

## ISAIAH BERLIN'S ENLIGHTENMENT AND COUNTER-ENLIGHTENMENT

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Isaiah Berlin often compared himself to a tailor who only cuts his cloth on commission, or to a taxi driver who goes nowhere without first being hailed, a journeyman philosopher, rather like Locke's notion of the philosophical underlabourer so frequently invoked in the tradition of Oxford analytical philosophy. One such commission, from Scribner's *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, led him to produce the essay on 'The Counter-Enlightenment' in 1973, commonly said to mark the invention of that term, at least in English. In fact, the expression was not at all invented by Berlin. It is perhaps odd that the French, whose eighteenth-century *philosophes* bequeathed the Enlightenment to the world by way of spreading that infection abroad, have never had a term for it at all and hence no term for the Counter-Enlightenment either. In the English language, 'the Enlightenment' seems to have made its first appearance in the 1870s in English commentaries on Hegel, a few decades before the expression 'Scottish Enlightenment' came to be invented, and fully 100 years before anyone had heard of the 'Enlightenment Project' invented by Alasdair MacIntyre in *After Virtue*, more than three decades after the launch of the Manhattan Project. It was, of course, the Germans, whose detractors still insist it never had one, who invented the term 'the Enlightenment' (*Die Aufklärung*) in the 1780s, and it is in that same decade, and indeed in the same journal – that is, the *Berlinische Monatsschrift*, which embraces Wieland's, Reinhold's, Mendelssohn's, and, most famously, Kant's treatment of the subject, that the terms *Gegenerklärung* and *Gegen-Aufklärung* – Counter-Enlightenment – were introduced as well.

Berlin's coinage of 1973 is not even the first minting of the expression in English, since the term 'Counter-Enlightenment' appears fifteen years earlier in William Barrett's *Irrational Man*, where he states, not without some justice, that 'Existentialism is the counter-Enlightenment come at last to philosophical expression'. For all I know, the term has an even longer pedigree in English. Now that what passes for civilisation is all on disk, it might be helpful if some computer hack were to trace all its published uses prior to 1973. Berlin's essay on the subject in the *Scribner Dictionary of the History of Ideas* rehearses the doctrines of a familiar cast of characters who had engaged his attention before: Hamann, to whom he had devoted a chapter of his collection, *The Age of Enlightenment*, in 1956; Vico, on whom he had already published an essay in 1960 in a collection on eighteenth-century Italy;<sup>1</sup> Herder, on whom he had contributed an essay for a Johns Hopkins Press collection on the eighteenth century, subsequently published as an article in *Encounter* in 1965; De Maistre, the subject of an essay Berlin largely completed by 1960 but first published in Henry Hardy's edition of *The Crooked Timber of Humanity* thirty years later. It would not be until 1977 that he first turned his attention to Jacobi.

Although the term 'Counter-Enlightenment' is now associated with Berlin more than with any other scholar or thinker, we ought to bear in mind that before the mid-1970s, by which time he had long retired from the Chichele Chair of Social and Political Theory in Oxford and, more recently, from his subsequent Presidency of Wolfson College, that expression, and the ideas which it encapsulated, had virtually no bearing at all upon his academic reputation. His initial writings on Hamann, Vico, and Herder, if they were read at all, were received with much the same enthusiasm as had greeted David Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* two hundred and forty years earlier. At least until he was in his seventies Berlin's fame rested chiefly on four other works: his not altogether flattering intellectual biography of Marx; his contributions to the philosophy of history in his essay on 'Historical Inevitability' and his treatment of Tolstoy in *The Hedgehog and the Fox*; and, in the field of political theory, his 'Two Concepts of Liberty', much the most widely discussed of all the inaugural lectures given by professors of politics in the English-speaking world in the twentieth century. It was by virtue of his defence of the idea of 'negative' liberty in particular that Berlin, already in his fifties, came to be regarded as the supreme advocate among contemporary political philosophers of a notion of modern liberty which Benjamin Constant contrasted with the ideal of ancient liberty in his celebrated treatment of the subject in 1819 and which by way of John Stuart Mill was to form the kernel of modern liberalism itself. Berlin came in the late twentieth century to be regarded as liberalism's foremost advocate, or to its detractors as its chief apologist, and by way, for instance, of Perry

<sup>1</sup> 'The Philosophical Ideas of Giambattista Vico', in *Art and Ideas in Eighteenth-Century Italy* (Rome, 1960).

Anderson's critiques of British national culture in the *New Left Review* or perhaps, most recently, Quentin Skinner's own inaugural lecture in Cambridge, it was the alleged vacuousness of his liberalism that was subjected to closest scrutiny.

One might have imagined that in his retirement Berlin's political philosophy would have ripened sufficiently to begin its natural course of decay, but by virtue of his treatment of the Counter-Enlightenment his standing has over the past twenty-five years come to be reinvigorated, freshly enhanced in new circles, now including communitarians who had earlier found his liberalism unpalatable. Thanks in large measure to the editorial labours of Henry Hardy, works which Berlin drafted or broadcast more than thirty years ago have made him appear less the defender of modern liberalism than the sceptical critic of the universalist pretensions of modernity, the sage of disparate cultures who recognised the inescapable conflict and incommensurability of their values, thereby apparently making common cause with the anti-foundationalist detractors of the metanarratives of modernity, from his unlikely perch at the Albany or Athenæum becoming, in the phrase of Ernest Gellner, 'a Savile Row postmodernist'.

Perhaps even more than his liberalism before, it is Berlin's pluralism which now forms the mainspring of his reputation; and while that idea figures prominently in his essay on Montesquieu, first published in the *Proceedings of the British Academy* in 1955, and in three eloquent paragraphs addressed to it which form the conclusion of his 'Two Concepts of Liberty', it is largely by way of his elaboration and embellishment of his notion of the Counter-Enlightenment that his pluralism has come to seem the mainspring of his political philosophy as a whole.<sup>2</sup> I say 'elaboration and embellishment' because his original contribution on the subject was as much ignored as had been his earlier treatments of Hamann, Herder, and De Maistre from which it was distilled. In 1976 Berlin reassembled and expanded two of those earlier essays as a book, the last that he would edit himself, entitled *Vico and Herder*, which for the first time occasioned the scholarly attention that had previously been devoted only to his writings in other disciplines. Here we find these pre-eminent spokesmen of the Counter-Enlightenment portrayed not only as critics of some of the most central tenets of Enlightenment philosophy but also, in anticipating the divide between the *Naturwissenschaften* and *Geisteswissenschaften* that would come to inform the historiography and social sciences of the next two centuries, the pre-French Revolution post-modernists of their day.

Here we find historicised conceptions of human nature opposed to the timeless principles of natural law. Here, through Vico's notions of *verum ipsum factum* and Herder's putative conception of *Einfühlung* or empathy, we can detect a species of understanding, of *Verstehen*, only accessible to persons able to penetrate a scheme of things subjectively, with an insider's grasp of how it comes to be what it is. Here we find our contemporary notions of culture, of the spiritual dimensions of human activity represented in the arts, in legal systems, languages, and myths. Through Herder, in particular, we confront ideas of communal identity, of language and the arts as forming the essence of man's species-being, of a celebration of multiplicity and difference, which Berlin termed populism, expressionism, and pluralism, respectively. In casting as profoundly radical and original two provincial and, in many respects, reactionary figures of the eighteenth century – each largely unappreciated by his contemporaries in the international republic of letters – Berlin managed to pluck from the peripheries of the Age of Enlightenment the seeds that would subsequently come to transform it, without ever having to channel a course through those ideological swamps that other commentators interested in the same subject associated above all with the influence of Rousseau.

In *The Magus of the North* – in part inspired by the chapter on Hamann in *The Age of Enlightenment* but which Hardy in fact assembled from papers dating from the mid-1960s for the Woodbridge Lectures at Columbia – Berlin added that Hamann, in his defence of the particular, the intuitive, the concrete, and the personal, denounced the opposite attributes of the Enlightenment and all its works and thereby proved the founder of modern anti-rationalism and romanticism and the forerunner of Nietzsche and the existentialists. These themes were also to inform the Mellon Lectures Berlin delivered in Washington in 1965, finally published as *The Roots of Romanticism* in 1999, with a recording of the last lecture in its original form appended as a compact disk. *The Roots of Romanticism*, incidentally, only now available in print but never completed by Berlin, also forms the unfinished *magnum opus* of Moses Herzog in Saul Bellow's novel, published one year before Berlin presented his lectures, which refers to many of the same figures, including Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, Tolstoy, and De Maistre, who were to

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<sup>2</sup> With respect to the philosophical roots of Berlin's pluralism, consider, perhaps, W. D. Ross's distinctions between *The Right and the Good* (Oxford, 1930), as well as the account of the Pluralist movement in Kingsley Martin's biography of *Harold Laski* (London, 1953).

figure in Berlin's own cast of characters, as well as the Hotel Pierre, in New York, where Berlin often resided when in America. One way of reading *The Roots of Romanticism* is by intercalating Berlin's inchoate lectures at appropriate points of Bellow's novel, so that by way of the compact disk one book may be said to complement the other, with Herzog thus the first fictional figure in world literature to have undergone transubstantiation, through Berlin passing over to the other side and thereby acquiring his own voice.

Several of the reviews of his *Vico and Herder* Berlin found profoundly dispiriting. While friends and admirers, like Patrick Gardiner and William Dray, commended his scholarship, other philosophers and historians of ideas found major faults in his arguments and took him to task. Arthur Scoutens and Hans Aarsleff in particular incurred his wrath. Scoutens, writing in *Comparative Literature Studies*, and Aarsleff, in the *London Review of Books*, challenged the main thrust of his argument about the Counter-Enlightenment, Scoutens partly on account of Berlin's exaggerating the extent to which Herder had parted company from the *Encyclopédistes*, Aarsleff mainly with respect to Berlin's apparent ignorance of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century anthropological linguistics, in the light of which Vico and Herder, both separately and together, ought to have been portrayed as disciples of Enlightenment philosophy rather than as critics. In acid replies to each author, Berlin valiantly defended his scholarship, insisting, especially against Aarsleff, on the profound originality of Vico and the depth of the influence of Hamann upon Herder.

Two other reviewers, William Walsh, writing in *Mind*, and Arnaldo Momigliano in the *New York Review of Books*, troubled him even more. Can it really be the case, as Berlin had claimed on behalf of Herder, that to explain the meaning of an activity in its local context was also to endorse it?, asked Walsh. How can a genetic explanation form a justification? We are not required to agree that whatever is, is right. Momigliano, from the perspective of a historian of the classical tradition, pursued the same point in a different way. The philosophies of Vico and Herder, the second born in the year the first had died, must not be conflated, he argued, since Vico remained deeply immersed in the values of Christian and classical culture, whereas Herder's fascination with Orientalism inclined him instead towards modern racism. In any event, Berlin appeared to overlook the implications of his reading of these two main protagonists of the Counter-Enlightenment. The crucial question to be asked in each case, Momigliano insisted, was that if we accept Berlin's account of their attachment to pluralism, how then are we to escape the conclusion that they were also relativists? Before we celebrate their vitality, let us pause to take stock of where such pluralism would lead.

Momigliano was personally well-acquainted with Vico's classical sources and references, but in contrasting the ancient Vico with the modern Herder, and in imputing a relativist stance not only to Vico and Herder but, by implication, also to Berlin himself, he appears to have fallen under the influence of Leo Strauss, whose colleague he had become at the University of Chicago since 1959, after having earlier been a close companion of Berlin at All Souls College, Oxford. Strauss and Momigliano were each expatriate Jews, refugees from fascist powers, who were convinced that Central and Eastern Europe's descent into fascism and Western Europe's appeasement of it had been prefigured by modern social science's abandonment of the universalist and absolutist principles of classical or Christian civilisation. The Counter-Enlightenment doctrine of relativism that Berlin appeared to applaud was denounced by them as lending warrant to the most catastrophic crisis of modernity, thereby making it conceptually and then historically and practically possible. For Strauss, in particular, the relativism entailed by value-free modern social science had opened the prospect of the Holocaust and the extermination of the Jews. Alexander Pope's *Essay on Man* had correctly encapsulated our dilemma. In the world of modernity, whatever is, is indeed right.

Berlin did not reply in print to the reviews of Walsh and Momigliano as he had done with respect to those of Scoutens and Aarsleff, but in 1979 he accepted an invitation of the International Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies to speak at its Congress of the Enlightenment at Pisa, just a few miles from his summer home in Liguria, and there, at a session over which Momigliano himself presided and which I attended – virtually his last public appearance in any academic setting – he supplied his answer to the imputation that his heroes of the Counter-Enlightenment had been heralds of relativism and all its dreadfully attendant consequences. His talk was entitled 'Alleged Relativism in Eighteenth-Century European Thought', and it was published, in 1980, in the *British Journal of Eighteenth-Century Studies* and reprinted a decade later in Hardy's edition of *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*.

‘A distinguished and learned critic has wondered if I fully appreciate the implications of the historical relativism of Vico and Herder which, unacknowledged by them, constitutes a problem [that] has persisted to this day’, Berlin remarked. ‘If we grant the assumption that Vico and Herder were relativists . . . the point made by my critic [is] valid. But I now believe this to be a mistaken interpretation of Vico and Herder, although (and here he may be referring to some remarks about relativism which he had made in his original work on these writers) I have in my time contributed to it myself.’ ‘True relativism’, he continued, in so far as it entails fundamental doubt about the possibility of objective knowledge, is derived from other and later sources – from the metaphysics of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, from social anthropology, from Marx and Freud. It is a nineteenth-century doctrine, ‘not consistently put forward by any influential thinker of the eighteenth century’, he claimed. Vico and Herder, he now contended, were pluralists rather than relativists; they believed not in the absence of objective ends but in their variety, their multiplicity, and sometimes conflict. Relativism, he maintained here, was not the only alternative to value monism. The Counter-Enlightenment had confronted Enlightenment monism not by way of the potentially sinister trappings of a nineteenth-century ideology but by invoking the liberating principles of pluralism. It was in this manner that Berlin restated the central theme of his concluding section on ‘The One and the Many’ in his *Two Concepts of Liberty*, except that whereas previously it had been various forms of *monism* which had given rise to the ‘slaughter of individuals on the altars of great historical ideals’, as he had put it, conceptual responsibility for that dreadful outcome had now been passed even more to *relativism*.

If the Counter-Enlightenment was fundamentally pluralist, the Enlightenment must of course have been its opposite, uniformitarian, undifferentiated, homogenous, and monolithic. In mapping the richly pluralist dimensions of the Counter-Enlightenment, Berlin all too frequently, for my liking, portrayed the Enlightenment as if, as he put it in *The Roots of Romanticism*, it could be boiled down to three fundamental principles, which also, incidentally, constitute the Ionian fallacy, as he elsewhere describes it, and indeed virtually the whole of our Western intellectual tradition so enthusiastically bludgeoned into well-merited obsolescence on Berlin’s behalf by John Gray. These principles are, first, that all genuine questions can be answered; second, that all the answers are knowable; and third, that all those knowable answers must also be compatible. That, in short, is what might be termed Berlin’s version of the Enlightenment Project, and for his communitarian, postmodernist, or pluralist admirers it has proved quite sufficiently devastating to license their hammering of the last nail into the Enlightenment’s coffin.

It is of course true that a richer and more sympathetic portrait of the age of Enlightenment in general can be culled from Berlin’s writings, particularly in the last few paragraphs of his introduction to Enlightenment thinkers where he praises their intellectual honesty and the courage of their campaigns against injustice and ignorance, and perhaps above all in his *Conversations* with Ramin Jahanbegloo, published in 1992, where he speaks of himself as a liberal rationalist who, despite their dogmatism, subscribes fundamentally to the liberationalist values of Voltaire, Helvétius, d’Holbach, Condorcet, and the Enlightenment in general. ‘They were against cruelty’, he remarks there, ‘they were against oppression, they fought the good fight against superstition and ignorance . . . So I am on their side.’ But ‘I am interested in the views of the opposition’, he continues, ‘not because I greatly admire them but because clever and gifted enemies often pinpointed fallacies of the Enlightenment and exposed some of its political implications as inadequate and, at times, disastrous’. It is just this last proposition, we might note, that forms the central thesis of Jacob Talmon’s *Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* of 1952, in fact inspired by (an unmentioned) Harold Laski, in which Talmon instead acknowledges a debt to Berlin’s ‘stimulating suggestions’, as he puts it.

For those of us who work in diverse fields of eighteenth-century studies and also greatly admire his achievement, Berlin’s invention of a monolithic Enlightenment with just three legs is a fraction embarrassing, particularly since it was only assembled so that it might be deconstructed in the manner of Procrustes and thereby point the way to a richer understanding of the diverse threads that constitute its opposite. It makes little sense, I believe, for a pluralist to set aside his own principles when addressing Enlightenment thinkers, who to my mind not only by and large but for the most part characteristically espoused the values with which Berlin confronts them no less tenaciously than he did. In depicting the Enlightenment as if its centrally guiding thread was an absolutist commitment to the pursuit of truth by way of science, Berlin appears to join both Carl Becker, whose *Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* he praises in his *Roots of Romanticism*, as well as Richard Rorty, whose portrayal of an Enlightenment doctrine of mind which mirrors nature is drawn upon a similarly Procrustean bed.

According to Becker in particular, the *philosophes* of the eighteenth century had just turned inside out the Christian absolutism which they decried, substituting the pursuit of earthly happiness in place of the unworldly salvation of our souls, thereby demolishing the city of god only to rebuild it on the terrestrial plain. The Enlightenment can thus be portrayed as having loved the thing it killed and of taking on its mantle in the very act of destroying it, by substituting a rationalist form of arcane dogmatism for another, based on faith. Berlin was to my mind far too wise and learned to be seduced by such nonsense.

Even among those *philosophes* of whom it might be said that this was their pre-eminent objective, the pursuit of scientific truth in the Enlightenment did not take the form of belief in the one and only true religion by another name. Of all major eighteenth-century thinkers, Montesquieu was perhaps the most tenacious supporter of the proposition that the laws of nature and the operations of the human mind must be understood in the same way. No one in the Enlightenment subscribed more plainly to physicalist explanations of social behaviour and culture, and I suppose that Rorty's account of mind as Nature's mirror in fact describes the central thrust of Montesquieu's philosophy perfectly. And yet from that monolithic perspective on both the natural and human sciences, there springs no universalism or cosmopolitanism of any kind. Above all his contemporaries, Montesquieu was *especially* sensitive to the local variety, specificity, and uniqueness of social institutions, customs, and mores. His *Esprit des lois* might well have been subtitled 'A Study of Difference'. His *Lettres persanes* ought to be required reading in any course of French or comparative literature devoted to the subject of 'otherness', as indeed should be Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and Voltaire's *Candide*.

A postmodernist definition of the Enlightenment in terms of its deconstruction of Christian dogmas by way of critical theory would, I believe, more aptly describe that century-long intellectual movement inspired by the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 and the Glorious Revolution in England four years later than do the uniformitarian strictures of Becker and Rorty. From Berlin's own pluralist perspective, the advent of that fresh approach may be said to have marked the passage from Bossuet's *Histoire universelle* to Fontenelle's *Pluralité des mondes*. No one who read the voyages assembled by the abbé Prévost in his collection which so much enlarged the one produced by Samuel Purchas in the previous century could fail to notice how disparate were the cultures of mankind throughout the world, and how diverse their social institutions. No one who read about the Egyptian or Hebrew chants in Burney's *General History of Music* or about Persian or Chinese tunes in Rousseau's *Dictionnaire de musique* could any longer be persuaded that the Western scale and its harmonies were universally appreciated.

Accounts relating real or imaginary journeys to exotic worlds, or which sang the praises of a primitive golden age, circulated as widely, and often to the same readers, as did Enlightenment treatises on the natural sciences and on the progress of civilisation. Europe's spiritual and political hegemony over the rest of the world was not appreciated at all but in fact fiercely opposed in a great many anti-colonialist classic works of eighteenth-century philosophy and anthropology, from Rousseau's *Discours sur l'inégalité*, to Diderot's *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville*, to the abbé Raynal's *Histoire des deux Indes*. Even while expressing optimism with respect to the increasingly secular development of the human race as it rose from barbarism to civilisation, the proponents of the Enlightenment Project characteristically displayed a profound pessimism about the imperialist nature of Western Christendom. Instead of denouncing the Enlightenment's rationalist and universalist pretensions, I believe that its detractors would do better to investigate the sceptical empiricism which informed the doctrines of its leading advocates, from Bayle, to La Mettrie and d'Holbach, who framed fundamentally liberal objections to the bigotry of sacred knowledge as uncovered by revelation and the universalism of blind faith.

These commonplace truths, which bear reiteration only because they are so infrequently remembered by most modern, postmodern, and communitarian critics of Enlightenment philosophy, were well known to Berlin. Although it had sometimes been gained second-hand and was seldom reliably stored for invocation in scholarly footnotes, Berlin's erudition was vast and his command of the literature in eighteenth-century fields in which I was working myself was as broad as that of any person I ever met while completing my doctorate at Oxford; and it was generally deeper on account of the fact that his own philosophical interests more closely approximated the ideas in the texts we discussed than those of my tutors with just literary backgrounds, whose grasp of the intellectual context of an eighteenth-century work sometimes obscured their penetration of its meaning.

When I conveyed to Berlin my thoughts about the *Querelle des Bouffons* of the mid-1750s, he not only pointed me towards commentators who had addressed this musical dispute's seventeenth-century precursors but also

corrected some doubtful eighteenth-century Italian prose I had transcribed that was in need of such attention. Berlin's own essay on Montesquieu in *Against the Current* sheds genuinely fresh light upon that central thinker, perhaps the most central thinker, not of the Counter-Enlightenment but of the Enlightenment itself. Although the tone of Aarsleff's objections to Berlin's account of Herder strikes me as distasteful, I feel more than a little inclined to agree with his contention that the intellectual gulf between Herder and Hamann is vast, and I am pleased to find from recent scholarship on Herder of which Berlin could not have been aware that many crucial passages of Herder's *Ideen*, his masterpiece, were drawn directly from Adam Ferguson and, more distantly, Montesquieu. As Berlin himself reports at length, moreover, Hamann read Hume meticulously and was greatly persuaded by his account of the nature of belief and reason. All of which, to my mind, suggests that much of what has come to pass for the Counter-Enlightenment properly figures within the Enlightenment and not outside it.

With the exception of the caricatures of that intellectual movement which he drew for the purpose of highlighting what he supposed was its opposite, Berlin's sympathies, style and almost the whole corpus of his writings strike me as cast in an Enlightenment mould. This really is the principal thesis I wish to convey here – that Berlin was a *philosophe* of enlightened disposition *malgré lui*, whose life and work together display the spirit of Enlightenment at virtually every juncture apart from where he contrived to address that subject. However postmodern he might have come to appear by virtue of the recent diffusion of lectures he conceived thirty or forty years before his death, it is hard to imagine this admirer of the analytical precision of Austin's prose impressed by the lectures on ontology which rendered Heidegger in Freiburg 'the secret king of philosophy' of an utterly different kind, although I suppose that he would have regarded Derrida's alleged charlatanism an insufficient reason to deny him an honorary degree, at any rate from Cambridge. Gray describes the main thrust of his philosophy as *agonistic* in its liberalism, but the combative nature of that imagery is an altogether milder affair than the traumatic notion of *Geworfenheit* – of being thrown – that lies at the heart of the human predicament described by Heidegger and out of which have sprung postmodernist notions of a decidedly coarser species than Berlin's bespoke variety from Savile Row.

As for 'difference' and 'otherness', I suspect that no philosopher of the twentieth century was more peripatetic but at the same time comfortably at home in every culture of the three continents he visited regularly in which he was welcomed. Throughout the night of his spiritual apotheosis in the company of Anna Akhmatova, depicted so brilliantly in Michael Ignatieff's biography, it was she who spoke incessantly of the inner world and dark intensity of Dostoyevsky and other writers who had laboured on Russian soil, Berlin who instead invoked the more luminous subtleties of Turgenev among exiled artists who had worked abroad. No nineteenth-century figure was to command his admiration more than Herzen, that ebullient Westerniser among dour Slavophiles, that cosmopolitan Russian abroad, that generous spirit of enlightenment from a dark-eyed nation in a still benighted age, whom he describes as a kind of Russian Voltaire of his day.<sup>3</sup> When Berlin addressed the greatest literary masterpiece of his native language, Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, it was not the rich tapestry of the social life of the Russian peasantry and aristocracy portrayed there which engaged his attention most, but rather Tolstoy's theory of history, his respect for Rousseau and other thinkers of the French Enlightenment, his contempt for 'unintelligible mysteries' drawn from 'mists of antiquity', his hostility to the cant of the freemasons.<sup>4</sup> The Tolstoy he most admired, cast in his own image, he describes as a sceptical realist who stood in lifelong opposition to dogmatic authoritarianism.<sup>5</sup>

In several respects, and above all in his comprehensive mastery of the Enlightenment *oraison funèbre* or funeral oration which comprises so many chapters of his *Personal Impressions*, Berlin was the spiritual descendant of both Fontenelle and Condorcet, permanent secretaries, in the mid-eighteenth century, of the *Académie française* and *Académie des sciences*, respectively. When, for instance, he congratulated Lewis Namier on his production of an excellent book, 'all the better for being short', he added, his wit could glisten with the sparkle of Voltaire. But to my mind, in his ideals, his enthusiasms, his spontaneity, his vitality, his mimicry of others, his genial self-abasement fuelled by genuine self-doubt, he was more like Diderot than anyone I ever knew. By way of his own *Einfühlung* with diverse past and present thinkers Berlin managed to make their ideas vivid and compelling, without having to adopt them as his own. Such transitivity or clairvoyance was much sought and greatly prized by the *philosophes* of

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<sup>3</sup> See Isaiah Berlin, *Russian Thinkers* (London, 1978), p. 189.

<sup>4</sup> See Berlin, *The Hedgehog and the Fox* (London, 1953), p. 46.

<sup>5</sup> *The Hedgehog and the Fox*, p. 79.

the Enlightenment I know best. No academic figure of our time was more suited or attracted to the delights of the linguistic turns of the *salon* of the eighteenth century.

Even with respect to his nationalism and Zionism, Berlin strikes me as a child of the Enlightenment. At least in the English-speaking world, communitarians today, including many who found themselves more drawn to Berlin's pluralism than his liberalism, have been mainly concerned with the cultures of ethnic minorities in parts of the world conquered and colonised by Europeans, or with the loss of spiritual bonds of fraternity in societies predominantly held together by market mechanisms alone. Berlin, by contrast, focused on the identity of a community which colonised but never gained security in Europe, and although a practising Jew with a command of Hebrew sufficient to enable him to lecture in that language, he never displayed the slightest interest in Jewish theology and scarcely any in Jewish culture and the arts. Even the greatest of Jewish artists – Heine and Mendelssohn, for instance – he judged manifestly inferior to Goethe, on the one hand, and Beethoven, on the other, if only because Heine and Mendelssohn had all too conspicuously attempted to scale the summits of German culture alone, whereas Goethe and Beethoven, he contended, had produced poetry and music of universally sublime character which had transcended the national identities of their composers. Though he travelled frequently to Israel, the Wailing Wall of Temple Mount in Jerusalem – that discotheque for the fanatically religious – meant virtually nothing to him. As passionate as was his commitment to Zionism, he felt utter contempt for Menachem Begin and the Irgun, which he regarded as a band of terrorists, and although he seldom spoke in public on such matters, he was convinced that the existence of a Jewish state – that last child of a European *Risorgimento*, as he sometimes put it – did not exclude but on the contrary necessitated the establishment of a Palestinian state as well. 'Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in', Robert Frost had once said, and Berlin concurred. What was necessary above all else was that in a world in which Jews cannot but remain perpetual strangers, destined never to be truly naturalised, there must somewhere be a refuge or homeland for them too, not in which they might all be obliged to live, but to which one day they might have to flee.

These are questions which have bedevilled Jews throughout the history of their diaspora. But from the late seventeenth to the late eighteenth century, in the great schisms of Catholic and Calvinist Europe which gave rise to a different diaspora that inspired the pleas of toleration of Spinoza, Bayle, Locke, and others – which to my mind lie at the heart of the only intellectual movement of the period that might correctly be termed the 'Enlightenment Project' – they were pursued in fresh ways, and for the Jews a new idiom, in the language of civil and human rights. Here, with respect to an eighteenth-century debate about Jewish identity, assimilation, and incorporation in the state, pursued with renewed vigour after the French Revolutionary enfranchisement of the Jews, not least by Marx, lies the proper context for an understanding of Berlin's Zionism.

I must not fail, however, to introduce the fly in this ointment. If the Enlightenment constitutes the background of Berlin's Zionism, its fundamental tenets, contrary to the central thesis I have just put forward, do not spring at all from Enlightenment ideals of toleration. Those ideals – encapsulated most famously by Voltaire in his *Lettres philosophiques* where he describes a London Stock Exchange comprised of men who before they worship their different gods in their separate churches negotiate in a common currency, of which the only infidels are traders who go bankrupt<sup>6</sup> – do not and cannot embrace Berlin's Zionism. For Voltaire and most other *philosophes* of the Enlightenment, the Jews only required the protection of the rule of law by civil powers uninterested in matters of faith. For Berlin, the Jews must be empowered to return to a land in which they alone constitute the predominant community. When writing about such matters with respect to the eighteenth century Berlin was impressed not by the *Plea for the Toleration of the Jews* compiled by Moses Mendelssohn, grandfather of the composer, translator of Rousseau and, by virtue of his learning and humanity, one of the foremost luminaries of the German Enlightenment. He was struck instead by the provocative and in some respects even anti-Semitic diatribe produced by Hamann, who regarded the mere toleration of differences as a denial of their importance – a genuinely postmodernist claim. When pursuing the same themes in the mid nineteenth century in his essay on the 'Life and Opinions of Moses Hess', he hailed as a masterpiece Hess's treatment of *Rome und Jerusalem*, in which Hess denounced as inconsistent a belief both in enlightenment and in the Jewish mission in exile, on account of its endorsing the ultimate dissolution and the

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<sup>6</sup> See Letter VI, 'On the Presbyterians'. This text, incidentally, on account of its description of Presbyterians who only preach through their nose when they return to Scotland where they prevail, forms the Enlightenment's reply to Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* (London, 1981).

continued existence of Judaism at the same time.<sup>7</sup> Here, wrote Berlin, was a work which preached Zionism more than thirty years before the term had been invented,<sup>8</sup> all the more powerfully persuasive today than it had proved in the course of Hess's own lifetime, in view of its warning to Germany's assimilated Jews that they would one day suffer a cataclysm of greater magnitude than any they could conceive.<sup>9</sup>

In 1932, in the same year that Becker's *Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* was published, Ernst Cassirer, one of the first Jewish rectors of a German university, produced as well his *Die Philosophie der Aufklärung*, which in large measure articulates his own defence of a noble tradition of German Enlightenment, including Leibniz, Wolff, and Baumgarten, in the face of contemporary barbarism. But while Cassirer was drafting his work, the Weimar Republic he served – in effect modern Germany's own Enlightenment Project – was itself in its death throes. A few months after the publication of *Die Philosophie der Aufklärung*, the institutions which had protected the civil rights of assimilated Jews vanished with the Republic's dissolution, and as a consequence Bertolt Brecht, Albert Einstein, Walter Gropius, Wassily Kandinsky, Thomas Mann, Paul Tillich, Bruno Walter, and many other luminaries of twentieth-century science and culture, as well as Cassirer, were forced into exile. In an essay on 'Jewish Slavery and Emancipation' which first appeared in *The Jewish Chronicle* in 1951 and has only just been published again, Berlin remarked that while the Jews had taken every conceivable step to adapt and adjust themselves in the societies in which they had sought to be naturalised, their efforts had all proved unavailing.<sup>10</sup> The extermination of European Jewry had established the hopelessness of true assimilation, he adds in his *Conversations with Jahanbegloo*. That perception above all else sustained his Zionism. It marks the most decisive break of his attachment to the principles of the Enlightenment I know, to my mind much more striking than his depiction of its three-legged uniformitarian faith in his portrayal of the Counter-Enlightenment.

I should like finally to comment briefly on just one matter which I believe to be intimately connected with this subject, although it was not addressed directly by Perry Anderson when he first raised it in his own fashion in an essay on 'Components of the National Culture', which appeared in the *New Left Review* in the summer of 1968. Those of my readers who can should cast their minds back to that period of our history which, by way of the Prague Spring and the student uprising in France in May, seemed for many left-wing commentators at the time a fresh and then subsequently a false dawn. Almost as if to recapitulate some lines about a spectre haunting Europe, Anderson begins his text as follows: 'A coherent and militant student movement has not yet emerged in England . . . But it may now be only a matter of time before it does.' Why was England so bereft of a radical political culture, he wondered, such as had arisen in Germany, Italy, and France? The principal reason, he explained, was the absence of a theoretical centre in England, which had never produced a classical sociology or national tradition of Marxism. And one of the main factors which explain England's 'listless mediocrity' and 'wizened provincialism' in such matters, as he put it, was that since 1900 it had been subjected to a wave of immigrants from Eastern and Central Europe whose 'elective affinity' for a quiescent society and unsystematic and untheoretical social sciences had impeded the development of a political culture such as could be found, in 1968, in Germany, Italy, and France. Whereas dissident radicals, or 'Reds', who fled the instability of Central Europe settled elsewhere – the Frankfurt Marxists in America, for instance, Lukács in Russia, and Brecht and Mann in Scandinavia – England had by a process of natural selection proved attractive only to the 'Whites', which had thus ensured that the mantle of intellectual authority progressively passed from Victorian families bearing the name Macaulay, Trevelyan, Arnold, Huxley, Stephens, Wedgwood, and Hodgkin, to Germans like Eysenck; to Austrians such as Wittgenstein, Popper, Gombrich, and Klein; to Poles like Malinowski and Namier; and to Russians like Isaiah Berlin.

I must not comment too lengthily here on this curious tableau of enduring complacency made possible by England's attraction of expatriate academics from Central and Eastern Europe, cloned with suitably acquired characteristics. Let me note only that while distinguishing 'Reds' from 'Whites', Anderson never once mentions the word 'Jew', nor does he take stock of anything to do with Judaism which might explain why these expatriates abandoned their homes abroad. If when fleeing Russia Berlin's parents had settled instead in Italy, Germany, or France and stayed there, it is more than likely that I should not have had this tale to tell. Unless it was Chaim

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<sup>7</sup> See Berlin, 'The Life and Opinions of Moses Hess', in *Against the Current* (London, 1979), pp. 239–40.

<sup>8</sup> *Against the Current*, p. 245.

<sup>9</sup> *Against the Current*, p. 249.

<sup>10</sup> See Berlin, *The Power of Ideas* (London, 2000), p. 165.

Weizmann, no political leader of any people in the contemporary world so commanded Berlin's esteem as Winston Churchill. Even more than Franklin Roosevelt, if only because it seemed to his own followers whom he rallied to his cause that success was so unlikely, Churchill's 'greatest service to mankind' had been to show that it was 'possible to be politically effective and yet benevolent and humane'.<sup>11</sup>

Berlin died on 5 November 1997. He was virtually the last survivor of that generation of immigrants whose ascendancy over higher education in Great Britain Anderson so much lamented. He had precious little in common, ideologically or temperamentally, with other luminaries of that 'White' rather than 'Red' emigration – with Hayek, Eysenck, or Popper, for instance – who collectively are held to have steered the English nation through its long slumber while less ideologically hamstrung radical students on the Continent revolted. His Zionism, like his liberalism, was undogmatic. He formed no school and had no followers. He flourished in a civic culture which was not his own without ever abandoning his native identities or the exotic languages of his youth. He was a Russian Jew who had come to feel at home abroad, the first Jewish Fellow of All Souls and the only holder of the Order of Merit and President of the British Academy whose two grandfathers, an uncle, an aunt, and three cousins had been shot, quite possibly by the associates of a now very elderly Latvian citizen of Australia, whom the British Home Secretary felt minded to deport but not detain when alerted of his presence in England two years ago. A few weeks before Berlin's death, John Pocock had delivered the first of a series of lectures in his honour at Oxford, which he had conceived as both paying his tribute and articulating their differences. Exactly one week after his passing, Quentin Skinner gave his inaugural lecture, 'Liberty before Liberalism', as the Regius Professor of Modern History in Cambridge in which he addressed and sought to correct the concept of negative liberty introduced by Berlin's own inaugural lecture forty years earlier.

With respect to Berlin's approach to the reading of texts in political theory and the history of ideas, Pocock and Skinner in their different ways point to *décalages* or breaks which are both epistemic and generational. In view of the number of columns of print that followed the demise of Britain's pre-eminent academic pillar of the establishment, some of which in other circumstances might have been devoted to reporting Skinner's lecture, there is a sense in which Berlin's death could accurately be described, in the words of Norman Mailer on learning of the passing of Truman Capote, as 'a good career move'. But although he was eighty-eight years old his demise shook me and many other persons throughout the world very deeply indeed. I was reminded of the Jewish child portrayed so affectionately in Louis Malle's autobiographical *Au revoir les enfants*, whose dazzling command of Schubert at the piano just before his deportation gave his classmates a glimpse of another world in their midst which they had never known first-hand, of all that was best in European civilisation, brought to them and then taken away by all that was worst. Not only by the sheer humanity of his writings and the exuberant cadences of his style, but also by virtue even of the circumstances of his presence in England, Berlin was, to my mind, the very epitome of the spirit of enlightenment.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> See Berlin, 'Winston Churchill in 1940' and 'President Franklin Delano Roosevelt', in *Personal Impressions* (London, 1981), pp. 16, 31.

<sup>12</sup> These remarks, delivered as a public lecture arranged by the Department of History and the Jewish Studies Program at the Central European University, Budapest, on 27 March 2000, were initially prepared for the Oxford Political Thought Conference and a symposium held in Tel Aviv on 'Isaiah Berlin's Counter-Enlightenment' in January 2000. Revised and with fuller annotation, they will appear as my own contribution to the proceedings of that colloquium, which I shall be editing with Joseph Mali. I am grateful to László Kontler and András Kovács for sponsoring their presentation in Budapest.