

The University of Liverpool

LOCATING ISAIAH BERLIN IN THE CULTURAL COLD WAR CONTEXT:
TEXT AND ONTOLOGY, 1945-1989

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by

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Abstract

The prominence of the political philosopher Isaiah Berlin (1909-1997) has not been dealt with in a thorough contextual and methodological manner. Although his work has been interpreted by political scientists, philosophers, literary critics and biographers, the context behind Berlin's writing has not been adequately solidified. Thus, Berlin's ideas seem isolated, and the original values behind them become increasingly obscured. I intend to approach the texts of Berlin in a manner that seeks to create a new impression of 'the Berlinian', itself supported by a complex set of ontological commitments.

Berlin's ontology, which I define as an internalised set of values arising from the contexts of cold war, Zionist politics, colonialism and ethno-hierarchies, had a significant impact on the shaping of Berlin's liberal values. I examine Berlin's texts through close analysis of normative language, and make the case that Berlin consistently employed normative language to act as the uncontested foundation for his conception of freedom. Implicit assumptions contained within his use of language led to Berlin displaying an authoritative 'instructive morality' through his work. I analyse a variety of Berlin's interpretations of authors to illustrate this point. I utilise postmodern theory and method to justify and elaborate upon these arguments.

The thesis also explores the role of Berlin as an intellectual figure. He appears a 'passive' yet powerful figure in the cold war context, yet a more visibly active intellectual in his commitment to Zionism and Israel. This leads to geopolitical interpretations of his writing, and raises questions over the impact of the intellectual in political culture. What emerges is an intellectual figure problematised both by his unacknowledged ontological commitments, and his implicit advocacy of political systems that clash with his explicitly formulated liberal values.

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Introduction

This thesis is an attempt to re-interpret the ideas and influence of liberal scholar Isaiah Berlin. A prominent 'historian of ideas', and occasional political philosopher, Berlin's precise intellectual presence has not been properly elaborated upon in the literature. An attempt needs to be made to situate his thought in a contextualised landscape, utilising a carefully defined methodological approach to disrupt the uncontested foundation of his thought. Therefore, before the main introductory section I wish to outline the theoretical and methodological foundations of this thesis, offer a sketch of intellectual influences, establish Berlin's place in the wider literature, and begin to situate this thesis in the context of broader intellectual traditions and practices. The main body of the introduction focuses on the personal and intellectual biography of Berlin, the varied reception and interpretation of his work, and offers a chapter by chapter run-through of the thesis.

Comment on Theory and Method

The philosophical foundation of this research is consciously inspired by an intellectual interest in postmodern ideas on truth, representation and power. This theoretical commitment is best expressed through my choice of methodology, namely discourse analysis.¹ Justified by the theoretical foundation of postmodernism, vocabularies and narratives are brought to the foreground ready to be analysed. I argue the validity of such an enterprise by recourse to

¹ See Gilbert Weiss & Ruth Wodak (eds.), *Critical Discourse Analysis: Theory and Interdisciplinarity* (London: Macmillan, 2003); Teun van Dijk (ed.), *Handbook of Discourse Analysis. Vol 1: Disciplines of Discourse* (London: Academic Press, 1985). Iris M. Zavala, Teun van Dijk & Myriam Diaz-Diocaretz (eds.), *Approaches to Discourse, Poetics and Psychiatry* (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1987).

postmodern theories of the text, and build an impression of Berlin within a newly defined 'intellectual context'. I had in mind another moral-political motivation for this thesis, which has been expressed in the literature²; namely the failure of political theory to come to terms with the devastating realities of the twentieth century. Isaiah Berlin can be viewed as a thinker who encapsulates this intellectual removal from real-world problems, even when such problems had a direct influence on the author.

My research was consciously driven by an idea of scholarship as inter-disciplinary, where theoretical insights could be borrowed from a variety of sources based on utility. I began with the confidence that abstract theoretical insights mapped onto the texts of Isaiah Berlin would open up new interpretations of these texts, and this approach would be sufficient. However, as my research developed, it became clear that a partial reliance on more 'empirical' research was a necessary and instinctive part of my work. The newly accessible Isaiah Berlin Papers³, and the use of unpublished correspondence between Berlin and Noam Chomsky, has given this thesis a harder contextual edge than anticipated, closing in on difficult to define networks of influence in both institutions and the 'real-world'.

White's 2002 article in *Political Theory* argued that 'there is at present no dearth of political theory...complaints now centre not on its demise, but rather on such things as where exactly our energies are best expended'⁴. The energy in this thesis is directed towards a

² See George Kateb, 'The Adequacy of the Canon', *Political Theory*, 30, 4 (2002), pp.482-505.

³ The Isaiah Berlin Papers, Department of Special Collections and Western Manuscripts, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

⁴ Steven K. White, 'Pluralism, Platitudes and Paradoxes: Fifty Years of Western Political Thought', *Political Theory*, 30, 4 (2002), p.476.

strenuous critique of the basis of liberal thought, and an attempt to contextualise the thought of a prominent intellectual figure who has not, as yet, been sufficiently scrutinised. To explain the contemporary relevance of my research, it is necessary to outline how my work fits into the broader academic landscape at present. Combining the field of cold war studies, and the disciplines of modern history, political science and political theory, I argue that a wilfully complex study of an unproblematised intellectual figure is timely.

The 'cultural turn' has had a clear impact on cold war studies, with the continued growth in the number of scholars interested in reinterpreting the cold war in terms of culture. Christopher Lasch's *The Agony of the American Left*⁵ was the first text to explore the cultural aspects of the cold war, and Larry May's pivotal text *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of the Cold War*⁶ argued the importance of the dramatic alteration of American culture in the years following 1945. Many scholars, and periodicals such as *The Journal of Cold War Studies*, have embraced the challenge of the cultural cold war, and this will be elaborated on in Chapter One, where I will promote the relevance of the narrative approach to cold war history.

Driven by an increasingly inter-disciplinary ethos, the journals *History and Theory* and *Rethinking History* have begun to challenge Berlin's legacy with some sophistication. *History and Theory* offers sophisticated challenges to traditional conceptions of history. As Kelley writes,

'the postmodern predicament, or at least its rhetoric, posits an end to subject-centred rationality, a decentering of language, the illusory character of presence, and a radical indeterminacy of meaning.'⁷

⁵ Christopher Lasch, *The Agony of the American Left* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973).

⁶ Larry May (ed.), *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

⁷ Donald R. Kelley, *The Descent of Ideas: The History of Intellectual History* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2002), p.306.

Kelley promotes the idea that the post-modern intellectual historian must embrace forms of eclecticism⁸ when approaching a subject matter that situates language in the theoretical foreground. More generally, important terms and concepts used in the thesis, such as 'ontology' and 'intellectual' have recently come under scholarly scrutiny, with the consequence that forms of analysis within intellectual history are continually expanding .

In the field of political theory there continues to be a rich literature on pluralism. However, there is a historiographical gap in the mainstream literature that leaves the foundations for the political philosophy of twentieth century liberalism uncontested and unproblematised. This has meant that recent research focused specifically on Isaiah Berlin is limited. To counter this gap, I have utilised Nietzschean inspired scholars to counter dominant liberal ontology.

Lastly, my study is situated in a stream of intellectual history inspired, firstly, by the 'Cambridge School' scholars Quentin Skinner and J.G.A. Pocock⁹, who argued that focus on language and authorial intention would lead to the creative re-thinking of texts in context. This rich tradition of self-reflective intellectual history is also practiced by LaCapra, who writes

'a context has its own complex particularity that calls for detailed interpretation...intellectual history shares with disciplines such as literary criticism and the history of philosophy, however, an initial focus upon complex written texts and the need to formulate as a problem what is often taken, deceptively, as a solution: the relationship between texts and their pertinent contexts.'¹⁰

⁸ See also review article, Randall Collins, 'Is The History of Ideas a Principled Eclecticism?', *History and Theory*, 43 (2004), pp.136-145.

⁹ See Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics. Volume 1: Regarding Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); J.G.A. Pocock, *Politics, Language and Time* (London: Methuen, 1972); James Tully (ed.), *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and his Critics* (Oxford: Polity, 1988).

¹⁰ Dominick LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Language* (London: Cornell UP, 1983). See also Dominick LaCapra, *History and Reading: Tocqueville, Foucault, French Studies* (Toronto: UTP, 2000).

The influence of Wittgenstein is confirmed in James Tully's introduction to *Meaning and Context* when he writes

'language is an intersubjectively shared multiplicity of tools for various purposes, yet one in which only some elements are open to subjective criticism, modification, and change at any time. This is because language is woven so deeply into human action that the whole – language and ways of acting – itself provides the grounds in the light of which criticism and change take place.'¹¹

Secondly, and most explicitly, this study is inspired by more radical continental ideas. The work of Michel Foucault is a significant presence in the thesis. The work of Thomas Dumm and Edward Said, heavily Foucault inspired, is also prominent. I utilise these thinkers to argue that a form of discourse analysis is a legitimate way in which to 'uncover' new ontological meaning within the texts of Berlin. This meaning does reflect the way in which Berlin reinforces the dominant political and ontological status quo in the liberal west.

Steven E. Aschheim's *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany 1890-1990* serves as an important inspiration for my interpretative approach, as he presents the efficacy of the 'synoptic' approach to intellectual history.¹² In a sense, my insistence on using 'ontology' is a thematic gesture that, unlike Berlin's approach, does not attempt a 'dialogue' with texts. The one similarity I would acknowledge with Berlin's use of 'reconstructive imagination' is that I do maintain a distinct understanding of 'reality' can occur through reading practices. The understanding of 'reality' is provisional, and one possible construction of 'reality'. I am not making a comment on 'inherent

¹¹ Tully (ed.), *Meaning and Context*, p.8.

¹² A useful discussion of Aschheim's approach appears in LaCapra, *History and Reading: Tocqueville, Foucault, French Studies*.

truth, falsity, or even plausibility that must lie at the center [sic] of historical analysis.'¹³ Indeed, as Aschheim writes, 'the cultural historian cannot claim access to a privileged grasp of the unadulterated text by which all subsequent uses should be judged.'¹⁴ I would argue that Aschheim's careful treatment of Nietzsche's complicated legacy is essential. However, for a thinker such as Berlin who has a less controversial legacy, my work does tend towards a more radical re-interpretation, where the term ontology is utilised to build a case; to argue for the possibility of other powerful readings of Berlin.

These broad areas meet in a field of agreement that centres around the need to contest previously unquestioned aspects of modern intellectual history and modern liberalism by utilising creative interdisciplinary approaches to texts. This is a general scholarly trend borne from a tradition stemming from the work of Foucault. Joan Scott argues that categories and commitments need to be constantly checked by a theoretical commitment to the premise that all cultural forms are complex constructions. It is the task of the scholar to deconstruct these forms in inventive ways. In the words of Scott, historians should '[heed] the advice of Michel Foucault to historicize the categories that the present takes to be self-evident realities.'¹⁵ Naturally, Foucault and Scott are interested in structures of power, and discourse analysis carefully legitimated and utilised is a good way to develop interpretations that uncover such structures. This can appear a 'leap of faith', for we arrive back at a philosophical problem: that of truth claims. The thesis has been

¹³ Steven E. Aschheim, *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany 1890-1990* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992), p.5.

¹⁴ Aschheim, *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany 1890-1990*, p.3.

¹⁵ Joan Scott, 'Fantasy Echo: History and the Construction of Identity', *Critical Inquiry*, 27, 2 (2001), p.285.

written from the standpoint that all such claims are necessarily provisional and open to contestation.

Suggesting that ontology is a valuable conceptual approach, the philosophical setting for this thesis is inspired by readings of Nietzsche and Sartre¹⁶, which leads to the conceptual possibility that there are *infinite* ways to 'be' in the world. The 'ontological' investigation is a way in which to identify, conceptualise and to *contextualise* these infinite possibilities. The possibilities are dependant on an existing complex of relations, and I am interested in how the 'material' and the 'abstract' are in a constant state of collision. It is in this sense that the intellectual historian needs to be a very sensitive navigator. The ontological approach has the potential to offer the scholar a flexibility and creativity that can lead to original insights.

I invoke a methodological approach to intellectual history that is far removed from Berlin's. His continual reliance on 'reconstructive imagination' acts as a type of 'modernist relativism' that proves unsatisfactory under the scrutiny of postmodernist theories of the text offered by Foucault and Said. Berlin's methodological inspiration stemmed from the influence of R.C. Collingwood and Lovejoy¹⁷, where texts and authors are consciously enlivened by the 'morally responsible' scholar. My approach applies a mixture of post-modern theories onto Berlin's textual output, and places this analysis within a broader frame of analysis, which I have labeled Berlin's 'ontology'.

I will return to the definition of the term ontology towards the end of this Introduction.

¹⁶ The formative texts being Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* (Oxford: OUP, 1998); Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (London: Routledge, 2001).

¹⁷ See Arthur Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1936).

Berlin's significance as a liberal political philosopher must be judged in terms of his modern counterparts, namely Nozick, Raz, Dworkin, Rawls, Popper and Hayek. For Gray, Berlin's uniqueness is due to the fact that, for Berlin, 'the value of freedom derives from the limits of rational choice'.¹⁸ Gray, like many other Berlin scholars, argues that Berlin does not allow his liberalism to rest on a conception of rationalism. However, viewed ontologically, I argue that Berlin's thought rests on consistent moral and political assumptions that embody different, yet equally powerful, intellectual restrictions.

This contextualised ontological approach means that this study impacts on the relationship of Berlin's oeuvre to philosophy. The critique of Berlin's liberal-pluralist discursive context offers a textual examination that places him at the heart of an activated cold war value system. A contextual examination of his thought highlights the contradictions inherent within his system of thinking. My approach, therefore, acts to disrupt Berlin's position as a liberal-pluralist philosopher by questioning the accepted understandings of the philosophical tradition from which he emerged.

Isaiah Berlin and the Twentieth Century

Isaiah Berlin was a man at the heart of the Anglo-American twentieth century. Although he came to symbolise the image of the academically detached 'historian of ideas', Berlin's intellectual role was complicated by his proximity to prominent governmental institutions and powerful political personalities. It is impossible to ignore the defining effect of his work in Washington in the years

¹⁸ John Gray, *Isaiah Berlin* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), p.8.

1942 to 1946, his lifelong affiliation with Oxford University, and his involvement in the creation of the state of Israel. He was famously admired by Winston Churchill¹⁹, was with J.F. Kennedy the evening before the Cuban missile crisis surfaced in 1962²⁰, was friends with influential American diplomats such as Charles 'Chip' Bohlen, and was a close acquaintance Chaim Weizmann, the first President of Israel. His intimacy with elite culture in the western cold war world also impacted on his scholarly work. He developed an interpretative style that was subtly instructive and certainly representative of values and preoccupations defined by the anxieties of the political elite. To illustrate this point I intend to unpick Berlin's use of language in an attempt to uncover a set of deeper politicised statements. This approach relies on a belief that the relationship between language and politics is crucial to a meaningful understanding of a specific 'ontology', itself defined as a philosophy of existence that encompasses assumptions of a moral and political nature.

Uncovering these complex assumptions has meant viewing Berlin's use of written language as a collection of normative statements, the implicit meanings of which can be constructed into an original critique of Isaiah Berlin's role and intellectual project. Berlin's intellectual role, part of which I term a 'passive' role, impacts on and partially defines the operation of normative language. Grounded in a unique context defined by western cold war ideals and Zionist ideology, Berlin's oeuvre and role thus appear problematically close to the sources of

¹⁹ Berlin's essay 'Winston Churchill in 1940' [1949], in *Personal Impressions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp.1-22 is evidence of Berlin's measured admiration of Churchill. (Throughout the thesis, year of origin is indicated in square brackets after essay title).

²⁰ Michael Ignatieff, *Isaiah Berlin: A Life* (London: Vintage, 2000), pp.240-43.

governmental power. Furthermore, his methodology emerges as insufficiently malleable to adapt to the changing nature of intellectual history in the twentieth century.

Brief Biography of Isaiah Berlin

There is no need to launch into a comprehensive biography of Isaiah Berlin, as this has been done elsewhere.²¹ For now, I will concentrate briefly on themes in Berlin's life that are significant in the context of this study, and may help explain some of the motivations behind Berlin's particular brand of liberalism. The objective of this thesis is to unravel the processes of Berlin's texts in a carefully defined context; a context that wishes to avoid over-exaggeration of biographical aspects of Berlin's personal life, and concentrate instead on the impact of Berlin's textual contribution. Nevertheless, a brief outline of Berlin's life is necessary.

Isaiah Berlin was born in 1909, on 6 June in Riga, then part of the Russian Empire, to Russian speaking Jewish parents. Mendel Berlin, Isaiah's father, was a relatively prosperous owner of a timber business. The family moved from Riga to Andreapol in 1915, and then on to Petrograd in 1916. The family, Isaiah included, witnessed revolutionary violence, in both February and November of 1917, and the family also suffered harassment from the secret police.²² In 1920 the Berlin family left Petrograd, and eventually settled in Britain from 1921 onwards. Firmly 'middle-class' they settled in Kensington, London. Isaiah was schooled at St. Paul's, London before becoming a scholar at Corpus Christi College, Oxford between 1928-32. Berlin gained a

²¹ The 'official' biography of Berlin is Michael Ignatieff, *Isaiah Berlin*. For a philosophical biography see John Gray, *Isaiah Berlin* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996). For the most recent synthesis of Berlin's life and thought see George Crowder, *Isaiah Berlin: Liberty and Pluralism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004).

²² For an account of this period of Berlin's life see Ignatieff, *Isaiah Berlin*, Chapter 3.

First in Greats and PPE. Between 1932-38 he became Lecturer in Philosophy at Oxford, and a Fellow of All Souls. Clearly, from Isaiah's early years of upheaval came a period of real stability leading to his wholehearted embrace of English culture. In 1938 Berlin became a Fellow and Tutor in Philosophy at New College, and in 1939 he published *Karl Marx: His Life and Environment*, his first major publication. In 1941 he moved to New York and worked for the Ministry of Information, before moving to Washington in 1942 to serve at the British Embassy in Washington, reporting on the changing political mood in the United States. A selection of his despatches to Whitehall from Washington was later published.²³ He worked in America until 1946, yet spent several months in 1945 at the British Embassy in Moscow. In November 1945 Berlin met with the Russian poet Anna Akmatova²⁴ at her flat in Fountain House on the Fontanka Canal. During this period he also met and befriended the novelist Boris Pasternak. These meetings proved the catalyst for a period of sustained criticism by Berlin over the repression of Russian artists.²⁵ Both Akmatova and Pasternak were important figures in the emerging cultural cold war. Akmatova's work had been unofficially banned by Stalin in 1925, and in 1946 publication of her work was officially banned as a result of Berlin's visit. Akmatova had long been an object of suspicion because of her aristocratic roots, her undeniable popularity, and her marriage to poet Nikolay Gumilyov who was

²³ Herbert George Nicholas (ed.), *Washington Despatches 1941-1945* with an introduction by Isaiah Berlin (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1981).

²⁴ For a review article by Lesley Chamberlain of two recent books - a translation of Anna Akmatova, *The Word That Causes Death's Defeat* [trans. Nancy K. Anderson] (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005) and Elaine Feinstein, *Anna of All the Russians: The Life of Anna Akmatova* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005) see *Times Literary Supplement*, September 16, 2005, p.13.

²⁵ See Henry Hardy, 'Preface', in Isaiah Berlin, *The Soviet Mind: Russian Culture under Communism* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2004), pp.xix-xi.

executed in 1921 for 'anti-Soviet' activity.²⁶ More relevantly, her poetry dwelt on themes of love, womanhood and memory; themes anathema to the emerging Soviet system of cultural regulation. Pasternak's writing career was also heavily defined by the tension created between his own creative impulses and the imposition of Soviet cultural restrictions. Both Pasternak and Akmatova were victims of Stalin's dogmatism in the 1920s and were symbolic figures for Berlin in the war against Soviet intellectual oppression.²⁷

In the post-1945 years Berlin's anti-totalitarianism - or anti-'monism' - was shaped by his affiliation with Anglo-American governmental institutions and the stark reality of Nazi violence inflicted on his own family members. Both 'his grandfathers, an uncle, an aunt, and three cousins were murdered by the Nazis in Riga in 1941'²⁸, providing the profoundest formative experience for Berlin. As well as publishing essays expressing his deep distrust of political monism, Berlin's 'activist' energy in the post-1945 years became directed towards the political debates over the creation of Israel. Indeed, Chaim Weizmann tried to convince Berlin to emigrate to Israel and become involved in Israeli politics, but Berlin refused. However, Berlin retained links with prominent Zionists, essentially serving as an organic intellectual²⁹ for Israel. He helped with speech writing³⁰, and even felt sufficiently expert of the situation in Israel to answer Ben Gurion's request to define Jewishness, and Jewish nationality in 1959.³¹ Leaving this dalliance with political 'activism' in the background, Berlin decided to concentrate on a career in the academic world

²⁶ Although they were divorced in 1918.

²⁷ See 'Conversations with Akhmatova and Pasternak' [1980] and 'Boris Pasternak' [1958] in Berlin, *The Soviet Mind*.

²⁸ Gray, *Isaiah Berlin*, p.3.

²⁹ Definitions of the intellectual are explored in Chapters Two and Three.

³⁰ See Ignatieff, *Isaiah Berlin*, Chapter 12.

³¹ Unpublished Essay, 'Response to the Prime Minister of Israel', 1959. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Berlin 385.

and in 1950 Berlin switched from formal philosophy to a fresh focus on the 'history of ideas', and returned as Fellow at All Souls. Berlin married Aline Degansbourg in 1956, and in 1957 was elected to the Chichele Chair of Social and Political Theory, at Oxford. His inaugural lecture 'Two Concepts of Liberty' was soon published, and he was knighted in the same year. From 1966 to 1975 Berlin was the First President of Wolfson College, Oxford. In 1971 he was appointed to the Order of Merit, and from 1974 to 1978 he was President of the British Academy. He won the Jerusalem Prize in 1979. Isaiah Berlin died in 1997 after continuing to publish extensively during the 1980s and 1990s. The stream of obituaries after his death is testimony to his standing as a scholar, proof of his prominence as a public intellectual, and the obvious affection felt by those who knew him.³²

It must be noted that alongside Berlin's formal academic career came a foray into broadcasting. Noted for his conversational eloquence, Berlin was commissioned to do a series of lectures for the BBC. This meant that alongside his position at Oxford, Berlin became a recognisable public intellectual with an 'establishment' broadcasting platform. Berlin rose to the heights of academic life in Britain, and any biographical understanding of Berlin must consider how the ideals represented by elitist seats of learning in mid-twentieth century Britain impacted on his intellectual role. It is clear that there is a constant tension between the public image of Berlin and his private motivations. It is important to remember that Berlin never jettisoned his self-image

³² Of the many obituaries published, the most notable are Henry Hardy, 'Obituary', *Independent*, 7 November 1997 p.18; Michael Ignatieff, Stuart Hampshire, Alfred Brendel and Aileen Kelly, 'On Isaiah Berlin, 1909-1997', *New York Review of Books*, 18 December 1997, pp.10-12; Stuart Jeffries, 'A Prophet with Honour', *Guardian*(G2), 10 February 1997, pp.8-9. An online tribute with links to further obituaries can be found at <http://berlin.wolf.ox.ac.uk/tribute/index.html>. I examine less affectionate pieces published by Christopher Hitchens and Edward Said in the body of the thesis.

of émigré intellectual, which undoubtedly impacted on his conception of value-pluralism, and the nature of his relationship with establishment institutions. The themes of duty and allegiance have real resonance within my thesis, and it is clear that Berlin felt a real bond to both Oxford and England in terms of values as well as place. Clearly, these broad themes impact on Berlin's sense of identity as well as his wider interpretative project.

It is important to realise that aspects of Berlin's biography can be viewed as sensationalised. Two examples of this involve Berlin's relationship with Russia. Firstly, the young Isaiah witnessed an 'ashen faced' policeman being dragged to his death in the revolution of 1917. The essay 'The Purpose Justifies the Ways'³³, written by Berlin aged twelve and a half, signifies the imprint which this incident left on Berlin's mind. The language demonstrates an immature hopefulness, an attempt to understand the meaning of violence. The piece is filled with emotion, an interest in 'the human', the humane, and the meanings and limits of 'right and wrong'. The vignette symbolises Berlin's abhorrence of violence that is a constant theme in his mature work. In an interview with Ramin Jahanbegloo, Berlin said 'I remember seeing a policeman being dragged off, pale and struggling, by a mob, obviously to his death – that is a terrible sight that I have never forgotten; it gave me a lifelong horror of physical violence.'³⁴ The revulsion is understandable, yet the fact that Berlin, and his biographers, return to this event frequently as a motif for Berlin's abhorrence of violence has drawn criticism from Terry Eagleton.

'it might be more accurate to claim that Berlin had a lifelong horror of totalitarian violence;

³³ Isaiah Berlin, 'The Purpose Justifies the Ways' [1922], in *The First and the Last* (New York: New York Review of Books, 1999), pp.5-21.

³⁴ Ramin Jahanbegloo, *Conversations With Isaiah Berlin: Recollections of an Historian of Ideas* (London: Phoenix, 1992), p.4.

liberal capitalist brutality, such as the US war in Vietnam, seems not to have disturbed him quite so deeply. He is not on the public record as objecting to the invasion of Guatemala or the bombing of Iraq. Anyway, it is not as though most individuals have a lifelong relish for violence, and Berlin stands out from this shabby crew as some sort of saint...[h]e was indeed an eloquent witness against...tyrannical teleology; but he seemed not to have noticed that the social system he supported goes in for it all the time'.³⁵

Perhaps a more diluted form of Eagleton's argument would be to emphasise the undeniable tension between the limited experience of Berlin's actual confrontation with violence, and the methodological legitimacy he sees this experience giving his variety of liberal-humanist empathy.

Secondly, Berlin's meeting with Anna Akmatova, according to one rather extreme interpretation, helped alter the course of the twentieth century. György Dalos argues that when Stalin learned of the meeting he became so enraged that his intransigence towards the 'western bloc' became solidified.³⁶ As far-fetched as this may appear, its symbolic power is intriguing.

Berlin, an emerging Oxbridge academic with Latvian roots, met with an ageing humanist poet who represented old Russia. For Berlin, her poetry resonated more closely with western values than with Soviet dogma. This episode certainly seems to have reawakened profound formative experiences for Berlin, and offers the romantic theatre of two like-minded intellectuals talking until dawn, knowing they were unlikely to meet again due to the increasing sense of separation between the western and Soviet worlds. More importantly, this dramatisation of personal biography is symptomatic of the way in which Berlin's writing and personality has become interwoven into an image of a philosopher who supposedly understood the central dilemmas of

³⁵ Terry Eagleton, *Figures of Dissent* (London: Verso, 2003), p.105.

³⁶ György Dalos, *The Guest From the Future: Anna Akmatova and Isaiah Berlin* (London: John Murray, 1998), p.64, 66-7.

the human condition. This process of legendisation needs challenging, and Berlin needs placing in a context free of myth and drama. I will endeavour to create a context in which new understandings of Berlin's textual output can be reached.

Work Published by Berlin - Themes and Texts

The post-1945 writing of Isaiah Berlin followed certain explicit themes, which I will introduce briefly here.³⁷ Berlin's writing can be viewed in five strands, with chronological overlaps. Firstly, Berlin began his academic career writing formal philosophy, engaging and disputing the logical positivism of Anglo-American academia.³⁸ Secondly, as Berlin turned to an interest in the history of ideas, he concentrated on European thinkers, predominantly of the Enlightenment period onwards, and Russian thinkers. A persistent theme in this strand is Berlin's implementation of 'reconstructive imagination', which was a methodological attempt to 'enter into' the mind of the

³⁷ The majority of writings by Berlin have now been published in the form of thematic volumes. The editions I use in this thesis are: *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas* (London: Pimlico, 1997); *Concepts and Categories: Philosophical Essays* (London: Pimlico, 1999); *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas* (London: John Murray, 1990); *Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); *Personal Impressions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980); *The Power of Ideas* (London: Pimlico, 2000); *The Proper Study of Mankind: An Anthology of Essays* (London: Pimlico, 1998); *Russian Thinkers* (London: Penguin, 1994); *The Sense of Reality: Studies in Ideas and Their History* (London: Pimlico, 1997); *Three Critics of the Enlightenment: Vico, Hamann, Herder* (London: Pimlico, 2000); *The Soviet Mind; The First and the Last*. The only work presented as a single monograph is *Karl Marx: His Life and Environment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983). *The Roots of Romanticism* (London: Pimlico, 2000) and *Freedom and Its Betrayal: Six Enemies of Human Freedom* (London: Pimlico, 2003) are book length versions of Berlin's BBC lectures. A collection of Berlin's letters are published as *Flourishing: Letters 1928-1946* (London: Pimlico, 2004), with a second volume forthcoming in May 2006. Interviews with Berlin include Ramin Jahanbegloo, *Conversations with Isaiah Berlin*, and *Unfinished Dialogue: Sir Isaiah Berlin and Polanowska-Sygulska* (Amhurst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2006) I have also consulted the recently established Isaiah Berlin Papers collection at the Bodleian Library, Oxford. This is an interesting collection yet, frustratingly, there are restrictions on certain items of interest. Nevertheless, I have made use of some unpublished texts and letters. For a review article on the Berlin Papers, see Michael Hughes, 'The Papers of Sir Isaiah Berlin at the Bodleian Library', *Twentieth Century British History*, 16, 2 (2005), pp.193-205. The Isaiah Berlin Virtual Library (<http://berlin.wolf.ox.ac.uk/>) has been an invaluable research tool throughout this thesis.

³⁸ See *Concepts and Categories* for these earlier writings, for instance 'Verification' [1938], pp.12-31, and 'Empirical Propositions and Hypothetical Statements' [1950], pp.32-55.

thinker he was analysing. Thirdly, Berlin wrote in contemporary journals on the intellectual currents he identified in the world.³⁹ Linked to this strand, fourthly, was Berlin's attempts to join these musings with elements of the second strand (history of ideas), to attempt definitions of history, values, and morality in the twentieth century context. Most famously, his essays 'Historical Inevitability' and 'Two Concepts of Liberty' define this effort in the 1950s. Published in 1954, 'Historical Inevitability' was a critique of historicism and determinist thought, and an effort to promote free will, action and ideas as pivotal any 'real' understanding of history.

'Two Concepts of Liberty' refashioned Constant's duality of ancient and modern liberty, and introduced the concepts of 'negative' and 'positive' liberty. Critical of broadly coercive forms of 'positive' liberty, Berlin presented the case for 'negative' liberty, where man can act 'unobstructed'. As a pair, 'Historical Inevitability' and 'Two Concepts of Liberty' inescapably form the central focus of any examination of Berlin within a cold war context. Much of the contemporary literature in the area of political science still concentrates on 'Two Concepts of Liberty', and the value-pluralism that is attributed to Berlin's thought stems from this strand. Berlin would criticise those thinkers who wished to reduce human experience to a single explainable conception of the world. In this sense, Berlin's entire writing career was moving towards his mature theories on monism⁴⁰, and his eventual divorce from the study of formal philosophy to the study of the 'history of ideas'. This crucial break also signifies a core theme of Berlin's mature writings, his interest in uncovering 'the human' in history. Lastly, Berlin wrote on Jewish identity, and his Zionist

³⁹ Exemplified in articles published for *Foreign Affairs* (the pre-eminent journal of the foreign policy establishment in America). In 1952 Berlin publishes 'Generalissimo Stalin and the Art of Government'. In 1957 two more pieces are written by Berlin for *Foreign Affairs* entitled 'The Soviet Intelligentsia' and 'The Silence in Russian Culture'.

⁴⁰ See Claude J. Galipeau, *Isaiah Berlin's Liberalism*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), p.15.

preoccupations serve as an important aspect of Berlin's thought. Berlin wrote on Jewish identity within the history of ideas, and also added his thoughts on contemporary Zionism, and Zionists.⁴¹

Within the thesis I bring these strands together to form a fresh impression of a 'Berlinian' project that encompassed a consistent use of language to express a rigid set of underlying values.

In general terms, Berlin's *oeuvre* is characterised by broad historical and contemporary concerns.

The way in which the 'historical' and the 'contemporary' overlap in the work of Berlin is one difficulty that many interpreters do not challenge. Berlin spent a huge amount of intellectual energy theorising on and attempting to categorise the shift from Enlightenment to Counter-Enlightenment (or Romantic) thought. He analysed thinkers he believed were unduly neglected or spurned by historians of ideas, and wrote rich portraits of philosophers and their ideas, from Herzen to Vico, from Herder to Hamann. The avalanche of erudition that is *The Roots of Romanticism* is an excellent example of this attempt to define the shift in consciousness between identifiable intellectual epochs.

Berlin wished to expose the flaws of both excessive rationalism and excessive irrationalism in human thought. Both these excesses were products of Enlightenment and Romantic thought. As a counter to untrammelled excess, Berlin created the impression that twentieth century European liberalism was the most 'natural', the political philosophy most akin to

⁴¹ On Jewish identity, see especially Isaiah Berlin, 'Jewish Slavery and Emancipation', in *The Jewish Chronicle*, 21 September 1951; Isaiah Berlin, 'Benjamin Disraeli, Karl Marx, and the Search for Identity' [1970], in *Against the Current*, pp.252-286. On contemporary Zionism see Isaiah Berlin, 'Israel: A Survey', in *The State of Israel* (London: Anglo-Israel Association, 1953), pp.42-55. On Zionists see Isaiah Berlin, 'The Life and Opinions of Moses Hess' [1959], in *Against the Current*, pp.213-25.; Isaiah Berlin, 'Chaim Weizmann' [1958], in *Personal Impressions*, pp.32-62. For a discussion of the problematic nature of Berlin's Zionism, see Joan Cocks, *Passion and Paradox: Intellectuals Confront the National Question* (Princeton, N.J.: PUP, 2003).

'real humanness' or the 'ways of life'. He offered the impression that the 'sense of reality' derived from the liberal standpoint was the only world vision that truly reflected the desires and wishes of the human individual. Within this discursive process, Berlin aids the creation of certain myths, or certain representations of intellectual figures, that bolsters the impression of a 'naturally strong', vibrant and widespread foundation to 'the liberal tradition'. Linked to these ideas, Berlin has been identified closely with anti-totalitarianism⁴², and anticommunism. The Russian influence is consciously emphasised in the work of Berlin, and I look at whether his readings of Russian thinkers distorts and exaggerates 'the liberal tradition' in the west, artificially broadening the liberal conception of 'the human'. Crucially, I argue that Berlin's use of normative language is the basis of any distortion. This approach moves away from the substantial amount of literature that is based on Berlin's formal political theory to ground where the boundaries of meaning are defined by the language employed by Berlin. To help understand this shift it is imperative to explore the range of responses offered by political theorists who have written on Berlin.

Sympathetic Responses to Berlin

To outline the political theory of Isaiah Berlin is to examine the main themes of incommensurability, value pluralism and morality that combine to create the focus of liberal scholars in the field of political theory. Berlin's value pluralism is most recently analysed in George Crowder's *Isaiah*

Berlin: Liberty and Pluralism, where Crowder states

'Berlin's concept of value pluralism is central to his thought, emerging out of his critique of moral monism...monism is false, since it does not do justice to the deep plurality of moral

⁴² See Crowder, *Isaiah Berlin*, p.2.

experience, as shown by the everyday occurrence of dilemma, disagreement and rational regret for lost value even when we have acted rightly.⁴³

It is acknowledged that Berlin's thought on value pluralism is imperfect, and much of the political theory in response to Berlin's ideas have been attempts to justify, clarify or improve upon Berlin's fragmented thoughts. Crowder's work is the most recent major text to concentrate solely on Berlin, and whilst viewing Berlin's thought as problematic, considers Berlin's work as a valid starting point for a meaningful political philosophy for the future. Recent articles by Jonathan Riley and Alex Zakaras⁴⁴ in the journal *Political Theory* seem to confirm the consensus that Berlin's thought, once interrogated, has much to offer to political culture in the twenty-first century. The ramifications of Berlin's values pluralism, as well as the moral dimension to his thought, are taken seriously. The result of a steady stream of articles on Berlin has meant that Berlin has earned a prominent place as a key liberal thinker of the twentieth century.⁴⁵ To understand how these recent texts have arrived at this consensus on Berlin's contribution to political thought it is necessary to briefly introduce the evolution of sympathetic writing on Berlin.

The literature on Berlin is broad and influential enough to be viewed as a mini Berlin industry. The earliest significant responses to Berlin's ideas, from his friend, the Cambridge historian E.H. Carr, were fiercely critical of Berlin's denunciations of historical determinism. However, from the publication of 'Two Concepts of Liberty' in 1957, Berlin's 'positive' and 'negative' liberty thesis became a theoretical beacon around which liberals could circulate.

⁴³ Crowder, *Isaiah Berlin*, p.147.

⁴⁴ Jonathan Riley, 'Defending Cultural Pluralism: Within Liberal Limits', *Political Theory*, 30, 1 (2002), pp.68-96; Alex Zakaras, 'Isaiah Berlin's Cosmopolitan Ethics', *Political Theory*, 32, 4 (2003), pp.495-518.

⁴⁵ For a concise summation of responses to Berlin see Ian Harris, 'Berlin and His Critics' in *Liberty*, pp.349-346.

Berlin's ideas on liberty would be examined in great depth for years to come, and would serve as the foundation of his intellectual reputation. When Henry Hardy requested to sort Berlin's work into edited volumes in 1974,⁴⁶ Berlin had already gained a reputation that seemed impenetrable to criticism. *The Idea of Freedom*, Berlin's *Festschrift* published in 1979, is a sign of his rise to establishment status as a thinker. A second *Festschrift* was published in 1991, confirming Berlin's place at the top of the scholarly hierarchy.⁴⁷

Whilst critically examining Berlin's ideas, criticism and interrogation of the *foundation* of his thought from those of differing fundamental beliefs was a rarity. Those who took Berlin's work seriously agreed with the direction of Berlin's moral compass, and most of those who engaged with his work shared Berlin's 'ontological' assumptions. Scholars would, consciously or otherwise, cement Berlin in the liberal tradition, validating his position, thus creating the image of a philosopher engaged in creating an acute and authentic vision of the future. A prominent example of this reading comes in the form of Gray's conception of 'agonistic liberalism'. Gray's label was developed in his philosophical biography of Berlin, and can be found restated in numerous texts by Gray.⁴⁸ Gray defines Berlin's 'agonistic liberalism' as

'that species of liberalism that is grounded, not in rational choice, but in the limits of rational choice - limits imposed by the rational choices we are often constrained to make among goods that are both inherently rivalrous, and often constitutively uncombinable, and often incommensurable, or rationally incomparable. Agonistic liberalism is an application in political philosophy of the moral theory of value-pluralism - the theory that there is an irreducible diversity of ultimate goods'.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ See Hardy, 'The Editors Tale', in *Liberty*, pp. ix-xxxiii.; Ignatieff, *Isaiah Berlin*, pp.279-290.

⁴⁷ Alan Ryan, (ed.), *The Idea of Freedom: Essays in Honour of Isaiah Berlin* (Oxford: OUP, 1979); Edna Margalit and Avishai Margalit (eds.), *Isaiah Berlin: A Celebration* (London: Hogarth Press, 1991).

⁴⁸ John Gray, *Isaiah Berlin*; 'Agonistic Liberalism' *Social Philosophy and Policy*, 12, 1 (1995), pp.111-135; *Enlightenment's Wake* (London: Routledge, 1995); 'Berlin's Agonistic Liberalism' in *Post-liberalism* (London: Routledge, 1993).

⁴⁹ Gray, *Enlightenment's Wake*, p.68.

In the work of John Gray, 'agonistic' is differentiated from 'traditional' liberalism, in that agonistic liberalism lies closer to value pluralism, for 'value-conflict among incommensurables breaks out at the very heart of liberalism as [Berlin] conceives it, that is to say, within the idea of liberty itself.'⁵⁰

Indeed, as Ignatieff observes, 'Berlin had reason to believe that he was the first to argue that pluralism *entailed* liberalism'.⁵¹ Berlin's work is undeniably important in defining twentieth century

liberalism as necessarily linked to pluralism. As Ignatieff points out Gray's work highlights the contradiction that 'a pluralist logically cannot put liberty first. Liberty is simply one of the values that must be reconciled with others; it is not the trump card.'⁵² A central problem in a

historiographical examination of Berlin is that his concepts of liberty and pluralism appear to be based in a degree of assumption which, potentially, sees Berlin placing too much emphasis on one particular way of living. By the 1990s, the term liberal-pluralist increasingly became attached to Berlin's thought, and the term 'Berlinian'⁵³ became a buzzword for a tolerant, peaceful future.

Theses by Claude Galipeau and Robert Kocis⁵⁴ proved important in adding variances on a theme,

the theme that seemed increasingly to be the general 'correctness' of Berlin, and his continuing

relevance for late twentieth century political thought. As well as the wealth of obituaries published

after his death in 1997, academic articles have increased in density in the following years, and

various attempts to sum up Berlin's political philosophy have been offered. However, these

⁵⁰ Gray, *Enlightenment's Wake*, p.73.

⁵¹ Ignatieff, *Isaiah Berlin*, p.286.

⁵² Ignatieff, *Isaiah Berlin*, p.286.

⁵³ See Michael Kenny, 'Isaiah Berlin's Contribution to Modern Political Theory', *Political Studies*, 48, 5 (2000), pp.1026-1039.

⁵⁴ Claude J. Galipeau, *Isaiah Berlin's Liberalism*; Kocis, *A Critical Appraisal of Sir Isaiah Berlin's Political Philosophy*, (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1989).

attempts are rarely radical, and Berlin scholarship is now at a stage where depth and variance of interpretation needs to increase. Berlin scholarship needs to take an imaginative turn. The central problem is that a 'Berlinian consensus' has quietly emerged that prioritizes liberal assumptions on the foundations of freedom within society. Notably, Tamir and Zarakas have recently attempted, in different articles, to suggest Berlin was offering a tolerant vision of a multicultural future, and a more recent article by Plaw finds sympathy with Cracraft's article of 2002 that described Berlin as methodologically 'anti-postmodernist'.⁵⁵ Thus, Berlin's intellectual legacy has become aligned with a variety of twenty-first century political and social preoccupations in a manner that, I will argue in this thesis, exaggerates and distorts aspects of Berlin's intellectual project.

The publication of Michael Ignatieff's official biography, partially completed before Berlin's death, introduced in a more popular format a picture of Berlin that married the BBC persona of Berlin the public intellectual, with the emerging academic consensus. A swift summary of the well known literature on Berlin does indeed confirm the growth of a consensus surrounding the thought of Berlin. However, there are also scholars who question the ground on which Berlin's liberalism stands. Berlin's critics point out the way in which his gentlemanly, or 'bleeding heart', liberalism sidesteps issues of state sanctioned violence, social inequalities, and social change. Berlin is

⁵⁵ For the most recent scholarship on Berlin, see; James Cracraft, 'A Berlin for Historians', *History and Theory*, 41 (2002), pp.277-300; Michael Kenny, 'Isaiah Berlin's Contribution to Modern Political Theory'; M. Lilla, R. Dworkin, & Robert B. Silvers (eds.) *The Legacy of Isaiah Berlin* (New York, NY: New York Review of Books, 2001); Joseph Mali & Robert Wokler (eds.), 'Isaiah Berlin's Counter-Enlightenment', *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, 93, 5, (2003); Avery Plaw, 'Isaiah Berlin and the Plurality of Histories: Two Concepts of Karl Marx', *Rethinking History*, 10, 1 (2006); Jonathan Riley, 'Interpreting Isaiah Berlin's Liberalism', *American Political Science Review*, 95, 2 (2001), pp.283-95; Peter Skagestad, 'Collingwood and Berlin: A Comparison', *Journal of The History of Ideas*, 66, 1 (2005), pp.99-112; Johnny Steinburg, 'The Burdens of Berlin's Modernity', *History of European Ideas*, 22, 5/6 (1996), pp.369-383; Yael Tamir, 'A Strange Alliance: Isaiah Berlin and the Liberalism of the Fringes', *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 1 (1998), pp.279-289; Andrezej Wicher, 'In a World Where Ends Collide - Romantic Discrepancies in the Thought of Isaiah Berlin', *History of European Ideas*, 20 (1995), pp.375-381.

painted as a thinker who either offers positive propaganda for the western world in the cold war period, acts as polemicist for the Zionist cause, is an apologist for the ideals of the capitalist west or, with 'Two Concepts of Liberty', offered the west its 'self-image'.

Non-Sympathetic Responses to Berlin

Michael Kenny's article 'Isaiah Berlin's Contribution to Political Theory' is a balanced effort to problematise the way in which scholars approach Berlin. Kenny states 'there are...good analytical and normative reasons for a renewed engagement with Berlin. Yet mild scepticism about his intellectual contribution ought to mediate such an encounter.'⁵⁶ Kenny observes the contextual problems that are overlooked by many Berlin scholars, and looks beyond the abstractions that occupy scholars such as John Gray. The non-sympathetic literature, originating from the criticism of E.H. Carr and G. Cohen⁵⁷, remains predominantly 'left-wing', and focuses on the contextual basis for Berlin's claims. Perry Anderson, Noam Chomsky, Terry Eagleton, Christopher Hitchens and Edward Said have launched stinging assaults on Berlin's thought and personality.⁵⁸ There is also a more radical neo-Nietzschean strain to be found through the work of Thomas Dumm. This sustained double-pronged attack confronts Berlin at an altogether different level. Together, these scholars represent a sustained critique of Berlin that attempts to dislodge the legitimacy of the

⁵⁶ Kenny, 'Isaiah Berlin's Contribution to Modern Political Theory', p.1037.

⁵⁷ E.H. Carr, *What is History?* (London: Penguin, 1990), *passim*; Marshall Cohen, 'Berlin and the Liberal Tradition', *Philosophical Quarterly*, 10, 40 (1960), pp.216–27.

⁵⁸ Perry Anderson, *A Zone of Engagement* (London: Verso, 1992); Noam Chomsky, *Pirates and Emperors, Old and New: International Terrorism in the Real World* (London: Pluto, 2002); Terry Eagleton, *Figures of Dissent* (London: Verso, 2003); Christopher Hitchens, *Unacknowledged Legislation: Writers in the Public Sphere* (London: Verso, 2000); Edward Said, *The End of the Peace Process: Oslo and After* (New York: Vintage, 2001).

liberal ground on which Berlin is located.

Dumm examines the way in which the views that underpin liberal sentiment can be detected through Berlin's implicit use of language. Through this, Dumm argues that Berlin can never be as 'liberal' as he claims. Within the thesis I borrow from this interpretative approach, extend and modify the textual analysis, and apply the methodological implications to broader aspects of Berlin's thought and context. The key to my approach is persuasively linking the context to the text, and arguing that Berlin's implicit use of language had a detectable impact. Viewed prosaically, I would judge myself to be more aligned with the unsympathetic literature of scepticism, rather than with the static nature of much of the sympathetic literature. Absorbing strands of insight from Said, Eagleton and Chomsky over the possibility of the material, or 'real-world', consequences of Berlin's thought, I argue that Berlin's thought should be considered geopolitical to some degree. This creates a radical contextual setting in which to view Berlin's textual practice. By linking this contextual synthesis with new textual analysis, the purpose of the thesis is to offer a radical re-examination of Berlin by locating his work in a challenging and previously unacknowledged landscape. The need for this renewed approach is alluded to, but not systematically explored by Berlin scholars. For instance, Kenny has written 'there is a tendency in recent writing about him to disconnect his thought from the acute dilemmas posed by the geopolitical contexts and crises that he experienced – on occasions as an engaged and partisan political actor.'⁵⁹ Along these lines, I depart from evaluations of Berlin rooted in the detached problems of political science, in favour of a study that goes beyond questions of validity or worth,

⁵⁹ Kenny, 'Isaiah Berlin's Contribution to Modern Political Theory', p.1037.

retrieving the contextual foundations of Berlin's textual claims.

Supporting the contextual core of my argument is a description of Berlin's ontological stance, which is also underemphasised in the literature. For instance, Berlin's 'imaginative sympathy' arises from the fact that he has a very rigid idea about morality that is not adequately expressed in the literature. Kenny writes,

'[t]his quality [imaginative sympathy] enables us to learn from our encounters with others that we possess trans-subjective moral capacities. It is this attribute that, in Berlin's mind, permitted the development of a discernable common horizon to human values and a limit upon the 'goods' that human beings could meaningfully hold.'⁶⁰

I engage with the methodology of 'imaginative sympathy' (or, rather, as Berlin calls it 'reconstructive imagination') in depth in Chapter Four. However, the crucial point from Kenny's quote is that Berlin held the conviction that there was a standard of 'common humanness' that underlay liberal sentiment. Steinburg brings out the contradictions of Berlin's broader claim of the inauthenticity of totalitarianism by stating '[f]or Berlin the historian, the dark side of modernity reaches as authentically into the funds of human possibility as Berlin's liberalism does. As Ignatieff has pointed out, 'Berlin cannot have it both ways.'⁶¹ On the one hand, Berlin displays optimism for humanity, and he assigns a certain purity to his idea of 'humanness'. On the other hand, Berlin wrote in the shadow of human depravity, makes reference to 'inhumanness', and views the extreme impulses of modernity as carried out by 'moral idiots'. It is in this sense that Berlin's tragi-optimism is particularly interesting, feeding into a new appreciation of his ontology.

⁶⁰ Kenny, 'Isaiah Berlin's Contribution to Modern Political Theory', p.1029.

⁶¹ Steinburg, 'The Burdens of Berlin's Modernity', p.382.

Towards a Berlinian Ontology

Ontology

The term 'ontology' arises frequently in this thesis and this requires some explanation. I wish to briefly elaborate on how my own understanding of the term fits into an examination of Berlin's thought, and explain why I see this as a necessary concept with which to sustain my methodological approach. In a recent article, Michael Bentley wrote, 'the next thirty years will, I propose, be the period in which ontology returns to the centre of historical theory'.⁶² There is an exciting sense of immanence here, as Bentley argues for the need to create 'arguments that are congruent with what revisions of epistemology have taught us about the limits of historical knowledge and the inevitability of textual representation'.⁶³ However, some scholars argue that the term has limited use: 'the problems of pure philosophical ontology have seemed so deep or confused that philosophers who concentrate primarily on the concept of being as such have acquired an occasionally deserved reputation for obscurity and even incoherence'.⁶⁴

However, questions surrounding the meaning of ontology are of contemporary relevance, and it is important to realise the term has a varied and complex genealogy. *The Oxford English Dictionary*⁶⁵ (OED) breaks the word into two streams, firstly that of formal philosophy where ontology is defined as 'the science or study of being; that branch of metaphysics concerned with the nature or essence of being or existence'. Jeremy Bentham's *Fragment on Ontology*⁶⁶ is cited

⁶² Michael Bentley, 'Past and 'Presence': Revisiting Historical Ontology', *History and Theory*, 45 (October 2006), p. 349.

⁶³ Bentley, 'Past and 'Presence': Revisiting Historical Ontology', p. 349.

⁶⁴ Dale Jacquette, *Ontology* (Chesham: Acumen, 2002), p.xi.

⁶⁵ *The Oxford Dictionary Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁶⁶ Jeremy Bentham, 'Fragment on Ontology', in *Works* (Edinburgh, 1843).

as discussing ontology as 'the field of supremely abstract entities...a yet untrodden labyrinth.' F.C.S. Schiller, in *Humanism*, wrote 'the effect of what Kant called the Copernican revolution in philosophy is that ontology, the theory of Reality, comes to be conditioned by epistemology, the theory of our knowledge.'⁶⁷

Ontology is also defined 'as a noun: a theory or conception relating to the nature of being. Also in extended use.' This strand is related to Logic and Symbolic Logic, especially important being the work of Lesniewski who developed an 'ontology of classes'.⁶⁸ The work of analytic philosopher W.V.O. Quine is not mentioned in the *OED*, for whom 'ontology came to refer to the analysis of those basic entities whose existence is presupposed by a given proposition, theory or research tradition.'⁶⁹ Traditionally, especially in formal philosophy, ontological studies have provided a way to view opposing dialogues and categories.⁷⁰ However, more recently scholars have been 'thematizing this implicit [ontological] commitment across a wider range of intellectual activities.'⁷¹

A Dictionary of Political Thought, edited by Roger Scruton, has a definition that moves closer to the meaning of the word as used in the body of this thesis: 'Literally, the study of being; but usually used in political theory in a sense which ultimately stems from modern phenomenology, to mean the underlying assumptions about reality, especially social reality, that

⁶⁷ F.C.S. Schiller, *Humanism: Philosophical Essays* (London: MacMillan, 1912).

⁶⁸ D.I. Barnett, S.J. Surma & J.T. Srzednicki, (eds.), *Collected Works of Stanislaw Lesniewski* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1992).

⁶⁹ Stephen White, 'Weak Ontology and Liberal Political Reflection', *Political Theory*, 25, 4 (August 1997), p.502-3. Also see W.V.O. Quine, *From A Logical Point of View: 9 Logico-Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953).

⁷⁰ Hans Burkhardt and Barry Smith (eds.), *The Handbook of Metaphysics and Ontology* (Vol.2) (Munich: Philosophia Verlag, 1991).

⁷¹ White, 'Weak Ontology and Liberal Political Reflection', p.503.

are made in some given outlook.⁷² This general definition is useful, and surpasses older definitions⁷³, as it highlights the problem at the heart of understanding Berlin's ontology; namely uncovering assumptions within Berlin's use of language.

Some recent literature has offered prolonged interpretation of the term. A very useful article that has confronted the problem of ontology holds relevance for this study. Stephen K. White contends that in the last few decades an 'ontological shift' is visible, due to an increasing number of scholars employing the term. He explains this 'shift' signifying the reaction of scholarship to the 'late modern' period where

'the sense of living in late modernity implies a greater awareness of the conventionality of much of what has been taken for certain in the modern West. The recent ontological drift might then be characterised generally as the result of a growing propensity to interrogate more carefully those 'entities' presupposed by our typical ways of seeing and doing in the modern world. One of the entities most thrown into question has been our conception of the human subject.'⁷⁴

On the problem of definition and understanding of ontology, White believes that

'the lack of explicit thematization has been at least partially a measure of modernity's self-confidence. It is precisely the waning of this self-confidence that engenders such a widespread recourse to ontological reflection. Accordingly, the current drift might now be seen as an attempt to think ourselves, and being in general, in ways that depart from the dominant ontological investments of modernity.'⁷⁵

Building on this contextualised understanding of ontology, White creates the duality of 'weak' and 'strong' ontologies. White explains:

'strong are those ontologies that claim to reflect for us 'the way the world is,' or how

⁷² Roger Scruton (ed.), *A Dictionary of Political Thought* (London: MacMillan, 1982).

⁷³ See, for instance, Alasdair MacIntyre, 'Ontology', *The Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (New York: MacMillan, 1967)

⁷⁴ White, 'Weak Ontology and Liberal Political Reflection', p.503.

⁷⁵ White, 'Weak Ontology and Liberal Political Reflection', p.503.

God's being stands for human being, or what human nature is. For strong ontologies, the whole question of passages from ontological truths to moral-political ones is relatively clear....[however], weak ontologies are...not rooted in a crystalline conviction of ultimate cognitive truth. Rather, their proponents acknowledge that they are interpretations of the world. They are contestable pictures with a validity claim that is two-dimensional.⁷⁶

So, the 'ontologies' of Bentham and Schiller cited in the *OED* are examples of 'strong' ontologies that seek ultimate truths. The way in which I view Berlin's ontological commitment also falls into this category. I will argue that, for Berlin, *there are ontological truths that cannot be contested*. Berlin's ontological commitment can also be contrasted with continental understandings of ontology. White links the thought of Heidegger to Foucault, Derrida and Lyotard, summing up that Heidegger

'gave ontological investigation a historical dimension, insofar as he reacted against the dominant, modern way of understanding human being or subjectivity and indicated the whole tradition of Western metaphysics, which, in his view, had sought cognitive frameworks in which to 'grasp' being conclusively.'⁷⁷

Indeed, Heidegger's complicated attempt to confront the fundamental question of being in *Being and Time*⁷⁸ can be viewed as one of the problems I wish to unpick. Elden states (after quoting Heidegger on Newton), that 'it is clear Dasein and truth are fundamentally linked, that truth is context dependent.'⁷⁹ This gets closer to the way in which I conceive ontology, for Berlin's role and textual output *can* tell us something important about broader conceptions of 'truth' and

⁷⁶ White, 'Weak Ontology and Liberal Political Reflection', p.505-6.

⁷⁷ White, 'Weak Ontology and Liberal Political Reflection', p.504.

⁷⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* [trans. J McQuarrie and E. Robinson] (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969).

⁷⁹ Stuart Elden, *Mapping the Present: Heidegger, Foucault and the Project of a Spatial History* (London: Continuum, 2001), p.9.

'existence', subject and object, and how these conceptions relate to what we understand as 'context'.

I propose a specific definition of ontology which challenges conventional understandings of Berlin. 'Ontology' was chosen as a vital term that encompassed a sense of broad interlocking political, cultural and intellectual contexts behind complicated forms of expression. Ontology is language contextually understood; an acknowledgment that modes of thought are saturated by peculiar contextual landscapes. The usefulness of such an approach is that it complicates an otherwise unacknowledged set of conceptual problems surrounding the study of Isaiah Berlin, and the study of twentieth century liberalism more generally. The use of the term ontology is, therefore, a conscious attempt to expand methodological boundaries and challenge the vocabulary that dominates Berlin scholarship.

'Ontology' in this thesis denotes a contextualised elaboration on the philosophical connotations of the term, and is fixated on the wider philosophical implications of a study such as this. The term, as I understand and deploy it, will involve the description of patterns of language, comment on the conditions that allow for the production of these patterns, and explore how certain vocabularies make up and sustain these patterns. Ontology is therefore a term anchored in discourse, and only understandable through discourse analysis centred on Berlin's use of language. In a wider sense, I define the term ontology as a statement on the transition from modernity to postmodernity, which is what White means by his 'weak' and 'strong' dichotomy. Postmodernism has created a philosophically transparent lens through which to retrieve possible meanings. The definition I have employed is a useful way in which to approach an analysis of

Berlin's discursive impact, and it will become clear how the term can effectively blend understandings of the abstract and the concrete. The difficulty is deciding whether to agree that 'ontology' is assumed widely to imply a denial of free human choice.⁸⁰ A central tension is clearly the question over the extent to which the scholar can claim to elucidate 'implicit' attitudes that emanate from a definable ontology.

Context

In Chapter One I wish to move towards an understanding of the cold war as a cultural landscape that is best viewed as a set of narratives that represented, at root, the internalisation of definite values. This begins to set the contextual basis for an appreciation of the operation of Berlin's texts. I wish to approach the question of the relationship of the 'abstract' and the 'real-world', unravelling how I should begin to locate an intellectual figure such as Berlin. I concentrate on the way in which values simultaneously reflected complex foreign and domestic concerns, became internalised as such, and formalised into the cultural cold war. This is a vital approach, as Berlin has been labelled by Said as supplying the west with its 'self-image' during the cold war.⁸¹ Clearly, the relationship between ideas and reality, text and context, needs to be considered. I examine the theoretical implications of writing on hegemony and modernity. I finish the chapter by looking at how the alternative narratives of Apocalypse and Science Fiction can yield insights into the nature of the cold war. Placing these alongside the more accepted narratives of religion, and

⁸⁰ Fred R. Dallmayr, 'Ontology of Freedom: Heidegger and Political Philosophy', *Political Theory*, 12, 2 (May 1984), p.204.

⁸¹ Said, *End of The Peace Process*, p.218.

later colonialism, the ground is prepared for an original perspective in which to view the work of Berlin.

Chapter Two concentrates on Berlin's precise intellectual role within this context. My historiographical survey illustrates how the term 'intellectual' is a term understood and deployed in a variety of ways, normally with an exaggerated sociological or biographical slant. This usually means our understanding of 'intellectual functions' within society becomes distorted. I survey the historiographical trends surrounding this problematic term, and examine how it is that certain ideas of 'the intellectual' remain surprisingly dominant. I then offer a comparative sketch, concentrating mainly on French and British conceptions of the intellectual, in an effort to pin down the intellectual in a specifically national culture. Finally, I examine a sociological model which places Berlin in the role of 'preserver'. I suggest that Berlin assumed a deceptive 'passivity' in cold war anticommunist discourse. This means his 'role' has been largely neglected, or at least underestimated. Berlin begins to emerge as a problematic figure whose role was elusive, and whose impact was only detectable through an understanding of the relationship between text and context.

In Chapter Three, this context becomes problematised even further. In this chapter I detail the nature of Berlin's Zionism. In contrast with thinkers who appear as his intellectual opposites (namely Noam Chomsky and Edward Said) Berlin emerges as a thinker potentially at odds with the liberalism he purports to represent. I offer an extended case study detailing the way in which Berlin became embroiled in an ideological disagreement with *Index on Censorship*. The magazine had published a thought-provoking and controversial piece by Chomsky concerned

with American journalistic coverage of the Jewish-Palestinian conflict. Berlin's involvement places further question marks over his role as liberal intellectual, and throws new light on the 'reality' of his 'passive-preserver' intellectual role. This episode also uncovers how Berlin conceived the public and private 'realms'.

Chapter Four shifts focus towards the problems of method, style and the use of language in the work of Berlin. This is the final chapter before an extended textual analysis of Berlin's work. It is in this chapter that I scrutinise his intellectual legacy in depth and offer a critique of his methodology. For instance, an analysis of Berlin's 'reconstructive imagination' raises many complex questions. Throughout his career Berlin chose to remain aloof from the sensitive methodological issues surrounding the study of texts. For instance, he does not acknowledge, as Said suggests, that texts can 'misconstrue reality'. On the contrary, Berlin attempted to fit 'what an individual may have thought' into patterns that 'accord with life'. I contrast Berlin's methodology with the broadly 'postmodern' methodology of Foucault and Said. This avenue of investigation is not without its dilemmas, for one must remember that writers such as Said were extremely partisan and, although I see methodological value in the work of Said, it must be appreciated that many of his conclusions are far from unproblematic.⁸²

Text

Chapter Five begins a systematic analysis of Berlin's texts, introducing the concepts of 'space', 'normality', 'power' and 'the Other' to make sense of the way in which Berlin's texts are animated by concerns that can be detected through Berlin's use of language. This approach not only

⁸² See Patrick Williams (ed.), *Edward Said* [4 vols.] (London: SAGE, 2000) for a hugely useful collection of articles on Said's legacy.

confirms my earlier thoughts on the problematic nature of context, but also opens up the breadth of possibilities on the interpretation of language patterns. This leads to thoughts on 'cold war Orientalism', and a firm setting for a sustained textual analysis in the subsequent chapters. I also introduce the idea that it is possible to pin down Berlin's liberal ontology.

Chapter Six is an attempt to deepen and strengthen the ideas introduced in the previous chapter. I wish to link Berlin to specific thinkers, ending with the point that Berlin consistently displays a form of moral knowledge that is, in simple terms, an 'instructive morality' - a kind of *modus operandi* on Berlin's part. This morality is itself indicative of wider cold war concerns, where external intellectual pressures (most prevalent in the formal discourse of cold war) become manifested through an internalising process that pervades not only conscious anticommunist 'speech-acts', but the whole configuration of language. I examine Berlin's two most influential essays, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' and 'Historical Inevitability', and uncover the implicit meanings within these ideologically charged texts. This chapter begins to identify what I term the 'vocabulary of power' that Berlin employs.

Chapter Seven consolidates the textual analysis begun in the previous chapter, continuing to explore Berlin's writing on a variety of thinkers, paying close attention to Berlin's relationship to the 'liberal tradition'. These further explorations uncover further evidence of Berlin's ideological preoccupations and ingrained assumptions, and confirm the complicated nature of the intellectual process surrounding the production of his texts.

Finally, Chapter Eight, somewhat speculatively, explores the notion that Berlin also employed a 'vocabulary of place'. This geopolitical dimension to Berlin's thought necessarily

encompasses his attitudes on Israel and the cold war, as well as more abstract notions of nationalism, recognition and violence. This chapter serves as an attempt to tie together the disparate contextual and textual approaches of my thesis before I embark on the conclusion.

Synthesis

I have come to view Berlin in a similar way to E.H. Carr, who wrote, '[i]t is perhaps unfair to hold Sir Isaiah responsible for his disciples. Even when he talks nonsense, he earns our indulgence by talking it in an engaging and attractive way'.⁸³ There is no denying the strength of Berlin's style. His writing is elegant and rich (arguably overly so given the subject matter), his essays are at once erudite and exaggeratedly stylised. Yet, there is more than stylistic surface-tension here because, with Isaiah Berlin, we are dealing with depths that stylistic sheen cannot conceal. I am interested in the function of language, and the unravelling of implicit meaning and assumption. When considering Berlin on 'assumption', it is with a certain tentativeness that I read Skegestad's point on the way in which Berlin treated nineteenth century philosophers,

'he [Berlin] chose to emphasize the assumptions that they held in common, which they took too much for granted to be even aware of, and which we no longer share...[t]wentieth century totalitarianism, Berlin goes on to argue, is born out of the disappointment attendant upon the breakdown of this set of assumptions. If rational solutions cannot always be found, forcible solutions usually can.'⁸⁴

The irony here, which resonates throughout my thesis, is that Berlin did not pause to question his own set of assumptions, themselves internalised and naturalised by his formative experiences to a

⁸³ E.H. Carr, *What is History?* (London: Penguin, 1990), p.9.

⁸⁴ Skagestad, 'Collingwood and Berlin: A Comparison', p.109.

point where expressions of 'instructive morality' are not seen as problematic occurrences, themselves emanating from the elitist, dominant forms of formalised western moral knowledge. With this idea absorbed, it becomes clear that the role of the intellectual in western life was pivotal in the cultural cold war in covert as well as overt ways.

The further irony, clearly, is that I am also claiming to identify patterns of assumption in texts removed from my personal context. However, an approach that embraces methodology that uncovers and explains patterns of discursive activity is a transparent approach to a complex problem. I do find sympathy with what I call 'leftist' interpretations, and find the neo-Nietzschean ideas of Dumm compelling. This probably means that I accept 'systems' of some kind, yet I view this more as an acceptance of the existence of the certainty that texts 'operate' in contexts yet described. To operate is to create meaning. To decipher this meaning is to *offer* a context, but not to presume that this is the only possible context.

The approach offered by Dumm is a genealogical interpretation of an operation in the context of normality and space. The tides of postcolonialism and postmodernism flowed past Berlin whilst he was still actively publishing, and I am intrigued by the consistency of his opinions and methodology in the face of wider intellectual shifts. As a quick example of this, Berlin wrote 'the more specifically we look at the world, the less we can say about it'⁸⁵, which seems to go against most scholarship in the second half of the twentieth century, with the increasing focus on the potential value of deconstructive theory, and the advancement of the opinion that focusing on specific aspects of texts and narrative reduces the possibility of a rational analysis of history

⁸⁵ Isaiah Berlin, 'The Concept of Scientific History' [1960] in *The Proper Study of Mankind*, p.57.

Another methodological 'black-spot' within the work of Berlin is gender. Apart from the very brief appearance of Hannah Arendt, Anna Akmatova, Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir in various contexts, women do not figure highly in my thesis as a consequence. Berlin never touched upon the issue of gender, as with so many other issues that he did not approach. On the issue of feminism in relation to Berlin's liberalism, Crowder notes that 'a more hostile feminist response is that both negative and positive conceptions of liberty ought to be rejected, because both contain an inherently masculine bias'⁸⁶. He goes on to detail the thoughts of Diana Coole, who argues that (in Crowder's words)

'to emphasise negative non-interference is to promote the standard liberal commitment to a private realm of society in which public intervention is forbidden or discouraged. Yet it is this private realm, including the family and perhaps civil society more broadly, that has been a traditional site of women's oppression.'⁸⁷

Elsewhere, Joan Cocks writes of Berlin's dismissive attitude towards Hannah Arendt, and I look in some depth at the contrast Cocks makes between the 'realist' vision of Arendt toward the Jewish future, and the strangely blinkered liberal-idealism of Berlin's Zionism in Chapter Eight.

However, it is only necessary at this point to make clear that I view Berlin's approach to the 'history of ideas' as methodologically flawed on many levels, which will become clear through my construction of a new conception of 'the Berlinian'. It should also become clear that I am not offering a 'Foucauldian' or 'Marxist' analysis of Berlin, but an analysis that is perhaps best

⁸⁶ Crowder, *Isaiah Berlin*, p.90.

⁸⁷ Crowder, *Isaiah Berlin*, p.90. See also Diana Coole, 'Constructing and Deconstructing Liberty: A Feminist and Poststructuralist Analysis', *Political Studies*, 41 (1993), pp.83-95.

described as inspired by a variety of theoretical sources, culminating in an 'eclectic postmodernist' approach in an attempt to create original insights and fresh context.

PART 1 - Context

Towards a Cultural Cold War Context: 1945-1967

Introduction

In this long first chapter I wish to undertake a series of explorations. The purpose of these explorations is to begin the process of contextualisation; to interrogate traditional interpretations of the cold war; to promote the theoretical possibility of discursive understandings of aspects of Berlin's thought; and, ultimately, to prepare the ground for the methodological approach I propose in the thesis. I use new evidence to stress the extent to which Berlin was, sporadically, on the intellectual front line in the cold war.

The process of locating Berlin within this cold war context begins with an interrogation of the *idea* of cold war. The cold war, a problematised site since the influx of cultural interpretations of the period, is viewed as a series of narratives that reflect values and assumptions produced by contextually based preoccupations and anxieties. An exploration of the formalisation of cold war culture that led to identifiable discursive practices helps to develop and understanding of the way in which Berlin became embedded in an identifiable value system, as well as a national 'space'.

An examination of the Congress For Cultural Freedom (CCF) and the intellectual elite leads to questions of material interest and geopolitics. From this contextualised exploration the chapter arrives at a stage where I introduce the possibility that the implicit language of liberalism masks contemporary issues of real importance. Arguing for the validity of a re-interpretation of the cold war by viewing the period as an activated set of narrative sites, the chapter ends with the possibility that 'meaning' in cold war culture can be sought through a contextually based

discursive approach. This begins the preparation for the discourse analysis I undertake in the second part of the thesis. This approach entertains the possibility that textual representations affect the physical operations of political culture in the cold war context. Narrative analysis will illustrate how, the cold war context, 'implicit meaning' and perception of meaning became unusually heightened representations of reality. Therefore, an original study of Berlin demands movement away from a rigidly 'cold war' framework towards an analysis based on the meaning of the language he employed.

Isaiah Berlin and 'Real-World' Connections in the Cold War Context

The period 1945-1967 is specified because these were the years Berlin played an important part in formulating what Said termed the western 'self-image' in cold war culture. Berlin's famous lecture 'Two Concepts of Liberty', published in 1958, argued for a particular form of freedom and rejected overly coercive political philosophies. 1967 was the year that the abstract view of liberty began to lose its rose-tinted appeal as it emerged that the CCF had received government funding for years.

The 'cold war' can be understood as a theoretical narrative context broadly understood, not necessarily restricted by geopolitical boundaries. For instance, correspondence between Berlin and Melvin Lasky illustrates how American intellectuals concerned with Europe shared common assumptions and attitudes about Communism and totalitarianism. Berlin in many ways embodied the parallel American and British experience in the post-1945 world. Berlin spent a considerable amount of time in American and British governmental and educational institutions.

The positivity he expressed towards Anglo-American culture, linked to his condemnation of communism, meant that he embodied a set of values that characterised western cold war discourse. In turn, these values, if not stated explicitly, can be traced in Berlin's implicit use of language.

It is important to emphasise that ideas and attitudes that came to define Berlin's cold war thought did not somehow miraculously appear in 1945. Later in this chapter, my discussion of religious rhetoric will dwell on a cold war narrative trend with roots deep in the western experience. Indeed, during the documentary 'I'm Going To Tamper With Your Beliefs A Little', Berlin recalled the 1930s as a decade that shaped his belief system to a significant degree. In conversation with Stuart Hampshire he said

'I was brought up during Abyssinia and Spain, and those things have permanently altered my thought. I can't think of politics except in terms of a certain amount of black and white where totalitarianism does represent a very, very black kind of regime indeed. We were conditioned by what went on in the thirties, and remain permanently under the influence of that. At least I speak for myself. This is what shaped my thought ever-after.'⁸⁸

Clearly, the seeds were sown for a profound distrust of totalitarianism in all its forms. By the way Berlin speaks of this period, it is clear a habit of thinking in 'black and white' was also formed. This polarisation of thought was transparently political, and it is interesting to relate this directly to his cold war essays 'Two Concepts of Liberty' and 'Historical Inevitability'. A central theme in these texts is the use of dualities by Berlin to argue his case. Whether Berlin is discussing negative and positive liberty, determinism and free will, or even hedgehogs and foxes, he continuously displays a penchant for polarisation and duality. More importantly for present concerns is the fact that

⁸⁸ *I'm Going to Tamper With Your Beliefs a Little*. Dir. Michael Chanan. Logic Lane. 1972.

although Berlin seemed to view political allegiance as 'black and white', his work in the cold war period would become less explicitly anticommunist. It could be argued that Berlin's writing was explicitly anticommunist up to 1950. Galipeau cites a letter to *The New York Times* confirming Berlin's engagement with anticommunism⁸⁹, and Galipeau states that Berlin, in interview, was 'rather proud' of his cold war liberalism.⁹⁰ Furthermore, Galipeau views Berlin's 1949 article 'The Anglo-American Predicament'⁹¹ as a statement of Berlin's belief that

'the United States was the main guarantor of civil liberties in the Western world. It was the major power resisting the communist threat from Russia and Eastern Europe. For this reason, he argued that Britain should accept the new worldhistorical position and pre-eminent role of the United States.'⁹²

Berlin was clearly defining his allegiance with American hegemony, however, I would argue that the period after 1950 saw Berlin develop a style of writing that moved away from explicit denunciations of communism. Instead, Berlin would more subtly express the 'white' ideals of the western world. Subtle anticommunists like Berlin have not been as well documented as the more visible anti-communist intellectuals⁹³. Literature on the visibly anticommunist intellectuals illustrate the extent of blatant anticommunism in America and Britain. For example, Schrecker writes 'that anticommunist crusade - McCarthyism - dominated American politics during the late 1940s and 1950s. It used all the power of the state to turn dissent into disloyalty and, in the process,

⁸⁹ Isaiah Berlin, 'Attitude on Marxism Stated: Dr. Berlin Amplifies His Remarks Made At Mount Holylake', letter to *The New York Times*, 8 July 1949, p.18.

⁹⁰ Galipeau, *Isaiah Berlin's Liberalism*, n.54, p.134.

⁹¹ Isaiah Berlin, 'The Anglo-American Predicament', *Listener*, 29 September 1949, pp.518-9.

⁹² Galipeau, *Isaiah Berlin's Liberalism*, n.54, p.134.

⁹³ For an examination of state-sponsored propaganda in the USA see Nicholas J. Cull, 'The Man Who Invented Truth: Edward R. Murrow as director of USIA', *Cold War History*, 4, 1 (2003), pp.23-48.

drastically narrowed the spectrum of acceptable political debate.⁹⁴ It was a surreal collaborative project that 'created timidity' in the general population; indeed, 'patriotism, it seems, expediated the injustices of McCarthyism'⁹⁵. This shift in America can also be detected to a lesser extent in British culture, with a different type of intellectual engagement exemplified by Berlin; an anxious, less vitriolic anticommunism, yet equally virulent at the moral-philosophical level. The post-1945 world was punctuated by profound psychological shifts within intellectual circles, as well as wider society, towards the ultimate meaning of politics. In America, for instance, in the 'real-world' context,

'[a] few years earlier educators, labour leaders and businessmen would have been outraged at the idea that outside investigators could induce them to punish their employees or associates for political reasons. However, by 1949, most of these people subscribed to a set of assumptions that placed national security above the Constitution and Communism below it. These assumptions - about the critical nature of the world situation and the alien nature of Communism - enabled most Americans to view the repressive measures taken against alleged Communism as necessary for the survival of the U.S.'⁹⁶

This led to some intellectuals consciously modelling themselves into 'cold warriors'. Transatlantic American intellectuals such as Melvin Lasky⁹⁷ would become prominent anticommunist personalities in the cold war era. Berlin came to symbolise and shape the western 'self-image', and he can also be linked to these dynamic and increasingly influential and mobile intellectuals who concerned themselves with European affairs. Hence, even the more abstract aspects of Berlin's cold war links take on real-world connotations.

⁹⁴ Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are The Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (London: Little, Brown & Co., 1998), p.x.

⁹⁵ Schrecker, *Many Are The Crimes: McCarthyism in America*, p.xiv.

⁹⁶ Schrecker, *Many Are The Crimes: McCarthyism in America*, p.xiv.

⁹⁷ *Der Monat* was founded in 1948. Melvin Lasky was editor until 1958. He edited the magazine again from 1978 to 1983. From 1958 until 1991 he edited *Encounter* (co-edited with Stephen Spender until 1967).

In 1950 Lasky, then editor of *Der Monat*, wrote to Berlin suggesting he should supply plentiful footnotes to his translated 'Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century', 'making reference to the best literature in the field - this is most important for thousands of copies (and reprints) go into the Soviet Zone and it is good that the readers get some notion what has been published in the west.'⁹⁸ In 1951, Lasky writes 'the reaction among students (especially in the East-Zone universities behind the Iron Curtain) has been so favourable that we are making a reprint of some five thousand copies for 'special distribution'.⁹⁹ Furthermore, later that year, Lasky writes that Berlin's article had 'go[ne] underground 'fashion' into Soviet Germany and illegally circulate[d] in the 6 Leninist-Stalinist universities (Jena, Dresden, Rostock, Greifswald, Leipzig, Halle).'¹⁰⁰

Within these letters there is not only genuine enthusiasm from Lasky (and also, seemingly, thousands of students in the East-Zone), for Berlin's work but also, crucially, Berlin is on the intellectual 'front line' in the cold war, and is being encouraged to do so by energetic and forceful cold war warriors such as Lasky. Berlin continued to publish on themes that reinforced cold war ideals, and was asked by Josselson, in 1966, to become the British representative in the CCF. In a letter to Lasky Berlin wrote 'I tried to assure him and Sheppard Stone that I was not the man - not British enough -, as it were, too busy, too uninterested in Africa and Asia, too likely to irritate your Arab collaborators.'¹⁰¹ These letters symbolise the extent Berlin became increasingly embedded in the cold war intellectual journalistic establishment in the west. To a significant degree, these affiliations must have shaped and focused on Berlin's thought on the

⁹⁸ Unpublished letter, Melvin Lasky to Isaiah Berlin, 28 September 1950. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Berlin 264.

⁹⁹ Unpublished letter, Melvin Lasky to Isaiah Berlin, 2 February 1951. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Berlin 264.

¹⁰⁰ Unpublished letter, Melvin Lasky to Isaiah Berlin, 24 March 1951. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Berlin 264.

¹⁰¹ Unpublished letter, Melvin Lasky to Isaiah Berlin, 24 March 1951. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Berlin 264.

meaning of cold war. They also illustrate how Berlin conceived himself somehow outside the direct, formal concerns of organisations such as the CCF. Yet, and the point must be made clear, even before examining the more abstract impact of Berlin's texts in creating the western 'self image', it is clear that he played a discernible and important role in authoring the dissemination of western ideals beyond the Iron Curtain.

So, the extent of the anticommunist 'crusade' was not only significant in its 'visible' sense - the transmission of ideas via journalistic networks - but also the 'invisible' way in which Anglo-American sensibilities were being steadily transformed. This psychological shift sprang from the necessity for an entirely new set of allegiances in the early cold war period. Schrecker believed this process of transformation was only conceivable with a major ideological shift: 'it was a complex process, involving partisan politics, bureaucratic infighting, intellectual conversions, legal proceedings, congressional investigations, and the not always well coordinated activities of the various elements of the anticommunist network'.¹⁰² Although not implicated as a vehemently explicit denunciator of communism in the Anglo-American context, Berlin nevertheless fits into a niche that attacked Soviet culture for its repressive nature whilst simultaneously advocating western democratic conceptions of freedom.

Berlin would later define the conception of freedom in great detail, and I will deal with his complex conception of freedom in the second section of the thesis. Berlin's conception of freedom has at its root a set of ontological assumptions with a definite moral core. Using similar

¹⁰² Schrecker, *Many Are The Crimes*, p.120.

language that created the impression of a 'generically traditional 'other''¹⁰³, anti-communism in general sought to denounce communism as immoral, whilst implicitly reinforcing the dominant western moral and political norms. Prominent anti-communists infamously generated paranoia, creating an 'aura of criminality' around communists residing in Anglo-American society. Berlin, concentrating his focus outward towards the Soviet Union, served to strengthen anti-communism by helping to create the impression that distinctive character traits could be associated with communism, for instance claiming determinism 'turns out to rest either on a mythology or on a metaphysical dogma.'¹⁰⁴ The collection of essays in *The Soviet Mind* illustrate this point by emphasising the differences between Soviet and western society as resting on fundamentally different forms of existence. The collection of essays in *Liberty* illustrates how Berlin had internalised these concerns, and implicitly presented western capitalist democracy as the natural foundation for true freedom.

These essays, the majority conceived between 1945 and 1967, served to reinforce moral and political norms. Seen alongside the development of cold war culture, where ostensibly apolitical cultural organisations and institutions became increasingly politicised, Berlin can be seen as an intellectual figure who related to, and indeed *defined* perceptions of ideology. Away from these abstract assertions, it is clear that Berlin was undoubtedly, to some extent, a part of formalised cold war culture, as he published articles in *Foreign Affairs*, and *Encounter*, the periodical of the CCF. As I will outline, in 1966-7 articles appeared in the *New York Times*,

¹⁰³ Schrecker, *Many Are The Crimes*, p.121.

¹⁰⁴ Isaiah Berlin, 'Historical Inevitability' [1954] in *Liberty*, p.155.

Ramparts and the *Saturday Evening Post* that revealed the CIA had financed *Encounter*. The challenge is how to conceive Berlin within this context.

Emphasising the Formalised Nature of Cold War Culture

Christopher Lasch's essay, 'The Congress for Cultural Freedom' in *The Agony of the American Left*, published in 1969, was the first effort to link the *idea* of cold war to its cultural impact. It now seems essential to make the case that this relationship was formalised, and consciously generated by certain individuals embedded within Anglo-American political culture. The CCF was an extensive 'network of intelligence personnel, political strategists, the corporate establishment, and the old school ties of the Ivy League universities'¹⁰⁵ that served to bolster and sustain certain western 'cold war' values. Stoner-Saunders writes:

'[T]he US government committed vast resources to a secret programme of cultural propaganda in western Europe. A central feature of this programme was to advance the claim that it did not exist. It was managed, in great secrecy, by America's espionage arm, the Central Intelligence Agency. The centrepiece of this covert campaign was the Congress for Cultural Freedom...At its peak, [the Congress] had offices in thirty-five countries, employed dozens of personnel, published over twenty prestige magazines, held art exhibitions, owned a news and features service, organised high profile international conferences...Its mission was to nudge the intelligentsia of western Europe away from its lingering fascination with Marxism and Communism towards a view more accommodating of 'the American way'.¹⁰⁶

This complex network of influence coloured vital aspects of Anglo-American discourse. The nature of intellectual allegiance was altered, shaping and polarising the western intellectual climate. It was a product of the ideological shift in post-1945 Anglo-America, and was the psychological

¹⁰⁵ Frances Stoner-Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper?: The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (London: Granta, 1999), p.1-2.

¹⁰⁶ Stoner-Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper?*, p.1.

'internalisation' of a set of new norms and values in the western cold war world. The number of academics, writers and artists *directly* involved with the CCF was considerable.¹⁰⁷ Those *indirectly* involved with the CCF - either through avowed support, or unwittingly writing for a financed magazine - includes a significant proportion of those writing in conservative-liberal Anglo-American discourse. Naturally, the wide readership, and influence, of literature linked to the CCF meant the cultural waves formed by the CIA were formidable. At the 1950 Berlin conference of the CCF a 'Freedom Manifesto' was conceived, which would become the 'framework for judging the commitment of individuals and individuals to total freedom of expression, to the uninhibited flow of ideas and opinions.'¹⁰⁸ However, this 'uninhibited flow of ideas and opinions' did not stop some of the more strident anti-communists from proposing a formal intolerance of Marxist ideas. This, as Stoner-Saunders writes,

'was vociferously contested by the British contingent, who demanded that the offending reference be excised. Essentially, the British were objecting to the assumption that....the writings of Marx and Lenin were 'less political philosophy than the field manual of Soviet strategy''.¹⁰⁹

It must be emphasised, therefore, that the CCF was not necessarily an institution that was dominated by the ethos of anticommunism. Indeed, the American sociologist Edwards Shils wrote that

'from 1945 onward, 'anti-Communists' and 'cold warriors' were reviled as liars, as reactionaries, as enemies of good relations between the peoples, as enemies of social justice and freedom...This was the situation in which the [CCF] came into existence. It was very unpopular. Its publications were treated scornfully. *Encounter* was shunned and

¹⁰⁷ (Detailed at length in Stoner-Saunders)

¹⁰⁸ Stoner-Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper?*, p.83.

¹⁰⁹ Stoner-Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper?*, p.82.

disparaged.'¹¹⁰

However, Shils elevates the idea of the CCF to a level that he believes warrants historical parallel with other 'great' intellectual enterprises:

'The Congress for Cultural Freedom fits into a tradition of intellectuals of a common outlook joined together in a common task – it is a product of the 18th century Enlightenment. I think it is not wrong to see its forerunners in the circle which produced the *Encyclopedie*.'¹¹¹

Although not vehemently anticommunist, the CCF promoted western values, and was an intellectual community that strove toward goals that were inherently 'proper', rational, morally correct, and humane. However, tensions remain between these high-minded abstractions and the context of government funding; tensions that can be forgotten behind the rhetoric of cosy communality of contemporary liberal thought. As Said points out, organised anticommunism leads to the nature of liberal discourse being extremely problematic:

'Whole systems of discourse derived from anticommunism from the supposed pragmatism of the end of ideology school to its short lived inheritor in the past few years, the end of history school. Far from being a passive defence of freedom, organised anticommunism in the U.S. led aggressively to covert support by the CIA for otherwise unexceptionable groups such as the Congress of Cultural Freedom - which was involved not only in the world wide distribution of *The God That Failed*, but in subsidising magazines such as *Encounter* - as well as the infiltration of labour unions, student organisations, churches and universities.'¹¹²

Part of the problem with this intellectual climate was one of avowed and un-avowed ideological

¹¹⁰ Edward Shils, 'Remembering the Congress For Cultural Freedom', *Encounter*, 1990, p.55.

¹¹¹ Edward Shils, 'Remembering the Congress For Cultural Freedom', p.56.

¹¹² Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures* (London: Vintage, 1994), p.83. See also Stefan Collini's chapter 'Intellectuals in Britain and France in the Twentieth Century: Confusions, Contrasts - and Convergence?', in J. Jennings (ed.), *Intellectuals in Twentieth Century France* (London: MacMillan, 1993) esp. p.211, 217.

allegiance. In America, the case of Whitaker Chambers is a good example of the assumptions and problems surrounding the 'literary-intellectual'. In the early 1930s, Chambers wrote for the *New Masses*, before writing for (and eventually partially editing) *Time*, and contributing articles to *Life*. During the 1930s, Chambers was attached to the Communist Party 'underground' which was 'an open secret to many of his former associates on the literary Left. Most of them knew nothing very specific about what his Party work actually entailed, of course, but they knew it was clandestine – and they also knew that the Party served the interests of the Soviet Union.'¹¹³

In 1948-50, Chambers was a pivotal witness in the infamous Alger Hiss perjury trial case, when he named Hiss as an underground Communist. On the weight of the testimony of Chambers (before the House of Un-American Activities Committee), Hiss was jailed for 'criminal acts that publicly identified him as a Soviet espionage agent.'¹¹⁴ By this time, Chambers had 'emerged as a despised, emblematic figure - the archetypal ex-Communist and counter-revolutionary who was not to be trusted'¹¹⁵ - and would publish his autobiography, *Witness*¹¹⁶, in 1953. In Hilton Kramer's rather odd treatment of Chambers, Kramer writes

'*Witness* fundamentally altered the terms of the political and intellectual debate that had been raging within the liberal camp at least since the Moscow Trials in the Thirties: the debate about the relation in which liberalism stood not only to Communism and Stalinism but to socialism....(that) debate – essentially a debate among disabused liberals over the future of liberalism – had reached...a watershed in the fierce divisions...caused by the Hiss case and the other revelations of spying treason, and disloyalty in the late Forties and early Fifties. The 'innocent' liberalism of the Thirties was now seen to be hopelessly compromised by its inability (or refusal) to resist the corruptions of Communist influence.

¹¹³ Hilton Kramer, *The Twilight of the Intellectuals: Politics and Culture in the Era of the Cold War* (Chicago: I.R. Dee, 1999), p.5.

¹¹⁴ Kramer, *The Twilight of the Intellectuals*, p.6.

¹¹⁵ Kramer, *The Twilight of the Intellectuals*, p.5.

¹¹⁶ Whitaker Chambers, *Witness*, (London: Andre Deutsch, 1953).

Something else – a 'new' liberalism – was needed to take its place. Liberals had entered upon a vast effort to set their own intellectual house in order.¹¹⁷

But this meta-narrative, with ideas shifting in prominence and vying for primacy, is a strange contrast to the Hiss trail itself, which actually ended up as little more than a slanging match, with Hiss's lawyer branding Chambers a 'leper'¹¹⁸. At the time, much was made of the contrasting personalities of the two men. Chambers, thought of by the prominent literary critic Lionel Trilling (among others) as a shifty, physically unattractive, opportunistic outsider, is contrasted with Hiss, who was good-looking, had friends who were 'society people', and who, at least, stuck by his beliefs. Without going further into this story¹¹⁹, it is clear that the intellectual climate specific to cold war America deeply affected literary, journalistic and academic circles. The nature of the 'House of Un-American Activities Committee' that, very publicly, tried and convicted those who were accused of 'cold war crimes' reflects more than a desire to ensure 'cultural freedom'.

As Stoner-Saunders comments, '[the hearing] showed 'less interest in the names supplied than in testing the sincerity of the witness's confession'. Leslie Fiedler described the process as a kind of symbolic ritual when he said that 'The confession in itself is nothing, but without the confession...we will not be able to move forward from a liberalism of innocence to a liberalism of responsibility'.¹²⁰ Within this context, what seems to characterise liberal discourse at this time is the distance between reality and expression that perhaps, as Shils believed, really did place cold

¹¹⁷ Kramer, *The Twilight of the Intellectuals*, p.11.

¹¹⁸ Kramer, *The Twilight of the Intellectuals*, p.16.

¹¹⁹ See Allen Weinstein, *Perjury: The Hiss-Chambers Case* (New York: Knopf, 1978); Sam Tanenhaus, *Whittaker Chambers: A Biography* (New York: Random House, 1997).

¹²⁰ Stoner-Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper?*, p.282-3.

war liberals alongside the Enlightenment rationalists. In reality, the liberalism that was promulgated was an abstract moralistic creed that need not be questioned. The 'liberalism of responsibility' that Fiedler described was one that had the weight of government funds and ideological trials rumbling behind the facade of choice.

In this climate, expressions of reality take on a new level of implicit meaning. Liberal intellectuals were consciously organising themselves around formalised institutions such as the CCF, whilst unconsciously subscribing to, and creating, a language of formal liberalism. In the Anglo-American context it could be argued that Berlin is the archetypical author of such implicit language. He expresses cold war concerns and assumptions explicitly only occasionally. Yet at the level of language he constantly expresses himself in the vocabulary of implicit cold war values. This is perhaps unsurprising considering his proximity to the epicentre of government and state. It is clear that an understanding of the impact of authorship in this context is the key to unravelling the meaning of these implicit statements.

Indeed, 'left-wing' interpretations can help us to understand how denunciations of communism in the cold war era can be viewed as self-contradictory. Terry Eagleton brings into sharp focus the more concrete political implications within Berlin's implicit statements. Concentrating on the implicit meaning of Berlin's theoretical stance Eagleton writes 'Berlin quite properly rejects the idea that scientific elites should tell the rest of us how to behave; but he seems to have in mind only party theoreticians rather than capitalist technocrats, an odd exclusion for a liberal'.¹²¹ Away from the alleged contradiction within Berlin's framework of thought, Eagleton

¹²¹ Eagleton, *Figures of Dissent*, p.105.

stresses the idea that Berlin, on many levels, is removed from a certain type of reality, is 'all too obviously partisan', offering 'coded bits of anti-communism' in a way that reminds Eagleton that Berlin is 'loftily sequestered from the indignities that sometimes inspire ordinary men and women to revolt'.¹²² Eagleton, clearly illustrating his leftist credentials, stresses the material context of society that defines Berlin. He states, 'Berlin writes as the spokesman of a social order that can afford its dystopian scepticism....there is no particular reason why a don who enjoyed the company of the rich and powerful should have backed radical change. Unlike his less fortunate fellow citizens, he had little need of it'.¹²³

Scathingly, Eagleton writes that, for Berlin, 'Marxism or fascism are fully fledged creeds, whereas a Berlin-like belief in private property, market forces, social elitism and the occasional imperialist war is apparently not'.¹²⁴ This makes a case for the material basis of Berlin's thought that expresses itself through a complex set of value assumptions. The appreciation of these value assumptions needs lengthy exploration, and will comprise the second half of my thesis. To test the usefulness of further 'leftist' foundations for a critique of Berlin, and to add to these broader 'material' considerations in relation to Berlin, it is necessary to turn to the question of hegemony as well as a host of more abstract theoretical problems. For now, it seems clear that the formalised nature of cold war culture was a process that privileged the interests of Anglo-American government, and shaped the intellectual engagement of Berlin.

¹²² Eagleton, *Figures of Dissent*, p.105.

¹²³ Eagleton, *Figures of Dissent*, p.106.

¹²⁴ Eagleton, *Figures of Dissent*, p.107.

Isaiah Berlin and 'Abstract' Connections in the Cold War Context

Hegemony

The allegation that Berlin represented Anglo-American material interests in the cold war context is a serious charge. Is it fair to argue that Berlin's thought, at root, was shot through with the acceptance of 'social elitism' and the 'occasional imperialist war'? In an attempt to approach this question at a level of complexity, I wish to confront a further set of leftist-influenced arguments that potentially place Berlin within a hegemonic global framework. Alongside the assertions from Eagleton, I have already argued that Berlin wrote within an Anglo-American milieu characterised, in part, by an increasingly formalised cold war culture. This leads to understanding Berlin's intellectual role and political influence within a hegemonic culture. With these thoughts in place, a broadly 'leftist' methodological foundation exists that consequently allows a new appreciation of Berlin's texts with a focus on language and narrative. What emerges is the argument that Berlin was constrained and characterised by the wider context within which he wrote. An excellent summation of an internationalist theory of hegemony is offered by the American political scientist Robert Keohane. Keohane conceives the core operation of hegemony as the manufacture of consent by the hegemon:

'hegemony is related in complex ways to co-operation and to institutions such as international regimes. Successful hegemonic leadership itself depends on a certain form of asymmetrical co-operation. The hegemon plays a distinctive role, providing its partners with leadership in return for deference; but, unlike an imperial power, it cannot make and enforce rules without a certain degree of consent from other sovereign states.'¹²⁵

¹²⁵ Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1984), p.46.

This sophisticated observation on international arrangements of power takes into account the fact that the partners of a hegemon may consciously defer to hegemonic leadership. It could be argued that this model is more useful in understanding the cold war in western Europe. It is impossible to deny that in Eastern Europe the Soviet Union exacted crude domination over her satellite states. However, that America was attempting the 'altruistic' hegemonic approach, realising 'that hegemony can facilitate a certain type of co-operation'¹²⁶ involves a process where 'domination' is more difficult to unravel.

It is clear that this territorial hegemony also translated into an ideological hegemony. I have already examined the impact the CCF intended to have on 'the intelligentsia of western Europe', shaping general thought in the region to 'a view more accommodating of 'the American way''. Conceived in this manner, territory and ideology are inseparable conceptions of political opportunity and power within a hegemonic framework. The ideas of Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci may help link Berlin to an abstract sense of ideological hegemony. Gramsci suggested an intertwined relationship between hegemony and the manufactured intellectual force of 'co-operation'

'Gramsci used the concept of hegemony to express a unity between objective material forces and ethico-political ideas – in Marxian terms, a unity of structure and superstructure – in which power based on dominance over production is rationalised through an ideology incorporating compromise or consensus between dominant and subordinate groups.'¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Keohane, *After Hegemony*, p.31.

¹²⁷ Robert W. Cox, quoted in Keohane, *After Hegemony*, p.44.

This not only helps to explain the primacy of capitalist liberal democracy, but also the structures of 'power' which allow ideas to take on a significant role in any understanding of ideology as a support to these material conditions. Useful, if not wholly persuasive, the Marxist theory of ideological hegemony does lead to a possible explanation for the formalised nature of cold war thought. The implication is that ideological hegemony creates a discursive system that reduces the possibility of certain forms of expression arising. This discursive system reinforces and encourages certain value systems. Viewing Berlin within this context implies that any liberalism he purports to represent is defined by the material interests of the dominant political structure. This leads to understanding Berlin's intellectual role and political influence as limited and defined by a hegemonic culture. Complicated methodological tools are needed to make sense of his precise impact. This explains the basis for an examination of Berlin's thought through the prism of language, and acts as the foundation for my later explanation of Berlin's 'vocabularies of power' and 'vocabularies of place'.

Modernity and the State

The main problem with any theory of hegemony must be that the ground on which hegemonic theory rests is a set of metahistorical assertions that renders attempts to locate an intellectual within a workable context ultimately unsatisfactory. Even if ideological hegemony is to be accepted, and in some form it must surely be acknowledged, locating Berlin within a useful context cannot be achieved by returning, ultimately, to theories on the relationship between 'material forces and ethico-political ideas'. Only through closely examining Berlin's use of

language can the scholar hope to explain the vocabulary that expressed a set of ingrained assumptions. Theories on hegemony may help understand the possible foundation for such assumptions, but do not satisfactorily help us understand the operations of the text within a specific context. Indeed, it is to 'postmodernist' theory that we must turn to gain theoretical insights that prove truly efficacious.

In a sense, Berlin fits into a niche that characterises the intersection between modernity and postmodernity. The idea that the mid-twentieth century was a pivotal period in the evolution of western thought is not a new one, but to conceive of Berlin as a thinker who lived through the rise of postmodernism is interesting as, through his texts, he appears totally insulated from the influence of theoretical advances offered by postmodernists on, for example, theories of the text, or postcolonialism. Moreover, he was a modernist in the way he approached texts, and the way in which he viewed history. In Chapter Four I will examine and dismiss Millar Jones's belief that Berlin 'embrace[d] the aspect of plurality in postmodernism', as it seems clear that any attempt to mould Berlin into a postmodernist are ill-founded. Berlin worked with and embraced the categories of thought that exemplified modernism, and he never problematised these categories. Indeed, categories such as 'liberty', 'freedom', or 'totalitarianism' were used in the unproblematic, continuous way that allowed implicit assumption to flourish, hidden in the flowers of modernist prose. Elsewhere, Kenny states, 'it is...tempting to regard his penchant for dichotomous categorizations – negative against positive liberty above all – as the normative internalization of the 'us' and 'them' logic animating the Cold War.'¹²⁸ The following quote from Foucault illuminates

¹²⁸ Kenny, 'Isaiah Berlin's Contribution to Modern Political Theory', p.1037.

further the failings of modernism as a nostalgic, unproblematic set of assumptions that also impact on agency and knowledge,

'If the history of thought could remain the locus of uninterrupted continuities, if it could endlessly forge connexions that no analysis could undo without abstraction, if it could weave, around everything men say and do, obscure synthesis that anticipate for him, prepare him and lead him endlessly towards his future it would provide a privileged shelter for the sovereignty of the consciousness'¹²⁹.

Here, Foucault is designating a problem that can be found within Berlin's writing. Berlin's texts can be seen as exemplifying an impression of history as an uninterrupted continuity, a modernist portrayal of humanness and freedom laced with a tragi-optimism for the future of mankind. Separated from the need to question the foundation of the freedom he champions, Berlin isolates and utilises the comfort of normative expression that serves as the 'privileged shelter for the sovereignty of the consciousness'. Dealing in non-specifics, Berlin is similar to other thinkers in the cold war era in that the conception of 'the state' is rarely confronted. Berlin expresses cold war ideals in normative language that also serves to endorse the structure of British government and state or, as Eagleton would have it, the *status quo*.

For instance, the standard notion of the 'body politic' is problematised greatly by the effects of war, and the ensuing cold war. An interesting quote from Simon Critchley on the French Revolution reads as follows, 'with the advent of democracy in the French Revolution, the place of power becomes an empty space. In democracy, those who govern cannot incarcerate power...power is not occupied by a king, a party leader, an egocrat or a *Fuhrer*, rather it is

¹²⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 2002), p.9.

ultimately empty'.¹³⁰ This sense of 'emptiness' is often presented by liberals such as Berlin as the 'area' in the privacy of the individual is sanctified. The 'place of power' in relation to freedom can never be truly defined, but is an *assumed* central aspect of any conception of liberal democracy. Privacy is an ill-defined yet sacred conception. As Neocleous writes 'the idea of privacy has become one of the central tropes within debates about bourgeois democracy: defenders like to say that bourgeois democracy's liberal nature protects privacy better than other system.'¹³¹ Indeed, Berlin writes in 'Two Concepts of Liberty',

'the desire not to be impinged upon, to be left to oneself, has been a mark of high civilisation on the part of both individuals and communities....[t]he sense of privacy itself, of the area of personal relationships as something sacred in its own right, derives from a conception of freedom...scarcely older...than the Renaissance or the Reformation'¹³².

Linking this point to a broader one that fits in nicely with the cold war context, Neocleous argues that 'defence of privacy historically went hand in hand with its defence of capital. In other words, in helping shape a particular defence of the individual, 'privacy' was ideologically functional to the consolidation of the power of capital.'¹³³ So, perhaps we do have a 'material' basis for Berlin's abstractions on freedom that fits more neatly than hegemonic theory. The 'sovereignty of the consciousness', transmitted by Berlin through his thoughts on privacy, may after all lead us back to his assumptions on western liberalism and, at root, a capitalist ethos. In a wider sense, it can be argued that Berlin promulgated a 'liberal nationalism' that conceived of a national 'space' that

¹³⁰ Simon Critchley, 'Re-tracing the Political', in D. Campbell & M. Dillon (eds.), *The Political Subject of Violence* (Manchester: MUP, 1993), p. 80, quoted in Mark Neocleous, *Imagining The State* (Maidenhead: OUP, 2003), p.23.

¹³¹ Neocleous, *Imagining The State*, p.69.

¹³² Isaiah Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' [1958] in *Liberty*, p.176.

¹³³ Neocleous, *Imagining The State*, p.69-70.

had, at root, geopolitical ideals that typified cold war assumptions on geographical space and the wider world. The cultural and ideological transition that the cold war represents, therefore, contains subtle and elusive aspects that are often overlooked by traditional cold war interpretation.

Viewed within the context of hegemony and shifting impressions of modernity it is tempting, as a starting point, to view the liberalism Berlin purports to represent as defined by the material interests of the dominant political structure. These material interests increasingly influenced foreign policy aims within formal political culture, and also influenced the popular imagination. The popular cold war imagination was based firmly on the generation of fear and difference as justification for foreign policy aims that were shrouded in the rhetoric of freedom. I now wish to turn to an analysis of western cold war perceptions of the Soviet Union, foreign policy, and how cold war policy aims have been traditionally conceived. I will then turn to the impact of foreign policy on the popular imagination, and consider how this impact is traceable through narrative trends. This analysis of narrative trends will serve as a basis and justification for my methodological approach to Berlin.

Isaiah Berlin and the Wider World

It is now becoming clear that Isaiah Berlin was caught in the web of cold war. He was perfectly placed to personify Anglo-American discourse when one considers the extent his ideas on freedom represented the Anglo-American world view, the time he had spent in America during the

war, his close ties with numerous influential friends and colleagues as evidenced in his correspondence, and his links with the CCF and its publishing branch. Anglo-American ideas and values permeated his personal outlook. The work of Berlin in the cold war era was defined, as was other anticommunist writing, by a complex mixture of perceptions about global politics that became internalised into certain values which then became implicitly visible in the anticommunist use of language. As a foundation to this process of internalisation, I wish to describe how political aims changed in the period, and consider how political culture and the authors of anticommunist discourse responded to the altering visions of politicians. Clearly, Berlin exemplifies the concerned intellectual who whilst looking inward, and advocating the western social order and its accompanying ideals, also looked outward to criticise the communist social order and its perceived attendant ideals. This polarisation is prevalent in Berlin's work in his separation of 'pluralism' and 'monism' as distinct socio-political psychologies. A general overview of the dual process of looking 'outward' and 'inward' introduces the basis for Berlin's polarisation, and his ontological position. Berlin's role as a 'passive' cold war intellectual within this context will be elucidated in the next chapter.

Looking Outward

Politically, foreign policy 'aims' took many forms in the cold war era. After 1945, political rhetoric transformed, and as increasing levels of diplomatic intransigence became evident from both super-powers, the result was that ideas became conceived as inherently and inevitably divisive. Ideas, and the perception of these ideas, became viewed as concrete political ends. Within the western political imagination it was clear that core values vividly clashed with the tenets of Soviet

Marxism. This clash was not only on the level of the perceived difference between western pragmatism and Soviet dogmatism in the political arena, but also as inherently opposed over the more abstract conceptions of choice, privacy, justice, equality and liberty.

Optimistic western liberals such as Berlin believed the pluralist-capitalist social order that existed in the western world set the foundations for true and meaningful freedom. This belief was characterised in part by a conscious ontological opposition to a Marxist dogma that had at its core the belief that the foundation for true and meaningful freedom lay in a future free from capitalist modes of production. Explicitly or otherwise, anticommunist discourse rested on these fundamental differences of principle, and added legitimacy to the aims of Anglo-American political culture. The complexity surrounding foreign policy in the cold war era is only understandable if the interplay of these fundamental differences is properly understood. These served as the basis for perceptions, and especially threat perceptions¹³⁴ of the superpowers. Tucker states, 'a formal aim is the object one declares oneself to be seeking; an operative aim is the object implicit in what one actually does. The two may or may not coincide.'¹³⁵ This distinction between 'formal' and 'operative' aims is crucial, because whilst governments express their 'formal' aims, what they actually do (and how this is perceived globally) will often surprise policy makers into creating extra unforeseen 'operative' objectives.

¹³⁴ Michael McGwire 'National Security and Soviet Foreign Policy' In Leffler & Painter (eds.), *Origins of the Cold War: An International History* (New York: Routledge, 1994), *passim*.

¹³⁵ Robert C. Tucker, *The Soviet Political Mind* (London: Pall Mall, 1963), p.168.

To solidify the emergence of this suspicious cold war atmosphere in the Anglo-American world, it is worth considering Stalin's speech of February 9, 1946. In the speech Stalin sets out his interpretation of the meaning of the war, 'his justification for policies pursued before and during that conflict, and prescriptions for the future.'¹³⁶ Stalin described the war as the 'inevitable result of the development of world economic and political forces on the basis of modern monopoly capitalism...[and]...of the law of uneven [capitalist] development.'¹³⁷ Ideologically, Stalin asserted the triumph of the Soviet social order, the superiority of Soviet social organisation over other social forms, and the heroism of the Red Army - a kind of 'ideological militancy.' I have already argued that the basis of western ideology can be thought of as similarly 'militant' in its wish to dominate the cultural-political arena in Europe.

However, it has been argued that Stalin held a *world* view, compared with America's overly Russia-oriented conception of the world. Thus, rather than attempting to deal with 'Russia in terms of a world policy...[America attempted] to deal with the world in terms of a Russian policy.'¹³⁸ American post-war rhetoric became war-like in its tone and implication. Melvyn Leffler believes this places added doubt on the 'myth' of American Ideological integrity:

'The dynamics of the Cold War after 1948 are easier to comprehend when one grasps the breadth of the American conception of national security that had emerged between 1945 and 1948. This conception included a strategic sphere of influence within the western hemisphere, domination of the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, an extensive system of outlying bases to enlarge the strategic frontier and project American power, an even more extensive system of transit rights to facilitate the conversion of commercial air bases to

¹³⁶ R.C. Donaldson & J.L. Noguee, *Soviet Foreign Policy Since World War Two* (New York: Pergamon, 1988), p. 77.

¹³⁷ Quoted in R.C. Donaldson and J.L. Noguee, *Soviet Foreign Policy Since World War Two*, p. 77.

¹³⁸ Tucker, *The Soviet Political Mind*, p.183.

military use, access to the resources and markets of most of Eurasia, denial of those resources to a prospective enemy, and the maintenance of nuclear superiority.¹³⁹

This wide ranging set of strategic objectives had the cumulative effect of intensifying the perception of threat from both sides. As Leffler shrewdly observes, 'America's own conception of national security tended, perhaps unintentionally, to engender anxieties and to provoke countermeasures from a proud, suspicious, and cruel government [also worried about] the development of foreign bases on the periphery of the Soviet homeland.'¹⁴⁰

Leffler observes in another article¹⁴¹ that, in Truman's opinion, meaningful conciliation with the Soviet Union quickly became an impossibility. Although Washington was initially willing to work with Stalin, it is clear that American officials soon 'concluded that they had to take unilateral actions to build situations of strength.'¹⁴² The geopolitical implications of the Soviet decision to refuse free elections in Poland, Bulgaria and Romania¹⁴³, the collapse of the Baruch Plan as well as recent Communist successes in France, Italy and Greece, became serious for Washington. America began to view the geopolitics of the region with growing anxiety. Once American advisors concluded that the Soviets were intent on world domination, appeasement was no option. With the added context of continuing arguments over Germany, a policy of territorial containment was soon conceived. The central thrust of this policy was that 'potential adversaries must never again be allowed to gain control of the resources of Eurasia through autarkical

¹³⁹ Melvyn P. Leffler 'National Security and US Foreign Policy' in Leffler & Painter (eds.), *Origins of the Cold War: An International History*, p.37.

¹⁴⁰ Leffler, 'National Security and US Foreign Policy', p.39.

¹⁴¹ Melvyn P. Leffler, 'Economics, Power and National Security' in Klaus Larres & Ann Lane, *The Cold War: The Essential Readings* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p.38.

¹⁴² Leffler, 'Economics, Power and National Security', p.38.

¹⁴³ It is important to note that this was Stalin's response to feeling let down by false promises from Roosevelt.

economic practices, political subversion, and/or military aggression.¹⁴⁴ 'Soft' diplomacy ('I think our two antipathetical systems can dwell in the world together – but only on a basis which establishes the fact that we mean what we say when we say it')¹⁴⁵ was soon replaced by 'harder' diplomacy and heightened rhetoric from advisors such as Kennan. Soon, Washington wished to dominate the potentially disastrous 'escalatory process', a decision that led them to talk of economic approaches and defensive preponderance.

This was strategic geopolitics of a sharply hegemonic variety motivated by both material interests in Europe and Eurasia as well as an ideological belief system. This global policy would come to define American foreign policy for decades and can be viewed as fundamentally defensive. This led to cumulative tension and anxiety within American political culture:

'traditional principles of self-determination and the open-door principles that heretofore had been geared to American economic needs and ideological inclinations, now had profound implications for the national security, physical safety, and political economy of the United States. Once this fusion of geopolitical, economic, ideological, and strategic considerations occurred, traditional foreign policy goals were transformed into national security imperatives.'¹⁴⁶

It does seem clear that for basic security Stalin sought similar objectives. Stalin believed he needed strong and friendly countries on Soviet borders which naturally 'implied communist-controlled governments.'¹⁴⁷ For Stalin, any American interference in countries close to Soviet borders, especially Poland, 'smacked of ulterior motives'.¹⁴⁸ This period marked the beginning of

¹⁴⁴ Leffler, 'Economics, Power and National Security', p.39.

¹⁴⁵ Leffler, 'Economics, Power and National Security', p.30.

¹⁴⁶ Leffler, 'Economics, Power and National Security', p.39.

¹⁴⁷ MccGwire, 'National Security and Soviet Foreign Policy', p.67.

¹⁴⁸ MccGwire, 'National Security and Soviet Foreign Policy', p.67.

the cold war proper, yet perceptions of the Soviet Union had been negative for a significant period. This would signify deep-rooted Anti-Soviet feeling already existent in American political culture. For instance, during the last months of the war, most polls in America showed that 'fewer than half of all Americans expected co-operation to persist into the post-war period. In other words, the American people retained a strong residue of animosity and suspicion toward the Bolshevik motherland.'¹⁴⁹ As Leffler points out, little was done to 'cultivate' friendly feelings toward the Russian people. This pessimistic view of Russia and the paranoia surrounding Soviet expansionist plans exaggerated by indiscriminate anti-communist rhetoric, caused a potentially paralytic distrust of the Soviets.

So, diplomatic and strategic analyses of the period concentrate on the perception of threat, or perception of intention. Similarly, anticommunist intellectuals concentrated on these perceived markers of difference. It is clear that 'western perceptions of the Soviet threat have their roots in the 1945-50 period. It was during those years that the public indictment of the Soviet Union was firmly established.'¹⁵⁰ It is also important to point out that political figures were framing rhetoric in fundamental terms. For instance 'neutralism', said Acheson, 'is a shortcut to suicide.'¹⁵¹ Furthermore, it could be argued that underpinning the entire transition between 'soft' and 'hard' diplomacy transition mentioned earlier was Stalin's speech of February 9, 1946. He stressed the incompatibility of capitalism and communism, talked of inevitable 'future wars', and called for rapid economic development through three further Five-Year Plans, so that 'our country will be

¹⁴⁹ Leffler, 'Economics, Power and National Security', p.29.

¹⁵⁰ MccGwire, 'National Security and Soviet Foreign Policy', p.54.

¹⁵¹ Leffler, 'Economics, Power and National Security', p.32.

insured against any eventuality.¹⁵² Strategic rhetoric was couched in apocalyptic and violent language that dwelt on ultimate consequences and the decisive nature of the present. This type of language would influence the abstract ideas that came to characterise intellectual engagement from figures such as Berlin, and heavily influenced the framework of the narrative forms of Science Fiction and Apocalypse Theory I examine at the end of the chapter.

What is clear is that the role of perception should not be brushed aside. Faced with these *perceived* threats, could America afford to stay 'soft' against supposedly 'hard' Soviet rhetoric? Could Stalin understand 'soft' diplomacy? Would he want to? As the liberal Eric Sevareid said soon after, 'if you can brush aside Stalin's speech of February 9, you are a braver man than I am.'¹⁵³ What is clear is that the perceived threat of communism, and resulting policy decisions, created a unique cultural and intellectual climate which led to government financed initiatives on both sides of the 'Iron Curtain', as well continuing subtle shifts in perception amongst prominent intellectuals. Indeed, Churchill's 'Iron Curtain' speech of 5 March 1946 is proof of the Anglo-American nature of the emerging geopolitical cold war rhetoric. Churchill's expression of the geographical polarisation of Europe was clearly an expression of an inescapable new reality, yet it was also an ideological message for Stalin. He called for 'the permanent prevention of war and the establishment of conditions of freedom and democracy as rapidly as possible in all

¹⁵² John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War 1941-1947* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), p.299-300.

¹⁵³ Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War 1941-1947*, p.300.

countries.'¹⁵⁴ Thinkers such as Isaiah Berlin would add intellectual ballast to these geopolitically motivated speeches by reaffirming the solidity of freedom and democracy in the west.

Looking Inwards, and the Importance of Ideology

Shifting the focus away from how politicians and diplomats defined themselves by the way in which threat was perceived, I now wish to concentrate on how intellectuals looked inward, domestically, to the western state. This is important, as it is imperative to remember how Anglo-American conceptions of self were developing. Some cold war interpretations concentrate on the 'uniqueness' of Soviet political culture, where 'ideology is the most cohesive moral force in Soviet society. Those who acquire power...cannot claim legitimacy on the basis of elections...without its ideology, the Soviet Union would face anarchy.'¹⁵⁵ This dilemma was brought into focus by Robert Tucker¹⁵⁶ who talked of a 'Dual Russia' experiencing 'a revival of the cleavage of cultures', where there was a 'suppressed and little-known unofficial Russia with a life of its own.'¹⁵⁷ To imagine a comparable American 'dual entity' is almost impossible. The post-war confidence and national unity that swept across the country was soon joined by waves of pop-cultural exportation which gained momentum (and criticism) through the course of the century. American popular culture, although increasingly artificially - or self-consciously - manufactured, was nationally embraced and, more often than not, internationally sought after and envied.

¹⁵⁴ Robert Rhodes (ed.), *Winston S. Churchill: His Complete Speeches, 1897-1963* (Bowker, New York, 1974), p.178.

¹⁵⁵ Donaldson & Noguee, *Soviet Foreign Policy Since World War Two*, p.39.

¹⁵⁶ See Tucker, *The Soviet Political Mind*, Chapter 4.

¹⁵⁷ Tucker, *The Soviet Political Mind*, p.86-7.

At a more profound level, American consciousness had no need to split itself between the 'official' and 'unofficial'. The American state can appear as an effortlessly unifying organism. It is as if, on many levels, unity was a prerequisite, somehow embedded within American state machinery. America was rich, and her people understood their historical imperative, and the urgency of the international situation. However, American culture was partially shaped by government financed initiatives, meaning the appearance of a 'natural' effortless unity is potentially a mirage and a concealment of political action. It is in this sense that one must be prepared to unravel discursive patterns and identify imagery that is representative of wider political culture.

As a contrast, for Tucker 'the state' in 'Dual Russia' appeared an alien power to the general population: 'To the ordinary person, the 'great state machine' was a force that was constantly mobilising him; calling upon him for fresh sacrifices; taking all and giving nothing....it was a force whose bureaucratic organs were callous to his concerns.'¹⁵⁸ Tucker takes a sophisticated standpoint on the role of Stalin within the decision-making and - more importantly - the 'historical' process. He views Stalin as someone who believed he was the legitimate successor to both Lenin and Ivan the Terrible:

'Having identified himself with the historic pattern of revolutionism from above, he mentally assimilated Marxist revolutionism to this pattern. He thus became, in his own self-image, a kind of Marxist Tsar.'¹⁵⁹

Tucker asserts that during the post-war years the 'full implications of the earlier Russian historical

¹⁵⁸ Tucker, *The Soviet Political Mind*, p.85.

¹⁵⁹ Tucker, *The Soviet Political Mind*, p.83.

process under Stalin emerged into clear view.¹⁶⁰ This process alienated large sections of the Russian people, and recreated the old duality between *narod* and *gosudarstvo*. This duality seems to reflect a greater authenticity than any Marxist construction; as if some sort of 'natural' Russian (or even 'human') consciousness rose to the surface when faced with oppressive autocracy. This type of interpretation sits as an example of the modernist belief in state structures, containing the assumptions that the earlier quote from Foucault was criticising. The idea of the 'dual culture' of Russia, and the *appearance* of the 'American state appearing as an effortlessly unifying organism' perhaps tells us more about western notions of the nation state. Indeed, the way in which the 'state' is conceived is rarely confronted by cold war scholars - even those applying theoretical ideas with considerable effect. This is normally due to the fact that ideological preoccupations colour interpretations of the workings of government and state.

The need for a fresh methodological approach, moving away from discussion of Soviet and Anglo-American 'ideology' *per se*, is justifiable for the bare fact that the role of ideology in the political process can be exaggerated. In 1964, Barraclough stated, 'the ideological conflict is neither so distinctive a feature of contemporary history as is so often assumed, nor is it much more than useful propaganda for the pursuit of other objectives.'¹⁶¹ He continued to assert that Marxist theory was 'scholastic ballast of little relevance to the actions of the U.S.S.R. in the realm of foreign policy.'¹⁶² Yet, it was the persistence of ideological concerns - especially American apprehension of Soviet ideological goals - which meant the role of ideology could not be ignored,

¹⁶⁰ Tucker, *The Soviet Political Mind*, p.83.

¹⁶¹ Geoffrey Barraclough, *An Introduction to Contemporary History* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1975), p.200.

¹⁶² Donaldson & Noguee, *Soviet Foreign Policy Since World War Two*, p.38.

and for many years to come the deepening of the ideological conflict continued. Most strikingly, whilst the conflict of ideologies may not have been the sole cause of the cold war, ideology undoubtedly became a prominent factor acting against the fine balance of cold war peace. It now seems that a sensible way to conceive ideology in the cold war context is to link cold war ideology with a wider appreciation of narrative trends and patterns of assumption in the period.

The outcome of these brief explorations of the material and abstract contexts surrounding Berlin is the realisation that the cultural cold war is a complex landscape that encompassed an array of ideological and geopolitical stances. Berlin was institutionally grounded within the cold war infrastructure, with concrete links to Washington, Oxford and a variety of cold war personalities¹⁶³. These links coloured his political outlook, and made him a significant part of the cold war intellectual landscape. Yet in order to move on and locate Berlin in this context it is vital to realise that underpinning his outlook was a vast subterranean mass of value assumption. I argue that it is through the process of identifying this pattern of assumption that Berlin becomes visible as an 'active' cold war intellectual. For Berlin, these assumptions included unquestioned attitudes toward a particular conception of freedom, of the state, of humanity. Supporting and shaping these assumptions was a rigid conception of normality, and an examination of Berlin's normative vocabulary comprises the second part of my thesis. Viewing Berlin's impact discursively allows me to develop and define what I refer to as Berlin's ontology. This ontology is the product of the

¹⁶³ See Berlin, *Flourishing* for a roll-call of Berlin's early cold war acquaintances, including George Kennan and Arthur Schlesinger.

process where geopolitical and ideological narrative contexts interact with one another and create Berlin's 'subterranean' set of assumptions. To elucidate further exactly why I view the discursive approach to be important I now wish to turn to examples of narrative forms that more visibly reflected broader cold war anxieties, leading to a valuable and subtle appreciation of the complex milieu in which to view Berlin.

Towards a New Appreciation of Isaiah Berlin in the Cold War Context

The balance between material and abstract contexts in the cultural cold war is a complex and elusive one, yet abstract intellectual contexts undoubtedly reflect more familiar material and political contexts. My key concern revolves around the question of how to expose the links between the 'abstract' and the 'material' that often go unexplored or are presented as ephemeral. I have decided that to effectively locate Berlin within this complicated context involves a process of reductive textual analysis. This process is necessary because the only way to make sense of how implicit patterns of assumption impact on Berlin's conscious liberal intellectual project is to attempt a reading of his texts that is sensitive to broader narrative trends. I am interested in problematising the whole notion of the cold war by illustrating how reducing the conception of 'ideology' to an examination of language patterns leads to new understandings of the period, as well as a fresh appreciation of Isaiah Berlin. To add strength to my methodological approach I wish to turn now to an examination of religious rhetoric, science fiction, nuclear and apocalypse narrative in the early cold war period. The purpose of this shift of focus is to illustrate how the cold war can be viewed as more than just ideological in the formal political sense, but also existed in

the implicit function of a variety of narrative forms. If these case studies prove persuasive, it will become clear that a narrative examination of Berlin is justified, as the process will serve as a methodological platform from which to uncover the importance of Berlin's vocabulary in the context of cold war. Crucially, the following section is a shift away from traditional cold war interpretation, and a movement towards constructing the idea of cold war as a landscape defined by vocabularies and narratives.

Religious Rhetoric in the Cold War

I now wish to discuss the persistence of religious rhetoric in the cold war era. This examination begins the movement toward an understanding of the cold war as a cultural landscape that went far beyond simple definitions of 'ideology'. It is also through these examinations that we can begin to understand the process of the internalisation of values as a process not solely dictated by cold war high politics. Also, it is important to point out that certain narrative trends were developing before the perceived 'cold war' era. Trilling, writing in 1940, stated 'the world seems to be less and less responsive to literature; we can even observe that literature is becoming something like an object of suspicion, and it is possible to say of the historical study of literature that its very existence is an evidence of this mistrust.'¹⁶⁴ Concentrating on this theme, Trilling goes on to talk about the autonomy of ideas:

'since the situations in which people or cultures find themselves are limited in number, and since the possible responses are also limited, ideas certainly do have a tendency to recur, and because people also think habitually ideas also have a tendency to persist

¹⁶⁴ Lionel Trilling, 'The Sense of the Past', in *The Liberal Imagination* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), p.186.

when the situation which called them forth is no longer present; so that ideas do have a certain limited autonomy, and sometimes the appearance of complete autonomy.'¹⁶⁵

For Trilling, belief in the autonomy of ideas becomes especially strong in times of war and, to take Trilling's postulation to its logical psychological end, the forces of *cold* war could be viewed as the ultimate crystallising and polarising of perceptions of 'ideas'. For Trilling, 'this conflict of ideas, genuine as it may be, suggests to both sides the necessity of believing in the fixed immutable nature of the ideas to which both sides owes allegiance. What gods were to the ancients of war, ideas are to us.'¹⁶⁶ This could be a significant clue as to how the 'them and us' polarisation was internalised, with the western conception of the role of God as a significant psychological underpinning. Trilling, a prominent liberal intellectual, is symptomatic of much western mid-twentieth century discourse. He displays a belief in the autonomy, and conflict, of ideas in the consciousness of 'peoples'. As his last quote suggests, it is only a matter of time before you 'owe' allegiance to a certain idea. This, I think, is a telling indicator of the intellectual seed-bed that facilitated the formalisation of cold war culture.

The God That Failed, written in 1949, has in its title an obvious 'explicitly religious cachet'¹⁶⁷. The book, edited by Richard Crossman, is summarised by Said as follows:

'intended as a testimonial to the gullibility of prominent Western intellectuals – who included Ignazio Silone, Andre Gide, and Stephen Spender among others – *The God That Failed* allowed each of them to recount his experiences of the road to Moscow, the inevitable disenchantment that followed, the subsequent re-embrace of non-communist faith. Crossman concludes his introduction to the volume by saying in emphatic theological terms 'The Devil once lived in Heaven, and those who have not met him are unlikely to recognise an angel when they see one'. This of course is not only politics but a

¹⁶⁵ Trilling, 'The Sense of the Past', p.198.

¹⁶⁶ Trilling, 'The Sense of the Past', p.198.

¹⁶⁷ Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, p.82.

morality play as well. The battle for the intellect has been transformed into a battle for the soul, with implications for intellectual life which have been very baleful. That was certainly the case in the Soviet union and its satellites, where show trials, mass purges, and a gigantic penitentiary system exemplified the horrors of the ordeal on the other side of the iron curtain.¹⁶⁸

Interesting here is the religious language, which is often echoed in cold war literature of a specifically anti-communist tinge. Indeed, anti-totalitarianism sometimes became confused with anti-Catholicism. A good example of the pervasiveness of cold war narrative is to move from these intentionally 'cold war' focused texts to the work of American theologians such as Blanshard and Herberg. The predominant theological theme in the early cold war years seems to be one of anxiety. There were general worries about the transformation of Judeo-Christian faith into a 'cult of culture and society'¹⁶⁹ that encouraged social irresponsibility.

The rhetoric of Blanshard links these moral anxieties with the broader cold war context when he explains how the threat posed by 'political Catholicism'¹⁷⁰ parallels the threat from communism. For Blanshard, control over the human mind is characteristic of both the Catholic church and the Soviet Union. Blanshard published a series of articles in *The Nation* in 1947 and 1948, and was at the centre of controversy when the magazine was banned from New York City high-school libraries because of his inflammatory anti-Catholic remarks. However, rather proudly, Blanshard writes 'this ban not only provided national publicity but also produced a strong counterattack by free-speech advocates of national prominence.'¹⁷¹ By suggesting that thoughts

¹⁶⁸ Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, p.82-3. Said quotes R. Crossman (ed.), *The God That Failed* (Washington DC: Regnery Gateway, 1987), pvii.

¹⁶⁹ Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1956).

¹⁷⁰ See Paul Blanshard, *American Freedom and Catholic Power* (Boston, MA.: Beacon, 1960).

¹⁷¹ Blanshard, *American Freedom and Catholic Power*, p.6.

on religion are closely linked to cold war preoccupations Berlin himself groups 'the Roman Church' along with Marxism as examples of over-rationalised 'older traditions', as opposed to the more recent Romantic 'human' turn in Western Europe.¹⁷² Although Berlin does not equate the Roman Church directly with totalitarianism, by levelling the institution with Marxism he certainly implies that both are part of a general 'problem'. Given the accepted context of cold war, the overriding problem for Berlin is one of excessive control over man in the form of various 'totalitarianisms'. Similarly to the formal theologians, Berlin demonstrates a level of anxiety about the direction of humanity in the cold war era.

Some commentators attached real vitriol to their anxieties. Harold Laski, also writing in *The Nation* in 1947, wrote that the 'influence of a militant Roman Catholic church in U.S. politics is as much the expression of the purposes of a foreign power as any influence exerted by the Communist Party'.¹⁷³ Clearly, American Christian conceptions of freedom were solidifying in a process that was partly fuelled by the fear of the influence of external interference on the foundation of those belief systems. The theologian and philosopher Reinhold Niebuhr disagreed with 'those 'timed spirits' who suggested that communism's opponents might be exaggerating the evil it embodied, and he dismissed observers who contended that traditional Russian imperialism, rather than communism, was what made Moscow dangerous.'¹⁷⁴ In his 1953 essay 'Why Is Communism So Evil?' he contrasted the characteristics of America and the Soviet Union, explaining that the key

¹⁷² Isaiah Berlin, 'The Romantic Revolution' [1960], in *The Sense of Reality*, p.193.

¹⁷³ Harold Laski, 'Why Does Russia Act That Way?', *Nation*, 1 March 1947.

¹⁷⁴ H.W. Brands, *The Devil We Knew*, p.34.

was to realise the difference

'between the comparatively ordinate and normal lust for power of a great traditional nation and the noxious demonry of this world-wide secular religion...(that is) an organised evil which spreads terror and cruelty throughout the world and confronts us everywhere with faceless men who are immune to every form of moral and political suasion...nothing modifies [communism's] evil display of tyranny'¹⁷⁵.

As Brands rightly points out, whilst Niebuhr may have been rather more articulate than McCarthy, when it came to expression of belief, both were similarly unsubtle. Niebuhr was an honorary patron of the CCF, and contributor to *Time-Life*, 'winning Sidney Hook's approval for successfully reviving the doctrine of original sin as a political tool, and making 'God an instrument of national policy''.¹⁷⁶ Stoner-Saunders illustrates how intimately Niebuhr became involved with making 'God an instrument of national policy', by uncovering the fact that as well as Niebuhr's position as 'chairman of the Advisory Committee of the Policy Planning Staff (which oversaw the creation of the CIA), he was recommended to work as a consultant for the 'Psychological Strategy Board'.¹⁷⁷

Whilst the process of demonisation of ideological 'faith' in communism was common in Anglo-American culture, it is often forgotten that certain organised religious beliefs were also seen as constituting a broad threat to freedom. The significance of such a phenomenon is two-fold. Firstly, the preoccupations of theologians such as Niebuhr and Blanshard, although ostensibly 'religious', have firm 'ideological' foundations. This fact alone means that attaching labels such as 'ideology' or 'religion' onto these narratives is futile, as we are dealing with a more complex

¹⁷⁵ Reinhold Niebuhr, 'Why is Communism So Evil?', *New Leader*, 6 August 1953, quoted in H.W. Brands, *The Devil We Knew*, p.35.

¹⁷⁶ Stoner-Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper?*, p.281, quotes Hook from interview.

¹⁷⁷ See Stoner-Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper?*, n.457.

system of values and assumptions. This leads to the second significant consequence of this realisation; namely that an approach that takes into consideration these complex narrative patterns is a far more successful way to explore the nature of the text within a context. The close consideration of Berlin's religious belief system in Chapter Three will illuminate aspects of his thought that impact on his precise status as a 'cold warrior'.

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Naturally, there are other cultural patterns beyond religious rhetoric that can be traced in an attempt to understand post-1945 narrative trends. The 'cold war' imperative was far more than immediate political or ideological concerns if viewed as a narrative structure with roots in prior anxieties. A far richer picture of authorship in the cold war emerges if one also takes into consideration recent scholarly work concerned with 'apocalypse theory' and nuclear fear in the popular imagination. It could be argued that these subtle narrative trends, reflecting cultural concerns and abstract psychological notions, were inextricably linked to the progression of science. Perceptions of society changed irrevocably with the advent of atomic weaponry. Yet, Berlin's work is silent on the new negative achievements made possible by the modern industrial military complex. Berlin's work is consistently silent on concrete, politically 'real' questions that held increasing prominence in the popular imagination.

Apocalyptic Rhetoric and the Bomb

Relating Berlin to the nuclear threat whose imagery dominated the cold war period is an interesting and unexplored avenue of interpretation. The spectre of the atomic bomb hung

unavoidably over the post-1945 world, and Berlin must be viewed as more acutely affected due to his work in Washington. This institutional aspect undoubtedly influenced his use of language, and added to the polarised nature of his thought. His promotion of liberal values, to an extent that he commented that humankind's 'very survival must be risked in their defence', can be read in the context of the perceived threat of mutual destruction in an atomically armed world. It is certainly tempting to argue that all intellectual figures in the post-1945 world were influenced to a significant degree by the emergence of a 'nuclear consciousness'.

In a more general context that can help understand some of the discursive patterns surrounding Berlin, Paul Boyer argues that it was indeed the perception of nuclear technology that set off powerful 'chain reactions' within society and state institutions. Gradually, people arrived at definite perceptions, and a 'nuclear consciousness' was born that was indicative of profound psychological change. This change came in two main forms in Anglo-America. Firstly there was nuclear fear; in this sense contemporary culture was growing in a dark place, 'under the shadow of the nuclear threat'.¹⁷⁸ Secondly, harnessing nuclear power was viewed as a social good for the future, which created a strange dichotomy. Widespread admiration and pride in the scientific achievements underlying the development of nuclear power existed alongside widespread awe and fear over the realisation of the destructive capability of nuclear power. For instance, Boyer mentions how an advertisement on the back of an American *Kix* cereal packet saw 750,000 children mailing in for their opportunity to own an 'atomic bomb ring'.¹⁷⁹ In his book *By The*

¹⁷⁸ Paul S. Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Nuclear Age* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), p.85.

¹⁷⁹ Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light*, p.88.

Bomb's Early Light Boyer illustrates how cartoons captured the underlying unease over nuclear power as well as material aimed at children that effectively 'domesticates' the atom.¹⁸⁰ Defence agency pictures echo themes in late twentieth century culture on the importance of 'not looking' at the atomic flash.¹⁸¹ Much of the imagery was new and anticipatory, and acted as a popular outlet for more formal expressions of cold war anxiety.

Part of this cold war anxiety meant that Anglo-America began to view scientists and 'science' *per se*, with less reverence. For some, science became equated with the 'destruction of life and the degradation of the human spirit.'¹⁸² Science was becoming identified with the reality of atomic destruction, and the threat of ultimate annihilation. This undoubtedly fed into an already prominent Anglo-American anti-intellectualism, where 'science' and intellectuals generally, were discredited. People were 'turning elsewhere for hope and solution'.¹⁸³ Niels Bohr, a theoretical physicist who was involved with the Manhattan Project, believed that all scientists must be 'prepared to assist, in any way open to him, in bringing about an outcome of the present crisis of humanity that is worthy of the ideals for which scientists through the ages have stood.'¹⁸⁴ Einstein wrote, 'the atomic bomb has altered profoundly the nature of the world as we knew it, and the human race consequently finds itself in a new habitat to which it must adapt its thinking.'¹⁸⁵ Scientists and philosophers alike were reassessing the role of man within technologically advanced society. Berlin's role as promoter of liberalism in this period must also be viewed in the

¹⁸⁰ Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light*, *passim*.

¹⁸¹ Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light*, p.309.

¹⁸² Manhattan Project veteran I.I Rabi, quoted Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light*, p.87.

¹⁸³ Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light*, p.87.

¹⁸⁴ Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light*, p.50; quoted Bohr 'A Challenge to Civilisation', *Science*, October 12 1945.

¹⁸⁵ Albert Einstein, 'The Real Problem is in the Hearts of Men', *The New York Times Magazine*, June 23, 1946, p.7.

context of nuclear fear, but without direct engagement with the contemporary questions that were at the forefront of many in the scientific community.

For instance, the scientists involved with the Manhattan Project¹⁸⁶ felt an acute ethical responsibility for a new form of technology whose ramifications went beyond the limits of conventional imagination. Because of this Einstein, and especially Bohr, sought to actively engage with political leaders in the early cold war years. They strove for co-operation and offered radical new ideas about politics, national boundaries and information sharing. In effect, they were asking for co-operation between nations, the polar opposite of the dystopian fears that would characterise cold war anxieties. Perhaps the political naivety and idealism of the scientists in the post-1945 years can be best understood with reference to the blunt fact that American military and political leaders would demand the knowledge that the scientists possessed. A utopian world where the scientists could have chosen *not* to share their expertise with their countrymen in a time of international crisis would seem a pleasant alternative.¹⁸⁷

As a rather strange aside, Bertrand Russell wrote an article in the October 1946 *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* (co-founded by Edward Shils) that advocated a pre-emptive nuclear attack on the Soviet Union as a solution to the threat of a fresh conflict.¹⁸⁸ This highlights the difference between the scientific intellectuals who were directly responsible for the creation of nuclear weaponry, who became generally pacifist, and the intellectuals who made up much of the political

¹⁸⁶ For discussions of post-1945 nuclear history see; Jeff Hughes, *The Manhattan Project : Big Science and the Atom Bomb* (Cambridge: Icon, 2003); R. Rhodes, *The Making of the Atomic Bomb* (London: Penguin, 1987); Gar Alperowitz, *The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb* (London: Fontana, 1996).

¹⁸⁷ See Edward Shils, 'A Slippery Slope', *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 10, 6 (1954), pp.242-256.

¹⁸⁸ Bertrand Russell, *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 1 October 1946, pp.19-21. See also discussion in Paul Johnson, *Intellectuals* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1988) where Russell is presented as a 'blundering political absolutist'.

commentary. Berlin can be viewed as a similar thinker at the pinnacle of social commentary.¹⁸⁹ Removed from the creation of nuclear technology thinkers like Berlin, Russell and Shils were markedly more aggressive in their rhetoric towards international adversaries. Ironically, these thinkers retained prominence as social commentators and institutional figureheads as their rhetoric chimed more readily with cold war political culture. Russell was soon to be an honorary chair of the CCF, Edward Shils would become a director of the American strand of the CCF, and Berlin would emerge as a central figure in British intellectual life. Central to the development of formalised western cold war culture, prominent intellectuals such as Russell would publicly opine on nuclear science and global politics. Even though Berlin's writing does not explicitly approach the nuclear threat, it could be argued that his writing contributed to a growing sense of anti-intellectualism in wider British culture as a response to 'establishment' figures such as Berlin who did not always stress tolerance, restraint and eventual disarmament on the global stage. Thinkers such as Berlin struggled to reflect the 'nuclear consciousness' emerging in the popular imagination, adding to the elitist tinge of his work.

To elaborate further on the overlaps between intellectual discourse and formal political culture I now wish to turn to John Bacon's *Flannery O'Connor and Cold War Culture*, where Bacon promotes the value of a narrative approach to the cold war. Indeed, he writes 'the symbolic order imposed on international relations by a clearly defined, morally charged conflict lends itself to literary study'.¹⁹⁰ Bacon is quick to assert that the reality of given situations should never be lost

¹⁸⁹ Especially *Foreign Affairs* articles, and collection of essays in *The Soviet Mind*.

¹⁹⁰ Jon Lance Bacon, *Flannery O'Connor and Cold War Culture* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), p.2.

sight of, for 'many of the actions essential to the construction of the cold war narrative were expressive acts'¹⁹¹. Bacon also moves the discussion into questions of identity,

'[t]he narrative employed by the U.S. government to justify military build up and political orthodoxy entered into discussions of national identity. At the same time, however, the Cold War figured in discussions of regional and religious identity, consumerist values, even literary standards.'¹⁹²

It is clear that the perception of the cold war created significant ripples in Anglo-American discourse, 'popular' and otherwise. Cold war discourse was a site where a formalised culture of politics, ideology and science intersected and become expressed in more informal narrative forms. Popular fiction adapted to technological advance and reacted to fresh global geopolitical stresses, and the popular imagination broadened in response to the threat of nuclear annihilation. Yet, it must also be remembered that the imagination was tempered by constant reports of nuclear weapons testing and the threat of nuclear weaponry.¹⁹³ Thus, in a more heightened sense than ever before, popular literary imagination confronted realities that threatened the future of humanity.

Elsewhere Derrida makes the point that even in military reports from strategic experts, there are imaginary tactics, perceived threats, new possibilities, 'whose complexity far outruns the grasp of any 'rational' decision-making process.'¹⁹⁴ Thus in a manner never seen in western society in such acute focus, the limits of the imagination were stretched by new realities. Whilst Derrida did confront the nuclear age and apocalypse theory Bacon argues that he, perhaps like

¹⁹¹ Bacon, *Flannery O'Connor and Cold War Culture*, p.2.

¹⁹² Bacon, *Flannery O'Connor and Cold War Culture*, p.2-3.

¹⁹³ Christopher Norris, 'Versions of Apocalypse' in Malcolm Bull (ed.), *Apocalypse Theory and the Ends of the World* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p.227-49.

¹⁹⁴ Norris, 'Versions of Apocalypse', p.242.

Berlin in political philosophy, is conservative in his choice of material to interpret. For instance, Derrida ignores the huge corpus of science fiction literature¹⁹⁵ in favour of searching through Kafka or Joyce in an attempt to make sense of twentieth century apocalypse narrative.¹⁹⁶ Yet, perhaps Derrida was sensible to look beyond contemporary literature, for

'Between 1880 and 1917, dozens of American novels projected imaginary wars in the near and far future, creating a popular literature that certainly expressed and very likely helped to shape the apocalyptic ideology prominent in America's wars from 1898 on. The emerging faith in American technological genius wedded the older faith in American messianic destiny, engendered a cult of made-in-America superweapons and ecstatic visions of America defeating evil empires, waging wars to end all wars, and eternally making the world safe for democracy. Some of these were preparedness propaganda tracts in the European tradition.'¹⁹⁷

A parallel can be made with the Anglo-American context where Berlin wrote political philosophy with the emphasis on 'eternally making the world safe for democracy', therefore writing 'preparedness propaganda tracts in the European tradition'. Only by understanding the deep discursive roots of the narrative forms Berlin wrote amongst can sense be made of authorship in the cold war period as a delicate balance between narrative themes influenced by contemporary political culture and narrative forms that existed before the advent of the cold war. Themes were explicitly stated through the more formalised intellectual milieu, as well as through the more informal discourse of literature. Crucially, Berlin was embedded within an Anglo-American discourse that incorporated a vocabulary loaded with the implicit language of values. To highlight this further, I wish now to briefly concentrate on science fiction in the cold war period.

¹⁹⁵ See Paul Briens, *Nuclear Holocausts: Atomic War in Fiction, 1895-1984* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State U.P., 1987).

¹⁹⁶ Jacques Derrida, 'No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives)' *Diacritics*, 14, 2 (1984), pp.20-31.

¹⁹⁷ H. Bruce Franklin, *War Stars: The Superweapon and the American Imagination* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1988), p.119.

Science Fiction as Cold War Narrative

To continue my development of a complex cold war context in which to locate Berlin I wish to look at science fiction narrative as a final case-study of cultural cold war discourse. This lends theoretical explanation to my methodological approach and further illuminates Berlin's separation from the popular imagination. Science fiction narrative in the cultural cold war period was finely configured to the realities of a world in flux. Science fiction in this period can be viewed as a therapeutic form of cultural self-awareness, for 'these narratives perform a role of negative prophecy where dreaded outcomes are envisaged and therefore hopefully deferred in such a way that the reader is induced to ponder on previous signs of disaster.'¹⁹⁸ Science fiction can lead us to a richer understanding of cold war culture because, '[s]cience Fiction novels and films are not producing arbitrary fantasy but rather reworking key metaphors and narratives already circulating in the culture.'¹⁹⁹ Also 'post-war Science Fiction demonstrates again and again the ways in which secrecy becomes institutionalised in mechanisms of control.'²⁰⁰ The increasing popularity of science fiction was a radical literary departure that sought to highlight the absurdities and flaws of government and the modern democratic state, as well as bringing the possible futures of humanity into focus. Fears about the future of humanity would circle around the nuclear threat and concentrate on the threat of powerful and supposedly corrosive ideas. The literature renegotiated meaning in a way that highlights the writing of Berlin as elitist or, to use Eagleton's phrase, 'loftily sequestered' from populist concerns. It is through this comparative reading of Berlin that his work

¹⁹⁸ David Seed, *American Science Fiction and the Cold War: Literature and Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p.9.

¹⁹⁹ Seed, *American Science Fiction and the Cold War*, p.2.

²⁰⁰ Seed, *American Science Fiction and the Cold War*, p.10.

appears effortlessly directed towards the political status quo.

Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*²⁰¹ is a science fiction novel deeply informed by the events of cold war. The book's subtitle is 'the ambiguous utopia', and central characters have diluted their original revolutionary visions with a dogmatic conformism, where artistic pursuits are discouraged, and dissenting ideas are all but invisible. The inference to the perceived coercion of communist ideology is obvious enough. It is worth pointing out that these visions of a future devoid of basic psychological freedoms are not too distant from the perceptions expressed by theologically focused authors such as Blanshard or Niebuhr, or the writing of Berlin in his essays on Soviet culture.²⁰² It was not uncommon for such fears to become generalised and all-encompassing in science fiction. For instance, Seed states,

'the 1954 film *Them!*...picks up the double metaphor of ants-as-monsters and ants-as-people to dramatise the unpredictability of the Bomb and fear of Communist attack. Radiation...has produced giant mutant ants who threaten centres of civilisation like Los Angeles. They are thus 'spawned' by the Bomb but embody a perception of Communist society.'²⁰³

It can be persuasively argued that science fiction bridges the gap between fact and fiction in a more direct way than other narrative types. Maybe this is because the 'facts' are facts in the forefront of people's perception of the world - military activity, technological advancement, and so on. Nuclear power, and most visibly nuclear weaponry, was fictive for most people until 1945. Suddenly, futuristic tales of 'unbelievable' technology enter the realm of believability. Strong, heroic, altruistic characters (such as characters in Gene Roddenberry's *Star Trek*) now needed to

²⁰¹ Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Dispossessed* (London: Millennium, 1974).

²⁰² See Berlin, *The Soviet Mind*, *passim*.

²⁰³ Seed, *American Science Fiction and the Cold War*, p.1-2.

embody determination in the face of unknown futures. They must show mastery of new technology, accelerating in the direction of some form of perfect knowledge. Science fiction was a radical attempt to make sense of a changing world. Berlin's writing can be viewed as juxtaposed in this sense, especially given the consistent nature of his work and his comparative distance from contemporary problems.

The narrative device employed by Algis Budrys in *Who?*²⁰⁴ is also symptomatic of wider trends in science fiction narrative. The central characters are highly trained government operatives who have to deal with a scientist returning from Soviet captivity. The scientist is returned half cyborg, and the reader is invited to be in awe of the technology that is simultaneously mysterious and beautiful, as well as feeling comfort in the knowledge that these government operatives stay rational in the face of potentially shocking new experiences. These 'new experiences' are shrouded in secrecy and conducted with constant, almost paranoid, reference to possible Soviet motivations:

'He shrugged. 'We're all old acquaintances by now. This frontier's been here forty years. They know we're not going to start shooting, any more than they are. This isn't where the war is.'

He looked at the clustered Soviets again, remembering a song he'd heard years ago: 'Give the Comrade With the Machine Gun the Right to Speak.' He wondered if they knew of that song, over on their side of the line. There were many things on the other side of the line that he wanted to know. But there was little hope for it.

The war was in the world's filing cabinets. The weapon was information: things you knew, things you'd found out about them, things they knew about you.²⁰⁵

Interestingly, *Who?* also draws on a pool of 'common' cultural narratives, with lines such as 'Slavs

²⁰⁴ Algis Budrys, *Who?* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958).

²⁰⁵ Budrys, *Who?*, p.6.

and stumpy Asiatics in shapeless quilted jackets²⁰⁶ reflecting longstanding preoccupations with otherness. The notion of separateness and the imagery of the 'stand-off' at the frontier is a common cold war device, and Berlin evoked similar intellectual polarisations with his interpretations of thinkers.

It is clear that science fiction - with its themes of apocalypse, nuclear fear, technology and often the shadow of perpetual conflict - is a valuable and often under-utilised body of work relevant to cold war studies. Franklin believes that early exponents of nuclear war novels such as Hollis Godfrey and Frank Stockton²⁰⁷ were 'missionaries of the myth, and cult of the superweapon, thus helping to create the cultural matrix of America's actual wars and our current potentially apocalyptic predicament'.²⁰⁸ For the purpose of this thesis, it is clear that an appreciation of the wider narratives of cold war presents the scholar with a useful lens through which to view the clash between ideas and politics, texts and contexts, and the impact of anxieties and preoccupations. In the case of Berlin it is also useful to note the contrast between his style of writing and the style of alternative narratives. It could be argued that the urgency of Berlin's writing was as powerful as science fiction writing, yet Berlin's style was far more implicit. It is from this complicated context that a narrative reading of Berlin can emerge.

²⁰⁶ Budrys, *Who?*, p.5.

²⁰⁷ Hollis Godfrey, *The Man Who Ended War* (1908); Frank Stockton, *The Great War Syndicate* (1889).

²⁰⁸ H. Bruce Franklin 'Abstract, Strange Scenarios: Science Fiction, the Theory of Alienation, and the Nuclear Gods', *Science Fiction Studies*, 13, 2 (1986), pp.117-126.

Problems with 'Traditional' Cold War Interpretation

In contrast to the exposition above, traditional interpretations of the cold war have focused on post-war power politics, concentrating how political developments altered the complexion of global interrelations. For instance, Leffler and Painter summed these up these post-war 'alterations' as fundamentally caused by: 'new 'great power' rivalries; changes in technology of warfare; transnational ideological conflict; reform and reconstruction of the world capitalist system; movements of national liberation.'²⁰⁹ Events in each of these categories affected each other, accentuating tensions between the superpowers, thus fuelling the arms race. From this point, domestic and international politics polarise, and the world split into artificial, clearly defined, 'blocs'. These blocs were geographical, military and strategic entities, but also became intellectually distinct in the post-war years.

It has been argued that 'in effect, the world situation became reasonably stable soon after the war and remained so until the middle 1970s...(and) once the USSR acquired nuclear weapons – both superpowers plainly abandoned war as an instrument of policy, since it was the equivalent of a suicide pact'.²¹⁰ However, I have hoped to demonstrate that any idea of 'the cold war' cannot solely encompass formalised cold war political culture. Attempting to absorb the theoretical insights offered by a narrative examination of the cultural cold war allows the scholar to attain a sharper focus on the general assumptions of the period. These assumptions activated certain modes of expression, and are detectable through a reading of implicit normative language. These are very strong discursive patterns; 'it was, after all, the continuing

²⁰⁹ Leffler & Painter, (eds.), *Origins of the Cold War*, p.12.

²¹⁰ Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes* (London: Abacus, 1994), p.228-9.

acknowledgement of boundaries that meant the Cold War remained 'cold' while still being meaningfully, if ambiguously, a 'war'.²¹¹ These 'boundaries' were not only well known by the inhabitants of 'high politics' and 'high culture', but also cemented in the wider cultural context through the dissemination of ideas using normative language. A quote from Mitter is a fitting justification of the efficacy of the cultural approach:

'[W]ith the demise of fascist anti-Enlightenment thinking, both liberal democracy and communism pretended to the true mantle of scientific rationality. Both professed to embody modernity, and appropriated the term 'democracy', but applied to it fundamentally different meanings. But the global conflict also created its own overarching logic, that of nuclear self-destruction and species preservation, which forced some to think outside the constraints of limited notions of national self-interest. Linguistic and discursive approaches are thus necessary for understanding both the texts and contexts of Cold War culture, as well as an important gateway into the analysis of class and gender identities *vis-a-vis* the 'master narrative' of system conflict.'²¹²

If the scholar deploys a complex methodological approach, then s/he can begin to make sense of the interlocking relationship between ideology, narrative, geopolitics and authorship. Whilst excellent contributions have been made by traditional cold war interpretation, there are also an array of more complex observations that need to be incorporated into a field of study so long dominated by diplomatic, or 'event', history. The pithy title of *We Now Know*²¹³, by John Gaddis, is both indicative of the mistakes of 'traditional' cold war interpretation, and an ironic statement on how so many earlier commentators claimed to hold the definitive truth on the reasons behind the cold war. Much contemporary debate is centred around factors on the periphery of orthodox cold war studies; such as the re-consideration of unique problems within European nations and the

²¹¹ Rana Mitter, 'East is East and West is West' in Rana Mitter & Patrick Major (eds), *Across the Blocs: Cold War Cultural and Social History* (London: Frank Cass, 2004), p. 17.

²¹² Mitter, 'East is East and West is West', p.8.

²¹³ John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997).

aspirations of countries around the world.

For instance, Charles S. Maier has recently argued that European statesmen were acutely aware of American apprehensions about Soviet gains, and so ensured their own domestic gains. 'European officials often transformed their weakness into strength.'²¹⁴ This re-examination highlights flawed conceptualisations of power²¹⁵ and legitimacy, meaning that the cold war is seen in less prosaic terms than previous literature would suggest. New phraseology has also helped deepen our understanding of the cold war. Controversial new theses under phrases such as 'consensual hegemony' and 'empire by invitation' have impacted on cold war studies, serving as useful catalysts for debate.²¹⁶ In *Across The Blocs*, the authors express the opinion that although the journals *Diplomatic History* and *Cold War History*, have been path-breaking in creating the cultural study of the cold war, much still needs to be done to go beyond this. There is a constant need to discover new forms of analysis and methodology. Whilst never denying that the cold war was (visibly at least) grounded in high politics, scholars must go beyond the confines of formal international history to bring into focus the complex interplay of structures of meaning underpinning the traditional 'event' of the cold war. Mitter writes that,

'because the Cold War remained very much a war of words, we need to pay special

²¹⁴ Charles S. Maier 'Hegemony and Autonomy within the Western Alliance' in Leffler and Painter (eds.), *Origins of the Cold War*, p.155.

²¹⁵ See especially Keohane, *After Hegemony*.

²¹⁶ For 'consensual hegemony' see R.W. Cox, 'Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations: An Essay in Method', in Robert Cox & Timothy Sinclair, *Approaches to World Order* (Cambridge: CUP, 1983), pp. 124-143; John Krige, *American Hegemony and the Postwar Reconstruction of Science in Europe* (Cambridge, MA.: MIT Press, 2006). For debate surrounding 'empire by invitation' see Geir Lundestad, 'Empire by Invitation? The United States and Western Europe 1945-52', *Journal of Peace Research*, 23 (1986), pp.263-277; *The American 'Empire' and Other Studies of US Foreign Policy in a Comparative Perspective* (Oxford: OUP, 1990). For broad theses on hegemony, empire and the question of consent see P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion, 1688-1914* (London: Longman, 1993) and P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Crisis and Deconstruction, 1914-1990* (London: Longman, 1993).

attention to the internal dynamics of the conflict. Clearly, the United States' political elites felt the need to keep a domestic consensus for Cold War going. The very ideological nature of the confrontation also placed a premium on conformity of ideas. The nexus between high politics and everyday society has thus been a vital factor in understanding the social disciplinary aspects of America's Cold War, even down to the local level.²¹⁷

The thrust of new cold war scholarship is that new understandings of the 'war of words' has made the balance between 'political' and 'cultural' readings more subtle. It is within this context that I argue a valuable new reading of Isaiah Berlin's texts can be approached.

Conclusion

Berlin's work has as its backdrop a variety of anxieties existing in the Anglo-American context in after 1945. These anxieties were subtle and a product of a complex cold war context where new political challenges and realities generated explicit statements from a variety of intellectuals. However, these new realities and challenges also generated an implicit use of language that can be found within cold war discourse, as evidenced from an examination of science fiction and apocalypse narrative. Berlin was a concerned intellectual yet he would deal with abstract generalities, for instance the looming spectre of 'monism', rather than focusing on the shadow cast over the post-1945 world by the atom bomb. Berlin's evasion of 'concrete' questions on economics, militarism and technology is best epitomized by his avoidance of the nuclear question which was itself such a preoccupation in the popular imagination. Yet Berlin, who was embedded in a traditional educational institution, and traditional forms of philosophical and literary criticism, hoped to offer a moralistic political philosophy for the future of humankind. Through this prism, his

²¹⁷ Mitter, 'East is East and West is West', p.4.

work takes on a strange double-edged relevance to the period 1945-1967. On one hand, Berlin is wrestling with common anticommunist themes, developing the ideas in essays such as 'Two Concepts of Liberty' that would contribute greatly to the western 'self-image'. I have begun to show how this 'self-image' can be reduced to a set of implicit value assumptions, themselves products of the internalisation of values derived from a psychological shift in the post-1945 Anglo-American world. It is in this sense that Berlin was a 'cold warrior'. I will also examine in Chapter Three how Berlin's role must also take into account that he can be considered an organic intellectual for Israel. Yet Berlin can be viewed as peculiarly removed from any sense of 'post-war identity crisis'. Instead, it is tempting to view Berlin as positioning himself in comfortable moral-political compartments that would remain persistent indicators of Berlin's thought. Berlin's work has as its ontological foundation a degree of assumption detectable through his heavy reliance on normative language. It is easier, and more persuasive, to view this liberal-normative position as an ideological product of the cold war than it is argue that this liberal ethos also underpins the legitimacy of capitalism, thus legitimising real inequalities undeniably existent in contemporary society.

Clearly, the unique context surrounding Berlin has not been properly expressed in the literature. Kenny states that much interpretation of his work 'downplay[s] the extent to which his thinking was moulded by his visceral opposition to particular traditions and ideologies.'²¹⁸ 'Left-wing' arguments are still central arguments to confront when looking at a thinker with intellectual and political affiliations close to the epicentre of the Anglo-American power base in the cold war.

²¹⁸ Kenny, 'Isaiah Berlin's Contribution to Modern Political Theory', p.1037.

Central to my argument is that Berlin, within this problematised context, represents a variety of liberalism that does not feel the need to justify its existence. Berlin's liberalism is presented as an unquestioned, 'natural', political philosophy that best reflects humanity. For Berlin, this is a given. It could be argued that for an intellectual figure to appear as such, and to be privileged enough to present his thought in such a way, is a by-product of the ideological hegemony that will always partly define cold war culture. It is within this tentatively defined context that Berlin wrote, and his writing added to, created, and reflected cold war concerns. However, to concentrate solely on the material basis of Berlin's thought, shrouds the equally important question of the extent we should let this basis define his thought. Moving away from econo-centric ideas on material 'reality', social order, and so on, I instead wish to concentrate on the patterns of language in an attempt to gain new understandings of Berlin's texts. My analysis of the alternative narratives of science fiction and apocalypse theory was an attempt to illustrate how links can be made between cold war context and discursive patterns.

Towards this end, this chapter has been an attempt to explain how the 'cold war' was a process that affected discourse in indirect ways. Not wishing to downgrade the direct, physical and military manifestations politicised cold war culture took, my study of Isaiah Berlin concentrates on the indirect consequences of narrative trends, and considers the possibility that patterns of language were representative of the more 'direct' products of cold war culture. A picture of the cold war emerges that stresses the need to come to terms with the complexities that exist between the extremes of abstractness and material 'reality'. The array of narratives in the period are powerful, critical, and intimately related to cold war concerns. Arguably the most

important narrative trend, certainly the one that fits most closely with Berlin's use of language is the complex relationship between the persistence of colonial rhetoric linked with denunciations of totalitarianism. This relationship, which I will examine in depth in Chapter Five, is an important avenue to realising the sense of 'otherness' that exists within Berlin's work.

However, this chapter has begun the process of unscrambling a problematised cold war context. A thorough examination of language alongside the clearly defined problems of context is the path this thesis will take. The lengthy study of a prominent intellectual figure such as Isaiah Berlin is a good methodological exercise of how to cut through the tensions between context and text.

2

The Role of the Intellectual

Introduction

In recent years the literature on the meaning of the word intellectual has grown considerably.²¹⁹

This chapter serves as an exploration of the genealogy and historiography of the word. This exploration acts as the basis for a fresh approach to Isaiah Berlin, whose intellectual role has not been interpreted in relation to new understandings of the word. The previous chapter explored the context within which Berlin can be approached, and this chapter wishes to explore how an idea of Berlin's self-perception and publicly perceived role can be enriched by reference to understandings of the term 'intellectual'.

The way in which Berlin *intervenes*, both discursively and physically, can be viewed in a fresh light. The word is often linked with a moralistic judgement process, where questions of responsibility and truth come to the foreground. The conception of the intellectual is intimately linked to ideas of culture, nation and identity, so 'the intellectual' is a particularly interesting social construction. If we look at the British and French contexts comparatively, wider cultural trends appear that highlight how national institutions operate, how hierarchies are conceived, and even how political culture is shaped by levels of anti-intellectualism. The fact that Berlin is integrated within the British ruling elite leads to further questions over function and significance.

²¹⁹ Stefan Collini's formidably researched book *Absent Minds: Intellectuals in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) is the first comprehensive examination of the intellectual in a specifically British context. Thomas William Hayck, 'Myths and Meanings of Intellectuals in Twentieth-Century British National Identity', *The Journal of British Studies*, 37, 2 (1998), pp.192-221 is a more concise introduction to the complexities surrounding this under-researched aspect of British culture. Further references in the body of the chapter illustrate the growth of recent literature on intellectuals.

The central idea developed in the chapter is the notion that 'passivity' defined Berlin's intellectual role. This argument links in with the wider cold war context described in the previous chapter. Just as Berlin can be seen to have discursive power that is not explicit in his writing, his role as intellectual can also be seen to be 'silently' powerful. As a consequence, the illusory impression of his intellectual role as passive aids this discursive power. His 'passive' intellectual status is not questioned, nor are the assumptions behind his ideas. This conservative momentum reinforces the social hierarchy as well as the specificity of Berlin's image as intellectual.

Towards a Definition

To begin with it is imperative to explore the ways in which 'the intellectual' has been conceived. Berlin clearly wielded, and still wields, a degree of political influence, yet he was rarely a visibly politicised cold war intellectual. Yet, I argue that an ostensibly 'passive', non-politicised, intellectual can possess 'power' in the discursive sense. The power of the 'passive' intellectual stems from the operation of normatively charged language. This links considerations of intellectual 'role' directly with the context of cold war narrative, and the mechanisms of Berlin's textual output.

I have already emphasised the difficulty in deciding exactly where and how Berlin fits into the complexities of political and cultural life in the cold war era. In this chapter I will explore the way in which Berlin conceived his own work, and illustrate how certain themes such as 'duty' were moral imperatives within his texts. These themes explain the implicit aspects of Berlin's intellectual role. In 'Historical Inevitability' Berlin writes of the 'duty' of the historian to 'judge Charlemagne or

Napoleon or Genghis Khan or Hitler or Stalin for their massacres.²²⁰ Berlin believed passionately in 'the power of ideas', and he believed the intellectual should be morally instructive on acceptable limits of agency, even if the intellectual is temporally dislocated from the context of agency in question. It is in this sense that Berlin represented a set of values that would come to embody the cold war as well as wider Anglo-American attitudes towards the progress of history and humanness. It is clear that Berlin himself had a clear conception of what meant to be 'an intellectual'. For Berlin, the intellectual is typologically distinct;

'intellectuals are people who are simply interested in ideas, they want ideas to be as interesting as possible, as aesthetes are people who want things to be as beautiful as possible. The intelligentsia, historically, are people who are united around certain social ideas, who believe in progress, in reason, reject traditionalism, believe scientific methods, free criticism, individual liberty, in short oppose reaction, obscurantism, the Church and the authoritarian state, and see each other as fellow fighters in a common cause – above all for human rights and a decent social order.'²²¹

Here, the intellectual is presented more as a 'free-floating' intellectual separate from the thinker who is attached to 'certain social ideas', evidently the Russian intelligentsia in this paragraph. These 'attached' intellectuals encompass a distinct set of politicised values whilst 'intellectuals' are presented as apolitical. Presumably, a 'conscious' detachment from formal social ideas is a prerequisite of the intellectual proper. As I examined in the previous chapter, one must consider the different contexts within which 'social ideas' originate and the way in which these different ideas permeate into discourse and society. In this sense, Berlin underestimates the discursive power intellectuals can hold, and does not seem to acknowledge that this power may be as

²²⁰ Isaiah Berlin, 'Historical Inevitability' [1954], in *Liberty*, p.144.

²²¹ Jahanbegloo, *Conversations With Isaiah Berlin*, p.183.

politicised in nature as that possessed by thinkers who consciously unite around common ideas. Yet, Berlin wrote from an anti-monist standpoint that privileged his conception of freedom and simplified his assumptions on the links between human agency and politics. Needless to say, this was a standpoint with its origins in Berlin's distrust of Soviet ideological dogmatism as well as his promotion of liberal ideals.

This has the beginnings of a fascinating insight into wider methodological issues surrounding Berlin. Concerned enough to delineate the 'intellectual' from a member of the 'intelligentsia', elsewhere Berlin also delineates the humane from the inhumane, springing from the foundation of his own ideological preoccupations. It is already taken as given that we, the readers, understand what a 'decent social order' is. Now we are invited to understand what a decent human being is: 'There are two authors whom I make propaganda for: one is Herzen, the other is Shestov. They are both totally decent, open-minded, open-hearted human beings, as Dostoevsky was not'.²²² For Berlin, identifying thinkers whom he wishes to write about is a surprisingly moral and emotive judgement process. Berlin conceives of and classifies certain intellectuals in a way that places them in a moral hierarchy. The implication is that Berlin gives primacy to those thinkers who enter into his 'moral sphere'; those he judges to be 'open-minded, open-hearted human beings'. There is nothing unusual or 'wrong' with this, but problems arise when the reader realises that Berlin's conception of the specific role of the thinker may be an exaggeration or, worse, a fabrication based on Berlin's assumptions surrounding the 'proper' role of the intellectual. The power of assumption is a major theme in my thesis, and it is clear already that Berlin held

²²² Jahanbegloo, *Conversations With Isaiah Berlin*, p.175.

assumptions on morality and values that impacted heavily his conception of the intellectual. Berlin's thoughts on the intellectual in 1992 clearly contain the residues of attitudes that elevated and revered particular intellectuals as 'geniuses'.

It will become clear that new research on the role of the intellectual is conscious of, and moves away from, qualifications such as 'genius'. Instead fresh research informed by the work of thinkers such as Gramsci and Said wishes to bring the intellectual 'down to earth', concentrating on the function and context of the intellectual. Genius is now a dirty word. It seems clear that recent literature on intellectuals comprises of various blends of 'works on' and 'definitions of' intellectuals, and deciding the particular interpretative approach is the most important thing. An understanding of the complex interrelated aspects of different intellectual roles serves as a basis for understanding the textual output of the intellectual.

Intellectuals: The Evolution of Hierarchy Through the Twentieth Century

The term 'intellectual' is a recurrent problem because it is a word that is still understood and deployed in a variety of ways.²²³ It has become an awkward term lying somewhere between the sociological category, which tends towards universal traits divorced from context, and the biographical category, where historical context is seen as categorising and explaining the 'intellectual'. These two categories are made politicised and contentious by the desire of authors to argue for a particular conception of the intellectual that contain, at its core, a specific message about the contemporary world. One recent book by Furedi, *Where Have All The Intellectuals*

²²³ For an excellent analysis of the genealogy of the word 'intellectual' see Collini, *Absent Minds*, Chapter 1.

*Gone?*²²⁴, is subtitled 'confronting 21st century Philistinism'. This is a clear indicator that the residues of older conceptions of the intellectual still exist as a marker of a 'high culture'. For Furedi, the polymath intellectual personalities of prior generations, like Isaiah Berlin, will be lost in the confusing and stressful morass of postmodernity, specialisation and career targets. So, Furedi's work, like Steve Fuller's recent book²²⁵, is concerned with the relation of the contemporary intellectual to the changing character of the academic world. These are quite narrow and conservative concerns compared to some of the issues that motivated authors to write on intellectuals in the twentieth century.

It is necessary to emphasise that the term 'intellectual' is a comparatively recent addition to the western academic lexicon. Although linked to popular conceptions of 'the Intelligentsia' in revolutionary France and 1860s Russia, its rather immodest beginnings sprang from a group of self-proclaimed 'intellectuals' who united in opposition to the Dreyfus affair. To think of the 'intellectual' as a necessarily separate or distinct mind-set seems to have found its way quickly into academic circles. The work of the French humanist Julien Benda consolidated the idea that the intellectual was an unique entity. Somehow, for Benda, the intellectual existed in a different mental space, and played by different rules from the ignorant 'mass' of society. Not surprisingly, the idea that these 'intellectuals' were superior in *purpose* also materialised, which, in turn, was inextricably linked with the idea of the 'intellectual' as a breed of people. Linked strongly to these notions is also the idea of 'mission'; the intellectual as wise or sensible, transcending moral norms,

²²⁴ Frank Furedi, *Where Have All The Intellectuals Gone?: Confronting 21st Century Philistinism* (London: Continuum, 2004).

²²⁵ Steve Fuller, *The Intellectual: The Positive Power of Negative Thinking* (Cambridge: Icon, 2005).

viewing things with focus, observing the world with perfect clarity. They also judge the world, and their judgment should be followed *because* of their superior purpose. For Benda, 'intellectuals constituted a disinterested, idealistic elite unconcerned with practical matters, immersed in the realm of ideas, in art, science, literature, and reflection.'²²⁶ In an attempt to define intellectuals,

Benda wrote:

'I mean that class of men whom I shall designate 'the clerks' by which I mean all those whose activity essentially is not the pursuit of practical aims, all those who seek their joy in the practice of an art or a science or metaphysical speculation, in short in the possession of non-material advantages, and hence in a certain manner say: 'my kingdom is not of this world'...(this series of men throughout history) whose influence, whose life, were in direct opposition to the realism of the multitudes.'²²⁷

So, for Benda, it is simple enough: the intellectual is an idealised entity, who must stand aloof from society if he is to sustain a 'responsibility to truth.'²²⁸ It seems that it is possible to draw parallels with Berlin's view of the intellectual as a separate entity at the top of the moral hierarchy. A modified version of Benda's attitudes - that intellectuals act in the public realm, from a position of *relative* autonomy - is reflected by the Hungarian sociologist Karl Mannheim. His famous notion of the 'free-floating', 'unanchored' intellectual is described in *Ideology and Utopia*;

From a sociological point of view the decisive fact of modern times, in contrast with the situation during the Middle Ages, is that (the) monopoly of the ecclesiastical interpretation of the world which was held by the priestly caste is broken, and in place of a closed and thoroughly organised stratum of intellectuals, a free intelligentsia has arisen'.²²⁹

²²⁶ Paul Hollander, *Political Pilgrims: Travels of Western Intellectuals to the Soviet Union, China and Cuba, 1928-1978* (New York, NY: OUP, 1981), p.44.

²²⁷ Julien Benda, *The Treason of the Intellectuals*, quoted in Hollander, *Political Pilgrims*, p.43.

²²⁸ See J. Jennings & A. Kemp-Welch, *Intellectuals in Politics: From the Dreyfus Affair to Salman Rushdie* (London: Routledge, 1997), p.10.

²²⁹ Mannheim, quoted J. Jennings & A. Kemp-Welch, *Intellectuals in Politics*, p.10.

Mannheim's notions take us away from Benda's idea that the 'intellectual' has a fixed and universal role and responsibility, instead realising that there are 'enduring *and* changing attributes of the intellectual'.²³⁰ Benda republished his book after World War Two, and Edward Said's comments tell us a great deal about the practice of defining 'intellectuals';

'[Benda] add[ed] a series of attacks against intellectuals who collaborated with the Nazis as well as against those who were uncritically enthusiastic about the Communists. But deep in the combative rhetoric of Benda's basically very conservative work is to be found this figure of the intellectual as a being set apart, someone able to speak the truth to power, a crusty, eloquent, fantastically courageous and angry individual for whom no worldly power is too big and imposing to be criticised and pointedly taken to task.'²³¹

It is clear that cold war discourse sustained these views of the intellectual. Edward Shils, the American sociologist, partly restates Benda when he writes, 'intellectuals are a sort of clerical minority.....intellectuals stand at two extremes; they are either against the prevailing norms, or, in some basically accommodating way, they exist to provide 'order and continuity to public life'.²³²

Said has claimed that only the first of these can be true for the modern intellectual, because the

'dominant norms are today so intimately connected to (because commanded at the top by) the nation, which is always triumphalist, always in a position of authority, always exacting loyalty and subservience rather than intellectual investigation and re-examination of the kind that both Woolf and Walter Benjamin speak about...Moreover, in many cultures today, intellectuals principally *question* rather than communicate directly with, the general symbols Shils talks about.'²³³

Berlin, viewed in the British context, can be seen to be aligned closer to the values of 'the nation' and the origin of authority. In this sense, Berlin should be viewed as closer to the 'symbols' Said

²³⁰ Hollander, *Political Pilgrims*, p.41.

²³¹ Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, p. 7.

²³² Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, p.27.

²³³ Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, p.27.

believes many contemporary intellectuals question. On these symbols, Shils wrote

'in every society....there are some persons with an unusual sensitivity to the sacred, an uncommon reflectiveness about the nature of their universe and the rules which govern their society. There is in every society a minority of persons who...are inquiring and desirous of being in frequent communion with symbols which are more general than the immediate concrete situations of everyday life.'²³⁴

As we read earlier, Shils placed the CCF in 'a tradition of intellectuals of a common outlook joined together in a common task – it is a product of the 18th century Enlightenment. I think it is not wrong to see its forerunners in the circle which produced the *Encyclopedie*.'²³⁵ Shils represents an idea of the intellectual as separate and somehow more suited to dealing with vital questions too demanding for 'everyday life'. Gradually these dominant ideas about 'the intellectual' were challenged, but the notion of 'superiority of purpose' is a residue that undoubtedly still exists. This, as we'll see, has had negative as well as positive effects on conceptions of the intellectual, especially within the British context, where the term 'intellectual' is often used as a term of derision, or is even denied as a category of description. Stefan Collini, intellectual historian and critic, writes

'the very durability of the cliché indicates that it fits easily into a larger pattern of British culture's self-understanding. In fact, the persistence and appeal of the hackneyed claim that intellectuals are an alien species not naturally found in Britain becomes more intelligible once we realise that the earliest versions of this claim were grafted on to a pre-existing set of ideas about national identity and the peculiarities of British history and politics.'²³⁶

²³⁴ Edward Shils quoted in Hollander, *Political Pilgrims*, p.40.

²³⁵ Edward Shils, 'Remembering the Congress For Cultural Freedom', p.56.

²³⁶ Stefan Collini, 'Intellectuals in Britain and France in the Twentieth Century: Confusions, Contrasts - and Convergences?', in J. Jennings (ed.), *Intellectuals in Twentieth Century France: Mandarins and Samurai* (London: MacMillan, 1993), p. 199-200.

But before we venture into specific cultural understandings of the term, we must continue this brief historiographical survey, and consider some of the alternative notions of the intellectual. The

American sociologist C. Wright Mills, in 1944, wrote:

'independent intellectuals were faced either with a kind of despondent sense of powerlessness at their marginality, or with the choice of joining the ranks of institutions, corporations or governments as members of a relatively small group of insiders who made important decisions on their own and irresponsibly.'²³⁷

A different, perhaps stronger, sense of frustration is emphasised by Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own*, when she describes the ingrained set of male values a woman must face when she picks up her pen to write. This, naturally, fits in to a larger picture, for 'there is always a structure of power and influence, a massed history of already articulated values and ideas, and also and most important for the intellectual, an underside to them – ideas, values, people who, like the women writers Woolf discusses, have not been given a room of their own.'²³⁸ However, do these two quotes partially echo the sentiments of Benda or Mannheim? This display of 'frustration', or 'powerlessness' with 'the way the world is' could be, in general terms, illustrating the fact that certain individuals - such as Woolf and other 'independent intellectuals' - are in a position within society to question and define. They are listened to, and have influence. But is this because they have 'uncommon reflectiveness', mystically bestowed on them, or are there more concrete reasons why intellectuals serve the roles they do? According to Gramsci's conception of history, intellectuals are the group most responsible for social change and social stability, yet are 'rooted in the world of production'. Gramsci redefines the meaning of 'intellectual' by pointing out 'the

²³⁷ Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, p.15.

²³⁸ Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, p.15.

'widespread error of method' which searches for the criterion of distinction between intellectuals and non-intellectuals in the 'intrinsic nature of intellectual and non-intellectual activities'....Gramsci does not follow Marx in recognising a separation between mental and manual labour.²³⁹ There is always a minimum of intellectual activity in *any* human activity and, at the very least, the human individual 'participates in a conception of the world, he has a conscious line of moral conduct, and therefore contributes to sustaining or to modifying a conception of the world'²⁴⁰. This 'conception' of the world can be viewed as a similar phenomenon as Sartre's belief in every individual 'project'. If this 'conception of the world' and the 'project within the world' are thought of in terms of social *function*, not social *significance*, we can view these two ideas a wish to express an anti-elitist view of human relations.

Whilst recognising that 'hierarchies' exist, the inherent inequalities which make certain individuals more 'prominent' within society, can be explained within Gramsci's conception of 'intellectual hegemony'. The ensemble of institutions within civil society - containing individuals who are following their own 'projects' - assert a kind of 'passive domination'. In Femia's terms,

'hegemony is attained through the myriad ways in which the institutions of civil society operate to shape, directly or indirectly, the cognitive and affective structures whereby men perceive and evaluate problematic social reality.'²⁴¹

Collections of theorists, or 'authors', are immediately denoted as 'a structure, a kind of work, a style, a kind of language, an attitude.'²⁴² It is certainly tempting to view Berlin as embedded near

²³⁹ Joseph V. Femia, *Gramsci's Political Thought: Hegemony, Consciousness, and the Revolutionary Process* (Oxford: OUP, 1983), p.131.

²⁴⁰ Femia, *Gramsci's Political Thought*, p.131.

²⁴¹ Femia, *Gramsci's Political Thought*, p.24.

²⁴² Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, p.12.

the top of this structural hierarchy within a group of influential intellectuals who, because of their proximity to prominent institutions, express a language charged with the dominant social values. The implication is that these dominant, institutionally influenced intellectuals are 'structurally' likely to represent and legitimise the values of the institution. Linked to this serious implication is the idea that intellectuals have become more specialised, compartmentalised, and less likely to evaluate their own position in the structures of power. Alvin W. Gouldner has described how he views intellectuals as a 'new class', with intellectual managers taking over from the old monied and propertied classes.²⁴³ As a consequence of this, intellectuals are no longer people who address a wide public but - because of their ascendancy - those who are members of a 'culture of critical discourse'.²⁴⁴ This is similar to Foucault, who has written that the 'universal' intellectual has had his place taken by the 'specific' intellectual, someone who works inside a restricted discipline. This is why it is important to regain a sense of how the role of the intellectuals impacts on wider society. Said has offered a possible synthesis:

'in the end it is the intellectual as a representative figure that matters - someone who visibly represents a standpoint of some kind, and someone who makes articulate representations to his or her public despite all sorts of barriers. My argument is that intellectuals are individuals with a vocation for the art of representing.....In the outpourings of studies about intellectuals there has been far too much defining of the intellectual, and not enough stock taken of the image, the signature, the actual intervention and performance, all of which taken together constitute the very lifeblood of every real intellectual.'²⁴⁵

So, for Said, the intellectual is an impassioned figure, one who realises certain responsibilities that come with his/her social position. The central problem when viewing Berlin's role, however, must

²⁴³ Alvin W. Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class* (London: Macmillan, 1979).

²⁴⁴ Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, p.7.

²⁴⁵ Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, p.10.

be that Berlin was rarely 'visibly' representing an explicit standpoint, and questions of intellectual responsibility are subsumed within cold war anticommunist sentiment. It is in this sense that, as Said suggests, the scholar must look towards 'the image, the signature, the actual intervention and performance' as a way to unravel the operation and impact of the intellectual. It is necessary first, however, to ask if it is possible to root Berlin in a specifically national context.

The Intellectual in National Culture: General Definitions and Trends

It is clear that a certain degree of anti-intellectualism became prevalent in post-1945 Britain. Disillusion was expressed by British intellectuals on a variety of issues surrounding the catastrophe of world war, but the most significant area of unease for my immediate concern revolved around the perceived failure of systems of radical political thought. British disillusion over the failure of applied Marxism in the Soviet Union under Stalin correlated with an increase of distrust in the role of the radical intellectual in liberal society. Questions of intellectual responsibility were positioned starkly alongside moral anxieties over the emerging injustices in Stalinist ruled Eastern Europe, the defining example being the events of 1956. Ex-Marxists had already begun distancing themselves from a set of ideas that were now perceived immoral and fundamentally incorrect. The publication of books such as Crossman, Gide, Koestler and Silone's *The God That Failed* in 1949, or Orwell's famously stark renditions of the failings of political utopianism are prominent examples. This departure from utopian belief led thinkers such as Orwell to a stance of pragmatism, or 'commonsense' gradualism, that wished to lead people away from those intellectuals who would continue to argue that abstract political theory could

necessarily equate to benevolently governed societies of perfection.

It must be made clear, however, that a significant strand of anti-intellectualism existed in Britain from the late nineteenth century onwards. I would still argue, however, that the decades of the 1930s and 1940s cemented a view of the radical intellectual figure as a true danger to liberal society. It is in this context that Berlin can be seen as exemplifying an intellectual role in the post-1945 period that represented a calm and reassuring 'Establishment' tone on the state of humanity, a reminder to be steadfast against 'enemies of freedom'. British culture shunned one perceived intellectual type, yet at the same time a role for a public intellectual who exemplified the virtues of the educational elite and political gradualism was clearly acceptable. Ironically, this intellectual figure could express an anti-intellectualism towards those intellectuals who had proved morally 'irresponsible'. To return to the perceived 'unimportance' of intellectuals in British culture, Hayck looks to a set of historical reasons,

'first, a tradition in modern British history carrying an image of British society itself as nonintellectual; second, paradoxically, the high degree of integration of the intellectuals with the ruling elite; and third, a problem of multiple meanings of the term 'intellectual,' a problem arising from the use of the term in different discourses.'²⁴⁶

On the first point, Hayck writes, to back up my own earlier assertion, 'in the context of the cold war of the 1940s and 1950s, such views about the nonintellectual aspect of Englishness and the corresponding insignificance of British intellectuals became commonplace.'²⁴⁷ However, this is symptomatic of the cultural climate, not of some deeper truth which decrees 'there are no British intellectuals'. Yet, some recent work has argued that anti-intellectualism is a conventional aspect

²⁴⁶ Hayck, 'Myths and Meanings', p 193.

²⁴⁷ Hayck, 'Myths and Meanings', p 193.

of contemporary British society. It is clear that some politicians, intellectuals and writers use anti-intellectual sentiment to further their own agendas. For instance, Jennings & Kemp-Welch state,

'few modern British prime ministers have been so conscious of the importance of ideas and have so surrounded themselves by academics as Mrs. Thatcher...in parallel to the conservative government's political assault upon the bastions of intellectual power and privilege, took place a sustained re-examination of the role of the intellectual viewed from the perspective of the ideologues of the Right.'²⁴⁸

It seems that a reaction against the broadly 'leftist' inspired movements of post-structuralism and post-modernism has led to a particularly conservative attempt to redefine intellectual role. Paul Johnson's *Intellectuals*, and John Carey's *Intellectuals and the Masses*²⁴⁹ have aided the continuation of an anti-intellectual strand within British culture. Indeed, as Jennings & Kemp-Welch write, '[Johnson's] views are broadly representative of a wider anti-intellectualism in contemporary Britain.'²⁵⁰

Johnson's argument, in a nutshell, is that we should not judge intellectuals by what they write but by what they do. The book dissects the lives of various thinkers, such as Marx, Rousseau and Brecht, and displays the 'personal foibles' of each character. For instance, Johnson examines the sex lives of certain thinkers, claiming 'intellectuals are seen as being as unreasonable, illogical, selfish and superstitious as anyone else.'²⁵¹ However, Johnson takes this argument to its extreme, claiming that because intellectuals are prone to offering radical and dangerous solutions to societal problems, they are forced to condone and possibly encourage, violence. From here,

²⁴⁸ Jennings & Kemp-Welch, *Intellectuals in Politics*, p. 4.

²⁴⁹ John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses* (London: Faber, 1992).

²⁵⁰ Jennings & Kemp-Welch, *Intellectuals in Politics*, p.5.

²⁵¹ Jennings & Kemp-Welch, *Intellectuals in Politics*, p.5.

Johnson tells us we shouldn't allow intellectuals 'to move out of his or her own subject and into the realm of public affairs', for this would release the 'tyranny of ideas' into the public domain.²⁵² This is clearly an over-simplistic view of how intellectual role operates. Johnson, predictably enough, does not consider how his own intellectual role (and conservatives like him) might contribute in subtle ways to a problematic legitimation of the dominant social order.

Carey's book, as Jennings & Kemp-Welch describe, is a 'full-blooded assault upon the prejudices, pretensions and elitism of the British intelligentsia in the period after 1880 when, it is argued, intellectuals first became troubled by the accession of the masses to complete social power.'²⁵³ Carey cites plenty of examples - including the Bloomsbury set - as being snobbish and culturally elitist. He then concludes that this ingrained intellectual culture created a European 'orthodoxy' which, in turn, created the possibility for works such as *Mein Kampf*. And, as Jennings & Kemp-Welch write, 'the conclusion is simple: it is the intellectuals who are ultimately responsible for the Holocaust'.²⁵⁴ Clearly, authors such as Carey and Johnson are harnessing the term intellectual for very specific political ends, and the constant danger when discussing such broad categories as 'the intellectual' is that scholarly interpretation becomes a mask for politicised opinion on unrelated issues.

Indeed, whilst Jennings & Kemp-Welch's efforts are praiseworthy (they are writing with such vigour against anti-intellectualism because of the widespread murder of contemporary Algerian intellectuals, and with fears about the wider implications of anti-intellectualism in Britain),

²⁵² Jennings & Kemp-Welch, *Intellectuals in Politics*, p.5.

²⁵³ Jennings & Kemp-Welch, *Intellectuals in Politics*, p.5.

²⁵⁴ Jennings & Kemp-Welch, *Intellectuals in Politics*, p.6.

they are perhaps a little too quick to assume 'the intellectual', as s/he is popularly understood needs revitalising in the British context. Stefan Collini writes about the dangers of 'self-aggrandisement':

'take the recent dictum...that 'the intellectual is someone who should live in truth' One might as well say that the intellectual should live in Basingstoke: intellectuals have no monopoly of truth, nor are all other roles in society functionally committed to error and deceit.'²⁵⁵

In the British context, it seems the 'true intellectual' often takes the form of some 'Other'; a figure that 'should really be found in other societies or other ages, never here and now.'²⁵⁶ A general attitude in Britain seems to be to one which habitually contrasts the British intellectual negatively with, say, the French intellectual. When removing ideological or philosophical concerns, it seems we are dealing with a 'denial in a psychological as well as sociological sense' about the existence of the British intellectual.²⁵⁷ Part of this may stem from what Collini terms as 'Dreyfus-envy'; that a

'long standing national self-definition' has formed, which secretly craves an alternative history, one more exotic, with a tradition comprised of intelligentsia-led social change. Those proponents of the 'absence thesis' are left with the fact that in Britain the aristocracy was too adaptable, or the church was too tolerant, or the military was too apolitical, or the bourgeoisie was too reformist, to produce the need for a properly 'oppositional' intelligentsia.'²⁵⁸

Small argues that an alternative to this would be an atavistic belief in the superior pedigree of thinkers within the European tradition:

'Ignatieff's 1997 lament for an older, better, public life of the mind can stand as representative of one familiar strain of response. For Ignatieff, the prestige of an earlier

²⁵⁵ Stefan Collini, "Every Fruit-juice Drinker, Nudist, Sandal-wearer....": Intellectuals as Other People', in Helen Small (ed.), *The Public Intellectual* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), p.212.

²⁵⁶ Collini, 'Every Fruit-juice Drinker, Nudist, Sandal-wearer', p.214.

²⁵⁷ Collini, 'Every Fruit-juice Drinker, Nudist, Sandal-wearer', p.215.

²⁵⁸ Collini, 'Every Fruit-juice Drinker, Nudist, Sandal-wearer', p.216.

generation of writers (he instances Sartre, Beauvoir, Camus, and, in the British context, Priestly, Berlin, Ayer, Gombrich) depends on habits of deference which have rightly had their day....But however deferential it might have been, it was a *public* culture.' What we have lost is not merely intelligence disinterestedly and visibly at work within public life (and therefore a good in itself), but a more active custodianship of our cultural values.'²⁵⁹

This type of belief suggests that, presumably within a generation, culture has changed so markedly as to warrant renewed attention to the role of the intellectual. It is clear that no matter which analytical angle is taken,

'the narrative tends to run along uncannily similar lines: intellectual life has become increasingly specialised and academised since the post-war expansion of higher education, and individual intellectuals now derive what compromised authority remains to them from the deployment of a specific or merely technical expertise in place of any general moral authority to speak on matters of cultural and social moment.'²⁶⁰

Collini quotes a Belgian study which is one of the few attempts to sum up the relationship between intellectuals and British culture:

'In a country where, very significantly, the usage of the noun 'intellectual' is far from being current....intellectuals display very little sense of group identity....and evince a long-standing disposition to remain outside political debate.....except when acting in the role of experts....The prestige attached to ideas and the taste for abstraction found in France is largely absent...and political life is characterised above all by its pragmatism...As a result, there is very little historiography on the role of intellectuals'.²⁶¹

But, as Collini points out intellectuals per se are "ordinary" in the sense that they are indeed part of the cultural landscape of all complex societies...[they are] important, yes, but not exceptionally important. So, perhaps it's time to stop thinking of intellectuals as Other People....Some

²⁵⁹ Helen Small 'Introduction' in Helen Small (ed.), *The Public Intellectual*; Michael Ignatieff, 'The Decline and Fall of the Public Intellectual', *Queen's Quarterly* 104, 3 (1997), pp.395-403.

²⁶⁰ Small, 'Introduction', p.4.

²⁶¹ Philippe Bradfer, 'Quelques remarques sur les intellectuels en Belgique', in Granjon (ed.), *Histoire comparee des intellectuels* (Paris: IHTP, 1997) quoted in Collini, 'Every Fruit-juice Drinker, Nudist, Sandal-wearer', p.218.

intellectuals are PLUs (People Like Us), some aren't'.²⁶² This refreshing approach illustrates the extent that considerations of hierarchy had evolved in the twentieth century. Once revered, an accepted moral authority, and confined to an elitist status, the intellectual is in a position where the power structures legitimating this authority are trusted to a lesser extent.

Towards Locating Berlin Specifically

In an attempt to understand exactly how we can conceive various intellectual 'roles', a comparative sociological model has been developed by Lipset & Basu, who have explored the 'variations of behaviour among those involved in high cultural institutions'²⁶³. Firstly Lipset & Basu define 'intellect' and 'intelligence'. Secondly they differentiate between 'innovators' and 'integrators'. These two dichotomies can help demonstrate certain types of political roles, and should be considered 'cross-cutting, though independent. While 'intellect' tends to be 'innovator', and 'intelligence' tends to be 'integrative', the correlation is far from unity'²⁶⁴. They then identify four separate roles: 'gatekeeper', 'moralist', 'preserver', and 'caretaker'. The following table illustrates the approach taken:

²⁶² Collini, 'Every Fruit-juice Drinker, Nudist, Sandal-wearer', p.222

²⁶³ A. Gella (ed.), *The Intelligentsia and the Intellectuals: Theory, Method and Case Study* (New York: SAGE, 1979), p.125.

²⁶⁴ A. Gella (ed.), *The Intelligentsia and the Intellectuals*, p.124.

	Intellect	Intelligence
Innovator	'gatekeeper'	'moralist'
Integrator	'preserver'	'caretaker'

According to Lipset & Basu, this model is not intended as research tool to be transposed onto, and define, any single agent, but it can still be helpful in understanding the *nature* of the role any given agent may have: 'the examples point up the complex interrelated aspects of the different roles, and the difficulties involved in any effort to unravel their overlapping interconnections in the 'real world'.²⁶⁵ If this model is taken as convincing, Berlin could be viewed as a 'preserver'. As

Lipset & Basu write,

'it is important to point up [sic] the need to pay attention to the larger structural context in which intellectual activity takes place...commentators on the comparative role of intellectuals have suggested that British Intellectuals, though given little formal role recognition, the very word is regarded as un-English, have long been accepted as part of the Establishment, of that group of high level 'cousins', who attend the same schools, belong to the same clubs, and listen to each other, regardless of differences in opinion or roles. One who already belongs cannot 'sell out'. In France, on the other hand, those intellectuals not directly involved in government, have extremely high public status, are fawned on by the press, but have almost no direct contact with the governing elites...In the United States, on the whole, intellectuals have perceived themselves as doubly 'outsiders', unloved by the governing elites and 'public opinion'. Conversely, America has provided more comfortable incomes and more provision for employment in universities and other institutions. As a society without the kind of social establishment derivative from

²⁶⁵ A. Gella (ed.), *The Intelligentsia and the Intellectuals*, p.124-5.

aristocratic norms, it has not given diffuse elite status to intellectuals (or anybody else) and has sharply differentiated between experts and intellectuals. British intellectuals, handled more 'sensibly' than their compeers elsewhere, are better able to play the 'preserver' role, to explicate the national tradition in a positive fashion.²⁶⁶

It seems that within the notion of the 'British preserver', in comparison to other national cultures, lies an implicit *passivity* of intellectual role. The preserver inhabits an unquestioned and unquestioning world, living in an atmosphere which discourages anything beyond happy radicalism - a radicalism which by its nature must, at root, originate from acceptably liberal foundations. These 'foundations', although evidently psychological assumptions, can be explained partly by viewing the prominent intellectual as a product of a standardised milieu:

'English intellectuals, whether they teach at Oxbridge or write for the BBC, whether they work for magazines or publishing houses or are unattached, have frequent occasion to meet one another. And such frequent interchange encourages the development of certain common assumptions and shared views that transcend institutional affiliations.'²⁶⁷

Limited and enclosed by this liberal intellectual arena, the national tradition is reinforced and supposedly illuminated by these 'preservers', who underpin political culture, and mirror the increasingly moderate body politic. Unfortunately, this intellectual inertia can mean political culture becomes very unresponsive to social antagonism - rather than reflecting society, political culture reflects itself. This, interestingly, may also imply a diminished moral role, or pressure, on the British intellectual, who merely reasserts commonly held beliefs.

This also links to the earlier point on the term 'intellectual' being an 'un-English' word.

Said, discussing the proposed themes of his 1993 Reith Lecture series 'Representations of the

²⁶⁶ A. Gella (ed.), *The Intelligentsia and the Intellectuals*, p.139-40.

²⁶⁷ Lewis Alfred Coser, *Men of Ideas* (New York: Free Press, 1965), p.352.

Intellectual' with a 'sympathetic journalist' was told 'associated with the word 'intellectual' was 'ivory tower' and 'a sneer'.²⁶⁸ As Collini writes, the word 'intellectual', in Britain, 'triggers some very deep cultural reflexes. At its appearance, people immediately sense pretentiousness, arrogance: on most of its outings, 'so-called' travels with it like a bodyguard.'²⁶⁹ It is in this sense that the intellectual figure in Britain is implicitly invited to be unassuming and modest, and to operate as consensual agent, not as a negatively conceived combative intellectual. Here is a quote reflecting on the ingrained and clichéd nature of conceptions of 'the intellectual' in Britain, and the relative 'tranquility' of British intellectual 'Imports' such as Isaiah Berlin:

[the] integration of British intellectuals into the ruling elite has been well chronicled...their natural habitat could not have been further removed from the Parisian café of their French counterpart, being rather the Senior Common Room of the Oxbridge college and the gentleman's club in London...Political integration, it is argued, was also matched by ties of family kinship. Noel (later Lord) Annan not only gave this trend personal embodiment but also coined the phrase 'intellectual aristocracy' to characterise the remarkable proportion of the nation's academic elite that was drawn from a relatively small number of interconnected families. To this picture of untroubled tranquility was added the fortunate occurrence that Britain, to the dismay of the Marxist New Left, received the wrong sort of intellectual immigrant: it was settled by 'a 'White', counter-revolutionary emigration' from Central and Eastern Europe. Rather than receiving such revolutionary firebrands as Herbert Marcuse, Britain had welcomed the likes of Isaiah Berlin, for whom it epitomised 'tradition, continuity and orderly empire'.²⁷⁰

Berlin's liberal conception of the individual marks him out from an existential figure such as Sartre in that Berlin's emphasis on individual responsibility is more markedly defined by the state. For Berlin, a certain set of rules over the 'proper' role of the state led to an implicit moral code emerging in his work. Alternatively, Sartre wished to move away from a general, all-encompassing

²⁶⁸ Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, p.x.

²⁶⁹ Collini, 'Every Fruit-juice Drinker, Nudist, Sandal-Wearer', p.208.

²⁷⁰ Jeremy Jennings 'Deaths of the Intellectuals', in Helen Small (ed.), *The Public Intellectual*, p.119-20.

moral instruction stating 'no rule of general morality can show you what you ought to do: no signs are vouchsafed in this world'.²⁷¹ This type of statement highlights the distance between Berlin and existential intellectuals like Sartre, and also illustrates the distance of the French intellectual community from the centre of government power. In the post-1945 period, French intellectual culture became extremely divided. There were many sections of French intellectuals who contributed to the theoretical controversy; a controversy which centred around Marxism, and its accommodation. Raymond Aron can be seen as representing the 'liberal' quarter, there was the continuous input of the 'Marxist but non-communist' sector, the Catholic left, and Paul Nizan, who died during the Second World War. A contemporary of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty at the *Ecole Normale Supérieure*, Nizan became for Sartre the 'incarnation of a revolutionary force and moral inflexibility lost forever in the compromises of the post-war period'²⁷². As Merleau-Ponty wrote, 'Nizan already knew what Sartre said much later....we do not keep the world, or situation, or others at the length of our gaze like a spectacle; we are intermingled with them, drinking them in through all our pores. We are what is lacking in everything else.'²⁷³ These years saw friendships broken over ideological disputes. Camus and Sartre, once close friends, barely spoke after heated exchanges over Sartre's extreme Marxist beliefs intensified.

Sartre would eventually break with the French Communist Party, despairing at Stalin's economic dogmatism. Tony Judt contends that similar conflicts would become all-consuming moral dilemmas to a generation of French men and women, arguing that their responses were

²⁷¹ Jean Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*, (London: Eyre Methuen, 1980) quoted in A. Arblaster, *The Rise and Decline of Western Liberalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), p.19-20.

²⁷² Pietro Chiodi, *Sartre and Marxism* [trans. Kate Soper] (Brighton: Harvester, 1976), p.105.

²⁷³ Jean Paul Sartre, *Signs*, quoted Pietro Chiodi, *Sartre and Marxism*, p.106.

conditioned by war and occupation, and that post-war political choices have come to sit uneasily on the conscience of later generations of French intellectuals.²⁷⁴ The moral weight in post-war France informed the French intellectual climate severely, with pangs of 'collaboration guilt' heavily influencing an intellectual generation. The dynamism and social conscience often thought to characterise the French intellectual may have something to do with their 'frustrated structural position'.²⁷⁵

This position of unease or frustration still however implies intellectual *activity* of a type, and a more strenuous desire to change, influence, or explain. The French intellectual role can be viewed as one that, distanced from the governmental elite in comparison to the British intellectual community, had the opportunity to characterise itself. This helps explain the preponderance of radical thought amongst French intellectuals in comparison to British intellectuals such as Isaiah Berlin. The French intellectual tradition, however, is derided by some contemporary Anglo-American intellectuals, viewing French theoretical radicalism as a serious affront to an idea of knowledge based on empiricist ideals. Camille Paglia has talked of the 'Parisian paper matchbox', with Lacan, Derrida and Foucault cast as 'the perfect prophets for the weak, anxious academic personality, trapped in verbal formulas and perennially defeated by circumstance.'²⁷⁶ Elsewhere Paglia is equally damning, when she demands: 'study the massive primary evidence of western history and forge your own frameworks'²⁷⁷ rather than follow the French intellectual 'demi-Gods'.

²⁷⁴ Tony Judt, *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals 1944-1956* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

²⁷⁵ Gella (ed.), *The Intelligentsia and the Intellectuals*, p.140.

²⁷⁶ Camille Paglia, *Sex, Art and American Culture* (NY: Vintage, 1992) quoted in J. Jennings & A. Kemp-Welch, *Intellectuals in Politics*, p.66.

²⁷⁷ Camille Paglia, 'Forget Foucault; Remember the Facts', *Salon*, 4 November 1998, p.12.

However, sober and balanced opinions give the modern French intellectuals a little more credit.

Writing in *Console and Classify*, a (firmly empirical) book on French psychiatry, Jan Goldstein writes,

'Foucault uses historical material to great advantage, and his historical sense was extraordinarily acute. The brilliant global conceptualisation in *Discipline and Punish* of 'disciplines' such as psychiatry, clinical medicine, pedagogy, and penology and their role in sustaining the nineteenth century liberal state is not merely suggestive; it is frequently borne out by detailed research.'²⁷⁸

The French intellectual tradition has conceived of some of the most convincing abstract thought which, used alongside empirical groundwork, can serve as invaluable frameworks to understanding. The hostility directed towards radical thought of a French origin seems in Paglia's case to be directed against the imposition of theoretical frameworks, and feeds in to the Anglo-American distrust of intellectuals espousing all-encompassing theory. Along with Paglia, Judt also expresses frustration with the character of French intellectual culture, writing, 'the French intellectual is alive and well everywhere....except in Paris....the prospect of Jacques Derrida selling his wares on the sun-dappled streets of California is not quite right'.²⁷⁹ As Jennings writes: 'Why this should be so is not exactly clear. Would the sight of the British liberal Sir Isaiah Berlin doing the same thing be thought to be equally incongruous?'²⁸⁰

At the foundation of Judt's thesis is the belief that the post-war French intellectual community, openly hostile to liberalism, refused to acknowledge the 'true' nature of Stalinist

²⁷⁸ Jan Goldstein, *Console and Classify* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2001), p.3. Also see her article 'Foucault Among the Sociologists', *History and Theory* 23, (1984), pp.170-92.

²⁷⁹ Quoted in J. Jennings & A. Kemp-Welch, *Intellectuals in Politics*, p.66.

²⁸⁰ J. Jennings & A. Kemp-Welch, *Intellectuals in Politics*, p.66.

totalitarianism. This idea can, perhaps, tell us rather a lot about the nature writing on the intellectual has taken. Judt's thesis relies upon the fact that the French intellectuals *should have* – because of their 'responsibility' – acquiesced to liberal ideals and, presumably, fulfilled the ideals that the 'universal' intellectual will always believe in – those of 'humanity and freedom'. But this is far too simplistic. Sartre, and many of his contemporaries, were fiercely opposed to American involvement in Korea, and Camus was intimately involved in the Algerian crisis. These intellectuals were involved in causes they believed too important to ignore. The language they used also encompassed universal ideals but, and here is the difference, these ideals do not have to be solely 'liberal' in the Anglo-American sense. Sartre wrote, 'the true intellectual [could be] neither a moralist nor an idealist [and that all conflicts] be they class, national, or racial [were struggles between groups] for the statute of universality'. The intellectual *had* to take sides, 'to commit himself in every one of the conflicts of our time.'²⁸¹

For Judt, and other academics like him, to claim for themselves the moral right to judge what an intellectual's responsibility should have been, is to place a peculiarly political lens over historical interpretation. This lens amplifies the aspects of political allegiance one disagrees with, rather than attempting to understand their deeper roots, and more subtle ramifications. Judt writes of French intellectuals (existentialists at least) opposing the post-war status-quo, and liberal political culture. For

'the act of opposing would not only release the intellectual from the discomforts of a contingent existence but would in itself change the rules of the intellectual game.....in the

²⁸¹ J. Jennings & A. Kemp-Welch, *Intellectuals In Politics*, p.66.

political configuration of postwar France, this pointed inevitably in the direction of Marxism.²⁸²

This paragraph shows the flaw in Judt's thesis. If intellectuals were pointed 'inevitably' towards Marxism, how can Judt then claim the intellectuals 'should have' accepted the responsibility of denouncing Marxism? Even if he is claiming that only the *initial* postwar configuration of France pointed towards Marxism, and the French intellectuals should quickly have seen the discrepancies within the Soviet system, Judt - all of a sudden - allows the French intellectuals a huge amount of moral agency, when before (in the post-war period) he gave them none. It is clear that Judt's study of intellectuals tells us more about the nature of writing on intellectuals than anything else. It is also worth bearing in mind that the refusal of many prominent French intellectuals to be a part of the CCF may have played a large part in the feeling of distance between Anglo-American and French intellectuals in the cold war period. Sartre *et al* were absent from the ranks of those intellectuals with, in Shil's words, a 'common outlook joined together in a common task'. Indeed, American intellectuals can be viewed as offering the most stringent attacks on communism. The 'New York intellectuals'²⁸³,

'were largely responsible for teaching American liberals how to think about Communism. Not only did they legitimize anticommunism in the eyes of the educated elites, but the formulations that they crafted helped to structure the way in which the anticommunist political repression of the McCarthy years functioned'²⁸⁴.

²⁸² Judt, *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals 1944-1956*, p.83.

²⁸³ See Hugh Wilford, *The New York Intellectuals: From Vanguard to Institution* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1995); Nathan Abrams, "'A Profoundly Hegemonic Moment": De-Mythologizing the Cold War New York Jewish Intellectuals', *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*, 21, 3 (2003), pp.64-89; Joseph Dorman, *Arguing The World: the New York intellectuals in their own words* (Chicago: CUP, 2001); Schrecker, *Many Are The Crimes*, pp.79-81.

²⁸⁴ Schrecker, *Many Are The Crimes*, p.79.

The New York intellectuals - Irving Howe, Daniel Bell, Irving Kristol and Nathan Glazer - are portrayed in a documentary by Joseph Dorman, in which it is extremely clear that American intellectuals were afforded a prominent role in the post-war world.²⁸⁵ The American intellectual experience of the 1940s also comprised of disenchantment with leftist ideology, yet anticommunist sentiment flourished amongst intellectuals with vigour that surpassed the British intellectuals. The New York intellectuals would gradually shift to the 'right' in the 1960s, intellectually clashing with students in the 1960s, indeed Irving Kristol should be considered a prominent figure in the creation of the ideology of neo-conservatism. These intellectuals, seen in relation to intellectual figures such as Niebuhr, Crossman, Rostow, and McCarthy formed a strong anticommunist clique that would *visibly* influence political culture to an extent that cannot be equaled by Berlin's more passive role.

To return to a focus on the specifically British context, Hayck claims that British intellectuals are 'integrated' with the 'British ruling elite'. The 'intellectual type' became silently integrated within the traditional 'ruling elite' and, especially in comparison to France, the existence of 'an intellectual class' is historically less noticeable. As Hayck succinctly states, 'intellectuals wore the same old-school ties as the members of the ruling elite.'²⁸⁶ Noel Annan is cited as providing work which indicates the existence of an 'intellectual aristocracy' in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, comprising of prominent upper middle-class families. Building on this, Annan detects

²⁸⁵ See also Joseph Dorman, *Arguing The World*.

²⁸⁶ Hayck, 'Myths and Meanings', p.202.

patterns connecting these families to the ruling elite - through kinship as well as influence.²⁸⁷

These patterns indicate a high proportion of British intellectuals emerged from a small number of privileged families.

As Hayck goes on to detail, Victorian 'men of letters' could be 'confident that their ideas reached practically every member of the political and economic decision-making circles of society' due to the interconnected nature of middle-class interests and, presumably, the limited nature of discourse. As Hayck's article seems to demonstrate, even when sociological aspects of British culture altered, when 'professions and professional people assumed the role of the 'new gentry,' the highly stratified British educational system ensured that many intellectuals, political leaders, and civil servants all came from the same upper- and middle-class ranks.²⁸⁸ In the complicated study of culture, the simple explanation seems to be that individuals privileged enough to emerge from the stratified British education system originated from a narrow kinship strata. This strata, in turn, would eventually fulfill roles, intellectual or otherwise, within the ruling elite. To sustain this stream of privileged individuals, the term 'intellectual' (which itself was an ambiguous, shifting term) was denied legitimacy. As Hayck also details, the idea that Britons were 'innately practical and antitheoretical...was useful for nationalist purposes.'²⁸⁹ This idea was also useful for discrediting 'Leftist' intellectuals. The effect is that certain 'intellectuals' like Berlin, undoubtedly intellectually influential, now have the illusion of invisibility, or impotence. It is through

²⁸⁷ See Noel Annan 'The Intellectual Aristocracy,' in *Studies in Social History*, ed. J. H. Plumb (London, 1955), pp. 243-87.

²⁸⁸ Hayck, 'Myths and Meanings', p.202. Also see Harold Perkin, *The Professionalisation of Society: England Since 1880* (London, 1989); Correlli Bennett, *The Collapse of British Power* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1972).

²⁸⁹ Hayck, 'Myths and Meanings', p.216.

the deconstruction of their contribution within British discourse that we can understand their visibility, their relationship to certain institutions, and their role within the relations of power. We can then see how these 'passive-preservers' are, in fact, active, 'unpassive'.

Conclusion

So far I have traced the rough edges of a broad anti-intellectual trend in Britain and attempted to illustrate the unique perceptions of intellectual role in Britain. To make sense of Berlin's intellectual role is to take into account his position within a rigidly defined hierarchy, revolving around institutional values that dovetail with the complex elucidation of cold war values undertaken in the previous chapter. Defined as the embodiment of cold war values, and an archetypal 'passive' British intellectual, Berlin appears closely identified with the centre of governmental power. However, as I will elucidate in the next chapter, Berlin's intellectual role is further complicated by his active, or 'visible', involvement in Zionist politics. Nevertheless, I now wish to cement the idea that Berlin's role can be perceived as 'passive', yet discursively powerful, in relation to dominant Anglo-American ideas on freedom, and in relation to those more visibly active intellectuals in the post-1945 period.

More research effort has been directed, perhaps understandably, towards visibly 'active' intellectuals, intellectuals who 'made a difference', or radical intellectuals operating in post-colonial environments, representing and elucidating forgotten voices, normally controversial in their opinions. These dissident voices, unlike the post-1945 anticommunists, in Said's opinion, serve to question governmental authority:

'the intellectual in my sense of the word, is neither a pacifier nor a consensus builder, but someone whose whole being is staked on a critical sense, a sense of being unwilling to accept easy formulas, or ready-made clichés, or the smooth, ever-so-accommodating confirmations of what the powerful or conventional have to say, and what they do. Not just passively unwilling, but actively willing to say so in public.'²⁹⁰

However, perhaps we return to the problem of the intellectual as a 'man apart', an individual who must 'understand' his responsibility. All discussion of intellectual responsibility seems to revolve around authorial concerns rooted in contemporary political anxieties. It is in this sense that much of the literature on the 'intellectual' is calling for a similar role for the intellectual, but conceptions of 'responsibility' or 'truth' have very differing foundations. Said, in his preface to the Reith Lectures, comments,

'the attempt in these lectures is rather to speak about intellectuals whose public performances can neither be predicted nor compelled into some slogan, orthodox party line, or fixed dogma. What I was trying to suggest was that standards of truth about human misery and oppression were to be held to despite the individual intellectual's party affiliation, national background, and primeval loyalties...the attempt to hold to a universal and single standard as a theme plays an important role in my account of the intellectual'²⁹¹.

It could be argued that these thoughts are similar to Berlin's, but with a different emphasis on 'standards of truth'. Berlin also expresses how a 'universal and single standard' set of regulating truths should dictate how intellectuals should act, yet the relation between the intellectual and formal state structures is markedly different. Indeed Said, elsewhere, argues that Berlin's intellectual role, defined by differing standards of truth and freedom, was intimately involved in shaping and legitimising the 'western self-image' in the cold war context:

²⁹⁰ Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, p.17.

²⁹¹ Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, p.xi.

'In his most famous essay 'Two Concepts of Liberty', [Berlin] elaborated a theory of realistic political freedom, negative (the right not to be persecuted) and positive (the right to positive liberties) which became the hallmark of the Western self-image during the Cold War years and the battle against Stalinism and the Soviet bloc. Berlin stood for balance, reasonableness, intellectual freedom, pragmatism, civilised behaviour'²⁹²

This 'shaping and legitimising' process must be linked to my earlier assertions over Berlin's depiction of, and assumption over, intellectual role. This is a way to make sense of the central contradiction when considering Berlin, namely that he undoubtedly wielded power as an intellectual, yet it is persuasive to argue that his role as liberal intellectual was characterised by an illusion of passivity.

Berlin's own thoughts on intellectual role, linked to the moral judgment process he employed when selecting thinkers to write on, means that the philosophers he wrote about are frequently depicted as visionary, life-changing, life-enhancing individuals. Often, these thinkers are presented as moralistic 'special souls' who are in a position to alter political perceptions. Linked to this promotion of an unspoken, commonsensical morality, Collini believes Berlin simultaneously created an exaggerated impression of a strong, uniform liberal tradition in the western world. By acting as a 'historical ventriloquist' he placed 'liberal' words in radical mouths in an attempt to condemn 'monism' in the western tradition. Interestingly, it is often how these intellectuals implement 'intellectual responsibility' that shapes Berlin's interpretation and, as will become clear in my textual analysis of Berlin's work, Berlin's interpretation is fundamentally shaped by normative assumptions on the 'proper' relationship between ideas and governmental power. Therefore, I argue that to understand the impact of Berlin's role, the scholar must return to

²⁹² Edward Said, *The End of the Peace Process: Oslo and After* (New York: Vintage, 2001), p.218.

Berlin's textual output. It is this approach that seeks to understanding Berlin's role as 'unique', yet conceiving 'the unique' in terms of textual impact.

The key idea I want to convey is that whilst anticommunist discourse was anything but passive, the intellectual role of Isaiah Berlin acquired the illusion of passivity, or at least a wide enough separation from contemporary politics to seem irrelevant or impotent. Berlin's image as 'relatively inactive' in the political 'sphere', helps to explain the absence of interest in this context surrounding Berlin. Berlin's role aided discourse to continue, develop and grow in the directions it did. Much has been written on the more active intellectuals who vocally legitimised and bolstered ideology²⁹³, either by their advocacy or opposition to particular ideologies, but the study of the peculiar 'passive' British intellectual who nevertheless plays a forceful discursive role has been neglected. In my textual analysis of Berlin's work, I will consolidate this idea by illustrating the way in which normative language sustains the illusion of 'passivity'.

The case of Isaiah Berlin is particularly striking. If one analyses his perceived 'exotic' personal history and attached persona, his links to prominent institutions, his visibility in the media, the intellectual following he has earned, and the cold war context in which he wrote, it is clear his role and intervention must be properly understood. It is useful to realise that Ignatieff has written that the 'conscious' intellectual motives of Berlin involve the search for a 'personal intellectual morality'.²⁹⁴ This 'morality' would shape the nature of his work, and give his texts the

²⁹³ See Noam Chomsky, *American Power and the New Mandarins* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1969).

²⁹⁴ Ignatieff, *Isaiah Berlin*, p.73-4.

politically charged tinge that reflects the cold war context.

What we are left with is an interesting case study of a neglected area of intellectual history, namely how to conceive the role of an influential intellectual working in Britain. Although Berlin is often presented as a politically disengaged intellectual, we are left in no doubt of his role when he says 'I remain totally loyal to Britain, to Oxford, to Liberalism, to Israel, to a number of other institutions with which I feel identified.'²⁹⁵ Yet, I still argue that much of Berlin's influence and power emanates from the illusion of passivity that surrounds his work. The illusion of passivity proffers detachment, yet implicitly reinforces political interests by representing the normative framework that supports the conservative-liberal order in the cold war. This is what should be understood by the 'western self-image' in the cold war context.

To further problematise Berlin's intellectual role, attention must now turn to Berlin's relationship with Zionism. The picture will then emerge of Berlin's intellectual role as contradictory. I have examined how Berlin's 'passive' role in relation to his liberalism, and his use of normative assumptions. An examination of his Zionism will illustrate that he did directly engage with contemporary political problems. I do not intend to separate these two aspects of his intellectual role, yet a separate examination highlights the contradictions within Berlin's intellectual persona.

²⁹⁵ Jahanbegloo, *Conversations With Isaiah Berlin*, p.87.

3

Berlin's Zionism 1945-1997

Interviewer: 'When you write on general themes, don't you think you write from a Jewish perspective?'

Isaiah Berlin: 'No, I never feel that I write from any particular perspective'.²⁹⁶

Introduction

It is difficult to argue against the fact that Isaiah Berlin was a useful intellectual figure for the Zionist cause, and for the State of Israel. He became embedded within Jewish political culture, and utilised his position of authority in the west. I have already argued that, in the cold war context, the nature of Berlin's role was passive, his politicised expressions were often implicit, yet he was an influential intellectual figure. He was quietly instructive, both morally and politically, defending western values. However, once attention turns to Berlin's Zionism it becomes clear that his role becomes more active.

A central aspect of Berlin's intellectual life yet to be touched upon is the issue of his Jewish identity. He consciously dwelt on this integral part of his life, and his Jewishness remained an intrinsic part of his self-perception. Although Berlin was mindful of the contradictions within Zionism, it was a cause vigorously defended by him, perhaps because Zionism was deeply ingrained as a 'different layer of his soul'. Edward Said considered Berlin an 'organic'²⁹⁷

²⁹⁶ Anon, 'Sir Isaiah Berlin on Israel, Zionism and the Jews', *Jewish Chronicle*, 18 April 1966, p.31.

²⁹⁷ 'Organic' here is understood as defining the general affinity shown by Berlin towards Zionist and Israeli values, and the attendant legitimacy he affords to any social, political or cultural consequences of such values. Berlin serves a purpose for the political elite interested in the manifestation of such values.

intellectual for Israel, and the accent that Berlin's Zionism places on the geopolitical and spatial dimensions of his thought is intriguing.

However, I argue Berlin went further than simply defending Zionism, and exacerbated a language of cultural superiority. The way in which Berlin dealt with the Palestinian people in his writing led to tensions that he did not explicitly engage with; namely the human and geographical realities that stemmed from Palestinian dispossession. The strength of Berlin's convictions were brought into focus when, influenced by the political heat of the mid-1980s, controversy erupted around an article published by Noam Chomsky in *Index on Censorship*. Journalists and academics joined a debate that became deeply politicised. The incident prompted an exchange of letters between Berlin and Chomsky, highlighting the differences between intellectual figures with opposing conceptions of Jewish identity. The chapter analyses these unpublished letters to offer a new interpretation of Berlin's Jewish identity and Zionist politics. More broadly, this chapter adds further complexity to Berlin's intellectual role in the context of the cold war and beyond that serves to highlight contradictions within Berlin's thought that have not been properly emphasised in the literature.

Berlin and Zionism

Only a handful of published works confront the serious contradictions within Berlin's thought on Zionism, and his liberal-pluralist political philosophy. Berlin chose never to deal with the issue of Zionism in a sustained manner, nor to confront the significant issues of dispossession, of belonging or rootlessness in any serious, direct, manner. These concerns were secondary to the

complexities and origins of anti-Semitism, and the Holocaust, yet Berlin also chose never to discuss these issues of contemporary importance in any depth. On a moral level too - a level Berlin was fond of stressing, and apparently personifying - Berlin's position was questionable. The extent that Berlin subsumes the Palestinian people beneath the dominance and legitimacy of Zionist ideology seems clear, and could be viewed as an unforgivable blind-spot in his liberal project.

Berlin never wished to address the problems of Zionist historiography. For instance, there exists extremely critical Jewish interpretation of pre-war Zionism, with Lenni Brenner accusing the Zionists of 'accommodating the anti-Semites'²⁹⁸; Ben Hecht, in 1961, accused Ben Gurion - as well as most of the Zionist leaders in the U.S. - of doing almost nothing to save the Jews of Europe in 1933-45, even hindering efforts of rescue.²⁹⁹ Instead, Berlin neatly side-stepped these scholarly issues of presumably significant concern for him, and concentrated on cementing firm allegiances with prominent Zionists. As I will examine, he is even alleged to have attempted to block an article written by a non-Zionist Jew, Noam Chomsky. In this case, as with others, it is clear that Berlin was thinking not only in Zionist terms, but in the wider cold war political context. As Richard Wollheim writes, 'people may be divided into those who like communities, those who like institutions...Berlin, as I thought of him, like institutions, not communities. In this regard, he made really something of an exception in favour of Zionism.'³⁰⁰ Indeed, one immediate way to link Berlin's Zionism to broader themes within his writings is to re-think his belief that conflict will be averted by the rise of

²⁹⁸ Lenni Brenner, *Zionism in the Age of the Dictators* (London: Croom Helm, 1983).

²⁹⁹ See Ben Hecht, *Perfidy* (New York: Messner, 1961).

³⁰⁰ M. Lilla, R. Dworkin & Robert B. Silvers (eds.) *The Legacy of Isaiah Berlin* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2001), p.168.

a gentler, benign nationalism. His analyses of Herder discuss the hope that violent nationalism will become an outdated mode of political mentality.³⁰¹ In Millar Jones's words Berlin is 'wistfully optimistic that diversity will not lead to conflict'. It is hoped that 'toleration and understanding will somehow prevail'.³⁰² Read in a certain light, this is itself a form of utopianism. In the harsh glare of the Israeli-Palestinian question, for instance, this seems an abstract and detached. An acceptable form of benign nationalism, in Berlin's eyes, was Zionism.

It is clear then, that Berlin's Zionism should be seen as an important motivating passion, part of the foundation of his philosophical outlook. Berlin had commented that Jewishness was an identity never to be discarded.³⁰³ In many ways, Berlin dealt with Zionism in a strange manner, in a way that clashed with principles he held on a variety of issues. His close relationship with Zionists was also unique, in that it was a rare moment when Berlin chose to be visibly politicised. As Margalit writes, 'Berlin was wary of expressive politics'³⁰⁴, but in the political movement of Zionism, Berlin found a form of nationalism he found - in its mild form - acceptable, and evidently felt comfortable supporting. For much of his life he sustained Zionist loyalties which, in the public domain at least, can be observed in his numerous publications on the subject, as well as his intimate acquaintance, and respect, for figures such as Chaim Weizmann and L. B. Namier. His sympathies with the Zionist cause have deep roots and are, to some degree, a manifestation of his own unsettled formative years. He was an émigré Jew, and all his life he tussled with the

³⁰¹ John Millar Jones, *Assembling (Post)modernism: The Utopian Thought of Ernst Bloch* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), p.4 See Berlin, *Three Critics of The Enlightenment*.

³⁰² Millar Jones, *Assembling (Post)modernism*, p.173.

³⁰³ Ignatieff, *Isaiah Berlin*, p.88.

³⁰⁴ Lilla, Dworkin & Silvers (eds.) *The Legacy of Isaiah Berlin*, p.158.

problem of identity - both in the abstract and personal senses - because he understood (although not uniquely) the problems of rootlessness. His belief in the Israeli state was based on the firm conviction that Jews must be allowed to act freely, and this freedom of action could flourish only if the Jews had a geographic place called home.

'The creation of the State of Israel [sic] has rendered the greatest service that any human institution can perform for individuals - has restored to Jews not merely their personal dignity and status as human beings, but what is vastly more important, their right to choose as individuals how they shall live'³⁰⁵.

For some critics, Berlin's involvement with Zionism is a blot on his otherwise flawless intellectual reputation,

'The one discordant note for me about Berlin was that in public he was a fervent, unquestioning, and unskeptical Zionist, a true believer, whose close involvement with Israel as a country and a cause contributed in a major way to the positive image and structure of feelings created in the West about the Jewish state.'³⁰⁶

Berlin's thought on this subject is ambivalent, even confused, and is occasionally at odds with the liberal theory he has conventionally been interpreted as championing. As Margalit highlights, the problem of 'how to reconcile Berlin's objection to *a priori* blueprints with Zionism given that Zionism was a blueprint ideology' is a genuine tension³⁰⁷. Berlin's views clearly change over time, with the rose tinted views of Zionism altering to a pessimism detectable through his writing, in which one can sense Berlin's knowledge of the growth of the messy and violent politics of the region. He was also acutely aware of the emergence of politically intransigent individuals. These individuals, some of which came to represent extreme and unshifting axioms did not represent the

³⁰⁵ Isaiah Berlin, 'Jewish Slavery and Emancipation' [1951] in *The Power of Ideas*, p.182.

³⁰⁶ Said, *The End of the Peace Process*, p.219.

³⁰⁷ Lilla, Dworkin & Silvers (eds.) *The Legacy of Isaiah Berlin*, p.156.

strand of Zionism in which Berlin believed.³⁰⁸ As Wollheim writes,

'Zionism is a discrete nationalism, and one which Berlin supported, despite his hostility to the Jewish religion. Or perhaps I should say despite his hostility towards religion, from which hostility towards the Jewish religion might be inferred. Berlin further supported the state of Israel, though he strongly disapproved of some of the means by which it came about, and a number of the means by which it sought to preserve itself'³⁰⁹.

Discrete Nationalism: Berlin's Zionism

As I mentioned earlier, Berlin was very much involved in post-1945 Jewish political culture; for instance Weizmann turned to Berlin for help with speech-writing.³¹⁰ Ignatieff considers the fact that Berlin quickly became intensely aware of 'new pressures forcing him to choose between his Jewish and British identities'³¹¹ as the most important force working on Berlin's conscience. Berlin already felt a unbridgeable distance between himself and the emerging Israeli citizens, but many senior Israeli politicians continued to attempt to persuade Berlin to live in Israel.³¹² However, from Oxford he used his influence and attempted to put pressure on the government, through Leo Amery, 'to see whether pressure could be put on the Arab governments to relax their grip on the city.'³¹³ The picture begins to build of an intellectual who had aligned himself closely to Zionist interests, finding few moral qualms about using his position of authority in Britain.

Berlin rejected Koestler's unrealistic proposition that Jews should either assimilate fully with their foster nation, and jettison their Jewishness, or emigrate to Israel. Berlin realised that such brash modes of argument would not help the Zionist cause, but create an atmosphere

³⁰⁸ See Ignatieff, *Isaiah Berlin*, p.80.

³⁰⁹ Lilla, Dworkin & Silvers (eds.) *The Legacy of Isaiah Berlin*, p.162.

³¹⁰ Ignatieff, *Isaiah Berlin*, p.77.

³¹¹ Ignatieff, *Isaiah Berlin*, p.76.

³¹² Ignatieff, *Isaiah Berlin*, p.181.

³¹³ Ignatieff, *Isaiah Berlin*, p.181.

suitable for the gestation of extreme political or intellectual positions. Furthermore, 'westernised' Jewish intellectuals, as Berlin well understood, could help the 'Israeli cause' through a steady stream of writing and avowed affiliation. It is in this sense that Berlin was one of the Jews who,

'stood at the very authoritative centre of Western society, where their prestige as intellectuals, scientists....gave weight and credibility to their support for the Zionist project. No comparable body of opinion or opinion-makers existed on the Arab side, with the result that for years the Palestinians were both invisible and silent insofar as their 'desires and prejudices' (to use Balfour's disparaging phrase) were represented in the West.'³¹⁴

Berlin was an integral part of this imbalance; an imbalance that could be considered intellectual, cultural, sociological but at root, surely, political. Having in mind Said's general 'orientalist' theory, we can see that the 'solid' political realities that created the state of Israel are hidden behind systems of (western) representation which, in turn, contain the relations of 'power'. He was not an uncritical, passive observer of 'Zionism', but an impassioned voice, a western intellectual representative for the moderate-Zionist cause, at the level of abstract speculation, and material concerns. At the practical-political level Berlin was occasionally active but, on the whole, his ostensibly apolitical approach would characterise his writing. Exceptions to the apolitical appearance of Berlin came in a number of forms, including speech writing, nomination to the Council of the Anglo-Jewish Association³¹⁵, the acceptance of a request from the Prime Minister of Israel Ben Gurion in 1959 to define Jewish identity.³¹⁶ These instances mean that Berlin became, whether he meant to or not, a prominent British intellectual who consciously engaged with Zionist

³¹⁴ Said, *The End of the Peace Process*, p.217.

³¹⁵ See unpublished letter February 16, 1948. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Berlin 382.

³¹⁶ See unpublished letter to PM of Israel, 1959. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Berlin 385.

politics, and whose status as an organic intellectual was at such a high point in 1959 that Ben Gurion sought his views as an 'expert' on Jewish identity.

Although unpublished letters suggest Berlin's reluctance to engage frequently with organisations such as the Anglo-Jewish Association,³¹⁷ it does not seem to reflect his own sense of Jewish identity. Victor Cucar, then president of the Anglo-Jewish Association, wrote a letter to Berlin in 1974 congratulating Berlin on his acceptance of the Presidency of the British Academy, where he wrote 'This achievement is not only a high distinction for yourself, but as the first Jew to hold this office in the three quarters of a century of the Academy's existence is an honour for the Anglo-Jewish community as a whole.'³¹⁸ In response, Berlin wrote 'I must admit that one of my reasons for accepting this by no means easy job is contained in your second paragraph [text above].'³¹⁹

So, whilst the extent of Berlin's involvement in Anglo-Jewish and Zionist affairs can be debated, it is undoubtedly an involvement that must be explored in relation to his liberalism, and the wider cold war context. Berlin's broader theological beliefs impacted on his philosophy and contributed to his broader geopolitical preoccupations. Berlin defended Zionism using language mindful of wider international perspectives. In an address entitled 'The Achievement of Zionism' given at an academic symposium of the Institute of Jewish Affairs on June 1 1975, Berlin said, 'Zionism is now being described as imperialism, colonialism, radicalism, and so on, All these

³¹⁷ Unpublished letter 13 June from Teulon. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Berlin 382.

³¹⁸ Unpublished letter 15 July 1974, Cucar to Berlin. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Berlin 382.

³¹⁹ Unpublished letter 16 July 1974, Berlin to Cucar. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Berlin 382.

charges appear to me baseless.³²⁰ Berlin, in the same speech says of the Balfour Declaration 'perhaps not enough thought' was given to 'accommodation with the Arabs'. Again, in the 1975 speech, his notes read,

[the Zionist leaders] said to themselves: here is our land, it is capable of supporting a population of, say, three million (they said it even then); there are now 400,000 Arabs there, so there is room for everybody. Why should this constitute a problem? In Herzl's Alt-Neuland, for example, Arabs do not figure much. There is a friendly Effendi, a sort of dignified amiable figure who obviously represents a minute minority. But there was little notion of natives, of resistance, of fighting opposition³²¹

Berlin does seem mindful of the contradictions of the creation of the Israeli state, and offers the sense that he understands the problems inherent in the early Zionist caricature of the Arab. Yet, Berlin makes no attempt to displace this complex colonial imagery, but offers conciliatory language loaded with a similar set of assumptions,

'We ourselves are the cause, although not the motive, for the creation of an Arab movement very similar to our own....We reply to the Palestinians: 'We tried to talk to you but you don't want to talk to us. You have been used by other Arab countries for political motives. You are refugees. You wish to exterminate us. You wish to destroy us, but we don't wish to destroy you.'³²²

It is clear that Berlin is willing to act as an organic intellectual for Israel, and understands acutely the ways in which influence and persuasion operate. For instance, a memorandum entitled 'Memorandum on the establishment of a P.L.O. Office in London' exists in the Berlin papers and details fears of P.L.O. encroachment into Britain. Berlin deals with the problem by suggesting

³²⁰ Unpublished address, 'The Achievement of Zionism', June 1, 1975, p.347. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Berlin 591.

³²¹ Unpublished address, 'The Achievement of Zionism', June 1, 1975, p.348. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Berlin 591.

³²² Unpublished address 'The Achievement of Zionism', June 1, 1975, p.361. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Berlin 591.

sending 'private letters' to twelve different newspapers and periodicals. Whether just or unjust, Berlin's involvement in such activity at least illustrates his political mobilisation towards Zionist interests. Berlin was defended by Noel Annan in *The Times* in 1989 from charges made by Roger Scruton³²³ over Berlin's seemingly non-committal role as an intellectual. Annan writes:

'Does Berlin fear to be counted? Many is the letter he has signed deploring injustice done to individuals, particularly in Soviet Russia. What he does not do is join causes or habitually sign round-robins full of high minded platitudes against injustice wherever it rears its head in the globe.

But then, unlike Professor Scruton Berlin does not regard academic discourse as a religious revival. He does not think you have to rise and testify to the true faith....he has never written a snide sentence in his life.'³²⁴

Interestingly, the letter hits on some of the central tensions within Berlin's Zionism. Firstly, that Berlin does not 'sign round-robins' is an indicator that Berlin make his influence felt in other ways; a different sort of 'high minded platitude' that is interested to go for the 'official' jugular. Secondly, that Berlin 'does not think you have to rise and testify to the true faith' is true in the sense that Berlin does not explicitly subscribe to an 'official' ideological line. However, if we consider Berlin's implicit ideological stance in the cold war world, his brand of 'instructive morality' is powerful. The fact that Berlin does not have to 'rise and testify' illustrates the fact that liberalism in the cold war era was based on a significant degree of agreement over the policy of Anglo-American government. In this sense we can accept that Berlin had never 'written a snide sentence', because his power lies elsewhere. Through his normative language he expresses a set of assumptions that are still relatively rigid and enforce a 'true faith' that goes unquestioned. Part of

³²³ Roger Scruton, 'Freedom's Cautious Defender: Roger Scruton assesses the work of Sir Isaiah Berlin, 80 on Tuesday', *The Times*, Saturday 3 June 1989, p.10.

³²⁴ Noel Annan to *The Times*, published Tuesday, June 13, 1989.

these assumptions is Berlin's belief in Zionist politics, and this is the reason emphasis must be placed on Berlin's Zionism.

Ironically, whilst Annan asked the question whether Berlin feared to be counted, Margalit argues Berlin's last published words showed that by the end of his life Berlin 'simply wanted to stand up be counted'³²⁵. Berlin's statement, published in Israeli newspapers, read,

'Since both sides begin with a claim of total possession of Palestine as their historical right and since neither claim can be accepted within the realm of realism or without grave injustice it is plain that compromise, i.e. partition, is the only correct solution, along Oslo lines - for supporting which Rabin was assassinated by a Jewish bigot.

Ideally, what we are calling for is a relationship of good neighbours, but given the number of bigoted, terrorist chauvinists on both sides, this is impracticable.

The solution must lie somewhat along the lines of reluctant toleration, for fear of far worse - i.e. a savage war which could inflict irreparable damage on both sides.

As for Jerusalem, it must remain the capital of Israel, with the Muslims' holy places being extraterritorial to a Muslim authority, with a guarantee from the United Nations of preserving that position, by force if necessary.'³²⁶

Although this plea could be seen as a product of, what Dumm terms, 'bleeding-heart' liberalism, it is strange on its own terms. He may have had reservations about the plight of the Palestinian population with the flood of Jews into 'Israel', but in his writing career he *never* seriously engaged with the problems - philosophical, political or otherwise - of co-existence in Palestine. In fact, much of his language is almost entirely blind towards the existence Palestinian people. Why choose 1997 to engage with an issue that should have held relevance for him since the 1930s? Less diplomatically, one can return to the Palestinian question. Said comments that 'for him

³²⁵ Lilla, Dworkin & Silvers (eds.) *The Legacy of Isaiah Berlin*, p.158.

³²⁶ Lilla, Dworkin & Silvers (eds.) *The Legacy of Isaiah Berlin*, p.157-8, and see Ignatieff, *Isaiah Berlin*, p.298.

[Berlin] they [the Palestinians] seemed to have been the inevitable clutter that, once swept away in a higher cause, need never be mentioned or thought of again.³²⁷ There certainly seems to be hints of cultural superiority within Berlin's thought. In 'The Origins of Israel', he discusses the birth of the Israeli 'State':

'The ideals which the Jews imported, and the culture they were able to build in the relative vacuum of Palestine - with a minimum of counter-influence on account of the evident feebleness of the Muslim culture in this corner of the Arab world - were founded upon typically nineteenth-century principles.'³²⁸

This is very disparaging; talk of 'the evident feebleness of the Muslim culture' and what Berlin perceives as a 'vacuum' which the Jews were correct to fill. Written originally in 1953, these sorts of sentiments are symptomatic of a wider trend of Zionist blindness, where the phrase employed by Berlin is the 'existence' of the Jews, not the 'co-existence' of Jews and Palestinians. In the same article, Berlin links the word 'want' frequently with the word 'Jew' enough for it to be of unavoidable psychological interest. The thrust of Berlin's belief - his Zionism - is that if the Jewish people 'want' the opportunity to be truly free, they should be granted this wish. Whilst leaving Holocaust memory in the background as a constant silent legitimator for Zionism, he does not even approach the Palestinian people as people whose right to a home should also be respected. It is this contradiction that one must always bear in mind when discussing Berlin's liberalism.

Margalit states that

'Berlin's Zionism was not an ideology which derives from primary principles such as nationalism or liberalism. His Zionism was for him more akin to a family business than to a doctrine. Yet Berlin's version of Zionism tallies with the emotions that underlie his version of nationalism. For Berlin the emotional underpinnings of nationalism are the most

³²⁷ Said, *The End of the Peace Process*, p.220.

³²⁸ Isaiah Berlin, 'The Origins of Israel' [1953], in *The Power of Ideas* (London: Pimlico, 2001), p.150.

important element in nationalism, more important than the set of beliefs that nourish it. Altogether, Berlin's interest was in the emotions, feelings, and moods which motivate social movements, even more than in their ideas.³²⁹

Margalit goes on to suggest that Berlin's Zionism should be considered as belonging to his 'base', whilst his liberalism and nationalism belong to his 'superstructure'. Margalit suggests it is potentially impossible to reconcile these separate areas of Berlin's beliefs. Instead, he considers them belonging 'to different layers in his soul'³³⁰.

At the heart of Zionism is the belief that Jewish people deserve the right to a definite geographic landscape, acquire lines on a map they can call their own - a newly defined space leading to the emergence of new political imagery, a new culture, a new land. This wish is idealistically perfect and stems from the unimaginable oppression of the Jewish people in Europe. Yet the reality of the territorialisation of historically relevant and sacred land by the Jewish people had the effect of displacing Palestinian people and culture. As Margalit writes, 'for the Jews to regain a home meant for Palestinian Arabs to lose theirs. This troubled Berlin, but not to the point of seriously questioning his Zionism.'³³¹ On this highly contentious issue, to reiterate, Berlin remains curiously apolitical. He is clearly concerned with cultural prowess, as both 'Origins of the Israeli State' and 'Jewish Slavery and Emancipation' attest. However, whilst discussing the need for the Jews to live within a 'normalised' society of their own, so that 'Jews could create cultural conditions similar to

³²⁹ Lilla, Dworkin & Silvers (eds.) *The Legacy of Isaiah Berlin*, p.150.

³³⁰ Lilla, Dworkin & Silvers (eds.) *The Legacy of Isaiah Berlin*, p.157.

³³¹ Lilla, Dworkin & Silvers (eds.) *The Legacy of Isaiah Berlin*, p.149.

those of other nations'³³², he does not see that this process of 'normalisation' - in the form presented by the Zionists - had always ignored the consideration that co-existence with the Palestinian people would have enriched the immature Israeli cultural landscape. In the same article, Berlin concentrates on Israel in the international context, ignoring the possibility of inequality. Said uncovers Berlin's blindness towards the Palestinian people through an examination of Berlin's 'idolatrous' depiction of Weizmann. In Said's words, 'Weizmann presided over the colonisation of Palestine, he knew about the eviction of the Palestinians, and of course he must have felt all along that had those things been done to Jews, he would have been the first to call them injustices.'³³³

Berlin is critical of some aspects of Israel, but confines his insights to the Israeli character. Berlin condemns a new type of Israeli he sees appearing before his very eyes: 'one comes across individuals who say: 'We are not greatly interested in the outside world. We are the natives of this land. No doubt we did come from the outside.'³³⁴ In letters to Felix Frankfurter he was very candid about the Israeli mentality. He wrote, 'the trouble about the Israelis is not only their partly unconscious conviction born of experience that virtue always loses and only toughness pays, but a great provincialism and blindness to outside opinion.'³³⁵ Unfortunately, Berlin seemed blind to the fact that the entire process of Jewish territorialisation would cause huge sociological problems, of which 'dysfunctional' young Jewish attitudes are merely a symptom. Is this attitude far removed from bitter revolutionaries claiming the reality of the 'unfinished revolution' - an ardent

³³² Berlin, 'Jewish Slavery and Emancipation' [1951], p.175.

³³³ Said, *The End of the Peace Process*, p.219.

³³⁴ Berlin, 'The Origins of Israel' [1953], p.157.

³³⁵ Ignatieff, *Isaiah Berlin*, p.182.

belief that the revolution should have been done differently, whilst failing to realise the problem may have been the idea of revolution itself? It is clear that Berlin is exacerbating a certain type of discourse. Said makes the point that one way of viewing Berlin's belief in 'incommensurable values' is that Berlin merely presents an explanation of the inevitability of conflict. If values are incommensurable, there will always be conflict, and this conflict should come as no surprise. Thus, in the Middle-Eastern context, rather than looking for the root causes of continued conflict, Berlin analyses the inevitability of conflict. This is part pessimism, part high-brow justification for inequalities and moral problems. Berlin's role as an organic intellectual for Israel seems quite clear. To further cement this impression, I now wish to turn to an incident that focuses these preliminary thoughts on Berlin's Zionism onto specific questions of influence. The following controversy involving *Index on Censorship* helps to illuminate the extent to which Berlin should be thought of as 'embedded' in a restless climate of Anglo-American intellectuals concerned with Middle-Eastern issues. These issues, as I will examine, can also be linked to wider cold war considerations.

*Index On Censorship*³³⁶

As well as illustrating the relationship of Berlin to the broader issues of Zionism and the cold war, the following section will concentrate on the details of the role of the intellectual, making a comparison between the contrasting imagery of personality and methodology between Berlin and Noam Chomsky. The exchange of opinion I will detail here involved the publication of an article by Noam Chomsky, and the controversy it caused. Chomsky was invited to write an article for *Index*

³³⁶ My thanks again to Noam Chomsky and Henry Hardy for permission to use the unpublished letters in this section. Isaiah Berlin's letters are used with the permission of The Isaiah Berlin Literary Trust.

On Censorship, which was then published in the July/August 1986 edition. The editor of *Index* was concerned that the journal was too heavily focused on denunciations of censorship in totalitarian states, and should also highlight the way in which 'free societies' can also successfully marginalise unwanted opinion.³³⁷ This explanation of the origin of the article is important and intriguing when considering the nature of the controversy that followed.

The controversy must also be briefly located within the context of heightened tension in the Middle-East. Prominent flashpoints in 1985 included the Vienna and Rome airport hijacks in late 1985 where 19 people were killed in uncertain circumstances³³⁸ and the *Achille Lauro* hijacking, in which American national Leon Klinghoffer was murdered by Palestinian hostage-takers. The *Achille Lauro* hijacking was retaliation for Israeli bombing of Tunis 'on no credible pretext, that resulted in the death of seventy-five Tunisians and Palestinians'.³³⁹ For Chomsky, the defining context at this time was the Israeli 'iron fist' operations in southern Lebanon directed against what the military command, under the guidance of Peres, called 'terrorist villagers'.³⁴⁰ At this time Chomsky held a firmly negative attitude towards Western support of Peres, and the American bombing of Libya in April 1986.³⁴¹ After his article was published, his critics wrote in the context of the 'Gate of Moors' operation by the Palestinian 'Islamic Jihad' in October 1986, culminating in an attack on the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem. The intellectuals who wrote a series of

³³⁷ *Précis* of email correspondence with Prof. Chomsky. Chomsky also mentions the parallels to Orwell's (unpublished) alternative introduction to *Animal Farm* that expressed similar anxieties over informal censorship in the English context.

³³⁸ Noam Chomsky, 'Libya in U.S. Demonology', in *Pirates and Emperors*, p.84.

³³⁹ Chomsky, 'Introduction', in *Pirates and Emperors*, p.10.

³⁴⁰ Chomsky, 'Libya in U.S. Demonology', p.8; 'Middle East Terrorism and the American Ideological System', in *Pirates and Emperors*, p.46.

³⁴¹ Chomsky, 'Libya in U.S. Demonology', p.8; 'Middle East Terrorism and the American Ideological System', p.46.

letters and opinion pieces were working in the months leading to the eruption, on 7 December 1987, of the Palestinian Intifada in the West Bank and Gaza. This in turn led to the rise of HAMAS, and the continued degradation of Palestinian relations with Israel (and Israel's traditional allies), since the snubbing of Arafat at the Amman conference in November 1987. For Chomsky, the overriding issue throughout this period of unrest was that western discourse set a one-sided interpretation of events at this time by consistently painting a pro-western picture of Palestinian 'terrorism'.³⁴²

The delicacy of the political situation in the mid-1980s was surrounded by an indelicate climate of intellectual expression. As I will examine, this indelicacy was not confined to the Middle-East, but also to intellectuals working in the Anglo-American context. More recently, academics who attempt to redefine the conflict, to redress balances, and to understand the cycle of violence in a balanced manner have become significantly more prominent in the Israeli and Middle-Eastern academic community. Revisionists, or 'new historians', or 'post-Zionists' have made real efforts to come to terms with the conflict in the post-modern age, but still fight against the inertia of bigotry and prejudice.³⁴³ It is in this contemporary historiographical context that the opinions of those involved in the debacle appear transparently partisan. As an introduction to the issue, Said

³⁴² See 'International Terrorism: Image and Reality', in Chomsky, *Pirates and Emperors*, pp.119-143.

³⁴³ For 'revisionist' history of Zionist and Palestinian nationalism see Ilan Pappé, *A Modern History of Palestine* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004); Benny Morris, *1948 and After: Israel and the Palestinians* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); 'Peace? No Chance', *The Guardian*, February 21, 2002; Avi Shlaim, *Collusion Across the Jordan: King Abdullah, the Zionist Movement, and the Partition of Palestine* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988); 'America must see that Sharon is the problem' *The Observer*, April 14, 2002. The agenda of these 'new historians' is attacked in Efraim Karsh, *Fabricating Israeli History: The New Historians* (London: Frank Cass, 2000). A thorough examination of the historiographical issues can be found in Anita Shapira & Derek J. Penslar (eds.) *Israeli Historical Revisionism* (London: Routledge, 2002). For alternatives see Noam Chomsky, *Middle East Illusions: Including Peace In The Middle East?: Reflections on Justice and Nationhood* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).

speaks of two telling incidents;

'In the late 1960s while giving a series of lectures at Oxford, Chomsky devoted one to the Middle East situation and was extremely critical of Israel. The next morning Berlin visited him and said that even though he might not have agreed with some of what Chomsky said, he had come to tell the celebrated intellectual dissident that Jews should not speak about Israel that way in public....the two men remained friends.....In the mid-1980s, when Chomsky wrote a solicited article for *Index on Censorship* about the way Israel's actions either are not reported properly or are covered up in the Western media. From behind the scenes Berlin organised a campaign to try to stop the magazine from printing Chomsky's article; he got influential friends of his to write letters of protest, and in many ways attempted to harm the magazine (which did publish Chomsky after all [sic]) and even tried to get it closed'.³⁴⁴

Whether or not you agree with Said's observation that Berlin was acting with 'the kind of unblinking zeal that fanatics of either the Right or the Left might have felt'³⁴⁵, it is hard to reconcile these images of Berlin with the normally presented view of the 'gentleman scholar'. It is at this point that we realise that the 'public' and the 'private' Berlin are unexpectedly at odds. How directly politically involved was Berlin? Should this cast a shadow over his variety of liberalism? The question is to what extent we agree with Said: 'It was not only that Berlin supported Israel and never raised a question about the morality of what it did in dispossessing and oppressing an entire people, it is also that he tried to prevent others from doing so, using his enormous prestige and influence to stifle dissent and opposition'.³⁴⁶ With these layers of involvement in mind, there can surely be no argument that, to some degree, Berlin was an 'organic intellectual for Israel'³⁴⁷, as the following analysis suggests.

Chomsky's article reads as a sophisticated attempt to understand the murky areas

³⁴⁴ Said, *The End of the Peace Process*, p.221.

³⁴⁵ Said, *The End of the Peace Process*, p.221.

³⁴⁶ Said, *The End of the Peace Process*, p.220.

³⁴⁷ Said, *The End of the Peace Process*, p.221.

between the language of political journalism, political rhetoric, and the 'real world' of political action. It is in this sense that it should be stressed that although this article was more-or-less commissioned on a topic requested by the editor, the piece is undeniably 'Chomskian' in its central assertions. Chomsky begins his article by writing: 'From a comparative perspective, the United States is unusual if not unique in the lack of restraints on freedom of expression. It is also unusual in the range and effectiveness of the methods employed to restrain freedom of thought.'³⁴⁸ For Chomsky, 'the problem arises whenever state policy is indefensible, and becomes serious to the extent that the issues are serious'. In respect to the Arab-Israeli conflict, 'US policy contributes materially to maintaining the state of military confrontation and is based on racist assumptions that would not be tolerated if stated openly'.³⁴⁹ For Chomsky, much of this is hidden by what he terms the 'manufacture of consent', an old technique articulated by Walter Lipmann. Most importantly, 'crucial terms have a technical sense, divorced from their original meanings. Consider, for example, the term 'peace process'. In its technical sense, as used in the mass media and scholarship generally in the United States, it refers to peace proposals advanced by the US government. It is thus true by definition that the United States is committed to peace, a useful consequence'. Thus, "Are the Palestinians Ready to Seek Peace?'....in the system of thought control...means something else: Are the Palestinians ready to accept US terms for peace?'³⁵⁰ Chomsky goes on to elucidate the role of the press in creating misleading impressions of those groups and individuals who did not conform with US policy. For Chomsky the terms

³⁴⁸ Noam Chomsky, 'Opinion: Thought Control in the USA: The Case of the Middle East', *Index on Censorship*, 15, 7 (July/August 1986), p.2.

³⁴⁹ Chomsky, 'Opinion: Thought Control in the USA', p.2.

³⁵⁰ Chomsky, 'Opinion: Thought Control in the USA', p.2.

'extremist' and 'moderate' are important. Chomsky's overarching concern is that the role of the 'free press' in the contemporary world acts as a legitimating structure for official policy.

The article elicited a significant response in the pages of subsequent issues of *Index*. Indeed, Glass later remarks that '*Index*'s editorial and advisory boards (who included Stephen Spender, David Astor, Mark Bonham-Carter and Stuart Hampshire) were bombarded with protests that *Index* had published Chomsky at all.³⁵¹ With this in mind the Editor's note in the October issue rather politely stated,

'we have received a number of complaints about Noam Chomsky's 'Opinion' piece...the gist of these letters can be summed up as follows: the article contains various inaccuracies and, accurate or not, should not have been published in the first place because it criticises American media for distortion and is thus not an exposure of censorship, which is *Index*'s business'.³⁵²

Index publishes a response from William Frankel in the same issue. Frankel, formally an editor of the *Jewish Chronicle*³⁵³, writes,

'what was yet another anti-Israel article by Chomsky doing in a publication like *Index on Censorship*?...He omits any reference at all to censorship in Israel, presumably because he cannot bring himself to say anything positive about the Jewish state. For a nation in a permanent state of military preparedness and surrounded by irreconcilable enemies, Israel is a remarkably open society....no Arab state comes within measurable distance of Israel's freedom.'³⁵⁴

On Chomsky's alleged 'thought control', Frankel argues,

'in the USA there is no press censorship, no controlled radio and TV...in the free democracies every government, every political party, every advertiser, seeks to influence and change public opinion.....how is it possible for one source of 'thought control' to be as

³⁵¹ Charles Glass, *Spectator*, 21 March, 1987, p 13.

³⁵² Editorial, *Index on Censorship*, 15, 9 (Oct 1986), p.2.

³⁵³ From 1958 to 1977.

³⁵⁴ William Frankel, 'Opinion: Word Games Fuel Extremism: A Reply to Noam Chomsky', *Index on Censorship*, 15, 9 (Oct 1986), p.2.

all-pervasive as Mr. Chomsky suggests?...his argument is a patent nonsense.'³⁵⁵

Frankel makes the further point that

'there are newspapers, journals, and Middle East university departments throughout the US, not to mention Chomsky himself, free to hold and advocate pro-Palestinian views and to employ what language they choose. If the American government's pro-Israeli stance is so readily accepted by the media and public opinion, could this be...related to its plausibility in the eyes of the public?'³⁵⁶

Frankel continues, and offers counter-claims on some specific events Chomsky had mentioned in his original article. As if sensing the contradiction in his own wish that Chomsky's article had not been published alongside his rueful comment that anyone in America 'not to mention Chomsky himself' is 'free to hold and advocate pro-Palestinian views', Frankel ends his article by succinctly stating his belief that 'by his word games, Mr. Chomsky fuels the cycles of extremism.'³⁵⁷ In the November/December edition of *Index*, the exchange continues. Nora Beloff is of special interest, not least because she labels Chomsky a 'fanatically anti-American and anti-Jewish American Jew.'³⁵⁸ She alleged 'Index has lost sight of its proper task', and also brings cold war politics into the debate which I will return to at the end of this section. According to Charles Glass in his article in *The Spectator* in 1987, Nora Beloff also disclosed the involvement of Berlin. According to Glass, Beloff enclosed a covering letter which read 'unless you publish the enclosed, either in the form of a letter or comment, I propose to make my views known elsewhere'. As Glass remarks,

'she wrote in the letter for publication, 'Since *Index* featured Chomsky, the wisest and least polemical of our philosophers has cancelled his subscription. Many of us will follow

³⁵⁵ Frankel, 'Opinion: Word Games', p.2.

³⁵⁶ Frankel, 'Opinion: Word Games', p.2, 7.

³⁵⁷ Frankel, 'Opinion: Word Games', p.39.

³⁵⁸ Nora Beloff, 'Opinion', *Index On Censorship*, 15, 10 (Nov/Dec 1986), p.2.

his example unless, in future, *Index* shows greater discrimination.' Who was 'the wisest and most polemical of our philosophers', whose very name had to be kept secret from *Index* readers? For your *private* information, Nora Beloff wrote in her covering note, 'the philosopher to whom I refer in my last paragraph is Isaiah Berlin. He does not want to get into an argument with Chomsky who, he says, is outwardly quite a pleasant man but mad and a terrible and tireless enemy'. Nora did not say whose enemy Chomsky was or why Berlin seemed willing to condemn Chomsky privately rather than publicly'.³⁵⁹

Before dealing with Beloff's introduction of cold war preoccupations, I wish to dwell on an exchange of letters that occurred between Berlin and Chomsky. This exchange was initiated by the publication of an article by Alexander Cockburn in *The Nation*. Cockburn's article which, amongst other things undertook a character assassination of Elliot Abrams³⁶⁰, who had sent a letter to Dan Jacobson³⁶¹ claiming Chomsky was 'a fanatical defender of the PLO who has set new standards for intellectual dishonesty and personal vindictiveness...can it be that you and your editors simply do not know who Chomsky is, and are unfamiliar with his record?'³⁶². Here is

Cockburn's relatively short article in full:

'To anyone familiar with the rottenness of U.S. press coverage of the area, Chomsky if anything understated the degree of self-censorship and the constraints on free discussion of the relevant issues. But the reaction to his piece was instructive. The editor of *Index* received abusive communications protesting the mere fact that Chomsky had failed in the very activity the magazine exists to challenge: the exercise of censorship. Among those protesting was Nora Beloff, formerly a political correspondent of *The Observer*. She cited in support of her protest an anonymous denunciation of Chomsky by someone she described in an earlier version of her published letter as the 'wisest and least polemical of our philosophers.' That philosopher, she said, had now canceled his subscription to *Index*. Beloff confided privately that the philosopher was Isaiah Berlin, supposed by many to be a glorious emblem of high-minded liberal tolerance.

As retailed by Beloff, the sagacious Berlin asserted flatly that it is inaccurate to say, as Chomsky had, that while there is technically no censorship in the United States, the press is so pro-Israel and anti-Arab that it exaggerates atrocities committed against Israel and

³⁵⁹ Charles Glass, *Spectator*, 21 March, 1987, p.13.

³⁶⁰ (Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs at the time).

³⁶¹ (editorial board member at *Index*).

³⁶² Letter published in Noam Chomsky, *Pirates and Emperors*, p.104.

suppresses atrocities committed by Israel. Berlin also maintained, rather comically, that a piece denouncing the U.S. media for distortion and suppression is not an exposure of censorship and hence is beyond the purview of Index. Far more vitriolic was a letter to Index director Dan Jacobson in which the correspondent flailed at Chomsky as 'a fanatical defender of the PLO who has set new standards for intellectual dishonesty and personal vindictiveness in his writings about the Middle East.' This raving came from Elliott Abrams, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs and son-in-law of Norman Podhoretz. It was inscribed under the letterhead of the State Department and thus was a denunciation by the U.S. government of a foreign magazine for publishing the work of a U.S. citizen. It's exactly as if the editor of The Nation got an abusive letter from the Soviet Foreign Ministry for publishing the work of a Soviet dissident. It is not often that one can find so bizarre a case: Abrams superintending a campaign of mass murder in Central America while finding the time to write to a tiny magazine 3,000 miles away about the folly of efforts to discuss censorship in the coverage of Israel in the press of that country's chief sponsor. Index has now published a foolish rebuttal to Chomsky, to which he will respond in the January issue.³⁶³

In response to Cockburn, Berlin sent a letter to Chomsky that he had intended to send to *The Nation* in response. In the end, the letter was never sent to *The Nation*, but Chomsky retained the letter, and he was kind enough to send me a copy. It is dated December 2 1986, and it reads:

Sir,

A friend has sent me a cutting of an item by your contributor Mr. Alexander Cockburn (November 22, p.541), in which a largely false account is given of my comments in a private letter on the publication by the British periodical Index on Censorship of an article by Professor Noam Chomsky. I must admit that I have never been able to take Mr. Cockburn seriously, nor have I ever heard of anyone who has; discovery of the truth does not seem to me to be his main objective, as it was that of earlier muck-rakers. Nevertheless, your readers, who may be insufficiently aware of this, deserve to have the record set straight.

According to your contributor, I wrote 'anonymously' that Professor Chomsky's thesis about the bias of American press in favour of Israel was not valid. Whatever my opinion about this, I said nothing of the kind. My present knowledge of the American media is too small to enable me to assess the justice of Professor Chomsky's accusation. Be that as it may, the point I made in a private letter to a friend, which I did not fail to sign, was that the censorship with which Index has been dealing, and for the most part dealing very well

³⁶³ Alexander Cockburn, 'Beat The Devil', *The Nation*, 22 November 1986, p.541.

indeed, is censorship in the proper sense of the word – that is, suppression of writings or other forms of expression by institutions or their representatives – churches, political parties, courts of law, juntas of various kinds, and, of course, government departments empowered to do this by kings, Popes, dictators or parliaments – whoever may be sovereign in a given state or community. Other forms of interference with freedoms of speech – by pressure groups, blackmail, threats, corruption, arm-twisting, are evils but not forms of censorship – activities which legislation is largely incapable of checking – and so are partiality or bias or whims on the part of editors or journalists or broadcasters or those who influence them, whom Professor Chomsky condemns. People sometimes speak of 'self-censorship' – that seems to me a metaphor, like promises to oneself. The 'useful little periodical', as Mr. Cockburn so patronisingly calls Index, has done the excellent job it has because it has confined itself to cases of censorship proper, which can be accurately pinned down and described (since they are official). It has its hands full enough with these cases, as it is. If it tried to go into a wider field, and deal with general cases of interference and obstruction, it would necessarily take on too much – and dilute its strength in the vast grey territory which this would open up. Professor Chomsky's article could very well have been published in your pages – and more than one British publication which I could mention would, I think, have been glad to have it. Its publication in Index seems to me to have opened the door to a new policy which in my opinion would damage its effectiveness. This is an issue on which rational persons can disagree; at any rate, that is my view.

Mr. Cockburn refers to my cancellation of my subscription to Index: I should find that difficult to do, since I have rendered some service to the periodical and it kindly placed my name on its free list. So much for Mr. Cockburn and his revelations: perhaps not too high a price to pay for an uncensored press.

Yours faithfully,

Isaiah Berlin³⁶⁴

In a second letter, dated December 8 1986, Berlin tells Chomsky: [selected paragraphs]

I have decided, after all, not to send my letter to 'The Nation' [...]. I have met Alex Cockburn, and did not take to him, and his methods seems to me so unattractive that to roll about in the mud with him, however just my cause, seems a somewhat horrible prospect [...]. We have had friendly relations for so long now, and I believe enjoy a mutual liking and respect for each other, despite profound disagreements, that I did not want you to think that I had done what Cockburn charged me with doing.³⁶⁵

³⁶⁴ Unpublished letter, IB to NC, Dec 2, 1986 (© The Isaiah Berlin Literary Trust, 2006).

³⁶⁵ Unpublished letter, IB to NC, Dec 8, 1986 (© The Isaiah Berlin Literary Trust, 2006).

Chomsky replied, in a letter dated December 18, 1986. It is long, so I will quote the passages of interest:

Dear Isaiah,

[...] I do not at all agree with your assessment of [Cockburn's] work. On the contrary, he is one of the very few truly honest and courageous journalists in the United States [...] Cockburn's work is quite distinct in character from the typical stance of marching in fashionable parades with much hypocritical posturing about one's libertarian commitments, narrowly focused on the abuses of official enemies [...] his work is carefully researched and deals with matters generally excluded by those who prefer the rewards of conformity to received doctrine.

[...]

As to what information Cockburn used, you would have to inquire with him. However, I do not want to conceal from you that a certain amount of material has been leaking about the sordid affair at Index on Censorship, and some of it has reached me indirectly. Included is an astonishing letter by Elliot Abrams [...] and a letter from Nora Beloff [...] the statements in Cockburn's columns are based on the letter by Abrams, the published letter by Beloff, and Beloff's second letter, which I have seen. If the statements Cockburn makes are incorrect, they are Beloff's falsehoods, not his[...] [another unsigned] memorandum also states that 'Chomsky's polemical writings are so violent and distorted that the New York Review of Books finds it impossible to publish his letters.' I will not stoop to commenting on that. The memorandum also states that my article contains inaccuracies, giving examples which are entirely false, as can be easily documented.

This, I should say, is quite typical of many examples I have seen over the years of the behavior of elite British intellectuals, spewing forth their malice in secret, knowing that the arrangements of power will enable them to vilify those whom they regard as having breached the limits of decorous conformity. The reactions you mention to Alexander Cockburn's honest and forthright work are simply another example. I saw enough of the infantile senior common room antics while I was there so that I am not very much surprised.

[...]

The published letter by Beloff and the article by Frankel you will, by now, have seen. The former is merely scurrilous and libelous trash, in a style and at a level of accuracy familiar from the ugliest days of Stalinism. The latter at least attempts to deal with some issues, though at a level that will embarrass anyone who maintains reasonable intellectual standards; it also contains childish and inane slanders, which merit no comment.

As to whether Index should have requested an article on thought control in societies with no formal censorship, I will not comment, except to say that whatever one thinks about this rather technical issue, it hardly can explain the nature of the response to my article, public and private. Rather, that can only be explained in a way that again will be familiar to students of Stalinism, and of the style of the secular priesthood more generally, Stalinism being, of course, not a unique phenomenon.

I should say that I have had a number of rather curious experiences, of a similar sort, with respected British intellectuals, experiences which would be regarded as a major scandal if the victim of abuse and lies were someone not regarded as a dissident, including even an 'Encyclopedia entry' that merits comparison to what one would find in a Soviet Encyclopedia; this, under the editorship of Alan Bullock, who know very well that what he published consists of disgraceful lies, as documented in considerable detail in letters I wrote him which, naturally, he never answered. I am afraid that substantial segments of the British intellectual elite merit little respect for their integrity, or their courage.

[...]

Sincerely

Noam Chomsky³⁶⁶

Berlin's role in this episode unquestionably emerges as shady, ambiguous, and telling. Not necessarily ambiguous on his main, rather narrow, point on censorship, Berlin does appear worryingly ambiguous when one considers the motives behind his hidden, unapproachable, righteous standpoint. The absence of material on this affair in the Berlin Archive is indicative of the sensitivity of the issue. The indignation shown by Chomsky in his private letter to Berlin illustrates how far Chomsky believed this issue went – to the heart of establishment intelligentsia. Building on the role and the image of the intellectual as detailed in the previous chapter, it is clear that Berlin indeed appears as an establishment intellectual, concerned with the 'proper' aims of a journal over the discretion of its authors. Berlin is conformist in the way in which he aligns himself with a

³⁶⁶ Unpublished letter NC to IB, 18 Dec 1986. Used with permission of Prof. Chomsky.

cause which has Zionist and cold war ideology at its centre. The image is of a wise gatekeeper, formally addressing concerns that are framed in the 'proper' way. In Chomsky's eyes, Beloff's and Berlin's assertions over the 'proper' definition of censorship rests on principles that contradict any claims of intellectual dishonesty against Cockburn, and also contradict the broader 'liberal' case for fairness and freedom. As Roger Hardy, a balanced contributor to the debate in the pages of *Index*, writes

'to take the narrower view of censorship, and hence of *Index's* purpose, is to run obvious risks. It might suit the ideological preferences of a few of your readers for you to act as if censorship and the denial of free speech were the problems exclusively of communist and Third World states. But it would be a scandalous denial of the truth.'³⁶⁷

The whole episode is intended to tarnish Chomsky as an 'anti-Zionist Jew', a potentially harmful dissident, non-conformist radical. However, the original article, read twenty years on, seems intended to broaden the intellectual terrain, ask some important questions on the role of the media, and interrogate the 'reality' behind the rhetoric of policy objectives. The image of Chomsky is far less formal, far less concerned with the 'proper' way of doing things, and more with the free expression of issues that worry the scholar at a level that is concerned with the creation of 'fair' boundaries of discussion for both sides of the Middle-East peace process. If Chomsky is biased, it is only in response to the perceived bias of the American government towards Zionist aims (this bias, it seems, is confirmed by the words of the 'anti-Chomsky' group).

This is undoubtedly a key episode in my construction of Berlin the intellectual. In searching for an accurate definition of 'Berlin the intellectual', this exchange of thoughts and

³⁶⁷ Roger Hardy, 'Letter', *Index on Censorship*, 15, 10 (Nov/Dec 1986), p.12.

letters brings into sharp focus how far Berlin was willing to push his Zionist agenda, and how far he found it acceptable to influence and manipulate people around him. The stark contradiction between attempting to prevent the publication of an article in a journal which Berlin had minimal contact with, and his avowed liberal credentials is plain to see. Also, on a methodological level, this instance shows Berlin's consistent adherence to a set of formal scholarly outlines. When Chomsky discusses, in transparent terms the meanings of 'the real world', questions of the integrity of governments, and the links of governments to media, he uses detailed examples of 'language games' to make a persuasive case. Perhaps the problem is that Berlin disagrees with Chomsky methodologically, or perhaps he disagrees with Chomsky because he is not playing the standard cold war game. Truthfully political, angry and principled in a cause he believes in, Chomsky is derided by those who, and Berlin must be included here, are dishonestly apolitical, sometimes anonymous, and superciliously present their arguments against 'the enemy', without pausing to think he may have a point. Beloff, after all, had written that Berlin believed Chomsky to be 'outwardly quite a pleasant man but mad and a terrible and tireless enemy'.

It is easy to make the assumption that Berlin disagrees on the public, transparent nature of Chomsky's arguments. Remember, Said was quoted as saying that Berlin, in the 1960s, told Chomsky that 'Jews should not speak about Israel that way in public'. Also, it is tempting to view the way in which Berlin involved himself in the affair - writing a private letter to Chomsky - as significant. Calmly presenting his case in a conciliatory manner, he has the weight of officialdom behind his action, with an opaqueness surrounding his intellectual position that contradicts the barbed comments of Beloff. It is useful, as a conclusion, to return to Beloff's concerns, many of

which seem rooted in an international outlook dominated by the cold war, whilst bearing in mind the highly charged international context at the time of this exchange. Beloff responded to Chomsky's article in a vehement manner, 'cranking-up' the tone of argument, labeling Chomsky a 'fanatically anti-American and anti-Jewish American Jew', as already quoted, as well as placing him in a context which Beloff evidently found all-important - the war against communism. Beloff makes the case that Chomsky's writing during the Vietnam war was exploited by communists world wide, and as a consequence Chomsky 'must surely be one of the world's least censored authors'. She continues,

'if *Index* cannot see the difference between, on the one side, the USA where anything is allowed, including the fulminations of dotty doctors, and, on the other, the Soviet Union, where any criticism of the regime exposes the perpetrators to the gulag or psychiatric ward, then it has forfeited any claim to champion the victims of repression. We live in a world in which NATO is unfortunately necessary and where the biggest danger to the survival of free societies rests in our loss of confidence in our own values and in the erosion of our will to defend ourselves against the threats and intimidation of the Soviet dictatorship. Many of us will cancel our subscriptions unless, in future, *Index* shows greater discrimination.'³⁶⁸

Chomsky responded in January 1987 by writing a long refutation of Frankels's allegations. Of Beloff's letter Chomsky wrote 'Beloff's letter is a torrent of abuse directed against me personally...her letter can only be interpreted as an admission that she cannot deal with the substance of my remarks and therefore seeks to discredit the source so as to prevent discussion of facts that do not conform to her ideological prescriptions.'³⁶⁹

³⁶⁸ Beloff, 'Opinion', p.2.

³⁶⁹ Noam Chomsky, 'No Anti-Israeli Vendetta', *Index On Censorship*, 16, 1 (1987), p15.

Conclusion

It is clear that Berlin's intellectual role was defined by ambiguity. Berlin was content to actively engage with Zionist issues, yet the visibility of this engagement was often hidden behind layers of influence and supposed scholarly detachment. Similarly to his role in the cold war, this supposed detachment added to the sense that Berlin was a 'passive' apolitical intellectual who did not forcefully pursue a political agenda through his writing. However, it is clear that Berlin intervened when necessary and this aspect of Berlin's intellectual role can be traced through his implicit use of language that persistently represented a politicised standpoint. Therefore, I propose that the only way to make sense of Berlin's role is to consider Berlin's intellectual representations of Zionism and liberalism at the level of the text. Through examining unpublished letters and essays an impression of Berlin appears that is significantly different to the one presented by 'sympathetic' interpreters of Berlin. Unexplored aspects of Berlin's thought appear where texts, institutions and the wider context intersect. The *Index on Censorship* case-study illustrates this point well. The way to go 'beyond' this appreciation of Berlin is to realise that a combination of political and religious ideology fed into Berlin's particular conception of normality that can also be identified at the level of the text. Berlin's conception of normality is a significant expression of a specific geopolitical orientation towards Israel, Anglo-America and the wider world that is also informed by the wider context of cold war. It is through this exposition that I can break through the ambiguity over whether Berlin should be considered an 'active' or 'passive' intellectual. I argue that at the level of the text Berlin was never passive, but constantly active in a complicated war of words. This approach helps develop an understanding of the contradiction between Berlin's Zionism and

his liberalism. Illustrating Berlin's consistent use of language and assumption pours light on these supposed contradictions, and helps make sense of his institutional links.

More abstractly, Berlin's conception of normality was also an expression of his opinions on the nation, state and the foundations of freedom, rooted firmly in the western tradition. Berlin's conception of normality was based on the unquestioned nature of his views that developed after 1950 where, for example, his conception of freedom was heavily based on a belief in the 'naturalness' of such a concept. The strength of his Zionist beliefs and cold war liberal values can only be understood in relation to the solid form his entire belief system took. My textual analysis of Berlin's texts will lead to the identification of this general pattern of thought that I will term Berlin's 'ontology'. It should then become clear how the various contexts I have examined fuse together and form an ontological outlook that is detectable from Berlin's use of language. This adds the necessary sophistication to the basic assertion that Berlin wrote with 'ideological preoccupations'. I have shown how Berlin's affiliations and ideological concerns were intricately tied to a variegated contextual landscape. Before this examination of language begins in earnest, the next chapter serves as a general introduction to Berlin's texts, the way in which Berlin has been interpreted, and further confirmation over the methodology I will implement.

4

Isaiah Berlin in Context

Introduction

Having examined the complicated nature of Isaiah Berlin's location in the Anglo-American and Zionist contexts this chapter is intended as a survey of Berlin's writings, and their reception in the academic world in the eyes of some of his sympathetic and non-sympathetic interpreters detailed in the Introduction. This chapter is a transitional one, between the largely historiographical examination of contexts related to Berlin, and the rigorous textual analysis I undertake in the second section of the thesis.

Berlin was convinced that the foundations for 'true' freedom existed in the western world. This reflected his ontological commitment, and his particular brand of optimistic liberal-pluralism. This liberal-pluralism was enlivened by a stringent intellectual morality that manifested itself in the morally instructive nature of Berlin's writing. This was a partially conscious motivation for Berlin, for he was driven by a set of ontological assumptions, encompassing moral and political concerns. The process of defining this ontology leads to the possibility of highlighting Berlin's implicit discursive impact.

This chapter focuses on stylistic and methodological questions, and centres on tensions in the substance of Berlin's approach and textual output. Berlin's instructive morality is created by the implicit deployment of normative vocabularies. Berlin's textual output reveals the nature of Berlin's politicisation, and his methodological approach - reconstructive imagination - highlights much about his treatment of authorship and intention.

It seems logical to contrast Berlin's approach to post-modern approaches, for Berlin 'humanises' texts he interprets, does not problematise authorship and meaning, and does not attempt to distance himself from texts. This places him at odds with the precepts of much post-modern theory. Cracraft's interpretation offers a sentimentalised view of 'the way history should be practiced', supposedly legitimising Berlin's pluralist world-view in a post-modern world. The Berlin 'mini-industry' in the academic world is standardised, critical in only the narrowest sense, and fundamental questions over method are rarely acknowledged. This chapter is intended as an introduction to the analytical core of my thesis, where I introduce some of the contradictions that lie within Berlin's writing.

Berlin, Identity and Style

As an indicator of the trends existent in academia and its institutions, Berlin is not alone in creating a privileged niche for himself, where his work seems normally to be unquestionably praised rather than critically questioned. On a similar case, Michael Tanner has not only commented on Walter Kaufmann's 'perniciousness' and 'hegemony', but of his 'intellectual dependants'³⁷⁰ who appeared, in part, in response to Kaufmann's celebrated reconstruction of Nietzsche's reputation in post-war Anglo-American academia. Whether Berlin can or cannot be described as 'pernicious' or 'hegemonic', it is clear he has attracted a significant number of intellectual disciples, mainly due to the reputation he gained from his reconstruction of thinkers.

What both these academics do have in common is that they both constructed, in the

³⁷⁰ Michael Tanner, 'Organising the Self and the World', *Times Literary Supplement*, 16 May 1986, p.519.

main, liberal interpretations of the philosophers they chose to work on. And they both wrote in the cold war era. Berlin's solidification and advocacy of a form of liberty had a strong idealistic quality and at times seems content to justify its worth merely by reasserting the 'naturalness' of value-pluralism. For Berlin, the western form of liberty he espoused was the corner-stone to a natural and gentle 'humanness' applicable to all men everywhere. Thus, Berlin's brand of liberalism is content that the foundation for meaningful liberty exists in the western cold war context. This is an assumption that Berlin's intellectual followers also make, and is based on a loose perception of moral commonsense. Indeed, Berlin's position as a prominent intellectual personality has much to do with the dedication of a body of followers who, generally, promote Berlin in a highly positive hue. A rather embarrassing example of Berlin sycophancy comes from Noel Annan, who writes: 'Though like Our Lord and Socrates he does not publish much, he thinks and says a great deal and has had an enormous influence on our times.' Cracraft has called him 'prophetic'.³⁷¹ Berlin's *Festschriften* recount how influential Berlin had been on various contributors, containing fond recollections of friendships, whilst also helping the elevation Berlin to some higher place. Encounters with the great man are described as 'wonderous' or 'pivotal', and Berlin should be read with 'delight and instruction'.³⁷² We are clearly not dealing with a 'normal' human being, but someone who somehow transcends 'ordinary' concerns.

It is clear that residues of the 'traditional' concept of the intellectual are in evidence here.

Shils earlier exemplified this view, when he stated that 'there are some persons with an unusual

³⁷¹ Cracraft, 'A Berlin for Historians', p.277.

³⁷² Margalit & Margalit (eds.), *Isaiah Berlin: A Celebration*, p.1.

sensitivity to the sacred, an uncommon reflectiveness about the nature of their universe and the rules which govern their society.' For his admirers, Berlin represents the moral core of liberal thought. He can sense the 'real' nature of the universe, and how humans interact within society. The 'rules', to reiterate, are commonsensical, and understood by 'humane' liberal intellectuals such as Berlin. That these ideals typify more formal cold war political ideals hardly needs reasserting. Building on the idea that Berlin's thought is intrinsically linked to a rigid humanism, according to Ignatieff, Berlin seemed indifferent to other individual's views if they had other 'redeemable features'. Maybe, also, this can explain the static temporality of Berlin's work.³⁷³ Perhaps it is a manifestation of this personality trait that lends to the illusion of an 'apolitical' passivity in the work of Berlin, where an assumed 'fairness' dominates his thought. For instance, Berlin felt 'he felt he had no 'doctrine' to teach'³⁷⁴ when he became the founding president of Wolfson College. As argued in Chapter Two, Berlin continually offered an intellectual vision that can be considered 'passively instructive'. Collini points out Berlin's writings can be called 'occasional'³⁷⁵, yet it is striking how consistent the tone and substance of the pieces are, created by the consistent vocabularies Berlin employs. For Berlin to declare he 'has no doctrine to teach' is certainly naïve once the scholar unpicks the function of his texts, and constructs the extent to which cold war ideological preoccupations and assumptions informed his use of language.

Some of Berlin's main detractors, such as A. L. Rowse, have used the emerging image of Berlin the 'gentlemanly scholar' to emphasise the significance of their own work: 'There is no

³⁷³ Ignatieff, *Isaiah Berlin*, p.130.

³⁷⁴ Stefan Collini, *English Past: Essays In History and Culture* (Oxford: OUP, 1999), p.199.

³⁷⁵ Collini, *English Past*, p.203.

comparison between the solid body of my work, with its originality, and Isaiah's inadequate performance...a couple of booklets and a couple of essays'.³⁷⁶ This type of scholarly sniffiness seemed common to most of his contemporaries. However, with the publication of volumes of Berlin's contributions to the history of ideas, and of his letters, Berlin's corpus begins to seem more substantial. As for 'originality', away from the distinctive 'conversational' style of Berlin, the content of his work can seem thin. Syntheses have been offered in attempts to explain the philosophical outlook behind his wanderings into the worlds of significant intellectual figures. Yet, I would argue that Berlin's methodology, in the light of the kind of history he practiced, became inadequate in the light of academic advances, and under the glare of 'postmodernism' Berlin's work can seem strangely static. His arguments, style, conceptions, and politics, barely changing through the decades. This leads to the question of whether Berlin ever questioned his intellectual activity. Did he examine or develop the underlying assumptions which undoubtedly inform his work, or rigidly adhere to the attitudes he developed at an early stage in his intellectual life?

Berlin's earliest significant text, *Karl Marx: His Life and Environment*, is a liberal critique of patterns of thought that go against Berlin's 'personal intellectual morality'. For Berlin, Marx's 'historicism' was a product of European intellectual habits that threatened the moral code that Berlin would later, implicitly and explicitly, advocate. Berlin's examination of Marx, although undeniably thorough, lucid and with a sheen of fairness and balance, has at its foundation a set of assumptions about the 'proper' direction of European thought. In the words of Toews, '[Berlin]

³⁷⁶ Quoted in Simon Blow, 'The Outsider at the Gates Forever Looking In', *Independent on Sunday*, June 8, 2003, p.17.

wrote about Marx in order to examine and clarify his distrust of, and critical opposition to, Marx's particular transformation of the conceptual frameworks provided by his intellectual environment and, by extension, to the various theoretical and practical Marxisms so predominant in his own environment in the 1930s.³⁷⁷ It seems *Karl Marx* indicates the genesis of a number of persistent themes in Berlin's formal writing career. The trajectory of Berlin's writing (as I will develop in my textual analysis of a variety of his texts) followed the general pattern of ontological and moral assumption. I will examine how a set of assumptions on human nature, 'the natural', agency and 'the other' evolved into a style of thinking that, in the cold war period, had at its core the desire to be 'morally instructive'. The language that characterised Berlin's 'instructive morality' is based firmly in the language of the familiar, the consequences of which raise questions over the validity of Berlin's claims on liberal freedom. These ideas will be expanded in the second part of the thesis.

Away from Berlin's preoccupations with the course of European thought, *Karl Marx* is important in another respect, for it is the text that marks another important strand in the writings of Berlin - namely Berlin's preoccupations with his *own* identity. Cracraft concludes that Berlin's early academic work on Marx - 'the Marx project, on which Berlin laboured furiously for several years....appealed directly to the Russian and particularly the Jewish sides of his character'³⁷⁸. This early interest in the way in which Marx's 'Jewishness' influenced his work, is echoed in a later

³⁷⁷ John E. Toews, 'Berlin's Marx: Enlightenment, Counter-Enlightenment, and the Historical Construction of Cultural Identities' in Mali & Wokler (eds.), 'Isaiah Berlin's Counter-Enlightenment', p.164.

³⁷⁸ Cracraft, 'A Berlin for Historians', p.280-1.

essay entitled 'Benjamin Disraeli, Karl Marx, and the Search for Identity'³⁷⁹, where Berlin 'stressed the Jewishness of these two giants of the nineteenth century and what he saw as the psychological and other consequences of their repression of it.'³⁸⁰ Elsewhere, commentators have stressed that Berlin's 'reflections on his own identity, and on Jewish identity in general, [are] central to the understanding of his philosophy.'³⁸¹ It is here that we find the 'appreciation of difference' which combined to create Berlin's humanistic 'value-pluralism'. The 'value-pluralism' demonstrated by Berlin can be presented as deriving from an 'apolitical' authorial position. This alleged 'apoliticalism', apart from being puzzling when one considers the extent of his influence and activism as described in the previous three chapters, also appears strange when one senses Berlin's obvious knowledge of the delicacy of political persuasion. He wrote in his essay 'Fathers and Children' that 'the natural inclination of liberals has been, and still is, towards the left, the party of generosity and humanity, towards anything that destroys barriers between men.'³⁸² He was institutionally well placed to understand, and intellectually engage with, the subtleties surrounding political categorisation. His dexterity and sharpness on human motivation, public mood and an array of opinions on contemporary political issues are evident through an examination of his dispatches from Washington. His demonstration of a shrewd understanding of political culture during the four years he worked in America, where he developed a discerningly realistic perception of the relationship between the media, government and the public, means that to pretend Berlin entered the academic world an apolitical, impartial observer of past thought is a

³⁷⁹ Berlin, 'Benjamin Disraeli, Karl Marx, and the Search for Identity' [1970], (Also see n.22 *Introduction*).

³⁸⁰ Cracraft, 'A Berlin for Historians', p.282.

³⁸¹ Yael Tamir, quoted James Cracraft, 'A Berlin for Historians', p.284.

³⁸² Isaiah Berlin, 'Fathers and Children' [1970], in *Russian Thinkers*, p.297.

misunderstanding. In fact, it is persuasive to view his supposed 'apolitical', and 'passive', authorial role as proof of the internalisation of an unquestioned value system, where a 'liberal' stance is seen as natural, human – apolitical.

What is clear is that the details of his life, and the development of his attitudes through close relationships with people and institutions at the heart of the decision-making process in the Anglo-American and Zionist world, have significant ramifications in the written work of Berlin. His role in academic discourse should not be conceived as isolated from his role in national political culture. The residues of allegiance are evident through his thoughts on his adopted homeland: '[m]y ideas are very English, I've thrown in my lot with England. It's the best country in the world.'³⁸³ Anderson interprets Berlin's words in the following way:

'[this] patriotic conviction...is also a kind of exoneration. If our island story is so satisfactory, what more is there to theoretically add? So indeed, Berlin has not had all that much to say about the politics or thought of his adopted country....his Imagination has essentially been drawn elsewhere.'³⁸⁴

In a more convoluted but, equally powerful way, Berlin displays his allegiance to Anglo-American culture through his ontological standpoint, which remains consistent throughout his writing career. Berlin's ontology represents certain ideas and legitimates a strain of political imagination that has at its core certain conceptions of the state and the world that problematise Berlin's liberalism.

³⁸³ Jahanbegloo, *Conversations With Isaiah Berlin*, p.87.

³⁸⁴ Perry Anderson, 'The Pluralism of Isaiah Berlin', in *A Zone of Engagement* (London: Verso, 1992), p. 239-40.

Berlin and Method

Interpretation of Berlin has pondered over how to unravel his method. Answers have responded to Berlin's own 'parlour game' over assigning thinkers as either 'hedgehogs' or 'foxes'. The hedgehogs are those thinkers who pursue one big idea, whilst foxes are those who offer a more varied approach to intellectual life. One interpreter has written, 'Berlin writes like a fox, yet one senses he is really a hedgehog'.³⁸⁵ Others have picked up on the problems within Berlin's method in a more sophisticated manner. Anderson picks up on the complications within Berlin's style,

'There are two poles to his imagination. On the one hand, Berlin is fascinated by individual - often idiosyncratic - personalities, men like Belinsky or Hess...on the other hand, he constructs and pursues very general notions, broad *idees maitresses* like monism or positive freedom, through sweeping pedigrees through time'.³⁸⁶

The inference is that Berlin 'tries to have it both ways', that his intellectual project will sometimes throw up complicated methodological problems, as he never goes beyond a basic idea of 'historical empathy' to explain how he situates individual thinkers within their contexts, or alongside 'general notions'. Often, too, he will make implicit reference to the contemporary world. For instance, Berlin writes at the end of *Russian Thinkers*, 'The doubts Turgenev raised have not been stilled. The dilemma of morally sensitive, honest, and intellectually responsible men at a time of acute polarisation of opinion has, since his time, grown acute and world wide'³⁸⁷. This is an obvious comment on the polarisation of ideas in the cold war context, where he also makes a conscious judgment about the moral nature of intellectual responsibility. With this in mind, a

³⁸⁵ See Steven Lukes, 'An Unfashionable Fox', in Lilla, Dworkin & Silvers (eds.), *The Legacy of Isaiah Berlin*, pp.43-58.

³⁸⁶ Anderson, 'The Pluralism of Isaiah Berlin', p.231

³⁸⁷ Isaiah Berlin, 'Fathers and Children' [1970], p.303.

degree of scepticism seems the sensible approach when considering Berlin's work, because it can be easy to divorce Berlin's context from his style of writing. As Kenny writes,

'there is a tendency in recent writing about him to disconnect his thought from the acute dilemmas posed by the geopolitical contexts and crises that he experienced – on occasions as an engaged and partisan political actor...his thinking was moulded by his visceral opposition to particular traditions and ideologies....it is, for instance, tempting to regard his penchant for dichotomous categorisations....as the normative internalisation of the 'us' and 'them' logic animating the Cold War'.³⁸⁸

This is a reminder that Berlin's method and thought are intimately linked to a politically charged context. Kenny thinks that 'an interesting question that arises in terms of his intellectual impact is whether Britain's elite culture found particular uses for Berlin as an eloquent and 'exotic' legitimator of the indigenous polity, as much as he found inspiration in British intellectual sources'³⁸⁹. Thus, we are back to the allegation that affecting Berlin's method is his role as 'exotic legitimator' for a hegemonic social order. Linked to the concern that Berlin's texts are problematic methodological sites shot through with contemporary concerns, Berlin's most famous 'dichotomous categorisation', that of positive and negative liberty, has undergone a strenuous textual analysis in Arblaster's 'Vision and Revision'³⁹⁰. The article highlights the way in which Berlin amends his work between editions. Although seemingly innocuous, these changes can be of interest, especially if 'Berlin's revisions reflect a changed intellectual climate in which political commitment is taken more seriously than it was 20 years ago'³⁹¹.

One of Berlin's central stylistic problems is his keenness to list names which, 'starts to

³⁸⁸ Kenny, 'Isaiah Berlin's Contribution to Modern Political Theory', p.1036

³⁸⁹ Kenny, 'Isaiah Berlin's Contribution to Modern Political Theory', p.1037.

³⁹⁰ Anthony Arblaster, 'Vision and Revision: A Note on the Text of Isaiah Berlin's *Four Essays On Liberty*', *Political Studies*, 19 (1971), pp.81-86.

³⁹¹ Arblaster, 'Vision and Revision', p.82.

become pseudo-history: it contains enough names to suggest it is more than a piece of shorthand...(it) suggests a 'loci' of thinkers'³⁹². Naturally, this is a highly selective process. Arblaster picks up on the amendments Berlin makes between the 1954 version of 'Historical Inevitability' and the 1969 version. A list of names beginning with 'From Plato to Lucretius' becomes 'From Zeno to Spinoza', and 'from Thomas Hobbes to Lenin and Freud' was replaced by 'from Thomas Aquinas to Lenin and Freud'. As Arblaster comments 'the inclusion and exclusion of names in this particular catalogue looks exceptionally random'³⁹³. There are many more instance of this kind of alteration, which unquestionably 'undermines confidence in Berlin's judgement in selecting the names'³⁹⁴. This 'randomness' is also noticeable in other works. For example, in 'The Purpose of Philosophy', Berlin lists certain notions, and then writes, 'to take some central ideas completely at random'.³⁹⁵ This may say more about Berlin's writing style than his methodology, but with each incidence of 'randomness', Berlin's intellectual approach becomes weaker.

Arblaster cites some more intriguing alterations in later versions of 'Historical Inevitability' and 'Two Concepts of Liberty' which seem to be the 'moderation of many of the original anti-Marxist and anti-Communist phrases and comments, while occasionally a remark complimentary to Marx, Marxism or Marxists has been thrown in.'³⁹⁶ On another occasion, Marx and Engels suffer from 'guilt by association' when part of the text in 'Historical Inevitability' changes from 'the

³⁹² Collini, *English Past*, p.201.

³⁹³ Arblaster, 'Vision and Revision', p.85.

³⁹⁴ Arblaster, 'Vision and Revision', p.86.

³⁹⁵ Berlin, 'The Purpose of Philosophy' [1962] in *Concepts and Categories* (London: Pimlico, 1998), p.8.

³⁹⁶ Arblaster, 'Vision and Revision', p.84.

morality preached by Marx, by Engels, by Prussian nationalist historians, by Spengler, and by many another thinker' to 'the morality preached if not by Marx, then by most of the disciples of Engels and Plekhanov...'³⁹⁷ Another example of 'guilt by association' appears in 'The Purpose of Philosophy' which, in this case, may stem from the often casual tone of Berlin's writing:

'the notion of an army on the march with its emphasis on such virtues as loyalty, dedication, obedience, needed to overtake and crush the enemy (with which so much play has been made in the Soviet Union).'³⁹⁸

Here, it is perhaps a little unclear exactly what Berlin means. However, we are left with the Soviet Union textually linked with 'crushing the enemy'.

To return to his propensity to 'list' names, it is as though Berlin has quite a rigid conception of each 'thinker' in his mind, and he freely uses all of these conceptions as though the reader has precisely the same conception as he does. As we shall see, Berlin's *general* conception of thinkers often understates – or ignores – important *specific* aspects of their written work. Berlin does not undertake rigorous genealogical approaches of, say, a Nietzschean style;

'Genealogy, then, presupposes that its object has a stable or essential character...that permits us to individuate it intelligibly over time. What the genealogist denies is that this stable element is to be located in the object's purpose or value or meaning: it is precisely that feature which is discontinuous from point of origin to present-day embodiment.'³⁹⁹

In contrast to a Nietzschean methodological process, I would argue that Berlin does place emphasis on an 'object's purpose or value or meaning'. It is in this sense that Berlin presents a more continuous, and detectable, set of intellectual links between 'point of origin' and 'present-

³⁹⁷ Arblaster, 'Vision and Revision', p.84.

³⁹⁸ Berlin, 'The Purpose of Philosophy' [1962], p.9.

³⁹⁹ Brian Leiter, *Nietzsche On Morality* (London: Routledge, 2002), p.170.

day embodiment'. Linked to this, Berlin also attributes a static value, or meaning, to words such as 'power', 'choice', or 'humanness'. Berlin's approach, viewed as such, becomes increasingly dubious, as it is clear that Berlin places little importance on the possibility of temporal discontinuity. Tellingly, Berlin argued that the specific arguments of a theorist were less important than their 'general outlook', and the 'origin of ideas less interesting than their echoes'.⁴⁰⁰

Here is a strange methodological contradiction. Whilst Berlin believes in the value of understanding the 'general outlook' and the 'echoes' of a thinker's ideas, he has been constructed as a 'value-pluralist'. The belief in the 'incommensurable' nature of human values is a strange philosophical stance, if Berlin also believes in 'general outlooks' and 'echoes'. For, how can 'incommensurables' suddenly, magically, combine to 'create' general outlooks and echoes? It is in this sense that returning to the 'hedgehog and the fox' parlour game may confirm the fact that Berlin is indeed a hedgehog in foxes clothing. This gives added methodological weight to my argument that Berlin consistently employed powerful normative vocabularies that served as the discursive tools to 'passively' present an implicit 'instructive morality'.

Deconstructing the 'Berlinian'

The methodological argument over 'continuity' and 'discontinuity' may be over-simplistic, but does highlight a profound separation between Berlin's confident view of history and truth as supporting a common foundation for morality, and the 'postmodernist' impression of history as a problematised arena where truth and knowledge are shifting and uncertain, and the foundations

⁴⁰⁰ See Anderson, 'Isaiah Berlin's Pluralism', p.230.

for moral certainty are questioned. A useful counter-intellectual to Berlin is Michel Foucault, whose ideas on history and historical practice can be seen as contrasting strongly with Berlin's ideas. It

does need to be pointed out that Rabinow, in the introduction to the *Foucault Reader*, writes

'Foucault has often mistakenly been seen as a philosopher of discontinuity. The fault is partially his own; works such as *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and *The Order of Things* certainly do emphasise abrupt changes in the structures of discourse of the human sciences. But Foucault has also stressed, in other contexts, the longer-range continuities in cultural practices'⁴⁰¹

For Foucault these 'longer- range continuities' are classed as 'epochs'. Divining the evolution of language, and more specifically the relationship between language and political order, brings sense to the idea of history as a 'controlled' system of a kind that requires a careful and self-conscious interpretative approach. Foucault argues for the approach that considers 'rupture' and inconsistency in history, and viewing academic 'disciplines' as problematic and limited categories:

'in the disciplines that we call the history of ideas, the history of science....in those disciplines which, despite their names, evade very largely the work and methods of the historian, attention has been turned, on the contrary, away from vast unities like 'periods' or 'centuries' to the phenomena of rupture, of discontinuity.....Beneath the persistence of a particular genre, form, discipline or theoretical activity, one is now trying to detect the incidence of interruptions'⁴⁰².

Foucault is concerned with the foundation of knowledge, and similarly to Nietzsche recognises that claims to knowledge are provisional, arbitrary and open to contention. This logic applies to complex human concepts such as freedom or morality. In contrast Berlin, and the majority of his interpreters, impose limits and rules to which their 'theoretical activity' must adhere. This doesn't

⁴⁰¹ See P. Rabinow, 'Introduction', in P. Rabinow (ed.) *The Foucault Reader* (London: Penguin, 1984), p.9.

⁴⁰² Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p.4.

have to be an explicit or conscious imposition, and for Berlin this takes the form of his fixed conception of normality that imposes an 'instructive morality' on his subject matter. This is what has led some critics to say Berlin appears as an observer who lacks conscious rational conviction, and who 'admires liberal and nonliberal cultures alike as if they were artworks....[reducible to] common standards of truth and morality'⁴⁰³. Allegedly, this 'aestheticism'⁴⁰⁴, which Berlin fails to recognise, 'countenances the destruction of his liberalism'⁴⁰⁵. But this argument, revolving around the vocabulary of liberal political science, still does not consider the possibility that Berlin's liberalism may be *constructed* or *deconstructed* in ways other than examining his outward political stance. To claim Berlin is any *less* liberal because of his 'aestheticism', or deciding whether he is an 'agonistic' or 'benign' pluralist, is not the approach this study will take. To do so creates continuity where there is none, and merely prolongs the 'persistence' of a particular genre of vocabulary which, in turn, creates the deception of unity. Instead, the basis of Berlin's knowledge claims must be interrogated, and the implicit force of his activity emphasised.

I argue that the methodological basis of Berlin's work is problematic in a way that has not been properly elucidated in the literature. Clearly, Berlin cannot fail to impose his ideological preoccupations onto the static entity that is the 'shell' of the thinkers he interpreted, yet his writing is often presented as being the final voice of truth on a variety of thinkers. For instance, by merely approaching an interpretation of the Russian radical Alexander Herzen, Berlin is creating an activated space on which he imposes his own discursive pattern. There are startling examples of

⁴⁰³ Riley, 'Interpreting Isaiah Berlin's Liberalism', p.283.

⁴⁰⁴ See Patrick Gardiner, 'Freedom as an Aesthetic Idea', in *The Idea of Freedom*, pp.27-40

⁴⁰⁵ Riley, 'Interpreting Isaiah Berlin's Liberalism', p.283.

how this space can be occupied by the 'voice' of the commentator. For instance, Berlin writes about Herzen as 'high-spirited violently liberty loving'⁴⁰⁶, 'with considerable originality possessing affinities with views fully articulated only in our own time',⁴⁰⁷ 'inhabitants of the twentieth century scarcely need reminding of the tyranny of the great altruistic system'.⁴⁰⁸ Here are prime examples of how Berlin glosses a heavy layer of his own preoccupations onto the thought of another writer. But to venture further into the gravity of such action, I wish to be clear about my own ideas on method.

Deconstructive projects can uncover details of textual *practice* that can uncover surprising new interpretative results. Thus far I have argued that normative 'patterns of language' within Berlin's writing are not consciously 'commanded' by Berlin, yet can lead us to a clearer understanding of the nature of Berlin's textual power. It is clear that deconstructive interpretations are problematic. In Irene Harvey's words, the "problem' is the actual work of deconstruction'.⁴⁰⁹ Harvey's examination of Derrida questions the "actual' method of deconstruction. Where does one cut? What is borrowed? What is copied and what is cut? Where does the doubling stop and the re-mark over and above this begin?...Derrida claims...that deconstruction borrows all its resources from the text it analyses'.⁴¹⁰ This seems an exaggerated claim, perhaps a defiant gesture in the face of the inevitable subjectivity of the author, but perhaps it is better understood as the resistance of the 'self-effacement that is so characteristic of the treatment of the sign in

⁴⁰⁶ Isaiah Berlin, 'Introduction' in Alexander Herzen, *From the Other Shore* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1956), p.xiv.

⁴⁰⁷ Berlin, 'Introduction' in Herzen, *From the Other Shore*, p.xv.

⁴⁰⁸ Berlin, 'Introduction' in Herzen, *From the Other Shore*, p.xviii.

⁴⁰⁹ Irene Harvey, *Derrida and the Economics of Difference* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), p.28.

⁴¹⁰ Harvey, *Derrida and the Economics of Difference*, p.30

classical metaphysics'.⁴¹¹ To pursue the point;

'Derrida claims that certain terms in a text, or certain structures, more precisely, must be treated as symptoms or signs which if followed through the text will reveal an underlying system of constraints operating in the text and indeed that this almost totally invisible structure is that which governs, commands and organises the textual production itself'.⁴¹²

My approach is interested in detecting 'symptoms or signs which if followed through the text will reveal an underlying system of constraints operating in the text', thus revealing how Berlin's writing hinges on a normative vocabulary that defines and limits his thought. At this point, it is valuable to compare two differing readings of Italian philosopher Giovanni Battista Vico, by Edward Said and Berlin. Berlin's methodology can be further elucidated by taking into account his interpretation of Vico. The contrast with Said will be a useful way in which to further place Berlin in opposition to 'postmodern' interpretative trends. I will argue that Berlin's methodology of 'reconstructive imagination' is intellectually unconvincing, and analytically unsatisfactory in the face of theoretical advances in the twentieth century.

Berlin, Textual Practice and the Author

Tensions within Berlin's methodological approach circulate around his belief in 'reconstructive imagination' which, linked to his promotion of a pluralist world-view, highlights a rigid conception of human agency and authorial role. These conceptions act as a fixed lens through which to view thinkers. Anderson has made the point that Berlin often seemed to view thinkers in terms of his own idiosyncratic preoccupations,

⁴¹¹ Harvey, *Derrida and the Economics of Difference*, p.29

⁴¹² Harvey, *Derrida and the Economics of Difference*, p.31.

'seeing them [Vico and Herder] essentially as precursors of cultural pluralism, the tradition in which he situates himself, Berlin is disinclined to pay much attention to the themes of mental identity and emergent universality in their writings, which point in another direction.'⁴¹³

Elsewhere, Berlin has been accused of exaggerating Vico's originality.⁴¹⁴ Said has offered a very different interpretation of Vico. In Said's view, Vico argues that

'every text...stands between the scholar and the historical past – or rather, the text in its didactic simplicity, is often interpreted (because of its seeming clarity) as the reality of a past that its textual form misconstrues.'⁴¹⁵

But Berlin takes the view that there is the need for 'reconstructive imagination'⁴¹⁶, where a general impression of a thinker can be constructed from a comparatively vague non-textual basis. In the 'Concept of Scientific History' Berlin compares 'historical method' with 'linguistic or literary scholarship', where he writes,

'no scholar could emend a text without a capacity (for which no technique exists) for 'entering into the mind of' another society and age....how do gifted scholars in fact arrive at their emendations? They do all that the most exacting natural science would demand; they steep themselves in the material of their authors....in the end what guides them is a sense (which comes from a study of the evidence) of what a given author could, and what he could not have said; of what fits and what does not fit into the general pattern of his thought.'⁴¹⁷

If the practitioner is not as 'gifted', 'he can fall back only on inductive techniques, then, however accurate his discoveries of fact, they remain those of an antiquarian, a chronicler, at best an

⁴¹³ Anderson, 'Isaiah Berlin's Pluralism', p.232.

⁴¹⁴ (Hans Aarslef, 'Vico and Berlin', in *London Review of Books*, 3 (5-18 November 1981), p.6-7. Berlin replies to the criticism in the same issue. See also A. H. Scouten's review of *Vico and Herder*, in *Comparative Literature Studies*, 15 (1978), pp.336-40. Reply in 16 (1979), pp.141-5. Peter Burke has also attacked this 'myth making' in *Vico* (PM Series, 1985).

⁴¹⁵ Edward Said, *Beginnings* (London: Granta, 1997), p.203.

⁴¹⁶ Galipeau, *Isaiah Berlin's Liberalism*, p.19.

⁴¹⁷ Berlin, 'The Concept of Scientific History' [1960], in *Concepts and Categories*, p.137.

archaeologist, but not those of an historian.⁴¹⁸ This snobbish view of the superiority (and implicit *value*) of the Berlinian historical 'method' above other disciplines ironically lists archaeology as one of the useless 'inductive' techniques; ironic when you consider Foucault - less than a decade later - would publish *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, which would slowly redefine the way in which the academic world viewed the text as a source of knowledge. But, again quoting Trilling, much western cold war discourse retained simplistic thoughts about how to define the production of knowledge:

De Quincey's categories of *knowledge* and *power* are most pertinent here; the traditional scholarship, in so far as it takes literature to be chiefly an object of knowledge, denies or obscures that active power by which literature is truly defined. All sorts of studies are properly ancillary to the study of literature. For example, the study of the intellectual conditions in which a work of literature was made is not only legitimate but sometimes even necessary to our perception of its power. Yet when Professor Lovejoy in his influential book *The Great Chain of Being*, tells us that for the study of the history of ideas a really dead writer is better than one whose works are still enjoyed, we naturally pull up short and wonder if we are not in danger of becoming like the Edinburgh body-snatchers who saw *to it* that there were enough cadavers for study in the medical school.⁴¹⁹

Trilling seems to be gesturing towards the importance of some abstract 'active power' to the production of power. Whilst the idea of an 'underlying *something*' would be picked up by the existentialists, then properly confronted by Foucault, it seems the majority of western thinkers were looking backwards - towards vague essences - rather than forward, asking questions about how to confront 'traditional' forms of interpretation. Here is another example of Trilling's struggle to make sense of 'the unseen':

'In its historical meaning, influence was a word intended to express a mystery. It means a flowing-in, but not as a tributary river flows into the main stream at a certain observable

⁴¹⁸ Berlin, 'The Concept of Scientific History' [1960], p.136-7.

⁴¹⁹ Trilling, 'A Sense of the Past', p.187-8.

point...(but) the infusion of any kind of divine spiritual, moral, immaterial, or secret *power* or principle'.⁴²⁰

These 'historical meanings' were still very much a part of cold war language, for much discourse had not moved beyond liberal-traditional conceptions. And, as Foucault reminds us,

'If the history of thought could remain the locus of uninterrupted continuities, if it could endlessly forge connexions that no analysis could undo without abstraction, if it could weave, around everything men say and do, obscure synthesis that anticipate for him, prepare him and lead him endlessly towards his future it would provide a privileged shelter for the sovereignty of the consciousness'.⁴²¹

Galipeau interprets Berlin's thought the following way: 'Historical knowledge is about human agency, or collective and individual behaviour, or the meaning of acts and institutions; and because of this, intentions, motives, and purposes are essential to understanding and explaining history'.⁴²² In an almost antithetical interpretation to the post-modernist approach to Vico, Berlin allows the idea of 'reconstructive imagination' to run wild over the readings of texts. As Galipeau writes,

'Vico made it legitimate to say that we, as historians, can reconstruct in our imaginations the purposes and goals that motivated past actors. We can do this because, we, like our historical subjects, have goals and purposes which motivate us to action. By grasping hold of these intentions we give full, rounded, and realistic representation of past cultures and historical events'.⁴²³

Galipeau is echoing Berlin's interpretation of Vico, and Berlin's interpretation in turn can be read as Berlin justifying his own way of practicing history. It does seem a slightly inaccurate position to

⁴²⁰ Trilling, 'A Sense of the Past', p.196.

⁴²¹ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p.9.

⁴²² Galipeau, *Isaiah Berlin's Liberalism*, p.16.

⁴²³ Galipeau, *Isaiah Berlin's Liberalism*, p.18-19.

adopt, when one considers the *type* of history Berlin deals with. Rather than, as quoted earlier, Berlin 'absorbing and accepting (even the possibility of) a combination of 'historical method' and 'linguistic or literary scholarship', Berlin does not see that his own obscure angle of intellectual approach requires close regard of linguistics, discourse, and language.

If one is describing specific physical historical events, intention and motive are more easily definable. But if one attempts to describe and relate with an author within a general context, itself a highly problematic undertaking, then rather than relying on 'a sense of what a given author could, and what he could not have said' as a route to 'uncovering' knowledge, the scholar should concentrate on uncovering what Foucault describes as patterns of 'discursivity'. By focusing more firmly on the text the scholar can get closer to what Said describes as 'the possibility of, as well as the rule of formation for, subsequent texts.'⁴²⁴ Berlin claims he is creating 'depth of insight' or, as he terms it "deep' historical writing"⁴²⁵, but this aesthetic approach leads us to little more than the walk towards a masterpiece which, once viewed in close proximity, appears - in focus - as a blatant fake.⁴²⁶ Berlin can be located alongside other cold war intellectuals who advocated similar methodological approaches. Trilling wrote

'a very important step forward in the complication of our sense of the past was made when Whitehead and after him Lovejoy taught us to look not for the expressed but for the assumed ideas of an age, what Whitehead describes as the 'assumptions which appear so obvious that people do not know that they are assuming them because no other way of putting things has ever occurred to them'. But a regression was made by Professor Lovejoy [who] assured us that 'the ideas in serious reflective literature are, of course, in great part philosophical ideas in dilution'".⁴²⁷

⁴²⁴ Said, *Beginnings*, p.34.

⁴²⁵ See Isaiah Berlin, 'Is a Philosophy of History Possible?' [1978], in Yirmiahu Yovel (ed.), *Philosophy of History and Action* (Dordrecht: Reider, 1978) quoted in Galipeau, *Isaiah Berlin's Liberalism*, p.19.

⁴²⁶ This is also evident elsewhere, for instance 'The Purpose of Philosophy' [1962], p.10.

⁴²⁷ Trilling, 'A Sense of the Past', p.195. Trilling's quotes are unreferenced.

'Ideas' for Trilling are presented as static reflections of 'consciousness', or clues representative of 'an age'. Similarly to Berlin, Trilling views the 'search' for the 'assumed ideas' as the substance of the proper scholarly approach. Questions of agency and context fade into obscurity. To return to Said's earlier comments, it is clear that Berlin does not recognise, at least in the sense that Said does, that texts can and do 'misconstrue' the 'reality' of the historical past. With this in mind, it seems that Said can be seen as methodologically opposed to Berlin. Whilst Said would advocate careful, specific readings of texts - precisely *because* of their clarity - and afford them no special isolated value, Berlin is happy to afford special value not only to certain texts, but also to *authors*. We see authors, reconstructed as figures to revere; we realise Berlin is building up his conception of a given thinker, which he will soon place at our feet.

Foucault has inquired as to why the text should be thought of as an 'authored' piece at all. He calls for isolation - perhaps even the *dehumanisation* of a text - where Berlin calls for the expansion, the 'deepening' of insight through *humanising* the text, by heavily stressing the role of the author.

'It would seem that the author's name, unlike other proper names, does not pass from the interior of a discourse to the real and exterior individual who produced it; instead, the name seems always to be present, marking off the edges of the text, revealing, or at least characterizing, its mode of being. The author's name manifests the appearance of a certain discursive set and indicates the status of this discourse within a society and a culture'.⁴²⁸

⁴²⁸ Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?' in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader*, p.107.

Foucault wishes to 'entirely reverse the traditional idea of the author'⁴²⁹, namely a process which would prevent 'authors' being viewed as superior to all other men. It seems Berlin believes certain 'authors' (for instance Herzen and Vico) transcend the norm. However, Foucault believes,

'if we are accustomed to presenting the author as a genius, as a perpetual surging of invention, it is because, in reality, we make him function in exactly the opposite fashion. One can say that the author is an ideological product, since we represent him as the opposite of his historically real function (When a historically given function is represented in a figure that inverts it, one has an ideological production.) The author is therefore the ideological figure by which one marks the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning'.⁴³⁰

Although this passage makes reference to authors of fiction, the ideological implications of Foucault's argument are also applicable to works of philosophy for - surely - the 'author function' is still in action. Perhaps a fresher, more immediate problem when viewing the authorship of works by Herzen and Vico is *intention*. In comparison to authors of fiction, authors of more formal texts are in one sense more easy to identify, but in other ways more elliptical. This is because authorly intention - although ostensibly visible - may be hidden, and subsequently prone to alternative interpretations. It is in this sense that Berlin can reconstruct 'the way Herzen was', or 'the way Herzen thought' with an air of authority. Because Herzen's authorly intention is not seriously explored by Berlin, the question of intention is left languishing in the obscure grey discourse it was born in. Berlin, probably having read all Herzen wrote, 'imaginatively reconstructed' the 'way Herzen may have thought'. This 'imaginative reconstruction' now seems vague and irresponsible. Thoughts about discourse or intention are bypassed for simplistic notions that, by Berlin's

⁴²⁹ Foucault, 'What is an Author?', p.118.

⁴³⁰ Foucault, 'What is an Author?', p.119.

reasoning, 'accord with life'. An example of Berlin's methodological flaw (in terms of exaggerating the role and value of the 'author function') can be seen in very stark terms in the following passage:

'Herzen's basic political ideas are unique not merely by Russian, but also by European standards. Russia is not so rich in first-rate thinkers that she can afford to ignore one of the three moral preachers of genius born upon her soil'⁴³¹ . . .

Firstly, Berlin using the phrase 'first-rate' raises the issue of whether his perception of thinkers requires, for him, a system of mental 'ranking' and, secondly, assigning Herzen the status of 'genius' serves to 'represent him as the opposite of his historically real function'. Thirdly, Berlin writes that political ideas have certain 'standards' and - implicit to the construction of the sentence - European standards are normally 'higher' than Russian ones. It is persuasive to view this as a product of the cold war context, explaining Berlin's wish to 'define' Russia's separateness from the European experience. The same can be said of Berlin's general interpretation of Herzen. Arblaster wrote that Berlin was

'generally over-anxious to claim Herzen for his own tradition of empiricist liberalism, as someone committed primarily to 'the preservation of individual liberty', and implacably opposed to the sacrifice of individuals... 'upon the alter of idealised abstractions... This is somewhat misleading, since Herzen certainly regarded himself as a socialist.'⁴³²

It is in this sense that Berlin's attempt to delve 'into the mind of' Herzen results in an interpretation that is more reflective of Berlin's own ideological preoccupations in the cold war period.

To return to the way in which Berlin unflinchingly discusses 'high culture' and 'genius',

⁴³¹ Berlin, 'Herzen and Bakunin on Individual Liberty' [1955], in *Russian Thinkers*, p. 83.

⁴³² Arblaster, *The Rise and Decline of Western Liberalism*, p.268.

whilst discussing the discovery of 'specialised techniques' in 'The Purpose of Philosophy' he writes that 'discoveries by men of genius in these fields, once they are established, can be used by men of no genius at all in a semi-mechanical manner in order to obtain correct results'.⁴³³ In another sentence, Berlin writes: 'What Mazzini did for the Italians, Herzen did for his countrymen: he created, almost single-handed, the tradition and the 'ideology' of systematic revolutionary agitation, and thereby founded the revolutionary movement in Russia'⁴³⁴. Again, we are confronted with a 'Berlinian' rigid conception, this time with respect to historical events; to compare Mazzini's influence with Herzen's is to assume the reader has the same conception of Mazzini and Herzen that Berlin does. If we do not, we are asked merely to trust Berlin's judgement. Also, drawing direct parallels between two geographically separate men is as problematic as the assignation and comparison of Russian and European 'standards'. With these two brief sentences alone, Berlin is on shaky methodological ground.

Berlin and Postmodernism

For James Cracraft, Berlin counteracts the 'historiographical crisis precipitated by a 'postmodernist' assault on history's core values.'⁴³⁵ Two more recent articles also argue for Berlin's continued methodological relevance.⁴³⁶ Cracraft paints the picture of Berlin as the compassionate, humane individual whose work has 'an emotional depth as well as a sophisticated breadth'⁴³⁷. The

⁴³³ Berlin, 'The Purpose of Philosophy' [1962], p.2.

⁴³⁴ Berlin, 'Herzen and Bakunin on Individual Liberty' [1955], p.83.

⁴³⁵ Cracraft, 'A Berlin for Historians', p.299.

⁴³⁶ Plaw, 'Isaiah Berlin and the Plurality of Histories', *passim.*; Zakaras, 'Isaiah Berlin's Cosmopolitan Ethics', *passim.*

⁴³⁷ Cracraft, 'A Berlin for Historians', p.299.

reasons Cracraft gives for the special 'Berlinian' perspective, which constitutes a view of history as a 'moral discipline, and one to be practiced accordingly with all the sympathy, imagination, insight and judgment that the historian can muster'⁴³⁸ stems from

'the authority of a witness, from childhood, of some of the greatest upheavals of the twentieth century, including the Russian Revolution, the rise of Hitler, World War II, the Holocaust (in which he lost both grandfathers, among other Riga relatives), the regime of Stalin, and the birth of Israel, experiences which freed him of any utopian illusions and inclined him to a tragic view of life.'⁴³⁹

Yet, Berlin does not always appear too distant from idealist-utopian thinking. He has spoken of 'hope of a rational order on earth'⁴⁴⁰, showing he is both looking to the future, and conceiving of a better way, or a perfect way of life. As quoted in the previous chapter, his last published words consisted of a plea towards an Israeli-Palestinian peace in the future. Berlin, in Cracraft's eyes, is imbued with an authority which derives from his 'plural inheritance and plural identity'⁴⁴¹ which, presumably, can also be thought of as Berlin's philosophy of history; and perhaps his methodology stems, in part, from his personal knowledge that people accept his seemingly irremovable authority, linked with his 'exotic' academic persona.

Cracraft's article does seem simplistic when concerned with methodology. Whilst stating Berlin views it necessary to 'enter into people's motives...the movement of their thoughts and feelings', Cracraft then writes 'for Berlin...history was not foremost a theoretical exercise but rather a 'human study'.⁴⁴² In an unashamedly arbitrary fashion, Cracraft states historians must

⁴³⁸ Cracraft, 'A Berlin for Historians', p.296-7.

⁴³⁹ Cracraft, 'A Berlin for Historians', p.298-9.

⁴⁴⁰ Berlin, 'The Purpose of Philosophy' [1962], p.10.

⁴⁴¹ Cracraft, 'A Berlin for Historians', p.298.

⁴⁴² Cracraft, 'A Berlin for Historians', p.296.

'understand, rather than just classify or describe....we cannot in so doing adopt a determinist perspective, Berlin contends, if only because we cannot seriously or consistently adopt a determinist self-conception'⁴⁴³. An equally unsatisfying statement is concerned with the proper study of 'patterns' within the historical discipline - 'patterns which satisfy us because they accord with life'. Paradoxically, this trajectory of thinking is both ambiguous and, in its own way, determinist.

Rather than focus on the 'major political philosophers of the modern period', Berlin has 'sympathy for the informal and undoctinal, [revealing] one of the attractive features of his work'⁴⁴⁴. But this can be a dangerous pursuit, for 'where there are elements in a particular corpus of ideas which for one reason or another are uncongenial to Berlin, his characteristic procedure can free him from the need to accord them proportionate attention'⁴⁴⁵. This 'procedure' involves Berlin discounting 'specific arguments' whilst stressing 'general outlooks' - or replacing 'documented origins' with 'presumed effects'.

'Berlin's accounts of - for example - Tolstoy's view of history, or Herzen's brand of politics, or Mill's conception of value, understate central aspects of each: the simple chauvinism of *War and Peace* or mysticism in *Anna Karenina*, the agrarian socialism of *The Bell*, the declared utilitarianism of *On Liberty*. The result is to make each sound subtly closer to their commentator than they are.'⁴⁴⁶

It is worth noting Anderson's comments on Berlin's reading of Machiavelli. Earlier it was mentioned that Berlin's readings of Vico and Herder saw them as 'precursors of cultural pluralism'. Anderson

⁴⁴³ Cracraft, 'A Berlin for Historians', p.297.

⁴⁴⁴ Anderson, *A Zone of Engagement*, p.231.

⁴⁴⁵ Anderson, *A Zone of Engagement*, p.231.

⁴⁴⁶ Anderson, *A Zone of Engagement*, p.232.

writes

'Machiavelli plays a rather similar role in Berlin's vision, becoming the stepping stone to a tolerant liberalism. In this interpretation, the scandal his work provoked lay not in Machiavelli's counsels of princely crime, but in his equable observation of contrasting civic and Christian virtues. The only evidence for this claim, abundantly disproved by centuries of polemic, is the autobiographical illumination Berlin reports in these pages - the intellectual discovery he himself made on reading Machiavelli. In such annexations, philosophical advocacy visibly takes precedence over historical balance. Detached from their context, ideas are gracefully *umfunktioniert* for present purposes'⁴⁴⁷.

In an intensive exploration, Anderson illustrates how Berlin's repetitious use of the famous sentence from Kant ('Out of the crooked timber of humanity no straight thing was ever made'), with the purposeful contrast of the 'bent' and the 'straight', actually tells the 'opposite story from its proverbialization'. Anderson argues that

'so far from Kant insisting on the irremediable crookedness of humanity in general, he uses the self-same term - *krumm* - to describe the kind of timber humanity need *not* become in a well-ordered civic union, where something straight - *gerade* - is just what can indeed be made'⁴⁴⁸.

It is these subtle difficulties within Berlin's unproblematised interpretations of thinkers that highlight further the potential for Berlin's methodology to act as a conduit for Berlin's assumptions and preoccupations. Although I would strongly argue these methodological flaws, and the textual practice Berlin employs, relegates Berlin to intellectual ground away from postmodernist theory, one interpreter has disagreed. Millar Jones has compared Berlin to Ernst Bloch, where 'the connection of the concept of *Heimat* to cultural specificity indicates that Bloch shares a

⁴⁴⁷ Anderson, 'Isaiah Berlin's Pluralism', p.232. See 'The Pursuit of The Ideal', 'in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, p.7-8 and 'The Originality of Machiavelli', in *Against The Current*, p.79 for examples.

⁴⁴⁸ Anderson, *A Zone of Engagement*, p.234.

consciousness of the plurality of cultures with thinkers like Berlin⁴⁴⁹. Furthermore, 'for both Bloch and Berlin, human loyalty can only be inspired by the particular and the familiar, not by arguments based on appeals to abstract universal reason'⁴⁵⁰. These are, arguably, the primary motivating concerns of Berlin the thinker. His awareness of the plurality of cultures developed into an idea of concreteness - 'the particular and the familiar' - which defined cultural traditions and *mores*. This 'cultural identification' forms the basis for Berlin's objection to 'utopian universalism'⁴⁵¹. Returning to plurality, Millar Jones writes,

'Isaiah Berlin differs from Popper in that he embraces the aspect of plurality in postmodernism, perhaps not with the delight of Lyotard, but certainly with the conviction that pluralism is the inevitable condition of social reality and that there will always exist a certain amount of disharmony'⁴⁵².

I think that the problem with Millar Jones's assertion is either a misunderstanding of Berlin's pluralism or an impossibly broad conception of postmodernity. Millar Jones's conception of Berlin's plurality certainly does not take into account the anachronistic and often idealised way in which Berlin approach towards texts and authors. It should become clear in the next section of my thesis that Berlin's ideas on 'social reality' and 'disharmony' were far more problematic than Millar Jones assumes. As Kelley writes, 'the postmodern predicament, or at least its rhetoric, posits an end to subject-centred rationality, a decentering of language, the illusory character of presence, and a radical indeterminacy of meaning.'⁴⁵³ Kelley describes the preponderance of 'eclecticism' in the practice of intellectual history, from the Greeks onwards, and it seems that the (post)modern

⁴⁴⁹ Millar Jones, *Assembling (Post)modernism*, p.7.

⁴⁵⁰ Millar Jones, *Assembling (Post)modernism*, p.8.

⁴⁵¹ Millar Jones, *Assembling (Post)modernism*, p.8.

⁴⁵² Millar Jones, *Assembling (Post)modernism*, p.73.

⁴⁵³ Donald R. Kelley, *The Descent of Ideas: The History of Intellectual History* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2002), p.306.

intellectual historian must embrace forms of eclecticism when approaching a subject matter that, after all, has language and rhetoric at the intellectual foreground. It is this sense that I feel distanced from the methodology of Berlin, who appears, in his moralistic timbre, to accept the possibility of 'subject-centred rationality', the possibility of determinacy of meaning, as he employs 'reconstructive imagination' on his subject matter.

Conclusion: Towards a Berlinian Ontology

The chapters in this thesis thus far have attempted to lay the contextual foundations for an elucidation of a 'Berlinian ontology'. Elements of Berlin's personal biography serve to demonstrate the weight he assigned to his personal experiences of violence, of separation, of identity and allegiance, of place and of human psychology. I began by arguing for a cold war context that privileges the function of language within narrative structures. These narrative structures point towards new ways to understand the role of the intellectual. I then attempted to illustrate the active and passive aspects of Berlin's intellectual role, emphasising how his role should be viewed as shifting between different politicised contexts. This chapter has analysed broad methodological problems within the work of Berlin, as well as working towards explaining my own methodological convictions, revolving around imaginative theories of the text and the author that depart significantly with Berlin's approach towards his subject matter.

I would agree that Berlin's methodological approach, termed as 'reconstructive imagination', sustains the modernist use of "metanarratives" whose secret terroristic function was

to ground and legitimate the illusion of a 'universal' human history'.⁴⁵⁴ Unlike Millar Jones, I do not view Berlin's 'plurality' as the 'laid back pluralism' of the post-modern, but a taut Oxbridge pluralism, bound up with ideological preoccupations to which the text does not immediately alert us. Moreover, it is the assumed 'normality' of the language Berlin deploys which can steer us towards the prickly ideological reality which allowed the text to emerge as it did.

The purpose of the first section of the thesis has been to argue that the key to understanding Berlin's impact, influence, and even solid contextual grounding, is to search the 'unseen' operations of language. I view an interrogation of the implicit, the passive, and the 'invisible structures' of Berlin's textual output as the crucial method to arrive at a convincing, multi-layered and original interpretation of Isaiah Berlin the author. Within this complex network of textual output will emerge definite vocabularies of power, which themselves reflect the contextual factors I have surveyed. These vocabularies contain the language of assumption and normality and, at root, embody the dominating matrix of cold war values. Bringing together these strands will culminate in what I have termed a new 'Berlinian ontology'. I now must turn away from the informing contexts and methodologies I have analysed, and begin look at the precise function of Berlin's textual output.

⁴⁵⁴ Terry Eagleton, 'Awakening from Modernity', *Times Literary Supplement*, 20 February 1987, quoted in David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p.9.

PART 2 - Text

5

Ontology, Space and Normality

Introduction

Berlin's textual output had, at its foundation, language patterns shaped by normative assumptions. These assumptions can be implicitly - and occasionally explicitly - identified in the work of Berlin. Berlin consistently employs what I term a 'vocabulary of assumption', utilising certain words and phrases that serve to construct a normatively charged ontological position. Ironically, Berlin approached questions of 'common sense' in his earlier work, and did seek to understand the origins of assumption in the history of ideas. However, the way in which Berlin conceives this methodological problem differs from the way in which I conceive the operations of the language of normality.

This chapter is an attempt to further explore the conceptual and methodological difficulties faced in the thesis. An analysis of the work of Thomas Dumm brings into focus many of the themes I have explored. Dumm introduces the concept of normality to explain the ontological framework that coloured Berlin's writing. This innovative argument goes beyond many interpretations by engaging with the foundations of the liberal tradition, suggesting that the liberal-pluralism promoted by thinkers such as Berlin is restrictive. The implication of Dumm's interpretation is that there are 'sites', or spaces, where freedom is expressed, and these spaces are detectable through an examination of Berlin's use of language.

Human nature is an important concept in the work of Berlin, and the conception of the human subject is central to his intellectual project, and his ontological commitment. Berlin's fixed

idea of human nature is a feature of the liberal tradition, and is linked to the language of normality, and the wider context of cold war values. The chapter is intended as an expansion on the concept of power. The links between reality and representation are expanded upon, and attempts are made to explain how Berlin is able to present authoritative expressions. This adds another layer onto the impression that Berlin is only *ostensibly* passive.

Especially important in the cold war context is the way in which Berlin presented Soviet ideology as 'unnatural', whilst liberal ideas are presented as 'natural', and uncontested. Another integral aspect of cold war discourse is the idea of otherness. It can be argued that Berlin entered into cold war 'orientalism' and created the impression of a hierarchy of cultures, with the westernised value system at the apex. Berlin's treatment of Soviet culture and writers reflects a certain 'ethno-hierarchy' that is indicative of deeper geopolitical assumptions and categorisations. I take the view that the impact of 'ordinary language' in the textual output of Berlin served to support the operations of power in the cold war context. The next chapter, more specifically focused on determinism and assumption, acts as the continuation of the textual analysis employed in this chapter.

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Berlin discusses 'common sense' explicitly in 'Empirical Propositions and Hypothetical Statements', first published in 1950, in the journal *Mind*. In this essay, Berlin explores phenomenology through the lens of 'common sense'. It was through his early writing on formal philosophical questions that he became preoccupied with questions of 'ordinary language', and

'common sense' in relation to philosophical questions⁴⁵⁵. This period of thought was defined by his involvement with 'the essentially conversational'⁴⁵⁶ group of Oxford philosophers in the 1930s. This group contributed strongly to the general movement towards linguistic philosophy.⁴⁵⁷ In a recent article, Peter Skagestad refers to the influence of R.G. Collingwood on the thought of Berlin.

Through Skagestad's assertion that Berlin inherited the belief that 'philosophy is the study of basic frameworks and categories'⁴⁵⁸ and that Berlin, perhaps not consciously, 'adopted Collingwood's doctrine of absolute presuppositions'⁴⁵⁹, the picture is painted of Berlin as a thinker whose thought derives from detectable and solid roots. Crucially, his thought is also portrayed as rigidly defined and containing a belief in 'presuppositions'. I will be arguing that Berlin did indeed have a rigidly defined set of intellectual traits, but I will take the argument further than Skagestad. I will attempt to paint a picture of the *ontological* framework that shaped Berlin's thought, and generated the contradictions detectable through an examination of the man and his work. I link Berlin's ontology to his consistent use of the language of the familiar - hence the brief description of those philosophers who discuss 'common sense' as a tool to understand the world.

It has not escaped my attention that it could be argued my approach has parallels with Berlin's own. In much of his work, Berlin attempts to explain distant ideas by stressing the context

⁴⁵⁵ It is perhaps salient to mention the prominent group of philosophers drawn to the 'philosophy of the ordinary', including J. L. Austin, Gilbert Ryle, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Peter Strawson and John Wisdom. Wittgenstein believed the 'meanings' of words are to be found in their 'ordinary' uses, and particularly that we may discover that there is no single entity to which the word 'truth' corresponds. This is something Wittgenstein attempts to elucidate through his concept of a 'family resemblance'.

⁴⁵⁶ Bernard Williams 'Introduction' in *Concepts and Categories*, p.xiii.

⁴⁵⁷ See 'I'm Going To Tamper With Your Beliefs A Little'.

⁴⁵⁸ Peter Skagestad, 'Collingwood and Berlin: A Comparison', p.108.

⁴⁵⁹ Skagestad, 'Collingwood and Berlin: A Comparison', p.111.

of assumption.⁴⁶⁰ I also discuss assumption, but relate the discussion far closer to a self-conscious appreciation of what *creates* assumption, and how the 'language of the ordinary' can express and reinforce certain ideals that are not stated explicitly through the text. For instance, where Berlin writes 'the central assumption of common thought and speech seems to be that freedom is the principal characteristic that distinguishes man from all that is non-human'⁴⁶¹, there are a whole set of assumptions about 'common thought', 'man', 'freedom' and even processes such as 'distinguishing' that Berlin did not view as problematic or loaded with assumption. I intend to widen the whole field of argument through exploring notions of space and normality. This, linked with my reservations over Berlin's methodology discussed in the last chapter, should make clear the fundamental differences between Berlin's methodology and my own.

Ontology, Normality and the Liberal Tradition

If I use the phrase 'ontology' frequently, it is because I view the term as embodying certain factors that relate to the ordering of intellectualised activity. In the context of my study, I view Berlin's ontological position to be the consistent expression of a specific *philosophy of existence*. This philosophy of existence is explicitly and implicitly suggested through the writing of Berlin, and must partly be understood with reference to the fact that he does not readily acknowledge his ontology. As I discussed in the Introduction, ontology should not be viewed as divorced from context, but dependent on contextual factors that shape ontological commitment. Through the study of Berlin's use of language, I can construct a new layer of interpretation that attempts to

⁴⁶⁰ See Isaiah Berlin, 'From Hope and Fear Set Free' [1964], in *Liberty, passim*.

⁴⁶¹ Berlin, 'From Hope and Fear Set Free' [1964], p.270.

theorise on the internalisation, and subsequent expression, of certain assumptions. Through an examination of Berlin's conception of normality we can properly understand the core of Berlin's assumptions. His conception of normality therefore impacted on his use of language in the broadest sense and created identifiable vocabularies.

In the following chapters I seek to do several things. Firstly, I wish to arrive at a solid conception of what type of liberal Isaiah Berlin was. I agree with Dumm's broad postulate that liberals deal with 'politics that addresses the state'.⁴⁶² In this sense politics is formally arranged around perspectives that do not enter into different 'spheres' - for instance, many liberals will insist on the separation between public and private.⁴⁶³ Liberalism's anti-monist anxiety would be concerned that radical commentators such as the 'neo-Nietzscheans' are interested with general attempts to organise power beyond the limited confines of 'the political'. I view this as the political perspective verses the ontological perspective. In attempting to understand Berlin's liberalism, I will be approaching his work from an ontological perspective. Following on from this is the need, secondly, to clarify the exact relationship between the conception of 'normality' and Berlin's conception of freedom. I will make clear that this relationship has much to do with implicit assumptions and what I have termed an 'instructive morality' - a kind of *modus operandi* on Berlin's part. This morality is itself indicative of wider cold war concerns, where external intellectual pressures (most prevalent in the formal discourse of cold war) become manifested

⁴⁶² Thomas Dumm, *Michel Foucault and the Politics of Freedom* (London: SAGE, 1994).

⁴⁶³ See Jahanbegloo, *Conversations With Isaiah Berlin*, p.42 for Berlin's brief comments on this perceived split.

through an internalising process that pervades not only conscious anticommunist 'speech-acts', but the whole configuration of language.

This internalisation of the liberal ethic is a process of entrenchment; of values, attitudes and the 'normal'. The 'normal', through constant repetition, and its eventual disappearance into the background of assumption, becomes reinforced as the one thing placed beyond rational speculation. This 'background of assumption' is the place where the power of cold war liberalism resides. Beyond deliberation, reflection and realisation, this background becomes normalised as 'the natural' foundation of liberal values. In a sense, this exemplifies Berlin's thought to the extent that his idea on 'incommensurability of values' can be viewed as his ontological statement on human nature. The 'background of assumption' disguises the unavoidable fact that Berlin is presenting one form of moral knowledge. Instead, it is taken as a given that Berlin's liberal ontology is the natural state of humanity. Dumm goes further with this, arguing that because Berlin (and all liberal thinkers) create this 'space' where one form of knowledge dominates, liberal ideas of freedom are fundamentally flawed, for they are not grounded in, or reflective of, the transgressive nature of all possible freedoms. This is a potentially devastating yet disregarded critique of Berlin, for it attacks him at a level beyond the normalised nature of formal political philosophy thereby undermining the current piecemeal assessment of Berlin's thought. Berlin's work, in this light, evades deeper theological or ontological questions by basing his work in the foundation of the dominant normality.

My final aim, linked closely to the concept of power, is to expand the examination of Berlin's relationship with 'the other'. As a consequence, what I argue flies in the face of recent

scholarship, as detailed in my Introduction. Certainly; in the field of political theory, numerous academics cite Berlin's philosophy as a philosophy for a peaceful and tolerant future. I am wary of such work, as I am wary of the legitimacy the liberal tradition expects for itself: an expectation itself born from the widespread liberal belief in the universal 'rightness' of the values underpinning liberal thought. In his lecture 'Democracy, Communism and the Individual', given in 1949, Berlin states, "eighteenth century rationalism' is the root of both liberal democracy and of communism, since both draw on the notion that questions of morals and politics are susceptible to a scientific approach that will yield certain knowledge'.⁴⁶⁴ Rather puzzlingly, Berlin discusses elsewhere the primacy of Romanticism in the origins of liberal democracy. European rationalism, culminating with the Enlightenment, was 'the belief that values, the answers to questions of action and choice, could be discovered at all'.⁴⁶⁵ and that the Romantic movement 'maintained that there were no answers to some of these questions'.⁴⁶⁶ Berlin even brings the Romantic movement back to Machiavelli who, for Berlin, first identified the reality of incommensurable values shaping human interrelations. Berlin observes that Romantic thought 'is first traceable in the innocent pages of Rousseau and Kant'⁴⁶⁷, and is detectable in the existential movement.⁴⁶⁸ It seems the origins of twentieth century European pluralism can be found in the work of a diverse collection of thinkers. The overarching sense of Berlin building an awkward sense of continuity in European thought is evident in the following quote,

⁴⁶⁴ Crowder, Isaiah Berlin, p.45.

⁴⁶⁵ Berlin, 'The Romantic Revolution' [1960], p.175.

⁴⁶⁶ Berlin, 'The Romantic Revolution' [1960], p.175.

⁴⁶⁷ Berlin, 'The Romantic Revolution' [1960], p.176.

⁴⁶⁸ Berlin, 'The Romantic Revolution' [1960], p.190.

'my thesis is that by their positive doctrine that romantics introduced a new set of values, not reconcilable with the old, and that most Europeans are today the heirs of both opposing traditions. We accept both outlooks, and shift from one foot to the other in a fashion that we cannot avoid if we are honest with ourselves, but which is not intellectually coherent'.⁴⁶⁹

The 'opposing' traditions are the 'rationalist' enlightenment legacy and the romantic movement. The sense that Berlin is 'having it both ways' illustrates the way in which he attempts to create the impression that all forms of thought gravitate towards a naturalised liberalism. The foundation for twenty-first century 'Berlinian' liberalism is, therefore, based in a set of normalised assumptions about the progress of European thought. This intellectual process is essentially a metanarrative that views the history of thought in great swathes that detracts from a detailed appreciation of the particular author. On the contrary, I wish to move away from this outdated form of analysis and view Berlin in a definitive normative context. Only then can a suitable appreciation of Berlin's power as an author begin to unravel.

Berlin, Human Nature and Power

Linked to the process of 'naturalisation', and the creation of an illusory 'liberal' continuity in European thought, are questions that touch upon earlier thoughts on Berlin's location within western hegemonic culture in the cold war context. At the heart of this issue is the need to make sense of, and define, the concept of 'power'. Before I treat the formal historiographical connotations of the term 'power' I wish to build a picture of how I view the concepts of power, human nature and assumption as interacting in nineteenth and twentieth century discourse. The

⁴⁶⁹ Berlin, 'The Romantic Revolution' [1960], p.175.

work of Tocqueville is important in relation to Berlin, as Tocqueville theorises on a new type of power that, it could be argued, defines the 'hidden' impact modern liberal-democratic states have on the individual.

Berlin's work, as his preoccupations with the Enlightenment and Romantic 'legacies' attest, does deal with evolving questions on human nature and the role of assumption. However, I am more interested in the non-evolving concept of human nature in the use of language that Berlin employs. In the contemporary context the liberal 'non-evolving concept of human nature' requires serious re-evaluation in a socio-political climate where violence continues to grip peoples lives. The term 'inhuman' is used to express the incomprehensibility of violent acts; maybe the willingness to label those acts as perpetrated by 'fanatics-less-than-human' is a common theme in western culture, as this moral-religious statement banishes the difficult process of looking at the dominant culture as less than perfect. A pre-occupation in the work of Berlin is a condemnation of certain configurations of power that emanate from formal state institutions and structures, without paying much attention to the ways in which 'power' can manifest itself in other ways. This is important in the way Berlin dismisses Chomsky's article on censorship as 'improper'. Acknowledging that certain political acts can become manifested as acts of representation is as important as realising the 'central', traditionally identifiable and visible, operations of power. These representations of power are also linked closely to ideas on agency. For Berlin, human agency – a central concern throughout his work – is based on a firm conception of power, itself supported by a set of common assumptions.

The genealogy of the modern concept of power may offer some indications of how we

should understand its normative, moral, and ideological connotations. Machiavelli's *The Prince* is intensely shot through with a concept of political, or princely, power that is conceived as noticeable, human willed, and a break with the old pretence that the attainment of political power is secret. It could be argued that from Machiavelli onwards, conceptualisations of 'power' are closely related to ideas on 'human nature'. From Hobbe's pessimism, to Burke's distrust of 'the masses', a degree of conservatism has defined political philosophy's conception of human nature. For Marx, 'human nature' was crushed beneath the heel of capitalism. The proletariat, exploited and alienated, could never realise the potentiality of their innate humanness whilst shackled to bourgeois economics, ideas, culture and religion. Interestingly, Marx makes much of the *dehumanisation* of the industrial worker. Marx based his concern that workers become part of a machine that envelops body and mind on his generally positive view of the potential of human nature. For Marx, there exists the possibility of 'true' freedom if human nature is allowed to flourish away from the machine and capital. In Fetscher's words Marx conceived human nature as

'limited and dependent on nature, but at the same time capable of transforming nature and adapting it to his most daring ideas and plans...to really liberate himself...he has to overcome the present alienated and alienating socioeconomic system and to replace it by an organisation of production that corresponds to his rational, enlightened wishes.'⁴⁷⁰

Nevertheless, it must not be forgotten that this concept of human nature is a rigid one, and one that must be adhered to, which in itself can mean a new form of repression over the individual.⁴⁷¹

More fluid conceptions of human nature were set out by Freud, Nietzsche, and the existentialist

⁴⁷⁰ Irving Fetscher, 'Karl Marx on Human Nature', *Social Research*, 40 (1973), pp.466-7.

⁴⁷¹ See Tom Bottomore, 'Is there a Totalitarian View of Human Nature?', *Social Research*, 40 (1973), pp.429-42; Fetscher, 'Karl Marx on Human Nature', pp.443-67.

movement in the twentieth century. In a comparatively short space of time, early twentieth century thought in Europe began to identify a complex mélange of dishonesty, neuroses, and disillusionment. Culture was exposed as rarely allowing the full flourishing of 'human nature'. The fact that human limits were rarely explored or faced up to was a source of anger for existentialists who began to view the individual within modern society as fundamentally dishonest, unhappy or lost. Ideas around agency and responsibility began to transform and politics too was implicated in the struggle to break 'the subject' from its essentialist shackles. This more politicised struggle was personified by Sartre who self-consciously attempted to combine elements of existentialism with Marxism for an avenue out of twentieth century ignorance. The broad waves of structuralism and 'postmodernism' that would eventually follow were criticised for the reassertion of Nietzschean ideas, with thinkers such as George Steiner reminding intellectuals that a form of religious spirituality is essential in the face of postmodern sterility, intellectual shallowness and the perceived lack of certainty.⁴⁷² Naturally, much radical twentieth century thought on human nature was associated with the thinkers of the atheist left, explaining why those who fundamentally opposed the perceived radicalism may also be linked to a traditionalist-conservative strand of elitist thought also associated with Berlin.

Returning to 'human nature' in more detail, there seems to be diminishing importance placed on interrogating the term. An entire issue of *Social Research*⁴⁷³ was devoted to 'human nature' in 1973, where the mixture of subjects on which the articles concentrate range from

⁴⁷² See George Steiner, *Real Presences* (London: Penguin, 1992).

⁴⁷³ *Social Research*, 40 (1973).

genetics, nihilism, Marx, and Chimpanzees. Dwelling on the ideological baggage that comes with any attempt to define human nature, Yankelovich writes 'an outcropping of interest in human nature signals stirrings of unrest beneath the surface. People appeal to human nature when they feel the need to defend the status quo or when they wish to attack it.'⁴⁷⁴ Perhaps relevant to our concern with Berlin, Yankelovich continues,

'[c]onservatism in politics and skepticism about human nature go hand in hand for the simple reason that...a fixed human nature seems to imply that any large-scale social change will come to grief because 'you can't change human nature' – the presumption being that the existing social order accurately reflects human nature.'⁴⁷⁵

If it was true that, in 1973, thinkers believed they were close to an 'empirical theory over human nature'⁴⁷⁶, it is clear that it is still impossible to divorce science from more profound philosophical questions. For example one prominent contemporary scientist writes 'since Homo Sapiens is an individual, not a natural kind, there is no such thing as human nature.'⁴⁷⁷ Perhaps this points towards a perceived 'post-modern' loss of meaning and certainty. It does seem that discussions on human nature are concealed political statements about broader cultural concerns and philosophical problems. Thoughts on human nature often highlight the visions of the thinker towards the possible future of mankind. These possible futures cannot help but be bound up with the multitude of preoccupations existent in the human mind, so perhaps theories of human nature should be considered political-cultural expressions of the ambiguity of human thought. These ambiguities are then crystallised into the pessimistic visions of Hobbes on human nature, or the

⁴⁷⁴ Daniel Yankelovich, 'The Idea of Human Nature', in *Social Research*, 40 (1973), p.407.

⁴⁷⁵ Yankelovich, 'The Idea of Human Nature', p.407.

⁴⁷⁶ Yankelovich, 'The Idea of Human Nature', p.423.

⁴⁷⁷ Jerry Fodor, 'The Selfish Gene Pool', *Times Literary Supplement*, 29 July 2005, p.3.

optimistic visions of Marx over the potentialities of human nature. In both cases, however, we are dealing with the human belief in the need to control the future development of human nature, justified with a set of assumptions over the 'true' character of human nature.

So, if one symptom of nineteenth century political philosophy was the preoccupation with earlier Enlightenment ideas on 'human nature', the gradual separation of political philosophy and science in the twentieth century has meant that questions over human nature became increasingly redundant for political philosophers. I would argue that the concept of human nature, in the 'liberal' camp at least, became a relatively stable assumption in the twentieth century Anglo-American context. These assumptions on human nature constituted an important cornerstone of Berlin's conception of normality, 'the natural' and, ultimately, his ontological vision.

I now wish to dissect this diverse set of issues surrounding human nature by relating my discussion to a thinker who symbolises an interesting, if blurred, intersection between the concept of power and the concept of human nature. Aspects of Alexis de Tocqueville's philosophy serves to illuminate important facets of Berlin's thought. Tocqueville's sophisticated conception of power is related to the perceived distinction between physical and mental 'coercion' from the state. Tocqueville takes into account the nascent nation state, new pervasive phenomenon such as the growth of the press, and persuasively critiques the assumption that democracy is necessarily a 'good'. In Volume One, Part Two of *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville writes a chapter on 'The Power That the Majority in America Exercises over Thought', a portion of which reads as follows,

'A king has only a material power which acts upon behaviour and cannot reach wills, but

the majority is invested with a force at once material and moral which acts upon the will as much as upon actions which prevents at one and the same time the act and the desire to act'.⁴⁷⁸

This is a sophisticated and nuanced meditation on the nature of power. Tocqueville is convinced that with the advent of democracy new structures of power begin to 'do things' that are not necessarily *visible* within society. For instance, in the preceding chapter 'Effects of the Omnipotence of the Majority on the Arbitrary Power of American Public Officials' he writes,

'Tyranny may be exercised by means of the law itself, and then it is not arbitrary; arbitrary power may be exercised in the interest of the governed, and then it is not tyrannical. Tyranny usually makes use of arbitrary power, but if necessary it knows how to do without it.

In the United States, the omnipotence of the majority, at the same time that it facilitates the legal despotism of the legislature, also facilitates the arbitrary power of the magistrate.'⁴⁷⁹

Tocqueville began a pattern that saw thinkers move away from definitions of power and human nature as prosaic, stable and necessarily visible. The 'omnipotence of the majority' is an attempt to explain the emergence of a new form of power in a transforming political landscape. The origins of certain societal 'power', similarly to Rousseau, are of interest. Nietzsche would emphasise the process of genealogy, or etymology, as a way to pronounce polemics on the dishonest origins of words and concepts. Not only this however, but also an attempt to define the genealogy of morals, and to overturn the assumptions of modernity. Nietzsche's attempt to overturn these assumptions, linked with Marx's attempt to overturn liberal historical knowledge, illustrates the limitations of Tocqueville's 'sociological' approach, that still had at its core a traditional concept of human nature. For, whilst Tocqueville held an inventive view of the relationship between power

⁴⁷⁸ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* [trans. Stephen D. Grant] (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2000), p.111.

⁴⁷⁹ Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, p.110.

and the individual, he held a restrained and rigid moral code on the idea of 'being human'.

Indeed, questions over the fundamental foundations of 'human nature' have been gradually confined to thought that is classed as 'radical'. The thought of Nietzsche, for instance, which wishes to 'over-turn' the realm of assumption, to reevaluate all values, is a product of profound frustration over the grip modernity has over the individual. Berlin, in the light of 'radical' responses to the failings of modernity, represents an increasingly dominant liberal consensus over human nature that views 'human nature' as a question not demanding immediate justification. For instance, Rorty insisted that liberal democracy 'can get along without philosophical presuppositions'⁴⁸⁰, hinting towards a view of human nature that is a break from the efforts of earlier philosophers who sought solid philosophical principles to provide the theoretical groundwork for a liberal democratic political order. Presuppositions do not need to be interrogated, as a consistent conception of human nature is taken for granted. I would argue this conception acts as the basis for conceptions of liberal freedom. The problem generated here is that alternative freedoms do not fit in with the dominant view of human nature. Thus, liberalism is not as 'liberal' as Berlin wishes it to appear. On 'human nature', Berlin wrote,

'The concept...of a basic 'human' nature, which cannot be radically altered, and is that which makes most human beings human, is a vague effort to convey a notion of a complex of unvarying and unanalysed characteristics which we know by acquaintance, as it were, from the inside, but which is insusceptible to precise scientific formulation or manipulation.'⁴⁸¹

Emanating from this quote are a complex set of moral and normative assumptions that surround

⁴⁸⁰ Richard Rorty, 'The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy', in *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p.178.

⁴⁸¹ Berlin, 'The Sense of Reality' [1953], p.19.

the idea of 'being human'. The use of 'which we know', 'most humans', and the general tone of Berlin building a 'sense' of what it means to be human (away 'from scientific formulation') is an exercise in normative engagement with the reader. Clearly, the complexities of Berlin's implicit use of language needs to be slotted into contextual place and its impact considered. Another example of Berlin's use of normative language runs as follows:

'Kant's free individual is a transcendent being, beyond the realm of natural causality. But in its empirical form – in which the notion of man is that of ordinary life – this doctrine was the heart of liberal humanism, both moral and political, that was deeply influenced both by Kant and Rousseau in the eighteenth century.'⁴⁸²

Connecting 'the notion of man is that of ordinary life' to liberal humanism, and implicitly the broader 'liberal tradition' in the western world, Berlin is creating the impression of a fixed conception of human nature that is linked to a concept of the 'ordinary'. Perhaps most significantly, Berlin involves those thinkers that seems to have little in common with the normative liberal conception of freedom in the discussion of 'legacy'. I have already mentioned the questionable alignment of Machiavelli with nascent pluralism, and Berlin also attempts to turn the ontological commitments of the existentialists to liberal ends:

'In their own queer way, some modern existentialists, too, proclaim the crucial importance of individual acts of choice...the more serious of them are no less insistent than Kant upon the reality of human autonomy, that is, upon the reality of free self-commitment to an act or a form of life for what it is in itself...it shows a commendable strength of intellect to have seen through the pretensions of those all-explanatory, all-justifying theodicies which promised to assimilate the human sciences to the natural in the quest for a unified schema of all there is'.⁴⁸³

⁴⁸² Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' [1958], p.185.

⁴⁸³ Berlin, 'Historical Inevitability' [1954], p.163.

This is a vast, non-specific, generalisation on a theme. The act of labeling 'some modern existentialists' is a normative act in itself, but the confusion between existentialist 'acts of choice' and the liberal understanding of the term surely illustrates how content Berlin is to subsume one distinct form of thought within another. In his original introduction for *Four Essays On Liberty*, Berlin writes,

'I have...attempted to examine some of the fallacies that rest on misunderstanding of [sic] certain central human needs and purposes – central, that is, to our normal notion of what it is to be a human being; a being endowed with a nucleus of needs and goals, a nucleus common to all men, which may have a shifting pattern, but one whose limits are determined by the basic need to communicate with other similar beings. The notion of such a nucleus and such limits enters into our conception of the central attributes and functions in terms of which we think of men and societies'.⁴⁸⁴

Does this suggest that Berlin conceives humans as 'hard-wired' to act in certain ways, to inherently possess 'co-operative' instincts in society? Again, use of the words 'normal' and 'common' linked to 'our', 'we' and 'all men' seduces the reader into a normative world of assumption, where there are 'fallacies' and 'misunderstandings' to combat. This is normatively charged on another level, as it is assumed that 'we' know precisely what the misunderstandings are, and how 'we' should relate the rejection of certain 'fallacies' to Berlin's own concept of liberty in the obvious context of his essay. Furthermore, this subtly combative language rings true with wider value assumptions in the context of cold war, where the reader is invited to return to the comforting normative centre of the western concept of human nature. Interestingly, Berlin writes that as a result of the romantic revolution,

⁴⁸⁴ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' [1958] in *Liberty*, p.54.

'man has no identifiable nature, whether static or dynamic, for he creates himself: he creates his own values, and thereby transforms himself, and the transformed self creates new values, so that we cannot *ex hypothesi* ever tell what the upshot will be of his attempt to realise them'.⁴⁸⁵

I would argue that, through the normative context of Berlin's writing, this sense of 'transformation' is not possible, as he implicitly constructs an 'identifiable' human nature. Again, it seems Berlin is unaware that to forge all possible 'new values', to truly transform, is only possible through an ontological foundation that may depart from his own limited conception. It is in this sense that Berlin must be viewed as having an uneasy relationship with romanticism. Yet, he views his own methodology as indebted to the romantic legacy:

'The majority of the civilised members of Western societies continue in attitudes that cause more logical than moral discomfort: we shift uneasily from one foot to the other, from motive to consequence, from estimate of character to estimate of achievement. For the development of this logically unsatisfactory but historically and psychologically enriched capacity for understanding men and societies, we have to thank the last great revolution in values and standards.'⁴⁸⁶

This paragraph seems to sum up Berlin's methodological trajectory. With collections such as *Personal Impressions* we see Berlin dealing with an 'estimate of character' of those who have reached a considerable 'estimate of achievement'. This focus on historical 'actors' places emphasis on human potentiality, a certain standard of human morality and, most importantly, on human *praxis* as always consciously alterable because of Berlin's high degree of faith in the force of the 'free' human will. For Berlin, the central problem of intellectual exploration is the measuring of the morally good against the 'motives and consequences' of ideas and personalities that

⁴⁸⁵ Berlin, 'The Romantic Revolution' [1960], p.185-6.

⁴⁸⁶ Berlin, 'The Romantic Revolution' [1960], p.193.

represent the morally bad. The fact that Berlin displays a consistent conception of human nature, and this conception is central to his expressions of liberal 'normality' means that Berlin views the thought of, for instance, Nietzsche or Freud as 'irrational'. For Berlin, certain thinkers have developed an extreme, immoral form of ideas, unrelated to the study of 'proper' history.

This investigation into Berlin's relationship with the concept of human nature has served to illustrate that assumptions about human nature can also be expressions of power. In the case of Tocqueville, a new formulation of the relationship between society and the individual meant that questions over 'humanness' must be equated with the 'unseen' forces unleashed by modern democracy. For Nietzsche, realising the texture of human nature meant unraveling the hypocrisies of moral codes imposed by religious and political tradition. Marx viewed human potentiality as lost within the newly industrialised capitalist urban centres. Berlin, however, appears less inclined to uncover the 'unseen' operations of society, and is content to reinforce dominant and unquestioned liberal ideas on human nature in the twentieth century, focusing his attention on individual morality and the roots of the liberal tradition in the west. Berlin employs an implicit language of normality, meaning that he is himself thoroughly implicated in the workings of 'unseen' discursive power. To explore exactly how we can understand this 'unseen' power, I now wish to concentrate afresh on definitions of power. The term 'power' has already been a continual presence in this chapter. There is need for clarification because the term, whether used formally or informally, has been defined and deployed in many ways.

Berlin and Power

Ironically enough Berlin, writing on Tolstoy, discusses the need to elaborate on what 'power' is, and seems to confuse the term with authority and influence in 'high' politics.⁴⁸⁷ Berlin often discusses the 'power of ideas', or questions of coercion and repression, but he never pauses to think that the term also impacts on his own work. I have already examined Berlin's location within a network of institutions, and his interaction with personalities where questions over 'authority' or 'influence' become problematic. In this sense, I have shown how his discursive effect was inevitably coloured with a set of cultural codes that exceeded his control. Understanding these 'codes' means understanding the links between western political authority in the cold war context and the language used in the texts of Berlin. To understand these 'codes' we must first understand the concept of power. My interpretative approach, after all, returns to the 'implicit' or the 'unseen' operations of Berlin's textual output, and I must be clear how these definitions themselves operate.

It seems clear that the conscious definition of 'power' is a profoundly ideological act. There is no doubt that it is common now to 'use power as an exceedingly comprehensive term, one that virtually identifies it as the fundamental object of human striving and sees it as deeply ingrained in any and all human relations and social structures.'⁴⁸⁸ This 'diffuse and far-ranging notion in social and political theory'⁴⁸⁹ has emerged from the influence of Foucault 'and the

⁴⁸⁷ Berlin, 'The Hedgehog and the Fox' [1951], *Russian Thinkers*, p.39.

⁴⁸⁸ Dennis H. Wrong, *Power: Its Forms, Bases, and Uses* (New Brunswick, N.J: Transaction, 1995), p. vii.

⁴⁸⁹ Wrong, *Power: Its Forms, Bases, and Uses*, p.viii.

Nietzsche revival his writings have helped to promote.⁴⁹⁰ As Wrong has noted, power must be thought of as an 'essentially contested concept'⁴⁹¹, where no common meaning can be found, due to disagreement on normative issues of an increasingly varied nature.⁴⁹²

Lukes details the American historiography of the term 'power', through the behaviourism-centred 'pluralist' interpretations of the 1950s and 1960s⁴⁹³, to the responses of Bachrach and Baratz in 1970. Bachrach and Baratz argued that the pluralist approach was 'restrictive and, in virtue of that fact, gives a misleadingly sanguine pluralist picture of American politics'⁴⁹⁴. Lukes writes, 'the importance of Bachrach and Baratz's work is that they bring this crucially important idea of the 'mobilisation of bias' into the discussion of power'⁴⁹⁵. It is clear that Bachrach and Baratz were moving towards a more complex understanding of power, as they pointed out the role of more covert forms of power, and muddied the water further with considerations of *non-decision* making, as well as the *decision* making emphasis of the 'pluralists'. Without going into the technical detail of these early theories of 'power', it is interesting to note that Lukes argues:

'each arises out of and operates within a particular moral and political perspective. Indeed, I maintain that power is one of those concepts which is ineradicably value-dependent. By this I mean that both its very definition and any given use of it, once defined, are inextricably tied to a given set of (probably unacknowledged) value-assumptions which predetermine the range of its empirical application.'⁴⁹⁶

As a neat intersection before the inevitable shadow of Foucault is confronted, Lukes makes the

⁴⁹⁰ Wrong, *Power: Its Forms, Bases, and Uses*, p.viii.

⁴⁹¹ Wrong, *Power: Its Forms, Bases, and Uses*, p.viii.

⁴⁹² The same point is stressed by Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005), p.30.

⁴⁹³ See Lukes, *Power*, pp.16-19 for a discussion of the theoretical work of Dahl, Polsby and Wolfinger.

⁴⁹⁴ Lukes, *Power*, p.20.

⁴⁹⁵ Lukes, *Power*, p.20.

⁴⁹⁶ Lukes, *Power*, p.30.

shrewd point that theorists such as Parsons and Arendt use specific conceptions of power to strengthen their own methodology. Lukes writes,

'in Parson's case the linking of power to authoritative decisions and collective goals serves to reinforce his theory of social integration as based on value consensus by concealing from view the whole range of problems that have concerned so-called 'coercion' theorists, precisely under the rubric of 'power'. By definitional fiat, phenomena of coercion, exploitation, manipulation and so on cease to be phenomena of power - and in consequence disappear from the theoretical landscape'.⁴⁹⁷

Arendt performs similar tricks and, as Lukes puts it simply; 'they focus on the locution 'power to', ignoring 'power over". Thus, power indicates a 'capacity', a 'facility', an 'ability', not a relationship'.⁴⁹⁸ Lukes also asks the question: why do we need the concept of power? He defines three contexts in an attempt to answer this question. In the 'practical' context, it is clear that human agents have varying degrees of 'power' and have a working knowledge of the forms, informal or formal, power takes in the 'real world'. In the 'moral' context, Lukes argues that power is often reduced to the idea of responsibility; linking ideas on responsibility with the practical context leads to conceptions of 'political' power. Linked to the role of the intellectual (as discussed earlier), it is clear that questions of intellectual responsibility are closely linked to moralistic mediations on where power 'emanates' from, as well as the question of intellectual 'honesty' in political contexts.

Lukes explains that the third 'evaluative' context is to do with 'levels of impotence' (lack of power) and 'levels of domination' (being subjected to the power of others).⁴⁹⁹ These are areas of

⁴⁹⁷ Lukes, *Power*, p.33.

⁴⁹⁸ Lukes, *Power*, p.34.

⁴⁹⁹ See Lukes, *Power*, p.65-7.

empirical interest; areas that can be, to different degrees, measured, or approximated with evidence and analysis. However, it is clear that the word 'power' itself is 'polysemic' and 'like political or social it has multiple and diverse meanings, appropriate to different settings and concerns'.⁵⁰⁰ Another persuasive view of the term is offered by Lukes who says 'like the word 'game', 'power' denotes a range of different objects or referents that have no single common essence'.⁵⁰¹

Lukes views Foucault's main strength as his opening up of the question of compliance; 'the power of domination requires, where it is not coercive, the compliance of willing subjects. Foucault's massively influential work purports to address the rich topic of the mechanisms by which that compliance is secured'.⁵⁰² This now seems relevant to my exploration of Berlin, as his work is not explicitly coercive, yet implicitly activates moralistic value assumptions. If we think of Berlin's 'expert knowledge claims' as having a 'shaping impact'⁵⁰³ on the effectiveness, or legitimacy, of his liberal project, it is clear that the connections between power and knowledge can also be directly made, away from the more abstract discursive sense. Lukes quotes Foucault from *Power/Knowledge*;

'In thinking of the mechanisms of power, I am thinking rather of its capillary forms of existence, the points where power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies, and inserts itself into their very actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes, and everyday lives'.⁵⁰⁴

It seems clear that central to any one specific concept of power is a unique set of normative

⁵⁰⁰ Lukes, *Power*, p.61.

⁵⁰¹ Lukes, *Power*, p.61.

⁵⁰² Lukes, *Power*, p.88.

⁵⁰³ Lukes, *Power*, p.88.

⁵⁰⁴ Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, p.39, quoted Lukes, *Power*, p.89.

assumptions on moral, political, ethical and ontological questions. Foucault here is offering a picture of the force of 'unseen' power. This power originates from an intellectual assumption far different to Berlin's. Here, Foucault is placing emphasis on 'mechanisms' within a system of power, where the force of power reaches the individual agent in ways that shape and influence attitudes, and eventually discourse. Berlin, on the contrary, views power in a far more visible manner, where any overarching belief in a system of power is rejected in favour of the power of the human agent to act 'unhindered'. For Berlin, power emanates from *within* the morally responsible human agent, and this is the standpoint that informs his methodology, and explains his wish to enshrine the 'conditions' for the human agent to act 'freely'. Crucially, these 'conditions' are supported and justified by Berlin's normative discursive framework.

Indeed, this contested region of thought can be dissolved down into the way in which people have interpreted the interplay between 'generic attributes' of social life and 'normative notions'. The 'generic attributes' should be thought of as *meta*-concepts such as 'society' or 'group'. Clearly Berlin has fixed ideas on the 'proper conditions' a society should try to cultivate. 'Normative notions' can be thought of as 'democracy', 'liberty', 'justice' or 'human rights'. These can be considered *micro*-concepts 'below' the aforementioned generic attributes.⁵⁰⁵ For Berlin, these concepts rest on a foundation created by a 'proper' societal order. However, the character of his liberalism is highlighted when we realise that, unlike Foucault, the origin of these concepts is unquestioned, the possible operations of 'unseen' power are left unexplored.

⁵⁰⁵ Framework adapted from Dennis H. Wrong, *Power: Its Forms, Bases, and Uses*, p. viii.

The popular-conventional use of the term power could be summed up as 'the capacity or ability to do something'. There is the political-social understanding of the term, where words such as 'force', 'domination', 'control' emerge. Within this category, we have the difficulty of separating individual and institutional 'power', because the sphere of 'influence', 'fortune', 'opportunism' or 'political will' seem to have a bearing on the wielding of power. Important to the political-social understanding of 'power' must be the fact that certain individuals are granted, by the particular state system, authority to act. These basic notions of power can be viewed as '*non-ubiquitous*' notions of power; there remains an element of mystery, the belief that we can never 'really get to the bottom of' the secret patterns of human interaction. Power, in this sense, emerges and describes human *action*. As we will see, the most useful '*ubiquitous*' notions of power are intrinsically linked to the creation of human *knowledge*. Much western cold war discourse displays simplistic thoughts about how to define the production of knowledge:

De Quincey's categories of *knowledge* and *power* are most pertinent here; the traditional scholarship, in so far as it takes literature to be chiefly an object of knowledge, denies or obscures that active power by which literature is truly defined. All sorts of studies are properly ancillary to the study of literature. For example, the study of the intellectual conditions in which a work of literature was made is not only legitimate but sometimes even necessary to our perception of its power. Yet when Professor Lovejoy in his influential book *The Great Chain of Being*, tells us that for the study of the history of ideas a really dead writer is better than one whose works are still enjoyed, we naturally pull up short and wonder if we are not in danger of becoming like the Edinburgh body-snatchers who saw *to it* that there were enough cadavers for study in the medical school.⁵⁰⁸

Trilling seems to be gesturing towards the importance of some abstract 'active power' to the production of power. Whilst the idea of an 'underlying *something*' would be picked up by the

⁵⁰⁸ Trilling, 'The Sense of the Past', p.187-8.

existentialists, then properly confronted by Foucault, it seems the majority of western thinkers were looking backwards - towards vague essences - rather than forward, asking questions about how to confront 'traditional' forms of interpretation. Here is another example of Trilling's struggle to make sense of 'the unseen':

'In its historical meaning, influence was a word intended to express a mystery. It means a flowing-in, but not as a tributary river flows into the main stream at a certain observable point...(but) the infusion of any kind of divine spiritual, moral, immaterial, or secret *power* or principal'.⁵⁰⁷

These 'historical meanings' were still very much a part of cold war language, for much discourse had not moved beyond liberal-traditional conceptions. And, as Foucault reminds us,

'If the history of thought could remain the locus of uninterrupted continuities, if it could endlessly forge connexion that no analysis could undo without abstraction, if it could weave, around everything men say and do, obscure synthesis that anticipate for him, prepare him and lead him endlessly towards his future it would provide a privileged shelter for the sovereignty of the consciousness'.⁵⁰⁸

This ubiquity can be sensed through the work of Gramsci and Foucault who share the 'notion that power and domination function in so far as those dominated consent to that domination. Without consent there is no domination'.⁵⁰⁹ The ubiquity is expressed by the fact that those who are dominated must identify, evaluate, and consent to, this overwhelming pattern of 'power'. This process is an infinitely changeable process and, presumably, a conscious one:

'While all individuals are sites of power, not all individuals quantitatively and qualitatively embody the same form of power. Some possess more and some possess less, and the directedness of power in power relations attempts to maintain the balance of power. So that directedness originates somewhere, and proceeds with a certain purpose. It is not

⁵⁰⁷ Trilling, 'The Sense of the Past', p.196.

⁵⁰⁸ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p.19.

⁵⁰⁹ Renate Holub, *Antonio Gramsci: Beyond Marxism and Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1992), p.199.

purposeless. Indeed, if the exercises of power were undirected operations, merely dominative and hegemonic, there would be no reason for Gramsci to develop his theory of intellectuals and his notion of counter-hegemony'.⁵¹⁰

The foundation of Gramsci's work, and his conception of power, rests upon the realisation of the *unequal relations* of power. This view of power and history places liberal figures such as Berlin at the top of a hierarchy of power. More importantly, Berlin is implicated as a representative of the pattern of the dominant political and social order. Berlin 'proceeded' with a 'purpose' and in turn became tied into power relations as he transmitted his ideas through discourse into society. Berlin was part of a ubiquitous chain of power that served a definite purpose and on which Berlin became dependent. The question of consent must be viewed in relation to the unquestioned and normative nature of Berlin's liberalism. Presented as unproblematic and natural, Berlin's brand of liberalism invites and presumes assumption in return thus creating a consensual normative atmosphere for his readers.

The 'ubiquitous' conceptualisation of power has been applied in strands of international history. Keohane's thoughts on the post-war global 'power-balance', are clarified through his ideas on hegemony, as examined earlier. Again, we see that the 'exercises of power' are always directed and require consent. This is still a 'ubiquitous' understanding of power because, rather than focusing on traditional 'power-politics' methodology, here we have an all-enveloping system of power that 'limits' and 'regulates' the behaviour of the hegemon. The specific understanding of the 'hegemonic system' has emerged through generations of individuals, and is a constantly shifting, self-balancing, phenomenon. Otherwise, the 'set of rules' of power relations would

⁵¹⁰ Holub, *Antonio Gramsci*, p.200.

disappear, to be replaced with the more suitable definition of 'coercion'. Crucially, the exercise of this 'ubiquitous' power is not necessarily material, economic or political. Gramsci discussed 'ideological' hegemony, and it is important to realise that 'power' can have unseen, silent effects. The functions of power can be extremely deep-rooted and pervasive because of their apparent invisibility. These 'functions', for some theorists, exist in the realm of language and discourse. To re-emphasise, this is how Berlin can be implicated in the political manifestation of power.

Orientalism is concerned with the complicated relationship between reality and representation. Said has demonstrated how, historically, certain ('western') forms of 'knowledge' dominate, and govern, other ('Oriental') forms of knowledge. Systems of representation form, and relations of power are inherent within these systems. By unraveling these 'systems' – questioning assumptions that have become so ingrained they seem 'natural' – we can begin to realise that 'authoritative versions' of knowledge have behind them solid political action which ensured their production. Otherwise, as is normally the case, the origins of political action become 'hidden behind' certain forms of knowledge. Berlin can be read as part of this representative web, expressing western values and subtly creating a sense of 'the definitive' that rejects certain forms of knowledge as inferior. Said's theory is based, primarily, on the imaginative theories of Foucault. It is with Foucault that we arrive at a conception of 'power' that is complicated and elusive but, once found, can allow us to unravel important patterns of discourse; to find their rooted meaning, and 'intent'. We are faced with a conception of 'power' which continually moulds itself around constantly evolving 'strategical situations'. It is certainly tempting to view Berlin as a significant agent within the negotiation of these 'strategical situations'. If viewed as an organic intellectual

within western cold war and Zionist discourse, Berlin's writing must be activated in a certain strategical direction. Importantly, this can also be sensed through Berlin's implicit use of language. With this in mind it is important to move beyond a discussion of 'non-ubiquitous' and 'ubiquitous' forms of power to the complexities that texture 'relations of power'.

'by power I do not mean 'Power' as a group of institutions and mechanisms that ensure the subservience of the citizens of a given state...the analysis, made in terms of power, must not assume that the sovereignty of the state, the form of the law, or the over-all unity of a domination are given at the outset; rather, these are only the terminal forms power takes. It seems to me that power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organisation....The omnipresence of power: not because it has the privilege of consolidating everything under its invincible unity, but because it is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another. Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere....One needs to be nominalistic, no doubt: power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society.'⁵¹¹

Furthermore, for Foucault, it is essential to realise that 'the network of power relations ends by forming a dense web that passes through apparatuses and institutions, without being exactly localised in them.'⁵¹² 'Grand historical events' (the 'terminal forms power takes') are the culmination of 'points of resistance' which traverse 'social stratifications and individual unities.'⁵¹³

Foucault is describing, in technical detail, a tapestry of multifarious sections, textures and colours. This tapestry is always altering, expanding, certain attributes are more solid than others, most are vapours - all that's solid melts into air. Foucault's model is intended as organic, elastic; one which is designed to mould itself to the realities of life, twist into new shapes, unfurl under

⁵¹¹ Foucault, *The Will To Knowledge: The History of Sexuality, Vol.1* (London: Penguin, 1998), p.92-3.

⁵¹² Foucault, *The Will To Knowledge: The History of Sexuality, Vol.1*, p.96

⁵¹³ Foucault, *The Will To Knowledge: The History of Sexuality, Vol.1*, p.96

closer inspection. But this fragile tapestry, in Foucault's hands, undeniably contains a temporal framework, a methodological system. It is in this sense that the aforementioned 'unreachable mysteries' of human interaction become visible. It is clear, however, that Foucault is building a systemic approach to history that is open to criticism. Yet, it seems that a significant use for Foucault's overarching conception of power is to link this systemic idea of history to a microscopic analysis of the text that yields new results.

This approach also adds weight to the illusion of invisibility, or passivity, of Berlin in the cold war context. It is through the deconstruction of his contribution within British discourse that we can understand the strength of his discursive contribution, and the intricacies of their role within the 'relations of power'. It seems that continental philosophy has re-negotiated the term power, and a more '*ubiquitous*' notion of 'power' encompasses ideas about how discourse and language are linked with institutions and political motives. It is clear that 'unseen', implicit, forces are operating in Berlin's textual output. I now wish to elucidate more thoroughly these forces.

Dumm, Space and Normality

Thomas Dumm, a 'neo-Nietzschean', has assembled some very interesting work on the function of language in Berlin's work. Through an examination of Berlin's conception of 'the normal', Dumm demonstrates that Berlin personifies a liberalism that is reliant on assumption and the 'common-place'. The examination is concerned with a certain conception of ubiquitous power, because the 'unseen' operation of the language Berlin employs is alleged to legitimate the authority of the status-quo, strengthening the dominant ethos of cold war liberalism. This adds an extra dimension

to my assertion that Berlin's methodology, in the light of the kind of history he practiced, became inadequate in the light of academic advances - 'post-modernist' or otherwise - due to the implicit ideological emphasis of his interpretative approach. In *Michel Foucault and the Politics of Freedom* Dumm contrasts the 'Berlinian' approach to that of Foucault on an ontological level. Dumm argues that Berlin wrote with a dependence on 'neutral space' where liberty is presented as part of the natural 'normalcy' of human society. For Dumm this represents a belief in free-floating absolutes that is fundamentally opposed to Foucault, for whom 'space' is contested and problematised.⁵¹⁴ Possibly simplistic (although presented in very sophisticated language), this dichotomy does nonetheless open up some very interesting possibilities. Dumm's work is rich with ideas, and offers radical ways to read texts that at first glance do not appear to explicitly express much. At first, 'Dumm begins by underscoring the differences between Berlin and Foucault regarding their conception of space and its relation to freedom.'⁵¹⁵ 'Space' is still, it seems, a very abstract term which is used in many different guises, and applied in subtle ways. It overlaps the lines separating traditional disciplines, and often appears as an important mechanism within interdisciplinary studies. At the beginning of his study of Heidegger and Foucault, Elden examines the complicated niche that 'space' occupies, and expresses two worries. Either the term is over-conceptualised, where 'the specific philosophical, historical, political and geographical situation of the works is often ignored'⁵¹⁶. Or, secondly,

'although there has undoubtedly been a heavy bias in favour of history and time in the past, to swing too far the other way through a privileging of geography and space is no

⁵¹⁴ See Chapter 2, Dumm, *Michel Foucault and the Politics of Freedom*.

⁵¹⁵ Neve Gordon, 'Foucault's Subject: An Ontological Reading', *Polity*, 31, 3 (1999), p.402.

⁵¹⁶ Stuart Elden, *Mapping the Present*, p.3.

solution....instead we need to think of the two together: we need to both historicize space and spatialize history...we need to recognize how space, place and location are crucial determining factors in any historical study'⁵¹⁷.

Elden explains the complex ideas of Foucault, Heidegger and Nietzsche in the 'spatial' aspects of their writing. The intellectual is viewed as inhabiting, and inhabited by, certain 'spaces', which are constantly shifting as points of reference. Whilst it is more plain to see that Foucault is discussing certain physical 'spaces' such as the prison, the madhouse and so on, it is important to also view 'space' as an abstraction, a psychological chamber where thought is shaped. Thus, the intellectual tradition can be viewed as one peppered with interlocking 'spaces', where authors inhabit certain epochs.

This very conscious examination of intellectual activity is one that Dumm interprets as the problematic, contested 'real world' arena of power relations. This 'spatial' view of history, contested, dynamic and vital, is contrasted heavily with the neutral space of Berlin, who inhabits a comfortable, unquestioning world. Elden and Dumm both have pleas: for Elden, 'we need to spatialize history, to inject an awareness of space into all historical studies, to critically examine the power relations at play in the ways space is effected and effects'.⁵¹⁸ For Dumm,

'although there has been an extraordinary renaissance in the study of space in recent years, this realm of scholarship has not seemed to have much of an impact on the most dominantly theorized discussions of freedom, that is, those of contemporary liberal political theory. For the most part, space is assumed in liberal theory to be a neutral field which may be divided into public and private'⁵¹⁹.

Indeed in *Michel Foucault and the Politics of Freedom* Dumm undergoes 'an exercise of retrieval,

⁵¹⁷ Elden, *Mapping the Present*, p.3.

⁵¹⁸ Elden, *Mapping the Present*, p.7.

⁵¹⁹ Dumm, *Michel Foucault and the Politics of Freedom*, p.32.

a reconstruction of some of the spatial premises upon which liberal freedom is developed'.⁵²⁰ This is a novel enterprise, and one that deepens the way we think of Berlin. Dumm quotes Berlin's statement at the beginning of 'Two Concepts of Liberty', when Berlin crystallises his famous two concepts; 'The first of these political senses of freedom of liberty (I shall use both words to mean the same), which (following much precedent) I shall call the 'negative sense'.⁵²¹ Dumm interprets Berlin's comment on 'precedent' beyond, for example, the standard discussion of Berlin's reliance on Benjamin Constant's 'On Ancient and Modern Liberty'. Instead Dumm concentrates on the implication of Berlin's use of language. Dumm points out Berlin's 'synthetic quality',

[where] his most explicit categories are rooted in the familiar, in that they refer to concepts that compose the ordinary language of political philosophers. He writes of doing and being, of agency and result, of persons and subjects....his rhetoric of freedom is profoundly appealing, in that it suggests that Berlin is attuned to particularity, to the ordinary sites through which freedom is expressed.⁵²²

Siedentop discusses 'Two Concepts of Liberty' in a short essay, and echoes Dumm, perhaps in an unexpected way: 'In Berlin's political writings the self is so socially situated that the grounds for a strong principle of justice virtually disappear'⁵²³. Furthermore, 'Berlin's argument presupposes a theory of justice, a conception of human agency that turns on the assumption of an underlying or moral equality'⁵²⁴ In Siedentop's eyes, Berlin's conception of freedom is linked closely to Berlin's personality: 'Berlin's sort of liberalism was strangely incurious about political institutions. His

⁵²⁰ Dumm, *Michel Foucault and the Politics of Freedom*, p.33.

⁵²¹ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' [1958], p.168-9. Also quoted in Dumm, *Michel Foucault and the Politics of Freedom*, p.47.

⁵²² Dumm, *Michel Foucault and the Politics of Freedom*, p.47.

⁵²³ Larry Siedentop 'What Are We to Make of Isaiah Berlin?', in Roger Wm. Louis, *Still More Adventures With Britannia: Personalities, Politics and Culture in Britain* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003), p.191.

⁵²⁴ Siedentop, 'What are We to Make of Isaiah Berlin?', p.189.

arguments about liberty were presented in an almost 'institution-less' medium....For Berlin it was largely, I believe, a form of gratitude for Britain for the refuge it had provided'⁵²⁵.

Without explicitly aiming to, Siedentop is half-way to explaining how Berlin fits into the liberal tradition or, in Dumm's phrase, the arena of 'the familiar'. Dumm continues his analysis of the familiar in more depth. For Dumm, Berlin 'imagines a kind of ever-present presence, a stability provided by the inarticulate role of neutral space as the ground of both negative and positive freedom: Dumm picks out words that Berlin employs, such as 'area', 'frontier', 'portion', 'sphere' as signifying this 'space'. The key point from this area of Dumm's analysis is 'that in all cases the space he designates as a site of freedom is natural, not constructed, either invaded or evacuated, empty or filled, cultivated or wild'⁵²⁶. As if to illustrate the consistency of Berlin's vocabulary of space through his writing career, the short essay 'Liberty', published in 1993, demonstrates the sustained use of phrases such as those Dumm eluded to.⁵²⁷ Dumm makes very clear the difference between Foucault and a liberal like Berlin:

'In contrast to Foucault, Berlin's epistemological assumption concerning space is that it *is of itself*: as an empty neutrality, space operates as the *ground* upon which his argument concerning freedom is constructed, and as the product of the boundaries that produce it, space is the container for freedom, that which protects it as a possession of the boundaries created by its own existence. The idea of space as a neutral place is for most liberal thinkers an obvious banality and a not so obvious source of anxiety. To assert that freedom is comprehensible primarily in reference to a space assumed to be neutral betrays the inherent instability of neutral space when imposed as an absolute category. This instability is a consequence of the always politically ambiguous achievement of spatial neutrality. In presenting space as neutral, Berlin makes it the ground of freedom. To establish this space as the ground is to render it outside of contestation or struggle. Space is uncontestable as a neutral ground to the extent that one is prevented from

⁵²⁵ Siedentop, 'What Are We To Make of Isaiah Berlin', p.193.

⁵²⁶ Dumm, *Michel Foucault and the Politics of Freedom*, p.47.

⁵²⁷ It must be pointed out that, although published in 1993 in the form found in 'Liberty', the essay was bundled together by Berlin, then in his eighties, from notes dating from 1962. Nevertheless, my point on consistency remains.

questioning its production or recognizing that the production of space is already an architectural enterprise'.⁵²⁸

This paragraph contains important issues both of abstract and more practical interest. The liberalism of Berlin, often seen as problematic by political philosophers, is now alleged to be problematic in a much broader sense. This 'neutral', 'uncontested' space that Berlin inhabits in his study of freedom is, presumably, 'produced' in a similar manner to other 'spaces' produced by intellectualised discourse. A difference here seems to be that whilst Berlin's liberalism relies on an uncontested ontology, expressed through his use of language, ontologically 'radical' writers such as Nietzsche or Foucault are more acutely aware of the 'spatial' aspects of intellectualised discourse and the impact this has on writing practice. In the cold war context, we can begin to see the importance of such a separation. The evasion of the question of 'production', easily done due to the perceived 'naturalness' of 'neutral' space, means that the cultural cold war in the west produced its opposite 'spaces', those defined as 'unnatural', 'inhumane', or 'dogmatic'. Of course, these non-liberal 'spaces' were often said to be 'artificially produced', whilst the production of western discourse was not conceived as potentially problematic.

Liberalism, based in 'neutral' space, has the impression of emanating as part of a 'natural' process, which itself assumes a texture of 'correctness', a reflection of a peaceful 'real world' outlook. This is particularly evident through Berlin's repetition of a favourite phrase, 'the sense of reality', as well as his general belief in the natural 'gradualness' of political change. To sum up, Dumm states, 'while Berlin is able to assert that negative freedom is inexorably associated with

⁵²⁸ Dumm, *Michel Foucault and the Politics of Freedom*, p.47-48.

'non-interference' within a space, he leaves the politics of the architecture and construction of space unquestioned.⁵²⁹ Dumm is expressing frustration with the liberal propensity to ignore the relation of thought to 'spatial' realities, the 'politics' of which are enmeshed in discursive power relations. Thus, even when liberal space becomes an 'activated site of power', this may be denied by authors such as Berlin. The 'origins' of these activated sites of power is delved into by Dumm. Dumm's analysis continues by again contrasting Berlin with Foucault, and uncovering what he views as the entrapment of the liberal conception of freedom within boundaries that are not openly acknowledged by liberal thinkers;

'If one accepts, with Foucault, that transgressions are themselves practical exercises of freedom, the containment of freedom in neutral space becomes incoherent. From this perspective, the very establishment of the terms of neutrality arises from situations that are themselves not neutral but are, instead, locations of struggles to evade harm and instantiate desire. One needs to ask, what struggles, what desires, are constitutive of liberal spaces of freedom?'⁵³⁰

In an important sense, this can cast a sharper light on the way Berlin writes, on the process of selecting authors for himself to analyse. Already we have seen how Berlin writes only about authors who enter his 'moral sphere', but now we are coming closer to understanding what this moral sphere constitutes, and what its limitations are. By avoiding detailed analysis of problematic figures such as Nietzsche, Heidegger and Sartre, Berlin ignores the existence of contested space and the possibility of freedoms away from neutral space. This is a central problem to his conception of the 'incommensurability' of values. Read in the light of a 'spatial analysis', his ideas do not extend to offer validity to avenues of freedom that do not share the neutral space of

⁵²⁹ Dumm, *Michel Foucault and the Politics of Freedom*, p.48.

⁵³⁰ Dumm, *Michel Foucault and the Politics of Freedom*, p.48.

freedom. Ironically enough then, Dumm's serious ontological allegation is that liberals like Berlin characterise a liberalism that fails to, in reality, deliver viable prospects of freedom. Indeed, as Dumm comments, 'the *meaning* of freedom is minimised, as a reflection of the desire of those who seek to make freedom a controllable entity'⁵³¹.

Thus, an entirely new picture of Berlin emerges. Within the cold war context, the implication that his work serves to 'make freedom a controllable entity' adds explanatory weight to the image of Berlin as a 'passive' intellectual. Beneath the illusion of passivity, Berlin is writing within a space that is cultivated around fixed notions of 'normality', 'naturalness' and 'humanness' that act as the foundation for his conception of freedom. Clearly, this is an activated space, where Berlin wields a significant amount of influence over the western conception of liberty. Of crucial importance too, when conceptualising specifically western views on liberty, must be the realisation of the prominence of 'otherness' as a binding assumption in the cold war context. Berlin expressed a hierarchical set of assumptions when discussing a variety of cultures, highlighting another powerful layer of Berlin's textual output. Through further examination of Berlin's use of language, the cold war context can be further broadened to encapsulate values that add to our understanding of liberal 'neutral' space. This space is activated, in part, by residual colonial attitudes and values that necessarily compliment the broader cold war conception of liberty.

⁵³¹ Dumm, *Michel Foucault and the Politics of Freedom*, p.49.

Berlin and Cold War 'Orientalism'

Russia and the Soviet Union

So far I have analysed Berlin's conception of 'normality' through an exploration of the ontological connotations of the term. I have explained that I view his conception of normality as Berlin's ontological 'statement', his psychological outlook derived from a mix of politicised assumptions on human nature and power. Linked closely to the idea that Berlin influenced western cold war identity heavily, I wish to turn now towards another strand of Berlin's conception of normality that is harder to uncover, and may appear more theoretical and more abstract. The notion of 'otherness' is a strand of Berlin's conception of normality, and also reflective of broader cold war discourse. In his writings, Berlin presents implicit and explicit conceptions of 'otherness'. An analysis of this phenomenon will add a more detailed understanding of Berlin's spatial relevance.

Whilst discussing cold war 'otherness', some interpreters have claimed that 'whereas previous alterity was often metaphorical, the Cold War literalised otherness'.⁵³² If accurate, this description opens up fresh questions about the foundations of cold war culture. For instance, it is clear that, from the aforementioned quote, the cold war was a continuation of older attitudes, and somehow these attitudes were altered by a process of 'literalisation', presumably through the ideological pressures existent in the intellectual community. There is another point to bear in mind too. The liberal pleas for tolerance and acceptance, symbolised by Berlin's cultural pluralism, may be interpreted as a profoundly important part of this ideological battle. As Scott writes,

'for cold war liberal anthropologists....the conception as well as the promotion of cultural diversity was fundamentally shaped by the ideological antagonism of a world polarised by

⁵³² Mitter, 'East is East and West is West', p.7.

totalitarianism and democracy, and the duty to advance the interests of the latter over the former.⁵³³

It was common, therefore, for western cold warriors to promote cultural diversity, or 'cultural pluralism', without examining their own problematic treatment of 'the other'. Intellectuals such as Berlin did not realise that they were cementing a conception of 'the other' through their endorsement of a pluralism that had as its root ideological values attached only to the interests of the 'west'.

Scholars have explored the notion that post-1945 rhetoric echoed other traditional forms of rhetoric. Theorising on the shift of power in the early cold war era, Booker has argued that 'the Americans, stepping into the shoes of the British as the major Western global power, also often followed in the footsteps of the British in the rhetoric with which they justified this global power'⁵³⁴. Therefore, 'high-politics' in the cold war continued the use of atavistic colonial rhetoric. Pietz amplifies this theme, and describes how the language used by Kennan in 1946 and 1947 should be understood as 'Orientalist'. Pietz's argument is primarily concerned with illustrating how these attitudes were utilised to make sense of totalitarianism, and gradually how the language used to express attitudes on totalitarianism took on a distinctly colonial tinge. For instance, Kennan spoke of the 'natural and instinctive urges of the Russian rulers', and the 'atmosphere of oriental secretiveness and conspiracy'. And, as Pietz points out, the 'Russians' Oriental 'mental world' is explicitly contrasted with that proper to the 'Western' mind'⁵³⁵. Furthermore, 'it is the notion of

⁵³³ David Scott, 'Culture in Political Theory', *Political Theory*, 31, 1 (2003), p.110.

⁵³⁴ M. Keith Booker, *Monsters, Mushroom Clouds and the Cold War: American Science Fiction and the Roots of Postmodernism, 1946-1964* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2001).

⁵³⁵ William Pietz, 'The 'Post-Colonialism' of Cold War Discourse', *Social Text*, 19/20 (1988), p.59.

ideology that permits Kennan to link modern totalitarianism with the traditional Oriental psyche, with its alleged neurotic sense of insecurity and lack of faith in human dignity.⁵³⁶ In the eyes of Pietz, for many post-war diplomats,

'the basic argument is that 'totalitarianism' is nothing other than traditional Oriental despotism plus modern police technology. The appearance of the first truly totalitarian state in the heart of Europe was thus an accident, explainable by the fact that the technology permitting totalitarianism was invented by Western science and was thus first accessible in the West. Moreover, Germany's totalitarian moment is characterised by Kennan as a 'relapse' into barbarism; far from showing a flaw in Western culture, it proved the need for constant alertness in preserving our distinctly Western values'.⁵³⁷

Pietz goes on to discuss the explicit 'Orientalism' of Koestler, and the implicit 'Orientalism' of Orwell's *1984*, whilst focusing strongly on these degrees of Orientalist thought in relation to the emerging image of 'totalitarianism'. The implication is that there are unexpected and important overlaps in the traditional scholarly categories of 'colonial' and 'cold war' discourse. It is more useful of thinking of these 'categories' as discursive 'processes'. Clearly, 'the function of cold war language as a substitute for the language of colonialism raises the questions of the comparability and actual continuity of colonial and cold war discursive structures'.⁵³⁸

One example of the continuity of these discursive structures comes through the image of totalitarianism as a 'blend' of the distinctive ideologies of Soviet communism and German Nazism.⁵³⁹ This process, to echo Pietz, was a manifestation of the need to illustrate these 'totalitarian' realities as generalised anti-western aberrations. To follow on from this, Arendt's well

⁵³⁶ Pietz, 'The 'Post-Colonialism' of Cold War Discourse', p.59.

⁵³⁷ Pietz, 'The 'Post-Colonialism' of Cold War Discourse', p.58.

⁵³⁸ Pietz, 'The 'Post-Colonialism' of Cold War Discourse', p.55.

⁵³⁹ Les K. Adler and Thomas G. Paterson, 'Red Fascism: The Merger of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia In the American Image of Totalitarianism, 1930s-1950s', *American Historical Review*, 75, 4 (1970), pp.1046-1064.

known theses on totalitarianism are questioned by Pietz:

'For Arendt, totalitarianism's novelty resides in the functional interdependence of ideology...with arbitrary, total terror. The coupling of absolute ideology with arbitrary terror, that is, of blindly hyper-rationalistic conformance to the logic of an idea...with the release of a sub-rational power of pure caprice in the form of arbitrary police terror, is another version of the double-structured discourse about ideology embraced by anti-communist intellectuals wishing to deny any responsibility for fascism on the part of 'Western civilisation'.⁵⁴⁰

So, if we are to follow Pietz, the discourse of the cold war era was, firstly, one that echoed the familiar language of colonial superiority and, secondly, one that demonstrates how language was expressing 'the need for constant alertness in preserving our distinctly Western values'. Berlin is a significant intellectual figure within this process, as his writing serves to cement the core values of the west, and to implicitly present the west with its 'self-image'. With this fact in mind, a close reading of Berlin's textual output does uncover evidence of an underlying set of assumptions on 'otherness' that betrays the general pattern identified by Pietz. To develop this reading of Berlin further, it can also be demonstrated that his work represents an implicit hierarchy of nations, cultures, and races.

As a general example of how Berlin constructs this hierarchy of cultures, it is useful to scrutinise the way in which he presents Russian - and Soviet - culture. His depiction of nineteenth century Russian philosophers is a highly elitist one in which he clearly holds a high regard for the 'golden age' of literature. There are many instances where Berlin paints a simplistic picture of Russian backwardness as a contrast to this golden age. Berlin clearly respects the social status of the intelligentsia in nineteenth century Russia, possibly regretting that such a parallel does not

⁵⁴⁰ Pietz, 'The 'Post-Colonialism' of Cold War Discourse', p.66.

exist in contemporary Europe. This can be seen in his article 'The Silence in Russian Culture', published in *Foreign Affairs*, where he states

'In Russia, at any rate since the second half of the nineteenth century....no serious writer could think of taking a step without concerning himself with the question whether [sic] his work was appropriately related to the great ultimate problems, the purposes of men on earth'.⁵⁴¹

Berlin is building the impression of a knowing, ahistorical haze surrounding the intellectual milieu of the time, which drove literature and thought towards 'ultimate problems'. This kind of nostalgia for an ontological 'dreamstate' is only possible due to Berlin's idealised historical imagination. The context of Berlin's thought should be reiterated because the article appeared in 1957, by which time Berlin was stating the case against Soviet ideology in terms of the boundaries that have arisen between determinist and non-determinist thought. This article is also closely related to his first hand impressions of the repression of Russian literary figures. The tone of the piece is clearly concerned with universal themes, the ideals of the traditional view of the intellectual, as well as an attempt explain the dissemination of Marxism in Russia. Attempting to describe the texture of the intellectual milieu, Berlin argues that nineteenth century Russian culture was, for Marxism, 'almost ideal soil for it seeds'⁵⁴² due to the Russian belief that

'the life of individuals and the life of their institutions was one and indivisible. Every faculty and element in the individual were in a state of constant interplay; a man could not be one thing as a painter and another as a citizen...it was impossible to draw frontiers between any aspects of human activity, above all between public and private life. Any attempt to insulate this or that area from the invasion of outside forces was held to be founded upon the radical fallacy of thinking that the true function and purpose of a human being does

⁵⁴¹ Berlin, 'The Silence in Russian Culture', *Foreign Affairs*, 36, 1 (1957), p.2.

⁵⁴² Berlin, 'The Silence in Russian Culture', p.5.

not penetrate every one of his acts and relationships – or, worse still, that men had, as men, no specific function or purpose at all.⁵⁴³

The picture is painted of a society where the relationship between the individual and the state is somehow drawn towards conceiving every individual aspect of life as part of a system, a totality. For Berlin, this seems to explain how a culture was in place whose 'psychology' was geared towards a nascent totalitarianism. Reflecting here on the vocabulary used, Berlin uses normative phraseology, with words such as 'area' and 'frontier' to mark out the liberal norms of the 'public' and the 'private'. Describing the proto-socialist all-encompassing ontology as a 'radical fallacy', Berlin is clearly marking his liberal territory, where the private is a different 'area' that has diminished bearing on the public.

Replicating the type of language he also uses to explore his notions of freedom, Berlin also develops in more general terms a picture of the condition of a distant, alien, society. In both cases, Berlin is consistent in his normative use of language. This offers the possibility that there is an acute 'Berlinian' conception of society, and of the world, that can be gleaned from a close reading of his writing on a variety of themes. In his conclusion, Berlin states,

'The purpose of normal human societies is in the first place to survive; and after that, to satisfy what Mill called 'the deepest interests of mankind,' that is to say, to satisfy at any rate a minimum number of men's normal desires after their basic needs are satisfied – say, for self-expression, happiness, freedom, justice. Any government which realises these values to a reasonable degree is held to fulfill its function. These are not principle ends of Soviet society, or of its government...Soviet society is organised not for happiness, comfort, liberty, justice, personal relationships, but for combat.'⁵⁴⁴

⁵⁴³ Berlin, 'The Silence in Russian Culture', p.4-5.

⁵⁴⁴ Berlin, 'The Silence in Russian Culture', p.23-4.

Berlin's main point seems to be that whilst 'normal' (western) societies allow individuals the freedom to decide their own purpose, Soviet society decides the purpose of the individual, as a result of its constant striving towards goals. Whether 'military or civil, the defeat of the enemy within or without, or the attainment of industrial objectives'⁵⁴⁵ these goals can never represent the 'deepest interests of mankind'. Although undoubtedly true in respect to the widespread repression within Soviet society, a central aim of the article is to position the liberal project as the logical normative centre by which to compare other cultures by.⁵⁴⁶ The article also serves to bolster the clichéd polarisation of the cold war world through expressing cold war differences as emanating from definite, powerful and long-standing historical differences. Elsewhere, again characterising Russia as distinct or other-worldly, Berlin use phrases such as 'Slav temperament' or 'characteristically Russian disease'⁵⁴⁷ to create imagery that not only demarcates cultural differences, but promotes the sense of spiritual and 'innate' differences too. It is in this sense that Russia is characterised as *abnormal*.

However, Berlin stresses the 'moral feelings, common to all mankind' of the opposition to 'bureaucracy, hypocrisy, lies, oppression, the triumphs of the bad over the good' and describes 'the governed' as having 'the charm of a sheltered, strictly brought up, mildly romantic and imaginative, somewhat boyish, deeply unpolitical group of simple and normal human beings who are members of some ruthlessly ruled corporation'.⁵⁴⁸ So, amongst the rubble of abnormality,

⁵⁴⁵ Berlin, 'The Silence in Russian Culture', p.23.

⁵⁴⁶ As a minor point it is interesting that this is the first time Berlin mentions Mill in the entire piece, and he is included to represent the West verses the Soviet Union. This is perhaps further explanation of my earlier point on the primacy of the 'liberal tradition' when seeking intellectual authority over a subject.

⁵⁴⁷ Isaiah Berlin, 'Vissarion Belinsky' [1954], in *Russian Thinkers*, p.179.

⁵⁴⁸ Isaiah Berlin, 'The Soviet Intelligentsia' [1957].127.

Berlin argues that there exists the seed of salvation away from formalised authority. Berlin is quite clear on how he views the 'governers':

'they think in terms of Marxist concepts and categories, but not in terms of the original Marxist purposes or values: freedom from exploitation, or coercion, or even the particular interests of groups or classes or nations, still less in terms of the ultimate ideals: individual freedom, the release of creative energy, universal contentment and the like. They are too tough and morally indifferent for that.'⁵⁴⁹

Again, we have the repetition of themes we have come across already; namely 'morality', 'ultimate ideals', 'freedom'. This all adds to the cold war imagery of the Soviet Union. The impression that in the west people *are* allowed more real 'foundations' for true freedoms is an uncomplicated cold war assumption. Whilst Berlin is quick to condemn Soviet society it is clear that his motivations stem from a strong belief in western concepts of freedom, and cold war assumptions on the abundance of freedom in the west. This, naturally, diminishes the problematic nature of western liberal thought.

Elsewhere, in 'The Soviet Intelligentsia' Berlin expresses a type of humanist optimism in relation to the Soviet Union. He is keen to state Soviet citizens are not brainwashed as some may think, but in fact 'if by some stroke of fate or history Communist control were lifted from Russia, what its people would need would not be reeducation – for their systems have not deeply absorbed the doctrines dispensed – but mere ordinary education'⁵⁵⁰. He goes on to describe his belief that 'the relative absence of what might be called Communist *mystique* is perhaps the most striking thing about the ersatz intelligentsia of the Soviet Union....[Marxism] has become a form of

⁵⁴⁹ Berlin, 'The Soviet Intelligentsia' [1957], p.128-9.

⁵⁵⁰ Berlin, 'The Soviet Intelligentsia'[1957], p.126.

accepted, and unresisted, but infinitely tedious, official patter'.⁵⁵¹ As if to confirm Berlin's humanist credentials, he observes the Soviet intelligentsia's desire to 'simply describe life as they see it without constant reference to ideology'.⁵⁵² Plainly, the language of normality is in operation. Berlin strongly believes that 'ordinary' education would benefit people. In the context of the cold war of ideas, Berlin is presenting the case that Soviet society is full of 'people like us'. The vocabulary of normality is evident in Berlin's closing remarks on writers: 'The difference between genuine writers who can talk to other writers in normal human voices, and the literary bureaucrats – a difference, once again, between the governors and the governed – is the deepest single frontier in Soviet intellectual life.'⁵⁵³ The force of the language used is clear, carrying with it undeniable moral resonance. As a closing description of Soviet culture, again emphasising the hierarchical nature of the society, Berlin writes,

'Bullying and half-cynical semi-Marxist philistines at the top; a thin line of genuinely civilised, perceptive, morally alive and often gifted but deeply intimidated and politically passive, 'specialists' in the middle; honest, impressionable, touchingly naive, pure-hearted, intellectually starved, non-Marxist semi-literates, consumed with unquenchable curiosity, below. Such is Soviet culture, by and large, today'.⁵⁵⁴

Keen to stress the typologies of each rung of Soviet hierarchy, Berlin succeeds in arguing that the middle and bottom tiers of Soviet life are either 'civilised', 'morally alive' or 'touchingly naive', but altogether honest in comparison with the governors. This humanist perspective assumes 'frontiers' within intellectual life, whilst implicitly emphasising an unproblematic view of human agency - and

⁵⁵¹ Berlin, 'The Soviet Intelligentsia'[1957], p.126.

⁵⁵² Berlin, 'The Soviet Intelligentsia'[1957], p.126.

⁵⁵³ Berlin, 'The Soviet Intelligentsia'[1957], p.129-30.

⁵⁵⁴ Berlin, 'The Soviet Intelligentsia'[1957], p.130.

human nature - typical of cold war liberalism, where the foundation for 'normal' freedom could be gained for the bottom two tiers of Soviet society if Communism were to fail. It is clear also that Berlin does not attempt to link political, economic and social questions to his description of culture.

Ethno-Hierarchies

It is possible to identify explicit references to ethno-identities in the work of Berlin. There are instances where Berlin's informal use of terminology evokes both the imagery and underlying assumptions of ethno-stereotypes. For instance, in a discussion of Hobbes's use of the concept of the 'noble savage' - or man in the state of nature - Berlin writes that

'[a]ccording to [Macpherson's] view, Hobbes' men in the state of nature are the men of his own culture let loose - historically conditioned men, not Red Indians; they are logical constructions - elements in a sociological model used to point out a contemporary moral'.⁵⁵⁵

Whilst conscious of the danger of over-exaggeration, it could be argued that this small excerpt subtly illuminates Berlin's view of human agency, as well as his view of 'the other'. On both counts, the human agent - the Red Indian - is presented as a blank, an ahistorical, apolitical, amoral entity. Here, to be 'historically conditioned' is to be 'White' not 'Red', to be 'western' with a host of ethno-assumptions behind Berlin's use of language. Although it could be argued the remark is throwaway, it is undoubtedly indicative of wider ethnographic assumptions in western culture and also, perhaps, an indication of the permeation of certain aspects of American mythology into western discourse. Also it is clear that Berlin's ignorance of challenging new methodology and

⁵⁵⁵ Isaiah Berlin, 'Hobbes, Locke and Professor Macpherson', *Political Quarterly*, 35 (1963), p.447.

'alternative' discourses, renders him distant from the concerns that came to condition many post-war intellectual historians.

As to reinforce the separation of Berlin to 'enlightened' post-colonial thought there is a rich body of work from the 1960s onwards, of continual interest to intellectual historians, based around the relationship between Native Americans, nascent American political culture, as well as the reasons behind the specific attribution of colour to the Native Americans. This is worth consideration in relation to Berlin's earlier comments. Vaughan persuasively makes the case that the attribution of colour to specific racial types serves to cement the supposed inferiority of the non-white. This process of racial 'colouring' has a fascinating historiography, detailing the

'slow but drastic change in the late seventeenth century and throughout the eighteenth as Anglo-Americans shifted their perception of Indian colour from innately white to innately dark and eventually to red. That transformation, reflecting a confluence of European and American ideas and events, signaled [sic] important changes in white America's attitudes toward the native population. The new attitudes, in turn, helped assure the Indians' continued segregation and heighten their exploitation....not until they were thought of as inherently inferior 'redmen' rather than unenlightened 'whites' did their separate and unequal status become firmly fixed in the American mind.'⁵⁵⁶

The caricature of the 'Red Indian' - the prominent 'negative' twentieth century image of subservience, intellectual inferiority, immorality and deception, alongside 'positive' physical attributes, such as the 'spiritual' connection with 'nature' - pushes the image of Native American culture away from the realities of its diverse and sophisticated form.

The level of sophistication of Native American political organisation proved the inspiration for James Madison's more democratic ideas. Brandon has written that 'the effect of the Indian

⁵⁵⁶ Alden T. Vaughan, 'From White Man to Redskin: Changing Anglo-American Perceptions of the American Indian', *The American Historical Review*, 87, 4 (1982), p.921.

world on the changing American soul, most easily seen in the influence of the American Indian on European notions of liberty⁵⁵⁷. Often overlooked, there is a rich historiography of this alternative view of Native Americans, and detailed accounts of, for example, the Iroquois Confederacy⁵⁵⁸. This is also an insight into the central assumptions of western scholarship because, for instance, those who choose to celebrate the thought of James Madison often do not delve into the role Native American society played in the development of his thought. Berlin is symptomatic of this ignorance of intellectual exchange between cultures, and it seems that Berlin stood aloof from an emerging body of work that could have granted him valuable insights into the origins of western liberty. It is through assumption that Berlin dismisses the 'Red Indian' as unconditioned by history - a contradiction in the purest sense - and also in the face of a rich body of research; rich even in his working lifetime.

Part of this mind-set arises from a set of assumptions over race and culture that create a kind of colonial hierarchy in the work of Berlin. He talks of 'backward nations'⁵⁵⁹ or 'simple peasant[s]'⁵⁶⁰, themselves implicit statements on the western concept of 'progress'. So, perhaps underpinning Berlin's hierarchical vision is his standardised, western vision of progress. To build this idea of hierarchy, here is a very useful paragraph Berlin wrote on the Jews. He writes,

'they [the Jews] occupied no stretch of country which could be called their native territory in the sense in which Welshmen, or Slovaks, or Ruthenians, or Zulus, or Tartars, or even Red Indians or Australian aborigines - compact continuous groups living on their

⁵⁵⁷ See William Brandon, *The American Heritage Book of Indians* (American Heritage Publishing, 1965), p.65 quoted Vaughan, 'From White Man to Redskin', p.937.

⁵⁵⁸ Francis Jennings, *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism and the Cant of Conquest* (New York, NY: Norton 1975).

⁵⁵⁹ Isaiah Berlin, 'Kant as an Unfamiliar Source of Nationalism' [1972], in *The Sense of Reality*, p.248.

⁵⁶⁰ Isaiah Berlin, 'Tolstoy and Enlightenment', in *Russian Thinkers* [1960], p.250.

ancestral soil – patently did so'.⁵⁶¹

Here is a hierarchical form of categorisation, where Red Indians and 'Australian aborigines' for some reason have the preposition 'even' adorning their names, seemingly 'below' Zulus and Slovaks due to an odd Berlinian system of classification. There is little doubt that this small paragraph is a significant window into the complex pattern of cold war orientalism that exists within the work of Berlin. Delving within this ethno-hierarchy, it can also be argued that Berlin's use of certain words and phrases are indicative of the depth of assumption. Berlin writes,

'Arising out of this great movement [Marxism] we have the vast proliferation of anthropological and sociological studies of civilised societies, with their tendency to trace all character and behaviour to the same kind of relatively irrational and unconscious causes as those which are held to have so successfully explained the behaviour of primitive societies.'⁵⁶²

Here, a hierarchy is implicitly postulated, and key terms are not seen as problematic. 'Primitive' is not dealt with as a word imbued with its own complexity and multiple meanings; it is not (inverted commas) 'primitive', but somehow closer, more naturally, connected to terms such as 'behaviour', 'irrational', 'character' than the rational term 'civilisation'. The authority of the semi-ethnographic statement arises from the comments as a whole, which show Berlin's 'knowledge' of cultural difference, as well as the implicit belief that methods of interpreting 'primitive' society will not be compatible with 'civilised' society. In the selections thus far, Berlin has betrayed his conception of modernity, progress and normality. Through setting out the opinions of Maistre, Berlin again demonstrates certain assumptions;

⁵⁶¹ Berlin, 'Chaim Weizmann' [1958], p.34.

⁵⁶² Berlin, 'Historical Inevitability' [1954], p.158.

'The notion that barbarous creatures, wild aborigines from the woods, coming together for the first time in history in order to construct something called a social contract, are already furnished with such elaborate and sophisticated social notions as promises towards each other, obligation, duty, enforcement of promises, that they have all this ready to put into the intellectual pool, is a grotesque logical absurdity. People who are armed with the notion of a promise, the notion of respecting each other's will, the notion of punishment, the notion of reward, do not need a society, they are in it already.'⁵⁶³

Berlin does not interrogate Maistre's assumptions in any substantive manner; this in itself sees Berlin operating in a certain 'sphere' of assumption. Berlin - and this is a consistency within his general ontological approach - whilst disagreeing with Maistre on a formal philosophical level, does not explore the curious problem of the use of such phrases as 'the society' (presumably developed, industrial life) and the world of 'barbarous creatures, wild aborigines from the woods' (presumably indigenous groups such as Australian aborigines and Red Indians who inhabit an undeveloped geographical space). This 'duality', repeated elsewhere in Berlin's work, purports to say something on 'human nature'. However, with its static treatment of human agency, where 'sophisticated social notions' such as 'a promise' or 'punishment' or 'duty' are givens alongside 'the barbarous', who are not furnished with sophistication. There are also parallels in Berlin's discussion of the 'Indians of America' a few pages later.⁵⁶⁴ The reader is not directed towards the problematic nature of the parameters of such intellectual engagement, and is instead lulled into the acceptance of the continuation of such temporally displaced discussions.

This isn't necessarily an overly pedantic, or an overestimated or exaggerated view of Berlin's use of language. Instead, I view his impoverished and, more often than not, implicit,

⁵⁶³ Isaiah Berlin, 'Maistre' [1952] in *Freedom and Its Betrayal*, p.141-2.

⁵⁶⁴ Berlin, 'Maistre' [1952], p.143.

depictions and assumptions of 'the other' as another layer of Berlin's conception of normality: a powerful, yet often inconspicuous, collection of attitudes that point towards the unquestioned assumptions within much of Berlin's writing, as well as illuminating wider trends within cold war discourse. This line of investigation can be linked more firmly to Berlin's position as a prominent, and specifically, *western* intellectual whose role includes imparting moral knowledge. In 'Rabindranath Tagore and the Consciousness of Nationality', originally a lecture delivered in India in 1961, Berlin admits he is 'shamefully ignorant of Indian civilisation' and that 'where one culture is geographically remote from another, and has been historically insulated from it, bridges are genuinely difficult to build and to cross.'⁵⁶⁵

Berlin exonerates himself from any ignorance, because this can be explained by his detachment from a true understanding of Indian civilisation. Implicitly, however, the assumption is that he has the authority - derived from his position in the world of formalised western knowledge - to imprint universal principles on this 'civilisation' he is ignorant of. Interestingly he makes no indication he wishes to become 'non-ignorant'. Berlin, throughout his academic career, focused predominantly on philosophers from Europe and Russia. As a scholar he inevitably specialised in his field of choice. It cannot be ignored, however, that Berlin's use of language reflects deeper trends in academic discourse; trends that encapsulated the western view of 'the other', whether 'the other' was the inhabitant of the Soviet Union or the inhabitant of the wider 'undeveloped', 'uncivilised', world. Perhaps this fits into a pattern where 'markers of identity' consistently operate

⁵⁶⁵ Isaiah Berlin, 'Rabindranath Tagore and the Consciousness of Nationality' [1961], in *The Sense of Reality*, p.249.

within the work of Berlin, and can be identified as a persistent strand in Berlin's conception of normality. This cements both the ontological and institutional location of Berlin in relation to the rest of the world.

In contrast to this formal expression of Berlin's relationship with world cultures, there is an example of his informal use of colonial imagery. In 'Notes on Prejudice' - a scattered set of thoughts from 1981, written quickly in note-form for a friend⁵⁶⁶, published in *Liberty* - Berlin can be read discussing a variety of themes. Although an unrefined source, it is still possible to pick out a selection of sentences of interest. Within his overall thesis that 'it is a terrible and dangerous arrogance to believe that you alone are right'⁵⁶⁷, Berlin discusses stereotypes. In this brief section, he introduces the idea that 'tribes hate neighbouring tribes by whom they feel threatened, & [sic] then rationalise their fears by representing them as wicked or inferior.'⁵⁶⁸ The imagery here is that of 'the tribe' as a blank template, where Berlin can play out an ethnographic theory. He goes on discusses Russians in the nineteenth century as being depicted as 'darkly brooding semi-religious Slav mystics who write deep novels + [sic] a huge horde of cossacks loyal to the Tsar, who sing beautifully' and 'the English are ruthless imperialists lording it over fuzzy wuzzies, looking down their long noses at the rest of the world - & [sic] then impoverished, liberal, decent welfare state beneficiaries in need of allies.'⁵⁶⁹

In this phraseology, the 'West' is seen as the arena of history. Berlin details the 'power struggle' of the nations of the nineteenth century, of the influence of Napoleon, of nationalism. In

⁵⁶⁶ See Henry Hardy, 'The Editor's Tale', in *Liberty*, p. xxx.

⁵⁶⁷ Isaiah Berlin, 'Notes on Prejudice' [1981], in *Liberty*, p. 345.

⁵⁶⁸ Berlin, 'Notes on Prejudice' [1981], p. 346.

⁵⁶⁹ Berlin, 'Notes on Prejudice' [1981], p. 346-7.

order to gain the ideology of nationalism 'the Chinese' were 'humiliated' and 'the Indians' were 'patronised'. Apparently non-energetic without the negative influence of the West, the history of nations outside Europe are still viewed through European standards. For instance Berlin writes elsewhere, 'Asia and Africa are today boiling cauldrons of disruptive nationalism, as Germany and perhaps France were after Britain and Holland and Scandinavia had attained relative equilibrium'.⁵⁷⁰ This is a point made by Berlin in 1959, in the context of his broader theme of the 'common' foundations of conduct in the west. He differentiates the West from Africa and Asia, and states 'humanity does not seem to march with an even step, the crises of national development are not synchronised'⁵⁷¹, and writes 'our values today tend to be, increasingly, the old universal standards which distinguished men, however dull, from barbarians, however gifted'.⁵⁷²

This belief is echoed when Berlin writes that he views 'genuine progress towards an international order, based on a recognition that we inhabit one common moral world. Upon this our hope must rest'.⁵⁷³ This is idealism divorced from a sense of a context problematised by the recognition of innumerable difficulties in the 'real-world'. Naturally, the colonial legacy originated and continued to shape these global problems, yet this sense of wider global trends is ignored in favour of an emphasis on an idea of western 'morality' governing ideas of 'progress'. Ironically, it could be argued that Berlin's use of language prolongs prejudice, by employing imagery such as the 'fuzzy wuzzy', and the Cossacks who 'sing beautifully', or the 'Slav mystics'. Stereotypes can only fade away with the conscious removal or redefinition of the terminology of stereotype. This

⁵⁷⁰ Isaiah Berlin, 'European Unity and its Vicissitudes' [1959] in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, p.205.

⁵⁷¹ Berlin, 'European Unity and its Vicissitudes' [1959], p.205.

⁵⁷² Berlin, 'European Unity and its Vicissitudes' [1959], p.205.

⁵⁷³ Berlin, 'European Unity and its Vicissitudes' [1959], p.206.

basic premise seems obvious enough, yet Berlin's use of language in this informal setting is a telling indicator of underlying ethno-assumptions and unquestioned attitudes that act a significant part of his conception of normality.

The 'ethno-hierarchy' I have described in the work of Berlin also serves to underpin his conception of the state and nationhood. Berlin argues the 'sentiment of nationhood' is something universal. Nationalism originates 'from a wounded or outraged sense of human dignity'.⁵⁷⁴ 'National sentiment', 'common nationhood, or common race or culture'⁵⁷⁵ is positioned as the 'natural', opposed to the 'unnatural' ideology of communism. Indeed, Berlin also reiterates the cold war sentiment that 'Communism...certainly became a great force, but except in alliance with national sentiment, it cannot advance'.⁵⁷⁶ This point is repeated by Berlin⁵⁷⁷, and exemplified elsewhere by other cold war scholars⁵⁷⁸. For Berlin, the process is quite simple:

'Nationalism is the direct product of wounds inflicted on a sense of common nationhood, or common race or culture. Most commonly it takes one of two equally aggressive forms. The first of these is awareness of shortcomings, a conviction of backwardness or inadequacy, and an anxiety to learn from the superior culture or nation.....alternatively, it sometimes takes the form of resentful isolation'.⁵⁷⁹

The global geographical entity is referred to with colonial imagery in the forefront of description. For instance, Berlin writes 'in the parts of Asia once governed by France or Holland'⁵⁸⁰, and he

⁵⁷⁴ Berlin, 'Rabindranath Tagore and the Consciousness of Nationality' [1961], p.252.

⁵⁷⁵ Berlin, 'Rabindranath Tagore and the Consciousness of Nationality' [1961], p.256.

⁵⁷⁶ Berlin, 'Rabindranath Tagore and the Consciousness of Nationality' [1961], p.251.

⁵⁷⁷ Isaiah Berlin, 'Nationalism: Past Neglect and Present Power' [1979], in *Against The Current*, p.355, and *passim*.

⁵⁷⁸ See, for example, Chalmers Johnson, *Peasant Nationalism and Communist Power: The Emergence of Revolutionary China, 1937-1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1963).

⁵⁷⁹ Berlin, 'Rabindranath Tagore and the Consciousness of Nationality' [1961], p.256.

⁵⁸⁰ Berlin, 'Rabindranath Tagore and the Consciousness of Nationality' [1961], p.251.

uses the terms 'ex-imperialists'⁵⁸¹ or 'ex-colonial territories'⁵⁸² unproblematically. Berlin continues; 'we are told that children, primitive peoples, artists, and perhaps women too, think in images more than words. But once we begin to communicate coherently, conventional symbols dominate our lives: and these are mostly words.'⁵⁸³ Here, Berlin generates, alongside colonial imagery, an impoverished and incomplete vision of seemingly innate human differences. Link this to Berlin's overarching thesis (in the article on Tagore) that nationalism is a 'desire for recognition', his comments on 'human dignity', and a colonialised, simplified vision of the world emerges. This world vision is a 'cold war' vision when one thinks about the idealised nature of Berlin's writing. Building on what Berlin perceives as 'the desire for recognition' or '[d]awn of the awakening social self-consciousness'⁵⁸⁴ (divorced from any sense of material, practical concerns), he writes, '[t]he poor wish to be recognised as full human beings – as equals – by the rich, Jews by Christians, the dark-skinned by the fair, women by men, the weak by the strong.'⁵⁸⁵ He discusses 'the natural elite' in general, normative terms, as if we should know precisely what he is talking about.⁵⁸⁶ This, ironically, is a trait of a member of this 'elite' he is describing. He shows disdain for 'resentful attitudes of the new nations',⁵⁸⁷ and Berlin discusses at the end of the essay 'the truths...that England lived by'. Again, this betrays a colonial mindset towards the power structures of the colonial relationship. Bound up with the western conception of progress, 'achievement', 'us' and 'them' and 'acquiring strength', Berlin describes Tagore as striving towards 'the truth'. The truth, in

⁵⁸¹ Berlin, 'Rabindranath Tagore and the Consciousness of Nationality' [1961], p.251.

⁵⁸² Berlin, 'Rabindranath Tagore and the Consciousness of Nationality' [1961], p.258.

⁵⁸³ Berlin, 'Rabindranath Tagore and the Consciousness of Nationality' [1961], p.251.

⁵⁸⁴ Berlin, 'Rabindranath Tagore and the Consciousness of Nationality' [1961], p.264.

⁵⁸⁵ Berlin, 'Rabindranath Tagore and the Consciousness of Nationality' [1961], p.252.

⁵⁸⁶ Berlin, 'Rabindranath Tagore and the Consciousness of Nationality' [1961], p.253.

⁵⁸⁷ Berlin, 'Rabindranath Tagore and the Consciousness of Nationality' [1961], p.258.

this context, can be viewed as liberal democracy. Berlin's writing, with his persistent liberal orientation, also contains an implicit orientalist thread. Consistently, a 'vocabulary of assumption' means terms such as 'primitive' or 'civilisation' are unproblematically used to draw the framework of Berlin's ethno-hierarchy.

Conclusion

This chapter has begun the process of a critical reading of Berlin. I have assembled a complex set of conceptual tools in order to illustrate the implicit discursive power of Berlin's textual output. Unraveling the web of language has meant emphasising Berlin's 'vocabulary of assumption'. This vocabulary served to communicate Berlin's particular version of normality, which was characterised by an unquestioned use of key words and phrases that served as powerful expressions of Berlin's conceptions of human nature, freedom and 'the other' in a cold war context also influenced by strong colonial assumptions. I argue that Berlin's vocabulary of assumption is an example of the operation of 'ubiquitous' power, where his textual product is representative of cold war values in the west.

Dumm has suggested an overarching way in which to view Berlin's normative form of expression. Through viewing Berlin as occupying dominant 'uncontested' space in the west, we can better understand how the ontological foundation of his liberalism was taken for granted, and rarely questioned. This begins in earnest my description of Berlin's ontology. This is a process of identification, not condemnation. Yet, through the process of identifying the foundations for Berlin's liberal orientation, and the underlying assumptions involved, I have begun to demonstrate

that, in the cold war context and beyond, these assumptions remain critically unexamined in Anglo-American liberal academia and political culture. Instead, these assumptions remained implicit, and prepared the ground for dominant liberal 'space', where liberal values found legitimacy, and Berlin's conception of liberty could flourish, relatively unquestioned and unburdened by contesting 'spaces' of alternative freedoms. The more concrete geopolitical implications of Berlin's politics of space will be examined afresh in Chapter Eight, but my analysis of the abstract aspects of his textual output continues in the next chapter. It is now that I turn to two of Berlin's most well known essays 'Historical Inevitability' and 'Two Concepts of Liberty', and discuss their impact in the cold war context. The themes of determinism and the western conception of liberty are heavily stressed in these works and, as I demonstrate, are expressed with normatively charged language. Therefore, this chapter has served as a foundation for my continued attempt to reveal the extent to which assumption operates in Berlin's texts.

6

Politics, Space and Normality

Introduction

One of the consistent themes preoccupying Berlin's work is determinism. The famous controversy between E.H. Carr and Berlin over historical scholarship now appears anachronistic, but a careful analysis of Berlin's essay 'Historical Inevitability' can lead to some interesting insights into Berlin's use of language. In this chapter I use discourse analysis to argue that 'Historical Inevitability' was heavily reflective of Berlin's conception of normality, and not merely a reflection of his distrust of historians who placed trust in 'vast and impersonal forces'. Within the essay Berlin introduced the notion of intellectual and moral responsibility, supported and legitimised by a framework of normative language.

Extended analysis highlights the consistency of Berlin's use of the concept of normality, 'the natural' and an array of 'common' conceptions in an attempt to implicitly preserve liberal values. Berlin believed that intellectuals must not be 'misleading', and viewed determinist historians as falsifiers of truth. Berlin directs energy into the condemnation of these 'ideologically opposed' thinkers rather than theorising on the societal consequences of inequality. This aspect of his thought illuminates the nature of his intellectual self-perception, the contradictions within his liberal-pluralism, as well as the wider contextual anxieties that motivated him to write.

'Two Concepts of Liberty' is another prominent essay by Berlin that contains complex meanings that discourse analysis can uncover. The essay is possibly Berlin's most powerful ontological statement, aligning a conception of freedom with a rigid conception of human nature

and the modern subject. By process of internalisation, a space of freedom is implicitly defined.

The essay is an example of Berlin's claim to moral knowledge, where the concept of normality is presented as a universal principle.

Berlin and Determinism

Toews⁵⁸⁸ and Ignatieff⁵⁸⁹ have both, in different publications, written on the central importance of Berlin's early work on Karl Marx. Berlin's lengthy period of research on Marx between 1933 and 1938 shaped the way in which he would view the practice of philosophy and history. These years opened a new intellectual avenue for Berlin that allowed him to more fully express his universal concerns and imprint a new stylistic energy onto the 'history of ideas'. Indeed, *Karl Marx: His Life and Environment* begins the perennial problem over the textual analysis of Berlin. When does his interpretation of Marx finish and his own ideological and ontological positions creep to the forefront of the work?

As Toews and Arblaster have noted, an examination of the various revisions of *Karl Marx* is a good way to investigate this problem. Arblaster argues that Berlin finely tuned the text of *Karl Marx* in response to the changing pattern of intellectual activity in the 1950s and 1960s. This fact, evidenced by changes made between editions, suggests that he was acutely sensitive to the changing cold war landscape throughout these decades. It also suggests a level of engagement

⁵⁸⁸ John E. Toews, 'Berlin's Marx: Enlightenment, Counter-Enlightenment, and the Historical Construction of Cultural Identities', pp.163-176.

⁵⁸⁹ Ignatieff, *Isaiah Berlin*, p.70, 80.

that must be considered ideological at some level. Detailed by Arblaster in 1971⁵⁹⁰, these revisions were revisited by Toews in 2003. Toews places a great deal of importance onto the changes to the text, where 'the shifts in Berlin's position during the 1950s were articulated in the extensive additions to the chapter on 'Historical Materialism' in the third edition of *Karl Marx*, published in 1963'.⁵⁹¹ However, I argue 'beneath' these textual alterations lies a consistent vocabulary of assumption. For instance, Berlin writes in 'Final Retrospect', his last published work written in 1996, 'My only concern is to ask myself two questions. Why do philosophers and others think that human beings are fully determined? And, if they are, is this compatible with normal moral sentiments and behaviour, as commonly understood?'⁵⁹² He emphasises 'our common morality, in which we speak of obligation and duty, right and wrong, moral praise and blame.'⁵⁹³ In this context, Berlin offers an intense idealism, shot through with the language of normality, where phrases such as 'normal moral sentiments' or 'commonly understood' are used to demarcate Berlin's liberal space, which remains uncontested.

With this normative consistency in mind, I now wish to turn to the intellectual context surrounding Berlin's famous essay 'Historical Inevitability'. This essay evoked a significant response from the scholarly community, and early commentaries on Berlin's thesis were offered from Peter Geyl⁵⁹⁴ and, more famously, E.H. Carr's *What Is History?* Interestingly, Geyl seems to share the normative beliefs that run through the vocabulary of Berlin's work:

⁵⁹⁰ Anthony Arblaster, 'Vision and Revision', *Political Studies*, 19 (1971), pp.81-86.

⁵⁹¹ John E. Toews, 'Berlin's Marx: Enlightenment, Counter-Enlightenment, and the Historical Construction of Cultural Identities', p.170.

⁵⁹² Isaiah Berlin, 'Final Retrospect' [1996] in *Liberty*, p.322.

⁵⁹³ Berlin, 'Final Retrospect' [1996] in *Liberty*, p.324.

⁵⁹⁴ Peter Geyl, 'Historical Inevitability' in *Debates With Historians* (London: Bastford, 1955), pp.236-241.

'One of the most intriguing points made by Mr. Berlin, and made with great ability and originality, is that the fallacy of historical determinism appears from its utter inconsistency with the common sense and every-day way of looking at human affairs, which is ingrained in our whole habit of thought that even the determinists cannot help using the terminology properly belonging to it.'⁵⁹⁵

Geyl, on the question of why determinism is 'dangerous', goes further than Berlin - who asserts that the answer lies with the loss of 'the sense of individual responsibility' - stating that,

'even more dangerous I consider to be the fanaticising effect that a determinist theory can have....these sociological mythologies as we know them in our Western world are child's play compared with what we have seen happening in Russia. They have not, with us, succeeded...in nullifying the energy that we draw from a different source altogether, from free discussion, from criticism and the true scientific spirit....I welcome Mr. Berlin's spirited and valiant vindication of the true conception of history.'⁵⁹⁶

Geyl's hostile treatment of Toynbee in the same volume leaves no doubt that Geyl is in the same anti-metahistorical school as Berlin. Carr, in *What is History?*, views Berlin as a product of a long stream of historians who think that 'what matters in history is the character and behaviour of individuals'⁵⁹⁷. Carr makes the point that Berlin seems 'terribly worried about the prospect that historians may fail to denounce Genghis Khan and Hitler as bad men'.⁵⁹⁸ In other words, for Berlin, powerful historical actors make choices, and (in Carr's words) 'by explaining human actions in causal terms, it implies a denial of human free will, and encourages historians to evade their supposed obligation...to pronounce moral condemnation'.⁵⁹⁹ This moral condemnation, linked with, in Carr's eyes, a return to older historical fear of 'historicism' meant that 'Professor Popper

⁵⁹⁵ Geyl, 'Historical Inevitability', p.239.

⁵⁹⁶ Geyl, 'Historical Inevitability', p.241.

⁵⁹⁷ E.H. Carr, *What is History?*(London: Penguin, 1990), p.45.

⁵⁹⁸ Carr, *What is History?*, p.46.

⁵⁹⁹ Carr, *What is History?*, p.92.

and Sir Isaiah Berlin...between them have flogged this very dead horse back to life; and some patience will be required to clear up the muddle'.⁶⁰⁰ He continues,

'the trouble with contemporary history is that people remember the time when all the options were still open, and find it difficult to adopt the attitude of the historian for whom they have been closed by the *fait accompli*. This is a purely emotional and unhistorical reaction. But it has furnished most of the fuel for the recent campaign against the supposed doctrine of 'historical inevitability'. Let us get rid of this red herring once and for all'.⁶⁰¹

Berlin's preoccupation with 'historicism' is evident in his article 'Hobbes, Locke and Professor Macpherson', in which he uncovers Macpherson's methodological affinity to Marxism. Berlin writes,

'What is novel is Professor Macpherson's view that Hobbes is the spokesman of the bourgeoisie, that his model of man and society are founded upon his correct observation of the new commercial society that he saw rising round him in England, and that many of the difficulties and paradoxes which have hitherto appeared merely as blemishes in an otherwise logically coherent doctrine can be most easily explained by attributing his psychology and sociology not, as hitherto, to the rise of the influence of the new physics or the religious wars of the time, but to changes in the forces and the relations of production. Marx is seldom mentioned in these pages; nevertheless, the intellectual power and unity of Professor Macpherson's thesis is increased by his unswerving application of Marxist methods of analysis'.⁶⁰²

As if refusing any middle ground on the issue, Berlin later adds, 'the vitality of the classics springs from some quality that transcends their times, and the validity of their views can scarcely be exclusively due to their expression of a given class structure, even if the two are in fact connected'.⁶⁰³ Berlin seems to be stressing that 'ideas' have a measure of power that is as irresistible as the 'material' concerns of historians like Macpherson. This 'quality that transcends'

⁶⁰⁰ Carr, *What is History?*, p.93.

⁶⁰¹ Carr, *What is History?*, p.98.

⁶⁰² Berlin, 'Hobbes, Locke and Professor Macpherson' [1963], p.445.

⁶⁰³ Berlin, 'Hobbes, Locke and Professor Macpherson' [1963], p.446.

suggests again that Berlin is taking as a given the 'autonomy' of ideas - or at least an 'area' of autonomy where, at most, they may 'express' something about the class structure. Even on this point Berlin is unconvinced by the link between material factors and the expression of ideas.

For Carr, the debate is reducible to two sides. There are liberal historians such as Popper and Berlin who mistakenly argue that attempts 'to find significance in the historical process and to draw conclusions from it is tantamount to an attempt to reduce 'the whole of experience' to a symmetrical order'⁶⁰⁴. Then there are those historians who view 'history as a process of selection in terms of historical significance'⁶⁰⁵, most of which are fully aware that attempts to create 'symmetrical order' will fail. Carr, in a sense, is offering an opposite 'common-sense' view of historical scholarship. Nagel confronts the question of individual responsibility in more depth, although he too views the enterprise as stirring up 'dead ashes'.⁶⁰⁶ He is partially sympathetic with determinist thought, and sees that certain 'illusions' can be obliterated by 'objective inquiry into the various conditions which determine the existence of human traits and actions'⁶⁰⁷, which he views a positive step toward the 'advancement of knowledge'. He makes several points that serve to demonstrate that Berlin's thesis can be over-simplistic in a variety of ways. Nagel makes the point that it is perfectly tenable to consistently express a 'deterministic' vision of history whilst 'employ[ing] ordinary moral language to express familiar moral distinctions'.⁶⁰⁸ Berlin would argue that this cannot be the case. Crowder has summed up Berlin's belief: 'if we were to really to live

⁶⁰⁴ Carr, *What is History?*, p.103.

⁶⁰⁵ Carr, *What is History?*, p.105.

⁶⁰⁶ Ernest Nagel, 'Determinism in History' in Patrick Gardiner (ed.), *The Philosophy of History* (Oxford: OUP, 1974), p.209.

⁶⁰⁷ Nagel, 'Determinism in History', p.215.

⁶⁰⁸ Nagel, 'Determinism in History', p.214.

our lives as if determinism were true, we would have to change our moral language and thinking to a degree impossible for us.⁶⁰⁹ Berlin's work continually stresses, implicitly or otherwise, the incompatibility of the determinist view of history with 'normal' moral sentiment. If we examine Berlin on this point, we are somewhat to understanding three things about Berlin's methodology. Firstly, Berlin's belief that 'the power of ideas', and a conscious concept of history, is linked directly to terms such as 'morality' within each individual agent. Secondly, it is possible to examine the way in which Berlin conceives words such as 'inhuman' or 'immoral' as being the opposite to 'normal' moral distinctions as signifying a specific outlook. Finally, it is clear that Berlin's entire outlook is ontologically directed, and reducible to an examination of his use of language and normative assumption.

Before I undertake an examination of 'Historical Inevitability' along these lines, it is also salient to point out that Nagel speaks in terms such as 'our ordinary language' or 'the use of normal moral discourse' or 'the advance of knowledge'⁶¹⁰ in his conclusion, which suggests that 'Berlin's' normative assumptions are also widespread in the literature involved in his interpretation. Also it will become clear how a close textual analysis of 'Historical Inevitability' also demonstrates how Crowder, a sympathetic Berlin scholar, displays similar ontological assumptions. This opens up wider implications for the study of academic discourse, as it illustrates how pervasive these normative assumptions are, and how important it must be to locate and explain them.

⁶⁰⁹ Crowder, *Isaiah Berlin*, p.52.

⁶¹⁰ Nagel, 'Determinism in History', pp.214-215.

'Historical Inevitability'

Rather than over-emphasising the ways in which 'Historical Inevitability' is ontologically flawed, it is more important to ground the work in its cultural cold war context. The text is a refutation of determinism in the study of history and a plea for the realisation of 'true' human agency in history. In short, the text is interested in the 'personal' and 'impersonal' forces that shape historical understanding, and the ideological schools that represent either position. Seen in light of prominent cold war values, Berlin's text is anticommunist in that it shuns the basis for a Marxist view of history. Although a complex and subtle text, 'Historical Inevitability' holds the identifiable central message, explained by Crowder, that

'determinism is incompatible with our ordinary notion of freedom of choice, and therefore with our ordinary notion of moral responsibility....if we were to really to live our lives as if determinism were true, we would have to change our moral language and thinking to a degree impossible for us.'⁶¹¹

Expanded from the earlier quote, Crowder is echoing Berlin's normative form of expression. Determinism is viewed as artificial in the sense that 'we' would be required to overthrow the 'normal' circumstance of expression. This overthrow is presented as an impossibility. Crucially, Crowder is reinforcing Berlin's categorisations of 'compatibility', 'possibility', 'responsibility' and 'freedom of choice', and surrounding them with the vocabulary of normality. There is no need to go beyond these categories, no imperative to take into account the unnatural, artificial realm of determinism. In Berlin's own words,

'all this seems too self-evident to argue....these [moral] categories permeate all that we think and feel so pervasively and universally that to think them away, and conceive what

⁶¹¹ Crowder, *Isaiah Berlin*, p.52.

and how we should be thinking, feeling and talking without them, or in the framework of their opposites...is nearly, if not quite, as impracticable as, let us say, to pretend that we live in a world in which space, time or number in the normal sense no longer exist.⁶¹²

Like Crowder, Berlin uses 'we', 'normal' or 'self-evident' to build a normative framework which acts as a significant oppositional tool to the threat of determinist thought. Furthermore, Berlin argues that determinism goes against human experience and 'natural' moral and political ideals. He states

'both [relativism and determinism] have, at times, succeeded in reasoning or frightening men out of their most human moral or political convictions in the name of a deeper and more devastating insight into the nature of things. Yet, perhaps, this is no more than a sign of neurosis and confusion: for neither view seems to be supported by human experience.'⁶¹³

He goes on to explain that the human desire to explain, to find unity, has been a profound motivation in the history of thought, but it is essentially a misleading seduction that threatens to overthrow the sense of moral correctness accessible to all men. With the consistent use of normative language surrounding questions of morality and human experience, 'Historical Inevitability' is beginning to amount to a complex statement of Berlin's ontology. Although originally published in 1954, this text is consistent with the mature writing of Berlin. For instance the following passage strongly pre-empts his later 'liberal-pluralism':

'If we understand how conflicts between ends equally ultimate and sacred, but irreconcilable within the breast of even a single human being, or between different men or groups, can lead to tragic and unavoidable collisions, we shall not distort the moral facts by artificially ordering them in terms of some one absolute criterion; recognising that (*pace* the moralists of the eighteenth century) not all good things are necessarily compatible with one another; and shall seek to comprehend the changing ideas of

⁶¹² Berlin, 'Historical Inevitability' [1954], p.121.

⁶¹³ Berlin, 'Historical Inevitability' [1954], p.155.

cultures, peoples, classes and individual human beings, without asking which are right, which wrong, at any rate not in terms of some simple home-made dogma.⁶¹⁴

Berlin's work on determinism, as well as Crowder's summaries, displays signs of the dominant liberal conception of normality. In the essay Berlin writes

'Our view of the natural sciences, of the material basis of cultural evolution, of all that we call progressive, rational, enlightened, Western; our view of the relationships of institutions and of public symbolism and ceremonial to the emotional life of individuals and societies, and consequently our view of history itself, owes a good deal to his [Comte's] teaching and his influence'⁶¹⁵.

The use of 'our' in relation to terms such as 'institutions' and 'emotional life' assumes a logical, commonsensical, link that 'we' all supposedly understand as Berlin does. To leave no doubt that Berlin is talking in cloaked contemporary terms, he goes on to say, 'This naïve craving for unity and symmetry at the expense of experience is still with us'⁶¹⁶. The language of the 'dismissive' continues throughout the essay, climaxing periodically with such sentences as

'We are plainly dealing not with an empirical theory but with a metaphysical attitude which takes for granted that to explain a thing - to describe it as it 'truly' is, even to define it more than verbally, that is, superficially - is to discover its purpose.....Teleology is not a theory, or a hypothesis, but a category or a framework in terms of which everything is, or should be, conceived and described'.⁶¹⁷

The force of 'the normal', or the ordinary, is evident throughout the essay. The liberal position of Berlin is implicitly emphasised through assumptions about 'truth', and the sense of intellectual polarisation stressed by the continued use of 'we' in opposition to the 'metaphysical attitude'.

⁶¹⁴ Berlin, 'Historical Inevitability' [1954], p.151.

⁶¹⁵ Berlin, 'Historical Inevitability' [1954], p.95.

⁶¹⁶ Berlin, 'Historical Inevitability' [1954], p.96.

⁶¹⁷ Berlin, 'Historical Inevitability' [1954], p.105.

Another section of his essay exemplifies this position, and makes more obvious the operation of normative language:

'We can accuse historians of bias, or inaccuracy, or stupidity, or dishonesty, as we can accuse one another of these vices in our ordinary daily intercourse; and we can praise them for the corresponding virtues; and usually with some degree of justice and reason. But just as our ordinary speech would become fantastically distorted by a conscious effort to eliminate from it some basic ingredient – say, everything remotely liable to convey value judgements, our normal, scarcely noticed, moral or psychological attitudes – and just as this is not regarded as indispensable for the preservation of what we should look upon as a normal modicum of objectivity, impartiality and accuracy, so, for the same reason, no such radical remedy is needed for the preservation of a reasonable modicum of these qualities in the writing of history'.⁶¹⁸

Again, 'we' and 'our' are utilised in a normative manner, and the message is one that leans heavily on 'common-sense' conceptions. For instance, 'moral attitudes' can only be 'scarcely noticed' if everyone understands, presumably innately, the 'normal' texture of 'our' morality. When Berlin discusses a 'normal modicum of objectivity', he is again assuming some unwritten code that the reader is invited to understand as a basic ingredient of 'our' accepted scholarly practice. Clearly, these assumptions add up to powerful moral instruction, implicitly expressed in an ideologically charged cold war context.

Berlin implicates certain thinkers within this form of moral instruction. An important section of the essay concentrates on the link between Hegel, Marx and the belief in 'great social forces...of which only the most acute and most gifted individuals are ever aware.'⁶¹⁹ Berlin employs an effective, slightly sarcastic, tone when describing Hegel and Marx's 'notoriety';

'From time to time, the real forces - impersonal and irresistible - which truly govern the world develop to a point where a new historical advance is 'due'. Then....the crucial

⁶¹⁸ Berlin, 'Historical Inevitability' [1954], p.140.

⁶¹⁹ Berlin, 'Historical Inevitability' [1954], p.112.

moments of advance are reached; these take the form of violent, cataclysmic leaps, destructive revolutions which, often with fire and sword, establish a new order upon the ruins of the old....For Hegel...history is a perpetual struggle of vast spiritual forces embodied now in institutions....For Marx, the struggle is a fight between socially conditioned, organised groups - classes shaped by the struggle for subsistence and survival and consequently for the control of power.....To be wise is to understand the direction in which the world is inexorably moving, to identify oneself with the rising power which ushers in the new world.⁶²⁰

Marx and Hegel are interpreted as representing a strand of European thought that seeks to educate humanity as to the true meaning of the historical process. Conceived as an identifiable system, history, for Marx, is linked to broad economic forces that also impact on the potential freedom available to the working classes. For Berlin, this intellectual logic is presented as *abnormal*. Rooted in a firm belief in the existence of an overarching system, or totality, Marx and Hegel are presented as submerging the role of the individual agent 'beneath' impersonal, unnatural, forces. In the cold war context, it is also tempting to view this as Berlin's statement on individual moral responsibility. The individual is conceived as one with free will, the ability to shape history, within 'normal' liberal limits. The impact of the 'forces' identified by Marx is downplayed by Berlin, who instead views the foundation of historical understanding as defined by human choice. Indeed, further on in the essay Berlin writes, on determinist beliefs,

'these melancholy views are two, not one: the first is an argument from ineffectiveness, the second from ignorance; and either might be true and the other false. Moreover, neither seems to accord with common belief, nor with the common practice either of ordinary men or of ordinary historians; each seems plausible and unplausible [sic] in its own way, and each deserves its own defence or refutation'.⁶²¹

It seems clear that Berlin is condemning determinism in terms of moral opposition. Implicitly,

⁶²⁰ Berlin, 'Historical Inevitability' [1954], p.112-3.

⁶²¹ Berlin, 'Historical Inevitability' [1954], p.136.

'common practice' and 'common belief' are presented as liberal-gradualist products of an honest and morally sensible humanity. However, the extent to which the 'common' and the 'ordinary' are evoked presents the impression of a status quo that is near-perfect and a morality that is unquestionably correct. Thus Berlin presents a self-satisfied image of western society that overlooks the possible iniquities within the dominant social order that gave rise to Marx's concerns in the first place. Instead, Berlin views the popularity of determinism as an abstract product of the confusion arising from the methodological clash between the humanities and 'the natural sciences'. He writes:

'The invocation to historians to suppress even that minimal degree of moral or psychological insight and evaluation which is necessarily involved in viewing human beings as creatures with purposes and motives (and not merely as causal factors in the procession of events) seems to me to spring from a confusion of the aims and methods of the humane studies with those of natural science. Purely descriptive, wholly depersonalised history remains, what it has always been, a figment of abstract theory, a violently exaggerated reaction to the cant and vanity of earlier generations'.⁶²²

Thus, too often the human subject is undervalued due to the imposition of 'objectivity' as a positively perceived intellectual trait. Berlin is calling for history practiced in a morally sensitive fashion. Yet, Berlin is calling for, presumably, the very moral instruction I have suggested implicitly activates Berlin's own texts. Linked to my earlier considerations on power, it seems Berlin is being rather simplistic over the question of 'moral' or 'psychological' insight, as it is clear that he is, like any other author, constantly expressing a moral position. Berlin does not view his own 'moral instruction' as a product of a powerful normative centre that can also be identified as part of a 'system'. Again stressing the polarisation between two separate brands of thought Berlin writes,

⁶²² Berlin, 'Historical Inevitability' [1954], p.140-1.

'some interplay there is, of course, between a given scientific 'world-picture' and views of life in the normal meaning of this word.'⁶²³ The stress of the normative denotes an air of authority, as the reader is left in no doubt that some things 'are' normal and, therefore, some things 'are not'. Another paragraph highlights the way in which the 'normal' operates as a central conception in Berlin's text, where it is used to highlight the 'natural' limits of discourse:

'Where to draw the line – where to exclude judgements as being too subjective to be admitted into an account which we desire to make as 'objective' as possible, that is, as well supported by publicly discoverable, inspectable, comparable facts as we can make it – that is a question for ordinary judgement, that is to say, for what passes as such in our society, in our own time and place, among the people to whom we are addressing ourselves, with all the assumptions which are taken for granted, more or less, in normal communication.'⁶²⁴

This is an intriguing passage for two main reasons. Firstly, 'assumptions that are taken for granted....in normal communication' itself demands the conformity with certain forms of expression within discourse itself, thus excluding those forms of expression that communicate (presumably) *abnormally*. This conformity is a symptom of the uncontested nature of Berlin's own set of assumptions. Secondly, the emphasis on the question of 'publicly' known knowledge illustrates the typical liberal public/private dichotomy that is presented as natural and unproblematic. Interestingly, in terms of my interest in Berlin's use of vocabulary, Berlin adds the following self-conscious question in relation to his own work:

'What of the words such as those we have used so liberally above – 'valid', 'normal', 'relevant', 'perverted', 'suppression of facts', 'interpretation' – what do they signify? Is the meaning and use of these crucial terms so very fixed and unambiguous?'⁶²⁵

⁶²³ Berlin, 'Historical Inevitability' [1954], p.143.

⁶²⁴ Berlin, 'Historical Inevitability' [1954], p.145.

⁶²⁵ Berlin, 'Historical Inevitability' [1954], p.147.

Avoiding questions on the functionality of these phrases, Berlin is interested in a kind of relativism that sees the 'rules for the weighing of evidence [to] change'⁶²⁶ This suggests yet allows certain 'terms' to

'possess meanings, which may, indeed, be fluid, but stay within limits recognised by normal usage, and refer to standards commonly accepted by those who work in relevant fields; and that not merely within one generation or society, but across large stretches of time and space.'⁶²⁷

Berlin conceives of human history as having at root a continuity of standards. Meaning has accepted limits that are generated by 'common assumptions', and these commonsensical realisations highlight the inhumanity of determinist thought; 'the common ground is what is correctly called objective – that which enables us to identify other men and other civilisations as human and civilised at all.'⁶²⁸ This 'grounding' of common standards assumes a space where agents can express and exercise their 'free will'. Unconstrained, 'free' and occupying the common ground, these agents have the potentiality to possess all 'liberal' freedoms. This is only possible with a rejection of the concept of determinism, itself (presumably) reliant on '*uncommon* ground'; a 'ground' perverse, inhumane, away from the norms and 'proper' limits of 'common ground'. Liberal space must be accepted, and the optimistic belief in the opportunities inherent in liberal democratic society embraced.

After elucidating the 'common ground' of liberalism with its conception of the human agent at its centre, Berlin explains the folly of both determinism and relativism in the following way:

⁶²⁶ Berlin, 'Historical Inevitability' [1954], p.147.

⁶²⁷ Berlin, 'Historical Inevitability' [1954], p.148-9.

⁶²⁸ Berlin, 'Historical Inevitability' [1954], p.152.

'One of the deepest of human desires is to find a unitary pattern in which the whole of human experience, past, present and future, actual, possible and unfulfilled, is symmetrically ordered.'⁶²⁹

Furthermore, 'empirical evidence' is secondary to conceptual concerns, because 'there is an obsessive pattern at work'.⁶³⁰ Berlin states 'the frontier between facts and cosmic patterns, empirical or metaphysical or theological, indistinct and shifting as it may be, is a genuine concept for all those who take the problems of history seriously. So long as we remain historians the two levels must be kept distinct.'⁶³¹

Berlin elaborates on those who view history as the new religion, those who view history '...by inexorable 'societal' and 'behavioural' patterns, to quote but a few sacred words from the barbarous vocabulary of the new mythologies'.⁶³² Here is an example of oppositional language to reiterate the differences between the 'true' and the cosmic, the good from the barbarous. Berlin does not see that it could easily be argued that 'left-wing' ideology emanates from a wish to promote communal responsibility and to face up to injustice. It is this aspect of societal responsibility that Berlin never sees as missing from western society. Indeed, as he continues on responsibility: 'where there is no choice there is no anxiety; and a happy release from responsibility.'⁶³³ Responsibility is taken to mean moral obligation; a state of being where correct moral decisions must be, and 'are' made. If society allows individual freedom to flourish, moral

⁶²⁹ Berlin, 'Historical Inevitability' [1954], p.155.

⁶³⁰ Berlin, 'Historical Inevitability' [1954], p.157.

⁶³¹ Berlin, 'Historical Inevitability' [1954], p.157.

⁶³² Berlin, 'Historical Inevitability' [1954], p.159.

⁶³³ Berlin, 'Historical Inevitability' [1954], p.160.

responsibility will follow. Expanding on this, the following passage is an example of how Berlin reaffirms his belief that determinism is an ideology alien to human norms:

'Social determinism is, at least historically, closely bound up with the 'nomothetic' ideals of sociology. And it may, indeed, be a true doctrine. But if it is true, and if we begin to take it seriously, then, indeed, the changes in the whole of our language, our moral terminology, our attitudes towards one another, our views of history, of society and of everything else will be too profound to be even adumbrated. The concepts of praise and blame, innocence and guilt and individual responsibility from which we started are but a small element in the structure which would collapse or disappear....Our words – our modes of speech and thought – would be transformed in literally unimaginable ways; the notions of choice, of responsibility, of freedom are so deeply embedded in our outlook that our new life, as creatures in a world genuinely lacking in those concepts, can, I should maintain, be conceived by us only with the greatest difficulty'.⁶³⁴

Here, Berlin is in dialogue with the heart of western liberalism. In the cold war context this is inescapably stark. 'Our' or 'we' signify the normative assumptions at work on the surface of the text, and it is clear that Berlin holds a conception of liberal space, and the need to preserve this space, when he states 'notions of choice, of responsibility, of freedom are so deeply embedded in our outlook'. This is a firm indicator that, again, Berlin implicitly bolsters the impression of a natural liberal space that is best left alone and uncontested. That any other 'new life' can be only conceived 'with the greatest of difficulty', re-emphasises the humane 'naturalness' of the liberal space of discourse. This liberal space, it seems, has religious undertones. The unfortunates who have come to 'believe' in, what Berlin terms, 'metaphysico-theological theories of history', have done so because they 'have lost their faith in older religious orthodoxies'.⁶³⁵ The assumption here is that all interpreters must have a firm theological foundation driving their work, and that the 'older religious orthodoxies' - presumably Judeo-Christianity - allow for more enlightened, authentic

⁶³⁴ Berlin, 'Historical Inevitability' [1954], p.161-2.

⁶³⁵ Berlin, 'Historical Inevitability' [1954], p.162.

views of life. There is no suggestion that interpreters can use these theoretical tools without 'believing' in them. For Berlin, those who apply 'pseudo-scientific' ideals *believe* in them, on a quasi-religious level.

After this series of denunciations in the name of liberal norms, Berlin states that 'it needs more than infatuation with a programme to overthrow some of the most deeply rooted moral and intellectual habits of human beings, whether they be plumbers or historians'.⁶³⁶ The word 'infatuation' is suggestive of lack of control, lack of rationality, whilst the 'habits' of all other humans are implicitly presented as organic, natural, humane and just, in a context of western universalism. The origins of and conditions surrounding these 'habits' are not questioned. The unambiguous caricature of human agents as well as an overwhelming sense of sentimentalism is central to understanding Berlin's belief that these western 'habits' are inherently proper and 'good'. Adding further to his conception of normality Berlin continues in his denunciation of determinism, stating that

'to accept this doctrine is to do violence to the basic notions of our morality, to misrepresent our sense of the past, and to ignore some among the most general concepts and categories of normal thought. Those who are concerned with human affairs are committed to the use of the moral categories and concepts which normal language incorporates and expresses.'⁶³⁷

The essay ends with a plea to avoid the intellectual trap that has, at its centre, an abandonment of what Berlin views as dominant western moral values. Intellectuals must not use

'misleading metaphors and allegories, and make use of hypnotic formulae with little regard for experience, or rational argument, or tests of proven reliability. Thereby they throw dust in their own eyes as well as in ours, obstruct our vision of the real world, and

⁶³⁶ Berlin, 'Historical Inevitability' [1954], p.163.

⁶³⁷ Berlin, 'Historical Inevitability' [1954], p.163.

further confuse an already bewildered public about the relation of morality to politics...⁶³⁸

The clear message is that Berlin's conception of morality, encapsulated in his wider conception of normality, is all 'the public' should be permitted to experience. This confinement of morality limits the role of the intellectual to a narrow stream of expressions, 'concepts and categories' that must, to recall earlier expressions from Berlin, ring true with values 'rooted' and 'embedded' in the popular imagination. Berlin assumes these norms are there for everyone to observe in the present, stating the case in a commonsensical manner. Focusing on 'the moral', 'the human/e', 'the rational' and, implicitly, the natural, and the uncontested, the reader is told that only the practice of history as Berlin sees it leads us to a realization of 'the real world'. With this in mind, Berlin's actions surrounding the *Index On Censorship* debacle should come as less of a shock, and one can begin to see the less visible way in which Berlin is firmly aligned with cold war attitudes, and the way in which his writing resonates profoundly with the central markers of cold war discourse.

In a sense this instructive morality, which is also an instructive view of history, serves to bolster intellectual solidarity in a war defined explicitly elsewhere, but implicitly defined by the use of language by Berlin. Whilst 'Historical Inevitability' may be viewed as a justification of a particular conception, or brand, of historical process - an anti-determinist ontological plea for trust in the goodness of the human will, of human responsibility, of choice - 'Two Concepts of Liberty'

⁶³⁸ Berlin, 'Historical Inevitability' [1954], p.165.

presents the specific foundational belief in individual freedom already touched upon in 'Historical Inevitability'.

*'Two Concepts of Liberty'*⁶³⁹

The essay 'Two Concepts of Liberty', based on an inaugural lecture he gave in 1958, is Berlin's famous reassertion of the duality of 'negative' and 'positive' liberty. Highly influenced by Benjamin Constant, as elucidated by Lionel Gossman in 'Benjamin Constant on Liberty and Love'⁶⁴⁰, Berlin took the model as described in 'The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns', and moulded it to fit the twentieth century world. In the words of Constant,

'the danger of ancient liberty was that men, exclusively concerned with securing their share of social power, might attach too little value to individual rights and enjoyments. The danger of modern liberty is that, absorbed in the enjoyment of our private independence, and in the pursuit of our particular interests, we should surrender our right to share in political power too easily.'⁶⁴¹

The echoing of Constant in the work of Berlin is interesting because Constant, presenting his lecture in 1819, was directing his efforts towards contemporary problems. Constant wished to make sense of a visibly new socio-political order in France by stressing the vital nature of 'political liberty'. Constant is essentially discussing 'kinds' of liberty, a state of being which irrevocably affects the individual. He believes in the typology he describes, and sees the possibility of post-revolutionary peace hinging on the way in which liberty is embraced and understood among the

⁶³⁹ The literature generated from Berlin's famous lecture is vast. For a recent, accessible, analysis of the themes see George Crowder, *Isaiah Berlin*, Chapter 4.

⁶⁴⁰ Lionel Gossman, 'Benjamin Constant on Liberty and Love' in Joseph Mall & Robert Woklor (eds.), 'Isaiah Berlin's Counter-Enlightenment', pp.133-162.

⁶⁴¹ Benjamin Constant, 'The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns', in Biancamaria Fontana (ed.), *Benjamin Constant: Political Writings* [trans. Biancamaria Fantana] (Cambridge: CUP, 1988), p.326.

people. Berlin is making a similar case. Berlin's variety of liberalism is willfully more effuse, more prone to emphasise the inconsistencies of human nature and human society, more willing to place trust in certain institutions. However Berlin is still trading in the typology of liberalism where philosophers who betray certain 'human' realities in favour of a variety of 'positive' freedom are highlighted and blacklisted.

Away from stressing the obvious links between Berlin's dualism and 'The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns', Gossman contends that, for Berlin, Constant 'is Herzen in a different key - classical, somewhat 'cold' as Berlin put it himself, rather than romantic, Swiss rather than Russian, but equally cosmopolitan and endowed with the same capacity for seeing the world through other's eyes'.⁶⁴² Elsewhere, Berlin spoke of Constant as 'a genuine liberal' who had identified two kinds of liberty.⁶⁴³ So, perhaps contained within the intellectual inspiration for 'Two Concepts of Liberty' are further clues to Berlin's insistence on treating past philosophers as products of a strong 'liberal' tradition that gives a naturalised moral legitimacy to the type of liberalism Berlin champions. Similarly to 'Historical Inevitability', Berlin stresses the stark contrast between Mill and Herzen (among others) - who, apparently, made minimal assumptions about the ultimate nature and inherent needs of the individual subject - and Hegel and German Idealism, whose 'despotic vision' and dogmatic assumptions about the essence of the individual subject go against the more 'naturalist' version as presented by Mill and Herzen. Berlin makes clear that the problems posed by Hegel and the German Idealists - these

⁶⁴² Gossman, 'Benjamin Constant on Liberty and Love', p.134.

⁶⁴³ Jahanbegloo, *Conversations With Isaiah Berlin*, p.42, 144.

philosophers who stood for 'positive' conceptions of liberty - because of 'recent history', are 'not merely academic'.⁶⁴⁴ However, although Berlin seems intent on making a direct, contemporary case for negative freedom, the piece must still be interpreted as a veiled ontological message. For instance, Berlin is convinced 'that conceptions of freedom directly derive from views of what constitutes a self, a person, a man',⁶⁴⁵ therefore making instant assumptions on the nature of freedom and human agency. The normative consistency with 'Historical Inevitability' is apparent here.

To deal with Berlin's explicit messages in 'Two Concepts of Liberty', the essay is firstly a statement of the potential power of ideas. Berlin states

'our philosophers seem oddly aware of these devastating effects of their activities....politics has remained indissolubly intertwined with every other form of philosophical enquiry....It is only a very vulgar historical materialism that denies the power of ideas, and says that ideals are mere material interests in disguise.'⁶⁴⁶

It is in this sense that it is important to remember that the essay is first of all a plea. We are asked never to forget the importance of political thought, nor neglect its force to change society irrevocably. Berlin is clearly preoccupied with anxieties that are 'not merely academic', and concerned that scholars do not forget that 'ideals' are humanly motivated and not products of 'material interests'. However, it must be noted that whilst Berlin is concerned about 'forces' that can 'change society', he is always very shrouded when it comes to pressing issues of social and political inequality. Yet, he views distinctions along these terminological lines as all important.

⁶⁴⁴ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' [1958], p.181.

⁶⁴⁵ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' [1958], p.181.

⁶⁴⁶ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' [1958], p.167-8.

Berlin states very clearly that intellectual muddling is a severe blow to philosophical or scholarly understanding. Berlin derides the idea that there is a balance, and interchange of influence, between certain freedoms: '..it is a confusion of values to say that although my 'liberal', individual freedom may go by the board, some other kind of freedom - 'social' or 'economic' - is increased.'⁶⁴⁷ Berlin is ambiguous in his description of the interaction between the individual and society, but does seem to conceive 'ideas' as having a certain autonomy from societal forces. In the next quote, Berlin spends more energy deriding those who believe 'ideals are mere material interests' than thinking about the tension between the need for change in society and the inertia of conservative attitudes:

'Despite every effort to separate them, conducted by a blind scholastic pedantry, politics has remained indissolubly intertwined with every other form of philosophical enquiry. To neglect the field of political thought, because of its unstable subject matter, with its blurred edges, is not to be caught by the fixed concepts, abstract models and fine instruments suitable to logic or to linguistic analysis - to demand a unity of method in philosophy, and reject whatever the method cannot successfully manage - is merely to allow oneself to remain at the mercy of primitive and uncriticised beliefs. It is only a very vulgar historical materialism that denies the power of ideas, and says that ideals are mere material interests in disguise.'⁶⁴⁸

The reader needs to decide whether this is Berlin genuinely believing in the 'power of ideas' for the force of 'good', or a polemic against 'historical materialists' who promote the force of 'bad'. Either way, Berlin seems to be in contradiction: to say 'politics has remained indissolubly intertwined with every other form of philosophical enquiry' and then to add '[i]t is only a very vulgar historical materialism that denies the power of ideas, and says that ideals are mere material

⁶⁴⁷ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' [1958], p.172-3.

⁶⁴⁸ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' [1958], p.167-8.

interests in disguise' seems confused. The confusion stems from the fact that Berlin is saying the power of ideas does have a huge impact in politics and society whilst arguing that those on 'the left' are wrong when they claim ideas are representations of material interests. Berlin seems to want to have it both ways, and it is unclear if he really appreciates that the crux of what he is saying is 'some ideas that I believe in are correct, the rest are wrong'. This sits uneasily with his vision of liberty. Emphasising the vital nature of ideas to everyday life Berlin then goes on to say

'political words and notions and acts are not intelligible save in the context of the issues that divide the men who use them. Consequently, our own attitudes and activities are likely to remain obscure to us, unless we understand the dominant issues of our own world. The greatest of these is the open war that is being fought between two systems of ideas which return different and conflicting answers to what had long been the central question of politics – the question of obedience and coercion.'⁶⁴⁹

As if to reinforce the cold war polarisation of ideas, he says 'upon the answers to the question of the permissible limits of coercion opposed views are held in the world today, each claiming the allegiance of very large numbers of men'.⁶⁵⁰ I have already quoted Edward Said's belief that 'Two Concepts of Liberty' was the cold war 'self-image' in the west. To explore what this may mean in more depth, it is important to return briefly to the possibility that the cold war was, in part, a process of 'internalisation'. In the West, this 'internalising' process pervaded not only conscious anticommunist 'speech-acts', but the configuration of language in less overtly polemic works. This process was bolstered by the repetition of liberal values and attitudes, the constant creation of the 'normal' that came to act as the foundation of the liberal ethic. Much of this was evident enough but, as already explained, the liberal project also had an implicit vocabulary that rooted itself in

⁶⁴⁹ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' [1958]; p.168.

⁶⁵⁰ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' [1958], p.168.

the functioning of 'the familiar', itself the mobilisation of normality.

Throughout 'Two Concepts of Liberty' this normative vocabulary can be unearthed as a significant presence. Dumm has made a point similar to this, as introduced in the previous chapter, and I now intend to broaden this approach, and to elucidate more solidly the specifically 'cold war' context of Berlin's writing. Early in the essay⁶⁵¹ when introducing the idea of 'negative' liberty, Berlin writes on what is 'normally' termed as freedom: the 'area within which a man can act unobstructed by others' and 'the wider the area of non-interference the wider my freedom'. He defines coercion as 'deliberate interference of other human beings within the area in which I could otherwise act', and continually re-emphasises the term 'area' both in discussions of the liberal tradition and in relation to specific philosophers:

'it is assumed by these thinkers [classical English political philosophers] that the *area* of men's *free action* must be limited by law. But equally it is assumed, especially by such libertarians as Locke and Mill in England, and Constant and Tocqueville in France, that there ought to exist a certain *minimum area of personal freedom* which must on account be violated; for it is overstepped, the individual will find himself in an *area* too narrow for even that minimum development of his natural faculties which alone makes it possible to pursue, and even to conceive, the various ends which men hold good or right or sacred. It follows that a *frontier* must be drawn between the *area* of private life and that of public authority'.⁶⁵² [author's own italics]

The inclusion of italics creates a new emphasis to the paragraph. Without italicisation it reads as an idealistic agreement with the central assertions of the 'negative' liberals. With italicisation it becomes quite clear that the repetition of the term 'area' must hold some relevance. I have already shown that Dumm views the use of terms such as 'area' and 'frontier' as integral to Berlin's

⁶⁵¹ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' [1958], p.170.

⁶⁵² Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' [1958], p.171.

creation of a liberal conception of freedom, and 'that in all cases the space he [Berlin] designates as a site of freedom is natural, not constructed, either invaded or evacuated, empty or filled, cultivated or wild.' Clearly freedom 'lies' somewhere and exists within boundaries that are presumably normatively identified. Further on in the essay, Berlin contrasts his view of the inevitability of the incommensurability of values with the 'optimistic' view of human nature;

'Philosophers with an optimistic view of human nature and a belief in the possibility of harmonising human interests, such as Locke or Adam Smith or, in some moods, Mill, believed that social harmony and progress were compatible with reserving a large area for private life over which neither the State nor any other authority must be allowed to trespass. Hobbes, and...conservative or reactionary thinkers, argued that if men were to be prevented from destroying one another and making social life a jungle or a wilderness, greater safeguards must be instituted to keep them in their places; he wished correspondingly to increase the area of centralised control and decrease that of the individual. But both sides agreed that some portion of human existence must remain independent of the sphere of social control'.⁶⁵³

The consistent reiteration of terms such as 'area', 'portion' and 'sphere' are linked to normative statements on where freedom 'should' lie. This process also serves to place certain thinkers in a favourable light - or conversely a condemnatory darkness. With echoes of the Soviet system, Hobbes is linked to the 'area of centralised control', yet is also linked to a wider tradition that agrees 'that some portion of human existence must remain independent of the sphere of social control'. Thus, Berlin sees the flow of thought from Hobbes and Locke onwards as divergent, yet with a consensus of opinion over the 'sphere of social control'. Berlin is implicitly stating that at some point this intellectual consensus broke down, and in universalist terms he creates tension between the normative ideal of 'human existence' and the negatively loaded term 'social control'.

⁶⁵³ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' [1958], p.173.

This device is a good example of how Berlin contrasts certain normative ideals very subtly with negative visions of vague and 'powerful' invasions of freedom by using terminology that conjures up communist imagery and vocabulary - 'social control', 'interference', 'coercion' and so on. As if to confirm this hypothesis, Berlin continues his discussion by saying

'liberty in this sense means liberty *from*; absence of interference beyond the shifting, but always recognisable, frontier. 'The only freedom which deserves the name, is that of pursuing our own good in our own way,' said the most celebrated of its champions'.⁶⁵⁴

Berlin is citing Mill here, and the use of the phrase 'always recognisable' alongside Mill's 'our own good in our own way' functions as a comforting force - 'we will always recognise good'. That Berlin asserts that a 'frontier' of freedom is 'always recognisable' is also extremely vague. He does write that this 'frontier' is 'shifting', but this does not detract from the sense that Berlin is not really viewing freedom as a temporally based phenomenon, but a free-floating absolute value. Clearly, the overriding inference is that humans have access to 'free-floating' moral values, and have the 'choice' whether to practice them in the public sphere or not. The fact that plenty of human beings do not subscribe to the 'recognisable' freedom Berlin describes does not lead to Berlin examining the possibility that 'the recognisable' is only accessible by those who subscribe to Berlin's assumptions over the 'acceptable level of interference' by the dominant social order. When Berlin writes of 'absence of interference', he is making a statement on the naturalness of western liberal-democracy to adapt to the need of individual freedom without questioning the basis for such claims.

These are difficult aspects of Berlin's thought, for it seems the public/private split is also

⁶⁵⁴ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' [1958], p.174.

rigidly conceived, with the public sphere in the west appearing as the assumed arena for 'freedom'. Berlin goes on to describe how negative liberty has strong roots in a comparatively recent conception of privacy, 'of the area of personal relationships as something sacred in its own right', and how 'its decline would mark the death of a civilisation, of an entire moral outlook'.⁶⁵⁵

Again, the argument is presented in general terms, suggesting huge political shifts - 'the death of a civilisation' - with a dark space as to what would replace the 'moral outlook'. These universalist terms are echoed later in Berlin's concluding comments on negative liberty,

'The desire to be governed by myself, or at any rate to participate in the process by which my life is to be controlled, may be as deep a wish as that for a free area for action, and perhaps historically older. But it is not a desire for the same thing. So different is it, indeed, as to have led in the end to the great clash of ideologies that dominates our world'.⁶⁵⁶

For Berlin, this ideological battle is elucidated as that between negative and positive liberty - two quite distinct mindsets that drive ideological belief. Berlin is also posing an ontological problem. The 'clash' is presented as dangerous and precarious, with the capability of altering civilisations through eventual political upheaval and war. Peaceful societies must also be mindful that moral outlooks can alter through more subtle intellectual shifts. This leads to the problem of allegiance - within this potentially disastrous war of ideas, loyalty must become conscious and firm. To this end, Berlin sets up the imagery of a perennial opposition of morals, and a perpetual conflict of ideas. The resolution of the clash is less certain, unless Berlin succeeds in his promotion of moral goodness and freedom. This suspension of resolution is a defining feature of the intellectual cold

⁶⁵⁵ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' [1958], p.176.

⁶⁵⁶ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' [1958], p.178.

war. The question of the future is left hanging above normatively charged statements over the naturalness of liberalism in the west. This problem defines 'Two Concepts of Liberty', and illustrates how the essay is a product of the internalisation of cold war values.

Another essential strand of the essay is concerned with Berlin's denunciation of 'positive' liberty. With this in mind, I wish to offer a reading of Berlin's second conception of liberty. Berlin immediately positions the idea of 'positive' liberty alongside a certain type of heightened individualism. He writes,

'The 'positive' sense of the word 'liberty' derives from the wish on the part of the individual to be his own master. I wish my life and decisions to depend on myself, not on external forces of whatever kind. I wish to be the instrument of my own, not of other men's, acts of will. I wish to be a subject, not an object; to be moved by reasons, by conscious purposes, which are my own, not by causes which affect me, as it were, from outside. I wish to be somebody, not nobody'.⁶⁵⁷

He then links this psychological portrait with the danger of linking this wish for 'self-mastery' to the striving for 'higher' goals, 'higher' freedoms. It is then a short step to the promotion of an 'occult entity' within the individual. This entity can be argued to be

'their 'true' purpose - and that this entity, although it is belied by all that they overtly feel and do and say, is their 'real' self, of which the poor empirical self in space and time may know nothing or little; and that this inner spirit is the only self that deserves to have its wishes taken into account. Once I take this view, I am in a position to ignore the actual wishes of men or societies, to bully, oppress, torture them in the name, and on behalf, of their 'real' selves'.⁶⁵⁸

Here Berlin uses imagery of the 'occult', 'inner spirit', and of brainwashing and 'torture' to contrast those adherents of 'positive' liberty with the softer descriptions of humane negative liberty that

⁶⁵⁷ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' [1958], p.178.

⁶⁵⁸ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' [1958], p.180.

came earlier. This adds a commonsensical sheen to his earlier musings on negative liberty and further textual weight to his thoughts on the humanism of negative liberty, rooted as they are in the 'familiar'. In a later passage, Berlin elucidates this theme further when he bunches Locke, Montesquieu, Kant and Burke as examples of thinkers whose

'common assumption...(and of many a schoolman before them and Jacobin and Communist after them) is that the rational ends of our 'true' natures must coincide, or be made to coincide, however violent our poor, ignorant, desire-ridden, passionate, empirical selves may cry out against this process. Freedom is not freedom to do what is irrational, or stupid, or wrong.'⁶⁵⁹

Instead of tapping into the 'recognisable' frontiers of freedom and morality, these thinkers create new arenas that necessarily conflict against a humanness that 'cries out'. These thinkers intend to shape and coerce men into rational and pure forms. For Berlin, this is clearly a degree of imposition that marks out these thinkers as dangerous. Linking this sentiment to the enlightenment, Berlin writes, 'liberty, so far from being incompatible with authority, becomes almost identical with it. This is the thought and language of all the declarations of the rights of man in the eighteenth century'.⁶⁶⁰ Berlin then makes a logical conclusion that also adds to his conception of normality, and his idea of the 'naturalness' of an 'area' of freedom when he writes,

'if the underlying assumptions had been correct - if the method of solving social problems resembled the way in which solutions to the problems of the natural sciences are found, and if reason were what rationalists said that it was - all this [increase of the sum of liberty] would perhaps follow'.⁶⁶¹

Thus, other assumptions - those of the liberal tradition - were, and are, more 'correct'. The mistake

⁶⁵⁹ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' [1958], p.194.

⁶⁶⁰ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' [1958], p.194-5.

⁶⁶¹ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' [1958], p.195.

of linking methods of natural science to human society is identified. Very closely linked to this sense of 'natural' assumption from Berlin is the role 'recognition', or 'belonging' plays in the life of the individual. This seems to lend 'Two Concepts of Liberty' an acute contemporary edge, for Berlin is clearly discussing issues of colonial and cold war relevance. To build a little on the previous chapter, Berlin does not link 'recognition' to 'negative' or 'positive' liberty, but he does believe it is 'something no less profoundly needed and passionately fought for by human beings.'⁶⁶² In this sense 'recognition' is presented ontologically, and as a vital pivot for newly 'free' people to swing towards 'union, closer understanding, integration of interests, a life of common dependence and common sacrifice'.⁶⁶³

In section VI, 'The Search For Status', Berlin discusses recognition as closely linked to Mill's ideas on the individual within society, and of the distinction between the public and private sphere. The section is vague, and its temporal setting is uncertain. Berlin jumps from a discussion of Mill to a discussion of Kant on paternalism. Berlin writes, in a theoretical vein,

'I desire to be understood and recognised, even if this means to be unpopular and disliked. And the only persons who can so recognise me, and thereby give me the sense of being someone, are the members of the society to which, historically, morally, economically, and perhaps ethnically, I feel that I belong. My individual self is not something which I can detach from my relationship with others, or from those attributes of myself which consist in their attitude towards me'.⁶⁶⁴

As elsewhere in his writings⁶⁶⁵, Berlin then links this desire for individual recognition with broader phenomena such as nationalism. He writes 'what is true of the individual is true of groups, social,

⁶⁶² Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' [1958], p.204.

⁶⁶³ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' [1958], p.204.

⁶⁶⁴ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' [1958], p.202.

⁶⁶⁵ See previous chapter.

political, economic, religious, that is, of men conscious of needs and purposes which they have as members of such groups'.⁶⁶⁶ Berlin is also describing cultural and national separation. It is implied that the sense 'of being someone', 'a member', to 'belong' is something every individual strives for - a yearning that has at its core a debatable degree of conformism with the status quo. To assume everyone desires this recognition, or this acceptance within a set group, also implicitly assumes another central theme of Berlin's body of work; the incommensurability of values. Also, the tone of the writing is extremely idealistic. For instance, he goes on to say

'what oppressed classes or nationalities, as a rule, demand is neither simply unhampered liberty of action for their members, nor, above everything, equality of social or economic opportunity...what they want, as often as not, is simply recognition (of their class or nation, or colour or race) as an independent source of human activity, as an entity with a will of its own...and not to be ruled, educated, guided, with however light a hand, as being not quite fully human, and therefore not quite fully free'.⁶⁶⁷

He then discusses 'newly liberated Asian or African State[s]', which I have discussed in the previous chapter. The idealism comes from a sense of unattached analysis that does not use words like 'imperialism' or 'colonialism' or 'domination', but sentiments expressed through the pithy sentences such as: 'cautious, just, gentle, well-meaning administration from outside' to describe former colonial rulers⁶⁶⁸, that undoubtedly express a great deal about the texture of Berlin's views towards colonial intervention and foreign policy.

⁶⁶⁶ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' [1958], p.202.

⁶⁶⁷ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' [1958], p.202-3.

⁶⁶⁸ See Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' [1958], p.204, and previous chapter.

The 'clash of ideologies' does seem to be an ontological one, as Berlin contrasts – not willfully – those 'revolutionaries [who] have usually felt it necessary to argue that...they represented the party of liberty, or 'true' liberty, by claiming universality for their ideal'⁶⁶⁹ with his own brand of liberalism that has at its core a rock-hard belief in a meaningful, humane, 'true' liberty. This unstated belief is implicit throughout 'Two Concepts of Liberty', as it is throughout Berlin's work as a whole. This belief has as its legitimating core a set of normative assumptions that encompass the liberal conception of 'normality'; a 'normality' that is 'outside contestation or struggle'. As I stated in my introduction, Berlin does not pause to consider that his ontological assumption can be contested because, for him, it is an obvious truth. Berlin, too, claims a universality for his ideal. For him, 'the ends of men are many, and not all of them are in principle compatible with each other...the possibility of conflict - and of tragedy - can never wholly be eliminated from human life, either personal or social. The necessity of choosing between absolute claims is then an inescapable characteristic of the human condition'.⁶⁷⁰ Berlin does not acknowledge that this is a claim to moral knowledge, and a claim rooted in an ideological belief. This ideological belief goes to the root of the traditional cold war polarisation between, in Berlin's terms, the Soviet 'monist' political culture with its 'system builders'⁶⁷¹ and the pluralism that, for Berlin,

'with the measure of 'negative' liberty that it entails, seems to me a truer and more humane ideal than the goals of those who seek in the great disciplined, authoritarian structures the ideal of 'positive' self-mastery by classes, or peoples, or the whole of mankind. It is truer, because it does, at least, recognise the fact that human goals are many, not all of them commensurable'.⁶⁷²

⁶⁶⁹ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' [1958], p.207-8.

⁶⁷⁰ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' [1958], p.214.

⁶⁷¹ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' [1958], p.216.

⁶⁷² Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' [1958], p.216.

Although not explicitly stated - except for one brief mention of Communism in general terms - Berlin is dealing in classic cold war rhetoric, underpinned with a belief in a conception of normality that, arguably, restricts new political possibilities and 'personal freedoms' that do not fit the norm or transgress the 'ordinary frontiers' of 'private' and 'public' life. Again, Berlin makes an explicit knowledge claim: 'To assume that all values can be graded on one scale, so that it is a mere matter of inspection to determine the highest, seems to me to falsify our knowledge that men are free agents'.⁶⁷³ Here is an illustration of how Berlin's conception of normality is intrinsically linked with the language of 'us and them'. He has the authority to know what 'our knowledge' is, and makes the archetypical normative cold war assumption - 'that men are free agents'. To link the discussion of Berlin's normality and the cold war language of the 'familiar' back to my earlier thoughts on the broader 'liberal tradition', Berlin states, near the end of 'Two Concepts of Liberty',

'Throughout the nineteenth century liberal thinkers maintained that if liberty involved a limit upon the powers of any man to force me to do what I did not, or might not, wish to do, then, whatever the ideal in the name of which I was coerced, I was not free; that the doctrine of absolute sovereignty was a tyrannical...I must establish a society in which there must be some frontiers of freedom which nobody should be permitted to cross...what these rules or commandments will have in common is that they are accepted so widely, and are grounded so deeply in the actual nature of men as they have developed through history, as to be, by now, an essential part of what we mean by being a normal human being.'⁶⁷⁴

Here, Berlin imprints his own language of normality, with phrases such as 'actual nature of man', 'frontier', 'accepted' and 'normal' dominating the discussion of the 'liberal tradition' - itself a vague,

⁶⁷³ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' [1958], p.216.

⁶⁷⁴ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' [1958], p.210.

impressionistic 'movement' in the hands of Berlin. By aligning himself with 'the liberal tradition', Berlin is making further claims to moral knowledge, and authoritative assumptions over the state of humanity. It is, to echo my earlier argument, taken as a given that Berlin's liberal ontology is the natural state of humanity. Dumm argues that because liberals like Berlin have created this 'space' where one form of knowledge dominates, liberal ideas of freedom are fundamentally flawed, for they are not grounded in or reflective of the transgressive nature of all possible freedoms.

This, allied with Berlin's earlier thoughts on 'recognition', means the intellectual emphasis, albeit implicitly, reinforces a powerful political and ontological *status quo*; or at least an organised space where Berlin's 'freedoms' can find their 'true' expressions. This 'space' encompasses traditional 'public' institutional forms of authority, and does not encompass transgressive freedoms that must, for liberals, sit uneasily in the 'private sphere'. In the cold war context, this is a powerful legitimating force for political policy and broader academic debate - an easily ignored facet of cold war liberalism. Whilst Berlin energetically attacks 'positive' liberty - these sections are the most passionately written in 'Two Concepts of Liberty' - he justifies 'negative' liberty in terms of universalist assumptions of the inherent 'rightness' of liberalism. This assumption is crystallised in his conception of normality, and can be detected through his vocabulary of the familiar, that privileges Berlin's conception of 'the normal'. I stated earlier that Berlin's thought conjured up 'imagery of a perennial opposition of morals'. Seen alongside the more urgent and specific contrast between 'positive' and 'negative' liberty, this sense of moral opposition is at the core of the cold war 'clash of ideology'. As we have seen, Berlin represents the 'free' western world against 'system building' Soviet-Marxist dogma. This is oppositional in an intellectual, political and

ontological sense, and Berlin acted as a significant voice in the creation of the clichéd polarisation of cold war intellectual exchange. It was indeed Berlin who offered the west its self-image through his powerfully normative language that expressed the internalisation of cold war values.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the cold war twins 'Historical Inevitability' and 'Two Concepts of Liberty'. I have argued that these two essays are powerful statements of cold war values. These values are expressed through a vocabulary of assumption that is rooted firmly in an uncontested conception of normality. If Said was indeed correct in claiming 'Two Concepts of Liberty' provided the western 'self-image' in the cold war era, then this chapter was an attempt to explain the processes within discourse that allowed the generation of a cold war 'image'. Existent within these 'processes' is a complex network of statements on humanity. One of these statements is Berlin's moral stance that dominates so much of his work. This chapter has served to expand on my claim that Berlin's morality is fundamentally 'instructive'. In the previous chapter I argued that Berlin's morality was 'itself indicative of wider cold war concerns' and the 'internalisation of the liberal ethic was a process of entrenchment; of values, attitudes and the creation of a fixed concept of 'the normal'. I have illustrated the way in which this can be shown through a detailed textual analysis of two of Berlin's most well known essays. Clearly, a complex web of assumption is operating within Berlin's texts, and this impacts on Berlin's broader conception of freedom. Berlin viewed freedom as a conception that is limited, located and definable, and this can be identified through Berlin's use of terms such as 'area', 'frontier' or 'portion'. These are unspoken assumptions about the

inherent characteristics of a freedom that is not grounded in a concrete social setting. The social setting for Berlin's conception of freedom is an idealised state of society where agents have access to a genuine choice over how to act. This social setting is not problematised, and does not hint at the potential flaws within liberal democracy. Clearly, the two essays combined are powerful statements that lend intellectual legitimacy to the west in a time of polarisation, genuine moral anxiety and political turmoil. They are also Berlin's ontological statement on a variety of broad themes, such as morality, human nature, freedom, and a belief in the prominence of the human agent in history as opposed to a view of history that privileges 'impersonal' societal factors.

I now wish to shift from a focus on specific essays to a cross-essay analysis that is intended to focus more firmly on Berlin's interpretation of a variety of thinkers. I build on the arguments incorporated in the previous two chapters, and by placing sustained emphasis on the relevance of Berlin's interpretations of thinkers ask whether these interpretations can be thought of as distortions or exaggerations related directly to the ontological preoccupations and motivations of Berlin.

Berlin's Interpretation of Authors

Introduction

This chapter is an attempt to focus on Berlin's pattern of interpretation on a variety of thinkers. A glance at the index of any of Berlin's published volumes will attest to the vast array of thinkers to which Berlin refers. Indeed, the same can be said for a single page of his work. The erudition displayed by Berlin means that certain thinkers are thrown into the flow of Berlin's argument and coloured accordingly.

In the process of interpreting authors Berlin consistently built the impression of a strong liberal tradition in the western world. His interpretations were often temporally impoverished, offering false continuities across time. This is a problem that he does not confront explicitly, yet can be detected through careful analysis of his use of language and his methodology. Berlin utilised a 'vocabulary of power' that represented a system of thinking that impacted on the 'real-world'. His treatment of political gradualism and social change reflected his attitudes on a variety of wider issues in the cold war context.

I examine a selection of authors, some of which have generated historiographical interest due to Berlin's problematic interpretations of them. I expand on examinations of Berlin's treatment of Marx, Hegel, Vico, Herzen and Mill that I have already offered in the thesis. I also introduce the way in which Berlin interpreted the thought of Maistre, Rousseau, Helvétius and Saint-Simon. I also think about the prominent absentees from Berlin's work, and discuss the possibility of aligning Berlin with Tocqueville, thus entering into the possibility that Berlin was part of a 'liberal

tradition' that he did not consciously identify himself with.

Berlin's interpretation of Hegel makes explicit moral judgements and implicit statements on 'true' freedom. The way in which he treats Rousseau illustrates how Berlin's ontological commitment activates his writing, using 'irrational' words and imagery to create sympathy for 'the language of the familiar'. With Maistre, it can be argued that Berlin's interpretation shifted to fit Maistre more firmly in the liberal tradition.

By analysing how Berlin uses the word 'tyranny', it is clear that Berlin exploits a vocabulary of conflict and collision. This exacerbation of a dialogue of separation and difference is powerful in the cold war context. The normative power surrounding Berlin is also confirmed through a reading of Crowder and Gray (two of his most prominent interpreters) that suggests that they share his ontological commitment, preferring not to examine the foundation of their beliefs. A brief examination of Nietzsche, who should be understood as ontologically opposed to Berlin, helps confirm this sense of liberal conformity.

In broader terms there is clearly an ontological break between liberals such as Berlin and Nietzsche's assault on the dominant values of the west. The implication I draw from Berlin's omission to treat Nietzsche with any seriousness is that Berlin was ontologically blind to certain ideas that did not register in Berlin's moral and ideological template. Those thinkers that did go against Berlin's ontological project would invariably, as discussed in the last chapter, be castigated in a variety of ways. The combination of firstly, an examination of those thinkers Berlin did write about and, secondly, those that are notable absences, will add another layer of understanding onto Berlin's ontological vision. It is clear that Berlin allowed instructive morality to

dominate interpretations of an array of thinkers. He imprinted his own anxieties and preoccupations over his interpretation of authors.

*

Two publications I spend time considering in this chapter originated as a series of lectures given by Berlin. *Freedom and Its Betrayal* is based on Berlin's BBC lectures of 1952, and *The Roots of Romanticism* based on the 'W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts', recorded by the BBC in 1965. It is important to bear in mind that these collections of lectures are where we can see Berlin 'the public intellectual' in the clearest light, aligned with the BBC and its attendant values. It is through his treatment of intellectual figures that he carved his academic persona. The forceful tone of his lectures creates a persuasive energy that seeks to convey how important philosophical ideas are, and the thinkers are the prism through which he presents his own ontology. In this sense, Berlin imposes a moral code that, I will argue, adds a surprisingly polemical edge to his lectures. It is then that parallels with his more famous works 'Two Concepts of Liberty' and 'Historical Inevitability' appear, and the cold war context comes to the surface of the work.

The Liberal Tradition and the Vocabulary of Power

Berlin's ontological framework was one that considered the history of thought in stages; stages that required clarification and definition due to their impact on modes of thought. Berlin was intensely preoccupied by the movement from 'Enlightenment' to 'Counter-Enlightenment' thought,

and the meaning these historical epochs had on future political and intellectual life.⁶⁷⁵ In *The Roots of Romanticism*, Berlin describes 'romanticism' as 'caus[ing] what appears to me to be the greatest transformation of Western consciousness, certainly in our time.'⁶⁷⁶ Interestingly Berlin builds his case against this transformation, arguing that the 'romantic legacy' led to existentialism and fascism. He does this by returning to the sanctity of the familiar. After Berlin's extended musings on the meanings of romanticism, his final critique rests on the vocabulary of the familiar to make a persuasive case against the romantic legacy:

'human beings, in order to communicate with each other, are forced to recognise certain common values, certain common facts, to live in a common world; to the extent to which not everything which science says is untrue – because to say that is in itself a self-contradictory and absurd proposition – to this extent romanticism in its full form, and even its offshoots in the form of both existentialism and Fascism, seems to me to be fallacious.'⁶⁷⁷

Moving on from these thoughts Berlin, in a similar way to his treatment of Machiavelli, argues that romanticism gave

'prominence to and laid emphasis upon the incompatibility of human ideals...human beings must sooner or later realise that they must...make compromises....[t]he result of romanticism, then, is liberalism, toleration, decency and the appreciation of the imperfections of life; some degree of increased rational self-understanding...[a]iming at one thing, they [the romantics] produced, fortunately for us all, almost the exact opposite.'⁶⁷⁸

Perhaps Berlin's wish to categorise and classify these epochs was in fact an attempt to interpret the contemporary world through a looking-glass that would inevitably tarnish and 'delegitimise'

⁶⁷⁵ See Mali, Joseph & Wokler, Robert (eds.), 'Isaiah Berlin's Counter-Enlightenment', *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, 93, 5 (2003).

⁶⁷⁶ Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism* [1965] (Princeton, NJ: PUP, 1999), p.20.

⁶⁷⁷ Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism* [1965], p.146.

⁶⁷⁸ Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism* [1965], p.147.

certain epochs, or certain 'modes of thought'. As with 'Two Concepts of Liberty' and 'Historical Inevitability' Berlin lets the dangerous themes of violence, revolution, fanaticism or insanity echo behind his liberal vocabulary of decency and tolerance. Something went wrong with the romantic legacy. By tapping into the comforting language of the familiar Berlin implicitly makes the case that a humane realm of ideas, presumably divorced from any sense of context or 'reality', was ransacked by 'monist' fanatics. Instead, people 'should' have understood that the incompatibility of human ideals can lead to peaceful liberal democracy. Berlin is calling for a consensus that revolves around the liberal 'common sense' world vision which, in the cold war context, reads very interestingly indeed. Through further examination of the thinkers Berlin chose to write about, I will demonstrate that Berlin employs this normatively charged language in a persistent manner, displaying little geopolitical or temporal sensitivity when writing on thinkers separated by centuries of time, or by national borders, political cultures and intellectual context. Instead, thinkers often appear as isolated entities that represent a shape of thought conceived and then judged in relation to 'the liberal tradition'; a tradition that Berlin implicitly views as the uncontested victor in the battle for the ground of 'true freedom'. Berlin, it seems unconsciously, employs a cold war vocabulary of shrouded ideology and concealed assumption, where an unquestioned hierarchy of values rises to the surface of all of his texts.

This has become evident to me through a reading of Berlin's work that continually searches for the signs of Berlin's powerful conception of normality. I use the word 'powerful' deliberately, as Berlin wielded a 'vocabulary of power' that has gone largely unrecognized in the literature. This 'vocabulary of power' is linked to the idea of the 'ubiquitous' form of power already

detailed in Chapter Four. Through Berlin's use of the 'vocabulary of power', his conception of normality found grounding in a rationalised, organised and authoritative context that reflects and bolsters the wider context of cold war. By utilising the liberal vocabulary of power, Berlin invoked tradition, liberal humaneness, 'the good', sentimentalism, and a hierarchy of values and assumptions. At root, these assumptions were expressions of institutional, cultural and political power in the wider context of the socio-economic arrangement of Anglo-American society. This 'vocabulary of power' also involves the repeated use of certain words and meanings, and an almost slogan-like use of such phrases as 'sense of reality', 'crooked timber', for bolstering a familiarity of the subject matter, and also a kind of nostalgia for the work of Berlin by some of his scholarly successors. It is in this sense that 'the liberal tradition' continues. The power of this discursive process stems in part from the way in which Berlin submerged thinkers beneath his ontological project. His ontological project unquestionably coloured his interpretation of thinkers, in many ways acting as a predictable restriction on the width of possible interpretation.

Berlin and Ideological Strait-Jackets

These restrictions can be seen in many forms within Berlin's writing. One such restriction was the impoverished way in which Berlin deciphered temporal links. Often the distance between the twentieth century and the period in which certain thinkers were located was insufficiently bridged. For instance, in the introduction to the publication of his BBC Third Programme Lectures (published as *Freedom and Its Betrayal*), he wrote:

'although they lived towards the end of the eighteenth century and at the beginning of the

nineteenth, the kind of situation to which they seem relevant, which they seem to have perceived, to have to described with an uncanny insight, is often characteristic not so much of the nineteenth century as of the twentieth. It is our period and our time which they seem to analyse with astonishing foresight and skill. That, too, makes them worthy of our consideration.⁶⁷⁹

Berlin does not view this style of interpretation as problematic. He does believe that certain thinkers can 'speak' for contemporary concerns without considering that he is offering artificial temporal continuity. This justification of the worthiness of attention is methodologically weak, as the suggestion is that thinkers who do not fit this criteria are not worthy of analysis. Clearly, Berlin is not interested in the text as a temporally defined phenomenon, but as a tool to better explain the present. Unfortunately he is not explicit about this point very frequently, so realising his restrictive approach is only possible through deciphering implicit meaning.

Berlin is occasionally explicit, for instance when he writes 'Hamann deserves an act of belated homage in the twentieth century whose most revolutionary philosophical innovations he did something to anticipate'⁶⁸⁰. This same sentiment can be seen in his earlier quotes on the legacy of romanticism. This is an amplification of my earlier point that, for Berlin, it is only worth interpreting historical figures if they can tell us something about the contemporary world. Any text written at any point in history can tell a scholar about the contemporary world if they are determined to interpret it as such. The danger with this kind of interpretation is the level of intellectual distortion that is necessary to fit a certain thinker, or set of beliefs, into a particular strait-jacket.

⁶⁷⁹ Isaiah Berlin, 'Introduction' in *Freedom and Its Betrayal*, p.3.

⁶⁸⁰ Isaiah Berlin, *The Age of Enlightenment*, p.275.

This is interesting in another sense. Berlin is concerned with the formal arrangement, the validity, and the 'discipline' of philosophical practice. He writes elsewhere that 'where the answer is to be found by applying specific transformation rules [sic] in a field where the axioms and the methods of reasoning are laid down, as it were, beforehand...philosophy has no place'⁶⁸¹. So philosophy therefore 'has a place', an intellectual location, a defined space away from other disciplines. Linked to his belief in the 'power of ideas', Berlin seems to be making the case that, for instance, whilst fascism, in various contexts, may have 'claimed' Rousseau or Nietzsche as forefathers, liberalism can also 'claim' (with a rather wide net) the likes of Mill and Herzen. Here, philosophy, or at least the history of ideas, can be influential in undermining or promoting both isolated ideas and broader traditions. Berlin is not explicit about this point, but it is clear that this is not only a war of intellectual personalities, but a war of definition and description. Thinkers have to be placed in certain 'areas', they have to *represent something*. This representation has to fall within certain accepted fields - for instance 'Enlightenment', 'Romanticism', and so on. This also encourages the illusion of continuity through history. Foucault wrote, 'discontinuity was the stigma of temporal dislocation that it was the historian's task to remove from history. It has now become one of the basic elements of historical analysis'⁶⁸². With Berlin there is a dilemma. He is dealing with complex ideas, complex thinkers, but he encourages the holistic approach, where problems are not confronted and difficult questions not tackled. He encourages continuity and, crucially, Berlin does not question in any serious way how his *own* assumptions form part of the 'basic

⁶⁸¹ Isaiah Berlin, 'Philosophy and Government Repression' [1954], in *A Sense of Reality*, p.57.

⁶⁸² Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p.13.

element of historical analysis'. It is in this sense that he does not recognise that he, in a manner not so dissimilar to the 'system builders' he condemns, represents a system of thinking that impacts heavily on the world. It is in this sense that it should not be forgotten Berlin's 'pluralism' may rest on ground that is not as pluralist as it claims.

Continuing the theme of historical continuity, Crowder asserts that Berlin saw a direct thread from enlightenment thought to revolutionary sentiment in the nineteenth century. This can also be seen as a commentary on the naturalness of a 'non-fanatical' liberalism. Berlin writes,

'socialism, from a doctrine which, whatever view might be taken of its merits, had earlier almost universally been recognised as too impracticable to be more than a utopian dream, began a new career in the nineteenth century as a revolutionary and, in the view both of its champions and of its opponents, as a by no means unattainable goal'.⁶⁸³

For Berlin, the rise of socialism was linked with society attempting to come to terms with technological advancement: 'political forms were but the outer shape of the real connections, social and economic, between human beings, and it required men of organising genius to transform these political forms to fit the new social and economic realities.'⁶⁸⁴ Again, linked to the residues of enlightenment belief, 'unless there was organisation and rational planning, there would be waste, conflict and misery.'⁶⁸⁵ Berlin wishes to stress the huge gulf between what he describes as 'orthodox socialism' and communism. He writes,

'[o]rthodox socialism with its democratic organisation, its toleration of differences of view within a common framework, its belief in the acquisition of power by legal and parliamentary means, and in gradual socialisation, above all its steadfast regard for the civil liberties of the individual, pursued a path far distant from Communism with its rigid hierarchical centralisation, its abhorrence of any degree of political compromise with non-

⁶⁸³ Isaiah Berlin, 'Socialism and Socialist Theories' [1950], in *A Sense of Reality*, p.81.

⁶⁸⁴ Berlin, 'Socialism and Socialist Theories' [1950], p.82.

⁶⁸⁵ Berlin, 'Socialism and Socialist Theories' [1950], p.82.

Communists, its rigorous discipline, its machinery for the physical repression of all differences of view or policy among its adherents, above all its faith that the supreme end - the overthrow of all the forms of capitalism - justifies any and every means towards it.⁶⁸⁶

This description of political 'extremism' must be viewed as an attempt by Berlin to amplify a 'politics of opposition', where the reader is invited to be fearful of an ideology that justifies all ends.

Berlin, whether explicitly or through the tone of his description of socialism, offers a gentle form of liberalism that represents the 'humane' and presents gradual political change as the natural form of politics. Indeed, an important strand of the normative assumption of Berlin is the weight placed on the assumed *logic* of this political naturalism. In this context, the possibilities of social change are reduced beneath the belief in the current social order. In the cold war context this is highly relevant. Importantly, this is another facet of Berlin's conception of 'normality' that can be seen through his interpretations of different thinkers. Berlin writes in 'Herzen and his Memoirs' that Herzen believed that after 1847

'all genuine change...is necessarily slow; the power of tradition...is very great; men are less malleable than was believed in the eighteenth century, nor do they truly seek liberty, only security and contentment; communism is but tsarism stood on its head, the replacement of one yoke by another'.⁶⁸⁷

Here, communism is linked to Tsarism in terms of power. The ideology of communism is presented as a smoke-screen to the real intentions of the communist leaders - political power.

Berlin offers an interpretation of Herzen that exemplifies cold war attitudes towards communism and communist leaders. Another significant strand of assumption running through this type of

⁶⁸⁶ Berlin, 'Socialism and Socialist Theories' [1950], p.114-5.

⁶⁸⁷ Isaiah Berlin, 'Herzen and His Memoirs' [1968], in *Against the Current*, p.208.

interpretation is the assertion that Russian-Soviet political culture returns to a certain 'type' of rule. As well as being another layer that exemplifies the caricatured 'Soviet other', the stress on tradition as shaping the present and the future, and 'security and contentment' as political goals, contrasts greatly with the cold war fear of communist revolutionary sentiment.

Berlin on Hegel

Berlin is among those voices in the west that believed the idea of 'revolution' was an impossible goal. For Berlin, 'revolution' appears as a fallacious, unrealistic and sinister objective, also tainted with intellectual irresponsibility and the inevitability of failure. The underlying assumption is that revolutionary violence is 'wrong' because, apart from the fact it is destined to fail, revolutionary ideals do not sufficiently mirror the 'natural' or the 'humane', nor fit into Berlin's conception of freedom. The problem appears when it becomes unclear exactly what challenges to the social order Berlin advocates. Berlin's anti-revolutionary sentiments are clear in his ontological denunciation of 'system-builders' such as Hegel. Berlin on Hegel holds special interest in the cold war context due to Hegel's influence on the thought of Karl Marx.

Berlin's lecture on Hegel in the BBC Third Programme Lectures, and subsequently published article, are symptomatic of what Berlin is trying to do in *Freedom and Its Betrayal*. Perhaps simplified because he knew his audience would not be solely professional historians or philosophers, his tone in these lectures often borders on sarcasm with a knowing nod to the 'liberal way'. This exaggerates, albeit subtly, the normative thrust of Berlin's interpretation. Each essay has at its core the way in which the thinker interacts with the conception of liberty,

illustrating Berlin's central preoccupation, as well as acting as the central message of the lectures. For instance at the end of every essay Berlin chooses to explain how each thinker fits into a tradition that has, at its core, the fundamental assumptions of Berlin's liberalism. This creates the impression of continuity through Berlin's work, and also the impression of a strong liberal tradition running against nineteenth century 'mythologies'. Also evident here is the static way in which Berlin discusses values, often seemingly conceived as autonomous and isolated. Elsewhere, a good example of this is when Berlin discusses Saint-Simon and liberty:

'What about liberty, not perhaps in the empty sense in which he [Saint-Simon] says the eighteenth century lawyers used it, as a battering-ram against the survival of feudalism, but real liberty, civil liberty, the liberty of human beings to do what they wish within a limited sphere?'⁶⁸⁸

Berlin uses the term 'sphere' to demarcate and define a conception of a certain autonomy and natural space within which individual freedom can flourish. The assumptions behind this sort of sentiment should now be evident. Berlin takes for granted that 'real liberty' is possible, and the reader, swept along by the force of normative statements, is not invited to question the conception of the public 'sphere', where the possibility of true liberty resides. Concentrating on Hegel however, Berlin begins by stating how Hegel's 'vast mythology...poured forth both light and darkness'.⁶⁸⁹ Berlin introduces Hegel as a fearful and influential theoretician, and one that introduced a new mythology as well as a new 'terminology' to philosophical investigation. Berlin recognises Hegel to be an original mind, but asserts that to intellectually follow Hegel, one must

⁶⁸⁸ Isaiah Berlin, 'Saint-Simon' [1952], in *Freedom and Its Betrayal*, p.129.

⁶⁸⁹ Isaiah Berlin, 'Hegel' [1952], in *Freedom and Its Betrayal*, p.74.

either acquire a specific 'metaphysical insight or act of faith'.⁶⁹⁰ Although Berlin credits Hegel with creating 'institutional history', as well as the modern conception of the history of thought, Hegel

'created a school of *a priori* history which ignored the ordinary facts because the philosopher, armed with superior insight, can deduce what happens by a species of rational double vision, a kind of clairvoyance which enables him to tell in a mathematically certain way what had occurred, as opposed to the sadly empirical, imperfect, fussy way in which the ordinary historian has to proceed'.⁶⁹¹

This is nothing new. These are familiar assertions on the originator of nineteenth century 'system builders'. However, a closer examination of Berlin's essay throws up some implicit or convoluted examples of how 'us and them' cold war rhetoric informs his work. Apart from the aforementioned 'act of faith' - a standard cold war explanation for those individuals who follow forms of 'monism' - Berlin uses the intriguing vocabulary of 'inner' and 'outer' views to establish differences between Hegelians and other thinkers. Berlin writes,

'Followers of Hegel claim that, whereas previously they saw things only from the outside, they now see them from the inside. Whereas previously they saw merely the outer surface, the shell, they now see the inner essence, the inner purpose; the essential end towards which things tend. They have an 'inside' as opposed to an 'outside' view, and this difference between outside and inside is crucial to the understanding of the whole system'.⁶⁹²

So, Hegel's mythology is based on a spatial differentiation between 'inner' and 'outer', between the real and the unreal. Berlin is implicitly, and later explicitly, making the case that it is impossible to perfectly identify 'the inner essence, the inner purpose' in a broad sense, although, following Vico, Berlin writes,

⁶⁹⁰ Berlin, 'Hegel' [1952], p.80.

⁶⁹¹ Berlin, 'Hegel' [1952], p.103.

⁶⁹² Berlin, 'Hegel' [1952], p.74.

'By analogy with ourselves we know that he [Caesar] possessed a will, emotions, feelings, that he was, in short, a human being. We can try to talk about historical personages as we would talk about ourselves, and explain not merely what they did, but also what their purposes were, what their ends were, what their 'inner feelings' were. It is this distinction between inner and outer which becomes of importance'.⁶⁹³

So, in stark contrast to Berlin's description of the 'mythical' basis behind Hegelian belief in an overarching *Geist*, an 'inside view', Berlin positions an equally tenuous methodological position. The assumption is that a liberal humanist approach to history can wield 'truer' insights into the secrets of humanity. The contradiction here is that Berlin condemns the Hegelian belief that the inner essence of a *system* can be identified, yet argues that it is possible to identify the inner essence of an *individual* human in history. Berlin sees no problem in talking 'about historical personages as we would talk about ourselves'. This seems almost self-indulgent, and is clearly a liberal statement of intent. This is oppositional in both the ideological and ontological sense. The Hegelian method is presented as illusory, invalid, a myth, and the liberal method of 'imaginative insight' is presented as the natural intellectual foundation from where all 'honesty' and freedom emanates. Berlin elaborates further on his view of history,

'When I read about Robespierre or Napoleon, I do not wish to be told what it is that Napoleon had in common with all other adventurers or with all other emperors; I do not wish to know exactly how Robespierre resembled all other lawyers and revolutionaries. What I wish to discover is that which is uniquely important about and characteristic of these two men. I want Robespierre and his life and character and acts 'brought to life' before me'.⁶⁹⁴

Berlin is rejecting the metahistorical foundation of Hegelianism, but in its place is a rather simplistic and naïve vision of historical actors that encourages the exaggeration of a different kind

⁶⁹³ Berlin, 'Hegel' [1952], p.77.

⁶⁹⁴ Berlin, 'Hegel' [1952], p.99.

of myth. 'Great men' and their achievements in the confines of elite society are stressed, and supposedly 'brought to life' by a methodology only tempered by normative assumptions on the 'purposes and ends of life'. Focusing now on the 'ontological' aspect of Berlin's writing, it is clear that morality was also a relevant concern for Berlin,

Hegel's real error was to suppose that the whole of the universe – everything – was a kind of work of art which was creating itself, and therefore this kind of half-biological, half-musical terminology was what described it best. As a result he imposed upon mankind a great many erroneous views; for example, that values were identical with facts, and that what was good was what was successful – which all morally sensitive persons, long before and after his day, have rejected, and rightly rejected'.⁶⁹⁵

Berlin's style of writing here is infused with the 'instructive morality' as detailed earlier in the thesis.

Berlin acts as the one with the knowledge and the authority to tell us that not only was Hegel wrong, but he was immoral too. As well as this judgement on Hegel, Berlin argues that those who follow a pattern of thought derived from Hegel are morally insensitive. Again, cold war politics of opposition are in evidence, and the links between his assertions on morality and his advocacy of liberty are reinforced in the essay. Indeed, to leave no doubt that this essay is primarily about working out the 'essence' of liberty, and the 'true' future of humanity, Berlin goes on to write,

'There have always been some people who have wanted to be secure in some tight establishment, to find their rightful secure place in some rigid system, rather than to be free. To such people Hegel says a word of comfort. Nevertheless, fundamentally this is a vast confusion, a historically fatal identification of liberty, as we understand it, with security – the sense of belonging to some unique place where you are protected against obstacles because you can foresee them all. But that is not what we call liberty; maybe it is a form of wisdom, of understanding, of loyalty, of happiness, of holiness. The essence of liberty has always lain in the ability to choose, because you wish so to choose, uncoerced, unbullied, not swallowed up in some vast system; and in your right to resist, to be unpopular, to stand up for your convictions merely because they are your convictions.

⁶⁹⁵ Berlin, 'Hegel' [1952], p.102-3.

That is true freedom, and without it there is neither freedom of any kind, nor even the illusion of it.⁶⁹⁶

The first point to note here is that the type of vocabulary Berlin employs in this quote is of equal implicit force to his more avowedly politicised works, such as 'Two Concepts of Liberty'. Thus, Berlin is consistent in his reflection on the contemporary world when discussing thinkers writing in very different contexts. The indication of broader ideological concerns stems from the normative assumptions operating in the text. The phrases 'true freedom', 'the essence of liberty of has always lain', 'some people...their rightful secure place', 'as we understand it' or 'protected against obstacles' all tend towards a strain of liberalism that has clearly defined boundaries. The crucial word in the paragraph must surely be 'choose'. Surrounding the idea of a 'true freedom', or the 'essence of liberty,' is an unproblematic conception and context of choice which presumably the liberal democratic system always ensures. Unfortunately, these foundations only have the legitimacy of Berlin's vision of normality and morality to sustain them. It is in this sense that the vision Berlin condones is as fanciful as the vision he derides. The following quote ties in the themes of violence, morality, history, normality and power into an idea of what Berlin's ontology represents:

'Hegel drew attention to unconscious factors in history: the dark forces, the vast impersonal urges, what he liked to think of as the semi-conscious strivings of reason seeking to realise its being, but which we may call simply the half-unconscious forces, the occult psychological causes which we now think at least as important as the conscious intentions of generals or kings or violent revolutionaries. This too helped to de-personalise and, if I may put it so, de-moralise history'.⁶⁹⁷

⁶⁹⁶ Berlin, 'Hegel' [1952], p.103-4.

⁶⁹⁷ Berlin, 'Hegel' [1952], p.101.

Here, Berlin's ontology is represented as one that understands texts and thinkers in terms of a conception of power that is otherworldly in its depiction of 'dark forces' and the Hegelian world view, contrasting strongly with a *personalised* and *moralised* liberal view of history and the world. The normative aspect of the writing comes through the instances of 'we' in the paragraph ('which we now think', 'which we may call') that serves to reinforce accepted, if vague, psychological norms in a post-Freudian world. The 'revolutionary' is cast in a negative and violent light whilst generals and kings do not need such clarification, perhaps because Berlin implicitly regards the violence of organised militarism as more palatable or legitimate.

Berlin, Interpretation and the Politics of Opposition

In the same lecture series Berlin discusses Hegel, he also deals with Saint-Simon. Saint-Simon is presented as an original mind who preempted determinist economic thought because, for Berlin, he was

'the first person to define classes in the modern sense, as economic social entities, dependent in a direct way upon the progress of technology...wherever there is talk about a planned society, about a planned economy...wherever there is propaganda in favour of some kind of rational organisation of industry and of commerce...saw the light originally in the half-published manuscripts of Saint-Simon.'⁶⁹⁸

In a nutshell, Berlin sees Saint-Simon as the 'father of the quasi-materialist explanation'.⁶⁹⁹ It is clear that for Berlin the ideas of Saint-Simon are problematic because in Berlin's eyes the idea of social 'intervention'

⁶⁹⁸ Berlin, 'Saint-Simon' [1952], p.107.

⁶⁹⁹ Berlin, 'Saint-Simon' [1952], p.112.

'takes mild and humane forms in the case of, for example, the American New Deal, or the post-war socialist State in England. It takes violent, ruthless, brutal, fanatical forms in the case of directly planned Fascist and Communist societies'.⁷⁰⁰

This is evidence again of oppositional language creating the split between the gradualism of cold war liberalism and 'fanatical' alternatives. Linking Saint-Simon's thought to liberty, Berlin ends the essay with further indications that Saint-Simon struck a 'chillier' tone when thinking about the 'lower-classes'. Berlin writes that for Saint-Simon

'what the people want is not parliament, liberty and rights. These are the cravings of the bourgeoisie. What they want is boots, and this cry for bread, boots and not a lot of liberty and liberal slogans then becomes the staple refrain of all the hard-boiled left-wing parties up to Lenin and Stalin. This somewhat sinister note may also be traced to the gentle, humanitarian, noble Saint-Simon.'⁷⁰¹

It is clear that when Berlin turns to the contemporary world for interpretative inspiration, he chooses personalities dominant in the western cold war imagination. Without detailing the relationship between Saint-Simon's ideas and Marxist-Leninism - except that Marx owes a considerable intellectual debt to Saint-Simon - the jump is made that in some tragic twist a 'good-hearted' thinker is misappropriated by fanatical system-builders. Even when Berlin appears to advocate the supposed 'intention' of a thinker, he often nonetheless draws a negative parallel with contemporary ideological concerns. By stressing the misappropriation of Saint-Simon, Berlin heightens the imagery of the dishonest Marxist-Leninists. This process reinforces the 'politics of opposition' in the cold war context, where enemies of a supposedly defined 'freedom' are revealed through Berlin's exposé. It is through this interpretation of selected authors that Berlin

⁷⁰⁰ Berlin, 'Saint-Simon' [1952], p.128.

⁷⁰¹ Berlin, 'Saint-Simon' [1952], p.130.

appears a lucid voice in the ideological cold war, and an architect, as Said argued, of the western 'self-image'. Berlin's treatment of another 'proto-monist', Rousseau, in *Freedom and Its Betrayal* is interesting, and not altogether delicate. Berlin presents a picture of Rousseau in almost mystical terms:

'He [Rousseau] uses deductive reasoning, sometimes very cogent...for reaching his conclusions. But in reality what happens is that this deductive reasoning is like a strait jacket of logic which he claps upon the inner, burning, almost lunatic vision within; it is this extraordinary combination of the insane inner vision with the cold rigorous strait-jacket of a kind of Calvinistic logic which really gives his prose its powerful enhancement and its hypnotic effect. You appear to be reading logical argument which distinguishes between concepts and draws conclusions...when all the time something very violent is being said to you. A vision is being imposed on you; somebody is trying to dominate you by means of a very coherent, although often a very deranged, vision of life, to bind a spell, not to argue, despite the cool and collected way in which he appears to be talking.'⁷⁰²

Before examining exactly what Berlin considers this 'inner vision' to be, it is worth considering what Berlin's use of language may tell us. By using such words as 'burning, almost lunatic vision', 'insane inner vision', 'enchantment', 'hypnotic', 'violent', 'deranged', 'spell', Berlin employs the language of the familiar. By positioning the thought of Rousseau as paradoxically 'rational-yet-wild', Berlin is clearing the decks for his own liberalism to claim the rational high ground. This process is made easier by the calm imposition of Berlin's moral knowledge that compels us not be taken in by Rousseau's 'vision'. The inescapable irony here is that Berlin also presents a vision of the world in a 'cool and collected' manner, that I have argued appears through the language of 'the normal', and is therefore engaged in imposing a 'vision' onto his readership, albeit in a subtler and more implicit manner.

⁷⁰² Isaiah Berlin, 'Rousseau' [1952] in *Freedom and Its Betrayal*, p.43.

To continue the theme of opposition, violence and the normal, I wish to contemplate Berlin's work on Maistre. Berlin interprets Maistre as 'frightening' to his contemporaries 'because of the violence, the intransigence and the extremely uncompromising and hard-headed dogmatism with which he wished to strike down the doctrines of which he disapproved'.⁷⁰³ However, Berlin still argues that 'Maistre earns our gratitude as a prophet of the most violent, the most destructive forces which have threatened and still threaten the liberty and the ideals of normal human beings'.⁷⁰⁴ Berlin writes that Maistre's 'doctrines, and still more his attitude of mind, had to wait a century before they came – as come as they did – into their own'.⁷⁰⁵ Berlin explains how Maistre's abhorrence of the Jacobin Terror created in him the complete rejection of all attitudes related to the violent events and their inception. Berlin explains how Maistre rejected all

'a priori formulae of this idealistic [Enlightenment] sociology...decid[ing] to appeal to the empirical facts of history and to observe human behaviour. In place of the ideals of progress, liberty, perfectibility he preached the sacredness of the past, of virtue, and the necessity, indeed, of complete subjection, because of the incurably bad and corrupt nature of man. In the place of science he preached the primacy of instinct, superstition, prejudice. In place of optimism, pessimism. In place of eternal harmony and eternal peace, the necessity – for him the divine necessity – of conflict, of suffering, of bloodshed, of war.'⁷⁰⁶

Similarly to his view on Machiavelli, Berlin sees that Maistre's 'realism takes violent, rabid, obsessed, savagely limited forms, but it is realism nevertheless.' This pessimistic outlook on human nature, with the inevitability of conflict and violence, may actually be closer to Berlin's insistence of the incommensurability of values than Berlin himself would admit. Gerrard has the

⁷⁰³ Berlin, 'Maistre' [1952], p.131.

⁷⁰⁴ Berlin, 'Maistre' [1952], p.154.

⁷⁰⁵ Berlin, 'Maistre' [1952], p.132.

⁷⁰⁶ Berlin, 'Maistre' [1952], p.135.

following to say on Berlin's interaction with Maistre:

'The pessimistic 'realist' liberalism that Berlin propounded shares *some* (only some) of the dark assumptions of Maistre's reactionary outlook while utterly rejecting its illiberal prescriptions. Although most forms of liberalism trace their origins back to the Enlightenment, Berlin's has roots in soil that nurtured many of the opponents of the Enlightenment, such as Maistre. Whereas these pessimistic assumptions led Maistre to reactionary conclusions, for Berlin they pointed in the opposite direction, towards a liberal politics of pluralism, tolerance and self-restraint'.⁷⁰⁷

This is the classic dilemma of Berlin in the cold war context. Whilst Berlin spends energy deriding the misappropriation of thinkers such as Saint-Simon, he himself is engaged in an interpretative practice that seeks to claim thinkers as part of the liberal tradition. Viewing Maistre and Machiavelli as important figures in the history of liberal pluralism may be a step too far. Gerrard observes that Berlin is full of admiration for Maistre's insights into the subtle aspects of human behaviour. Yet, Berlin is well aware of Maistre's excesses, and 'fails to do justice to some of the conflicting tendencies within Maistre's thought'.⁷⁰⁸ The implication is that Berlin shaped his interpretation of Maistre to accommodate him within the liberal tradition. Clearly Berlin has very different fundamental assumptions to Maistre, yet the impression of Maistre is shaped by Berlin's assumptions, often circulating around contemporary preoccupations. As an example, Berlin writes,

'no one who has lived through the first half of the twentieth century...can doubt that Maistre's political psychology...has proved, if only by revealing, and stressing, destructive tendencies...which humane and optimistic persons tend not to want to see, at times a better guide to human conduct than the faith of believers in reason; or at any rate can provide a sharp, by no means useless, antidote to their often over-simple, superficial and, more than once, disastrous remedies'.⁷⁰⁹

⁷⁰⁷ Graeme Gerrard, 'Isaiah Berlin's Joseph de Maistre', in 'Isaiah Berlin's Counter-Enlightenment', p.118.

⁷⁰⁸ Gerrard, 'Isaiah Berlin's Joseph de Maistre', p.118.

⁷⁰⁹ Isaiah Berlin, 'Joseph de Maistre and the Origins of Fascism' [1990], in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, p.167-8.

The contemporary context rings through this quote. 'Humane' and 'optimistic' are heavily value laden terms, based on assumptions that do not seem to be temporally sensitive. Maistre's 'political psychology' is transplantable between centuries to act as a 'better guide'. The phrase 'better guide' is clearly Berlin's instructive morality coming through the text. This instructive morality rides indiscriminately over such delicate humanistic phrases as 'destructive tendencies' or 'human conduct', destroying any attendant contextual problems. Berlin's simplistic conception of 'human nature' wedded with Berlin's earlier comments on Maistre's bleak realism are signs of how heavily Berlin's assumptions are woven through his reading of Maistre. The simplicity of using such a term as 'destructive tendencies' is acutely problematic. Berlin alludes to an inflexible conception of human nature that conceives the human agent as malleable and fragile. However, Berlin also assumes that human agency entails a level of responsibility, free will and an awareness that these destructive tendencies are 'wrong', and that standards of 'human conduct' should be adhered to. Thus, human nature is conceived as 'weak' when it suits Berlin, yet strong in its natural capacity to discern 'proper' human conduct. Clearly, these are normatively charged assumptions that run through much of Berlin's texts.

Linked to the conceptions over the 'proper' conduct of individuals is the way in which Berlin discusses the public 'arena' of freedom. For instance, 'tyranny' is a word that contains a set of spatial assumptions when used by Berlin, especially in relation to individual freedom. In his lecture on Helvétius Berlin took the opportunity to explain how even utilitarianism can lead to tyranny;

'Helvétius...knew that nature told him that the only thing which men could do and should do was to pursue pleasure and avoid pain, and upon this he erected the utilitarian system which, armed with the best will in the world, inspired by the purest of motives, directed as it was against injustice, against ignorance, against arbitrary rule, against all the horrors with which the eighteenth century was still filled, leads directly to what is ultimately a kind of technocratic tyranny....a tyranny of reason, which, however, is just as inimical to liberty, just as inimical to the notion that one of the most valuable things in human life is choice for the sake of choice, not merely choice of what is good, but choice as such. It is inimical to this and in this way has been used as the justification both for Communism and for Fascism'.⁷¹⁰

The temporally vague word 'tyranny' is negatively opposed to 'choice'. 'Tyranny' encapsulates 'non-freedom' and 'destructive tendencies' as opposed to 'choice of what is good'. The word 'tyranny' suggests premeditated and sweeping influence, whilst not necessarily meaning coercion in the explicit sense. The word is powerful, and clearly any tyrannous act is an affront to liberalism. Symbolically, this is an example of how Berlin employed a consistent language of freedom and normality that, in the cold war context, was engaged in the constant war of image, of oppositional values and beliefs.

Indeed, it is a curious pattern that Berlin's work frequently returns to the vocabulary of conflict and collision. Whether discussing the specific thought of a philosopher, or attempting to explain his own belief in the 'incommensurability of values', Berlin returns to a picture of the intellectual world that mirrors the imagery of conflict in the wider contemporary world. This is linked to his belief in the importance of considering the 'power of ideas' as primary motivators of men. For instance, Berlin writes, '[m]en do not live only by fighting evils. They live by positive goals, individual and collective...at times incompatible'.⁷¹¹ He writes elsewhere, when attempting

⁷¹⁰ Isaiah Berlin, 'Helvétius' [1952], in *Freedom and Its Betrayal*, p.25-6.

⁷¹¹ Isaiah Berlin, 'Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century' [1950] in *Liberty*, p.93.

to explain the development of ideas, '[p]hilosophical problems arise because concepts and words and thoughts and ways of formulating and arguing about the world and about oneself come into special sorts of collision'⁷¹² On pluralism, Berlin writes frequently on the incompatibility of values, and the need for political understanding and compromise once this has been realised. In interview with Ramin Jahanbegloo he commented, 'one of my convictions is that some moral, social and political values conflict. I cannot conceive of any world in which certain values be reconciled...[c]ertain human values cannot be combined, because they are incompatible with one another; so there have to be choices.'⁷¹³ Although this is a prime example of Berlin's 'realist' liberalism that attempts to explain how reluctant compromise must be part of a peaceful world, Said makes the case that Berlin is creating the impression that there *will always be* conflict. In this sense, Berlin is exacerbating a dialogue of separation and difference. Remembering Dumm's overarching point on the limitations of Berlin's pluralism for ensuring all possible freedoms, Berlin is also unconvincing in his assertion that a 'pluralist democracy' offers the most appealing future for modern society⁷¹⁴ when his thoughts on the 'tragic' state of mankind are taken into account.

With Said's allegation in mind, I wish briefly to examine how thinkers sympathetic to Berlin have engaged with Berlin's ideas. This process illustrates further the depth of assumption in the work of Berlin and his interpreters, confirming the normative power sections liberal discourse have acquired. Crowder, in his examination of John Gray's assertions on the relationship between liberalism and pluralism writes,

⁷¹² Berlin, 'Philosophy and Government Repression' [1954], p.61.

⁷¹³ Jahanbegloo, *Conversations with Isaiah Berlin*, p.142.

⁷¹⁴ Jahanbegloo, *Conversations with Isaiah Berlin*, p.144.

'[h]e [Gray] argues in effect that if under pluralism a reasoned ranking of values is possible in context, it is possible *only* in context. The traditional project of liberalism is not contextual but universal: the classic justifications of liberalism (Lockean natural rights, Benthamite utilitarianism, Millian self-development, Rawlsian neutrality) privilege liberal goals not merely for particular societies but for all societies. Liberal universalism is therefore at odds with value pluralism and must be rejected.'⁷¹⁵

Gray's insistence that pluralism is contextual and Crowder's criticism of Gray, all seem to go along Berlinian lines. All three thinkers appear to *believe* in, and discuss at length, the usefulness of either pluralism or liberalism without really examining the foundations of their beliefs, nor possible alternatives in the future. It is in this sense that the reader peers into a controversy whose foundational limits are not explored, because the liberal-pluralist world vision dominates the map of the future. This domination, for these liberals, does not have to be questioned, and actually does appear as a 'universalist' idea in an way that the authors do not acknowledge.

The relevant point to consider over the 'context' of Berlin's interpretations is whether Berlin imprints his own context - *his* set of preoccupations, liberal-pluralist beliefs and so on - over that of the thinker he is writing on. Gray's discussion of 'agonistic liberalism' in *Enlightenment's Wake* reinforces how Berlin analysed Machiavelli as signifying the 'true originator' of a pluralist liberalism. The quote Gray uses to highlight Berlin's interpretation of Machiavelli has at its heart the same assumption upon which Gray implicitly leans - that of 'the normal'. The implication for Gray is that

'where the illiberal form of life is worthy of allegiance, it is not so because it is the form of life blessed by reason, or the one in which human beings as such best flourish, but simply because it is an incident in a choice-worthy tradition or form of life, to which some human beings find themselves constitutively, but at the same time contingently, attached'.⁷¹⁶

⁷¹⁵ Crowder, *Isaiah Berlin*, p.151.

⁷¹⁶ Gray, *Enlightenment's Wake*, p.86.

This loose discussion on 'human beings' and 'forms of life' mirrors Berlin's simplistic view on human nature and human agency. In the essay in question, 'The Originality of Machiavelli', Berlin seems to believe that men are much the same everywhere, or at least have the same sense of the differing nature of 'values'. Berlin writes, '[a]nyone whose thought revolves round central concepts such as the good and the bad, the corrupt and the pure, has an ethical scale in mind in terms of which he gives moral praise or blame. Machiavelli's values are not Christian, but they are moral values.'⁷¹⁷ Berlin continues by explaining how Machiavelli is different to 'monist' thinkers such as Hobbes and Marx in their approach to violence.

'Machiavelli's princes...are doing evil things, not condonable in terms of common morality. It is Machiavelli's great merit that he does not deny this. Marsilio, Hobbes, Spinoza, and, in their own fashion, Hegel and Marx, did try to deny it. So did many a defender of the *raison d'etat*, imperialist and populist, Catholic and Protestant. These thinkers argue for a single moral system: and seek to show that the morality which justifies, and indeed demands, such deeds, is continuous with, and a more rational form of, the confused ethical beliefs of the uninstructed morality which forbids them absolutely.'⁷¹⁸

This is intriguing, because from Berlin's perch of separation he judges Machiavelli comparatively in terms of the set of beliefs acting as the foundation for the violence. Berlin reiterates this interpretation of monism, being sure to link it to 'the deepest assumptions of western political thought'⁷¹⁹, and the process of the 'unifying monistic pattern'⁷²⁰. Berlin then goes on to argue that Machiavelli split open this 'rock, upon which western beliefs and lives had been founded'⁷²¹, thus 'uncovering...an insoluble dilemma, the planting of a permanent question mark in the path of

⁷¹⁷ Isaiah Berlin, 'The Originality of Machiavelli' [1972], in *Against the Current*, p.55.

⁷¹⁸ Berlin, 'The Originality of Machiavelli' [1972], p.63.

⁷¹⁹ Berlin, 'The Originality of Machiavelli' [1972], p. 67.

⁷²⁰ Berlin, 'The Originality of Machiavelli' [1972], p. 68.

⁷²¹ Berlin, 'The Originality of Machiavelli' [1972], p. 68.

posterity...ends equally ultimate, equally sacred, may contradict each other...systems of value may come into collision...as part of the normal human situation.⁷²² Berlin argued that in the contemporary world 'that looks for certainties' Machiavelli was particularly prescient, and should be viewed as 'one of the makers of pluralism'. Furthermore, Berlin asserts that Machiavelli transformed conflict 'from a paradox into something approaching a commonplace...relegating much uncriticised traditional morality to the realm of utopia.'⁷²³

It is certainly tempting to view Berlin's interpretation as conceived heavily through the lens of Berlin's specific context. Berlin's argument leans heavily on normative conceptions of morality and personal motivation. The way in which he equates Machiavellian violence as less reprehensible because Machiavelli does not deny the questionable morality of such acts, is confused. There are any number of examples you could use, that Berlin chooses not too, of prominent figures, Marxists included, who did not deny the need for violence. A recent alternative interpretation of Machiavelli stresses the unignorable influence Machiavelli had on Italian fascism.⁷²⁴ Liberal interpretations of Machiavelli are picked up on as a potential explanation for the strange relationship between Machiavelli and the rise of fascism: '[t]here is still another reason why fascist writers did not choose to appropriate Machiavelli. Curious though it may seem, their liberal and democratic enemies had already laid claim to his legacy'.⁷²⁵

A rejoinder to Berlin's view of Machiavelli may come in the form of Nietzsche. Elsewhere, Nietzsche has been interpreted as the philosopher who first practiced 'perspectivism', a

⁷²² Berlin, 'The Originality of Machiavelli' [1972], p. 74-5.

⁷²³ Berlin, 'The Originality of Machiavelli' [1972], p.78-79.

⁷²⁴ Joseph Femia, 'Machiavelli and Italian Fascism' *History of Political Thought*, 25, 1 (2004), pp.1-15.

⁷²⁵ Femia, 'Machiavelli and Italian Fascism', p.3.

methodology that has left an indelible mark on postmodernism and beyond. In a sense, Nietzsche's perspectivism can be viewed as pluralism beyond the narrow moral confines of the liberal project. Leiter writes,

'perspectivism implies, not the negation of meaning, but more insistence on speech than on the body and the impossibility of a totalisation of meaning. Human needs and desires determine what we label as 'knowledge' or 'truth'. In Nietzsche's eyes, words like 'knowledge' and 'truth' are no more than terms of praise applied to successful or useful discourse – they are in fact, just words. All knowledge claims must remain provisional. The interpreter cannot ignore the fact that other perspectives are possible.'⁷²⁶

What is clear is that Nietzsche never fitted Berlin's scholarly agenda. Along with the French existentialists of the post-1945 period, Nietzsche remains an unfronted presence in Berlin's work. Indeed it is possible to view Nietzsche and Berlin as ontologically opposed. Because he could not be squeezed into the moral strait-jacket Berlin's framework requires, unlike Machiavelli, Nietzsche is largely left alone. Part of the explanation may be offered from a snippet of Berlin's interview with Jahanbegloo:

'In countries like France, Italy or Spain, philosophy is supposed to tell you what to seek after, how to live. I mean they tend to be philosophies of life, *Lebensphilosophien*. Kant, Hegel, William James, Bergson, were philosophers in both senses - asked both types of questions - but then philosophy took a swerve - Nietzsche, Sartre, and I suppose Heidegger (whom I cannot read) veered away from the main traditions of philosophical thought.'⁷²⁷

Clearly, Berlin is far more comfortable submerging himself within 'main traditions of philosophical

⁷²⁶ Brian Leiter, *Nietzsche On Morality* (London: Routledge, 2002). See Leiter for discussion of Nietzsche's perspectivism. Also his article 'Perspectivism in Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morals', in Richard Schacht (ed.), *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality* (Berkeley: California University Press, 1994), pp.334-357. Leiter is one representative of the Anglo-American 'naturalist' school that views Nietzsche as primarily a philosopher of human nature. See also Maudemarie Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

⁷²⁷ Jahanbegloo, *Conversations with Isaiah Berlin*, p.140.

thought', defining thinkers as part of streams of thought he is happy to identify. That philosophy 'took a swerve', at the beginning of the twentieth century from the last quote, begs the question over Berlin's relationship to this 'swerve'. Clearly, Berlin has rejected new forms of philosophical inquiry. I would judge this rejection to be firmly based in a moral rejection of certain strands of thought. This returns us to the theme of opposition. Not only was Berlin motivated by ideological opposition to 'tyrannous' system builders but he was also opposed to certain radical thinkers on a moral-ontological basis. This can be identified through implicit and explicit statements on Berlin's part. I now wish to examine how Berlin's preoccupations influenced his interpretation of a final group of thinkers.

Preoccupation and Design

The basic fact that Berlin imprints his own preoccupations onto the thinkers he interprets is not a wholly original or radical thesis. I will now examine criticisms that have been leveled at Berlin's interpretation of Vico, Herzen and Marx. Although these criticisms do not go as far as I propose, interpretative problems clearly surround Berlin's work. Joseph Mali is clear that Berlin's 'methodological fallacy' meant that Berlin created 'of Vico much too modern a thinker, a champion of Berlin's own ethical and political creeds of liberalism or pluralism – creeds that Vico could not possibly have held.'⁷²⁸ Quoting a passage from *Vico and Herder*, Mali writes; 'This is vintage Berlin. But is it really Vico? Who, in this passage, is the real 'author of the view that a rite or symbol or object of worship, from fetishism to modern nationalism, is most correctly interpreted as an

⁷²⁸ Joseph Mali, 'Berlin, Vico, and the Principles of Humanity', in 'Isaiah Berlin's Counter-Enlightenment', p.53.

expression of...what later theorists were to call ideologies'?.⁷²⁹ A salient point on Vico's 'cultural pluralism' made by Mali also has wider implications for Berlin's methodology, for it suggests that his method is not honed to the delicacies of context and differing value systems, but rather a broad ontological approach that side-steps the delicacies of intellectual investigation. Mali states,

'Vico himself does not seem to have conceived of - let alone applied - those liberal terms of cultural equivalency in his *New Science*. Vico, in other words, may have come to recognise 'cultural pluralism' as inevitable but not as valuable in itself.'⁷³⁰

To add strength to the idea that Berlin is silently dealing in universalism, or ontological assumption, Lilla believes Berlin's interpretations of Vico overlook the crucial motivating force of Vico's trenchant belief in the eternal 'human aspiration to divinity' that 'imparted a certain unity and continuity to Universal History'.⁷³¹

Berlin's interpretative relationship with Herzen has also been focused on in depth, because Berlin seemed to consider himself close to Herzen in many ways, as I have already outlined. It could be argued that this psychological involvement dominates his interpretation of Herzen. Confino suggests that '[o]ne has the impression that very often in writing about Herzen Berlin is speaking about himself, or at least indicating how he would like to be perceived by others'.⁷³² Berlin, like Herzen, 'distrusted those who asked for sacrifices now, and promised....a singing tomorrow.'⁷³³ Berlin also wrote that '[Herzen] believed that the ultimate good of life was life

⁷²⁹ Mali, 'Berlin, Vico, and the Principles of Humanity', p.59.

⁷³⁰ Mali, 'Berlin, Vico, and the Principles of Humanity', p.63.

⁷³¹ Mali, 'Berlin, Vico, and the Principles of Humanity', p.63, on Mark Lilla, *G.B. Vico: The Making of an Anti-Modern* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

⁷³² Michael Confino 'Isaiah Berlin, Alexander Herzen, and Russia's Elusive Counter-Enlightenment', in 'Isaiah Berlin's Counter-Enlightenment', p.185.

⁷³³ Confino 'Isaiah Berlin, Alexander Herzen, and Russia's Elusive Counter-Enlightenment', p.187.

itself⁷³⁴, and that 'basic problems' are not easily resolvable.⁷³⁵ Berlin makes the point that Herzen's idea of liberty was 'closely linked to Herzen's life experience'.⁷³⁶ Remembering the importance Berlin placed on his own life experience in Russia as a child, it seems that Berlin conceived Herzen's characteristics as mirroring his own. For instance, Berlin stated '[h]e [Herzen] was an irrepressible talker'⁷³⁷; an aside that takes on added significance when it is realised Berlin was frequently labelled in a similar way. It is when the reader realises that Berlin is consistently describing Herzen in way that others could easily describe Berlin that the terrain becomes problematic. Confino seems to interpret this in another way when he writes,

'Herzen anticipated Berlin's central idea that there are conflicts with regard to values and goods that are irreconcilable, and that in states and society there should be structures and processes that allow these conflicting interests to coexist in peace. Herzen did not express this idea in these words, but of all his contemporaries - and compared to later thinkers - he was the one closest to the spirit and content of this quintessential vision of Isaiah Berlin'.⁷³⁸

Exacerbating the problem, Confino is in agreement with Berlin's broad argument - an argument that Berlin imprinted on, among others, Machiavelli. Confino also seems to extend the idea that there can be an identifiable 'spirit' of a thinker; perhaps a similar interpretative assumption to Berlin's wish to characterise a thinker as embodying a 'sense of reality'⁷³⁹. Confino points out, more convincingly, that Herzen

'stood high in Berlin's esteem on account of four major positions which Herzen gradually adhered to: the notion of individual liberty; the refusal to sacrifice the present for the

⁷³⁴ Berlin, 'Herzen and His Memoirs' [1968], p.194-5.

⁷³⁵ Isaiah Berlin, 'Alexander Herzen' [1954], in *Russian Thinkers*, p.202, 205.

⁷³⁶ Confino 'Isaiah Berlin, Alexander Herzen, and Russia's Elusive Counter-Enlightenment', p.188, quoting Berlin, 'Herzen and His Memoirs', 206-7.

⁷³⁷ Berlin, 'Herzen and His Memoirs' [1968], p.188.

⁷³⁸ Confino, 'Isaiah Berlin, Alexander Herzen, and Russia's Elusive Counter-Enlightenment', p.189.

⁷³⁹ Berlin, 'Herzen and Bakunin on Individual Liberty' [1955], p.111; 'Alexander Herzen' [1954], p.207.

future; the rejection of great magnificent abstractions, and a skepticism about the meaning and value of abstract ideas as such; and, finally, Herzen's sense of reality'.⁷⁴⁰

The way in which Berlin uses the phrase 'sense of reality' in relation to Herzen is of particular interest when thinking about the way in which assumption and normality fit into Berlin's broader intellectual project. Berlin places significant importance on the term 'sense of reality', and it is undoubtedly linked to his normative assumptions and commonsensical language, in that Berlin understands the words 'sense' and 'reality' in very static terms, which he imprints on the interpretation of temporally distant thinkers. He seems to use the phrase to emphasise his ontological impression of a thinker. For instance, on Herzen he writes, '[h]is sense of reality....variety of life and the comedy of the human character.'⁷⁴¹ He is clearly using the normatively charged phrase to create the impression of a psychological 'outlook'. Crucially, Berlin is implicitly arguing that this 'outlook' is not too dissimilar to his own. In contrast to this 'positive' sense of reality, Berlin also uses the phrase to paint a negative picture of Marx. Toews writes,

'[for Berlin] what Marx lacked was not so much a commitment to providing empirical evidence for his descriptions of social formations and their transformations but a sense of 'reality', that is, a sympathetic understanding of the indeterminacy of historical processes marked by diverging and converging stories constructed from alternative scripts (historically constructed traditions and cultural formations) by individuals making value-choices within the temporal and cultural parameters of historical worlds that had no discernable single meaning'.⁷⁴²

Whilst Toews seems to link the 'sense of reality' with liberal pluralism, I view this phrase as another example of Berlin's rootedness in the liberal narrative of normality that takes as given certain moral

⁷⁴⁰ Confino, 'Isaiah Berlin, Alexander Herzen, and Russia's Elusive Counter-Enlightenment', p.183.

⁷⁴¹ Berlin, 'Herzen and His Memoirs' [1968], p.207.

⁷⁴² John E. Toews, 'Berlin's Marx: Enlightenment, Counter-Enlightenment, and the Historical Construction', p.170.

and ethical positions. Berlin deploys the idea of a 'sense of reality' to position a thinker on scale of credibility that is completely reliant on Berlin's moral assumptions, themselves expressed through Berlin's conception of the normal. So, perhaps Berlin's 'sense of reality' should be thought of as his 'sense of normality'. This discussion ties in to earlier comments on Berlin's conception of the 'inner' and 'outer' worlds of a thinker. Berlin, in the introduction to his essay 'The Birth of Greek Individualism' writes,

'The thinker's cleverness is usually expended in inventing arguments with which to fortify this central idea, or, still more, to repel attacks, refute objections; but to understand all this reasoning, however cogent and ingenious, will not lead one to grasp the thought of a philosopher, a historian, a critic unless one penetrates through these sophisticated defences upon his bastions to what he is really defending - the inner citadel itself, which is usually comparatively simple, a fundamental perception which dominates his thought and has formed his view of the world'.⁷⁴³

Berlin suggests that this 'perception which dominates' is 'simple', a reducible core of thought that contains all the ideas of the thinker. Berlin, without using such terms, seems to assert that a thinker's 'ontological' position is detectable through a kind of deconstructive activity - working down through the layers of thought to find the core. Clearly, this is how he views his method of 'reconstructive imagination'. The 'inner citadel' is the prize and the descriptive focus for the scholar who has 'got into the mind of' a thinker. This is an interesting methodological aspect of Berlin's work, and is clearly not textually sensitive. Whilst advocating the possibility of 'reducing' a thinker to a sentence that sums up their ontological position - a summation of their overall project - Berlin, in his next paragraph states,

⁷⁴³ Isaiah Berlin, 'The Birth of Greek Individualism' [1962], in *Liberty*, p.288.

'Great moments of transformation occurred, for example, when the cyclical laws of the Greeks were succeeded by the ascending straight line, the historical teleology, of the Jews and Christians...[t]here are those who, like Condorcet or Hegel, Buckle or Marx, Spengler or Toynbee, claim to be able to perceive a single pattern of development in this succession of human perspectives. I do not wish to maintain that such ambitious efforts to reduce the vast variety of conscious human experience to one enormous dominant pattern are necessarily doomed to failure; I confine myself to saying that the three great crises...are not satisfactorily explained by the hypotheses of any of these thinkers, and that this naturally reduces the value of these hypotheses in my eyes'.⁷⁴⁴

In a sense, Berlin is disagreeing with those theorists of 'single-patterns' on similar methodological terms. Berlin does not move the discussion on with a new methodological approach that diminishes the importance of the very fact of the 'three grand crises', but instead bolsters the primacy of the metahistorical view - or at least accepted metahistorical framework - by presenting a liberal approach that does not problematise the temporal dilemma of engaging with thinkers in the distant past. Berlin's insistence on reducing a thinker to an unproblematised, crystallised statement dislocates the thinker to a comparable degree as placing the thinker in an 'enormous dominant pattern'. This approach exposes Berlin's desire to pronounce certain degree of moral knowledge over the thinker in question, claiming the thinker as his own. This style of interpretation takes on greater significance in the cold war context. Berlin wishes to approach thinkers in a 'moralised' manner, whilst criticising other methodologies for 'de-moralising' history. Berlin continues with a passage that demonstrates both his erudition, and also his concern to relate even ancient thinkers to the contemporary world (or, rather, the perceived intellectual origins of the contemporary world). Berlin jumps from the ancient world of Epiphanes to claim

'...it took many centuries for the notion of individual rights to emerge, the notion defended so passionately by Benjamin Constant, that men need an area...within which they can do

⁷⁴⁴ Berlin, 'The Birth of Greek Individualism' [1962], p.289-90.

as they please...The notion of freedom from State control which...Humboldt defended, and which found its most eloquent champion in John Stuart Mill - that notion is wholly alien to the ancient world. Neither Plato nor Xenophon nor Aristotle nor Aristophanes, who deplore the selfishness, rapacity, lawlessness, lack of civic sense...none of these had any notion of the rights of man, the rights to be left alone, the right not to be impinged upon within identifiable frontiers.⁷⁴⁵

Yet, Berlin goes as far to claim that the thoughts of Chrysippus (c. 300AD) represented the 'moment that marks the birth of the idea that politics is unworthy of a truly gifted man'; and represents one of the ways 'this new scale of values haunts the European consciousness'.⁷⁴⁶ He continues,

'once the seamless whole of the city-state in which the public and the private were not distinguished is torn, nothing can ever make it entirely whole again. In the Renaissance, in modern times, the notion of the separateness of moral and political values, the ethics of resistance, of withdrawal, of personal relationships, versus those of the service of mankind, is one the deepest and most agonising issues.'⁷⁴⁷

There is a contradiction here that further highlights Berlin's methodological fragility. Whilst, on one hand claiming that the 'ancients' did not have the 'notion' of the rights of man, Berlin then argues that they did originate a 'new scale of human values'. This seems to be a good example of the way in which Berlin can view ideas divorced from a meaningful context; a process that allows him more easily to make distinctions and claims of continuity in intellectual life. Clearly, Berlin's interpretative approach is problematic on multiple levels, but I propose that the overriding problem is that Berlin's ontology dominates all interpretations of thinkers. His ontology is comprised of ideological preoccupation and normative assumption that is detectable through a

⁷⁴⁵ Berlin, 'The Birth of Greek Individualism' [1962], p.318-9.

⁷⁴⁶ Berlin, 'The Birth of Greek Individualism' [1962], p.319.

⁷⁴⁷ Berlin, 'The Birth of Greek Individualism' [1962], p.319-20.

varied selection of his texts. I have also illustrated how contemporary values, shaped by cold war political culture, gave his work a specifically charged texture. Before concluding this chapter, I wish to focus specifically on the way in which a comparison of Berlin and Tocqueville may be useful to my approach, leading back towards a more contextual focus in the final chapter.

Berlin and Tocqueville: Re-emphasising the Contextual

Thus far, this thesis has suggested a discursive context in which to view Berlin, and offered a textual examination that places him at the heart of an activated cold war value system. To re-emphasise how Berlin's thoughts on history, violence, revolution, individual freedom and progress overlaps with the way in which he wrote, I now wish to turn specifically to examining the relationship between Berlin and Tocqueville. This is useful, because both thinkers became influential, yet remained aloof from the 'concrete' realities of public life.

Tocqueville is an interesting example to consider, as he is a rather 'silent' figure for Berlin, apart from figuring briefly in 'Two Concepts of Liberty'⁷⁴⁸, and sporadically in other essays. Bearing in mind my earlier thoughts on the 'moral and emotive judgement process' Berlin went through when selecting thinkers to write about, it comes as no surprise to note that Berlin considered Tocqueville a 'cold hearted man'.⁷⁴⁹ Interestingly, Berlin seems to have held this opinion because Tocqueville did not help Herzen in 1848 when the 'Russian agitator' was arrested, and that Herzen was a 'braver' thinker, willing to fight for his ideas, whilst Tocqueville

⁷⁴⁸ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' [1958], p.211-7.

⁷⁴⁹ Jahanbegloo, *Conversations With Isaiah Berlin*, p.180.

was not.⁷⁵⁰ The use of 'brave' in this context is clearly a normative statement because, as we have seen by now, much of Berlin's intellectual career was built around discrediting those thinkers whose radicalism - for them at least a certain type of 'bravery' - went too far. Berlin is on one side of a war of ideas, interested in representing 'open-minded, open-hearted human beings' against the moral 'coldness' of Tocqueville or Dostoevsky.

However, some parallels can be detected between Berlin and Tocqueville at various levels. Berlin elucidated, as Tocqueville did, his understanding of liberty at length, detailed in terms that separate possible spaces of freedom. Both were politicised, 'continental', both occupied aristocratic positions in society. One was born near to top of the social hierarchy, the other established a comfortable niche as a 'gentlemanly' scholar and, after years of apprenticeship embedded in the Oxford university system, was knighted. Tocqueville was excited by the new phenomenon of democracy, and offered extended critiques on the effects he observed. Berlin served to legitimise and bolster the 'phenomenon', thus strengthening its foundations. Tocqueville and Berlin may be similar in the sense that both their conceptions of the relationship between liberal democracy and the individual are, fundamentally, conservative. As LaCapra states 'one general problem with Tocqueville's ideal model of liberal democracy is that over the course of the nineteenth century conditions in both Europe and America increasingly tended to depart from it.'⁷⁵¹ Discussing Tocqueville's views on democracy further, LaCapra writes 'a democratic society is sometimes perceived in 'mass' terms that may obscure certain of its [sic]

⁷⁵⁰ Jahanbegloo, *Conversations With Isaiah Berlin*, p.180.

⁷⁵¹ LaCapra, *History and Reading*, p.111.

internal differentiations, tensions, and inequalities'.⁷⁵² In many ways exemplifying 'the liberal tradition', Tocqueville shares common concerns with Berlin; namely social order, questions of liberty and equality, and the relationship between 'the state', its institutions and the individual.⁷⁵³ Tocqueville 'devotes very little attention to socio-economic problems....Tocqueville discusses society largely in terms of its relationship to culture, government, and administration.'⁷⁵⁴ Although LaCapra does not discuss Berlin at all as a comparative figure, the parallels are striking. Tocqueville does not 'relate problems of government, administration, political culture, and social psychology to the socio-economic process and the interests and problems it generates.'⁷⁵⁵ It is fair to say that although sections of Berlin's work⁷⁵⁶ do touch upon socio-economic issues, these issues are not *confronted* but either advocated or rejected. More importantly the socio-economic process, for Berlin, is subsumed beneath layers of assumption. Implicitly, Berlin advocated liberal democratic capitalist ideals. It is tempting to view his phraseology on the mechanics of freedom, where 'areas' exist where the individual has the opportunity to be free, as similar to the capitalist economic ethos of freedom of opportunity. Berlin clearly admires Roosevelt who 'was plainly animated by a humanitarian purpose'⁷⁵⁷ by providing (almost a perfect definition of the aims of western democratic capitalism)

'a vast safety valve for pent-up bitterness and indignation, and trying to prevent revolution and construct a regime which should provide for greater economic equality and social justice - ideals which were the best part of the tradition of American public life - without

⁷⁵² LaCapra, *History and Reading*, p.105.

⁷⁵³ See LaCapra, *History and Reading*, p.109.

⁷⁵⁴ LaCapra, *History and Reading* p.112.

⁷⁵⁵ LaCapra, *History and Reading*, p.113.

⁷⁵⁶ Most notably Isaiah Berlin, 'President Franklin Delano Roosevelt', *Political Quarterly*, 26 (1955) pp.336-44, and brief mentions of Schumpeter in 'Two Concepts of Liberty' [1958].

⁷⁵⁷ Berlin, 'President Franklin Delano Roosevelt' [1955], p.24.

altering the basis of freedom and democracy in his country'.⁷⁵⁸

It is important to consider the authorly context here. Berlin states that with the original publication of the article in 1955⁷⁵⁹, he

'wished to remind readers of the fact that for my generation – those who were young in the 1930s – the political skies of Europe, dominated by Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, Franco, Salazar and various dictators in eastern Europe and the Balkans, were very dark indeed; the policies of Chamberlain and Daladier held out no hope; for those who had not despaired of the possibility of a socially and morally tolerable world the only point of light seemed to many of us to come from President Roosevelt and the New Deal. This article...was written largely during the recriminations of the immediate post-war years'.⁷⁶⁰

It could be argued that Berlin's article, as well as serving the function of reminding readers of the recently dark 'political skies', was also legitimating the new status quo, where capitalist democracy was the way forward for a 'socially and morally tolerable world', and where the alternatives would lead back to the darkness. Whilst this is a defensible position, it is only a seriously defensible one if it also engages at the domestic level, where analysis is directed towards inequalities that exist within economically and politically 'liberal' states. Berlin does not venture into this territory.

Whilst it could be argued that the proto-sociology practiced by Tocqueville differentiates him methodologically from Berlin, it can be argued both display similar ontological anxieties. These anxieties, in turn, place them both firmly in the liberal tradition, itself rooted in and defined by normative assumption. Both display contempt for intellectuals involved with 'revolution', with Berlin delving deep into the 'determinism' linked with totalitarian and revolutionary thought, and

⁷⁵⁸ Berlin, 'President Franklin Delano Roosevelt' [1955], p.25.

⁷⁵⁹ Berlin, 'President Franklin Delano Roosevelt' [1955], p.25.

⁷⁶⁰ Isaiah Berlin 'Preface', *Personal Impressions*, p.vii-viii.

demanding the contrast between revolutionary Bolsheviks with intellectually 'brave' Russians like Herzen. When reading Berlin's thoughts on violence and revolution, it is abundantly clear that his views are, understandably, directly linked to his experiences of violence he witnessed as a boy in Petrograd⁷⁶¹. However, the fact cannot be escaped that he sides with certain types of violence, and does not flinch as much when talking about revolutionaries being crushed. Also, witnessing violence, or the effects of violence, does not mean that Berlin, similarly to Tocqueville, should automatically view themselves as 'legitimate guides to public opinion and policy'⁷⁶² as so many liberals do.

Berlin's psychological repulsion of violence manifested itself as one part of his liberal-humanist project, but the fact he could express his views in, as it turned out, an influential manner, was a rarity among the hundreds of millions of individuals who witnessed horrors of varying extremes in the twentieth century. The difference is similar to Tocqueville; namely their position in the social hierarchy. Berlin became a cultural cold war 'hegemon', whose liberal orientation fed into the conception of normality, itself closely tied to the emerging *status quo* in the 1950s and 1960s. I will explore Berlin's problematic attitudes to violence in the next chapter.

It is important to stress the central point that Berlin, like Tocqueville, was intimately tied into an affectionate relationship with the social order of the time. LaCapra quotes Tocqueville from *The Old Regime*, who wrote that the intellectuals of the French Revolution believed they could get rid of 'the complex of traditional customs governing the social order of the day [and replace them

⁷⁶¹ See Jahanbegloo, *Conversations With Isaiah Berlin*, p.3-4.

⁷⁶² LaCapra, *History and Reading*, p.14.

with] simple, elementary rules deriving from the exercise of human reason and natural law'.⁷⁶³

Tocqueville is expressing very similar views to Berlin's thoughts on determinism. In 'Historical Inevitability', one way to understand Berlin's views on the 'determinist' theorists is to view them in opposition to a peculiarly *autonomous* value of 'liberty' that encompasses 'the normal', the natural; at root, the social order. These are moralistic meditations on legitimate and non-legitimate types of social change, and the extent of political activism.

Conclusion

This chapter has been an attempt to illustrate the consistency of assumption in the work of Berlin. The previous chapter drew the more obvious parallels between Berlin's 'cold war' essays 'Two Concepts of Liberty' and 'Historical Inevitability' and the significant levels of assumption expressed through normative language. This chapter has consolidated my general argument over Berlin's normative use of language, and through an abstract analysis of Berlin's interpretation of authors I have made clearer how I view the elusive links between text and context. These intertwined aspects of Berlin's intellectual life can be sensed through a scattered selection of Berlin's work on a variety of intellectual figures and themes.

I have demonstrated the thesis that Berlin imprints his own ideological preoccupations onto the ideas of other thinkers. His consistent use of normative language illustrates the extent of his ideological preoccupations, and serves to underpin and confirm my assertions on the wider implications of Berlin's discursive role as a cold war intellectual. The next chapter links the more

⁷⁶³ Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the French Revolution* [trans. Stuart Gilbert](New York, NY: Norton, 1955), p.139, quoted in LaCapra, *History and Reading*, p.115.

abstract textual analysis already undertaken to the geopolitical context that must be considered before a complete statement on Berlin's 'ontology' can be arrived at.

8

Berlin's Ontology*Introduction*

In Part 2 of my thesis I have described how Berlin's implicit textual statements are expressions of a powerful ontology. I now wish to re-emphasise how this ontology revolves around concrete contextual realities and ethno-religious attitudes that resonate throughout Berlin's writing. This process synthesises the question of the relationship between text and context, arguing it is possible to build a complex geopolitical spatial context within which to locate Berlin.

I wish to revisit the Israeli question; a question that, for Berlin, resonates with the language of colonisation and otherness, as well as reflecting wider cold values. Zionism is an intriguing example of an idea that broke out of abstraction and had real-world consequences. Berlin uses the concepts of 'recognition' and 'belonging' frequently in his writing, and the inference to a physical dimension places interesting connotations on the Israeli question.

Recognition, as deployed by Berlin, has at its core the 'concealed language of domination'. For Berlin, the 'unrecognised' simply yearn for markers of civility. The concept is idealistic because, in Berlin's hands, the term is understood as a more powerful motivating force than the wish to seek political, social or economic change. Clearly, Berlin is also dwelling on the problem of identity. It is clear that Berlin also perceives a 'hierarchy of recognition' within domestic society, which highlights the possibility of the institutional nature of his thought, and the encouragement of elitism that, in part, defines his intellectual role.

Throughout his work, a definite 'vocabulary of place' was an active and powerful

presence. The way in which he conceived the state impacted on his conception of violence. Certain uneasy realities - such as Palestinian dispossession - became 'facts of life', and gained legitimate geopolitical standing. Violence was only 'inherent' in certain political belief-systems. Berlin's use of the word 'coercion' illustrates the simplified way in which a 'common enemy' could be activated and set in polarised opposition to the liberal ideal.

This chapter moves towards viewing the cold war as a landscape that created a vast net of ontological assumptions that are visible through the textual output of Berlin. Linked into this cold war landscape, Berlin's geopolitical relevance was also especially stark considering his proximity to Israeli politics. Through his role of organic intellectual in the Anglo-American context he undoubtedly influenced political culture in a wider global context, which implies hegemonic impulses in the textual output of Berlin. Through this examination it becomes clear that there is a highly complex relationship between the act of writing, representation and influence.

It is important to make clear that the purpose of highlighting Berlin's relationship with Zionism is not through a wish to either advocate or condemn Berlin's ideological involvement, but to stress the necessity of viewing Berlin's textual power through a multi-contextual lens. This approach leads to a problematic reading of Berlin by emphasising how further, unexpected, assumptions in his work have foundations in territorial realities, and unambiguous conceptions of the state. The general argument arrives at the possibility that Berlin's 'ontology' also had a strong geopolitical layer that has not been adequately highlighted in the literature.

Berlin and the Vocabulary of Place

Whilst it is possible to argue the abstract point that Berlin's assumptions were linked to geopolitical considerations, it is worth pointing out he wrote rather more concretely, in 1953, that '[the Jews] have enjoyed rather too much history and too little geography'.⁷⁶⁴ Here, Berlin consciously aligns his ideological preoccupations with a particular conception of geopolitical space. However, I am interested by the possibility that an examination of Berlin's less explicit use of language can uncover a persistent strand of geopolitical assumption. A further complication arises when it becomes apparent how tightly Berlin's conception of Israel is bound up in the geopolitical context of 'cold war'. On the complex issues surrounding the creation of the Israeli state Neocleous writes,

'The Jews...served as both proof of and metaphor for the territorial dimension of the modern state; simultaneously, of course, they also symbolized its exclusionary and genocidal potential...the Jews can be seen as a paradigmatic example of the statist preoccupation with identity and territory. Thus although after World War II the problem of Jewish statelessness was solved through the colonising impulse inherent in territorial sovereign formations - the Israeli state became a necessity in a world where only states are allowed to stake a claim to sovereignty - the problem of the stateless minority remained far from solved. Indeed, the creation of the new state merely generated a new category of Arab 'refugee' who in turn now figures as searching for a 'homeland'.⁷⁶⁵

Whilst Neocleous seems to underestimate Jewish 'statelessness' and dispossession after 1945, Berlin's Zionism can be viewed as based on the belief that Israeli Jews could only achieve the legitimate geopolitical foundations for future freedoms with the birth of Israel. Berlin overlooked, at least according to his writing, the difficulties detailed above by Neocleous over subsequent

⁷⁶⁴ Berlin, 'The Origins of Israel' [1953], p.143.

⁷⁶⁵ Mark Neocleous, *Imagining The State* (Maidenhead: OUP, 2003), p.118.

Palestinian dispossession. Perhaps the 'colonising impulse' mentioned by Neocleous resonates through Berlin's language of 'Otherness' detailed earlier. On Israel, Berlin's geopolitical convictions certainly reverberate with the familiar normative language that tied him into the cold war context. In an unpublished address, he commented

'It is marvellous that Israelis have developed a normal life. They are perfectly ordinary human beings who do not suffer from the particular neuroses which the Zionist movement was intended to cure. But the main purpose of the movement was also to create a situation in which Jews, like other human beings, can make a free choice'.⁷⁶⁶

This quote is imbued with the assumptions that I have laid out in the thesis thus far. Firstly, normative language expresses how escape can be found from 'neuroses' towards a particular idea of freedom. To become 'ordinary' is a privilege that Zionism seeks to create. Only then can free choice occur. Clearly, this 'becoming' involves creating a 'situation' - a geographical space - where the Jewish people can thrive, become 'like other human beings'. Whether this creation is ultimately justifiable, or 'correct', is not the consistent theme with Berlin's writing. Instead, other possible freedoms are subsumed beneath Berlin's concept of freedom, itself geopolitically sustained by the 'colonising impulse'. This impulse, as well as Berlin's idea of the 'human being', are clearly ideas rooted firmly in the western colonial tradition, where an implicit hierarchy decides that some are more 'human' than others. This is also stereotypical of the cold war context, where geopolitical assumptions were linked closely with assumptions over freedom, and the positive possibility of state structures ensuring future freedoms. Linked to these broad patterns of assumption are the very real problems invested in Berlin's conception of the state. In the following

⁷⁶⁶ Unpublished address, 'The Achievement of Zionism', June 1, 1975, p.363. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Berlin 591.

unpublished text, Berlin clearly uses the fact that Israel is a 'mature state' to justify its position as a nation state. He begins by arguing that there was a genuinely organic community 'texture' behind the creation of the Israeli state,

'There must have been enough of that kind of texture in the Jewish communities, whatever their neighbours may have thought, to have generated a state....The state having come into being, it is quite clear that the Jews who are members of that state are now thought of by their neighbours, whether with approval or disapproval, as being normal persons enjoying a normal state existence upon a piece of geographical soil. Israel is a state among other states and has achieved a normal position.....the problem it has with the Arabs within and without, are problems of a mature state and not of a religious, racial, social or linguistic community'⁷⁶⁷

Berlin repeatedly employs the word 'normal' which, once linked with his emphasis on the 'mature state', seems to imply the unreasonableness, and abnormality, of those who go against the idea of the state structure. That Berlin separates his idea of the 'mature state' from a 'religious, racial, social or linguistic community' is surely only done for effect, for to necessarily divorce the ideas of the state and ideas on 'community', is to paint a surprisingly formalised picture of human communities, especially from a 'liberal-pluralist' perspective. Yet, perhaps this can be explained by the impression that for Berlin, the Jewish people in Israel are transformed, and there is no more need for apologetics. This is a positive, optimistic, vision for the future, where the conditions for freedom are guaranteed if external communities respect the foundations for these freedoms. In contradiction to the formalised picture of the state already described, Berlin comments in the same piece, 'the image which people carry of themselves within their own hearts is one of the

⁷⁶⁷ Isaiah Berlin, 'The Impact of Israel', Unpublished text, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Berlin 571, p.4.

greatest of all motive forces in human thought and behaviour.'⁷⁶⁸ This idea of identity as an 'image', an abstraction, is termed elsewhere by Berlin as 'belonging' or 'recognition'.

Recognition

To move into a discussion on Berlin's complicated use of the terms 'belonging' and 'recognition' in depth, it is necessary to move into a consideration of the spatial aspects of this use of language. It should then become clear that a significant amount of assumption surrounds Berlin's use of these phrases that fed into Berlin's 'vocabulary of place'. Thus far in my thesis the term 'space' has not really encompassed a geopolitical aspect, but more a psychological site of power, a certain confinement of ideas definable and discernable by their politicised agenda. Power, in the liberal sense, comes from the reinforcement of certain values that served to bolster the western state structure and 'self-image' in the cold war context. Thoughts on the geopolitical form of space also collide with my earlier thoughts on the psychological meaning of the term. As Neocleous writes, 'the word frontier (*frontière*) originally referred to the façade of a building or the front line of the army, but in the sixteenth century came to mean the boundaries or borders of a particular space.'⁷⁶⁹ Berlin's frequent use of the word 'frontier' when he speaks of freedom thus takes on a new quality. The inference is a physical one; there exists a 'frontier', and the context in which Berlin uses the word assumes a naturalness to the existence of recognisable obstacles. The existence of these obstacles presupposes the knowledge of the (liberal) limits around these obstacles, as well as the ability within the individual agent to judge the existence of the obstacle.

⁷⁶⁸ Berlin, 'The Impact of Israel', p.4.

⁷⁶⁹ Neocleous, *Imagining The State*, p.98-9.

It seems, however, that the main determinant of the frontier, or the obstacle, is a moral one. Why else would Berlin use the phrase in such a context? For Berlin 'acceptable forms of action' are morally obvious, and determined by a naturalised set of liberal beliefs. So, it is important to realise that Berlin is exercising moral authority by defining limits, and by assuming frontiers. Linked to the idea of the cold war 'self-image' is a rigid political imagination that prioritizes certain geopolitical boundaries in a way that parallels formal Anglo-American foreign policy concerns in the cold war and beyond. His thoughts on nationalism, for instance, often reduced back to the idea of 'belonging' and 'recognition'. Spatially, Berlin is reliant on a traditional conception of community and belonging. 'Belonging' has similar connotations to 'homeland', and Neocleous has discussed how terms

'such as 'homeland' are not simply decorative metaphors or convenient conceptual arrangements, but ways of making us think about and orient ourselves to the state and the kind of order it is engaged in producing....this legitimation of domination rests on the generation of the figure of the enemy'.⁷⁷⁰

Belonging, in Berlin's sense, is about accepting the status quo as the basis for freedom. Berlin pays lip-service to the conception of safety/security in a geopolitically defined space, and in the 'naturalness' of belonging in the confines of a mapped 'state'. Again, this is an important aspect of Berlin's conception of 'the normal'. This simplifies problems of agency and identity, and creates the utopian impression of the possibility of a perfect heterogeneity. This also has an impact on the way in which Berlin views globalisation, or the formalised European community; these multi-

⁷⁷⁰ Neocleous, *Imagining The State*, p.5.

societal growths that contradict the idea that 'the whole earth has been turned into an object of state ownership'.⁷⁷¹

Related to nationalism, and 'national consciousness', Berlin's discussion of 'recognition' also has at its core the concealed language of domination; where certain peoples are 'recognised' by the state they are developed, wealthy, 'sophisticated' or 'civilised' in a conventional western sense. Those 'unrecognised' people are the opposite, and yearn for the markers of civility in 'the search for status'.⁷⁷² Berlin writes

'what is true of the individual is true of groups, social, political, economic or religious, that is, of men conscious of needs and purposes which they have as members of such groups. What oppressed classes or nationalities, as a rule, demand is neither simply unhampered liberty of action for their members, nor above everything, equality of social or economic opportunity, still less assignment of a place in a frictionless, organic State devised by the rational lawgiver. What they want, as often as not, is simply recognition'.⁷⁷³

This quote must be viewed as idealistic in the sense that Berlin puts forward the idea that people wish for an abstract form of 'recognition' over concrete 'social and economic' change. Clearly, 'recognition' in this sense is a luxurious and intellectualised pursuit, presumably undertaken by the more financially privileged members of 'the oppressed'.

Interestingly, it can be argued Berlin also represents a *hierarchy* of recognition in light of his immediate biographical context. This is evident in the way in which he views the relationship between institutions and individuals. He evidently had no compunction in aligning himself with the established sites of institutional power, knighted and decorated as he was. As an example of this,

⁷⁷¹ Neocleous, *Imagining The State*, p.125.

⁷⁷² Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' [1958], p.202.

⁷⁷³ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' [1958], p.202.

a recent article by Mark Thompson highlights the way in which Berlin assumed the acceptance of accolade would necessarily be shared by other intellectual figures. Thompson quotes a letter written by Berlin to the radical British critic William Empson in 1976. Berlin, by now President of the British Academy, wished to persuade Empson to become a fellow of the Academy and approached Empson claiming it was 'disgraceful' he had not been considered before.⁷⁷⁴ In his letter of acceptance, Empson wrote that he had never felt 'resentful at any lack of official recognition.'⁷⁷⁵ This episode clearly casts Berlin and Empson as holding fundamentally different attitudes over what 'recognition' should encompass. Indeed, parallels to Berlin's intervention in the *Index On Censorship* case are evident here, where the formal 'role' of the institution and the author motivated Berlin's opposition to Chomsky. For Berlin, institutional recognition is important. Berlin was clearly embedded within a system of institutional norms where it is indecent or a source of embarrassment that honours have not been distributed to certain individuals. Prestige and prizes were an integral part of Berlin's career, so perhaps it should come as no surprise that he should feel an awkwardness to those who have not been formally regarded with such favour. This type of recognition defined for Berlin the role he himself played. In Thompson's words

'Berlin's opportune compliments and flattering melodrama hint at skills that helped to make him the ultimate mandarin insider, a position that Empson would surely have found ignoble; while Empson's comic but pointed bluntness about the Academy suggests well enough why his invitation came so late.'⁷⁷⁶

Clearly, measures of success, prestige and standards of achievement have been defined by

⁷⁷⁴ Berlin to Empson, 20 May 1976, quoted in Mark Thompson, 'Versions of Pluralism: William Empson, Isaiah Berlin, and the Cold War', *Literary Imagination*, 8.1 (2006), p.85.

⁷⁷⁵ Empson to Berlin, 25 May 1976, quoted in Thompson, 'Versions of Pluralism', p.85.

⁷⁷⁶ Thompson, 'Versions of Pluralism', p.86.

public and glamorous prize-giving in western culture for centuries. Nonetheless, Berlin's proximity to this process does offer another facet to his view of recognition as an idea. The attainment of a standard is glamorized, and those that have are the 'markers of civility' in western society. This encouragement of elitism defines the texture of the social order, adds an important layer to the dominant political culture. For Berlin 'recognition' was important in defining his private and public worlds. Berlin's conception of 'recognition' reflected his fundamentally elitist and hierarchical view of the domestic intellectual milieu, as well as his idealised ideas about the attainment of freedom and nationhood being somehow autonomous from real socio-economic change. Overall, 'recognition' encompasses Berlin's geopolitical and ontological assumptions, in a similar way to his understanding of the state.

The State

Ontologically, Berlin had an overarching impression of physical, formal and defined state structures based partly on the understanding that challenges to these structures, and their attendant values, should also be avoided. In this sense, Berlin goes along with Neocleous when he says 'every historian and theorist of the state has for some time now emphasised that over the last five centuries the state is *the* major political reality that humanity has constructed'.⁷⁷⁷ It is clear that Berlin, through his texts, has a strong sense of the political community. Presented through his texts, this community is often ill-defined, transitory and imaginary. Yet, Berlin's vocabulary of power, including words such as 'area', 'portion' and 'frontier' are powerful signifiers that the political community is rigidly conceived. It is in this sense that Berlin also employed a 'vocabulary

⁷⁷⁷ Neocleous, *Imagining The State*, p.2.

of place'. As if to confirm this, Berlin, quoted earlier, said: 'I remain totally loyal to Britain, to Oxford, to Liberalism, to Israel, to a number of other institutions with which I feel identified.'⁷⁷⁸ In an institutional sense, Berlin was bound tightly into the 'traditional' establishment centre of England, with links to the BBC and with the traditional powerbase of the Anglo-American intellectual community. With his work in Washington in the war years, and his involvement, at least indirectly, with the Congress for Cultural Freedom, Berlin was constantly near institutions characterised by government power, and the rigid, unquestioning ideology of the dominant social order. Indeed,

Cocks writes that

'the connections [Berlin] made at All Souls helped catapult him into circles near the center [sic] of Western power and authority. Those circles, in turn, were gratified by Berlin's heartfelt allegiance to the capitalist West and his fortification of the liberal idea of freedom against its enemies'.⁷⁷⁹

Cocks also writes on the way in which Berlin conceived of English society, and the 'proper' interaction between émigré Jew and elite society⁷⁸⁰. Berlin's institutional orientation feeds into a complicated postwar involvement with Zionism that, among other attitudes, led to Berlin's quote from earlier, on 'the evident feebleness of the Muslim culture' that reflects part cold war exaggerated 'otherness', and part persistent colonial assumptions on the hierarchy of cultures. This aspect of Berlin's realm of assumption has the effect of consolidating the 'fundamental political unit'. Neocleous makes the interesting observation that liberal democratic thinkers, as well

⁷⁷⁸ Jahanbegloo, *Conversations With Isaiah Berlin*, p.87.

⁷⁷⁹ Joan Cocks, *Passion and Paradox: Intellectuals Confront the National Question* (Princeton, N.J.: PUP, 2003), p.73.

⁷⁸⁰ Cocks, *Passion and Paradox*, p.74.

as more extreme political actors, held similar assumptions on territory that have their origins in the nineteenth century

'[t]he Nazis adopted the kind of geopolitical thinking which was by then a common part of bourgeois ideology and social science, and a fundamental part of the statist imagination - the kind of thinking which identified the territorial state as the most fundamental political unit'.⁷⁸¹

It can be argued that Berlin allies this conception of the 'territorial state' with his thoughts on nationalism. He writes with an early post-colonial attitude that attempts to moralise nationalism into an understandable and emotive part of the development of a state,

'It may be true that nationalism, as distinct from mere national consciousness - the sense of belonging to a nation - is in the first place a response to a patronising or disparaging attitude towards the traditional values of a society, the result of wounded pride and a sense of humiliation in its most socially conscious members, which in due course produce anger and self-assertion...but the story is plainly not so simple...the society must, at least potentially, contain within itself a group or class of persons who are in search of a focus for loyalty...in some cases these conditions are created by the emergence of new social classes seeking control of a society against older rulers.'⁷⁸²

In the context of Zionism, I have already discussed Berlin's hopes that a 'benign' nationalism will become widespread, and that this seems utopian. Berlin places trust in 'toleration' and understanding within the state structure, without looking at deeper causes of dissatisfaction and conflict. Berlin's thought on individual liberty places emphasis on the possible attainment of abstract freedom within a conception of the state that does not overly 'coerce' the individual.

⁷⁸¹ Neocleous, *Imagining The State*, p.118.

⁷⁸² Isaiah Berlin, 'Nationalism' in *The Proper Study of Mankind*, p.595.

Coercion

Before concentrating on Berlin and Israel in more depth I wish to examine the way in which Berlin used the idea of 'coercion'. The closeness of the word to his discussion of liberty meant that in his writing Berlin would construct a 'coercer', some sort of 'common enemy' that could function against the image of the 'good'. Berlin uses the word frequently in his discussions on liberty, and almost always in direct opposition to the point he is making. For instance, Berlin writes, '[t]he essence of liberty has always lain in the ability to choose, because you wish so [sic] to choose, uncoerced, unbullied, not swallowed up in some vast system'⁷⁸³ or 'Marxism...which is founded on historical determinism...enjoins painful and dangerous acts, coercion and killing.'⁷⁸⁴ Here, the vocabulary of opposition is dominant, and links coercion with unacceptable forms of violence. Coercion is consistently linked to positive liberty in 'Two Concepts of Liberty', and in one quote Berlin relates this politics directly to wider concerns:

'our own attitudes and activities are likely to remain obscure to us, unless we understand the dominant issues of our own world. The greatest of these is the open war that is being fought between two systems of ideas which return different and conflicting answers to what had long been the central question of politics - the question of obedience and coercion'.⁷⁸⁵

When discussing 'the open war that is being fought between two systems of ideas', Berlin is positioning a geopolitical image in the mind of the reader. Through this process, the classic polarisation of East and West is cemented, and the polarisation becomes a simplified, moralised choice for the reader. Maybe, as Lukes suggested in Chapter Four, Berlin has fallen into a

⁷⁸³ Berlin, 'Hegel' [1952], p.103-4.

⁷⁸⁴ Berlin, 'Final Retrospect' [1996], p.325.

⁷⁸⁵ Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' [1958], p.168.

valueless definition of power; an impotent conception that does not satisfactorily link power, agency, violence or, indeed, choice. Most relevantly, the choice between opposites does not allow room for an inquisitive approach to the possible defects of the western system of ideas.

This is interesting in another sense, for Berlin's understanding of human agency is impoverished in the sense that he holds the belief that 'the central question of politics' is one that genuinely confronts people in a democratic environment. He does not see that it is he, as a public intellectual, that helps create these imagined political 'choices', and cement the intellectual consensus. Crucially, Berlin also relies on a conception of the individual that is split between public and private modes; and it is this split that is deemed necessary to defend against 'coercion'. Neocleous writes that 'even where successfully used to limit state power, the mantra of privacy rests on a political imagination in which human beings are split between *public* and *private* selves.'⁷⁸⁶ Neocleous goes further, and asserts that the concept of privacy as a fundamental 'right' only

'confirms the processes of individualization and commodification in which we find ourselves...what 'privacy' manifestly fails to do as an organizing concept is to imagine any grounds for collective resistance - to either state or capital...they [capital and the state] want us to imagine being up against power - the social power of capital as well as the political power of the state - was (private) individuals rather than as a collective subject; in other words, they want us to be idiots'.⁷⁸⁷

Pessimistic, yet persuasive in its logic, this sentiment is partially reminiscent of Tocqueville's analysis of American society, when he describes the genesis of individualism:

'Since each class comes to be similar to the others and is mingled with them, its members become indifferent and like strangers to each other...as conditions become more equal,

⁷⁸⁶ Neocleous, *Imagining The State*, p.71.

⁷⁸⁷ Neocleous, *Imagining The State*, p.71.

there are a larger number of individuals who, while no longer being rich enough or powerful enough to exercise a large influence on the fate of their fellow men, have nonetheless acquired or conserved enough enlightenment and property to be self-sufficient. These men owe nothing to anyone; they expect almost nothing from anyone; they are accustomed to always consider themselves in isolation, and they readily imagine that their whole destiny is in their hands'.⁷⁸⁸

Although Tocqueville has the broader agenda of using this analysis to contrast the 'new American' man with the aristocratic ideal - that would cherish and perpetuate tradition - he is evidently saying something very insightful on the nature of democracy. Democracy is not flawless, and Tocqueville's idea of the 'tyranny of the majority' also warns of a dangerous aspect of modernity. It is these subtle aspects of a flawed modernity that Berlin overlooks. It is not a possibility for Berlin that capitalist liberal democracy, supported by pluralism, contains the possibility of further problems for society, the individual, and the wider world that comes into contact with the 'democracy' in question. Unlike many twentieth century theorists he does not deal in 'abstractions' such as capital or power, instead concentrating on vaguer essences such as tyranny, coercion or freedom as normative poles of decency and guides to action. Thus, Berlin employed a vocabulary of place that informed his writing on liberty, his interpretation of thinkers and, as I will now examine, his writing on violence.

Violence

Berlin's belief in the Israeli state as a principle was based on the firm conviction that Jews must be allowed to act freely, and this freedom of action could flourish only if the Jews had a geographic place called home. Although not explored in depth in Berlin's own work, the background of anti-

⁷⁸⁸ Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, p.206.

Semitic persecution in Europe is evidently central to his belief. All other concerns, even when shrouded in the rhetoric of Berlin's humanist liberalism, remain secondary. Palestinian dispossession is relegated into obscurity. Once Israel came into existence, Berlin did not view the concept of statehood as fundamentally problematic. In Neocleous's words, Berlin may be an example of how the

'map thus plays an important role in the ruling-class tendency to erase from the political imagination the violence and bloodshed out of which the state was born...Actions conducted under *raison d'État* appear to contain the interests not of an arbitrarily configured political power, but of 'natural' (biological, organic) needs. The great achievement of this naturalisation is to have depoliticized inter-state rivalry into a set of natural geographical 'facts of life'.⁷⁸⁹

The displacement of Palestinian Arabs was one of these 'facts of life' for Berlin and, once formalised, the state of Israel held legitimate geopolitical dominance. Berlin's abhorrence of violence, as detailed earlier in my thesis, does not extend to an abhorrence of certain legitimate or 'sanctioned' forms of violence. The implication is that Berlin's rejection of violence is influenced largely by geopolitical assumption and ideological concern, rather than purely emotional revulsion. Towards the end of his life, Berlin makes the point that

'Marxism...which is founded on historical determinism...enjoins painful and dangerous acts, coercion and killing, equally painful...but if history will inevitably bring about the perfect society, why should one sacrifice one's own life for a process which will, without one's help, reach it's proper, happy destination?'⁷⁹⁰

This rather mundane, often repeated, point on the paradox within a Marxist belief in inevitable revolution has at its core an abhorrence of violence. However, there does seem to be a

⁷⁸⁹ Neocleous, *Imagining The State*, p.124.

⁷⁹⁰ Berlin, 'Final Retrospect' [1996], in *Liberty*, p.325.

contradiction when one considers that, throughout his entire career, Berlin did not ponder, for instance, aggressive British or American foreign policy. This also suggests that Berlin is dealing in a cold war politics of fear, that emphasises violence 'inherent' within certain ideologies, whilst ignoring violence in others. It may at this point be useful to revisit the scathing critique offered by Terry Eagleton.

Examined in Chapter One, Eagleton's attack argues that Berlin is removed from a reality conceived by Eagleton in material terms. Thus, Eagleton sees a direct link between the material interests of the dominant social order and Berlin's place in the social hierarchy. This is what defines Berlin's ability to make 'morally instructive' judgements. Eagleton is quick to speak of the context of 'All Souls ignorance' and 'High Table wit' in conjunction with Berlin, and cleverly juxtaposes this caricature with real philosophical problems within Berlin's work. The juxtaposition creates the impression of Berlin as an intellectual firmly rooted in a social setting that allows and legitimises certain forms of political and military action. Within this setting Berlin is depicted as blind to the limits of idealistic liberalism. The stark conclusion of Eagleton's review comes in the form of a comparison between Berlin's books and a book by Hoggard, part of which involves a visit to Hoggard's mother's pauper's grave. Eagleton ends with stating 'Isaiah Berlin wrote finely against political tyranny; but no such critique will be fully convincing unless it acknowledges the truth that the alternative to social change involves, in one way or another, a pauper's grave.'⁷⁹¹

Whilst Eagleton is alleging Berlin's blindness to real social inequality, a similar charge could be made to the way in which Berlin is selective in his condemnation of varieties of violence.

⁷⁹¹ Eagleton, *Figures of Dissent*, p.108.

Zionism, Jewish Identity and Geopolitics

I now wish to pull together Berlin's Zionism, cold war politics, and the meaning of Berlin's various vocabularies explored thus far. Said made the compelling case that Zionism is an example of how an idea can break completely out of a world of abstraction, and take on concrete meaning in a comparatively short period of time. He writes,

'because Zionism seems to have culminated in the creation of the state of Israel it is also argued that the historical realisation of the idea confirms its unchanging essence and, no less important, the means used for its realisation. Very little is said about what Zionism entailed for non-Jews who happened to have encountered it.'⁷⁹²

This could be applied to Berlin's writing on Zionism and Israel, and also how the 'historical realisation of the idea' of democracy and pluralism became cemented into the geopolitical entities of postwar Britain and America in the writing of Berlin. Berlin can be viewed as one thinker who used 'ahistorical rhetoric', thus reinforcing the fact that:

'Zionism in the advanced capitalist West has acquired for itself an almost unchallenged hegemony in liberal 'establishment' discourse, as because in keeping with one of its central ideological characteristics Zionism has hidden, or caused to disappear, the literal historical ground for its growth'.⁷⁹³

Said states that intellectuals such as Niebuhr and Edmund Wilson spoke of Zionism 'with a sort of natural affirmation',⁷⁹⁴ and perhaps Berlin can be grouped with these members of the American intelligentsia. Although partisan as a thinker, Said is making connections between hegemonic cold war geopolitics in the west, and its alleged acceptance of a problematic Zionist ideology. It is difficult to ignore the possibility that the nature of western discourse allowed the 'naturalisation' of

⁷⁹² Edward Said, 'Zionism From the Standpoint of Its Victims', *Social Text*, 1 (1979), p.10.

⁷⁹³ Said, 'Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Victims', p.11.

⁷⁹⁴ Said, 'Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Victims', p.12.

Zionist ideology, and the simultaneous disappearance of the 'historical ground for its growth'. A similar point is argued in Chomsky's article in *Index on Censorship*. In a passage in the essay 'Chaim Weizmann', Berlin stresses a geopolitical view of Israel that displays this level of naturalisation. This 'naturalisation' has the effect of diminishing the importance of the Palestinian people in the historical record:

'Since he [Weizmann] thought in vast, synoptic terms, he saw the Jewish establishment in Palestine in these same scientific terms. As he reflected on the poverty of the land and its lack of natural resources, he placed his hope upon turning the one kind of capital that Jews did seem to possess - technical skills, ingenuity, energy, desperation - to the production of miracles in scientific technology that would contribute to the building of the new world, and especially the new, post-Chamberlain Britain'.⁷⁹⁵

This is a huge contradiction in the thought of Berlin. Throughout the essay Berlin discusses 'Palestine' or 'natural resources' either in general terms or attributing thoughts to Weizmann that Berlin, to judge from his passivity, agrees with. This exercise demonstrates the lack of interest Berlin has in applying the more abstract ideas that he promotes elsewhere. Nowhere are the universalist calls for freedom from coercion and harm related to anything other than the Zionist cause. The Palestinian people are pragmatically subsumed beneath economically defined territory. It is worth mentioning that Berlin describes Weizmann as a 'hero'⁷⁹⁶ earlier in the essay, so even the process of describing Weizmann's attitudes suggests strong agreement on the part of Berlin. At the very least, Berlin is extending the use of an unproblematic geopolitical discourse that subsumes 'coerced' minorities below broader political concerns. This is a glaring contradiction when one considers the theoretical and pragmatic importance Berlin places on his

⁷⁹⁵ Berlin, 'Chaim Weizmann' [1958], p.56.

⁷⁹⁶ Berlin, 'Chaim Weizmann' [1958], p.33.

own denunciations of Soviet coercion. In 'The Life and Opinions of Moses Hess', Berlin wrote,

'the socialist morality that he [Hess] so pure-heartedly preached, as well as the type of nationalism that he idealised, have, on the whole, proved more enduring and productive of human freedom and happiness than the more 'realistic' solutions of his more Machiavellian rivals, both on the right and the left.'⁷⁹⁷

Berlin wrote this after explaining how Hess advocated Jewish immigration into Palestinian territories. It seems to appear that when confronted with the very real problem of geographical dispossession, Berlin turns away and concentrates instead on the relatively abstract notions of 'human freedom and happiness'. This throws the presumed meaning of 'realistic' into obscurity. Clearly, these geopolitical assumptions impacted on Berlin's sense of identity heavily. Understood as a constant strand of Berlin's conception of normality, Berlin's Jewish identity seems to fall back on the decision not to emigrate to the newly formed Israel. Though ostensibly a general account of post-war Jewishness, the following quote can be viewed as Berlin explaining the way in which he felt thoroughly assimilated within his adopted country:

'despite all the social friction, discomfort, even humiliation and, in bad times, persecution that they have had to suffer - they were and are, by and large, too deeply involved in the life of the societies of which they form a part, and have in the process lost too great a part of their original, undiluted national personality to have retained the will to build a totally new life on new foundations. Even Hitler's onslaught did not seem to stir within the majority of the German Jews a feeling of specific Jewish nationalism, but mainly bewilderment, indignation, horror, individual heroism or despair.'⁷⁹⁸

This is an interesting passage first of all for its remoteness. Although Berlin lost family members in the Second World War, Berlin describes the situation with the detached professionalism of his Washington dispatches. This is not a criticism of Berlin, but an interesting contradiction when one

⁷⁹⁷ Berlin, 'The Life and Opinions of Moses Hess' [1959], p.251.

⁷⁹⁸ Berlin, 'Chaim Weizmann' [1958], p.37.

considers how far he was willing to venture when interpreting distant philosophical personalities. It seems to be a measure of Berlin's humanity that he looks upon the diverse responses of the German Jews, and the human consequences of the Holocaust. Berlin is restrained in his writing on the Holocaust, yet places emphasis on the national element, using the phrase 'national personality' and 'Jewish nationalism' as descriptors to explain individual experience. Indeed, on the relationship between nationalism and individual freedom Cocks writes

'[Berlin] goes on to make the curious case that nationalism enhances individualism, on the grounds that the same Jewish assimilation into European society that was an impossibility before the creation of the Jewish state becomes a real alternative afterward. This is not because European nation-states now embrace Jews as natives but because the opportunity for all Jews to become citizens of Israel make assimilation into societies a genuine individual choice, as though the absence of an alternative choice for the assimilating individual had been the sole stumbling block.'⁷⁹⁹

Cocks argues that Berlin has simplified the issue of Jewish identity to one of choice and opportunity. The foundation of 'choice and opportunity' are linked with the new state of Israel, as if the creation of the territorial space has somehow created correlative freedoms. Whether or not Berlin is wide of the mark, the use of 'choice' and 'opportunity' by Cocks reflects the cold war usage by Berlin that seemingly dominated his optimistic vision of the future. If the condition, in the eyes of Berlin, exists for true freedom of opportunity in the present, there is really no excuse. Berlin does not explore the social origins of anti-Semitism, and it is genuinely puzzling that Cocks's analysis seems to be correct. Linked to this, Berlin has been criticised for, paradoxically, mirroring anti-Jewish sentiments. To return to Berlin's essay on Weizmann, Cocks writes,

'[Berlin] does not demur at Weizmann's affirmation of the stolidity and self-satisfaction of a

⁷⁹⁹ Cocks, *Passion and Paradox*, p.82.

majority people with its own ethnonational state. Certainly he never protests that Weizmann's notion of the abnormal Jewish personality almost exactly mimics modern anti-Semitic ideas of Jews as nervous, rootless and degenerate, or that his ideal of the Jewish nationalist bears a close if not perfect resemblance to the ideal of the German nationalist articulated by the fascist and radical right.⁸⁰⁰

Cocks makes the point that Berlin's analysis of Jewish identity was insensitive in the sense that his

attitudes could be seen as reinforcing negative Jewish stereotypes. For instance, Cocks writes

'Disraeli exaggerates his Jewish identity, which Berlin sees as such a finer thing than ignoring it that he does not worry much about where such racial fantasies might have come from, not to mention to where they might and eventually did lead. Berlin likewise treats Marx's internationalism, against its backdrop of spiraling German chauvinism, as a sign of an unconscious evasion of the national question. Berlin never imagines that Marx's fervent belief in the universal solidarity if the working class might express his wished-for antidote to the ethnic, racial, and national prejudices of the entire world'.⁸⁰¹

This has very important connotations for my argument over Berlin's lack of self-analysing method.

Elsewhere Berlin was criticised when he used the example of the 'hunch-backed' Jew when attempting to explain the burden of Jewish tradition.⁸⁰² I have already made the case that Berlin

did not confront prejudice and assumption in a meaningful way, and Cocks is adding extra

contextual emphasis that undercuts Berlin's attitudes as abstract, and bound up in the western

system of thought in a potentially serious manner. Indeed, Cocks continues,

'Ultimately...Berlin's account of Marx is important less because of its disagreeable implications for Marx than because of its disagreeable implications for Jews in general. Berlin's 'Marx' suggests that no one can be a good Jew who does not take the Jewish question as the primary question, and that any other social passion Jews might feel can only be a deformed and redirected feeling for their own ethno-religious group'.⁸⁰³

⁸⁰⁰ Cocks, *Passion and Paradox*, p.81.

⁸⁰¹ Cocks, *Passion and Paradox*, p.81.

⁸⁰² See 'Discussion: Nationalism and Israel', in *The Legacy of Isaiah Berlin*, p.181.

⁸⁰³ Cocks, *Passion and Paradox*, p.81.

This complicated 'ethno-religious' foundation to Berlin's writing on Judaism is another vital part of his ontological outlook. This is a strong preoccupation informing his political outlook, as well as potentially illuminating Berlin's deeper assumptions of an ethno-religious, racial and geopolitical nature. Interestingly, Cocks analyses in depth the contrasts between Berlin and Hannah Arendt on the question of Jewish identity. Berlin, in his interview with Jahanbegloo, brands Arendt as difficult to engage with, and questions her merits as a 'serious' thinker claiming 'she moves from one sentence to another, without logical connection.'⁸⁰⁴ As if to confirm the intellectual distance between herself and Berlin, Arendt had spoken of an 'Oxford-inspired colonial romanticism...of poverty'⁸⁰⁵ in her work. Cocks presents Arendt as a thinker who has a more realistic vision of Israel, the future of Israel, and the problems that would undoubtedly come from the general treatment of the Palestinian people. Arendt offers complexity where Berlin paints a simplified picture of the creation of Israel. It is in this sense that Berlin can seem as utopian as the 'monist' thinkers he criticises elsewhere. Cocks makes the point that whilst Berlin states in conversation with Jahanbegloo

'his long standing conviction the Zionism would win the Jews 'normalisation' by carving out for them a place where they 'were not forced to be self-conscious', Arendt had believed that this process, on the contrary, would force Israeli Jews into an amplified form of self-consciousness, and eventual isolation in the international context.'⁸⁰⁶

The basis for Berlin's attitude is clearly his ontological stance. Berlin, fixated with Anglo-American ideals, cast his optimistic net of normality over the Jewish people, and viewed it as a real

⁸⁰⁴ Jahanbegloo, p.82.

⁸⁰⁵ Cocks, *Passion and Paradox*, p.84.

⁸⁰⁶ Cocks, *Passion and Paradox*, p.84.

possibility that 'normalisation' could occur. The only problem with this conservative logic is that blame will be directed outwards when 'normalisation' is discovered to be tarnished, or self-consciousness felt. The pressure of normalisation in this sense creates the seeds for further antagonism.

Conclusion

I have argued that Isaiah Berlin spoke with vocabularies that harmonised with the dominant geopolitical aims of the west in the cold war era. These vocabularies were powerful, and serve to confirm Berlin's proximity to political ideologies and illustrate further the way in which Berlin conceived the notion of identity and place. This chapter has been an attempt to highlight that an integral part of Berlin's ontology was characterised by normative patterns of assumption carry powerful geopolitical significance. If I am correct, then Berlin's geopolitical relevance should be seen as part of a legitimating process in the western political imagination. That Berlin's impact was split between the cold war and Zionism clearly complicates his role further. Neocleous has generated the idea that there are 'three icons of the political imaginary: the political collective, the common enemy and the sovereign agency'. For Neocleous, these 'icons' 'have been central to state power in the West'.⁸⁰⁷ These 'icons' can be detected in the texts of Berlin, and can be used to emphasise the importance of his involvement in the creation of a political landscape that underpinned and helped legitimise a particular conception of state power in the cold war era. Berlin acted as an organic intellectual for Anglo-American and Israeli interests, and the 'political collective' can be understood as created by significant levels of assumption over notions of 'the

⁸⁰⁷ Neocleous, *Imagining The State*, p.5.

state' and 'the individual'. I understand the 'organisation of space' that Berlin was involved in to contain, at root, a basis of assumption that maintains a normalised 'political collective'. Berlin's contribution is largely symbolic, yet also material in the sense that he adds the legitimising weight of moral authority - his instructive morality - to the political elite. In turn, this supported 'the sovereign agency'. I have discussed the way the 'common enemy' was activated in the texts of Berlin, and how the 'enemy' took forms ranging from the potentially destructive sense of 'otherness' in the colonial mold, to the extreme ideologically motivated stance against enemies of 'freedom'. The threat of 'coercion', and the erosion of the foundations of 'choice' in the western world meant that Berlin wrote from the basis of existing norms, meaning that Berlin wrote in a manner that emphasised certain assumptions about the western world that remained static, unquestioned and discursively powerful. Berlin's oeuvre is subsumed beneath this geopolitical context. His authorship, his interpretation of authors and his intellectual role was informed by his implicit and explicit assumptions in a way that is insufficiently explored in the literature.

Conclusion

Isaiah Berlin: Text and Ontology in the Twentieth Century

It seems that my thesis has arrived at a stage where I argue any reading of Isaiah Berlin must look beyond the basic meanings his writing suggests, because what he did write was representative of a complex set of abstract ideals he did not explicitly articulate. In a simplified sense, I *am* arguing this. Berlin set partisan boundaries to his thought, and followed a consistent agenda, both politically and ontologically, that he was at least partially conscious of. Berlin's attempts to define and explain complex philosophical ideas still make excellent reading. Yet, submerged beneath the sheen of undeniably impressive writing, clues to Berlin's intellectual role and responsibility exist that demand to be uncovered. This process has led to a judgment of Berlin that does not attempt to moralise, to uncover 'the sense of reality' surrounding Berlin nor 'enter into the mind of' the Oxford don. Instead, I have attempted to root him in a 'reality' that is balanced and honest through a transparent process of retrieval. In a sense, I take Berlin's own methodology of uncovering the assumptions within intellectual life a step further. I have offered an ontological portrait of Berlin.

A picture of Berlin's ontology can be constructed because Berlin was clearly a man of stronger allegiances and firmer convictions than his texts often suggest and, through reducing his thought to an examination of his use of language, consistencies begin to appear. The assumptions that underpin Berlin's thought (and many interpreters within the mini 'Berlin industry') are rarely presented as changeable, but set 'truths' in a quest for freedom. Indeed, in the words of

Eagleton, 'Berlin was on the whole a more intellectually distinguished figure for those who knew him than for those who did not. There is an ontological gulf between those of the coterie who could hear his voice while reading him, and those consigned to the outer darkness who could not.'⁸⁰⁸ It seems that I have been 'consigned to the outer darkness', for I have questioned the central assumptions that come from 'hearing' his voice acutely when reading him. At the level of the text I have concentrated on the level of representation and the discursive accent, and argued that Berlin's consistent use of certain vocabularies reflects adherence to a political landscape. I have attempted to define the operation of Berlin's texts within a carefully defined contextual landscape, and offered numerous examples of how an analytical approach that takes into account theories of the text can offer revealing new readings of old texts. In the main, this has involved uncovering Berlin's deep rooted assumptions on a variety of themes. This has allowed me to circle back and argue that Berlin had a definite ontological outlook that encompassed assumptions wider than the net of 'cold war values' can satisfactorily explain. Linking this to my reluctance to over-emphasise Berlin's Zionism, I have come to consider the political aspect of Berlin's ontology as an amalgamation of Zionist and cold war values in more or less equal measure.

Clearly, this thesis has been concerned with an intellectual biography that is complicated by Isaiah Berlin's proximity to powerful institutions. I have explored the intersection of Berlin's texts and his context, yet clearly the way in which he was affected by institutions and, conversely, the way in which institutions affected him is a central question that still needs to be answered. I have

⁸⁰⁸ Eagleton, *Figures of Dissent*, p.107.

concentrated on the way in which Berlin's use of language was representative of wider values, and thus attempted a redefinition of Berlin's thought and context that has sought to move away from the mass of personal recollection and biography. I wished to discover what lay at the root of my scepticism over Berlin's thought and why I felt a certain distance from his interpretations of thinkers. I realised that to understand my unease meant beginning an investigation into the context around the creation of Berlin's writing. I've discussed the perception of the impact of intellectual role, and questioned Berlin's practice of intellectual history. I have argued that Berlin's interpretation of authors was based on an ontology that was ostensibly altruistic yet, at root, was 'morally instructive' to an extent that can be viewed hegemonic. Without falling completely in line with the persuasive arguments of Dumm, Eagleton, Said and Chomsky who see Berlin as representative of the material interests of the west, clearly I am occasionally close to these critics of Berlin. I have implemented an eclectic set of postmodernist methodologies in a way I feel is coherent, and not prone to the methodological opaqueness from which Berlin suffered. I have wished to create a thesis of differing approaches, with a wish to experiment with methodology in a way that privileges new readings of Berlin before anything else. My wish was to be directed by conflicting problems, not a desire to resolve all theoretical problems under one specific banner. My greatest debt is to the work of Dumm, which introduced the idea of space in relation to Berlin's conception of normality. From here the suggestion that Berlin's use of normative language underpinned his conception of freedom gave me the inspiration to define the 'true' nature of his ontology.

Having flicked through Isaiah Berlin's notebooks, his address books, invitations to innumerable formal gatherings, the seemingly endless correspondence in the Modern Papers section of the Bodleian library and having wandered around the exterior of Isaiah Berlin's last home, Headington House in the Oxford suburbs, it is hard not to respect a life lived. Yet, walking around the high garden walls of Headington the occasional glimpse of rusting barbed wire brought to mind the tension of my interpretation of Berlin. The poignancy of the symbolism centred on the fact that Berlin was admired and loved, and is affectionately remembered. Naturally, I did not know Isaiah Berlin, and now I view him separated by brick and barbed wire and I have arrived at an interpretation of his project that can be viewed as condemnatory in the face of many sympathetic interpretations by those that did know him. I have illustrated how his thought, like Headington House, was insulated and separated from the reality of the twentieth century experience for many people. Around his old home are modest houses, pathways and public roads in part defined and shaped by the looming walls of Headington. As I continued walking, I could not shake the thought of Eagleton's phrase 'loftily sequestered'. 'Loftily sequestered'. I didn't care in what context Eagleton had used the phrase, it stuck and made sense. Berlin's writing was morally instructive, imbued with power and tragi-optimism, and did indeed shape the western 'self-image' in the cold war era. However, the ontology I have identified as lying behind his form of expression must not be ignored if we are to understand the complicated nature of the intellectual role of Isaiah Berlin which, at its core, was made of the barbed wire that protected western liberal values in the twentieth century.

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