestra, Koussevitsky, performances of plays by their two famous theatres etc., and they wish to make a success of that particularly. The secretary of it is the duly virtuous Edwin Samuel, son of Herb, who is a naive good man, although Weizmann thinks he is a sinister money-grubber. Be his character what it may, he is an honourable, and so lends some respectability to his partner Mr Evzerov, who I think made a fortune by selling charms and talismans in Siberia enabling ladies to have children of whatever sex they desired. Given that half these women would have children anyhow, or even a third, and that half of these children also will be male or female, if you sell your talisman for £1 and it costs less than 5/- to make, you cannot fail to make a profit. Thus enriched he came to the Holy Land and set up as a promoter and is very successful. He is to sell debentures in the Festival. Edwin Samuel thought that the purpose of it ought to be explained to the investors before they bought the debentures; 'No', said Mr. Evzerov, 'I do not do so. First to sell, then to explain. That is my principle.' But this is an aside. The point is, will you like to help them promote their cultural activities and be an adviser, for I presume some rich reward, and in any case go and have a look at the field of operations when the weather is not too hot in June or September or October, or even be interviewed in Paris by the very personable, agreeably ironical Weidenfeld? I think you will probably find it genuinely entertaining, and they are all very sweet and worth helping. Anyhow if you would even consent to discuss it, I could telephone and tell them. They sent me a cable weeks ago asking if I would approach you, but I have been regrettably remiss about this.

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Staying with the President was living in a land-locked lamasery with much worship but no contact. He was invited to change his name as all his Ministers have done to some heroic Biblical Ben David, or Ben Saul, or Ben Jephtha, but declined on the ground that he had something to lose by this, which did not make him more popular. He asked his Foreign Minister what being the Prime Minister [sc. President] entailed and was told it was a kind of symbol; he asked how one symbolised, and was told that if he did not like the job they could always abolish the post. How monstrous they are, how ungrateful. They are all very small-scale but very appealing and full of childish imagination. The En Geb music festival in a large unpainted hut on the shores of the Sea of Galilee in which the pianist is expected to play to the bourgeoisie from nine to eleven p.m. and the colony with explanations of when Chopin was born etc. from 11 to 3 a.m. is just what I like. I wish I could see you, and tell you how odd and un-twentieth century and comical and touching all this is.

I must stop, I must stop, and go and mind your son and be his moral tutor.

Yours ever,  
Isaiah.

◁Next time I write in MS: this is too orderly & frigid.▷

TO LEONARD SCHAPIRO

12 August 1950 [*manuscript*]

Grand Hotel, Vevey, Vaud, Suisse.

Dear Leonard,

[...] I must begin by sincerely and warmly congratulating you on having achieved a genuine addition to knowledge; & one which I have not seen remotely recorded anywhere else, since all other meticulous & scholarly work on 1917 is done either from a self justifying (Miliukovo-Kerensian) point of view, or, at best, from Trotskyist or Leninist anti-Stalin zeal. Whereas you are most scrupulously impartial – if you show any ‘tendency’ at all it is to be too indulgent to Trotsky whose consistency & brilliance obviously stand out in contrast to the zig zags, muddle & second rateness of all the others on the one hand, & the almost cynical utilitarianism –

dare one say it opportunism – of Ilyich himself. How differently Carr's coming oeuvre will read! & what a nuisance it will be to look at the reviews which praise him for exact & unbending scholarship. But to work! Only once more I shd like to say what a solid & valuable piece of detailed research this is, & how good the bibliography: I fear you might easily have got a doctorate in Oxford for the 4 chaps & 4 more in Harvard, Princeton, Yale, Columbia or each of these in turn. But soyons sérieux. I remember your caveat about small criticisms being timely now, & larger suggestions in November. I cd not sort them out. Here is the farrago.

1. Are you meditating a preface? it cd be v. useful for the reader if you tied your chapters, each of which can stand on its feet as a treatise on its particular topic, by saying how these streams fed opportunism in the post-1918 years. I shd advocate – but this is only a random suggestion that you begin by giving a v. rapid coup d'oeil of a crucial moment – sometime in the twenties – say during the chute of Trotsky or before the fatal Party Conference at which Stalin so coolly read out Lenin's will, or some such moment, classified the oppositional elements, & then promised to take the reader back to the mountain streams of 1917 which fed these rivers. Otherwise there is not enough connection between the chapters, too few links, each story starts *ab ovo*. And do you intend to print the footnotes & references at the *back* or at the foot of the page? I am a passionate advocate of the latter: looking up is a nuisance, & little numbers break up the print anyway: or else no numbers at all, & an appendix with reference to *pages*, but not to *lines*, which prop up the text: a kind of Quellen Kapital. This is what I mean by mingling trivialities with serious points.

2. Perhaps this is too much outside the scope of what, after all, is a specialist monograph, but wd not chap I profit by a kind of map of where everybody was in 1917: or at least where they began by being: you let quite a lot of this emerge in the text, but it wd be admirable, & no one has done, to have at least the left wing parties – from Kerensky leftwards – arranged in some sort of pattern: say by analysing the tendencies in the Central Soviet: Trudovius[?], S.Rs of the Right, of the Centre, of the Left; S.D.s who were on speaking terms with the Kadets, & S.D.s who were not; benevolent Fabians of the Prokopovich–Karpovich–right wing Bundist (Leshchinsky) sort; Revolutionary icons like Kropotkin, Veraigner, Breshkovskaya, etc. Plekhanov & Zaslulich; silly pacific SRs like

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Avksentiev & Zenzinov, & terrifying ones like Savinkov & Rutenberg; etc. etc. Is this too impressionistic for your rightly more precise technique? it will never be done except by learned & earnest vulgarians like Wolfe who is a typical East side ex-communist & not intelligent, or fastidious enough, nor as privy to the atmosphere as even you or I [...]

[*Here a long list of specific points follows.*]

As you see I've nothing to quarrel with in your story: but only want occasional amplification or qualification. It seems to me admirable, as I said: but I must now add that I know little about this period: & have learnt most of it from you. I hope you can read my writing & that this is all not too chaotic. [...] I saw Prokopovich & Kuskova yesterday. Most, most moving. And the stories about Vera Figner – the horror even now at her extremism – wonderful.

yrs,  
Shaya

TO EDWARD WEEKS<sup>9</sup>

15 October 1951 [*manuscript postcard*]

Harvard

This is just to say that I am hiding from you, having in the meanwhile grown serious, withdrawn & unreadable: so might Odysseus have informed Circe, Calypso etc. that he had lost all taste for travel and was in their vicinity again purely in the interests of the Ithacan olive trade.

yrs  
Isaiah Berlin

<sup>9</sup> Edward Augustus ("Ted") Weeks (1898–1989), editor, *Atlantic Monthly*, 1938–66; frequent solicitor of contributions from IB, but successful only twice, with pieces on Churchill and Roosevelt, published in 1949 and 1955 respectively.



TO JOHN SPARROW<sup>10</sup>

2 May 1952

All Souls

Dear Mr Warden,

I understand that I am required to present a biennial report of the research work done by me in terms of the undertaking which I gave when appointed to the Research Fellowship which I hold at present, and this I should like to submit. I was appointed in the summer of 1950 and since that date have accumulated material for both sides of the work upon which I am engaged:

- (a) The Antecedents of the Russian Revolution;
- (b) The History of European Thought from 1789 to 1870.

In connection with the first of these, I have gathered material for and drafted some three chapters of the first volume which is to deal with the Russian Radicals, in particular Belinsky during the '30s and '40s of the last century. I have prepared a first draft of these chapters and have lectured on the subject at Harvard during the last four months of 1951 (in accordance with the arrangements explicitly proposed in my scheme of work submitted in 1950 to Warden Sumner), and I have accumulated notes for the rest of the first volume, which, of course, will need much expanding and reinforcing, before the first draft of the entire volume is prepared.

With regard to the second field of study, I have prepared a complete first draft of a book on political ideas between 1760 and 1830, some of which I delivered in the form of lectures, in the first months of this year, at Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania (an institution kind enough to invite me to deliver lectures on the Mary Flexner Foundation in 1952). I propose to occupy myself for the rest of this year with the preparation of this material, which the Oxford University Press is to publish as a book, it is to be hoped some time next year. The title of it has not been finally decided upon, but it is, in effect, to deal with some among the most influential schools of political thought during the Romantic Age, three of which – the views of the German Romantic philosophers,

<sup>10</sup> A fair copy of this letter was prepared by All Souls and headed 'College Report Made to Warden and Research Fellowships Committee in accordance with By-Law IV, Clause 8'.

SUPPLEMENTARY LETTERS 1946–1960

of St Simon, and of De Maistre and Görres – have not, as far as I know, been adequately dealt with by any English writer (or in the English language), at any rate during this century. This book will cover part of the same field as, and is in the nature of a preliminary study for, the larger work on this subject which I have promised to the Oxford Press as part of their European series, and will be published under the joint auspices of the Oxford Press and the Mary Flexner Foundation.

Besides the work on the Russian Radicals and on the political ideas of the West, I have published a long essay in *Oxford Slavonic Papers* on the sources of Tolstoy's view of history in Russian and Western European thought, which bears directly upon the Westerner–Slavophil controversy in Russia in the 2nd and 3rd quarters of the last century. This essay has stimulated some discussion among Russian historians and I have devoted some time to scholarly controversies connected with this topic.

I have also written, but not published, a separate study of the views of de Maistre, which I may use as an introduction to a selection of his works which I may perhaps edit for Messrs Blackwell in their well known series of political classics, some time next year; I have also published critical notices of various works in the *Slavonic Review*, the *Journal of Slavonic Studies* etc., and contributed articles on Russian topics in Italy and the United States, notably on foreign affairs. In addition to this I have also performed my full functions as University Lecturer in this university, by lecturing and holding classes (one with Professor G. D. H. Cole), and had a small number of pupils in New College according to the original plan submitted by me to the College.

Yours sincerely,  
Isaiah Berlin

TO EDWARD WEEKS

3 October 1952

All Souls College

Dear Ted,

I have had a troubled summer, partly because of the illness of my father, partly because of the chaotic nature of my life, which means that when I do have to get something done it is always a crisis and

a mad scramble, and so I have not been to Italy or indeed anywhere but Aix-en-Provence, where the music was astonishingly inferior, no doubt due to the French desire for economy, which makes them import a grotesque-looking conductor from Baden-Baden, who looks like a caricature schoolmaster whose face first registers a hideous sternness, then sentimental rapture, while the orchestra played in a well-trained, mechanical, absolutely dead fashion after months of rehearsal, with supreme disregard both for the conductor and the music, in a state of continuous terror about false notes etc. On the stage two elderly Wagnerian sopranos, still young but already obsolete, repressing their hideous great voices to sing in *Don Giovanni*.

I originally said I might write about this in the *Manchester Guardian* or broadcast in the BBC, but in view of this thought it kinder to say nothing and was duly thanked for this by the cultural attaché of the French Embassy, who was justifiably terrified of reactions. Consequently I have nothing to write about music, except the two Toscanini concerts which I attended, plus rehearsals, and about which I have feelings almost too deep for words. I could later in the year if that suited you write a kind of chronicle of books and artistic events in Europe generally – largely anything that comes into my head – you could print it or not, and in any case anonymously. Next year I really shall tour Europe, listen to music in April and in the summer, and request you to defray my not very great expenses as arranged. About Toscanini and his reception in London I really could perhaps say something.

Now, there is quite a different matter which I feel ought to be of interest to you. One of my colleagues here, Hugh Trevor-Roper of Christ Church, whom you will know as the author of *The Last Days of Hitler*, and may have met besides, and who is certainly the sharpest detective of facts to do with the Nazis and virtually infallible as a scrupulous (and mordant) student of the most detailed aspects of contemporary history, has just been in to see me to say that he is anxious to publish about two thousand words on a man called Kersten. I know very little about the last days of Hitler, when this man and the late Count Bernadotte were involved in the abortive peace negotiations. Trevor-Roper's view is that Kersten is a good man and Bernadotte (although posthumously canonised after being murdered by Jewish zealot in Palestine) is in fact an impostor.

He says he can demonstrate this in possibly about two thousand words, and that the only groups of people who know about him are (1) the Swedes, who are inhibited by his Royal blood; (2) the Jews, who are inhibited by the fact that they killed him; (3) Himmler's entourage, who are inhibited by the fact that they do not wish to proclaim their Himmler connections; (4) in addition to this there are the Dutch, who have had a report about all this prepared for some special commission but do not wish to publish their finding because they do not want trouble with Sweden. They are said to be recommending Kersten for the Nobel Peace Prize, which according to Trevor-Roper is incompatible with approval of Bernadotte. Kersten's memoirs, published in English in the United States, apparently have little relation to anything he may have written, as he speaks no English, and the original (again according to Trevor-Roper, if I understand him alright) have not been published.

Now I do not of course know anything about any of these facts, and am not myself desperately interested, but Trevor-Roper is a scrupulous researcher and a brilliant writer – he wishes to publish his story quickly in order to help the Dutch in their support of Kersten, and he is aware that this may give pain to Bernadotte's relations, particularly to his wife, who is, as you probably know, an American heiress. On the other hand the story will certainly be at once a serious piece of work and mildly sensational in its implications, and inevitably involve you in some controversy, which I imagine on a historical question treated by a recognised authority, as Trevor-Roper certainly is, you would not mind too much.

If you are interested would you cable or write by air mail to H. Trevor-Roper, Christ Church, Oxford? He is a very competent businessman and his text is unlikely to be longer or shorter or earlier or later than he promises. If you do not want it, he will probably send it to *Harpers*, which has expressed a desire to publish his work in general, though it may not want to cast a shadow on the memory of Bernadotte. I feel quite sure that Trevor-Roper is in fact right, and that Bernadotte was in certain respects deeply phoney, though I have no evidence of this, and it does not of course excuse his brutal and gratuitous murder. I should think that in England Trevor-Roper would like his piece published by the *Daily Telegraph* or the *Manchester Guardian*. The *New Statesman* would print it automatically, but it would be discounted as a piece of left-wing or anti-German or anti-something propagandist, although Trevor-Roper himself is a staunch

old-fashioned reactionary Whig, or at least likes to think of himself as such.

I am very glad you are doing these things for Ed Prichard – I wish you would send me a copy of the *Atlantic* now and then, as it is not otherwise available here. I did borrow the last issue and read Holmes's letters with great interest – I was fascinated in the wrong kind of way, but fascinated nevertheless. I thought Laski's own letters were the sincere, lively, embarrassingly bogus and vulgar things you would expect – at least I would. You may have thought more highly of him than I, and Holmes's slightly ironical attitude towards Laski's gush, plus the desire not to offend and to treat him as the frivolous, amusing, lively, affectionate, ultimately trivial man that he was also fascinated me. However, not a word of this to Felix, who knows what I felt about Laski, but does not like to be reminded of it.

I hope the piece on Toscanini does him justice. I look upon him as literally the greatest man in the world, and nothing but undiluted veneration and self-prostration is enough. The man who could write and write about him, and tells the story better than anyone I know is the musical manager of NBC, Samuel Chotzinoff; he has just been in London with Toscanini and I have had a really absorbing time listening (for once) without interrupting to his stories. He tells them with great humour. I saw John Russell for a moment; I hope your ears were burning.

yrs ever

Isaiah (Berlin)

TO EDWARD WEEKS

23 December 1952

All Souls College,

Dear Ted,

Thank you very much for your letter. I am in the throes of writing, or thinking about, my piece for you now – it ought to reach you some time in January. Roland is very funny about the seven plumbers and a banker.

Let me send you two Churchill stories for New Year.

1) While travelling to Strasbourg by the night ferry from London over the Channel. A terrific bump on the ferry. Frantic ringing of

bells from Mr Churchill's compartment. Steward enters to find a broken whisky bottle.

Mr Churchill: 'As you see, the bottle broke. We need more liquid nourishment. Could you bring us two more bottles?'

Steward says 'Yes', and begins hurrying out. Mr Churchill stops him. 'Was that a serious accident? Are very many dead?'

The story might be entitled 'First things first', and is not for reproduction.

The second story is about Reynaud, who talked to Churchill for three-quarters of an hour, with great earnestness, about the past, present and future of France. At the end of it Mr Churchill said: '*Obviouslyment*' – interesting word.

Thank you very much for your suggestion about the solid nourishment for me. If your thoughts did turn to that direction I do beg you not to send it to me in London now but to Oxford towards the end of January, where I can share it with one or two equally hungry mouths (not that any of us are remotely that, but I am on the move at the moment and I can't bear solitary feasts).

God bless you, Merry Christmas, etc. I shall not sign this for earlier delivery.

Yours ever,

Isaiah Berlin p.p.

TO JOHN SPARROW

25 December [1952; *manuscript*]

49 Hollycroft Avenue

My dear Warden,

This is a formal little note to you to say that after a highly complex correspondence with Harvard & Princeton I shall have written to them to say that I am ready to visit Harvard in 1953 (autumn) & Princeton Institute for Advanced Study (the Woodwardum) in the spring of 1954 & early summer; but that all this [is] provisional as I must first obtain your permission (I do not need the University's). My desire to go back so soon – after four terms of Oxford – is non-existent: in fact it is a bore & a nuisance (why wd I not have used those terms to Warden Sumner? to Henderson, yes.) but the Russian books are there: so are the chaps to talk to: I shd

like Belinsky & his circle (the title seems foolishly esoteric & Beachcomberish) to be ready by say 1955 at the latest: sooner or later I'd have to go to Harvard & the Lib[rary] of Congress & New York Pub[lic] Lib[rary] to look at the stuff, which has been damaged by bombs in the B.M.: better earlier than later. The thing is that I go to U.S.A. regularly to supplement my £750·0·0 p.a. & the practice is not utterly remote from this: God knows I *hate* being away; I love living in All Souls; I hate any uprooting; & do this, for once, purely in the interests of “getting on with my work” to use the by now sacred formula of the dear President of Corpus in re Dummett. But if you see objections wd you be so very kind to let me know soon: for by Jan 15 or so Harvard, at least, (Princeton can wait) ought to know: And six–seven months seems to me the minimum for looking at all the relevant books. Then not return to the U.S. for 3–4 years at least, if then or ever.

yrs respectfully.

Isaiah.

PS What are the real reasons for going to America in September? as opposed to the reasons?

1) Not money. I know that one of our colleagues will not believe this. But it means as little to me as to – as to yourself. And anyway I spend it all there, almost. And I disliked my last visit to those excellent people more than I enjoyed it.

2) What then? Answer: the connection. If one does Russian history in any form it is the only place where there are facilities – books, catalogues, persons. And I don't want to have to cadge dollars from Rockefeller or go on lecture tours like dear old ALR. My Harvard liaison is a reasonably honest way of turning an honest dollar. There is a kind of gentleman's agreement (Burdon Muller is very sharp on how much more binding that is than a contract) about irregular visits between me & Harvard; if, because I *loathe* the thought of going, I break it, I shall (a) feel awful (b) be cut off from my 'stuff'. (I hope you have *plenty* of *time* & don't mind all this chat. It is a very exaggerated & misapplied method of carrying on our “complete candour” traditions). So I ought to go. What other thoughts occur to me? I can't deny that I wondered if about 1954 there wd not be a vacancy for a Chair for which I shd apply. That wd confine my movements across the ocean; but also, to some degree remove the reason for them; I mean if I got it: & I would not

want to be in Oxford during the season of election. My last absence was a great success, I thought. Is it improper for me to say all this? yes, surely, in a way. And talking of Chairs: have you any influence with Stuart Newton Hampshire? He may be applying for the Cambridge Chair in Morals: & they might give it to him: I would if I were they: & it really will make him unhappy & disimprove (as Ian Little might write) his work: will he listen to you or me on this? but only to Hart? & is not Hart just as goosey? & what about our poor bruised, concussed, unhorsed old Knight? But I am on dangerous ground. And have you had a dreadfully embarrassed Xmas card from Quinton? – But I stop

IB

TO JOHN PLAMENATZ

Boxing Day [1952; *transcript of missing (MS?) original*]

49 Hollycroft Avenue, London NW3

Dear Plamenatz,

I have read about 50 pp. of your book on Marx etc., and with deep interest. I quarrel with something literally almost on every page: your generalisations are much bolder and more dogmatic than Popper's – your attacks sometimes, however valid, like Joseph's: like a professional philosopher's: and don't allow for the de facto intelligibility of much that is stated in loose, obscure, and maddeningly bogus language: however I could supply you with details later. Of course I think this, like all you write, is worth publishing; in this case, like Tolstoy, even if one thinks your strictures too oversimplified, the questions you put are genuinely 'fundamental' and force one to rethink answers, half-nonsense usually – which one has swallowed a long time ago and repeats semi-mechanically. It is all wonderfully fresh, authentic, relevant, and Emperor's New Colthes'ish: But what I want to know is: what am I to do? Do you wish me to write you a letter which you could send on to Longman's, or what? I can either write you a general letter of 2–3 small pages like these, or a list of major points and reflections thereon (I am now determined to read it all, I think it reads so well and so spontaneously, without the usual Marxological patina) – please tell me.

IB



PS The Russian bits seem to me at once oversimple in part, and splendidly clear, and in parts genuinely devastating. Of course it ought to be published: I could make one or two suggestions about revisions here or there.

TO EDWARD WEEKS

25 February 1953

All Souls College

Dear Ted,

First let me thank you for your magnificent gift. It arrived intact and gave enormous pleasure not only to myself but to numerous avid friends. Thank you very much indeed.

And secondly a far – to me at least – less agreeable point. As you know, I have been preparing for you for some time a piece about the late Dr Weizmann. Since then I have seen his widow in London – she is very pathetic and melancholy – she is a genuinely distinguished but not very popular old lady who has never affected to love or admire the majority of her husband's followers, who naturally in their turn repay in something like kind. She is respected, but not loved, and having always pleaded what Trotsky used to call the magic of distance between her husband and his followers (and this did indeed save him from being turned into small change by them – he was very democratic and she protected him by snobbery), she is now paying for it by solitude and a sad life in a large house, unloved, unhonoured and unsung. I suppose she will devote the rest of her life in guarding and haunting his mausoleum. At any rate she does not want me to write the article. She feels that no short piece will be adequate, that more has to be known about him, that if a piece like that is written, it will serve as an excuse for not writing something larger – I can think of perfectly conclusive arguments against all these; nevertheless she really was adamant.

I am one of the feel people upon whom she looks as a friend (and indeed I am, so far as in me lies), and I do not wish to give her any pain or even a moment's uneasiness. Consequently I had in effect to promise not to write the piece. I am very sorry indeed about this – there is a lot I should like to say – and now I am afraid it will have to wait for another opportunity, for I do intend to write it

somehow, somewhen yet, when you shall certainly have the first refusal of it if we are both alive at the time. I feel great guilt about it, nevertheless, although it is really not my fault. I do not think that it is worth destroying an old friendship, particularly when one of the friends is really rather pathetic and isolated – for the sake of presenting the world with yet another vignette. I am sure you will understand – I feel remorse and guilt notwithstanding. But I promise I shall write something for you in the course of this year – less than that I cannot do, try to do something I mean. I shall go to Italy in the spring and that will surely make some sort of impact and cause me to be indignant about something, or enthusiastic about something else. I may go to one of the musical festivals in the summer. I shall produce something, I shall honestly try.

How have you been doing with the Trevor-Roper bombshell? He is very gleeful about it here and keeps on coming into my room with new angry communiqués from Sweden or Washington or the London Legation. He is a terrific sleuth and likes blowing up established reputations. In Bernadotte's case I feel that he must be right. He was a very smooth, blown-up, bogus character.

I have been invited to attend a conference by the Ford Foundation together with T. S. Eliot, Arnold Toynbee, Karl Barth, Karl Jaspers, Monsignor de Lubac, C. S. Lewis and R. H. Tawney, not to speak of Heisenberg and some other pious figure. What can I possibly be doing in that *galère*? I cannot help feeling that it would merely be compromising to be associated with a group of out-and-out reactionary figures of this sort. Only Tawney has some degree of intellectual and social conscience amongst them all. If there is anything more awful [than], or as awful as, the muddle-headed, cheap or weak or silly left, it is the pompous, complacent or else unhappy, persecution-ridden, dogmatic right. I admit that if I was invited to confer with Kingsley Martin, Michael Foot, Julian Huxley, the late Laski, J. B. S. Haldane etc., I should feel much the same. It is clear that there is no real place for me among the people who count in the modern world. Must I really attend?

Yours ever,  
Isaiah B.

TO HERBERT BUTTERFIELD

15 May 1953 [*manuscript*]

All Souls

Dear Butterfield

I owe you several apologies, I really do. Firstly I said to you, as I expect & hope you do not remember, when I first met you last year, that I was going to submit my L.S.E. Auguste Comte Lecture for your comments before I delivered it – since I was going to say something in it about what I understood of your views on moral judgments made by historians. And so I would have done if I had had a text before I delivered my lecture. But although I collected a number of disjuncted fragments, I had, of course, no continuous narrative when I spoke on the 12<sup>th</sup> before a much too distinguished audience. So there was nothing to send to you; I did make some references to your views: & Oakeshott who presided over me, said to me afterwards that he thought I had not got them right, or at least quite right; & it may well be so, & I may have traduced you terribly. In that connection, besides pleading guilt, I shd like to make amends by sending you the MS. of my lecture before publication (it is still in a dreadful mess: & I half talked & half read & it all seemed to me a terrible fiasco, but it is over & that is, thank God, that) since I am most profoundly anxious not to attribute to you any view which you haven't stated in your essays which I genuinely much admire, even though I disagree with at least two doctrines which I think I culled from them. If I did misrepresent you in any degree (it was only a few sentences) I am sorry for it: but my words will not be remembered by anyone for long: so there is perhaps no need to worry overmuch about that.

That is one thing. The other is that I read in the *Manchester Guardian* of the 13<sup>th</sup>, to my great horror, that I had “opposed ... three classes of determinists – teliologists (sic) metaphysicians and scientists – plus Professor Butterfield who severally think that history proceeds along inevitable lines and that therefore no historical judgment is possible’. Whatever I may have done, I certainly did not either believe you to be, or describe you as a determinist of any kind: & the M.G. account is a travesty: & I am almost inclined (& at a word from you wd immediately set myself) to write & testify that you are not, or at least that I do not consider

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you, or ever described you as being, an adherent of historical determinism. I spoke only of your view of historical moralizing: & if I was wrong, it was not in the ways implied by the M.G. reporter.

Still, I am the accidental cause of a misrepresentation: I cannot feel altogether guiltless: so I grovel to you again. Will you forgive me? & allow me to send you a typescript of my lecture before publication? or wd you rather not be so imposed upon?

Yours sincerely  
Isaiah Berlin

GBR/0012/MS Butterfield/B/81

TO HERBERT BUTTERFIELD

~~18 August~~ <1<sup>st</sup> Sept.> 1953

Hollycroft Avenue

Dear Professor Butterfield,

I feel dreadfully guilty about not replying to your most interesting and delightful letter, which it was very good of you to write. I delayed doing so largely because I wanted to finish the text of the lecture which was the occasion for it, and send it to you to look at – by which time alone I thought I would know my own mind about the issues which you raised. But of course I don't, even now; I do enclose a copy of the lecture before publication, in case I have said something untrue and unfair about your views, in which case I should be grateful if you would tell me; and I shall try to amend it duly. But the lecture is dreadfully long, and I fear very verbose. Perhaps you would rather not read it: I should not, in your place, have either the time or inclination to do such a thing; it is no service to anyone one likes and respects, whose time is limited, to deposit a sudden burden of this kind on his shoulders. So if I don't hear from you, within say a week or so, to the effect that you think something imperatively demands to be changed, even without saying what it is (in this, your first warning signal), I shall send it to the LSE, wash my hands of it and, with a sinking feeling, depart for Harvard (I sail on 10 September). Please forgive me for putting upon you so.

I am most grateful to you also for sending me your last book,<sup>11</sup> which I read with interest and admiration. I wish my lecture had half

<sup>11</sup> *Christianity, Diplomacy and War* (London, 1953).

its elegance or its feeling or its enviable moderation of tone. I am not a good writer and am an over-vehement and careless talker, and you are neither. But regarding the main issues I think that you are right – that we do start from positions which are not in the end reconcilable at all. You believe that it is arrogant and ignorant and dangerous to condemn, denounce, and fight campaigns on moral issues. I, on the whole, do not. Not but what I did once write a piece<sup>12</sup> in which I tried to say that the trouble of our time was not too little faith – as everyone in America seemed to be thinking – but too much; that different people pursued different ideals and the same people pursued incompatible ideals; and that a civilised society was one which made all this less costly than fanatical and barbarous ones; that human ends, being ultimate, had to be tolerated as such; and other Mill-like things like that, for which I was duly trounced anonymously by E. H. Carr in *The Times Literary Supplement*, who coupled me with Russell and accused us both of a *surtout pas trop de zèle*<sup>13</sup> attitude and damned us as propagators of a ‘new scepticism’.

I don’t know about Russell, but certainly I believe in the insolubility of problems of basic moral principle – or rather that they are not real problems in the sense in which factual ones are (which do seem to be soluble in principle or else not problems at all) but represent attitudes to life and not enquiries with their special techniques. So, to that degree, I think I should be inclined to applaud you every time you urge understanding, an atmosphere in which disagreements need not lead to bigotry or efforts at mutual extermination; the danger of indulging in the application of general principles to specific situations – of vivisection of human beings because of some fixed idea of how things ought to be; and ad hoc solutions, each in its own time and place, none hoping for finality. And I feel pro-Niebuhr on this, and agree with him that democracy is best because it is the most flexible, the least tidy, and therefore makes the most allowances for incompleteness of solutions and inevitable human fallibility (in an empirical, unreligious sort of way I believe in original sin, if that is the strict contradictory of perfectibility).

But whereas you think, unless I mistake you profoundly, the influence of individuals upon affairs has been exaggerated; and that

<sup>12</sup> ‘Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century’ (1950), in L.

<sup>13</sup> See L4 236/5.

the more we know, the more uncontrollable factors we find at work in history, and that we don't know much, and make a double mistake, when we blame or denounce, of exaggerating the part played by individuals and of our knowledge of what that part must have been, I am continually impressed (*a*) by how much greater is the influence of individuals and moral ideas than is allowed for in impersonal, e.g. Marxist or theologically or economically inclined, histories, or, for that matter, those which stress biological or other non-rational factors – surely the twentieth century, with its Hitlers and Stalins, carries that lesson against the lesson of the nineteenth; and (*b*) by the fact that we cannot divorce knowledge of fact from moral judgement, that we judge as we judge on the basis of whatever is the best knowledge available, and that to abstain from judging morally distorts the picture; that we have, both as historians and as human beings, a duty to understand and explain as far as we can, but that to understand is not to excuse, but, as a Dean of Christ Church once observed in my hearing, 'When a situation looks black it is usually the case that upon closer inspection it turns out to be blacker still.'

This is perhaps too pessimistic; but I do not see the connection between explanation and justification which is usually thought to exist; when we meditate about our own motives we sometimes blame ourselves more sharply, not less; why then should we withhold this from others? Save on the grounds of charity, which is a virtue indeed, but not necessarily compatible with truth or justice, except on interpretation of the word – ultimately a religious one – which is precisely, I suppose, what I do not share with you. I do not believe that a view of the world which denies the right to moral judgement to all save Divine Omniscience is a truer view of the facts than one which does not; a different view certainly, and one whose depth, coherence and nobility I recognise; but not one which does justice to ordinary human experience, it seems to me; within that precarious calculation of right and wrong by which most men guide their lives something is lost and something gained in every view compared with every other. But the extent of such loss and gain, and the point at which awareness of it inclines us towards one view rather than another, seems to me part of the fundamental outlook of every individual, and not therefore capable of being judged in terms of some other outlook – an ultimate set of standards beyond which one cannot in principle go.

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People whose ultimate judgements differ too widely from our own we cannot communicate with profitably. What we call objective in an outlook is the fact that it belongs to a sufficient degree to a general system of attitudes within which there are publicly accepted criteria which make public intercommunication possible. And this system, in terms of which we do in fact argue with each other, seems to me to take a large number of moral standards and rules for granted – they may vary at different times and in different places, but so may everything else, and we are as we are, and the fact that we might be different, or that other people might be or will be, doesn't seem to me to alter this. To try and eliminate these varying moral standards when we are discussing human beings and their acts, to put them in a temporary bracket as it were, refuse to raise moral issues, seems to me impossible, i.e. to invite us to use ordinary words in such contracted senses as to make them lose a great part of their flavour and meaning. In the sciences we do this by consciously idealising and abstracting. In ordinary thought surely we cannot.

I apologise for carrying on at such length, and so, I fear, lamely and obscurely, but most of all do I apologise for inflicting my lecture upon you. It is a poor response to your letter and your book, I do beg you not to spend time either from your labours or your pleasures unless you think that I have been outrageously unjust – in that case I appeal to your understanding and charity, inconsistently, since I myself profess not to attach such value to these attributes as you so generously do.

Yours sincerely,  
Isaiah Berlin

⟨The text has come out so terribly long that it really *is* monstrous to expect you to read it at all – let alone in a hurry. If you do I shall, of course, be very very grateful: but I sail, alas, on Sept. 10, & shall have to send the text in before that. So if I hear nothing from you, I shall understand perfectly.⟩

*GBR/0012/MS Butterfield 122/6*

TO DIANA COOPER

[early January 1954, *manuscript*]

49 Hollycroft Avenue

Dearest Diana,

I really do write from a full – but I really mean an empty – heart: for my father died a fortnight ago – I was just in time from America to talk to him – & since my family is the closest knit I know, the effect is one I cannot face at all. I go through a large number of tasks mechanically but with a kind of frenzied attention to impersonal detail & this fills the days: & I hope that some substitute for life – some temporary scaffolding – some automatic routine will offer a corridor to you too until the new level is reached and a quite different life begins. I know, I know that words are useless and even a burden: & that the world is for a moment depopulated: also that quite aside from all your love & your devotion and the unique intimacy and bright colour & warmth and unheard of combination of public glory & valour with the most vivid, unexhausted, *personal* private qualities – what is most impossible to believe *is* that such a source of life – *such* love of life and appetite for all its riches, is no more. I won't go on – for fear that some untoward word will touch painfully by some accident & give you a twinge unintentionally – but I can't resist saying that never have I met anyone in whom public life killed so little – nothing – who retained what is best – a full & intense inner life, *capacity* for passionate reaction to what alone is real – what human beings do, feel, think – in fact an inner personality and a soul so quick, so undead, in the midst of public concerns; who *else* ever did? nobody in England: in every other case large bits were atrophied & offered up & destroyed: The Duff remained a full, unsundered human being, with full luxuriant control of his infinitely generous resources – and still played a really unforgettable part on the public stage, and stood up and fought and defended what he believed in and struck at what he thought hateful, when others either temporized or ran or took refuge in being private individuals & hid inside small cosy worlds which were duly shattered – the combination of public courage and splendour and the rich and passionate private life – that was to me, as it must have been to others, a great miracle, and proof of the nonsense talked by those who excuse the white sepulchres of public life on the ground that



they cannot *help* it – & sacrificed their private faces to some public goal. He really has lived out a wonderful life – for he so plainly not only adored you, but being married to you, and every instant, every nuance, everything – but the last days must have been *fearful* for you, & no doubt you acted with splendid nobility & efficiency in a great crisis – but at some uncounted expense. Where will you live now? in England I do hope: & a new life. But it must have been a unique relationship between husband & wife – with perfect complementarity – export – import – & I do see that awareness of the splendour of it and the immense sea of love, admiration, affection, wonder, delight by which you were surrounded is for the moment a substitute for *nothing*: I apologize for this incoherent letter: I am in an abyss myself: very unrecovered: & in some sense I am writing about myself: & the destruction of a world. But what I want to convey is that there is nothing to say but that all my affection, devotion, love, admiration, are at your indefinite disposal, at all times, and that you must not dream of answering this unless you feel an independent wish to write: and that here I shall be, till March, trying to rebuild *my* smaller world, if wanted. And that I hope I shall be: & once again, as so often, to send you every possible healing prayer & again my love.

Yours,  
Isaiah.

TO HERBERT BUTTERFIELD

10 April 1954 [*manuscript*]

All Souls

Dear Professor Butterfield

I am ashamed of having delayed in sending the answer to your letter (for 6 months!) I did, as you see from the date, write it in Harvard in October; then I potted with the MS. of the lecture; then my father died and I had to return to England suddenly in mid-course, & my life after that was led among accountants & lawyers & business men, & very odious I found it. I only returned to the infinitely more attractive (& difficult) world of theory quite recently, & re-read your letter, & eliminated from the MS (a) all references to *anyone's* thinking that men seek to do good but achieve evil & (b) all references to yourself in this connection – I do hope that such

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references as, out of genuine interest in & respect for your views and because of the stimulation which I derived from them, I could not & did not wish, to suppress, do not seem to you misleading. I altered as much as I could; you will not mind the result, I now feel sure. Thank you again for your letter: & I apologize once more for my unconscionable time in answering.

Yours sincerely  
Isaiah Berlin

GBR/0012/MS *Butterfield* 531/B/83

TO JOHN SPARROW

4 May 1954

All Souls

Dear Mr Warden,

I submit herewith my account of my work as Research Fellow of the College for 1952–3.

In the course of these two years I have published the following:

1. A small book entitled *The Hedgehog and The Fox* dealing with certain problems in the philosophy of history, with particular reference to the views of Tolstoy and de Maistre, founded upon an article which I had published in vol. 2 of *Oxford Slavonic Papers* somewhat earlier. This essay is concerned with both the subjects which I undertook to study – the history of Russian social and political ideas and general ideas in Western Europe in the 19th century.

2. I have also published as part of the proceedings of the Columbia University Conference on Russian Intellectual History, a somewhat lengthy treatise on the political views of Herzen and Bakunin which is to form part of a volume of essays on Russian topics which I hope to publish in the course of next year.

3. I am at the moment correcting the proofs of the Auguste Comte Memorial Lecture entitled ‘History as the Culprit’ which I delivered at the London School of Economics last year, which is to come out as a separate publication in, I hope, a few weeks’ time.

4. Furthermore I have in MS about three-quarters of a book dealing with the origins of modern political ideas in the romantic age – the substance of which was delivered at Bryn Mawr College in 1951 and broadcast by the BBC in the autumn and winter of 1952–

3. I hope to complete the MS in the course of this year and the book should be published by the Oxford University Press in 1955 (if I can finish it by August, possible earlier than that).

5. I have also completed in the first draft some eight chapters of my projected book on the intellectual origins of the Russian Revolution to be entitled (provisionally) “Belinsky and His Circle”.

6. I have published critical notices in *Mind*, the *American Review of Philosophy*, the *English Historical Review*, and the *Times Literary Supplement* (front page article) all dealing with the history of ideas.

I have fulfilled my duties as University Lecturer by giving public lectures and classes, and teaching the required number of pupils, as Lecturer of New College.

I lectured at Harvard in the autumn term of 1953 and should have proceeded to Princeton where the Institute for Advanced Studies had kindly invited me to stay for an indefinite period in 1954, and which I should have liked to do as there are Russian texts of interest to me in the United States unobtainable in Europe, but for the fact that my father’s death in December of 1953 necessitated my return to England. I have unfortunately had to give up a good deal of my time to settling his estate during the first months of this year, which has seriously interfered with my academic work. However, this is now virtually over, and I propose to spend this term in preparing my book on political ideas for the Press as well as my normal academic duties.

I have also examined in the B.Phil. examination in politics during 1952–3 and in the College Fellowship examination in 1952, and am to do so once again in the autumn of this year.

Yours sincerely,  
Isaiah Berlin

TO JOHN SPARROW

1 November 1954

All Souls

Dear Mr Warden,

In connection with your statement at the College Meeting about the International Congress of the Historical Sciences to be held in Rome on 4–11 September 1955, I have received an invitation from the Slavonic section of this Congress to attend these meetings and

perhaps to read a paper. I am not sure whether I shall do the latter, but in any case I intend to attend the Congress itself. I cannot quite tell what the expenses entailed by this will be: the registration fee is 3,000 lire, the hotel accommodation should cost about 16 or 17,000 lire, and the transport about £25 – in all about £40. I should not expect the College to defray the whole of this of course, but should be exceedingly grateful if some portion – whatever is thought appropriate by the College – could be granted to me. My purpose in going (apart from the problematical paper which I may or may not deliver) is the value of the intellectual stimulus and technical information obtainable from meeting with scholars in one's own subject, which is peculiarly useful to those working in my field, since information and bibliography in it is very unsystematic (owing to the irregular information received from the Iron Curtain countries), so that any opportunity of meeting with the dozen or so persons concerned with my subject is most eagerly to be embraced. I very much hope that the College will not think this an unreasonable request. If it should wish to be represented by me officially together with Ernest Jacob and anyone else who may go, I should of course feel honoured to accept this mandate.

Yours sincerely,  
Isaiah Berlin

*On 16 November 1954, soon after they had met and talked at a mutual friend's, Arthur Koestler wrote to IB with a request. In his *Promise and Fulfilment: Palestine 1917–1949* (London, 1949) he had broached the subject of the 'self-liquidation' of Jewry in the Diaspora; he remembered that IB had attacked his position in the *Jewish Chronicle*, and he wanted to use IB's piece as the starting-point for a new essay.<sup>14</sup> 'Your attack', he wrote, 'was the only one which could serve as a basis for serious discussion.' But he could not remember the title or date of IB's article, and wondered if he might borrow it.*

<sup>14</sup> 'Judah at the Crossroads' (1954), included in *The Trail of the Dinosaur and other essays* (London, 1955).

TO ARTHUR KOESTLER

18 November 1954

All Souls

Dear Arthur,

I remember our conversation about my articles well; and I wish I could send them to you, but I have no copy here. The whole thing was reprinted in something called *The Hebrew University Garland: A Silver Jubilee Symposium*,<sup>15</sup> of which I do possess one copy in London, and which I think you could obtain easily by telephoning to either the *Jewish Chronicle* or the Friends of the Hebrew University, who in some ways sponsored it. You will be amused to hear that in an attack upon my article written by a man called Himmelfarb in one of the latest copies of the New York Journal *Commentary*,<sup>16</sup> I am regarded as your direct disciple, though somewhat milder in my views and more cautious, but holding an identical position with you as against that of the writer. It may be worth your while to look at that. It was described to me in an apologetic letter by the editor as ‘impertinent and resentful’, which it is, perhaps. At any rate, I do not think it worthy of an answer, nor will you when you read it. My articles originally were called (and in the *Garland* too) ‘Jewish Slavery and Emancipation’. The only difference that I remember between the original articles printed in the *Jewish Chronicle* and the complete thing – which was originally written as a contribution to the Hebrew University publication – is that one or two references to T. S. Eliot were softened<sup>17</sup> by me as the result of protests by him that I had misunderstood his position, which to some degree I think that I had. [...]

Yours ever,  
Isaiah

<sup>15</sup> *Hebrew University Garland* (London, 1952).

<sup>16</sup> Milton Himmelfarb, ‘Unease in Zionism’, review of Zalman Shazar and Nathan Rotenstreich (eds), *Forum: For the Problems of Zionism, World Jewry and the State of Israel* No 1 (December 1953 [Jerusalem: Information Dept of the Jewish Agency]), in which IB’s article is included.

<sup>17</sup> In fact, removed. See L2 278/3.

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*Koestler got hold of the book and wrote to IB on 25 November describing his essay as 'truly admirable'. He added: 'I feel that the difference in our approaches is small.'*

TO ARTHUR KOESTLER

30 November 1954

All Souls

Dear Arthur,

Thank you for your note. I agree that our differences are not great and all that substantially I complain of both with regard to your views and those of Eliot is that you demand tidiness and order, whereas I am daily becoming more and more obscurantist and cling to Kant's proposition that 'Out of the crooked timber of humanity no straight thing was ever made.'<sup>18</sup> The obscurantist bit is that I shall go further and say 'and should not be made either'. However, we can talk about that when we meet. [...]

Yours ever

Isaiah

[...]

TO EDWARD WEEKS

30 November 1954

All Souls College,

Dear Ted,

In default of works of my own – you would not, would you, wish to reprint a eulogy, about 3,000 words, which I wrote on Dr Weizmann, finally, under hideous pressure from something called the *Jerusalem Post*? I assume not – I send you a peculiar work by my friend, and your friend, Hugh Trevor-Roper. He obviously thinks it is rather hot stuff, and so it is. Do you think it publishable? By yourself? I enjoyed reading it, and I share the fundamental sentiment, that is to say, I think Toynbee a very nice, kindly, sweet, decent man and would not like to attack him myself in public, because of the kindnesses which he has shown me in the past. On the other hand, I regard his last four volumes as really rather

<sup>18</sup> See L1 72/4.

abominable. The first four volumes I enjoyed reading – I haven't really read them seriously since. They were like the product of a clever Wykehamist, which indeed he is. Rather like those stimulating intellectual games that very civilised, very enjoyable young men can play, of the form 'How many Queens conquered huge territories before they were thirty-five years of age?', or something of that kind, which needs considerable knowledge and is very gay in its own way, but is not serious, all the same. The facts, as everybody knew, were thin, the history pretty general, the pattern odd, but the whole thing was as agreeable as a very high-grade and high-brow game of patience, played by an exceptionally skilled and imaginative but ultimately frivolous undergraduate, perhaps of genius.

The next four volumes were straight ultramontane propaganda, and were obviously moving uneasily towards some far-off, divine, but on the whole Roman Catholic, solution. The last volumes had something which the previous volumes have not had, which is a strong note of unction or sanctimoniousness, which seems to me detestable and which is, I suppose, the product of the heavy adulation of the poor man in the United States.

Here, as you know, nearly every reviewer condemned the last four volumes in pretty trenchant prose. The only person to praise [them] was Christopher Dawson. But not only Trevor-Roper but such mild learned men as G. F. Hudson (in the *Twentieth Century*) and Patrick Gardiner (in *Time and Tide*) have not even troubled to damn it with faint praise, or praise it with faint damns, but condemned it, in my opinion justifiably, outright. And the TLS contained a pretty devastating front page on him, written by, I think, an American, which was damaging in every one of its charitable lines. Toynbee doesn't mind, any more, I suppose, than Muhammad would have minded poor reviews of the Koran. Nor, I imagine, would St Luke have been much shaken if someone had pointed out that his Gospel had been found wanting by some highbrow Roman reviewers.

This is obviously how Toynbee now thinks of himself – the stuff is straight sermonising, and will die as the last heavy brick in the already dead temple of huge, cosmic, circular constructions, beginning, I suppose, with Hegel and the Romantics and proceeding along this dreary path through Comte, Houston Stewart, Chamberlain, Danilevsky, Spengler (which I myself find much more exhilarating than Toynbee: unscholarly view of facts but much

livelier ideas), Lewis Mumford etc. etc. So far from thinking Toynbee a pioneer, something new and exciting, I think he is the last, fortunately the last, link of a long and on the whole useless German metaphysical school.

However, these are only my private views. I forward Hugh's (slightly vulgar) piece, however, just in case you think it possible to publish it. Or is Toynbee regarded as too saintly a personality to have that kind of thing done to him? There is no point in publishing it in England, where nobody takes him seriously anyhow; not, certainly, since the Reith Lectures, which have been a dismal failure in general, I fear. But America and England are much more different now, intellectually, than they have been, say, during the war. I have just reviewed Stevenson's book for the *Sunday Times*,<sup>19</sup> and, goodness me, here are sentiments which no European statesman would begin to differ from, which are almost platitudes, from Adenauer to Aneurin Bevan, and which yet are regarded in America as bold neutralist or semi-neutralist stuff, for knowing which a man might be eased out of the State Department. But what are platitudes in Europe are paradoxes in America; and this is something new.

Anyway, I won't go on, and will simply wish you and your wife the best possible Christmas; and I have the best possible memories of seeing you both in England this summer.

Yours ever,  
Isaiah B.

PS I don't know why Hugh doesn't send you the piece himself. But he feels a certain shyness. It is curious and not curious in his particular character.

TO JOHN SPARROW

17 February 1955

[All Souls]

Dear Mr Warden,

I should like to apply for re-election for the quinquennium 1955–60 to a Research Fellowship of the same class – the 'Robertson' –

<sup>19</sup> 'Calling America to Greatness', review of Adlai Stevenson, *Call to Greatness*, *Sunday Times*, 5 December 1954, 6



as that to which I was elected in the summer of 1950. On that occasion I undertook to work in two fields: Russian social and intellectual history, and European political thought. In the first of these fields I have published two overlapping studies of the origins and contents of Tolstoy's view of history, and a study of the political opinions of Herzen and Bakunin; and have prepared for publication, in an English periodical (and later in book form), the substance of lectures I delivered for the Northcliffe Foundation at University College, London (they were subsequently, in part, broadcast by the BBC) dealing with origins of Russian radical thought in the '30s and '40s of the last century. The articles are due to appear in the course of this year; the book, if it is worth publishing, in 1956. In addition to this I have prepared for the press an English edition and translation of *From the Other Shore*, a book by A. I. Herzen; and have contributed notices and reviews to learned periodicals in England and the United States, as well as articles for two encyclopedias. I have also in draft nine chapters of my book on the critic Belinsky – the first volume of a projected history of the forerunners of the Russian Revolution; this last is to be ready in 1956–7. In my other field I have published an essay (Auguste Comte Memorial Lecture) on the inevitability of history under the auspices of the London School of Economics; and concluded the second draft of a book on Political Ideas in the Romantic Age, arising out of lectures delivered at Bryn Mawr College and later broadcast by the BBC. I meant to finish this book at the end of last year, but bad health intervened. I hope to have it in the hands of the Oxford Press by June of this year. I have also completed for publication an article on historical method (originally delivered as the first Elizabeth Morrow lecture at Smith College in the USA), and almost completed one on the Russian writer Prince V. Odoevsky.

Should the College re-elect me, I propose to devote myself during the next five years to the completion of the first, and work on, and I hope completion of, at least one other volume of my history of the Russian radicals and revolutionaries. As for the study of European political thought, I should propose to accumulate material for the volume on the history of European ideas from 1789 to 1848 for the Oxford History of Europe, commissioned from me by the Editors of this series, combined with general work in this and adjacent fields. I have carried out my duties as a University Lecturer, and Lecturer in Philosophy of New College, and I have examined

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in the College Fellowship Examinations thrice. I have also supervised a number of graduate theses, examined thrice in the BPhil, once in the Final Examination of Literae Humaniores (I am to examine in the PPE Final School this summer), and examined PhD theses in London and Cambridge. I have, in accordance with my original proposal to the College, twice been away to teach and lecture at Harvard and other American Universities, but propose, if re-elected, to do so at less frequent intervals and for shorter periods of time; and also to curtail, so far as practicable, the work of examining, but not necessarily my other College and University tasks.

Yours sincerely,  
Isaiah Berlin

TO EDWARD WEEKS

25 February 1955

All Souls College,

Dear Ted,

Thank you for your letter of 9 February. I wish I was there too and could have met Mr Stevenson, about whom I wrote a very civil piece in the *Sunday Times* not so long ago. I have I am afraid been unwell for weeks but am slightly better now. Almost Rowland-like in my concern for my own sad health. However, I rose from my bed of sickness and went to a party given by Mr Aldrich for the opening of his new embassy and there gazed upon our Queen from respectfully close quarters for the first time in my life. She is tiny and dances like a pretty dwarf – so I expect did Queen Victoria – with a severe slightly marble expression about her face. The Queen Mother was once heard to observe that what a Queen needs are two qualities – patience and anger. That is formidable enough. I think our Queen possesses them.

I wish I had something to send you – the piece on Dr Weizmann has appeared all over the place and must be too shop-soiled for you by now; I propose to publish four articles [based] on the BBC lectures on the origins of the Russian intelligentsia in Stephen Spender's *Encounter*, starting May or June – one on the milieu in

general, two on Belinsky, one on Herzen.<sup>20</sup> The last is the best and not very bad. I do not know if you want to use that perhaps. Probably not. If not, do do anything you like with ‘Historical Inevitability’: an extract might be better than by condensation. It had a mixed reception here, being attacked savagely by Mr Deutscher, who is a very uncompromising early Bolshevik, one of the few really fanatical Communists of our time; and from the Right by an unknown journalist in the *Spectator*, who found my thoughts insufficiently Christian. On the other hand I was compared to Acton by *Encounter*, and to Coleridge by *The Economist*, so I ought to feel on top of the world. So far as I know, nobody has taken any notice of it in the USA – I do not even know whether it is on sale there. Anchor Books did want to publish it in their periodical, but the London School of Economics forbade this and said that the Oxford University Press alone would peddle it. I propose to write an enormous piece of historic[al theory]<sup>21</sup> for Ham Armstrong, I fear too stiff for you, but if I go and visit some musical festivals this summer I shall fulfil my promise and send you a musical chronicle.

Much love to you both,

Yours ever,

Isaiah

PS I shall probably be in Chicago this November, but breathe not a word of this to anyone, I beg of you.

TO EDWARD WEEKS

25 April 1955

All Souls College

Dear Ted,

<sup>20</sup> ‘A Marvellous Decade: Literature and Social Criticism in Russia, 1838–48’, Northcliffe Lectures for 1954, published in *Encounter*: I ‘1838–48: The Birth of the Russian Intelligentsia’, 5 no. 6 (June 1955), 27–39; II ‘1838–48: German Romanticism in Petersburg and Moscow’, 5 no. 11 (November 1955), 21–9; III ‘Belinsky: Moraliser and Prophet’, *Encounter* 5 No 12 (December 1955), 22–43; IV ‘Herzen and the Grand Inquisitors’, *Encounter* 6 No 5 (May 1956), 20–3.

<sup>21</sup> Probably a reference to ‘The Sense of Reality’, now in SR.

Thank you very much for your letter of the 13th and for the chaser which arrived some weeks before and confused me somewhat. I have now looked at the piece and beg you despite your strictures to reproduce it as spoken. Much better, I do assure you, not to turn it into an article but to put in a footnote saying that this was delivered as a talk produced by the BBC to commemorate the tenth anniversary of Mr Roosevelt; that it is printed as delivered (which is almost true – true enough anyway), that it was addressed to a British and not to an American audience, but that nevertheless (if that is your opinion) it says things which are too easily forgotten in these days when people on both sides of the Atlantic seem to see nothing but the feet of clay. The advantage of saying all this (I mean in the footnote) is that the piece is then not a contrived article for American readers of the *Atlantic Monthly* seeking specifically to defend Mr Roosevelt against the latest charges, Yalta, etc., which makes it look like a piece of propaganda designed specially by a foreigner to assist the Democratic Party of the United States – which is highly improper and lends itself to obvious criticism and attack – but is an authentic document, reproduced unaltered, of what was being said in England out of all relation to current American politics.

For this purpose it is particularly valuable to reproduce all the peculiarities of the spoken work, including the perfectly sincere and in my view not at all exaggerated apology for not being an American expert, etc. etc., which is exactly what an Englishman speaking to the English (and not writing a commissioned article) would be liable to say. You can say what you like about me in your statement about who I am and why I should have been asked to deliver this particular talk by the BBC; but I think it would be best to let me show myself in my true colours and to reproduce the whole thing quite explicitly as something of interest precisely as a British document and not as a piece of Anglo-American hands-across-the-sea sermonising. On these grounds I do pray you to leave things intact and only embody the corrections which I made. Let the eye read this as a piece intended for the ear, and this will give it a peculiar flavour, which for once could be risked by the *Atlantic Monthly*. Believe me, it will be much better so.

I do not think there is any point in saying much about Yalta. I did put it in a piece – you will observe on the last page – which more or less covers it. As for the *Listener*, they are a little cross with me for not letting them print the piece, but, as I told you before, I have

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made my choice of Paris and the apple is yours. I have no objection to publishing it somewhere in England – perhaps in some obscure publication like the *Political Quarterly*, which is edited by my friend Leonard Woolf, whom I greatly admire and respect; it will not be seen by many people here, but never mind. It is of greater value, as I am sure you will agree, in America.

Do reward me as well as you can, for I am very poor this year; and do send me something here – on which I shall pay tax even under Mr Butler's admirable reduced rates – and about the residue we can haggle when I come to America in November. I shall enjoy writing begging letters when I come to America. In my letters to the *Listener* I have had to advance as my chief motive that of lucre and my own sad academic poverty. This they understand. Other reasons not.

God bless you,  
Yours ever,  
Isaiah B

TO EDWARD WEEKS

6 May 1955

Hotel Ruhl, Nice

Dear Ted.

Thank you for your cable. I hope the Roosevelt piece is not too naively eulogistic, but it reflects my feelings very truly. [...]

Yalta: I don't think much difference has been made: certainly not 300 words worth. I'll add a footnote if you wish & enclose it herewith.

[...] The sun is shining, I am sorry Winston is gone without the adequate tribute in the press which he needs so badly & I send you my love

yrs ever  
Isaiah

PS And *would* you say something about the article being literally the talk of the 12<sup>th</sup> April in London & not an article. It excuses the chattiness & the 'Britain-oriented' tone.

footnote:

This talk was prepared before the recent publication of the Yalta documents, but they seem to me to add nothing of significance to our knowledge of the President's character or motives. In these days, when his detractors speak as if all that remained visible are his feet of clay, it is perhaps worth reiterating that his faults and errors as a statesman were the consequences of his virtues. He trusted the Soviet leaders and credited them with good intentions because the motives of those who denounced Stalin appeared to him prejudiced. He was certainly mistaken; but so were a very great many persons, both in the US and in Britain, whose uncritical enthusiasm for the Soviet Union also sprang from their (partly correct but, alas, misleading) belief that it had been misrepresented to them by reactionaries and ex-Communists. Mr Roosevelt's breezy anti-imperialism, which occasionally took reckless forms, his belief that the Russians were at bottom good fellows, if a little rough, who could be cajoled into harmonious cooperation with the democratic world, and, above all, his conviction that personal contact between him and the head of the Soviet State could always settle everything – all these opinions came from too generous and simple a view of his own powers and of the human qualities of others. If he had lived, he might, as so often before, himself have provided the swiftest and most effective correctives of his own gigantic aberrations.

TO MARIETTA TREE

Thursday [1955; *manuscript*]

Mount Holyoke College, Mass.

Dearest Marietta,

How sweet & nice they all are here – friendly, kind, sincere intelligent and a balm to the wounded spirit – not that mine is specially wounded at the moment – still this beautiful courtesy & extreme moral genuineness are really delightful. So was New York – I do thank you & Ronnie: I am much too well treated – I always feel like explaining that really my true nature is being mistaken – I am given too much more than my due – someone will subtract from it somewhere on some terrible day of judgement so as to get the reckoning just – *that is* Judaeo-Protestant Angst, *if* you like. But I did

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enjoy it all very, very much: including Mr. Lieberman whom I thought very exhilarating, amusing, intelligent & agreeable: not really gay inside – New York neuroses – but all the brighter for that: when he smiles it is a little mirthless, like Diana Cooper: that fascinated me too, George Barker (I say with quite superfluous malice) quietly feels that all depends on him now – unlike Harry Hopkins who used to muse about how a saddle maker’s son from Iowa got so far – that pleased me too. Sam B. alone retains unlimited humanity & with all *his* neuroses, a sense of proportion & interest in & love of other people. Evie I thought did look ill. But I must not say such things – cp. the Pam–Clarissa row – I am silent. Now for Chicago: I have spoken twice here already, & am to speak twice more: they *are* very kind, very disarming & exhausting to the highest degree. It is a very fine day but I must think about Coexistence & the Nature of Political Judgement. I never did ring John Russell. My thoughts are wandering I must collect them briskly and give value for money. Thank you ever so much – I’ll look forward enormously to liberty after Dec. 15 – it seems “we” sail on Jan 4 & cannot wait longer.

Much love

Isaiah

P.S. I hope I left you enough money? I sent no fewer than 4 cables –

*On 6 February 1956 the American politician Paul H. Nitze wrote to IB with some questions about his Historical Inevitability, first declaring himself, with some tact, ‘full of admiration for the clarity of the ideas which emerge from a richer style than most Americans are used to’. He wanted to know whether the system-builders whom IB attacks were really determinists, or left a measure of room for human responsibility and freedom; he also asked about the scope of moral judgement in taking us beyond tradition and common sense. He enclosed a copy of a reply he had written to ‘some of the more extreme scientific determinists’ in the USA.*

TO PAUL H. NITZE

24 March 1956

Headington House

Dear Paul,

Thank you very much for your letter of 6 February, which I have read with [the] greatest possible interest. The questions which you ask are questions indeed. I have thought about them – not nearly long enough I fear: I think about things in leaps and bounds instead of, as one should, in a solid continuous way – and have a few reflections in my mind which I hasten to let you have. Let me deal with your points in order.

1. You say that the constructors of great systems do in fact leave some room for human responsibility and freedom. This is quite true. You also say that they are not complete determinists and that I too concede that human freedom is not limitless, and that consequently what one should ask [about] is the nature of the limits to freedom and therefore the extent of the area of responsibility. With all this I agree. My objection to the constructors of the systems is their methods: I do not understand the principles in accordance with which some of these, e.g. Spengler and Toynbee (whom I think inferior to Spengler), determine the frontiers between freedom and necessity. It seems to me there are two ways at least in which this can be done that are intelligible. The first, and the only one which seems to me valid for historians who regard history as an empirical study (as e.g. Toynbee, at least, claims to do), is to do it empirically: that is to say to adduce such empirical evidence as the sciences or common sense provide about what men can and what they cannot do. The questions how far e.g. geographical, ecological, physiological, psychological etc. factors produce this or that set of effects, and therefore condition human lives in this or that degree and in this or that fashion, seems plainly an empirical enquiry. And the findings of, let us say, criminologists or Freudians or agricultural economists with a historical flair seem to me to be thoroughly relevant and tend both to explain and to exonerate the behaviour both of masses and of individuals in various situations to the degree to which one regards their findings as valid.

With all this I have no quarrel. Indeed I tried to say something of the sort in one or two long footnotes in my lecture. Alternatively,



there are religious or metaphysical methods of drawing these frontiers whereby you claim some non-empirical means of detecting an unalterable plan in the universe, whether made by [a] personal deity or due to some metaphysical structure in the nature of things. I do not myself hold with this: but if this is spelt out openly, as, let us say, by Bossuet or by some other openly orthodox Christian historian who claims to be able to trace the finger of God in the unrolling of specific episodes in history, I can, still, I suppose, as an empirical historian, complain that such a revelation is not vouchsafed to me – or even object that some of the empirical facts which I do know contradict this and that the intuition is therefore – if it exists – at fault. If one's a priori intuition collides with empirical findings, then, if one is to cling to it, one must with Hegel say 'so much the worse for the facts'.

This heroic proceeding is not adopted by any decent historian, almost by definition. If on the other hand the a priori intuition is of a very general kind and simply declares that whatever occurs is necessitated, or is part of the divine plan, but that we do not know enough to determine what this plan, or any portion of it, is in any particular instance, then it is compatible with empirical history, with *all* empirical possibilities equally, and therefore sheds no light upon it, nor upon the frontiers between freedom and necessity. Whatever happens is foreordained; but we cannot tell what is foreordained, nor therefore what is necessary and to what degree man is free, or whether he is free at all. Since we are incurably ignorant of this we could behave as if we are free; this I take to be the position of Calvinism. The great system-builders take up neither of these positions: they claim that they can see a specific pattern in history, and then wobble about whether this is done on empirical evidence or on [the basis of] some kind of peculiar historical insight, which is theological, metaphysical, and yet not exactly a priori. They then proceed to talk in terms of vast impersonal forces, [and] claim that these are unalterable, but no one asks what their evidence for the working of these is – it is not the scrupulous accumulation of evidence of more modest claimants, say economic historians or psychologists, but merely, it seems to me, the arrangements of the facts in vague patterns.

When I say 'vague' I mean that for example Toynbee, with his *Challenge and Response*, treats almost any differences between a posterior state and an anterior state as either a response to a

challenge or a failure to respond to a challenge, whichever suits him best. It is impossible to extract from him any definite criterion of what constitutes a challenge, and what constitutes its response, so that one could by means of it check in terms of some set of facts not adduced by him whether indeed a challenge has been met by the appropriate response in accordance with the provided criteria of what is appropriate. I mean that the kinds of things he regards as typical responses to challenges in one situation are so different from the kinds of things which he regards as typical responses in others that there is not enough that is common between them to give any clear sense, or criterion, of the kind of situation describable as a challenge and the kind of situation describable as a response, save the mere fact that they are in fact different from each other, and that one is later than the other. I do not think this is an exaggeration. That is why his theory, when looked at closely, turns out [to be] nothing but a vast tautology – namely that things happen after other things in the way that they do, and that what happens is often very different from that what preceded it.

He then goes on to attribute historical situations to the working of these undefined and, it seems to me, indefinable factors. The morphology of cultures, which is Spengler's stock-in-trade, similarly imposes some kind of determined pattern upon the human beings caught in these cultures, but again it is impossible to tell from him how one determines what enters into a morphology and what doesn't, and to what degree human beings are free to alter it and to what extent these 'inexorable' forces cannot be opposed. Those who read these treatises not unnaturally begin to attribute human actions – or what they had previously been thought to be human actions – to the workings of these 'forces', which turn out upon examination to be nothing but semi-arbitrary arrangements of facts in aesthetically pleasing patterns, suddenly transformed into causally efficacious 'forces'. My quarrel therefore is not that the system-builders are determinists – determinism may indeed turn out to be true – but that they are charlatans; that is to say that the bricks out of which they build their edifices, whether the determined sections or the free, are bogus; that what they claim to be revelations are not instruments of knowledge; that neither the use of Spengler's nor of Toynbee's frameworks helps us either to discover new truths, or to have a 'deeper' understanding of old truths, and that to the degree to which people have tried to use them as instruments for these

purposes, they have in fact been led into empirical blunders, as demonstrated for example by Geyl and other critics; while the antidote to this – the thesis that these schemata are not empirical keys, but frames into which all facts necessarily fit, makes them either too vague or empty tautologies.

2. Your second point is much more serious and strikes much nearer home. I do not, of course, wish to maintain that determinism is not true because it would be too bad if it were; on the contrary I do specifically allow that it may in fact be true; I do think that the case for it has not been rendered plausible – except by loose extrapolation – let alone demonstrated; and that the science of sociology, despite all hopes and promises, remains no more than a programme, not an achievement, not even as much of one as, say, psychology. Nor do I wish to say that determinism cannot be true because to assume that it is goes too deeply against the ways in which we think or speak. But I do say something very similar to this, namely: those who easily assume that determinism may be true, and argue for it, and regard themselves as such, do not *in fact* speak or think as if it were in fact true, do not in fact practise what they preach or what they believe themselves to believe. Determinism may indeed be true; but nobody has yet faced up to the transformation of our ways of thinking that the concrete – as opposed to the merely theoretical – acceptance of this would entail. I tried to indicate that a far greater revolution in our outlook would be required than the conversion from, say, teleology to mechanistic causality; a transformation so far-reaching, affecting so many of the most pervasive and apparently fixed habits of speech, thought and feeling, that we simply lack the imagination to be able to calculate the consequences – to conceive of what a world in which determinism was seriously taken for granted would be like (in which praise and blame in the normal sense would be meaningless, it was absurd to conceive of unrealised possibilities, the notion of choice was inapplicable or unintelligible, etc.).

This certainly does not disprove determinism, nor do I, I hope, represent it as so doing: but it does show what price the acceptance of this theory involves: the number of and kind of accepted beliefs and habits that would have to be overthrown if this view were adopted. One must – I argue – consider the kind of reasons one has for believing in determinism, and the kind of empirical evidence which exists for obliterating claimed areas of human freedom, as

against the reasons and the evidence for the vast structure of normal beliefs and mental habits which would have to be upset. If determinism is true, upset of course it should be; but the mass and weight and type of evidence against determinism is seen to be much greater as a result of this argument than determinists commonly assume – it is not just one theory among many, with so much evidence for or against itself, the truth or falsity of which leaves the rest of our structure of thought and feeling relatively intact. And this, together with the absence of positive evidence for determinism, and failure of all efforts to construct a genuine human science, seems to me virtually conclusive; virtually but not literally. In theory determinism may still yet be true. If someone really were to write down at this moment something which would tally exactly with all that I shall record myself as having thought and felt etc. in let us say the next twelve hours – if protocols of this kind, minute and comprehensive, could be made on the basis of some new psychological or physiological doctrine founded on experiment – I should be shaken; if this became frequent, our outlook would, in due course, be violently transformed; more so than it was after the Middle Ages (the last really violent upheaval).

As for moral judgement, you say ‘there are moral issues for which tradition and common sense don’t give conclusive, or even very satisfying,<sup>22</sup> answers’. This has, no doubt, always been true, and that is why there is at all times a liability to moral perplexity. But then you go on to say ‘It is the hope that cosmology, history, metaphysics and aesthetics may give some believable insights into purposes more general than the individual, the family, class, nations or culture [that sustains the interest of the student of these questions].’ Whose hope? Not mine. When in the famous argument Creighton urged Acton not to condemn the Borgias, but to consider that in their day the moral ‘climate’ was different, other moral and political considerations prevailed, etc., etc., even he was doing no more than to ask Acton, whether rightly or wrongly, to extend to the Borgias that measure of understanding which he would have extended to persons in his own time, bred in a different moral climate, with different sets of social influences prevailing, etc., etc., which still does not take us out of the bounds of common sense and tradition; and does not overrule the moral judgement of the individual,

<sup>22</sup> Nitze’s word was ‘satisfactory’.

founded on whatever data he can find, with whatever light is available to him, by means of some super-personal purpose – some cosmic plan, to understand the working of which provides one with ‘objective’ values which put to shame one’s own ‘subjective’ personal reactions.

People have always existed who have attempted to maintain that what seems cruel or ugly or false or iniquitous in terms of current morality, or one’s own feelings, looks different if surveyed in terms of some timeless reality, or a vast historical pattern, or an aesthetic whole into which men or cultures are being moulded by forces greater than themselves. Such men are obviously not necessarily insincere; they may have before their eyes a genuine vision, as perhaps Napoleon or Hegel or Mussolini or Hitler or Marx genuinely had. Perhaps I ought to include Augustine and the authors of Genesis, and Toynbee too. But however this may be, the proposition that certain events must of necessity come to pass, or that certain forms of life are required by some universal pattern or harmony; or the belief that what seems unjust or outrageous in the normal sense of these words may yet be seen to be just or natural from some transcendent point of view; none of them alter the fact that, as we normally use words, and according to our normal ways of thinking and feeling, the ugly remains ugly, the unjust unjust, the cruel cruel, the immorally revolting revolting, and that the attempts to reconcile us to these things in the sense of some experience very different from the normal, or some invisible universe for which no empirical facts are evident (either for or against), runs directly counter to the only experience in terms of which moral epithets (and I should hold that we cannot do without them), however civilised it might to some people feel to do so, have any meaning.

I sympathise with you in your controversy with the scientific determinists, and understand well the force of your final onslaught upon them. I think that Dr [Adolf] Grünbaum’s dogmatic collection of ideals in terms of which all human actions and institutions should be judged is a very dreary, narrow and arbitrary selection. Ideals are many and they conflict at different times, and within the breasts of the same individuals; the only point I wish to make is that they are those of individuals and that to retract them, be what they may, in the name of some non-individual ‘values’, that is in the name of some vision of the cosmos which no individual inhabits, of the values of beings different from ourselves, whether below us or

above us, bestial or angelic, is to deny the possibility of a usable moral terminology and therefore of moral judgements of any kind. For all these must be founded upon such experience as we have and not on something transcending this. When Ivan Karamazov refused worlds upon worlds of human happiness as the price of the torture of his single child, he may have been mistaken; he was certainly being obstinate; but the force of his position, which seems to me irrefutable, in that his final judgement is founded upon his own moral experience and nothing else, for there is nothing else to found moral judgements on, and if something revolts those feelings or those experiences which we regard as relevant to forming moral judgements, then no amount of appeals to cosmological or aesthetic or metaphysical considerations which say that those experiences or feelings would be very different in other ('transcendent', 'ideal', 'real') worlds make any difference to this.

I should love to hear your reactions to this long and muddled letter, for which I apologise. I enjoyed our meetings very much and hope that we may meet again soon.

With the warmest possible regards,  
Isaiah Berlin

*Also in 1956 IB joined a committee set up to consider the possible development of Ditchley Park as a Centre for Anglo-American Studies. In this capacity he was sent a document about the project, on which he comments in these two letters to Wilfrid Knapp of the St Catherine's Society, the committee's secretary. The letters, held by the Ditchley archives, were kindly supplied in 2017 by the Director, James Arroyo, who writes of his delight that IB's ideas match his own, adding: 'The emphasis on an unusual mix of people that will generate some sparks and insights is what sets Ditchley apart to this day. It has always felt very close to Berlin's concept of liberal democracy, and liberty as an active process, and it is great to see that it has the same DNA.'*<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Email to HH, 27 April 2017.

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TO WILFRID KNAPP

16 November 1956

Headington House

Dear Wilfrid,

Here it is – too long, too verbose, but you must have known that when you asked me to respond. I still adhere to my original propositions – that the most important thing is to get together people who will strike sparks from each other – that the important thing is to get hold of a small nucleus of people who are already in some sort of touch and know about each other or wish to meet each other and then build the others round them, instead of mechanically proceeding to scatter invitations to worthy institutions asking them to nominate delegates who as often as not will simply be sent here on holiday or are regular attenders of conferences. The second thing is that it is important to bring all kinds of apparently irrelevant persons – such as literary critics or academics of various sorts – or literary journalists – or even musicians, not merely for the sake of ‘culture’ as such or the value of the contacts to the persons concerned, as because such persons circulate a great deal more widely, talk more, are more articulate, and mould opinion a great deal more effectively than politicians or businessmen suppose that they do (or Foundations for that matter). So do, if you agree, lend your support to it on this – I dread otherwise the prospect of a lot of dough-faced men, politely saying afterwards that it had all been very interesting, and in fact advancing things just about as much as any other Convention. Do let me [know] how things go on.

Yours ever,

Isaiah

TO WILFRID KNAPP

16 November 1956

Headington House

Dear Wilfrid,

Thank you very much for the amended copy of the Ditchley Report, of which a copy was kindly sent me by Robin Davis. I have looked at it and read it carefully, and also Michael Astor’s comments, which he sent me. I was very sorry not to be able to avail myself of

Mr Wills's kind invitation to lunch at Boodle's last Thursday, when I gather an interesting and fruitful discussion took place.

I have only a few scattered thoughts which I should like to offer, for what they are worth.

1. The project seems to be well worth carrying through, even if it demands a good deal of trouble and expenditure of energy. Lack of contact between key figures in England and America still seems to be unnecessarily meagre, and the results of meetings between them often astonishingly fruitful. The actual results of such meetings, conversations and general association in a house as beautiful and comfortable as Ditchley seem to be likely to be even greater than the needs [*sic*] of formal papers likely to issue from conferences and conversations. I should value the result of informal contacts as being far greater than the impression made by conferences, reports, semi-formal speeches on and discussions of such reports by members of conferences etc. I can quite see that in certain fields – especially those of science and technology, conferences are the normal method of communication, and Anglo-American conferences could have the same beneficent results as similar meetings between specialists within a given country. But in certain other fields – the arts, education, and even economics and politics and social action, I am not sure that people do not get far more from casual private conversation with each other, interspersed with not over-prepared talks, which could easily be organised by the Director or the relevant Fellows of Ditchley, than from full-blown lectures and discussions by them. I should therefore be inclined to stress this side of things, as in this country at any rate far more productive and lasting impressions are made than [by] the more formal methods pursued on the Continent and the United States. Indeed this ties in with Michael Astor's remarks about the influence of meetings in the great houses and salons in England in the nineteenth century. It seems to me that at any rate before the war more was achieved in the way of mutual understanding (for better or worse) by politicians who could come to stay at, e.g., All Souls – and I dare say at house parties too – than in the course of more formal contacts. What leaders of opinion and even technical experts above all often desire to do is to meet their opposite numbers in as easy an atmosphere as possible, with reasonable assurance that their remarks will not be quoted outside and that they can get a great many views off their chests and bees out of their bonnets without



fear of being pinned down about these, and cross-examined about them afterwards. This is certainly the case with lawyers who want to reform the international law, both public and private, with academics who are dissatisfied with methods of education or organisation, and whose influence, certainly between the wars – on public opinion both in England and America (I mean especially historians, social scientists, economists etc.) was far greater than is even now generally realised; and with other similar groups. I should therefore like to suggest that although specific subjects must no doubt be provided for such discussions, the widest possible opportunity be given for roaming all over the field in private conversation, at any rate so far as non-scientific groups are concerned.

2. With regard to Michael Astor's remarks about an American v. British Director, I quite see there is much to be said for and against both these – perhaps an American long resident in England or an Englishman long resident in America would prove most satisfactory.

3. A further point which seems to me most important. The greatest good that Ditchley can, in my view, achieve is the creation of personal links between individuals in the two countries; if the enterprise is a success, it will create a pool of mutual good will and respect which – as was shown in London and Washington during the war – was the single greatest factor in bringing many good things to fruition. Once the thing gets going, once a certain numbers of persons have enjoyed and profited by meeting each other, this in itself will make it clear to the Director and his assistants as to whom it is advisable to invite, and with whom to discuss similar problems. But the beginning is bound to be critical, and the scheme is less likely to succeed if a mechanical choice is made of individuals or organisations, without scrupulous regard to who exactly it is who is being invited, and what their personal reactions are likely to be to one another. For this reason it seems to me more important to concentrate on suitable individuals than even on suitable topics for discussion or fields of study. Almost everything will depend upon the gift of the Director and his assistants for choosing persons to be invited. For this reason it seems to me crucial that they should, either out of their own experience, or with the advice of ad hoc small panels or individuals, be in a position to choose, at any rate, initially, those Americans and Englishmen whose meetings are likely to

prove the most rewarding. In matters of this kind it seems to me that it is the first steps that count; and if, for example, we want to promote a successful meeting of Middle Eastern experts or bankers or newspaper editors, or literary specialists (whose influence on young men in America is certainly greater than that of bankers), it is surely better to start with a small number of experts who really know each other and then ask them whom they would most like to meet, at any rate to form a nucleus, rather than formally get in touch with associations and official organisations and invite them to nominate ‘delegations’. To do this successfully will require great powers of imagination and wide social contacts on the part of the organisers – their enterprise seems to me to weigh more greatly than even the choice of topics and details of programming.

One final point. While of course it is desirable that papers should be written and published on important issues, it seems to be best that these be confined to live issues of great general interest – burning topics like the Middle Eastern situation, or policies vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, or Anglo-American atomic programmes or the like, where the impact of the written word really can make a difference to people anxious about an urgent problem in their own field. On questions either of narrower scope or smaller urgency, it seems to me not quite necessary to circulate final papers – accounts of actual discussions with précis of addresses, if intelligently done, would seem to me to suffice.

I am sorry to have gone on at such length, but the whole enterprise seems to me most timely and important.

Yours sincerely,

Isaiah

TO LEONARD SCHAPIRO

6 February 1957

Headington House

Dear Leonard,

[...] As for Plekhanov, you ask why he should have carried on so long with Lenin when obviously the latter was intriguing, treating etc. I think the reason is that he wanted some ‘firm’ ally as opposed to all the soft characters whom he, perhaps too unreasonably, despised. I suppose that whatever his faults may have appeared to

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be in the early part of the century, Lenin's devotion to the Revolution and lack of personal vanity were fairly patent to everyone; and there is nothing so tempting to an imperious professorial figure, such as Plekhanov was, as the firm if brutal and ruthless ally in the world of loose Social Democratic rhetoric and Jewish intellectuals in various stages of personal and political neurasthenia. But of course he ought to have broken before. I am reading about the mid-nineteenth century in Russia now – the revolutionaries are foolish, pathetic, sweet, the reactionaries generally repulsive – the worst, easily, is Katkov, who was the prototype of *all* the Dreyfusards.

Yours ever,  
Shaya

TO LEONARD SCHAPIRO

18 March 1957

Headington House

Dear Leonard,

[...] As to Plekhanov, vanity and an autocratic temperament doubtless had much to do with his political moves – but neurotic I do not think he was; I daresay he made a great many unjust charges during his life, but I do not see why you think that he destroyed 'a sane stream' in Russian life – do you mean among the Social Democrats or among potential Liberals, Conservatives etc.? However we had better talk about this when we meet. I feel our disagreements are probably much like those which went on in Russia from about 1840 onwards and now constitute objects of much careful and fascinated (if not fascinating) research.

Yours ever,  
Shaya

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TO JOHN LEHMANN

19 August 1957

Headington House

Dear John,

Forgive me for dictating from bed – I am under some queer spell which causes my eyelids to flutter and my addled brain to yield nothing but broken and disconnected fragments of what once may have been ideas. Otherwise I should have written by hand and coherently. Thank you for your congratulations. The whole thing is most embarrassing. I try to hide the awful prefix beneath my now most welcome professorship, as one hides a tie which one is not allowed to remove for fear of hurting feelings underneath a specially grown beard. So pray do not rub it in. I am low enough with it.

I am very grateful for the Turgenev piece<sup>24</sup> – the whole thing is most handsome and gratifying, and the blemishes few, trivial and entirely my own fault. Yes, I think you may be right, Dr Leavis and Mr Wain will find it not quite full enough of high moral content. What boobies they are even when they are right, as they sometimes are.

Yours ever,  
Isaiah

TO EDWARD WEEKS

13 November 1957

Headington House

Dear Ted,

Thank you very much for that admirable volume, which contains so many things much more interesting than my own piece. It is a rare pleasure to receive something which has the attraction of being exciting and agreeable to read over and above the thrill of containing one's own aging child enshrined like a crystal masterpiece in its pages. The compliment is great and I appreciate it.

<sup>24</sup> 'An Episode in the Life of Ivan Turgenev', *London Magazine* 4 no. 7 (July 1957), 14–24 (includes translation of Turgenev's 'A Fire at Sea').

I see that I am described as the Ritchie<sup>25</sup> Professor of Philosophy in the University of Oxford. It sounds eminently respectable and agreeable and I am entirely content to be that in those terms. It is true that there is no such chair in Oxford, neither a Ritchie Chair on any subject, nor a Chair of Philosophy *tel quel*. There is a Chair of Metaphysics, of Logic, of Moral Philosophy, or Natural Philosophy (that is Mathematics), and the Chichele Chair of Social and Political Theory, which in fact I occupy. I do not think that any celebrated Ritchie was educated here. Thackeray's grandchildren, it is true, were called Ritchie, and they were here, and the eldest, who died recently, was a charming and civilised man, but no chair was called after him, though he deserved it better than some. So if there is a reprint of the book perhaps this pleasant fiction could be replaced by the sober truth. But if not, let it stand, to the confusion of future antiquaries of the institutions of this ancient university. After all, if such things had not been perpetrated in the Middle Ages, where would our present mediaeval studies be? Talking of which, Trevor-Roper has just delivered a most brilliant inaugural lecture, denouncing antiquaries and dead research in a splendid procession of elaborate sentences delivered before a packed assembly. Each sentence was an arrowhead and each penetrated the flesh of some unnamed but all too conscious victim dotted about the room. A most enjoyable occasion: you must ask Hugh for a copy of it. It is a little undergraduaty, but exhilarating.

I am glad your negotiations with Sir Maurice are a success.

I wish I were coming over this Christmas. I hope you have a very happy one and my warmest good wishes to you both and from Aline.

Yours ever,

Isaiah

⟨P.S. A *far* worse blunder occur in my own text: when I say that a well known thinker says history is what Alexander did and suffered. The thinker is Aristotle. He says (most notoriously) nothing about Alexander, more's the pity. The name should be Alcibiades & is so in the *Cornhill* version. If there is another edition you *will* alter this? I feel dreadfully ashamed.⟩

<sup>25</sup> Presumably a mishearing of 'Chichele'. The error was caught in time, so what IB was sent must have been a proof copy.

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TO EDWARD WEEKS

29 November 1957

Headington House

Dear Ted,

Thank you ever so much for your letter – I wish I was coming over, but I am not, only my wife is.

My full title is Chichele Professor of Social and Political Theory in the University of Oxford. I am no longer a University lecturer, since my ‘translation’ to this more elevated realm, only a Fellow of All Souls College and Fellow of the British Academy (FBA for short), otherwise nothing at all. I should be much relieved if you put in Alcibiades.

I know nothing at all about Israeli writers – I may be there in the spring, but I cannot believe that Israeli writers are really much good – though this may be too pessimistic a view. I read Hebrew hardly at all, and the translations look terrible to me. There is only one *really* good writer, called Agnon. The rest are competent but pretty uninspired. As the purpose of the entire experiment was to ‘normalise’ the Jews and rid them of their neuroses, perhaps it is inevitable that art – which is the product of [a] certain sacred discontent – should fall by the wayside when the discontent is gone. At any rate that particular kind of discontent, which no doubt will one day reawaken, but is at present dormant. Or there may be some other explanation.

My love to Fritzzy,

Yours ever

Isaiah

TO EDWARD WEEKS

27 May 1958

Headington House

Dear Ted,

I am afflicted by guilt at not having telephoned to you on that Tuesday morning, but we didn’t actually manage to return to London on that day, having had to go back on the night before, owing to family complications which sprang from the abnormal life which we are living, owing to the fate of my little niece. Still, I should

have rung you up from here, and then with various forms of fuss and worry it went out of my head. However, all was well in the end, save for the fact that I omitted to get in touch with you.

You asked about the Pasternak novel. The man to write about it in the *Atlantic* would be our old friend Nicolas Nabokov. He has read the novel in Russian and is in a state of wild enthusiasm about it, and when he is aroused you know he can write marvellously. Why don't you get him to do it? There is not a very good article – but informative – about it in *Encounter* by Max Hayward, the translator, who is an interesting, able and remarkable man and an excellent translator, but who seems to me to have got the point of the novel somewhat askew. However, that is no doubt a matter of opinion. Nicolas was almost ill with excitement after he had read the novel and went about in a nostalgic dream for days and weeks. It is not so much that the novel casts a great deal of light on contemporary Soviet reality as that it talks about and describes things never described by any human being before. Moreover it is a work of genius. The first two hundred pages are not good, but after that it is incredibly good. But of course the person who really must write about it is Edmund Wilson. But for whom and when and at what length and from what angle, who can tell? He is very much a law unto himself, as I need not tell you.

With renewed apologies and fondest affection,

Yours ever,

Isaiah

TO FABER & FABER

n.d. [1958]

[Report on] *The Human Condition* by Hannah Arendt<sup>26</sup>

I could recommend no publisher to buy the UK rights of this book. There are two objections to it: it will not sell, and it is no good. The author's reading has evidently been wide, but her comprehension has too often been incomplete. Indeed the suspicion grows, as one reads these pages, that her inadequate command of English (a

<sup>26</sup> Chicago, 1958. Faber & Faber were considering publishing the book in the UK. A separate UK edition has never appeared.

language she appears to have learned only in mature years, as a refugee in America from Germany) has led her into many of the problems which she attempts to solve in these pages.

The first part of the argument of this book rests on the curious belief that the means of the word ‘labour’ (or ‘labor’ as it appears in this American text) is somehow significantly different from the meaning of the word ‘work’. This notion appears to have been prompted in the author’s mind by a line in Locke about ‘the labour of our body and the work of our hands’. Instead of seeing this as an attempt (one of the rare attempts) of that pedestrian stylist to embellish his prose with a little elegant variation, Dr Arendt sees it as the adumbration of a distinction in reality: a distinction which she here sets herself to elucidate.

‘Labour’, she believes, means those efforts which are necessary for the maintenance of the human species; ‘work’ means those efforts which go beyond the minimal demands of survival, and which yield the durable goods and furniture of the world. Taken as lexicographical definitions, these definitions are, of course, simply inaccurate. Presumably one must therefore take them as prescriptive or stipulative definitions. But even if they are thus accepted, they are found to lead, not to greater clarity, but to greater obscurity. In the later chapters of the book the categories of ‘labour’ and ‘work’ are supplemented by a third category of ‘action’; action meaning not, as one might expect, doing things, but rather {as} being in some sort of quasi-personalist fusion with other people. This leads to such conclusions as the following (p. 230): ‘The instrumentalization of action and the degradation of politics into a means for something else has of course never really succeeded in eliminating action, in preventing its being one of the decisive human experiences, or in destroying the realm of human affairs altogether.’ The phrase ‘of course’ strikes an amusing note, does it not?

Subsidiary observations, as well as the central argument, illustrate the author’s characteristic weakness. For example (p. 43), she writes: ‘The unfortunate truth about behaviorism and the validity of its “laws” is that the more people there are, the more likely they are to behave, and the less likely to tolerate non-behavior.’ This sentence had me completely foxed until I realised that the author was using the verb ‘behave’ in the sense of ‘act civilly’ and must therefore imagine that the word ‘behaviorism’ had something to do with civility!



A second example (p. 31): ‘What all Greek philosophers, no matter how opposed to *polis* life, took for granted is that freedom is exclusively located in the political realm, that necessity is primarily a prepolitical phenomenon [...]’. It is perfectly true that, in thinking of political freedom, all Greek philosophers ‘took for granted [...] that freedom is exclusively located in the political realm’ (what else could they think?); but political freedom has nothing whatever to do with necessity; it is opposed to constraint. Necessity is opposed to free will, and is not a problem of political, but of metaphysical, philosophy. Once more the author has got tied up in a false antithesis.

Speaking of moral virtue, Dr Arendt says (p. 75) that ‘the Christian demand to *be* good’ is ‘absurd’. Is it equally ‘absurd’ to demand that a book should *be* good? Let us hope she thinks so. Then she will not mind being told that her book is not good.

TO HERBERT BUTTERFIELD

[n.d.: p. 7 of a letter (possibly 10 April 1954) whose other pages are missing]

[...] workings of relativism, or determinism, which they would not dream of, or show, in their normal life or thoughts. I shall certainly do my best to amend my text so as not to misinterpret you, as I fear I perhaps have done, but not as much as I feel you believe that I have done.

Thank you once more very warmly for writing to me as you have. I do hope we may meet and discuss this and other things one not too distant day.

Yours sincerely,  
Isaiah Berlin

⟨I am terribly sorry about the messiness of this letter: & I do assure you that I realize the great amount of good which you have done & are doing by exposing shams and defending moral issues in ways & at times & before audiences where it is not always easy or comfortable to do so. And on that front I shall always be your ally to the best of my ability: I shd not be as solicitous about

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understanding & representing your views correctly, if I did not feel so much admiration & sympathy for your writings & attitude.

I.B.›

*GBR/0012/MS Butterfield 531/B/80*

The sources of letters to the following correspondents are:

Herbert Butterfield: University Library, Cambridge, Sir Herbert Butterfield Papers (specific references at the end of individual letters)

Kenneth Clark: Tate Archive, 8812.1.2.664

Diana Cooper: Eton College

Leopold Haimson: Columbia University, New York, Leopold Haimson Papers, Box 1

Wilfrid Knapp: Ditchley Foundation

Arthur Koestler: Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections

John Lehmann: University of Texas at Austin, Harry Ransom Center, John Lehmann Collection (MS-02436)

*The University of Texas at Austin*

Paul Nitze: Library of Congress, Paul H. Nitze Papers, Box 1:18

Leonard Schapiro: Stanford University, Hoover Institution Archives, Leonard Bertram Schapiro Papers, Correspondence, Box 11

Wardens of All Souls College, Oxford (Humphrey Sumner, John Sparrow):  
IB's file at All Souls

Edward Weeks: University of Texas at Austin, Harry Ransom Center, Edward Weeks Papers, Container 3.1

Other letters were supplied by their recipients.